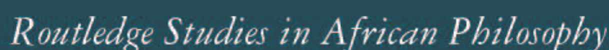

ENDANGERED AFRICAN KNOWLEDGES AND THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNITY

AN IGBO RESPONSE

Donald Mark C. Ude

"The book insightfully succeeds in pointing out that solidarity in Igbo society, and in Africa more widely, is a mode of perceiving the world, a 'social imaginary.' As such, it may provide, so the argument goes, the much-sought-after epistemic resources to counteract and redress the disruptive effects of Africa's modernization."

– **Toon Braeckman**, *Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus), KU Leuven, Belgium*

"This book adeptly articulates a response to the challenge of modernity, drawing on Igbo (African) epistemic resources. The author demonstrates an exceptional grasp of global politics of knowledge. Scholars working on African philosophy, African studies, postcolonial/decolonial studies, and related fields will find it greatly useful."

– **Edwin Etieyibo**, *Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department of Philosophy, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa*

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Endangered African Knowledges and the Challenge of Modernity

This book presents an innovative African philosophical response to coloniality and the attendant epistemicide of Africa's knowledge systems, drawing on Igbo thinking.

This book argues that theorizing modernity requires a critical conversation between African and Western scholarship, in order to unpack its links with coloniality and the subjugation of Africa's indigenous knowledges. In setting out this discussion, the book also connects with Latin American scholarship, demonstrating how the modern world is structured to marginalize and destroy knowledges from across the Global South. This book draws on Igbo epistemic resources of solidarity thinking, positioned in contrast to capitalist knowledge-patterns, thereby providing an important Africa-driven response to modernity and coloniality. This book concludes by arguing that the Igbo sense of solidarity is useful and relevant to modern contexts and thus constitutes a vital resource for a less disruptive, more balanced, and more wholesome modernity.

At a time of considerable global crises, this book makes an important contribution to philosophy both within Africa and beyond.

Donald Mark C. Ude studied in Nigeria, Kenya, Canada, and Belgium. He has a PhD in Philosophy from KU Leuven (2021), where he currently researches and teaches. He is a recipient of a number of coveted research fellowship awards, notably FWO (Belgium) and Humboldt (Germany). His articles have featured in *Theory, Culture & Society*, *Philosophy Today*, *South African Journal of Philosophy*, and several important journals. He maintains an active research interest in African philosophy, African studies, postcolonial/decolonial studies, critical theory, social/political philosophy, modernity, and post-secularism. At freer moments, he writes on topical socio-political issues in Nigerian newspapers.

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An Igbo Response

Donald Mark C. Ude

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To
Fabian and Suzzy Ude
for embodying
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I am eternally grateful to my dear parents who, being teachers by profession, ignited the passion for learning in me. Though I lost them in the course of writing this book, I have no doubt that they now look from heaven with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

To Almighty God, the very source of life and wisdom, I give all glory and honor!

Donald Mark C. Ude, PhD
Leuven, Belgium

Introduction

What Is at Stake

Modernity, the distinct time-frame that was birthed with the capitalist world order in the sixteenth century, inaugurated wide-ranging and unprecedented changes in the world. It may rightly be said that the changes associated with modernity fundamentally redefined the world as we know it. No part of the world has been left out.

As Immanuel Wallerstein recounts, the incorporation into the capitalist world-system of people, principalities, and kingdoms of the West Coast of Africa (around the late eighteenth century), through more intensified trade contacts with Europe, effectively introduced modernity in that part of the world.[1] Aided by a number of factors, modernity would gradually make inroads into African societies – Igbo[2] society included. Igbo society forms the context of this research. The response that is being articulated in this book will likewise draw on Igbo epistemic resources. The reader should, however, note that Igbo is meant to serve as a sort of "placeholder" for Africa, for there are remarkable similarities (of course with notable differences) in the way various African peoples have experienced modernity. Seen in this light, the Igbo experience is an instance of African experience, and the Igbo response is an African response – in other words, one of the many responses that could be articulated from Africa's rich and vast epistemic resources. This point speaks to the subtitle of the book.

Scholars, African and non-Africans alike, have looked at Africa's experience of modernity in various ways – political, social, economic, etc. Proceeding on the premise that the most insidious impact of modernity on Africa has occurred and is occurring at the epistemic sphere, this book will be particularly attentive to the epistemic dimensions and implications of modernity – the sphere of knowledge and knowledge-production. It does so by exploring fully the all-important concept of *coloniality*. Modernity is inextricably tied to coloniality. Indeed, it is the dynamic of coloniality that ties modernity to epistemicide, that is, the endangering, stifling, and sometimes outright annihilation of knowledges. To be sure, the modern (capitalist) world order has systemically endangered and shortchanged knowledges and knowledge-productions from the Global South while valorizing Western knowledge systems. Africa is perhaps the part of the world that is most disadvantaged by this process, for vast panoply of time-honored cultural knowledges and social imaginaries upon which life in African societies was organized have either been subjugated or summarily annihilated by mechanisms of coloniality.

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The asymmetric fateful clash between the Igbo culture and modern (Western) culture left the former reeling ever afterwards. This encounter was indeed an upheaval; it has had a disruptive impact on the Igbo society – one aptly described as things "falling apart"[3] in the words of the renowned Igbo scholar, Chinua Achebe. No doubt, the relationship between modernity and things "falling apart" (referring to historical changes) in Africa is much more nuanced, as deftly argued by Olufemi Taiwo.[4] But however we see the nuances, particularly the whole question of the agency at play in bringing about "modern" changes in African societies, the fact remains that time-honored practices have been altered, hallowed and venerable customs disrupted. More crucially, modernity has endangered the very modes of thinking (i.e., epistemologies) that support Igbo (African) life and society. This resulted in identity crisis.

I use the term "identity" in its widest possible sense. In other words, it refers to the whole gamut of a people's way of life. To speak of the Igbo identity in this sense is to speak of the entirety of Igbo way of life – social, political, religious, moral, economic, etc. The term "identity crisis" therefore underscores the all-ramifying, multi-dimensional character of the crisis introduced by modernity in the Igbo world. And, if a people's culture (i.e., the entirety of a people's way of life) touches upon their identity, it could then be said that the crisis in question is identity crisis (so long as it is recognized that identity is never static or fixed but always being constructed). As a matter of fact, the reality of flux and change in existence is not lost on the Igbo, as will be seen in their extant wisdoms and epistemic resources later in the work. Seen in this light, Igbo modernization would involve a search for a uniquely modern Igbo culture (identity). It is not a return to some supposedly "static" past but a laborious and never-ending construction of a modern, non-static, non-hypostasized identity from some relevant and compatible resources of the past.

Be it as it may, there is at least a "past" that has shown itself resilient, relevant, and hard to repress; there is also an overbearing present (i.e., modernity) that continues to device ever new ways of obliterating the past. A tension has emerged between the notion of the self richly embedded in community, on the other hand, and an overly individualistic conception of the self, produced by the imperatives of capitalism, on the other hand. Now more than ever, the Igbo person, and indeed the African, finds himself/herself in the throes of this tension.

By way of responding to the challenge modernity presents, especially the endangering of indigenous African knowledges, this book aims to analyze the sense of interconnectedness as an element of Igbo epistemic resources, arguing that the sense of solidarity derived from this wider sense of interconnectedness is useful and relevant to modernity, such that, if incorporated into modernization, it could make for a more balanced and wholesome modernity. A corollary to this claim is that the Igbo sense of solidarity, derived from the idea of interconnectedness, is indeed relevant to modern contexts, while possessing some equilibrating/moderating dimensions.

The nature and aim of the book, as stated earlier, immediately raise the vexed question as to whether such a project may be an exercise in "ethnophilosophy."

I briefly anticipate the issue here, while I address it in detail in Chapter 4. I make a case that my project may be seen as "ethnophilosophy" – and unashamedly so – if, by "ethnophilosophy," we mean a philosophical engagement with Igbo life and society, with the aim of disclosing certain epistemic resources that may be relevant for a wholesome modernization. However, if "ethnophilosophy" is understood in the pejorative, "Hountondjian"[5] sense of a philosophy that apologetically "faces" the West, one involving sweeping generalizations, metaphysical and essentializing claims about Africa or vast regions of Africa, then the work cannot fairly be considered "ethnophilosophy." The reason is that the work explores the epistemic sphere, that is, Igbo "lived knowledges,"[6] rather than supposed metaphysical essences or "vital force" (à la Placide Tempels[7]). Focusing on a "lived knowledges" allows it to forestall the propensity towards essentialization. Furthermore, Igbo is my context, a context I consider feasible enough for plausible scholarly claims, thereby avoiding such unwarranted generalizations about Africa as found in ethnophilosophical works like Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*.[8]

To be sure, the sense of interconnectedness is a mode of knowing in which realities are perceived as inextricably linked, mutually impacting one another in a seemingly universal web of interaction. Though the distinctness of each entity/reality is recognized, there is an epistemic predisposition to see things in terms of interrelatedness. One distinguishing feature of this mode of knowing is that the subject does not conceive of himself/herself as an isolated Cartesian "cogito" but rather considers himself/herself so linked with the other (i.e., other subjects and non-human realities) that the subject cannot validly assert his/her own existence in isolation from these other realities. Another crucial feature is that it is not some detached, "academic" mode of knowing but rather a lived knowledge, indeed a "social imaginary" in the Taylorian sense of implicit, unstructured, scarcely articulated, yet powerful knowledge that forms the foundation of social life.[9] As "lived knowledge," it has a practical social-ordering effect on Igbo society, such that a careful analysis of the various dimensions of Igbo life and society will disclose this animating thought-pattern.

To properly address the topic of this project and develop the key arguments, I shall combine different intellectual frameworks. This is perhaps the best approach to a project that focuses not on the ideas of a single thinker/philosopher but on an issue or a cluster of issues. So, it is issue-based, and the issues at stake here are modernity, its epistemic implications (i.e., the endangering of Africa's indigenous knowledge), and a possible response to the problem using the resources of Igbo indigenous knowledges.

For instance, to problematize the question of identity thrown up by modernity and the colonial experience in Africa, I place the work within the framework of African Postcolonial Theory and the various attempts by African scholars to understand, analyze, and offer potential remedy to the problem. To provide an operative concept of modernity for the present purposes, I turn to the insights of Habermas, Taylor, and Wallerstein. And to highlight the epistemic dimension to the discourse on modernity/coloniality, I insert the research within the framework of the (Latin American) Modernity/Coloniality Collective.

In what follows, I furnish a chapter-by-chapter description of the project, highlighting the key points each chapter aims to explore.

In Chapter 1, I place the research in the context of scholarship on Africa and its attempt to grapple with modernity, drawing on the insights of such key thinkers as Frantz Fanon, Achille Mbembe, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong' O, Pauline Hountondji, and Kwame Gyekye. My argument in this chapter is that the fateful clash between African cultures and Western modernity has had an all-ramifying disruptive effect on the former, particularly endangering Africa's epistemic resources and ways of life, leaving identity crisis in its wake. Various aspects of African life bear the mark of this crisis. Relying on Fanon, Mbembe, and a number of relevant African scholars, I highlight the ramifications of the crisis on the wider African scale. And drawing on the writings of Achebe, I show that the Igbo experience resonates with the larger African experience. It will be shown that the issues thrown up by modernity in Africa – race, leadership crisis and the problem of petit-bourgeois elite, the nation-state question, the shattering of traditional social fabric, subjugation of indigenous religions, languages, thought-patterns, etc. – betoken an all-pervasive crisis of modernity on the African continent.

The attempt at some "remedy" on the part of African scholars would make them straddle between certain extremes. These scholarly attempts harken back to the debate on "ethnophilosophy" and the question of a proper manner in which philosophy may be done in postcolonial Africa. On the one hand, Senghor's "negritude" and Nyerere's "ujamaa socialism" tend towards some reification of and return to a presumably "idyllic" past, an approach identified as possessing trappings of "ethnophilosophy." On the other hand, Hountondji and Towa adopt a somewhat blanket rejection of Africa's past in pursuit of a supposedly progressive and "scientific" Africa. Kwame Gyekye's proposal which seeks to judiciously incorporate positive elements of the past into the present represents my default position; it resonates with the overarching objective of this book.

Since the theme of modernity is at the core of this project, the second chapter will be dedicated to furnishing a "heuristic" or operative concept of modernity. The word "operative" signals the fact that there is hardly any exhaustive, all-encompassing definition of modernity, perhaps given the complexity of modernity itself. In any case, I draw on the insights of Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Immanuel Wallerstein to provide an operative concept of modernity most relevant for our present purposes. As a matter of fact, these thinkers possess some of the most theoretically elaborated ideas on modernity, a fact that informs my choice of them. On the basis of their insights, I show that modernity is a distinct time-frame, marked by an unprecedented transformation of society and ways of conceptualizing society; it manifests itself in the increasing complexity of societal forms, whose dynamics account for, but may not be equated with, the emergence of systems with overbearing tendencies.

For Habermas, I pay a close attention to how he conceives of modernity in terms of the "uncoupling" of systems from the lifeworld, and how he views the "pathologies" of modernity as resulting from the "colonization" of the lifeworld by the systems that uncoupled themselves from the lifeworld. For Taylor, I focus

on the somewhat "cultural" bent he offers, using the analytical tool of "modern social imaginary." In Taylor's view, the unprecedented transformations that go by the name "modernity" are effectively a mutation in "social imaginary," and the "malaises" of modernity, as he calls them, are analyzable only in terms of these changes in "social imaginary." In turn, I show how, for Wallerstein, the transformation that is "modernity" is nothing over and above the emergence of a monolithic capitalist world-system in the sixteenth century. In the enactment of its inner dynamic, this capitalist system divides the world into "core," "semiperipheral," and "peripheral" regions, whose fortunes vary according to their abilities to appropriate the resources and surplus values of the monolithic structure.

To provide an epistemic dimension to our analysis of modernity and, insofar as this book explores the epistemic resources of the Igbo people, Chapter 3 places the work in the framework of the epistemic discourses of the (Latin American) Coloniality/Modernity Collective, represented by Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Boaventura De Sousa Santos. These scholars have evolved into what may now be rightly called a "school" whose chief concern is to theorize and offer potential remedies to the epistemic injustice meted on knowledges of the "South" by Western ("Northern") hegemonic knowledges. The Igbo sense of interconnectedness belongs to such subjugated and "endangered" knowledges that need to be given their due place in the modern world.

I engage the all-important concept of "coloniality," a concept coined by Anibal Quijano and appropriated by the other scholars of the Collective. It is a notion that ties modernity inextricably to the dynamics that stifle knowledges and knowledge-productions from the Global South while promoting those from the Global North disproportionately. Drawing on these scholars, too, I show how "coloniality" plays out in the questions of race, identity, linguistic imperialism, and similar issues that challenge our world today. I also discuss and evaluate some of their proposals – notably, "border thinking," epistemic disobedience and knowledge "ecology" – aimed at achieving "decoloniality."

In line with the case made by the members of the Coloniality/Modernity Collective for "decoloniality" through the promotion of "endangered" knowledges, I explore, in Chapter 4, the sense of interconnectedness in Igbo thought-pattern. I argue, drawing on Igbo scholarship, that an analysis of the various dimensions of Igbo life – social, political, economic, religious, moral, etc. – would disclose the sense of interconnectedness as an underlying epistemic principle. A corollary to the aforementioned claim is that this notion of interconnectedness is not some theoretical or abstract form of knowledge; rather, it is a "social imaginary." For it indeed informs life as lived in Igbo society. It has a social-ordering effect and thus impacts politics, religion, morality, and multifarious aspects of Igbo life.

I analyze the Igbo sense of solidarity as an expression of the wider sense of interconnectedness, showing how such social practices as marriage, age-grade system, and communal land tenure may be explained in terms of this thought-pattern. In the political sphere, governance is carried out in the absence of monarchy (a distinctive feature of Igbo politics!), through a synergy of political and quasi-political forces. As I argue, the peculiar structure Igbo politics takes on is thanks

to a social imaginary that emphasizes kinship and solidarity rather than kingship. In the religious and moral sphere, I pinpoint the interpenetration of the "moral" and the "religious."[10] One of the most prominent points I shall underline in the religious/moral sphere is the status of *Ala* (the Earth Goddess) as the foundation of Igbo morality. As such, moral infringement (*aru*) is considered an offence against the Mother Earth from whom all get their nourishment, an offence that requires ritual cleansing (*ikwa ala*). That an offence against the kinsfolk, a desecration of hallowed customs, etc., are linked to Ala is, once again, an expression of the Igbo sense of interconnectedness.

On the basis of the findings and arguments of the preceding chapters, Chapter 5 makes the case that the Igbo sense of solidarity, which draws from the wider sense of interconnectedness, is useful and relevant to modern contexts, but also possesses some equilibrating features. Thus, when incorporated into Igbo modernization, it could make for a less disruptive, more balanced, and wholesome (Igbo) modernity. Now, the claim that Igbo solidarity resonates with modern contexts and values begs the question as to whether the individual-community dynamics therein would be compatible with the modern liberal ideal of individual autonomy which guarantees that individual good is not stifled by community.

To address this knotty question, I elaborate what I call the thesis of *co-constitutiveness*, drawing on M. O. Eze, a thesis that stresses that the Igbo individual and the Igbo community constitute each other. The significance of this notion is that it secures a balance between individual good and community good. Moreover, the fact of interpenetration of lives, good, and interests, secured through shared activities and social vision, guarantees that interests do not polarize irreconcilably. To further demonstrate that the Igbo individual is not stifled by the community, I analyze the concepts of *chi/akaraka* and *ikenga* as the Igbo principle of individuation and philosophy of individual enterprise, respectively. Thereupon I argue that a culture that possesses such a robust principle of individuation and an entrenched philosophy of individual enterprise could not possibly stifle the individual. By way of underlining the distinctness of the Igbo paradigm (as represented in Igbo scholarship) and its suitability for modern contexts, I put it in conversation with Habermas and Taylor. I consider this move appropriate not only because it makes for a narrative unity of the entire work (having earlier explored the duo in Chapter 2) but also because the duo are veritable representatives of Western scholarship on modernity.

The basis for incorporating the sense of solidarity into (Igbo) modernization is that, as a social imaginary, it is still very much alive, despite being "endangered" and pushed to the margins in the modern scheme of things. In other words, it has not been completely "murdered"; otherwise, there would have been no point resurrecting a dead way of life. So, this endangered epistemic resource could be brought from the margins to the center of Igbo modern life to serve as an animating philosophy of Igbo modernity.

Finally, I note here that a book that foregrounds an element of Igbo (African) endangered knowledges may rightly be considered a timely scholarly intervention, as Igbo people and indeed the entire continent of Africa continue to confront the

challenge of modernization. At the very least, it provides a response to modernity, sourced from the resources of Igbo (African) "endangered" knowledges.

Notes

1 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Vol. III), 187.
2 Igbo is one of the largest ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Rich in both human and natural resources, Igboland covers the Southeast and parts of what is known today as the Southsouth (i.e., Niger Delta) parts of Nigeria. More importantly – and for the purposes of this work – it is a culture with extant epistemic resources that are of scholarly and philosophical interest. In the entire work, I use "Igbo" in the plural sense as a statement against the practice of anglicizing Igbo words. So, I adopt "the Igbo" (rather than "Igbos") for Igbo people (Ndigbo).
3 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (First Published 1958). This pioneering work, in over 60 languages, narrates the earliest encounter of Igbo people in their encounter with colonialism (rooted in capitalist modernity), detailing the multifaceted social transformations thereof.
4 O. Taiwo, "On Agency and Change." Also see his work, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity* (2010).
5 Paulin Hountondji is famous for his scathing critique of "ethnophilosophy." His ideas are mainly outlined in his work, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1996). Aspects of his ideas will be partly explored in Chapter 1 and continued in Chapter 4.
6 B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 43. He adopts the term "lived knowledges" or "lived epistemologies" by way of contrasting epistemologies of the "South" with the hegemonic epistemologies of the "North." Also see, *Epistemologies of the South*, 158 and 159.
7 P. Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (2010 – First Published 1945).
8 J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.
9 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23–30.
10 The terms "moral" and "religious" are used here only to make discussion possible. The two are hardly distinguishable, as there is hardly any distinction between the sacred and the presumably "profane" in Igbo thought.

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1 Africa and the Challenge of Modernity

Introduction

Africa is going through deep crises resulting from modernization. At the institutional level, the colonial experience succeeded in reproducing a continent fashioned, as it were, after the image of the former European colonizers. Political, social, economic, and religious institutions inherited from the former colonizers hold sway in postcolonial Africa.

Africa's experience of modernity cannot be reduced to the colonial experience. But it is safe to say that colonialism and the changes associated with it form part of Africa's larger encounter with modernity. Wallerstein makes an elaborate case – and we shall discuss this further in the next chapter – to the effect that the mad chase after capital that came with the dawn of modernity in the sixteenth century led European powers to push beyond frontiers to colonize and to exploit.[1] Africa thus became one of the worst victims of this process. Therefore, when I refer to the wide-ranging transformation associated with colonialism in this chapter, I do so because the colonial experience is an aspect of Africa's wider encounter with modernity.

It cannot be denied that notions of freedom, rights, autonomy and self-rule, the principle of subjectivity, emphasis on reason (over revelation and authority), and all the beautiful Enlightenment tenets also belong to what it means to be "modern." But we must adopt an ambivalent disposition towards modernity, recognizing that it comes with both positive and negative elements. Indeed, colonialism, that dark package with which much of modernity was delivered to Africa, undermined its positive aspects. Therefore, if it is judged that modernity has failed to deliver the Enlightenment promises to Africa, then colonialism must be held largely responsible.[2]

Of course, certain elements of Africa's traditional past have proved themselves irrepressible and have continued to haunt the present. As a result, Africans today find themselves in the throes of a conundrum and at the crossroads, torn between an irrepressible past that continues to impinge on the present, on the one hand, and an overbearing modernity that attempts to suppress the past, on the other hand. The African person is at the center of these crises – *identity crisis*,[3] as it were.

Identity crisis may, thus, serve as the overarching idea under which the issues to be analyzed in this chapter are subsumed. "Identity" is used here in its widest

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sense of the *entire way of life* of a people, of course with the proviso that it is not conceived as something *fixed*. Therefore, the thesis I argue in this chapter is that the fateful clash between African cultures and Western modernity has had an all-ramifying disruptive effect on the former, particularly endangering Africa's epistemic resources and ways of life, leaving identity crisis in its wake. Various aspects of African life bear the mark of crisis. The aim of this chapter is to analyze the issues in the wider African context, and thereupon zero in on how Igbo society (the primary context of the present research) is peculiarly impacted. This chapter will also situate my research within African scholarship proper, by featuring the various attempts by African scholars to understand, articulate, and proffer some remedies.

In the first section of this chapter, I draw on the works of Frantz Fanon, Achille Mbembe, and Basil Davidson. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Mbembe's *Critique of Black Reason*, and Davidson's *The Black Man's Burden* will serve the purpose of analyzing the crises of modernity in which Africa finds itself. The choice of these three scholars is informed by the fact that their works thoroughly engage the most important elements of the crises of modernity in contemporary Africa, especially the ones engendered by the colonial experience. An important conclusion that will emerge from the views of these scholars is that the problem is traceable to the fateful colonialist encounter between Africa and the Western powers, an encounter that left profound disruptions in its wake.

In the second section of this chapter, I place my discussion on the Igbo context. Drawing on the works of the foremost Igbo scholar, Chinua Achebe, I render an account of the significant changes and transformations brought about by modernity in the Igbo world. There is hardly a better access to the Igbo world than the one provided by Chinua Achebe, whose 1958 opus magnum, *Things Fall Apart*, has been translated into over 60 languages. Besides *Things Fall Apart*, the other works, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*, as well as subsequent works, provide a comprehensive account of the impact of modernity on the Igbo society. As will be seen in my analysis, the characters in Achebe's novels voice out the angst, crises, and sense of loss that are lodged in the heart of the Igbo person. Through this analysis, I intend to make the case that the Igbo society finds itself at the crossroads.

While the first and the second sections of this chapter try to articulate the main issues at stake, the third section discusses and evaluates some of the solutions proposed by African scholars. For instance, it was the quest for a sort of African identity and self-affirmation that inspired the negritude movement of Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor, whose espousal of a "retour" (return) to Africa's hallowed past led to an exaggerated romanticization and essentialization of the past. I further discuss Fanon's notion of "revolutionary violence," which aims to overcome the apparent passivity and essentialism of negritude, but it has its own downside, nevertheless. I also assess the "anti-revivalist" standpoints of Paulin Hountondji and Macien Towa, who adopt a position that smacks of a repudiation of Africa's past. I finally evaluate Kwame Gyekye's position, which I consider more balanced and useful. He avoids the two extremes of "revivalism" (i.e., wholesale re-enactment of Africa's cultural past in the modern times) and "anti-revivalism" (i.e., a blanket

rejection of Africa's past). More importantly, he suggests some positive values of Africa's past that could be useful and compatible with modernity.

These scholarly attempts to address the challenge presented by modernity are already steeped in the famous debate on "ethnophilosophy" and the proper manner to do philosophy in postcolonial Africa. On this note, this book subscribes to Gyekye's approach. This invariably means that I shall avoid the two extremes, that is, generalizing and canonizing African past (embodied in "ethnophilosophy"), on the one hand, and rejecting African cultures in blanket fashion, on the other hand. Inspired by Gyekye's approach, I rather explore a useful and relevant element of Igbo (African) endangered knowledges – namely, the sense of solidarity – with the aim of incorporating it into modernization (as will be done in Chapters 4 and 5).

Africa at the Crossroads: The Colonial Burden

In this section, we shall see how Fanon, Mbembe, and Davidson understand and analyze Africa's current conundrum in terms of Africa's colonial experience. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Mbembe's *Critique of Black Reason*, and Davidson's *The Black Man's Burden* constitute the main texts. In their analysis, they uncover deep-seated identity crises Africa is living through.

Racism and Its Psychopathological Effects

The race question is central to any discourse on Africa's contemporary problems. Finding himself/herself in a world that tacitly (and sometimes overtly) asserts the inherent superiority of one race over another, the African wittingly or unwittingly denies himself/herself in a bid to become like people of the race that has been considered "superior." As soon as racism has succeeded in sowing a certain psychological complex in the African, it continues to sustain itself on this complex, thus creating a chicken-and-egg situation in which race and complex cause and reinforce each other. Fanon and Mbembe address this racial dimension. For both thinkers, any analysis of the situation of Africa in the modern world that leaves out the racial discourse is incomplete and basically flawed. Modernity, they maintain, is essentially racialized; the modern world is indeed a racialized world. As Mbembe notes: "Our critique of modernity will remain incomplete if we fail to grasp that the coming of modernity coincided with the appearance of the principle of race and the latter's slow transformation into the privileged matrix for techniques of domination, yesterday as today."[4] Similarly, Fanon explains that the "neurotic" complex that has come to define the Black Person is precisely a function of "a society that derives its stability from the perpetuation of this complex, a society that proclaims the superiority of one race."[5] The society Fanon here refers to is the modern society, a society somewhat predetermined against the Black Person (the African or a person of African descent). This situation already places him/her at a disadvantage in most ramifications of life.

But what precisely is the condition of the Black Person in the modern world? What specific race-determined conditions in the modern world must the Black Person contend with? Mbembe describes these conditions with a characteristic lucidity:

> The term "Black" was the product of a social and technological machine tightly linked to the emergence and globalization of capitalism. It was invented to signify exclusion, brutalization, and degradation, to point to a limit constantly conjured and abhorred. The Black Man, despised and profoundly dishonored, is the only human in the modern order whose skin has been transformed into the form and spirit of merchandise – the living crypt of capital.[6]

This citation represents Mbembe's belief that "Blackness" is hardly a biophysiological fact, but rather a socio-economic condition produced and sustained by modern capitalism. "Blacks" (the African continent taking a huge share of this category) are those who have lost out in the socio-economic struggles of modern society and are therefore despised, oppressed, manipulated, and excluded. Mbembe cannot overemphasize the role of modern capitalism in the reproduction of "Blackness":

> The Black Man represents one of the troubling figures of modernity, and in fact constitutes its realm of shadow, of mystery, of scandal . . . he bears witness to a mutilated humanity, one deeply scarred by iron and alienation . . . he represents a kind of silt of the earth, a silt deposited at the confluence of half-worlds produced by the dual violence of race and capitalism.[7]

In this citation, Mbembe draws attention to an inextricable nexus between race, modernity, and capitalism, an unholy alliance only destined to give birth to this miserable creature – the "Black Man." Though "Blackness" refers more appropriately to a condition, the two notions "Africa" and "Blackness," Mbembe observes, "took shape together." For "if the term 'Black' is a nickname, if it is that thing, it is because of Africa."[8] The point here is that "Black" or "Africa" interchangeably serves as a byword for failure, powerlessness, and misery. Historical circumstances, including the racist stereotypes in eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Western writings (painstakingly outlined by Mbembe[9]), combine to cast "Africa" in bad light, making it the prototype of everything negative. The result is that "in modern consciousness, 'Africa' is the name generally given to societies that are judged impotent."[10] It is in this sense that Mbembe uses the word "Africanization" to refer to those other societies, who, though not belonging geographically to the African continent, are increasingly being subjected to the fate of Africa, a name that "judges the world and calls for reparation, restitution and justice."[11]

In the foregoing discussion, Mbembe tries to highlight the relationship between modernity, capitalism, and the reproduction of the oppressive category of race – in this instance, "Blackness" or "Africa."

But how does this racial situation precisely affect or shape the Black Person's psyche and character? To phrase the issue more correctly, what is the inner constitution of a colonized African mind who is at the same time a victim of racism? How do these twin facts of colonialism and racism affect the African's sense of identity and self-worth in the modern world?

To these questions, we must turn to Fanon who claims to have carried out an extensive "surgery," so to speak, on the dynamics of the colonized African mind. He grounds his investigations in psychoanalysis. He announces that he intends to apply the conclusions of Freud and Adler to the project of understanding the man of color.[12] Regarding the book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon writes:

> This work represents the sum of the experience and observations of seven years; regardless of the area I have studied, one thing has struck me: The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation. Therefore, I have been led to consider their alienation in terms of psychoanalytical classifications.[13]

For Fanon, the "Negro" (a word he interchangeably uses with the "African") is almost exclusively defined by his/her inferiority complex. This complex is the immediate psychological reaction to the experience of colonial racism. In this respect, he disagrees with Mannoni who he thinks trivializes the relationship between colonialism, racism, and the Negro inferiority complex.[14] Fanon views this complex as a mental disorder – hence, he routinely employs terms such as "psychopathology" and "neurosis" in the entire course of his analysis. The pathological inferiority complex of the black person immediately manifests itself in the conscious or unconscious desire to be white. In this process, the black person literally rejects his blackness, simultaneously clothing himself/herself in whiteness. He/she denies himself/herself and tries to adopt wholesale the white man's way of life – his language, culture, and even his mannerism. "However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion," Fanon writes, "I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white."[15] Whiteness and all it represents becomes idealized as the standard, nay, destiny, to which the black person strives. Fanon observes the case of black women who are in the habit of bleaching their body in a bid to rid their skin of all blackness.[16]

Fanon accounts for the denial of one's own skin color in psychopathological terms. It is a neurotic condition that has much to do with what he calls the "epidermalization" of the inferiority complex. But such a pathological desire to be white is a function of modernity itself, one that has indeed made "whiteness" and all it represents an ideal, a "destiny." If the black person is "overwhelmed to such a degree by the wish to be white, it is because he lives in a society that makes his inferiority complex possible."[17] I have earlier noted that, for Fanon and Mbembe, the modern world itself is essentially racialized, privileging "whiteness" over "blackness." Seen in this light, the black person's aspiration to "whiteness" might just be an unconscious psychological mechanism for coping with a racialized modernity. He/she wants to be validated and welcomed into the community of

real "humans," since "humanity" is affirmed or denied by the extent to which the individual embodies whiteness.

According to Fanon, the condition of colonial racism threatens a complete annihilation of the African personhood. The African is alienated from himself/herself. As it were, his/her very identity is conferred upon him/her by the colonizers. This is so much so that it has become impossible to define the African without reference to the colonizers. Referring to the Malagasy, who as a matter of fact represents all colonized Africans, Fanon argues:

> [T]he Malagasy alone no longer exists . . . the Malagasy exists with the European. The arrival of the white man in Madagascar shattered not only its horizons but its psychological mechanisms. As everyone has pointed out, alterity for the black man is not the black but the white man.[18]

This dependence on the white man for self-affirmation is most obvious in the sphere of language to which I shall now turn.

Language

Language is one of the most potent tools of colonial subjugation. The "civilizing mission" (as it was called) of colonial powers primarily consisted in suppressing the supposed "barbaric" languages of the colonial subjects. The aim was not only to teach the subjects to speak in "civilized" languages but also to facilitate the replacement of the local culture, because culture is embodied in language. Fanon underscores this link between language and culture: "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization."[19] Similarly, the Kenyan literary icon, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, maintains that "language, any language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a career of civilization."[20] In line with these submissions, it becomes easy to see that the identity crises Africa faces have a lot to do with a crisis of language. Today, the language problem remains an apparently irreversible colonial disruption in Africa. There is hardly any country in Africa that has an indigenous African language as lingua franca. Where indigenous languages are tolerated, they must be made to assume a subsidiary status, placed below English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, as the case may be. In most metropolitan areas of Africa, certain hybridized versions of English, French, and Portuguese have evolved, usually among the lower classes. Creole or Pidgin, as they are called, is a mix of the colonial languages with indigenous languages. Whatever positive roles these hybrid versions may have played in facilitating communication among the less literate classes, I argue that they still reflect the identity crises that have come to define modern Africa. Emerging from decades of colonial rule, the modern African has indeed become a "hybrid," just like the creole or pidgin he/she speaks.

Some African intellectuals have voiced their concerns on this question of language. Ngugi wa Thiong'o recounts the humiliating childhood experience in the

colonial times where pupils were severely punished for speaking native languages at school, bemoaning the alienation he went through when "the language of my education was no longer the language of my culture."[21] Passing through several years of inner crisis of identity while at the same time building himself an illustrious career in English-medium literature, Ngugi had taken the momentous decision to bid farewell to English as a writing medium. Thereupon, he began publishing in his native Gikuyu and Kiswahili.[22] "I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples,"[23] he writes. Ngugi bemoans not only the alienation but also the debilitating effect colonial languages have on the overall intellectual output of a colonized society.

> It starts with a deliberate dissociation of the language of conceptualization, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind and the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a larger social scale, it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies.[24]

In view of the overall negative impact of colonial languages on Africa, Ngugi therefore wonders why his fellow intellectuals (especially in the field of literature) and indeed all Africans would still accept the "unassailable position" of colonial languages in our literature, culture, and politics.[25] He wonders why Africans, particularly his fellow writers, have uncritically resigned to the "languages of our own colonization," that is, the colonial languages that now serve as lingua franca all over the African continent.

Undoubtedly, the aforementioned submissions are valid and should generate concern for all those genuinely interested in the emancipation of Africa. However, the decision to bid farewell to English language as a writing medium came rather too early and may not achieve the desired objectives. It is not wrong *per se* to protest linguistic imperialism. But adequate preparations must be made in this regard. It has to be approached more holistically by combating epistemic imperialism through the promotion of Africa's endangered and subalternized knowledges. This is why the present work concerns itself precisely with the more comprehensive epistemic approach. Ngugi just succeeded in limiting his audience only to the Gikuyu-speakers, who might not even have the economic wherewithal to access his writings. Capitalist imperial forces are too strong to be defeated by tantrums thrown from some tiny corners in Africa. It requires a more strategic approach on the larger arena of knowledge and knowledge-productions.

Be that as it may, much of Ngugi's submissions are in line with Fanon ruminations on the problem of language and its psychological effects on the colonized African subject. A complex has developed, especially among the elite class, that one's self-worth is measured by the extent to which one demonstrates a mastery of colonial languages. "In a group of young men in the Antilles," Fanon observes, "the one who expresses himself well, who has mastered the language, is inordinately feared;

keep an eye on that one, he is almost white . . . 'He talks like a white man'."[26] The language being referred to here is French, but it also applies to all other colonial languages of Africa. Here again, the race question plays out. "He talks like a white man" in the aforementioned citation would actually mean that someone is "more human" and has more worth than those who do not. This experience is common with former colonies in Africa, whether French, British, Portuguese, or Spanish.

It is important to note here that, to this day, intelligence is generally measured by the level of mastery of the colonial languages. In this respect, Ngugi painfully recalls his childhood days:

> Any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige, applause; the ticket to higher realms. English became the measure of intelligence in the arts, the sciences, and all other branches of learning. English became the main determinant of a child's progress up to the level of higher education.[27]

The scenario given here was as true in Ngugi's childhood days as it is in the present-day Africa, where literacy has simply been reduced to being literate in the colonial languages. To link the foregoing discussion on language back to the question of African identity in the modern world, we need only point to the fact that the very identity of African countries is now partitioned along colonial linguistic lines, namely – English-speaking Africa, French-speaking Africa, Portuguese-speaking Africa, and so on.[28]

Africa's identity crises also find expression in Africa's politico-social and economic modernization on the model dictated by Western powers. In this respect, three interrelated problems come to the fore, namely, the problem of the nation-state political formation, the problem of the elite class (i.e., the petit-bourgeois elite of the new African states), and the crisis of urbanization. Basil Davidson's *The Black Man's Burden* and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* furnish an account of Africa's modern challenges that touch upon nation-statism, the petit-bourgeois elite, and urbanization.

As I explore the problems of nation-statism, petit-bourgeois elite, and urbanization in what follows, my objective remains the same: to present a continent at the crossroads, occasioned by the "colonial burden," to use Davidson's expression.

The Challenge of Nation-State

The Blackman's Burden is perhaps Davidson's most mature and sober work, written with the benefits of hindsight, out of what he describes as the "wisdom I have gathered in these forty-odd years of African study," containing "conclusions of a lifetime."[29] In his earlier works, written in the 1950s and 1960s, the dawn of independence of many African countries, Davidson had expressed a great deal of optimism (which he would now see as hasty and premature) regarding the future of the newly "liberated" continent, basing his prediction on the great achievements of precolonial African kingdoms and the likelihood of recording much greater feats.

Written in 1992, about three decades after the "paper independence" of most African states, the book attempts to account for Africa's overall underperformance and the "degradation from the hopes and freedoms of newly regained independence."[30]

Davidson chiefly argues that the root of Africa's problem is the uncritical and wholesale modernization of its political framework on the European nation-state models, taking no cognizance of its unique past.

> It may be fairly easy to understand that new nation-states, emerging from imperial or colonial oppression, have to modernize their institutions, their modes of government, their political and economic structures. Very well. But why then adopt models from those very countries or systems that have oppressed and despised you? *Why not modernize from the models of your own history, or invent new models*?[31]
>
> [My italics]

Davidson poses the question as to why Africa failed to modernize on the basis of its unique culture and history. He clarifies that the problem is not so much with "nation-statism" *per se* as a political arrangement; rather, it is with a Europe-modeled nation-statism adopted by Africa, a situation which makes it impossible for the future to "grow out of the past, organically and developmentally but from an entirely alien dispensation."[32] To buttress his claim, Davidson makes a historical survey of the political arrangement of great precolonial kingdoms like the Ashanti Kingdom (present-day Ghana) and the Oyo Empire (present-day Nigeria), insisting that they all possessed features of a "state," in every sense of the word, including democratic institutions and checks-and-balance mechanisms.[33] Therefore, he harbors no iota of doubt that those kingdoms would have made enormous progress had they not been interrupted by colonial invasion. Olufemi Taiwo makes a similar case, as he argues that Africa was not averse to modernization but was indeed already on the path to a uniquely modern society until colonialism jeopardized this process.[34]

The problems created by the wholesale adoption of Western political arrangements are enormous. These problems have continued to haunt Africa to this day. To talk in terms of authenticity and African identity, West-modeled nation-statism is neither autochthonous to Africa nor compatible with extant political realities. Primarily, the new African nation-states are arbitrary products of the colonial partitioning of the infamous Berlin Conference (1884–1885) that divided Africa among European powers. In Davidson's evaluation, these nation-states are not just "purely artificial" but also "positively harmful frontiers."[35] The idea that Africa is partitioned into frontiers that are "positively harmful" means that ethnicities and tribes with incompatible cultures were lumped together into one nation-state, a situation that breeds infighting, suspicion, animosity, and outright tribal wars. Davidson's verdict that the current framework is "positively harmful" has time and again been justified by historical events. The current arrangement indeed remains a "time-bomb"; it has detonated severally and may continue to detonate if postcolonial Africa does not seriously address it. The wars and political turmoil all over Africa are all traceable to this "time-bomb."

Alienation is a major issue in this regard. African peoples find themselves lumped into artificial political units, following the partitioning lines of the Berlin Conference and under the sway of alien political practices that stand in need of adaptation at the very least. As a result, it becomes profoundly difficult for the people to truly connect and identify with the modern postcolonial states in which they find themselves. Davidson could not have put it any better.

> Most of these precolonial political formations were communities with a venerable past rooted in popular acceptance. In the public mind they were living realities; they were identities to which people strongly held. Dismissing them as the regrettable phenomena of "tribalism" might comfort those, British or others, who preferred to think of precolonial Africa as savage backwoods, rather as the notion of Scottish nation or Welsh nation has long become an antiquarian absurdity to average English opinion. But that is how the "tribesmen" were prepared to see it.[36]

Davidson notes that the political allegiances and loyalties people willingly adhered to on account of their "venerable past" were all eroded, so as to pave a way for newfangled nation-states. This fundamental dichotomy between the *people* and the *state* generated and has continued to generate a problem of legitimacy in African politics. The question of the primacy of the people over the state (or vice versa) and the concomitant issue of legitimacy is one of the knottiest problems in political philosophy. This question becomes even more complex in the African context where imperial designs have made such a mess that the categories "people" and "state" are themselves rather indeterminate. In light of the forgoing, it makes sense to hypothesize that any attempt to remedy Africa's political problems in the modern era must first address the question of the true legitimacy of the current nation-states that make up the African continent.

Because the very foundations of Africa's nation-states are weak and their legitimacy is questionable, these states are invariably weak. In other words, nation-states with weak foundations can only give rise to weak institutions. A state with weak institutions can only be a theatre of corruption, clientelism, irresponsible politics, ethnic rivalries, and all forms of institutional malaise. Fanon and Davidson discuss these problems under the framework of "national bourgeoisie," that is, Africa's petit-bourgeois elite whose leadership spells doom for the entire population.

National Bourgeoisie (Africa's Petit-Bourgeois Elite)

Right from the early days of independence, African peoples have suffered greatly in the hands of what Fanon and Davidson refer to as the "National Bourgeoisie" (sometimes also called the "Petit Bourgeoisie"). They account for a vast majority of Africa's problems with modernity. In the 1950s and 1960s, they consisted of the national elite class and intellectuals, who led the nationalist struggle for independence and eventually became the new leaders of their various nation-states after independence. In recent times, the National Bourgeoisie may refer broadly

to Africa's political class, whose irresponsible politics has continued to destroy the continent. Davidson and Fanon hold them in low esteem; they devote several pages of their writings to a critique of the National Bourgeoisie. In fact, the third chapter of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* titled "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness" is an elaborate critique of the National Bourgeoisie, the elite class of Africa. The National bourgeoisie takes a big share of the blame for failing in their historic duty of setting Africa on the path of progress. When Davidson regrets the failure of Africa to evolve into a uniquely African political modernity, as has already been discussed, he mostly lays the blame at the feet of the National Bourgeoisie.

I agree with Davidson and Fanon that it is impossible to understand the problem of corruption, nepotism, and tribalism in Africa without reference to the National Bourgeoisie. As soon as independence was gained, they began to exploit the fault lines of the weak and incompetent state structure to entrench politics of nepotism and clientelism – all for personal aggrandizement. When the state is weak and state institutions porous, explains Davidson, people take shelter in their petty tribes and cliques:

> The more incompetent the state, in short, the wider grew the gap between the state and society, including the gap between town and countryside; and the wider this gap became, the more frantic and unbridled were the subversions of "tribalism," as people sought for self-defense in kinship ties or their equivalents. The circle of negation seemed complete.[37]

In the previous passage, the recurrent theme of alienation occasioned by the modern-day political formation comes up again. There is "gap" between the state and the society, a gap which was most likely absent in premodern African politics. As Davidson observes, this yawning gap makes Africa's political space susceptible to corruption and all forms of negative factors. The unscrupulous political class exploits this situation to make politics in Africa a theatre of clientelism, as the masses resort to "self-defense in kinship ties or their equivalents" in the face of a weak state.[38]

Fanon's critique of the National Bourgeoisie is even more scathing. In the years following independence, this elite class of African states failed in their historic task of providing a responsible leadership that would usher in progress and prosperity. They have ended up reproducing the same colonial situation the people had earlier rejected, having "assimilated to the core the most despicable aspects of the colonial mentality."[39] Fanon posits that the petit interest of the National Bourgeoisie is merely the "transfer into indigenous hands of the privileges inherited from the colonial period."[40] Their preference for privileges over responsibilities is indeed selfish and myopic. Corruption, which is now almost synonymous with African contemporary politics, is traceable to this preference for privileges over responsibility. Their craving for an ostentatious lifestyle is also symptomatic of their love for privileges. The following remarks summarize these corrupt tendencies:

> This bourgeoisie, especially in the aftermath of independence, has no scruples depositing in foreign banks the profits it has made from the national resources. Major sums, however, are invested for the sake of prestige in cars,

> villas, and all those ostentatious goods, described by economists as typical of an underdeveloped bourgeoisie.[41]

The reference to the term "underdeveloped bourgeoisie" is in line with the differentiation Fanon makes between the bourgeoisie of Western countries and the "underdeveloped bourgeoisie" (perhaps "pseudo-bourgeoisie") of the colonized countries. Though the former is also corrupt, they possess enough capital and a broader vision that have enabled them to play some positive pioneering and inventive roles in the history of Western society. The latter, that is, the underdeveloped bourgeoisie of Africa, on the contrary

> mimics the Western bourgeoisie in its negative and decadent aspects without having accomplished the initial stages of exploration and invention of these Western bourgeoisie whatever the circumstance. In its early days, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies with the last stages of the Western bourgeoisie.[42]

I should add that the problem of the African bourgeoisie (or the elite class, broadly speaking) is not so much the lack of capital as the misperception of their responsibility to the people. They see leadership mainly as a platform that guarantees an unbridled enjoyment of the good things offered by modernity, while failing to confront the challenges modernity particularly presents to Africa.

The fact that Western colonial powers did a shoddy job of partitioning Africa into incompatible units has already been acknowledged. But this fact alone would not have generated as much problem had the National Bourgeoisie not unscrupulously exploited the existing ethnic fault lines to its political advantage. In other words, the tribal rivalries that have come to characterize African politics are for the most part created and maintained by the elite political class. Because they really have nothing tangible to offer the masses, these politicians whip up ethnic sentiments to secure votes, even if it means pitting one tribe or ethnicity against the other. As Fanon succinctly puts it:

> Wherever the petit-mindedness of the national bourgeoisie and the haziness of its ideological positions have been incapable of enlightening the people . . . wherever this national bourgeoisie has been incapable of expanding its vision of the world, there is a return to tribalism, and we watch with a raging heart as tribalism triumphs.[43]

Today in Africa, politics largely takes on an ethnic coloration.

In many African countries, there exists "ethnic dictatorship," to use Fanon's expression, whereby a certain ethnic group deploys its numerous political advantages to keep itself in power. Political parties, which should aim at national interest, become ethnic parties, for the most part.[44] In a country like Nigeria, there appears to be a gang-up against certain ethnicities with the aim of keeping them away from the scheme of things. Key government positions are manned by individuals from the ethnicities that are part of the gang-up, with little or no consideration of actual

competence or merit. (Meanwhile, the idea of "key" positions by Nigerian political reckoning means nothing more than "juicy" positions that give one an unhindered access to the "national cake".) The Nigerian situation is particularly woeful because Nigeria's retardation today is quite traceable to the problem of mediocrity, a situation where incompetent hands are put in charge of various government organs by reason of their ethnicities or political affiliations, while competent technocrats from the "excluded" ethnicities or groups are kept away from positions of responsibility.

Urbanization and Rural–Urban Migration

The politics of exclusion described earlier is not unconnected to the wider problem of exclusion and marginalization that is now being entrenched in modern African development culture. I here refer to the culture of marginalizing the rural areas/countryside and excluding them from the scheme of things. One cannot discuss the challenges of modernity in Africa without taking note of rural-to-urban migration, occasioned by the marginalization of the rural areas. Urbanization (and the concomitant exclusion of the rural areas) is a colonial phenomenon. Colonialists established a development pattern that exploited resources from the countryside in an attempt to satisfy the insatiable consumerist appetite of the urban areas which served as administrative headquarters. Postcolonial Africa has entrenched this colonial developmental pattern which is neither sustainable nor just.

Once again, Fanon and Davidson are both concerned about this trend and could not leave it out in their incisive analyses of the problems of modern Africa. Linking this trend with colonialism, Fanon observes:

> We know that colonial domination gave preferential treatment to certain regions . . . Colonialism almost never exploits the entire country. It is content with extracting rural resources and exporting them to the metropolitan industries thereby enabling a specific sector to grow relatively wealthy, while the rest of the colony continues, or rather sinks, into underdevelopment and poverty.[45]

As a result of the preferential treatment given to select metropolis, all eyes turn to the metropolis. People desert the countryside in large masses and squeeze themselves in the metropolis with illusory visions of a better life. Fanon laments:

> And the dream of every citizen is to reach the capital, to have his piece of the pie. The towns and villages are deserted, the unaided, uneducated, and untrained rural masses turn their backs on the unrewarding rural soil and set off for the urban periphery, swelling the lumpenproletariat out of all proportion.[46]

African cities today represent some of the worst eyesores on earth, owing largely to the inundation of the cities by a mass of hungry, angry, illiterate, and

often unemployable people. The limited amenities at the cities get overstretched, leading to unimaginable crimes and overall horrible conditions similar to what Hobbes aptly described as the "state of nature." Shanty towns and slums sprout, whose living conditions are far worse than the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and other Latin American cities.

Like Fanon, Davison frowns at this state-of-affairs and sees it as the unfortunate "triumph of the 'city' over the 'village'," a triumph whose "price has had to be paid in a reliance on imports of foreign food into a continent which had always been self-sufficient in food."[47] Davidson's remark that Africa "had been self-sufficient in food" clearly traces the root of the current food crisis in Africa to warped colonialist economic strategies. The colonial developmental pattern which marginalizes the countryside leads to the desertion of the rural areas where real farming occurs. It is indeed worrisome that a continent that used to pride itself in food production must now rely heavily on foreign aids to feed its ever-teeming but starving population. Davidson refers to urbanization as a "colonial inheritance."[48] And, since urbanization and the sprawling of shanty towns and slums go hand in hand, one cannot but conclude that famous African slums like Kibera (Nairobi, Kenya) and Ajegunle (Lagos, Nigeria) constitute an infamous Greek Gift of modernity to Africa.

The foregoing section has explored the challenges associated with modernity, but more precisely colonialism (considering the relationship between the former and the latter), in Africa – as accounted for in the works of Fanon, Mbembe, and Davidson. Though Africa's problems are multifarious, the aforementioned issues are pivotal in any discourse that touches upon the disruptive impact of modernity on Africa. Ultimately, the image that inevitably distills from the aforementioned discussion is that of a continent at the crossroads, a continent mired in deep crises.

Since this book pays a special attention to Igbo society, let us now see how the cluster of new practices and ways of doing things that go by the name "modern" has impacted Igbo society.

Modernity: The Igbo Experience

The Igbo people inhabit the Southeast and parts of the Niger Delta areas of the present Nigeria, making up about a sixth of Nigeria's over 170 million population. It is an area rich in both human and natural resources, but perhaps more significant is its cultural and philosophical resources (as will be outlined in Chapter 4 and parts of Chapter 5). Like other parts of Africa, Igboland went through colonial experience, which forms part of its larger encounter with modernity. This experience *disrupted*, though did not completely *destroy*, the structure of the Igbo world. In what follows, I highlight the most important elements of this disruption, relying majorly on the works of the famous Igbo scholar and novelist, Chinua Achebe.

First and foremost, the very title of Achebe's first novel – *Things Fall Apart* – is instructive and telling. In the passage from which the book suggestively gets its title, one of the major characters, Obierika, voices out his regret about the advent

of the "white man" (who in this instance embodies Western modernity or, the "new era"):

> Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we try to drive out the white men in Umuofia, we should find it easy. There are two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? . . . Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that hold us together and *we have fallen apart*.[49]
>
> [My Italics]

At the heart of Obierika's lamentation is the shattering of a time-honored world of values and frame of reference that gave meaning to a people's life. It would be wrong to assume that Umuofia (Igbo) society had not experienced important societal transformations before the white man came.[50] But the white man was particularly successful in this instance because he first won over native agency – "our own people" – a factor that effectively undermined the bond of solidarity that held the people together and made them "act like one." As I shall argue in Chapter 4, solidarity is the foremost Igbo socio-epistemic principle, so vital that any threat to it bodes the collapse of the entire Igbo social order.

The previous passage is a concise statement of Achebe's verdict on the "new order." He sees the "new order" basically as a "falling apart" of the old Igbo world. Some passages in *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* respectively use the language of "emasculation"[51] and turning the world "upside down"[52] to describe the sweeping transformations that come with the new dispensation.

Now, what are the specific ways the colonial encounter has transformed the Igbo society? In other words, what are the key features of the transformation introduced by the "white man"? A terse cautionary remark by one of the speakers in an age-grade[53] meeting in *Arrow of God* points to some of the key features of the transformation: "The white man, the new religion, the soldiers, the new road – they are all part of the same thing. The white man has a gun, a machete, a bow and carries fire in his mouth. He does not fight with one weapon alone."[54]

The speaker is suggesting here that the new order is a whole package that comes with all manner of upheavals – political, social, religious, military, and a host of others. Achebe depicts this in a more narrative fashion in *Things Fall Apart* in the following report:

> But Stories were already gaining ground that the white man had not only brought a religion but also a government. It was said that they had built a place of judgment in Umuofia to protect the followers of their religion. It was even said that they had hanged one man who killed a missionary.[55]

In this passage and the preceding one, we get an insight into what the new order looks like. The point is that all-ramifying changes have been introduced in the Igbo

society by the coming of the white man, effectively threatening or even replacing certain old ways of doing things. In what follows, I shall discuss the current dilemma of the Igbo society following the tragic colonial encounter, touching upon issues of politics, religion, the legal sphere, epistemology/language, family/social structure, economy, and the realms of values/custom. It is not within the purview of the present analysis to track all the nuances therein. However, the salient features will be discussed – all with the aim of highlighting the crisis situation in which the modern Igbo society finds itself.

Politics

Obviously, colonialism redefined the Igbo political space. It has already been stated that the "white man had not only brought a religion but also a government." Many of the precolonial political institutions have been replaced by modern institutions, patterned after the West. To begin with, the British colonialists lumped Igbo people together with people of other ethnic stock into the current Nigerian state. In the preceding section, we saw that it is "positively harmful," to use Basil Davidson's expression, to erect such a motley artificial arrangement in the name of a "modern" state. Today, Igbo people perhaps bear much of brunt of this "harmful" arrangement, for the secessionist move they launched to extricate themselves from the British-creation called Nigeria was roundly crushed, leaving behind material and mental wounds that somewhat defines the contemporary Igbo person.[56] A sober assessment of the causes of the Nigeria-Biafra War (Biafra having the Igbo in the majority) would never fail to acknowledge the fundamental fault lines of modern Nigerian state. Therefore, it is safe to say that both the war and other ugly political realities that define the Igbo person today belong to the poisoned chalice of modernity insofar as Igboland remains part of the "modern" Nigerian state.

Aside from the fact of Igboland being part of the modern Nigerian state, there is another important political transformation worth mentioning – the transition from precolonial republicanism or "village democracies,"[57] in Chieka Ifemesia's language, to the recognition of centralized authorities. One of the most distinguishing features of the precolonial Igbo society, unanimously acknowledged among historians and anthropologists, is that, unlike many African tribes, the precolonial Igbo society never instituted any centralized authorities in the form of kings or monarchs. The popular expression, "Igbo enweghi eze" (Igbo have no king), underscores this fact. Achebe, in his characteristic thoroughness, did not leave out this fact in his narrative:

> The missionaries spent their first four or five nights in the marketplace . . . They asked who the king was, but the villagers told them that there was no king. "We have men of high title and the chief priests and the elders," they said.[58]

Similarly, an apparently perceptive British official in Achebe's account testifies that, quite unlike other Nigerian peoples, "the Ibos (sic) never developed any kind of central authority. That's what our headquarters people fail to appreciate."[59]

Over the centuries, the Igbo evolved a sophisticated form of republican politics in which society was governed by decisions arrived at in deliberative village assemblies involving male adults – devoid of any royal impositions. The chief priests oversaw the spiritual/cultic life of the community while the elders and titled men provided guidance and wise counsels. Elders and titled men commanded respect among the people but this was earned; they had no royal entitlements and never acted in any royal capacities. This scenario will be explained in detail in Chapter 4.

Suffice it to say that this state-of-affairs in Igboland perplexed the British colonialists, whose Indirect Rule system operated through existing monarchs and emirs, as obtainable in other parts. Unscrupulously, the British went about erecting "mushroom kings"[60] known as "Warrant Chiefs" to fill in the perceived leadership vacuum. Had the British taken some time to understand the political reflexes of the Igbo person, they would not have committed such a monumental blunder, whose consequences Igboland still contends with to this day. A more acceptable approach in line with the Igbo republican temperament would have been adopted. What worked for other ethnicities who were already used to centralized authorities must not work for Igboland. The Warrant Chiefs were given enormous powers, and they became high-handed. But they were stiffly resisted by their own people, whose political reflexes never entertained royal impositions. The Warrant Chief has somewhat metamorphosed into what is known today as Eze, Obi, or Igwe who now preside as monarchs in Igboland.

This is a major upheaval in Igbo political culture, a people who had for centuries evolved quite a stable democratic culture. The problem of legitimacy often comes into play, as the election of these so-called Eze, Obi, or Igwe is always fraught with controversy and corruption. The social atrocities committed in the quest for these modern forms of power threaten the peace and stability of Igboland. More importantly – and as it relates to the aim of this chapter – the question of identity crises comes into play. Since the dawn of these modern forms of power, an age-old Igbo republican and somewhat egalitarian culture has been pushing against some encroaching dictatorial modern institutions of power. The current crisis of political culture is, once again, attributable to the colonial encounter.

Religion

Any discourse on the upheavals of modernity in Igboland that does not touch upon religion would be incomplete. For, in Igboland, modernity is inseparable from Christianity and the Western education is introduced by the missionaries. In the eyes of the people, the "white man" (who stands for Western modernity) not only brought a new government but also came with the "white man's religion," as Christianity was earlier seen. It should be acknowledged that Christianity is an ambivalent phenomenon in Igboland; it came with a lot of positive developments, but it also has its own downside. My focus here is not to discuss its positive and negative features but to unpack the nature and extent of the upheavals it introduced to the pre-Christian Igbo society.

Like most pre-Christian/precolonial African societies, the Igbo society was polytheistic. The Igbo pantheon was composed of a plethora of gods (*chi*), each of which was called upon on specific occasions. Each god/goddess had his/her own adherents, but the cults of *Chukwu* (a "supreme deity" of a sort), *Amadioha* (the god of Thunder), and *Ala* (the Earth goddess/goddess of fertility) seemed to be the most popular. In light of the stabilizing role religion played in the Igbo society over the centuries, the shock and horror that came with the earliest encounters with the "white man's religion" would expectedly be unimaginable. It comes as no surprise that, in some passages in Achebe's novels, the white man is accused of introducing a "new god";[61] Christianity was seen as a wary, "abominable religion"[62] and missionaries seen as "strangers desecrating our land."[63] That sacred and ordered world which gave meaning indeed came under threat, and society was consequently unsettled.

In this respect, Achebe succinctly describes the personal crisis that Okonkwo, the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*, who typifies the premodern Igbo person, had to contend with, as he imagined the shattering of the old religious order.

> Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his fathers crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man's god. If such a thing were to ever happen, he, Okonkwo, would wipe them off the face of the earth.[64]

Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son, had already converted to Christianity against Okonkwo's wish. Okonkwo, a zealot for the tradition of his ancestors, had immediately disowned him and was now worried at the prospect of his other children and other members of the clan joining the white man's religion. That would soon be the case, as Christianity soon transitioned into a state institution promoted by the colonial government. The religion of the ancestors was abandoned, and Igboland became a Christian enclave – at least superficially.

But here comes the identity crisis: after nearly 150 years since the advent of Christianity in Igboland, the overall reception of the Christian message may at best be described as superficial. On the superficial level, Igboland today is a predominantly Christian enclave and, as it were, a "success story" of the great missionary endeavors of the French, the British, and the Irish, with bourgeoning Christian institutions, churches, Christian/Western education, etc. But the Igbo person is perhaps yet to wholly accept the "essence" of Christianity. The Igbo Christian has, to a large extent, remained polytheistic at heart.

An important question posed by an Igbo man to a Christian preacher might help drive home this point: "If we leave our gods and follow your god, who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors?"[65] The Igbo person goes to church in the morning but courts the friendship of the "neglected gods and ancestors" by pouring libations to them at night. In a sense, the old gods have continued

to haunt the Igbo person, even in an apparently Christian era. Today, religion is as much instrumentalized as it had been in the pre-Christian era, resulting in a general syncretistic atmosphere in Igboland. It is not within the purview of the present work to evaluate or pass verdict on the missionary approach of those who came to "evangelize" Igboland. My task here is only to point out the underlying problem of religious identity that this whole syncretistic atmosphere represents and to raise questions as to how the Igbo person could unproblematically integrate his/her religious past with his/her religious present in these modern times.

Social Fabric and Kinship Ties

Modernity has brought about sweeping transformations not only in the religious sphere but also on kinship relations. I make a particular reference to what the famous Igbo sociologist, Peter Ekeh, refers to as the "two publics" that were birthed by the colonial experience. In his famous essay, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," Ekeh argues that colonialism has created two public realms in postcolonial Africa. On the one hand, there is the "primordial public," composed of people who have little contact with Western modernity, and have therefore preserved the primordial instincts, customs, and morality. In this group, largely found in the rural areas, primordial sentiments, and ties influence and determine the individual's public behavior. On the other hand, there is the "civic public" which traces its origin from the colonial administration. During the colonial times, it was composed of the "elite" locals who had acquired some Western education and are consequently recruited into the colonial administration and services like the military, civil service, and the police.[66] In these postcolonial times, "civic public" may extend to all those, largely found in the cities who have keyed into the Western lifestyle.

My reference to Ekeh's theory serves to drive home the point that the Igbo postcolonial society epitomizes the division of society into "two publics" – thanks to the colonial experience. The crisis therein, according to Ekeh, is that elements of the "primordial public" impinge on the "civic public" and vice versa. In other words, Igbo society today is composed of social agents who somewhat lack a sense of direction as to how to properly integrate the old and the new ways of doing things. Crisis is expected, in that "the dialectical relationship between the two publics foments the unique political issues that have come to characterize African politics."[67]

Let's consider another aspect. Modernity has resulted in a shift in the economic structure of Igboland with a ripple effect on kinship ties. As more people travel to the cities to take up white collar jobs, the rural areas are left for the poor, the old, and the unlettered, who retain the traditional occupations of farming, fishing, and craftmanship. This situation has continued to pose a serious challenge to solidarity and kinship bonding that were the hallmark of the Igbo society when most of the people lived and practiced their trades in the rural areas.

A passage in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* beautifully describes the negative impacts of this economic shift on kinship ties: That was what the world had come

to. Children left old parents at home and scattered in all directions in search of money. It was hard on the old woman with eight children. It was like having a river and yet washing one's hands with spittle.[68] Indeed, that traditional set-up in which the old were surrounded and cared for by children and grandchildren is fast disappearing, because the young are nowadays almost compelled to leave for the city in search of the "white man's money." There are diaspora Igbo communities all over the world, owing largely to the enterprising spirit of the Igbo and their penchant to go after the "white man's money" (the so-called *ego oyibo*, a term that the Igbo generally use to describe modern economic pursuits).

As an attempt to bridge the gap between the "home front" and the "diaspora," efforts have been made to maintain kinship ties and establish solidarity among diaspora communities by way of "Igbo unions" that come under different names. Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* provides an interesting insight into the activities of one of the diaspora Igbo communities. These diaspora communities make efforts to keep themselves united, but the realities of modern life militate against their efforts.

The Moral Sphere

The crisis that modernity presents to Igbo society manifests itself in yet another way – the transformation of moral values. Modernity has occasioned what may be properly described as a "trans-valuation" of values, to use a famous Nietzschean expression. Premodern Igbo society had a set of moral values derived from their conception of what constitutes the good life. It could be discerned from Achebe's writings and other scholarly depictions of premodern Igbo society that moral values such as diligence, truthfulness, respect for elders, patience, justice, and mutual cooperation were held in high esteem. On the contrary, greed, indolence, falsehood, arrogance, injustice, violence, and selfishness were abhorred. Nowadays, many positive values for which the Igbo were known have come under threat, as newfangled behaviors continue to make greater inroads into society. It would be wrong to insinuate that the premodern Igbo world was a perfect world. It is likewise wrong to suggest a necessary connection between modernity and the current moral decadence in the Igbo society.

The problem is that the learning process that should usher in an unproblematic modernity was somewhat truncated by techniques of colonial administration, leading to a type of maladjustment. Modernity comes with entire new realities and standards of measurement that should be approached with utmost circumspection. As it were, the goalpost has shifted, and the standard of measurement has significantly altered. In *No Longer at Ease*, a wise village elder captures this point well: "Today greatness has changed its tune. Titles are no longer great, neither are barns . . . Greatness is now in the things of the white man. And so, we too have changed our tune."[69] Here, the old man observes that "greatness is now in the things of the white man." He is actually pointing out that modernity, for good or for bad, has introduced new realities and standards and that one should make judicious adjustments.

A New Capitalist Culture

It has been noted that modernity is not evil *per se*; but it comes with certain realities that the Igbo person is somewhat maladjusted to. One example is the modern capitalist culture. Achebe alludes severally to this capitalist reality in his writings. Among the things the white man introduced to the Umuofia Igbo community is the "trading store and, for the first time, palm oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia."[70] Umuofia had now been incorporated into the capitalist world, a situation that had increased the cost of living, though it also brought "wealth," at least on the white man's terms. Once this capitalist culture took root, an acquisitive mentality set in, such that the Igbo person, who used to be contented when he had enough to feed his family and take care of some short-term needs, may now crave to be a millionaire or billionaire, sometimes at the expense of other members of the community. Julius Nyerere describes this newfangled acquisitive mentality as the "capitalist attitude of the mind" and associates it with colonialism.[71] This acquired capitalist attitude is in contrast with the general disposition in the precolonial times when no one sought to grow rich at the expense of his neighbors.

Once again, I do not intend to paint a picture of a perfect Igbo past devoid of immoral behaviors. Rather, the point is that modernity has introduced peculiar forms of moral decadence, and at an entirely different scale – all in connection with the new capitalist dispensation. For instance, there may have been people of little moral restraint in the pre-capitalist Igboland who stole from other people's farms and barns to keep themselves from starving. Today, there are "career" robbers, as it were, who do not steal because they are starving but because they want to get the best of modern luxury. Today, there are "career politicians" whose only interest in politics is to enrich themselves with public funds at the expense of their fellow citizens. In the traditional Igbo society, robbing the entire community was considered an abomination that attracted appropriate disciplinary measures. Nowadays, the ostentatious lifestyle of corrupt politician, sustained at the expense of the public, often attracts some admiration. The sense of outrage has apparently been blunted. To sum up this point, it is safe to say that corruption, financial impropriety, and a whole range of social malaise rife in the present-day Igbo society have their root in the acquisitive mentality that came with the introduction of a capitalist culture in Igboland. Therefore, one cannot diagnose the problems of modern Igbo society without referring to the newfangled capitalist culture.

Indigenous Knowledges Endangered

In the foregoing discussion, it is impossible to miss out the fact that there has been a systemically subjugation of indigenous knowledges. Modernity is skewed in favor of Western knowledges and knowledge-productions, as will be elaborated in Chapter 3. Igbo cultural knowledges are not spared by this process. Time-honored wisdoms and knowledges that have held the Igbo society together are being systemically subjugated under Western epistemic paradigms. As earlier announced,

this book is chiefly motivated by the need to provide a balanced response to Western epistemic hegemony, using resources from the Igbo knowledges or imaginaries. It should generate serious concern that the system of knowledges which gave meaning and orientation to the Igbo society is fast being eroded. The time to intervene and respond to this threat is long overdue.

Achebe, who serves as a frame of reference in this part of the research, did not fail to identify the epistemic roots of our present predicament. To him, the colonial experience is primarily an epistemic disruption. Hence, his writings are shot through with expressions such as "the white man's knowledge,"[72] "what the white man knew,"[73] and "the knowledge of the white man's ways"[74] – and this is by way of underscoring the point that a certain form of knowledge has come to subjugate Igbo knowledges.

In the *Arrow of God*, the perceptive Ezeulu, who personally did not like the white man's ways, nevertheless admonished his son, Oduche, to embrace Western education: The world is changing . . . I do not like it . . . But . . . I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow.[75] Ezeulu's prediction has turned out to be true today, for literacy and competence are now measured against Western standards. For instance, one could be a genius in Igbo wisdom, but if he/she has not obtained "the white man's knowledge" and cannot speak the white man's language (English, in this particular case), one is likely to remain irrelevant in today's world. Even if one were an orator in Igbo language, the ability to also speak English is the de facto "meal ticket." This fact explains the gradual death of the Igbo language to which people have shown concern but seem to be at a loss as to the proper way to reverse the trend. It suffices at this stage of the work to point out that the gradual death of the Igbo language is one of the consequences of the wider epistemic hegemony at play in contemporary world.

Subjugation of Indigenous Legal Practices

The last point made in the previous passage leads to the final area I wish to discuss, namely, the subjugation of Igbo traditional legal knowledges and practices. Before the coming of the white man, traditional methods of arbitration and conflict resolution were already in existence. The Igbo had a sense of justice derived from their knowledge of what was right or wrong. Their legal knowledges may not have been perfect but were highly efficient in keeping order in society – perhaps because they were extant and enjoyed legitimacy from the people. Disputes were mostly resolved through often protracted sessions of arbitrations in village assemblies guided by the wisdom of the elders. The sanctions, resolutions, and disciplinary measures that resulted from such sessions were mostly accepted, since they were a product of the people's native wisdoms.

With the advent of the colonialists, however, these practices were effectively set aside, and foreign legal institutions were introduced. The establishment of the court

of law indeed belongs to the whole range of "package" that the white man brought with him. Achebe provides a good picture of this scenario in the following passage:

> Apart from the church, the white men had also brought a government. They built a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance. He had court messengers who brought men to him for trial. Many of these messengers came from Umuru on the bank of the Great River, where the white men first came many years before and where they had built the center of their religion and trade and government. These court messengers were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners and also arrogant and high-handed . . . They guarded the prison, which was full of men who had offended the white man's law.[76]

A critical look of the text quoted here reveals much of the problems of an "imported" justice system. Unlike the traditional methods which enjoyed legitimacy since they flowed from indigenous wisdoms and were presided over by recognized indigenous authorities, the new system does not enjoy legitimacy because the people feel alienated from it. In other words, the people feel they do not really own the new system. The law itself is seen as the "white man's law." When an offence is committed, it is not seen as an offence against a kinsman but an offence against the white man and his laws. The law enforcers are "hated" for being the white man's "agent" and judgment itself is carried out in "ignorance," for there is little or no consideration of indigenous sensibilities and sense of justice.

James Tully has carried out some extensive research that not only points to the imperial and hegemonic character of modern constitutional laws that govern modern nation-states but also alerts us of the inherent dangers of the negligence of the multiplicity of indigenous legal sensibilities and practices.[77] This negligence or, as Achebe puts it, "ignorance" of indigenous legal sensibilities particularly constitutes a problem in the Igbo context. In the colonial times, it accounted for much of the failure of the colonial legal system in Igboland. The people were largely uncooperative. The colonial administration unwittingly resorted to brute force to make up for their unwillingness to evolve a less alienating system for the Igbo. For the locals as well as the colonialists, it was a whole frustrating experience.

In Achebe's *Arrow of God*, this frustration is voiced by Captain Winterbottom, a British colonial official, in a discussion with his colleague:

> That's right. Actually, they're no longer very troublesome – not to us anyhow; the punitive expedition taught them a pretty unforgettable lesson. But they are still very uncooperative. In the whole division they are the least cooperative with their Native Court. Throughout last year the court handled less than a dozen cases and not one was brought to it by the natives themselves.[78]

Winterbottom's frustration, as expressed here, touches upon the core of the current crises with respect to the legal sphere. There is a general lack of faith in modern (colonial) legal system. The complicated wheelwork of legal bureaucracy, the

corruption, the fact of being represented by a lawyer who must present the case in English, the fines, damages, prison terms, etc., are quite alienating and hardly satisfy the Igbo person's inner yearning for justice. As a result, people have continued to take recourse to traditional methods of conflict resolution in a society that is supposedly "modern" in the twenty-first century.

Here again, identity crises reveal themselves, and the tension between the present and the past is manifest. An arrogant, ever-encroaching modernity has failed to satisfy the inner yearnings of the Igbo person, thereby forcing him/her to take from the past to make up for the lack in the present – albeit in a haphazard fashion. As I have shown in the course of the foregoing exposition, this dilemma is present in virtually all spheres of modern Igbo life – social, political, economic, religious, and so on. The modern-day Igbo person is at the center of these crises and carries it as a burden in his/her everyday life. I believe that the only remedy – and this is indeed overdue – is to chart a course for a less problematic modernity by incorporating relevant elements of tradition into modern life.

But we must first provide a brief survey of the relevant scholarly attempts by Africans to lead Africa out of this conundrum – the crisis of modernity.

Confronting the Conundrum in Africa's Scholarly Circles

Much of scholarship that emerged from Africa, especially in the 1940s and 1950s going forward might, broadly speaking, may be seen as a response to the challenge that modernity (more precisely the colonial experience) presents to Africa. During the colonial era, the writings that emerged were – and understandably so – aimed at emancipating Africa from colonialist stranglehold. When independence was eventually gained, the immediate task of African scholars became that of engaging a society shaped by the colonial experience. In the politico-ideological sphere, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, and L. S. Senghor are particularly important. At once intellectuals and statesmen, they systematized their decolonial narratives into philosophies of "Ujamaa Socialism," "Consciencism," and "Negritude," respectively.

In the area of literature, the writings of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (to mention but a few) not only dramatize the crisis and alienation occasioned by the displacement of traditional African values by Western values but also suggest some solutions to the dilemma. In the circle of professional philosophers, scholars like Macien Towa, Paulin Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, and Kwame Gyekye have grappled with the question of how Africa might deal with its cultural past in light of modern realities. Recognizing the centrality of the theme of modernity for the philosophical enterprise in Africa, Peter Amato makes this submission: "Wrapped up in the question regarding African philosophy is a whole series of questions regarding Africa and European modernity, and the ways that conceptions of modernity have been employed to facilitate colonization."[79]

As I see it, the key question boils down to whether Africa's "premodern" past is at all relevant to Africa's present, and the extent to which the past may be employed to address modern realities. In the politico-ideological, literary, and philosophical

circles, the debate has been somewhat polarized between cultural "revivalists" and "anti-revivalists," in Kwame Gyekye's classification.[80] Though there exist some nuances, "revivalists," on the one hand, generally advocate looking back on the past in order to find the way forward; "anti-revivalists," on the other hand, lay much emphasis on maximizing the opportunities modernity provides, as they see little or no need of reclaiming the past.

I shall analyze the most important of these intellectual currents. The various positions taken by these intellectual currents would help the reader make sense of the approach I pursue later in the work.

Negritude – Senghor and Césaire

Negritude is one of the earliest attempts by Africans to re-discover their identity in response to European political and cultural imperialism. The pioneer intellectuals usually associated with the foundation of the negritude movement are Aimé Césaire, L. S. Senghor, and L. G. Damas. Césaire is credited with the coinage of the word, "Negritude," which appeared in his celebrated book-length poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Notebook of a Return to the Native Land) published in 1939. But L. S. Senghor is perhaps the most influential, because of not only his prolific engagement with the theme of negritude but also his subsequent political influence, as a long-serving president of the Republic of Senegal. For our present purposes, I pay more attention to Senghor's conception of negritude.

Negritude as a movement has a multifaceted dimension – literary, aesthetic/artistic, philosophical, political, and spiritual – all of which emphasize the inherent powers, strength, uniqueness, and dignity of the black personhood. It celebrates and romanticizes black culture, art, ideas, modes of perception, and even mannerisms. There is no doubt that it does so in response or, perhaps, reaction to racism and imperialism, but it tends to essentialize "blackness" and "African-ness" in a manner that somewhat reinforces that same racism. For instance, Senghor famously declares that "Emotion is negro, as reason is Greek" ("L'émotion est negre, comme la raison est héllene"[81]). Doubtless problematic, the statement was meant to underline the black (African) person's propensity towards the aesthetic, the emotional, and the intuitive, in contrast with the tendency of the white man to be rationalistic and analytical, a factor that perhaps explains the latter's assumed success with the sciences. Black aesthetics, embodied in negritude, is essentially linked with the black man's reason or mode of perception which Senghor also contrasts with that of the white man: "European reason is analytical by utilization, Negro reason is intuitive by participation."[82] The point Senghor seems to make here is not that the Negro has no reason, but that his reason operates in a manner different from that of the European. Before an object of perception, "black" reason tends to be sympathetic, synthetic, and participative while Western reason tends to be analytical and somewhat aggressive. Each has its potential merits and demerits.

Proponents of negritude consider it a liberating force destined to emancipate Africa from political, economic, and cultural imperialism. Indeed, Césaire and Senghor were actively involved in revolutionary discourses, sometimes employing

Marxist categories to support their arguments. They were strong proponents of African solidarity on the basis of which the political decolonization of Africa could be achieved. Negritude was among the intellectual and political movements that struggled for the independence of Africa, and Senghor himself became the first president of the Republic of Senegal.

Whatever shape or form negritude may have taken, there is always an underlying assumption that there is such a *thing* or "essence" as being "black," that is, "blackness," from which the term "negritude" got its name. This supposed "essence" is the very "soul" of Africa or blackness. From this essentialist standpoint, therefore, Africa's search for identity in the face of modernity would be nothing but a "fervent quest for the Holy Grail, which is our Collective Soul,"[83] as Senghor puts it. Thus, it makes sense to think of the Negritude movement as a "revivalist" movement, to use Kwame Gyekye's classification.

Its shortcomings notwithstanding, negritude is one of the earliest expressions of Africa's search for identity; therefore, its historical significance should not be underestimated. At the very least, it is an attempt at self-affirmation in response to the dehumanizing experience of colonialism. It also provided intellectual impetus to nationalist movements that struggled for the liberation of Africa from colonial rule. Abiola Irele recognizes this historical link between negritude and the rise of nationalism, noting that "the specific contribution of negritude to the development of nationalism in Africa was to articulate, in the form of an all-encompassing concept of black identity, the sense of the African's separate cultural and spiritual inheritance."[84]

Paradoxically, this insistence on an "all-encompassing" idea of black identity and a "separate cultural and spiritual inheritance" constitutes the major grounds for the critique of negritude. Negritude has come under heavy attack by subsequent African scholarship, not only for its tendency to essentialize "blackness" or romanticize about the past but also for its sweeping claims that tend to homogenize a continent as vast as Africa. As Richard Bell remarks, "Negritude shares the universalizing tendency with some ethnophilosophy in identifying common, fundamental cultural characteristics that were thought to be specifically African or 'Negro'."[85] I shall revisit this charge that negritude is a species of "ethnophilosophy," for it constitutes a point of departure for philosophers like Macien Towa and Pauline Hountondji. Before then, I turn to Frantz Fanon, who also uses his scathing attack on negritude as a starting point in his attempt to grapple with the problem colonialism presents to the black person.

Revolutionary Struggle – Fanon

Fanon's idea of revolutionary struggle as the vital means of constructing the identity of black colonized subjects could better be understood against the backdrop of his critique of negritude. According to Fanon, negritude, with its emphasis on cultural identity in poems and arts, does not actually address the brute realities of alienation and unfreedom engendered by colonialism. To him, the negritude intellectuals' obsession with proving the existence of black (African) cultural essence to

the white man only succeeds in reinforcing racism and black inferiority complex. It is wrong for intellectuals to be trapped in defining oneself in relation to the white man, for the whole effort amounts to "window-dressing" and achieves nothing: "This historical obligation to racialize their claims, to emphasize an African culture . . . leads the African intellectuals into a dead end."[86] Negritude is, therefore, a defensive and timid approach to self-affirmation. This inclination to be on the defense is indeed a long-term effect of colonialism, which invariably controls the negritude intellectuals. As Fanon observes, "Colonialism's insistence that 'niggers' have no culture and Arabs are by nature barbaric inevitably leads to a glorification of cultural phenomena that become continental instead of national and singularly racialized."[87] It is being suggested here that some of the other weaknesses of negritude – namely, the romantic glorification of cultural phenomena and sweeping generalization about Africa – also flow from negritude's basic defensive posture.

Fanon insists that there is more to Africa's emancipation than the mere "revival of their past,"[88] which negritude was rather preoccupied with. Regarding the romantic glorification of cultural phenomena through poetry and arts, Fanon maintains a critical stance. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, for instance, Fanon clearly derides Senghor as a "singer" and berates his famous claim that Black is emotion as reason is Greek (Western):

> Listen to our singer Leopold Senghor . . . From the opposite end of the white world a magical Negro culture was hailing me. Negro sculpture! . . . Was this our Salvation? . . . the world had rejected me out of color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back toward unreason . . . Out of the necessities of my struggle I had chosen the method of regression, but the fact remained that it was an unfamiliar weapon.[89]

In light of the cited passage, it is therefore important to ask: What then is the "salvation"? What is the proper "weapon"? What alternative does Fanon present, which does not entrap the African in self-defense, inferiority complex, romanticism, and regression? How potent would this alternative weapon be?

To answer these questions, we must look at the whole concept of revolutionary "violence" in Fanon. Since "challenging the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of viewpoint,"[90] as the negritude intellectuals and other African intellectuals erroneously believe, the only viable option is, according to Fanon, an all-out revolutionary violence. Fanon believes that colonialism is such a violent phenomenon that it must be matched with violence. The process of invading a people to conquer, subdue, and dispossess them is in itself violent. It does not understand the language of diplomacy but that of brute force: "Colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence."[91] This violence is not to be carried out for the mere sake of it; it must be revolutionary, in that its goal must be the attainment of freedom for the colonized. The notion of freedom holds an important place in Fanon's thought. Fanon considers freedom paramount because such values as

cultural identity and self-affirmation that are the major preoccupations of African intellectuals would be unattainable under the yoke of foreign domination.

But there is more to revolutionary struggle than mere inflicting of harm. In Fanon, revolutionary struggle takes on a creative significance. Since romanticizing on supposed African past is stale and unproductive, only a revolutionary struggle has the creative potential of constructing a new culture for a people who took part in it.

> To fight for national culture first of all means fighting for the liberation of the nation, the tangible matrix from which culture can grow. One cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people's struggle for liberation . . . We should not therefore be content to delve into the people's past to find concrete examples to counter colonialism's endeavor to distort and depreciate . . . National culture is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong. National culture in the underdeveloped countries, therefore, must lie at the very heart of the liberation struggle these countries are waging.[92]

Revolutionary struggle not only possesses the potential of creating a national culture but also takes on the status of the foundational act of a nation. The victory that is won by the participation of all in the struggle, the sacrifice, and heroism of the people and the lessons that are learned therefore constitute a foundational culture that the people can fall back on and continually re-enact. In a veiled reference to negritude, Fanon declares his preference for the " 'Negro-African' culture that grows deeper through the people's struggle, and not through songs, poems, or folklore."[93]

Revolutionary struggle is described as a "cleansing force." Moreover, the freedom and self-worth gained at the end of a violent struggle is an achievement of all and not of a few elite "liberators."[94] This aspect of mass participation is of particular importance to Fanon, who is very critical of the local African "elite." If this freedom were to be a product of elitist round-table conferences in faraway Paris and London, the elite representatives would be misled into personalizing the victory and the gains thereof. Fanon completely rejects this scenario.

The following passage from D. A. Masolo sums up Fanon's standpoint on the quest for identity through revolutionary struggle.

> Fanon introduces the subject into the center of the quest for identity. For him, identity is not the result of passive appearances as is claimed in the old negritude. The prevailing political conditions in the world, and particularly the political conditions of colonization, clearly dictated for Fanon that identity ought to be defined as constituted of actions which prevent or eliminate political, economic, cultural, and psychological domination. Only violence can truly free the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it is the key to freedom, self-identity, and self-respect.[95]

Having presented Fanon's stance, I wish to make a few evaluative remarks. By emphasizing actual political and economic liberation, without which all talk about cultural identity makes no sense, Fanon's approach is undoubtedly pragmatic, down-to-earth. It takes us a step further from the apparent passivity and romanticism of the negritude intellectuals. And, by jettisoning the notion of a universal African culture and emphasizing national culture that grows from the revolutionary struggles of a people, Fanon moves away from the essentialism and universalizing claims of negritude.

But the very idea of violence as a means of achieving any goal at all is really suspect. Even if we should concede that violence could be appropriate in some situations, it cannot be the case in all situations. In Africa, for instance, colonial realities varied from place to place, some of which did not require an all-out violence to defeat.

Furthermore, Fanon speaks of violence in a manner that could mislead one into thinking that it is the "magic wand" to all colonial situations. To be sure, violence by itself cannot achieve anything; it must be complemented by diplomacy and dialogue. Even in cases where the people are forced to take up arms against occupying forces, warring faction must at some point sit at the negotiation table to broker peace. In fact, no African country got its independence without diplomatic negotiations involving elite representatives and colonialists. In other words, violence is quite unproductive if not backed up by diplomacy.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to point out that there is more to the construction of identity than violence could afford. In wartime, violence might be able to foster a "temporary" kind of identity and solidarity among so-called "brothers-in-arms." But Fanon's recommendation doesn't seem to have much relevance in peacetime when there is at least no ostensible "enemy" to fight. If Fanon had lived long enough to witness the post-independence Africa in which there is hardly any white, Western "enemy" to unite against, he would doubtless have to revise his thesis. Or, perhaps, he would have expounded an idea of "violence" that might entail a continual process of identity construction and self-definition equally valid in times when there are no external threats.

To sum up, it makes sense to think that any ideas or philosophies engaged in the search for African identity must recognize that identity is dynamic; such ideas or philosophies must themselves be relevant for the variety of situations in which Africans find themselves. Here I make special reference to "coloniality" (which will occupy us in Chapter 3). I contend that Fanon's violence cannot address the problem of "coloniality,"[96] a more insidious form of modern imperialism aimed at subjugating "subaltern" knowledges and knowledge-productions. The search for identity in the face of "coloniality," a reality much more complicated than direct foreign administrative/military presence in Africa, is better addressed at the epistemic level, as I shall demonstrate later in the book.

"Anti-Revivalism" – Towa and Hountondji

Aside the criticism it received from Fanon, negritude also came under attack by some professional, "anti-revivalist" philosophers, who are opposed to the "return"

to the past in the quest for identity. The most prominent among them are Macien Towa and Pauline Hountondji, whose views are outlined in what follows.

Towa launches a scathing attack on ethnophilosophy, which he considers an offshoot of old negritude that is stuck in the habit of essentializing and romanticizing Africa's premodern past. He vehemently maintains that ethnophilosophers, like Placide Tempels, Alexis Kagame, and John Mbiti, are not true philosophies, since their works are like ethnographical studies that merely regurgitate collective, folk wisdom. Towa dismisses their writings because they, in his opinion, lack the requisite philosophical rigor which critically interrogates the past without complacency.[97]

As an offshoot of negritude, ethnophilosophy has unfortunately limited the search for identity into a return to the past. "The movement of negritude, which ethnophilosophy would artificially like to prolong, has diverted us," he says, from the search for the means of "securing ourselves from the secrets of the Western world's victory over us."[98] The search for identity in the modern world would be meaningless if Africans do not discover the "secret" of Western power and knowledge that has enabled them to subdue the world. To discover this "secret," Africans must be prepared to reject and renounce such a weak past, for, as he argues, a culture that was easily subdued by another could not be a thing of pride:

> In order to affirm and assume oneself, the self must deny itself, it must deny its essence and therefore its past, it must expressly aim at becoming like the other, similar to him and hence uncolonizable by him. That is the necessary mediation that leads to the real affirmation of ourselves in the present world.[99]

This assertion explains Towa's preoccupation with the relationship between philosophy and scientific development. He believes that Europe became enormously powerful from the point at which its philosophy began to give impetus to scientific and technological development, and that Europe's strength and influence consist in this bond between philosophy and science. Rather than preoccupy itself with folk wisdom, African Philosophy must be development-oriented by providing the basis for African science. Since Europe already possesses the supposed "secret" of power, Africa's search for identity would be nothing other than striving to be like the possessors of such "secret." It is against this background that one understands Towa's rather controversial and exaggerated claim: "The option is without ambiguity: to deny oneself, to put the very being of the self in question, and to Europeanize oneself fundamentally."[100]

From the foregoing, it could easily be seen that Towa holds a "progressivist" position, in that he advocates social progress, especially viewed in scientific and technological terms, even if this entails denying Africa's traditional identities. It is this "progressivist" viewpoint that perhaps explains his adoption of Marxism, which he considers a progressivist philosophy. For this reason, too, he has great admiration for Lenin, Mao, and Fanon.

Like Towa, Paulin Hountondji is not only critical of ethnophilosophy (an offshoot of Negritude) but also thinks that African identity must be future-oriented

rather than backward-oriented. From the ranks of African professional philosophers, Towa and Hountondji are perhaps the most strident critics of ethnophilosophy. Thus, in Gyekye's classification, they are both "anti-revivalists," who think that Africa's traditional past is almost irrelevant to the construction of its modern identity. Despite the striking similarity between Towa and Hountondji, there are some important differences. As Abiola Irele observes:

> In contrast to Towa, Hountondji does not claim an explicit social and political function for philosophy. The primary objective of his work . . . is to hold the African philosopher to a more rigorous conception of the discipline than is apparent in the work of the ethnophilosopher. His position on the question of African philosophy thus makes no concession to ideology, as is the case with Towa."[101]

Irele's observation is indeed apt, for, as we saw earlier, Towa continues to harp on the practical social role philosophy should play in the development of Africa, a role that negritude and ethnophilosophy intellectuals abdicate. Hountondji likewise rejects the methodology of ethnophilosophy. However, he criticizes what he would regard as Towa's "obsession" with the socio-political role of philosophy which, in turn, leads to an overemphasis on scientific and technological progress.[102]

In his critique of ethnophilosophy, Hountondji points out that the negative influence negritude has on ethnophilosophy equally accounts for the latter's desperation to include what ordinarily cannot count for philosophy – namely, elements of collective thinking. As it were, the ethnophilosopher embarks upon this desperate move just to prove to the colonizers that Africa has an identity:

> In this quest, we find the same preoccupation as in the negritude movement – a passionate search for the identity that was denied by the colonizer – but now there is the underlying idea that one of the elements of the cultural identity is precisely "philosophy", the idea that every culture rests on a specific, permanent, metaphysical substratum.[103]

This supposed "specific, permanent, metaphysical substratum," upon which every culture rests, is precisely what Hountondji challenges in ethnophilosophy. Hountondji insists that such a "metaphysical substratum" does not exist, as a matter of fact.

The assumption of a "metaphysical substratum" nourishes the other major deficiency of ethnophilosophy. Hountondji refers to this as the "myth of primitive unanimity." "There is a myth at work," he writes:

> [T]he myth of primitive unanimity, with its suggestion that in "primitive" societies – that is to say, non-Western societies – everybody always agrees with everybody else. It follows that in such societies there can never be individual beliefs or philosophies but only collective systems of belief.[104]

The conclusion that follows from the tendency to collectivize thought is rather unpalatable and self-defeating. Ethnophilosophy sets out to reclaim Africa's identity and self-affirmation but ends up demonstrating to the white man that individuals in the African society are not capable of critically reflecting on, and possibly challenging, collective wisdom. This would invariably lead to the conclusion that there are no true philosophers in the traditional set-up, a conclusion that ethnophilosophers themselves would be quite ashamed to accept.

For this very reason, Hountondji posits his now-famous claim that, for anything to pass for African philosophy, it must be written down in texts, a criterion that at least requires some form of philosophical rigor and reflection on the part of the writer in an attempt to distil philosophy from collective wisdom. In this regard, Hountondji argues that it is "possible to retrieve [African philosophy] and apply it to something else not to the fiction of a collective system of thought, but to a set of philosophical discourses and texts."[105] When texts are written down, they could be properly analyzed, developed, and challenged by subsequent thinkers. This is the secret to the success of the Western philosophical tradition, and African philosophy must live up to this demand if it must establish its identity in the modern world. Furthermore, African philosophy must not only adopt the rigors of a science but also generate the discourse that gives impulse to scientific growth in Africa. Hountondji believes that every science is a product of a discussion in a given context or community. The role of philosophy would, therefore, be that of creating the environment for the discussion that gives rise to science. From this perspective then, "the first task of African philosophers today, if they wish to develop an authentic African philosophy, is to promote and sustain constant free discussion,"[106] that will provide impetus to scientific growth.

Having outlined in a nutshell the "anti-revivalists" views of Towa and Hountondji, it is germane to make a few evaluative remarks on them. I submit that the critique of the essentialist, generalizing and somewhat backward-looking viewpoints of negritude (and by extension, ethnophilosophy) is indeed apt. Drawing attention to the soft underbellies of negritude and ethnophilosophy, Towa and Hountondji advocate a more pragmatic and forward-looking approach that stresses development and ways of meeting up with the standards of modernity. In an attempt to overcome the backward-looking approach of Negritude and ethnophilosophy, however, the two thinkers manifest a discernible *disdain* for the African past. This disregard for the traditional past is perhaps much more pronounced in Towa than in Hountondji, with the former urging an all-out self-renunciation and "Europeanization," if that is what it would take to catch up with Europe in terms of development. I argue that Towa's advocacy for a sort of self-denial and self-renunciation in the name of "progress" is exaggerated. Much as Africans would like to live up to the challenges of modern life, this cannot be achieved by a complete rupture with Africa's hallowed past. As I shall show in Chapter 5 of this work, there is a less problematic way of integrating useful elements of Africa's traditional past, particularly its epistemologies, to make for a more balanced and sustainable African modernity.

This point about a sustainable African modernity leads to my next critical remark about Towa and Hountondji's "progressivist" tendencies. As has already been seen, the two thinkers are quite interested to see Africa meet up to the development standards of the Western world. Such development is usually conceived in terms of science. Towa's admiration for Western science and technology is not in doubt – and he makes no apologies for it. Hountondji also has a special place for scientific development in his thought. He maintains that one of the key roles of African philosophy would be to create an enabling environment for African science. He stresses the relationship between philosophy and science and harps on the need for the former to possess "scientific rigor" almost to a point of placing the two on the same pedestal. Massolo critiques Hountondji on this score:

> Thus, ethnophilosophy and Hountondji's critique have their limitations . . . And Hountondji because, in trying to shatter this ontological mythologization [referring to Ethnophilosophy], he creates another myth in its place: the scientific establishment of philosophical activity, the restoration of philosophy as a rigorous science.[107]

I would add here that the problem confronting Africa vis-à-vis modernity is not so much about its slow scientific development as that of making this development sustainable. In other words, the question of *sustainable* development is of primary importance. If the so-called scientific progress, about which Towa and Hountondji seem to be obsessed, is made without the corresponding development ethics, Africa might end up like Europe that destroyed itself in two major wars with lethal weapons brewed from the very pot of European science. I am sure Towa and Hountondji do not desire this for Africa. Even at the current level of technological advancement, Africa is already doing quite poorly when it comes to the issue of a prudent use of modern technology in a way that does not exert undue pressure on the natural environment. Today, Africa is having its fair share of consequences of environmental degradation associated with global capitalism. There is an urgent need for Africa to make a smooth transition to modernity using the resources of its relevant cultural values in order to temper the aggressiveness of the capitalist modernity it has inherited from Western world.

I round off this chapter by presenting the stance of the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Gyekye, who, in my judgment, holds a balanced view on this search for a modern identity.

"Specific-Aspect" Approach – Gyekye

Gyekye begins his intervention on the topic by identifying two broad categories of attitude towards Africa's cultural past, namely, the "revivalist" and the "anti-revivalist." Cultural revivalists argue for varying degrees of return to Africa's cultural past while anti-revivalists tend to repudiate Africa's past in favor of the Western strain of modernity. On the one hand, Gyekye mentions the Ghanaian scholar, N. K. Dzobo, as a famous advocate of the revivalist stance, whose idea of

Sankofa (meaning, "to go back") urges a radical return to Africa's cultural past as the panacea to Africa's present challenges. On the other hand, he cites Hountondji and Towa, who have been earlier reviewed, as champions of the anti-revivalist position.

While acknowledging some potential merits of each viewpoint when held in moderation, he however condemns the two polar opposites of "extreme or unrestricted revivalism" and "extreme or unrestricted anti-revivalism." He describes each of these tendencies thus:

> An extreme revivalist position is one that entertains nostalgic sentiments about the cultural products of the past and would perhaps not countenance any criticisms of them: for him or her the heritage of the past is perfect (or, near perfect) and can constitute a viable context for a modern life. An extreme anti-revivalist position is one that considers the heritage of the past as good for nothing in terms of ethos, purposes, and aspirations of life in the modern world.[108]

Rejecting the two extremes, Gyekye argues:

> Thus, in my view, the positions of both the extreme, unrestricted cultural revivalist and the extreme, unrestricted anti-revivalist must be rejected on the grounds that both positions are infected by an unnecessary hyperbole . . . This being so, any judgement about the total relevance or irrelevance of a traditional cultural value or practice to the contemporary cultural setting is bound not only to be premature but also a distortion of the truth. A view that represents a wholesale condemnation or exaltation of the culture of a people would not be realistic and could easily be falsified if serious normative investigations into the complexities of that culture resulted in one's rejection or appreciation of some features of it.[109]

Gyekye recommends that, instead of wholesale condemnation or endorsement of the past, we should look at specific aspects or specific problems and make the right evaluations as to their relevance to the present. This "specific-aspect" or "specific-problem" approach, as he calls it, would make us avoid sweeping generalizations, the "Scylla of wholesale, nostalgic acceptance or apotheosis of tradition and the Charybdis of wholesale, indiscriminate, cavalier rejection of it."[110]

Following this "specific-aspect" approach, Gyekye identifies some negative aspects of Africa's cultural past that should be discarded or radically revised in today's modern world. He also mentions some positive elements that could be taken up or even improved on and integrated into the African modernity.

One of the most prominent features of Africa's cultural past that must be discarded is the propensity to postulate agentive, supernatural causes for natural, everyday phenomena – a disposition that has sustained all forms superstition and stifled scientific progress. Gyekye admits that the traditional African usually starts off with quite an empirical and observatory approach to the knowledge of the natural world, which has yielded practical results in the areas of agriculture and

herbal medicine. However – and regrettably too – this initial empirical approach is soon given up or diverted to a search for agentive, supernatural causes. Thus, the exhaustive, rigorous search for natural causes that sustains the scientific enterprise is somewhat short-circuited.

> But, for a reason that must be linked to the (alleged) intense religiosity of the cultures, causality is generally understood in terms of spirit, of mystical power . . . In view of the critical importance of causality to the development of science, a culture that is obsessed with supernatural or mystical explanations would hardly develop the scientific attitude in the users of that culture and consequently would not attain knowledge of the external world that can empirically be ascertained by others, including future generations.[111]

This is precisely the reason African cultures have not fared so well in modern science and technology. Gyekye, therefore, thinks that the superstitious approach to phenomena that marked the African past should not be carried over to modernity, as it would be unhelpful in today's world. I should add here that, if Africa hopes to catch up with the rest of the world in terms of science and technology, it should not only reject superstition (and I do not intend to use "superstition" as a synonym for "religion") but must also be prepared to embrace vast aspects of modern scientific culture, provided that they are humane and sustainable.

Apart from the question of excessive supernaturalism, Gyekye points out a number of other aspects of Africa's past that might prove counterproductive in modern times. For instance, there are some cultural practices that are oppressive to widows, effectively denying them the right of inheritance to their husband's properties. Gyekye considers such practices "morally reprehensible,"[112] suggesting that they should not be part of an African modernity. In like manner, Gyekye rejects another aspect of African traditional societies, namely, the mentality that regards traditional beliefs and practices as unquestionable and sacrosanct under the guise of "This is what the ancestors said" or "This is what the ancestors did." While the culture of respect for elders and ancestors, prevalent among African traditional societies, is not bad *in itself*, the propensity to see the wisdom of the ancients as ever venerable and unalterable has dire consequences for the African society. In Gyekye's reckoning, "This mentality is an impediment to the cultivation of the innovative spirit or outlook required for making progress in the various spheres of human existence and the transition to modernity."[113] Indeed, the "transition to modernity" that Gyekye speaks of would be impossible in a society that readily ossifies ancient beliefs because it is scared of questioning and challenging them.

On a positive note, Gyekye recommends that some aspects of Africa's cultural past be integrated into modern life because they are useful, and compatible with the normal hopes and aspirations of the modern individual. He makes particular reference to the "humanistic" dimension of Africa's premodern societies. Using examples from the Akan context, Gyekye argues that African premodern societies placed a high premium on human life, which cannot be equated with silver

and gold or any material things. Society and all its institutions and practices were arranged in such a manner as to benefit humans and secure their maximum happiness. Though social institutions and practices were always intended to benefit humans, not all actually worked for the benefit of all persons. This was due largely to the level of knowledge the people had at the time and other practicalities. These problems of limited knowledge and other practicalities notwithstanding, the humanistic background of premodern African societies cannot be denied. As Gyekye notes:

> It seems that the enjoyment of the human being – which is involved in the meaning of humanism – is an outstanding feature of the African cultures . . . But what is it to enjoy a human being? To enjoy a human being certainly means several things: it is to appreciate her value as a human being and to express that appreciation in some concrete fashion such as demonstrating in her favor the virtues of compassion, generosity, hospitality, and so on.[114]

Such qualities as compassion, generosity, hospitality, and fellow-feeling that have been acknowledged by anthropologists and sociologists as hallmarks of African premodern societies thus flow from a fundamentally humanistic outlook of life. And Gyekye maintains that this humanism would remain relevant in the modern Africa.

As earlier opined, I consider Gyekye's approach more attractive and balanced than those of other African philosophers and scholars that have earlier been reviewed. Gyekye avoids the major pitfalls of the earlier approaches. On the one hand, he particularly avoids the display of adulatory idealization of the past, as the scholars of the Negritude movement tend to do; on the other hand, he rejects the other tendency to regard the past as worthless and irrelevant, shown by such "anti-revivalists" as Towa and Hountondji. Instead, he advocates a judicious incorporation of the useful elements of Africa's past into the present and goes ahead to indicate the specific aspects of the past that may or may not be relevant in the modern times. Barry Hallen corroborates my assessment when he notes that "Gyekye's vision of modern African society, therefore, becomes one which incorporates and interrelates the best elements of other cultures in the world with those elements of Africa's cultural heritage that deserve to be similarly valued."[115] Thus, Gyekye's vision of an African modernity is open-minded, as it allows for its enrichment with every good element of all human culture. He insists:

> [S]omething of value can be found in the cultural past of a people, and that, if one were to examine the ancestral system of values objectively, one would find some values that would be considered relevant to the modern circumstances of Africa.[116]

This project, therefore, anchors itself on the idea that something of value could be found in the cultural past of a people that is relevant to modern life.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion places the work within African scholarly discourses and their attempt to understand Africa's encounter with modernity. I drew on the works of Fanon, Mbembe, and Davidson. Through their works, I explored such vital aspects as the race question and its psychopathological effects, the problem of colonial language, the nation-state conundrum, the problem of the elite class and the consequent failure of leadership, and the challenge of urbanization.

Zeroing in on the Igbo context, it could be seen – based on the literary narratives of Chinua Achebe – that colonialism was at once a product and vehicle of modernity in Igboland. This introduced unprecedented disruptions in the political, social, economic, religious, and moral life of the people. In terms of politics, being made part of an artificial and West-modeled Nigerian state is as problematic as it is alienating. A people that had no monarchs and absolute leaders now have to cope with "mushroom" kings, earlier appointed by colonial masters as stooges, and now (in our times) acquiring power through various foul means. In the sphere of religion, Christianity has been introduced by white missionaries, but superstitious elements have persisted, leading to an overall syncretistic atmosphere in Igboland. In the social and moral sphere, the sway of the capitalist order and mentality has threatened Igbo traditional moral sensibilities. Demographically, Igboland has witnessed a rural–urban drift, which has had dire economic and social consequences. The tension generated by exigencies of modernity upon a resilient tradition puts the Igbo at crossroads.

Postcolonial African scholars have responded to the challenge of modernity in various ways. I have presented and assessed some of the relevant scholarship and trends. The negritude movement of Césaire and Senghor was perhaps the earliest response by Africa's intellectuals. Negritude brought the question of African identity to the fore of scholarly discourse but also shaped the discussion thereafter. But its obsession with Africa's presumably idyllic past led to an unhealthy romanticization and essentialization of the past. Fanon, who criticizes negritude for the aforementioned weaknesses and for its passivity, puts forward the notion of revolutionary "violence" as a means of reclaiming Africa's pride and identity.

While his ideas promised to be more pragmatic, I have argued that violence cannot achieve anything *by itself* if not complemented with diplomacy, and that Fanon's "violence" is quite irrelevant in peacetime and in situations of subtle forms of neocolonialism. "Anti-revivalists" like Towa and Hountondji also repudiate negritude and ethnophilosophy (considered as a variant of negritude); to these scholars, it is retrograde and ineffective. They recommend scientific progress in the manner of Western science, even if this entails a renunciation of Africa's past. In response to their position, I argue that it amounts to a rejection of even the positive elements in Africa's past – that is, throwing away the baby with the bathwater, as the English saying goes. I also reason that scientific progress, if not matched with proper ethics and values, could lead to disastrous consequences like the world wars waged among Western powers.

I find Kwame Gyekye's thesis the most balanced and helpful of all the scholarly proposals presented earlier. Rather than an unwholesome idealization of the past on the one hand and its blanket rejection on the other hand, Gyekye recommends

the integration of positive and relevant element of Africa's past for the construction of Africa's present. This book builds on this thesis, as it attempts to use the idea of interconnectedness (which translates into *solidarity* on the social sphere), as an epistemic resource upon which Igbo (African) modernization could be based. This task shall preoccupy us in the fourth and fifth chapters.

But, before then, we must understand the very idea of modernity and its ramifications, relying on authors like Habermas, Taylor, and Wallerstein.

Notes

1 This might be considered the central claim of I. Wallerstein's multi-volume *The Modern World-System*. However, it is in Volume III (1989) that he accounts for how the process of expansion of the Modern World-System led to the colonization of Africa, with special reference to the West Coast of Africa.

2 In an important work, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (2010), Olufemi Taiwo adduces cogent reasons he thinks that colonialism should be dissociated from modernity. As he maintains,

> We need to break the connection that is often affirmed between modernity and colonialism. We must reverse the causal line or at least the lexical ordering that seeks to place colonialism before modernity and uses the former to explain the emergence of the latter in the continent.
>
> (p. 25)

3 We may view it as a single, all-encompassing "crisis" embracing several "crises." I adopt "crisis" (singular) in what follows.

4 A. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 55.

5 F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 74.

6 A. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 6.

7 Ibid., 36–37.

8 Ibid., 38.

9 Ibid., 54–76.

10 Ibid., 49.

11 Ibid., 54

12 F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 109.

13 Ibid., 43–44.

14 Ibid., 62; Also see, 72.

15 Ibid., 4.

16 Ibid., 31. Fanon's observation is as true today as it was in his time. With improved pharmaceutical technology, the practice of bleaching the body has become commonplace in our times, even among black males.

17 Ibid., 74.

18 Ibid., 72.

19 Ibid., 8.

20 Ngugi wa Thiong' o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 13.

21 Ibid., 11.

22 Ngugi has recently reverted to publishing in English. Apparently, Gikuyu did not provide him with enough audience and financial reward. This again reveals the dilemma, indeed a double-bind, Africans have to contend with.

23 Ibid., 28.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 9.

26 F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 11.

27 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 12.

28 Ibid., 5.
29 B. Davidson, *The Blackman's Burden*, 8.
30 Ibid., 9.
31 Ibid., 18–19.
32 Ibid., 199.
33 Ibid., 52–73.
34 O. Taiwo, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*.
35 B. Davidson, Op. Cit., 163.
36 Ibid., 100.
37 Ibid., 229–230.
38 Ibid., 206–207.
39 F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 108.
40 Ibid., 100.
41 Ibid., 102–103.
42 Ibid., 101.
43 Ibid., 106.
44 Ibid., 126.
45 Ibid., 106.
46 Ibid., 129.
47 B. Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden*, 211.
48 Ibid., 210.
49 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 176.
50 See Olufemi Taiwo's "On Agency and Change: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and the Philosophy of History" for a detailed discussion on this.
51 C. Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 189.
52 C. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 16.
53 The age-grade is one of the most important social groupings in Igbo society. An age-grade comprises of individuals born within a certain time-frame which could be seasons (in the precolonial times) or years (in the present times). Members see themselves as mates, hold periodic meetings, help one other, and sometimes mobilize themselves to execute certain tasks for the entire community. More will be said about this in Chapter 4.
54 *Arrow of God*, 85.
55 *Things Fall Apart*, 155.
56 The Nigeria-Biafra war was fought between 1967 and 1970. Biafra had the Igbo in the majority.
57 C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living among the Igbo*, 39.
58 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 148.
59 C. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 37.
60 Ibid., 59.
61 *Things Fall Apart*, 145.
62 Ibid., 167.
63 *Arrow of God*, 134.
64 *Things Fall Apart*, 153.
65 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 146.
66 P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa," 92. The entire essay offers an interesting elaboration of the "two publics" theory, tracing its history and the present impact it has on the postcolonial African society.
67 Ibid., 93.
68 C. Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 153.
69 Ibid., 62.
70 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 178.
71 J. K. Nyerere, "Ujamaa," 7.
72 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 179.
73 C. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 189. See also, 215.

74 Ibid., 84.
75 Ibid., 46.
76 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 174.
77 J. Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*. Perhaps more than any other work of his, the notion of the imperialist and hegemonic nature of modern constitutional laws receives a thorough treatment in Tully's *Strange Multiplicity*.
78 C. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 108.
79 P. Amato, "African Philosophy and Modernity," in *Post-Colonial African Philosophy*, 72.
80 K. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 237–214.
81 L.S. Senghor, *Liberté I: Négritude et humanisme*, 288.
82 Ibid., 203.
83 L.S. Senghor, "Negritude and African Socialism," in *The African Philosophy Reader*, 439.
84 A. Irele, "Contemporary Thought in French Speaking Africa," in *Africa and the West*, 270.
85 R. H. Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy*, 24.
86 F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 152.
87 Ibid., 154.
88 Ibid.
89 F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 93. Indeed, the entire Chapter 5 of the work with the title, "The Fact of Blackness," is almost entirely dedicated to the critique of negritude, especially the versions of Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor.
90 *The Wretched of the Earth*, 6.
91 Ibid., 23.
92 Ibid., 168.
93 Ibid., 170.
94 Ibid., 51.
95 D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 32.
96 "Coloniality" is a concept developed and currently being popularized by the members of the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Discourse, most notable among whom are Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, and Walter Mignolo. Much of Mignolo's recent writings have been focused on addressing the problem of "coloniality." This concept will receive a detailed attention in Chapter 3.
97 M. Towa, *Essai sur le problématique philosophie dan l'Afrique actuelle*, 29.
98 Ibid., 39.
99 Ibid., 42.
100 Ibid., 45.
101 A. Irele in the "Introduction" to Hountondji's celebrated work, *African Philosophy*, 26–27.
102 P. Hountondji, *African Philosophy*, 171–174.
103 Ibid., 59–60.
104 Ibid., 60.
105 Ibid., 56.
106 Ibid., 67.
107 D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 203.
108 K. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 237.
109 Ibid., 241.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid., 244.
112 Ibid., 253.
113 Ibid., 257.
114 Ibid., 259.
115 B. Hallen, *A Short History of African Philosophy*, 32.
116 K. Gyekye, Op. Cit., 26.

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2 Understanding Modernity, Its Systems, and Imaginaries

Habermas, Taylor, and Wallerstein

Introduction

The theme of modernity is essential to this book. Since we need a concept of modernity, I aim to furnish, in this chapter, an *operative (heuristic*) understanding of modernity, drawing on the works of Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Immanuel Wallerstein, who offer contemporary and philosophically elaborated views on modernity that I consider relevant to this project. I acknowledge that it is impossible to provide an exhaustive, all-encompassing definition of modernity, not only because of the controversies that surround the subject in academic circles but also because of the vastness and complexity of modernity itself. Yet it is vital to have an "operative" (heuristic) concept of modernity, one that is relevant, at least for purposes of the present work.

Drawing on Habermas, Taylor, and Wallerstein, this chapter sets out to show that modernity is a distinct time-frame, marked by an unprecedented transformation of society and ways of conceptualizing society, a complex process manifest in the increasing complexity of societal forms, whose dynamics *account for* (though not to be *equated with*) the emergence of systems with overbearing tendencies. This unprecedented transformation that modernity represents has been theorized in different forms by all three thinkers and, through them, it is possible to disclose specific patterns and features of modernity. To be sure, the transformation that is modernity calls for some ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, systems of modernity and their dynamics have expanded the frontiers of knowledge, individual rights, liberties, and unlocked hitherto untapped economic, social, and political potentials. On the other hand, they come at a great cost of generating new forms of unfreedom, inequality, a lopsided global order, unbridled individualism, and a host of social malaise. The discussion that will be sustained all through this chapter will serve to elaborate the aforementioned point.

Habermas provides one of the most elaborate theories of modernity that captures this societal transformation. In Habermas, the modernization of society is couched in the idiom of an increasing complexity of society, whereby the "lifeworld" gets increasingly rationalized (à la Weber) according to its inner dynamics, occasioning the "uncoupling" of the lifeworld and systems and the "colonization" of the former by the latter. This is indeed a complex independent process that unfolds in

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accordance with a self-contained logic. The "uncoupling" defines modernity, while the "colonization" accounts for the pathologies of modernity that Habermas elaborately describes. In the discussion on Habermas, I demonstrate the significance of his notion of communicative action and how it discloses the communicative rationality that animates it. Furthermore, I try to show how Habermas understands modernity in terms of the "uncoupling" of the lifeworld and systems, and how the subsequent "colonization" of the former by the latter accounts for a wide range of pathologies of modernity.

Taylor theorizes the unprecedented societal transformation known as modernity from the explanatory standpoint of "social imaginary." Acknowledging that he has "obviously drawn heavily"[1] from Habermas, Taylor complements Habermas' insights by describing the process by which a transformed "social imaginary" at the turn of the sixteenth century accounts for the vast ways of thinking and practices that have come to be defined as "modern." Like Habermas, Taylor observes a concomitant emergence of systems that possess an overbearing influence on society. And this owes much to a transformation at the realm of "social imaginary." For instance, the conception of the economy as an "objectified reality" is considered by Taylor as a constitutive element of the modern social imaginary. Viewed as an "objectified reality," the economy becomes indeed a system (i.e., it is self-contained, its inner dynamic detached from agential factors), which becomes so overbearing that it represents "more than a metaphor: it came to be seen . . . as the dominant end of society."[2] This is so much so that much of what Taylor diagnoses as the "malaise" of modernity derives, directly or indirectly, from the working of an overbearing capitalist system.

For Wallerstein, the transformation that is modernity finds expression in the emergence of the capitalist economy as a world-system. Wallerstein takes the transition to the capitalist mode of production to be so decisive that none of the earlier modes of production or societal forms could be called "modern" in a proper sense. All pre-capitalist societies are premodern societies; modernity is squarely and simply a capitalist modernity. In Wallerstein's account, once capitalism emerged as a system in sixteenth-century Europe, it eventually became a single, monolithic world-system, drawing the entire globe unto itself, as it enacts the inner logic of its development.

It is evident from the foregoing that the insights of Habermas, Taylor, and Wallerstein reinforce each other. Interestingly, they all share the unshakable belief that there is such a *thing* as modernity, a *distinct* time-frame with discernible contours, as well as new and mostly unprecedented practices and institutional forms. It is also striking that, though each follows his unique analytical path, they all associate modernity in a special way with the emergence of the capitalist system, with overbearing influence on modern society as we know it. Furthermore, despite focusing largely on the West, the three scholars generate sufficient theoretical abstractions that may be judiciously applied to non-Western contexts. This justifies the occasional reflections and interventions I shall be making on how their theorizations might speak to the Igbo (African) situation.

A Theory of Modernity: Communicative Action, Lifeworld, and Systems

Modernity, its important features, and pathologies rank among the top intellectual preoccupations of Jurgen Habermas. As Lasse Thomassen notes, "Habermas wants to develop a theory of modern society and its pathologies. He seeks to develop a diagnosis and critique of contemporary society."[3] Because Habermas' theorization on the theme of modernity is too massive to be compressed under this section, only the aspects most relevant to the present work will be discussed. For methodical purposes, I shall begin with a clarification of the central concepts, and then gradually delve properly into his views on the "pathologies" of modern society.

Communicative Action and Communicative Rationality

Habermas characterizes communicative action as an action oriented to mutual understanding. He distinguishes it from purposive-rational action, which orients itself to strategic-instrumental mastery. Communicative action simply aims at establishing mutual agreement with other subjects. Habermas provides a detailed description of what transpires in communicative action.

> [T]he concept of communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations . . . The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of interpretation refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus.[4]

It is evident that communicative action, for Habermas, is not monologic but dialogic. The actor is dealing with the *other* who is equally a subject in his or her own right. In other words, communicative action is characteristically intersubjective. Furthermore, the actors are "capable of speech." This reference to "speech," whether verbal or extraverbal, underpins the indispensability of language for communicative action. Habermas, therefore, insists that "Only the communicative model of action presupposes language as a medium of uncurtailed communication."[5] This implies that language is inevitable in communicative action. Under a different model of action, that is, purposive-rational action, actors acting strategically to one another may bypass the medium of language and communication insofar as this helps secure a strategic advantage of success on their own terms. With communicative action, however, the medium of language cannot be by-passed, for the communicative model/paradigm has its basis in language.

Having closely observed communicative action, Habermas goes further to unravel the unique type of rationality at work in such communicative interactions devoid of strategic interests. He observes that the process of reaching understanding in communicative interactions is not based on mere sentimental compromises but "suggests a rationally motivated agreement among participants that is measured

against criticizable validity claims."[6] The mention of criticizable validity claims points once again to the intersubjective character of communicative action. It is the *alter* (other) who assesses the validity claims made by the *ego* (self) in order to give assent to them. Because communicative actions involve validity claims that must be evaluated rationally, Habermas proposes that participants must be "capable of mutual criticism."[7]

For the interaction between *ego* and *alter* to be deemed a communicative action, says Habermas, the "communicatively achieved agreement must be based in the end on reasons,"[8] This r*eason* at work in communicative action is what Habermas refers to as *communicative rationality*. By observing communicative interactions, a type of rationality is *uncovered*, one that does not follow the logic of strategic-instrumental reason. It is this rationality – communicative rationality – that *underlies* communicative action.

Habermas thinks that all earlier thinkers who undertook a critique of reason/rationality, from Weber through Lukacs to Horkheimer and Adorno, operated with a limited, one-sided notion of reason – purposive rationality (and its variants, namely, cognitive-instrumental reason and strategic reason). In his new "paradigm," however, Habermas presents an alternative – communicative rationality. Communicative rationality is markedly contrasted with purposive rationality, and the former is better understood against the background of the latter. First, while purposive rationality considers social action as basically that of an acting subject, communicative rationality rather considers the intersubjective dimension of social action, founded on language and communication. Second, in terms of the *telos*, while purposive rationality focuses on the means-ends tactics of dominating the other by gaining a strategic advantage in human interaction or gaining an instrumental mastery of external nature, communicative rationality, on the contrary, seeks to arrive at mutual understanding.

Habermas further points out that the typical environment for communicative action is the lifeworld: "Communicative action takes place within a lifeworld that remains at the backs of participants in communication. It is present to them only in the prereflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions and naively mastered skills."[9] This idea of "prereflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions" is perhaps the most important attribute of the concept of lifeworld that must be delicately explained.

Lifeworld and Systems: A Basic Understanding

Habermas regards the lifeworld as a concept "complementary" to communicative action. What this claim concretely amounts to is that one cannot be conceived without the other. While communicative action, according to Habermas, only feeds off the resources of lifeworld, the latter is, in turn, reproduced by the former. There is, thus, a feedback loop between lifeworld and communicative action.

Habermas describes the lifeworld as "the horizon within which communicative actions are 'always already' moving."[10] Communicative actors, he argues, are "always moving within the horizon of the lifeworld; they cannot step outside of

it."[11] In all discussions about the lifeworld, he uses such terms as "pre-theoretical," "preunderstanding," and "pre-interpreted" to characterize it. The lifeworld is also defined along the lines of such interrelated terms as "horizon-forming context of action," "background knowledge," "stock of knowledge," "implicit assumptions," "reservoir of taken-for-granted" and "normative context" of action.[12] The unmistakable point one could distill from these characterizations is that, for Habermas, participants in communicative action draw from the lifeworld, which is the background stock of implicit, pre-theoretical, taken-for-granted stock of knowledge, which the communicative actors themselves create and accept as the context of their action.

Elaborating further, Habermas shows that the lifeworld has three structural components – culture, society, and person. According to Habermas, these structural components correspond to the three crucial processes of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization.[13] These three processes can only be realized in and through communicative action. In Habermas' analysis, there is an obvious symbiotic relationship between lifeworld and communicative action. While the lifeworld is the typical sphere in which communicative action takes place and, as it were, "feeds" from, the lifeworld is reciprocally reproduced by communicative action. For example, in the sphere of culture, which is one of the structural components of the lifeworld, it is only through communicative action that cultural knowledges are renewed and transmitted, thus facilitating mutual understanding. In the sphere of society, communicative action serves to foster social integration and solidarity, thus facilitating action coordination. On the aspect of person, communicative action helps in the formation of individual identity through socialization. Communicative action plays this reproductive role precisely by connecting up "new situations with the existing conditions of the lifeworld; it does this in the semantic dimension of meaning or content . . . as well as in the dimensions of social space . . . and historical time."[14] These facts are of crucial importance for, as we shall see, Habermas' theory of modernity and its pathologies is hinged on certain major upheavals and subsequent anomalies in the aforementioned processes.

As a matter of fact, the stock of knowledge that forms lifeworld is not immutable but somewhat fluid; it is not unquestionable but could be questioned for validity. Situations might arise which prompt a community of actors to bring what was in the "background" to the "foreground"; when this happens, this background knowledge is "thematized," "problematized" and called into question, such that it could lose it status as "taken-for-granted." Habermas sums this point up in an insightful "earthquake analogy" that requires full citation:

> It takes an earthquake to make us aware that we had regarded the ground on which we stand everyday as unshakable. Even in situations of this sort, only a small segment of our background knowledge becomes uncertain and is set loose after having been enclosed in complex traditions, in solidaristic relations, in competences. If the objective occasion arises for us to arrive at some understanding about a situation that has become problematic, background knowledge is transformed into explicit knowledge only in a piecemeal manner.[15]

When examined very closely, there is perhaps no better way to explain Habermas' notion of the lifeworld than the idea that it is the "ground" on which we stand, from which we can hardly "step out," and from which all our life's activities are carried out – provided, of course, that we don't assume that this ground is immune to "earthquakes."

"Systems" is a concept complementary to that of lifeworld. The account of systems theory I present here will not be exhaustive. It will be brief and quite restricted to Habermas' representation, sometimes inaccurate, of Parsons and Luhmann; and it serves to make the point that the view of society only as an assembly of self-regulating systems is inadequate and must be complemented with the lifeworld notion of society. Habermas uses the distinction between systems and lifeworld to throw light on the dynamics of modern society. As Lasse Thomassen rightly points out, "The system/lifeworld distinction forms the center of contemporary Habermas's theory of modernity and contemporary society."[16] Habermas suggests that the picture of society is complete only when we view it as both systems and lifeworlds: "I would therefore like to propose that we conceive of societies simultaneously as systems and lifeworlds."[17] To him, all social theories, like those of Parsons and Luhmann, that fail to properly account for the two simultaneously are incomplete.

From the standpoint of systems theory, society is seen, not as a community of communicative actors who draw from a shared lifeworld, but as an assembly of "self-regulating" systems: "If, on the other hand, we understand the integration of society exclusively as system integration, we are opting for a conceptual strategy that presents society after the model of a self-regulating system."[18] Habermas interprets system theorists like Parsons and Luhmann as claiming that social systems are a "special case of . . . living systems"[19] or, better put, "autopoietic" systems. When system is the focus of analysis, the role of the individual is diminished or subsumed under that of the system. As Habermas puts it, "actors disappear as acting subjects; they are abstracted into units to which the decisions and thus the effects of action are attributed."[20] It might seem odd here that Habermas appears to be "defending" the supposed "acting subject," having repeatedly denounced what he calls the "philosophy of the subject." But I do think that Habermas' commitment to the whole idea of communicative action would not permit him to revert to the same "philosophy of the subject" he jettisons. Here, he is only guarding against the total disappearance of the individual under the abstracting or totalizing influence of the system – a trait he finds in systems theories.

To sum up, the thrust of Habermas' critic of systems theories is that an account of modern society on the basis of systems alone is incomplete and one-sided. Habermas argues in this regard that it is wrong to attempt to understand action systems as though they were organic systems. Furthermore, the "entities that are to be subsumed under systems-theoretical concepts . . . must be identified beforehand as the lifeworlds of social groups and understood in their symbolic structures."[21] This failure to first recognize the lifeworld constitutes a major deficiency of system theory. Even when some attempt is made to factor in the lifeworld, systems theories end up in a mere "objectivating conception of lifeworld as a system."[22] In other words, the lifeworld becomes too objectified, as though it were one more system or subsystem of society and not as a unique realm or domain, in its own right. As

a matter of fact, the pathologies of modernity that will be analyzed in what follows would basically arise, on Habermas' postulations, from a misappropriation and objectification of the lifeworld.

The ground is now well prepared for Habermas' theory of modernity and its pathologies, which revolve around the concepts that have been explained earlier.

A Theory of Modernity: The Uncoupling of Systems and Lifeworld

There is perhaps no better word that captures Habermas' thesis on modernity than the word "uncoupling." The distinctive feature of modern society, according to him, is that systems are "uncoupled" from the lifeworld. The idea is summarized in these words:

> The rationalization of the lifeworld can be understood in terms of successive releases of the potential for rationality in communicative action. Action oriented to mutual understanding gains more and more independence from normative contexts. At the same time, ever greater demands are made upon this basic medium of everyday language; it gets overloaded in the end and replaced by delinguistified media . . . this tendency toward an uncoupling of system and lifeworld.[23]

The point Habermas makes here is that the increasing complexity and rationalization of society eventually leads to systems differentiating and uncoupling from the lifeworld. In this process, systems, which were hitherto undifferentiatedly attached to the lifeworld, eventually get detached from the lifeworld and acquire some "life" of their own, as it were. Action coordination in society now depends less on linguistic media and societal norms, as securing agreement is transferred over to the delinguistified media of money and power. What this means, for all practical purposes, is that money takes over the role of language. Here is a concrete example I could immediately think of: whereas in former times, the times of barter trade, people had to bargain with regard to the value of commodities to be exchanged, the interested buyer nowadays only has to provide the amount on the price tag. In this way, the communicative interaction involved in the barter process gets displaced.

Habermas further affirms this thesis when he writes:

> In societies with a low degree of differentiation, systemic interconnections are tightly interwoven with mechanisms of social integration; in modern societies they are consolidated and objectified into norm-free structures . . . in modern societies, economic and bureaucratic spheres emerge in which social relations are regulated only via money and power.[24]

What defines these media of money and power, in Habermas' coinage, is that, first, they are "delinguistified," that is, they do not depend on the persuasive power of language; second, they are "norm-free," that is, they do not operate on the traditional normative contexts of action.

It is worthy of note that Habermas regards the emergence of capitalism as a watershed moment that typifies modern society in the sense of the uncoupling of economic and administrative subsystems from the lifeworld. By his reckoning, no earlier societies, not even the feudal societies, attained the level of system complexity that could signal this radical "uncoupling" from the lifeworld.

> The capitalist economic system marks the breakthrough to this level of system differentiation; it owes its emergence to a new mechanism, the steering medium of money. This medium is specifically tailored to the economic function of society as a whole, a function relinquished by the state; it is the foundation of a subsystem that grows away from normative contexts. The capitalist economy can no longer be understood as an institutional order in the sense of the traditional state.[25]

Corroborating this position, Habermas further states:

> [T]he far-reaching uncoupling of system and lifeworld was a necessary condition for the transition from the stratified class societies of European feudalism to the economic class societies of early modern period; but the capitalist pattern of modernization is marked by a deformation, a reification of the symbolic structures of the lifeworld under the imperatives of subsystems differentiated out via money and power and rendered self-sufficient.[26]

Thus, the modern administrative (political) and economic subsystems have radically detached themselves from lifeworld's normative contexts and are only beholden to their own imperatives – money and power. No earlier epoch has witnessed such great "uncoupling." But Habermas insists that this "uncoupling" cannot *per se* account for the multifarious malaise of modernity. The "uncoupling" must be followed by an "internal colonization" to generate "pathologies."

The "Internal Colonization" Thesis and Miscellaneous Pathologies of Modernity

One could be misled into thinking that the "uncoupling" of lifeworld and systems is enough to provide an immediate explanation for the pathologies of modernity. But a careful reading of Habermas would reveal that it is only a prelude to something that produces direct "pathological" effects on society – the "colonization" of the lifeworld by systems.

My reading is supported by the fact that Habermas speaks of a certain "threshold" at which the uncoupling process assumes the form of a "colonization" of the lifeworld.[27] At this point, the economic and administrative subsystems that have already separated themselves from the lifeworld through the media of money and power respectively "turn back destructively upon the lifeworld itself."[28] The striking thing is that these subsystems, which used to blend quite seamlessly with the lifeworld in earlier stages of societal progressive rationalization, not only begin to

overstretch lifeworld resources but also tend to overshadow the lifeworld rather than being beholden to the lifeworld. As Habermas poignantly puts it, "the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld from the outside – like colonial masters coming into a tribal society – and force a process of assimilation upon it."[29]

Habermas famously refers to the aforementioned phenomenon as "internal colonization," which definitely produces "sociopathological" effects by causing disturbances in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld.[30] In this connection, Lasse Thomassen explains that lifeworld/systems' distinction and the colonization thesis are the kernel of Habermas' theory of communicative action:

> The critical upshot of *The Theory of Communicative Action* is the distinction between systems and lifeworld and the so-called colonization thesis. The idea is that system such as the state and the market "colonize" areas that are not usually integrated through power and money, and this has alienating effects in society.[31]

In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, a work which contains insights already found in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas continues his analysis of the malaise of modernity. The following passage captures the thread that runs from the uncoupling thesis through the internal colonization thesis to the practical pathological effect this "colonization" has on modern society.

> The paradoxes of societal rationalization, which I have developed elsewhere, may be summarized in an oversimplified way as follows. The rationalization of the lifeworld had to reach a certain maturity before the media of money and power could be legally institutionalized in it. The two functional systems of the market economy and the administrative state . . . destroyed the traditional life forms of old European society to begin with. The internal dynamic of these two functionally intermeshed subsystems, however, also react back upon the rationalized life forms of modern society that made them possible, to the extent that processes of monetarization and bureaucratization penetrate the core domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization. Forms of interaction shaped by these media cannot encroach upon realms of life that by their function are dependent on action oriented to mutual understanding without the appearance of pathological side effects.[32]

Though Habermas focuses on European society, his analysis has a theoretical force that applies to modern societies in general, including those of Africa that are currently going through the upheaval of the modernization process.

It is germane to pause a little bit to reflect on how Habermas' thesis applies to the Igbo society. The challenges of the modernization of the Igbo world have been elaborately addressed in Chapter 1. Seen in the new light of Habermas' "colonization thesis," what comes to mind is how the new market economy and administrative state have sought to penetrate and "colonize" aspects of Igbo life,

including those lifeworld domains that cannot be successfully "administered" by modern economic and political imperatives.[33] To use Habermas' analogy, just like European colonialists physically made their way to Igbo tribal communities like "colonial masters," the imperatives of Western autonomous subsystems they came with simultaneously "make their way into the lifeworld [of Igboland] from the outside – like colonial masters coming into a tribal society – and force a process of assimilation upon it"[34] [my parenthesis].

The consequences of this forced invasion of the lifeworld of the Igbo society are multifarious. Several Igbo scholars, Chinua Achebe (see Chapter 1) being perhaps the most famous, have elaborated them. To be sure, systems develop according to their inner logic. But this normal development of systems following their internal dynamics inadvertently ends up in "colonization" and the eventual appearance of pathological side effects. The Igbo society has indeed had a fair share of these pathological side effects. And it could be safely argued that any diagnosis of the malaise of modern Igbo society that does not trace it to the "colonization" of the lifeworld domains of Igbo society by the systemic mechanisms of modernity might only be scratching at the surface.

From the foregoing, it has been established that, for Habermas, the colonization of the lifeworld by systems comes with pathologies. I shall go ahead to examine some that are particularly mentioned and addressed by Habermas and, where necessary, make brief remarks on how they might apply to Igbo society.

Legitimation Crisis and Juridification

Habermas maintains that the attempt in modern democracy to "administer" areas of life that should have been better coordinated only through communicative means drawn from the lifeworld comes with political consequences. These consequences are summed up under the term, "legitimation crisis," an idea he elaborates in a book with the same title.[35] Despite the time lapse between the publications of *Legitimation Crisis* and *The Theory of Communicative Action*, there are good grounds to argue that the idea in the former (*Legitimation Crisis*) to the effect that politics in the modern times has structural legitimation challenges is continued in some parts of the latter (*The Theory of Communicative Action*). Habermas thinks that, in societies organized around the state, that is, the modern state (as against earlier political set-ups), "a need for legitimation arises that, for structural reasons, could not yet exist in tribal societies."[36]

This calls to mind the argument I advanced in the preceding chapter regarding the difficulty Igbo people experienced (and are still experiencing several years down the line) with some representative patterns of modern (Western) political order. The people were and have remained quite uncooperative to the modern Nigerian state structure and its political actors because some dynamics of the modern state sometimes do not appeal to the "lifeworld" sensibilities of Igbo people.

But this is also the case even in Europe that prides itself as the bastion of democracy, for, in *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas writes that "in advanced capitalism politics takes place on the basis of a processed and repressed system crisis."[37] What

generates this "system crisis" is the ploy to secure a semblance of "legitimacy" by means other than the natural means of communicative action. There could be some political means for securing political loyalty that are not based on communicative resources, but their legitimacy is in question because the "traditions important for legitimation cannot be regenerated administratively."[38]

To elaborate his point further, Habermas turns to the concept of "juridification" (*verrechtlichung*). The term "juridification" [*Verrechtlichung*], in its simplest sense "refers quite generally to the tendency toward an increase in formal (or positive, written) law that can be observed in modern society."[39] Habermas thinks that there are too many positive laws in modernity society. But the problem is not quite a matter of the quantity of law. The proliferation of positive laws is only a symptom of a much deeper crisis. The remote cause takes us back to the colonization thesis and the attempt at a "remedy" through manipulation by systemic mechanisms. To make up for the fact that social integration is now more realized through juridical means than lifeworldly communicative means, positive laws would not only have to be expanded to address "new, hitherto informally regulated social matters," but the "density of law" would also have to be increased.[40]

Habermas observes that positive laws, resulting from a rationalized lifeworld, have indeed penetrated and come to regulate every aspect of modern life, including such informal settings as leisure, culture, recreation, and tourism. Under the banner of "fundamental rights," the process of juridification has almost taken over basic family relations. While it is true that positive laws have helped to secure certain fundamental rights and guard against abuses at the lifeworld domains, they may sometimes introduce some embarrassing estrangement. For instance, who would have thought in earlier times – when the lifeworld took care of informal settings – that, the child would now need "protection" against his/her own parents, wife "protected" against her own husband, pupil "protected" against the teacher and the school, and so on?[41]

The juridification has an ambivalent effect. On the one hand, they are a useful attempt at remedying problems arising from a rationalized lifeworld. On the other hand, they do not achieve this purpose as effectively as the lifeworld communicative resources. This fact accentuates the point that "Money and power can neither buy nor compel solidarity and meaning,"[42] precisely because juridification procedures are "artificial" to the lifeworld where solidarity and meaning operate.

Modern Welfare System

In his wide-ranging analysis of the modern society, drawing on the "colonization" problematic, Habermas also pays attention to the modern welfare system prevalent in advanced capitalism. The diagnosis, once again, is that the state resorts to social palliatives and "safety nets" as part of the larger process of "colonization." It is intended to take up the immense social burden that used to be shouldered by the lifeworld communicative resources. He cynically uses terms like "therapeutocracy," "pacification" of class conflict to describe this tactic.[43] All these terms are intended to drive home the point that welfarism and government interventionism

do not really address the root cause of the problem but merely paper it over. Indeed, the root cause is the disruption of the lifeworld domains and the attendant "negative effects on the lifeworld of a capitalistically organized occupational system, as well as the dysfunctional side effects thereupon of economic growth that is steered through capital accumulation."[44] Social burden is thus generated by the fact that the modern state is essentially bureaucratic and capitalist.

Habermas identifies some important political risks that arise from welfarism. The first is that citizens assume the status of mere "clients" to the state.[45] The second follows from the first, namely that, as "clients" who rely on the state for social handouts, citizens might not develop such an independent will-formation as to sufficiently organize themselves into a formidable resistance in demand for good governance. William Outhwaite's explanation in this regard may be apt:

> When the liberal constitutional state develops into a welfare state and thus massively extends the range of its activity . . . organizations are thus opened up to scrutiny by, and dialogue with, a corresponding variety of interest groups which link together members of the public concerned with the specific aspects of welfare state provision.[46]

Recall that, for Habermas, the modern state is already challenged by a legitimation crisis and "cannot produce mass loyalty in any desired amount."[47] Welfarism thus becomes something of a ploy to pacify and "sedate" the citizens to secure a semblance of mass loyalty, perhaps in a manner akin to the role of religion in sedating the masses, according to the famous Marxian dictum. Seen in this light, it is perhaps appropriate to say that, in Habermas' estimation, social welfare is a veritable "opiate."[48] Let's now turn to the domains of family, child-rearing, and education.

Family, Education, and Child-Rearing

Habermas sees family, education, and child-rearing as typical lifeworld domains that have come under the regulation and technical manipulation of modern state mechanisms. Of course, he does not argue that state regulation is bad in itself. He seems to be saying that notwithstanding the gains of governmental interference on family matters and education, it also comes at a cost. Here lies the ambivalence. It has already been shown how the juridification process establishes laws that regulate family matters – the child being as it were "protected" against parents and teachers, wife against husband, and so on. This could create an atmosphere of suspicion and trust deficit – the child becoming quite estranged from parents and teachers, husband estranged from wife, and vice versa – and so on. Habermas traces the various forms of personality disorder, "narcissistic disturbances," "adolescence problematic" rife in the modern society to the "colonization" of the informal domains of family, education, and child-rearing.[49] He argues that the "new problem situation cannot be handled with the old theoretical means."[50] The "old

theoretical means" in this instance is Freudian psychoanalysis. The new framework of the colonization thesis, derived from the larger theory of communicative action, represents a better approach, according to him.

In *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas points out the "scientizing and psychologizing processes of child rearing"[51] in the modern welfare state. Child-rearing has been "scientized" and juridified to such an extent that "formal education is competing with family upbringing as early as at the pre-school age."[52] Having practically snatched the child away from the parents and handed him/her over to the school, the welfare state does not stop at that. It fixes its prying eyes and meddling hands on the school, making it quite difficult for educators to do their jobs freely.

> The protection of pupil's and parents' rights against educational measures . . . or from acts of the schools or the department of education that restrict basic rights . . . is gained at the cost of a judicialization and bureaucratization that penetrates deep into the teaching and learning process . . . This has to endanger the pedagogical freedom and initiative of the teacher. The compulsion toward litigation-proof certainty of grades and the over-regulation of the curriculum lead to such phenomena as depersonalization, inhibition of innovation, breakdown of responsibility, immobility, and so forth.[53]

The cited text accentuates the submission that Habermas does not consider the protection of the basic rights of the child or pupil as something necessarily bad. He only warns that this could come at great cost to society when exaggerated.

Now, given the introduction of state regulations on informal domains that might otherwise be better addressed with lifeworld resources of communicative actions, extra social burdens are added to the state. If children become estranged from their parents, the natural sentiments of solidarity and responsibility to take care of parents in their old age might diminish. This would consequently generate extra geriatric burdens (e.g., preparing senior homes, providing wide-ranging social securities) on the state.[54]

When one reflects on this question of geriatric needs Habermas has raised, one thinks immediately of the Igbo society (or African societies in general) going through the modernization process. One can safely predict that the Igbo society may soon be faced with similar challenges, if conscious efforts are not made to address the pattern of modernization that risks subjecting senior citizens to a depersonalizing condition of loneliness and lack of care. For sure – and as already captured by Achebe in Chapter 1 – the beautiful times when the old were surrounded by loved ones, children and grandchildren are fast becoming a thing of the past. The crucial question that confronts the Igbo person today is: how could the modernization process of the Igbo society incorporate its time-honored value of solidarity which has its basis in the Igbo epistemology of interconnectedness? This question will be taken up in Chapter 5. In the meantime, I shall briefly present Habermas' attempt to address the foregoing challenges of modernity as they affect Western societies.

Proposed Remedy

From the foregoing exposé on Habermas' engagement with modernity and its pathologies, the remedy he offers becomes nothing short of predictable. He would maintain that no solution is possible outside the framework of communicative action, that is, actions oriented, not to strategic and instrumental advantages, but to mutual understanding achieved in and through lifeworld resources. In one of the most powerful passages containing his recommendations on the crisis of late capitalism, he vehemently argues that welfarism could not possibly be the way out of the conundrum.

> In the past decade or two, conflicts have developed in advanced Western societies that deviate in various ways from the welfare-state pattern of institutionalized conflict over distribution. They no longer flare up in domains of material reproduction . . . and they can no longer be allayed by compensations. Rather, these new conflicts arise in domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization . . . and the underlying deficits reflect a reification of communicatively structured domains of action that will not respond to the media of money and power. The issue is not primarily one of compensations that the welfare state can provide, but of defending and restoring endangered ways of life. In short, the new conflicts are not ignited by distribution problems but by questions having to do with the grammar of forms of life.[55]

As evident in the aforementioned remarks, the new conflicts arise at the lifeworld domains. Consequently, the solution can only come by "defending and restoring endangered ways of life." These "endangered" ways of life are lifeworld elements that have been undermined through the systemic mechanisms of the modern state and its capitalist imperatives.

I will not fail to note here that Habermas' recommendation reflects my approach in this work. Igbo knowledges are "lived knowledges." As such, they are Igbo ways of life, for Igbo knowledges inform life as lived in Igbo society. Igbo epistemic resources (ways of life) must be defended, restored, and conserved. And there could be no better way of conserving endangered Igbo (African) epistemic resources than actively deploying them in addressing the challenges and pathologies that modernity presents to Igbo (African) society. Again, this speaks to the very title and aim of this book.

To Habermas, the lifeworld has not only been undermined but has also been marginalized and displaced. Systems have become preponderant; they dominate every aspect of society. And the crisis that modern society faces stems precisely from this fact. Hence Habermas recommends that "impulses from the lifeworld"[56] should be made to penetrate and exert influence on the functional subsystems. The much yearned-for remedy can only come when lifeworld impulses take a pride of place. For Habermas, therefore, all hope is not lost. Unlike the earlier critical theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer, who think that modernity has led itself to a

dead end, a point-of-no-return, Habermas speaks of the "unfinished project"[57] of modernity. Modern individuals have all the while exhausted the aspect of modern rationality, strategic/cognitive-instrumental rationality, that only leads to a dead end. But Habermas insists that the positive potentials in communicative rationality are inexhaustible.

Having discussed Habermas theory of modernity at some considerable length, it is germane to briefly examine the most important criticisms leveled against his theory.

A Few Evaluative Remarks

The critical remarks that will be presented here are not meant to be exhaustive but will focus on the key aspects of Habermas' theory of modernity. Not intending to go into minute details, these remarks are simply meant to recognize in a general fashion the shortcomings (as perceived by a number of scholars) in Habermas ideas, shortcomings which do not detract from the overall merit and significance of Habermas ideas, both for the literature on modernity and for the purposes of this work.

The most common criticism leveled against Habermas is that of "Eurocentrism." Outhwaite, for instance, speaks of Habermas' "partisanship for European modernity," referring to the tendency in Habermas to see in European modernity "an epochal transition in world history rather than as one cultural form among others."[58] In other words, he seems to have totalized the European experience of modernity, apparently oblivious of other modernities and cultural forms. The scholars he engages with as well as the historical phenomena he refers to are primarily drawn from his immediate European world. This "Eurocentrism" (as it is perceived) has also been famously criticized by Enrique Dussel in what he terms the "Eurocentric fallacy" in the understanding of modernity.[59] Following Dussel, other members of the Latin American Coloniality/Modernity Collective – Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano – have expressed similar criticisms of Habermas, in their common project of challenging the epistemic injustice inherent in modernity through the promotion of Latin American subaltern epistemologies.

Another line of criticism questions not only the very possibility of communicative action but also the availability of the motivation to engage in communicative action rather than the apparently more "instinctual" strategic action. Those who question the very possibility of communicative action point out that the human person has a more "natural" tendency to act strategically to his/her own strategic advantage than to work for mutual understanding. According to this school of thought, although it might sometimes take a rather subtle form, the means-ends calculation seems to constitute the basic structure of human action. If this is so, then the possibility of communicative action diminishes. William Outhwaite poses the complementary question of the very motivation to act communicatively thus: "But, even if the reality of communicative action is conceded, it is still not clear just what constrains actors to adopt a performative attitude and to engage in communicative action"[60]

From the Habermasian standpoint, I think Outhwaite's criticism could be addressed by pointing out that it tends to essentialize the distinction between communicative action and strategic action, as though the two were mutually exclusive. But this would be a misreading of Habermas. Habermas would insist that communicative action is presupposed in strategic actions. Strategic actions presuppose that actors have at least a common definition of a situation and would have to interact in view of mutual cooperation. This interaction in view of mutual understanding is indeed a communicative action. To Habermas, therefore, communicative action enjoys some "priority" over strategic action in day-to-day life, when both are present in the same sphere of action.

The final challenge that strikes at the core of Habermas' theory concerns the system-lifeworld distinction. Thomas McCarthy, the famous translator of Habermas' works and his sympathetic critic, argues that the lifeworld-system distinction tends to oversimplify the mutual interpenetration of institutions of society.[61] Relatedly, Habermas' conceptualization of the spheres of society that might be designated as either lifeworld or system suffers some ambiguity. Outhwaite summarizes these ambiguities: "Doubts have focused around three main questions: the unclarity or incoherence of Habermas's concept of the lifeworld, the way he specifies the relations between system and lifeworld and his recourse to systems theory altogether."[62]

The aforementioned pitfalls to Habermas' theory notwithstanding, it cannot be denied that Habermas has carried out one of the most incisive and elaborate theorizing on modernity. His challenge to the model based on the "philosophy of consciousness" or the "philosophy of the subject" from Weber through Lukacs to the early Frankfurt School, and the introduction of the communicative model based on language, may indeed be considered a paradigm shift in theorizing on modernity, a shift which places his theorizing on modernity on a far more hopeful pedestal than those of his predecessors. Furthermore, it may be true that he primarily focused on Europe, his immediate milieu, prompting the charge of "Eurocentrism" against him. However, there are resources in Habermas that provide some grounds for self-defense. He speaks, for instance, of a "reflexivity" that should enable the West "step back" and learn to understand other cultures that might enlighten the West about its "blind spots."[63] On this note, scholars like Raymond A. Morrow and Eduardo Mendieta also see resources in Habermas' idea of communicative rationality that not only constitute a counterpoint to Eurocentric foundationalism but also make for the recognition of and dialogue with other (non-European) forms of life.[64]

In addition, his theorizing possesses enough abstraction that finds applicability in non-European milieus. It is precisely because of this that I have been able to connect some of his claims to certain social phenomena in the Igbo society (and sometimes the wider African society) in the foregoing analysis. Moreover, with the phenomenon of globalization, there is a sense in which one could legitimately speak of a common "global culture." One may observe that, in recent times, the difference in the cultural, political, and social realities of various parts of the world has diminished considerably. All these have conferred a certain global validity to some of Habermas' claims.

Finally, and as it relates to this project as a whole, Habermas' idea of communicative action is such that could support a vision of modernity built on solidarity. Habermas maintains that communicative action "serves social integration and the establishment of solidarity."[65] The pathologies of modernity, according to him, arise principally from the breakdown of the lifeworld of "solidaric communities."[66] When he thus recommends that "impulses from the lifeworld" should be allowed to penetrate and assume a pride of place in modern systems as a remedy to its pathologies, he is effectively proposing that solidarity should once again be the basis of social relations. This is precisely where it connects with the overall aim of this book. As announced at the introduction, this work proposes solidarity as an element of Igbo past that also appeals to the present, and upon which a less disruptive and balanced modernity could be constructed.

At this juncture, I shall further explore the subject of modernity by considering Charles Taylor's idea of "modern social imaginaries."

Modernity and Its Social Imaginaries

In the previous section, Habermas furnishes an understanding of the phenomenon of modernity that sees it in terms of the colonization of the lifeworld by systemic mechanisms as well as the pathologies that result from this colonization. In this section, I shall consider another angle to the analysis of modernity, namely, its "social imaginaries," as provided by the Canadian scholar, Charles Taylor. Taylor finds the notion of "social imaginaries" an important analytical tool with which the subject of modernity could be explained. The concept is also useful for a proper understanding of the malaise of modernity, as we shall see.

Before delving into the details of Taylor's analysis of modern social imaginaries, it is important to first stress that Taylor indeed affirms that there is such a thing as "modernity" whose features stand out somewhat in marked contrast to the features of earlier historical epochs. It is these features – rather unprecedented – that provide the justification to speak of "modernity" in its own right.

> From the beginning, the number one problem of modern social sciences has been modernity itself: that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution).[67]

Taylor identifies a number of features of modernity, most of which will be discussed in the present section. It is, however, striking that he thinks they are rather "unprecedented." Perhaps there may have been historical precursors, but in modern times, they take on new and unique forms and dimensions. Above all, they are rooted in and animated by specific social imaginaries that are distinguishable from the social imaginaries of earlier times. Talk about modernity would be quite meaningless if modernity is not understood and acknowledged as having some distinct contours, so long as these contours are not hypostatized.

The Idea of "Social Imaginary"

In its simplest sense, "social imaginary," according to Taylor, refers to the way in which people imagine the society they inhabit. This is something wider and deeper than mere detached intellectual schemes about social reality.

> By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.[68]

Taylor suggests that the ways people imagine their social existence, including the normal expectations they have of each other and society in general, underlie and give meaning to actual societal practices. Social imaginaries thus have a sense-giving potential, in that they form the background that enables and make sense of actual societal practices. It is on this note that Taylor sees social imaginaries as "the ensemble of imaginings that enable our practices by making sense of them."[69]

In order to further explain this notion of social imaginaries, Taylor distinguishes it from social theories. While social theories are usually a possession of a small circle of intellectual elite, social imaginaries belong to large groups of people, embracing the "ordinary people." Belonging to the "ordinary people," they are therefore non-theoretical and often expressed in images, stories, and legends. They are a repertoire of "unstructured" understandings at the disposal of a given society, not expressed in "explicit doctrines because of its unlimited and indefinite nature." He speaks of social imaginaries in terms of "implicit" or "background" understanding.[70]

The distinction between social theory and social imaginary notwithstanding, Taylor acknowledges that a theory could sometimes not only penetrate and impact social imaginary but also transform itself into a social imaginary. But it must gradually shed off its "elitist" form, become a possession of ordinary people and the wider society, become something "taken-for-granted" and associated with actual social practices.[71] Perhaps any kind of idealization could gradually transmute into a social imaginary. There is a sense in which one might consider all social imaginary as an ideal of sorts, but one that possesses a practical social force, influencing people's daily lives. On this score, Taylor argues that the modern notion of "moral order," which has penetrated and shaped modern Western social imaginaries, began as theorization/idealization by intellectuals before it gripped the entire society.[72]

Looking at the way in which Taylor characterizes this notion of social imaginary, it is not difficult to see its relationship with "lifeworld," as discussed earlier in this chapter. Since lifeworld is a much broader concept, social imaginary perhaps corresponds more correctly to the "culture" dimension of the lifeworld. As part of the lifeworld, it is likewise a non-theoretical, taken-for-granted, unstructured,

background understanding that makes sense of social life and make communication possible. These remarks by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze accentuate this relationship:

> The notion of "social imaginary" nearly coincides, in form and function, with that of "world-view." It is the prethematic plane that makes possible (i.e., enables, structures, and constrains) actual social and cultural practices and knowledges. It is part and parcel of the horizon of the life-world, in and through which reality occurs to us as objects of value and/or knowledge. It is a zone charged with the energy of myth and utopia . . . it is the field of the imaginary representations that carries the heaviest weight in the determination of conduct and collective orientation.[73]

Besides linking the notions of "social imaginary" and "lifeworld," Eze's remarks carry most of Taylor's insights regarding the idea of "social imaginary." For instance, we see in the aforementioned citation the point that social imaginary enables actual practices, that it finds expression in a people's worldviews, myths, and legends, and that it possesses some normative force, as it prescribes values, conducts, and orientation.

Despite the fact that "social imaginary" and "lifeworld" share something in common, there is a discernible difference. Taylor suggests that theory could transform itself into a social imaginary when it becomes an accessible, taken-for-granted knowledge at the disposal of the community. In other words, social imaginary may sometimes be "post-theoretical." But this "post-theoretical" element cannot be deduced from Habermas' theorization on the lifeworld. Habermas' "lifeworld" is decidedly pre-theoretical, and risks losing its status as lifeworld as soon as it begins to take shape as a structured theory. Be it as it may, social imaginary and the cultural dimension of the lifeworld are background repertoires of understanding that make speech and social life possible.

Having seen what Taylor means by the term "social imaginary," it follows that the expression, "modern social imaginary" would be nothing other than the way in which modern people imagine society and the expectations thereof, insofar as these enable actual social practices. Though Taylor endorses the existence of "multiple modernities," he focuses his analysis on Western modernity which he is familiar with. In this regard, he posits that the idea of moral order is constitutive of modern Western social imaginary that enables and makes sense of the features of Western modernity that we witness today.

> Even more important to our lives today is the manner in which this idea of order has become more and more central to our notions of society and polity, remaking them in the process. In the course of this expansion, it has moved from being a theory, animating the discourse of a few experts, to becoming integral to our social imaginary, that is, the way our contemporaries imagine the societies they inhabit and sustain.[74]

He frequently calls this moral order the "Grotian-Lockean" moral order because he thinks that the writings of Grotius and Locke were most invaluable in shaping

the new idea of order. On this note, his "basic hypothesis is that central to Western modernity is a new conception of the moral order of society."[75] This sense of moral order has constituted itself a social imaginary that has enabled much of the essential characteristics of Western modernity such as the market economy, the public sphere, notions of sovereignty/self-governing people, individualism, the language of rights and radical equality of all humans, secularism, and a host of others.

In what follows, we shall see how Taylor analyzes these key features of Western modernity, as he maintains that they are enabled or actuated by modern Western social imaginary.

Rights, Radical Equality, and Individualism

According to Taylor, the seventeenth-century Grotian-Lockean moral order that came to constitute the modern social imaginary of the West was such that was shot through with the language of individual rights, freedom, and equality. Political society comes to be seen primarily as that founded on the consent and mutual benefit of equal individuals whose rights could not be compromised.

Taylor considers the emphasis on *rights* and *radical equality* of individuals as unprecedented. In earlier times, society was founded on *hierarchical complementarity*, an arrangement in which some individuals, like kings and nobles, were considered natural superiors to others. "Premodern social imaginaries, especially those of hierarchical type," he says, "were structured by various modes of hierarchical complementarity. Society was seen as made up of different orders . . . the hierarchical differentiation itself is seen as the proper order of things"[76] Because societal hierarchy in the premodern social imaginaries was thought to correspond to the "order of things," that is, ontological hierarchy in the cosmos, people never questioned their status in society and went about carrying out the functions stipulated for their estate/status in society.

In contrast, modern social imaginaries that began to take shape around the seventeenth century upheld "a new understanding of sociality, the society of mutual benefit, whose functional differentiations are ultimately contingent and whose members are fundamentally equal."[77] Because societal status is contingent, there are no longer natural superiors but natural equals. Taylor considers this new understanding of equality as radical and unprecedented because, even in the instances where there was social discontent or disobedience by inferiors or subjects in earlier times, people never really questioned the very notion of ontological hierarchy at play in society. It was sacrosanct and taken for granted. In modern times, on the contrary, the notions of equality and rights are considered prior to and untouchable by political power. In the modern moral order, the political must take rights into consideration: "These declarations of rights are in a sense the clearest expression of our modern idea of a moral order underlying the political, which the political has to respect"[78] Amid these apparent victories, Taylor cautions that our contemporaries should not take the new freedoms they now enjoy for granted, as they are a product of a "long march," such that people of earlier epochs would consider "a luxury, a dangerous indulgence"[79]

In Taylor's estimation, the new language of rights, equality, and the order of mutual benefit, among other things, created a fertile environment for the flourishing

of individualism. To explain modern individualism, Taylor again places it in its proper context and against the background of earlier times. The modern era is associated with what he refers to as the "great disembedding."[80] This "great disembedding" implies that, for the first time, people can imagine themselves primarily as individuals over and above the social matrix of embeddedness.

> My thesis tries to link the undoubted primacy of the individual in modern Western culture, which is a central feature of the modern conception of moral order . . . I propose the idea that our first self-understanding was deeply embedded in society. Our essential identity was as father, son, and so on, and as a member of a tribe. Only later did we come to conceive of ourselves as free individuals first. This was not just a revolution in our neutral view of ourselves, but involved a profound change in our moral world, as is always the case with identity shifts.[81]

As could be seen from the above, Taylor believes that the shift from a self-understanding and identity embedded in society (family, tribe, etc.) to an individualistic notion of identity and self-understanding was indeed a "revolution" peculiar to the modern age. Moderns, who may now take the liberty to imagine themselves as individuals, might assume that it has always been the case, a mere common sense. But Taylor points out that this is a product of a protracted and profound shift in "epistemological thinking."

Following Weber, Taylor also suggests that the Protestant Ethic is at the root of modern Western individualism. He acknowledges Weber as one of his sources but posits that the link between the Christian Ethic and capitalist individualism is "much more pervasive and multitracked" than Weber may have imagined.[82] Be it as it may, there is an inherent but subtle call in Christianity to "break away from established solidarities."[83] Though not always obvious, the very spirit of the New Testament contains this call.

From what has been said so far, it somehow appears that the conquest of individual rights and liberties is one of the greatest achievements of modernity at the personal level. However, in *The Malaise of Modernity*, Taylor presents the paradox therein. In this work, individualism figures prominently as a malaise of modernity. The problem is not individualism *per se*, but its pathological forms, as manifested in the modern society. This pathological form of individualism, according to Taylor, often cloaks itself as an "ethic of authenticity," a bogus quest for personal authenticity and advancement. Those who subscribe to it "seem to accept no allegiance higher than their own development – say, those who seem ready to throw away love, children, democratic solidarity, for the sake of some career advancement."[84]

Elsewhere, Taylor elaborately critiques this pathological individualism, masquerading itself as "authenticity":

> A similar point can be made for those appeals to authenticity that justify ignoring whatever transcends the self: for rejecting our past as irrelevant, or denying the demands of citizenship, or the duties of solidarity, or the needs of the natural environment. Similarly, justifying in the name of authenticity a

> concept of relationships as instrumental to individual self-fulfillment should also be seen as a self-stultifying travesty. The affirmation of the power of choice as itself a good to be maximized is a deviant product of the ideal.[85]

The destruction of bonds of solidarity has deleterious effects on society. Taylor cannot emphasize enough the dangers of what he pejoratively refers to as "atomism"[86] or "fragmentation" in modern society. Among other things, socio-political life is adversely affected, for a "fragmented society is one whose members find it harder and harder to identify with their political society as a community."[87] The reason for this, Taylor argues, is that people are

> increasingly less capable of forming a common purpose and carrying it out. Fragmentation occurs when people come to see themselves more and more atomistically, otherwise put, as less and less bound to their fellow citizens in common projects and allegiances.[88]

But individualism is just one out of the many features of modernity actuated by the modern Western social imaginary.

A Secular Age

Secularism is another feature of modernity that Taylor traces to the modern Western social imaginary. "[It]is another feature of Western modernity, another facet of the social imaginary that has helped to constitute this civilization," Taylor notes.[89] Taylor's understanding of the phenomenon of secularism is rather nuanced and consequently demands a careful analysis. To associate modern Western society with secularism is to use a term that has many senses some of which are quite shallow and do not capture the thing that truly defines our secular age.

Before we delve into the "technicalities" Taylor employs in clarifying his notion of secularism, it is proper to point out how Taylor takes the modern secularist culture as an aspect of the sweeping "great disembedding" that defines the modern era. It has been shown how this "great disembedding" supports modern individualism on the social plane by dis-engaging the individual from the social matrix from which his/her life, in the premodern times, was considered inextricable. Due to this "great embedding," it becomes possible for moderns to imagine and define themselves primarily as individuals without any necessary reference to community or society. Now, this "great disembedding" has a religious dimension – secularism. Seen in this light, secularism becomes, for Taylor, a "disembedding," a radical disconnect from something "higher" – often understood in religious terms – in which the lives of premodern people, both ancient and medieval, were embedded. Modernity is, thus, a time in which humans could, for the first time, imagine their lives independently of some religious "higher force" (be it God, Cosmos, etc.).

This "great disembedding" from the sway of "higher force" is associated with a process of "disenchantment." Following Weber, Taylor also thinks that disenchantment is an important element of modernity: "One of the central features of

Western modernity, on just about any view, is the progress of disenchantment, the eclipse of the world of magic forces and spirits."[90] Christianity, especially the Reformation, contributed in no small measure to the disenchantment of the world. A similar line of argument has been pursued by Marcel Gauchet in his work, *The Disenchantment of the World*, for which Taylor himself wrote an elaborate and insightful foreword and later acknowledged to have learned a great deal from the "fascinating and profound work."[91] Gauchet famously refers to Christianity as "a religion for departing from religion."[92] He buttresses this point by suggesting that, in Christianity, the emphasis on the absolute transcendence of God over the world and humans acquires a revolutionary dimension. Paradoxically, even the doctrine of the Incarnation is premised on this transcendence. Having kept God far removed from the world, humans now possess an unprecedented freedom and autonomy to be masters of their own lives and destiny.

> The history of the principle of individuality thus merged with the process of expressing transcendence: the first emerged tentatively with the second. The believer was completely alone before a god completely outside the world, and the citizen was alone and free before human autonomy incarnated in the sovereign State, both of them expressing the changed relationship to the other world and the revolutionized relationship between the inhabitants of this world, and both being the complementary ultimate logical outcomes of western religion.[93]

It is remarkable that Gauchet thinks that "departure" from religion is an "ultimate logical outcome" of Western religion. Since the history of Western religion is intertwined with Western culture and civilization, it is here being implied that the secularism that has marked Western modernity is perhaps an inexorable outcome of Western culture and civilization. This position is similarly implied in Taylor – hence, he locates secularism at the heart of the modern Western social imaginary.

Now, back to the question that has been postponed up to this time: what does Taylor mean when he qualifies the modernity with the term, "secular"? Taking a cue from Gauchet, Taylor argues that secularity does not mean the absence of personal religion. People may still practice different forms of personal religions and spiritualities. But it is certainly "the end of the era when political authority, as well as other metatopical common agencies, are inconceivable without reference to God or higher time."[94] From Antiquity up to the Medieval ages, every facet of society was underpinned, as it were, by religion. The divine ruled over the earthly, and time itself made sense only in reference to some supposed "higher time." But the unprecedented thing about modernity is that time itself becomes decidedly secular and profane; there is no appeal or reference to any supposed "higher time." "Modernity is secular," Taylor maintains "not in the frequent, rather loose sense of the word, where it designates the absence of religion, but rather in the fact that religion occupies a different place, compatible with the sense that all social action takes place in profane time."[95] The secular society, rooted in profane time, is a "direct access society." By "direct access," Taylor means that secular modernity

has done away with the necessity for kings and priests who stand to mediate at some critical juncture; rather, a radical horizontality reigns supreme, where all members have equal, direct, and immediate access to all the "secrets" that used to be privileged only to the eyes of priests and kings.[96]

Another defining aspect of secularity, for Taylor, is the fact that belief is now only an option among many others. In *A Secular Age*, a work entirely devoted to providing an elaborate account of the rise as well as the character of secularism in the West, Taylor asks a question that guides the entire discourse: One way to put the question that I want to answer here is this: why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?[97] In asking this question, Taylor wishes to account for what he calls secularism in the "third sense" which touches upon the condition of belief. With respect to condition of belief, Taylor notes the distinguishing feature of the modern secular society:

> So, what I want to do is examine our society as secular in the third sense, which I could perhaps encapsulate in this way: the change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others . . . Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieu, it may be hard to sustain one's faith.[98]

Hitherto, it was impossible – indeed "risky" – to contemplate unbelief. One could not but be religious, because no other option was available. Religion was unchallenged and unproblematic. Being reduced to one among many options, religion has been "banished" from public space. To say that religion has been banished from public space does not mean there are no persons who may continue to openly profess and practice one form of religion or another. It precisely means that the era in which every other aspect of societal life – economy, politics, culture, etc. – was beholden to religion is over.

As already mentioned, the present state-of-affairs, that is, making belief an option and restricting it to the private domain, forms part of the modern Western social imaginary. Let us now see what transformation this same imaginary has precipitated on the economic plane.

An Objectified Economic Sphere

The notion of the economy as a detached reality figures prominently among the forms of social self-understanding of modernity. It is, in other words, constitutive of modern social imaginary. As Taylor notes:

> There are in fact three important forms of social self-understanding which are crucial to modernity, and each of them represents a penetration or transformation of the social imaginary by the Grotian-Lockean theory of moral

> order. They are respectively the economy, the public sphere, and the practices and outlooks of democratic self-rule.[99]

The focus is presently on the economy. Taylor tells the story of how the economy gradually came to be seen as an "objectified reality."[100] A combination of factors brought it about.

One of these factors is the gradual shift of emphasis from military conquest to economic power as the primary source of pride and glory. Economic activities, in the sense of the production and exchange of basic goods and services (and the advantages to be gained thereof), came to be seen as the crucial goal of a settled, stable, and civilized society. Writings such as those of Adams Smith helped to strengthen the emphasis on economic activities over other societal endeavors; they linked economic competition with the overall well-being of society and suggested that honor and rank accruing from economic fortunes should be admired by all. Soon the economy got stressed to a point that even political society itself came to be seen through a "quasi-economic" metaphor. Taylor continues:

> But the economy could become more than a metaphor: it came to be seen more and more as the dominant end of society . . . It more and more dawned on governing elites that increased production and favorable exchange were key conditions of political and military power. The experiences of Holland and England demonstrated that.[101]

The experiences of Holland and England Taylor here refer to are nothing other than the fact that, for the better part of the seventeenth century, these two countries were the foremost world powers precisely because they were the foremost economic powers. Later, France would replace Holland as a major rival to England due to factors not unconnected with the economic.[102]

Taylor mentions the "sanctification of ordinary life," promoted by Reformed Christianity, as another factor that contributed to giving the economy a central place in the evolving social imaginary. In a bid to present a counter-narrative to the Catholic notion that there were "higher," more "sanctified" vocations such as the monastic and celibate life of priests, nuns, and monks, Reformed Christianity placed the "ordinary life" (centered around economic activities) on an equal pedestal with the supposedly "higher" vocations. The ordinary economic life of production and sustaining the family came to be seen as equally hallowed and recognized in its own right as a path to holiness. Vocational life that centered on economic activities acquired a new importance, and the vision of sanctified ordinary life became entrenched, given its anti-elitist thrust. This is yet another dimension of the secularist thrust of modernity. And, as Taylor suggests, this new vision helped to shape a society that gives the economic a pride of place.[103]

The long march that began by giving the economy a new importance in society culminated in the idea of economy as an "objectified reality," an apparently detached and independent sphere. As an "objectified" reality, the economy began to be considered as a system in its own right, based upon certain laws and principles.

The idea of objectified, independent economy has made its way into the social imaginary and has thus become one of the hallmarks of modernity. Modern life, as Taylor sees it:

> involves being able to grasp society as objectified, as a set of processes, detached from any agential perspective . . . The first such independent take on society was that which grasped it as an economy, that is . . . as a connected system of transactions obeying its own laws. These laws apply to human actions as they concatenate, behind the backs of the agents they constitute an invisible hand.[104]

On this view, the laws that govern society are basically economic. These laws are at once objective and objectifying because the market does not need an acting subject to steer it. Indeed, much of the malaise of modernity is explainable in terms of the objectifying and unfeeling stranglehold of all-pervasive economic laws on humans. As it were, it is transaction all the way, a ubiquitous capitalism. And Taylor never fails to point this out in *The Malaise of Modernity*. As he rightly observes, economic logic and calculations dominate modern "instrumental reason."

> By "instrumental reason" I mean the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best cost-output ratio, is its measure of success . . . The fear is that things that ought to be determined by other criteria will be decided in terms of efficiency or "cost-benefit" analysis . . . These same demands make us insensitive to the needs of the environment, even to the point of potential disaster.[105]

The concerns expressed by Taylor suggest a certain "sway" of the economic at play in modernity. As a result, individuals with strong moral convictions who would have acted otherwise find themselves overwhelmed by the sway of economic dictates.[106]

Popular Sovereignty

The discussion we have had so far in this section of the work has centered on Taylor's account of how the modern social imaginary of the West could be used to make sense of certain socio-political institutional forms and practices in the modern Western society. In the political realm, for instance, the democratic practices we see today in the West are all a function of the peculiar notion of popular sovereignty that forms part of modern Western social imaginary: "Popular sovereignty is the third in the great connected chain of mutations in the social imaginary that have helped constitute modern society. It too starts off as a theory, and then gradually infiltrates and transmutes social imaginaries."[107] To be sure, theories from political and social writings of the seventeenth century and eighteenth century helped to shape modern Western social imaginaries. It is important to note that Wallerstein

(who will be discussed in the next section) shares Taylor's view that this whole emphasis on popular sovereignty is a hallmark of modernity. As he writes:

> This new language of the sovereignty of the people is one of the great achievements of modernity. Even if for a century thereafter there were lingering battles against it, no one has since been able to dethrone this new idol, the "people".[108]

The metaphoric use of the term "idol" may rightly be interpreted, on Taylor's terms, that the notion of a sovereign people had made its way into the social imaginary. Taylor would indeed concur that a social imaginary grips the masses as a sort of "idol."

Taylor uses the two great revolutions of the eighteenth century – The American Revolution and the French Revolution – to elaborate the modern idea of a "self-governing people": "Thus, the two great eighteenth-century revolutions inaugurated the age of popular sovereignty in terms of the interplay of social imaginaries, new and traditional, which helped determine their respective courses."[109] The two revolutions took different courses. However, the question that confronted the two revolutions, to which each set out to address in its peculiar way, was one: the question of the correct institutional expression of popular sovereignty. In other words, it was a question of the concrete institutional forms in which to express the notion of a free, self-governing people. The trajectory that would be taken to realize this unquestioned shared ideal of sovereignty would differ. Taylor discerns that, given a number of factors, the search for institutional forms to express popular sovereignty would be more focused and purpose-driven in the American (Anglo-Saxon, in a broader sense) case than in the French case. The most important of these factors was that, while there was a "clear and uncontested institutional meaning" of popular sovereignty in the former case, there was an "absence of any agreed understanding on the institutional meaning of the sovereignty of a nation" in the French case.[110]

What are the modern institutional forms and practices that the American Revolution stressed vis-à-vis this notion of popular sovereignty? The first is the Constitution. Taylor thinks that it is from the American Revolution that the constitution acquires a whole new importance as the foundational document of a sovereign people. The Constitution becomes a concrete expression of the will of the people. An appeal is made to natural law as "truths held self-evident," as the U.S. Constitution is put the mouth of "We, the people." Regarding this foundational significance of the Constitution, Taylor writes:

> Ultimately, the whole movement culminates in a constitution that places the new republic squarely within the modern moral order: as the will of a people that had no need of some preexisting law to act as a people but could see itself as the source of law.[111]

It is noteworthy to see that Taylor places the constitution within the context of the "modern moral order." It should be recalled that this modern moral order

supports a peculiar social imaginary. In the modern social imaginary, the Constitution receives a new significance. This is particularly modern and unprecedented – "a transformed social imaginary, in which the idea of foundation is taken out of mythical early time and seen as something that people can do today. In other words, it becomes something that can be brought about by collective action in contemporary, purely secular time."[112]

In premodern times, foundation was considered primarily an act of God or some mythical figures, whereas in the modern times, it is primarily an act of the people, a sovereign act, embodied in the Constitution.

Another institutional form that the American Revolution stressed and helped to entrench is republicanism. There has to be a representative structure, since political participation is conceived basically in terms of representation, but a broad-based one with an extended franchise. Taylor suggests that the idea of representation belonged to the wider Anglo-Saxon tradition as opposed to the French tradition that operated on a different logic.[113] Representation as an institutional structure of self-rule would undergo transformations until it arrives at the notion of universal suffrage, whereby all and not a privileged few participate in the process. Today universal suffrage is taken for granted and even thought of as self-evident. But Taylor would point out that it is a product of a "long march," a transformation in social imaginary. It is a radically modern idea derived from a social imaginary that lays a special emphasis on the radical equality of all humans. Even the fact that this universal suffrage exercised in "regular ordered elections" is being conferred "the meaning of expressions of popular will"[114] should not be taken for granted and could only be explained in terms of evolution of social imaginary.

Unlike the American case, the dividends of the French Revolution vis-à-vis a stable institutional expression of popular sovereignty would come at a slower pace and follow a more tortuous path. No doubt, the French had a noble culture of insurrection and revolt against tyranny. The French had established a political temperament of meting out severe punishment for tyrants.[115] Political ideals, especially those furnished by Rousseau, were not in short supply. The challenge was that the culture of scapegoating violence, insurrectionary radicalism, and apparent suspicion for representative forms somewhat stood in the way of charting a clear path to political stability from the ideals and options available to them. Hence, "The Revolution failed to produce a solution to the problem it set itself: how to produce a stable institutional expression for the new legitimacy idea it espoused, popular sovereignty."[116] Over time, however, more stable representative forms would take shape, universal suffrage would become accepted, and a republican culture would be entrenched in France. But, to bring these about, some change in social imaginary had first to occur.

In this section, we have seen how Taylor elaborates the notion of "social imaginary" and how it constitutes the dynamic that makes sense of socio-political practices. The unmistakable point of the foregoing discussion is that some of the chief features of modernity (Western modernity, to be more precise) – namely, an unprecedented emphasis on individual rights, radical equality and liberties,

secularism, the reification of the economic, and the modern notion of popular sovereignty – are all explainable in terms of the modern Western social imaginary. The last section of this chapter will examine the dynamic of modernity, seen from the standpoint of the World-System analysis. To this end, I shall rely largely on Immanuel Wallerstein.

The Modern World-System

In this section, I present Immanuel Wallerstein's "modern world-system" as an idea complementary to the insights already available in Habermas and Taylor. Habermas and Taylor both give a remarkable attention to the capitalist economy in their analyses of the key features and pathologies of modernity. Habermas makes the "uncoupling" of the economic subsystem an important element of modernity, and Taylor considers the notion of an "objectified" economic sphere a vital feature of modern social imaginaries. Now, Wallerstein will zero in on the capitalist economy in a comprehensive analysis that provides a predominantly economic perspective to the subject of modernity.

Wallerstein has produced what may be rightly called a magnum opus, a multi-volume work titled *The Modern World-System*, in which he renders a compelling exposition of the dynamics of the modern world, starting from the sixteenth-century emergence of a capitalist economic order. This work is massive and includes deep historical and statistical details. For our present purposes, however, I shall adopt a thematic approach. This means that my concern will not be so much with the chronological sequence of events as with the significant moments, features, and events that have shaped modernity, in Wallerstein's reckoning.

The Modern World-System: Key Idea and Broad Outlines

When Wallerstein uses the term "world-system," he refers, broadly speaking, to a social system, with boundaries, member groups, structures, dynamics, and internal logic. Like an organism, it is self-contained, has a life-span over which its features transform. Within a system, tension exists between the constituent parts or entities, engaged in a seemingly eternal mutual struggle to appropriate as much of the available resources and advantages as possible.[117]

More precisely, he refers to the modern world-economy as a "world-system" distinguished from any other forms of "world-system" such as an empire. Wallerstein is at pains explaining this crucial distinction:

> [T]hus far there have only existed two varieties of such world-systems: world-empires, in which there is a single political system over most of the area, however attenuated the degree of its effective control; and those systems in which such a single political system does not exist over all, or virtually all, of the space. For convenience and for want of a better term, we are using the term "world-economy" to describe the latter.[118]

On this view, a "world-economy" and an "empire" are possible forms in which a "world-system" could assume, but while the former is essentially an economic unit, an "empire, by contrast, is a political unit,"[119] though there are inevitable economic undertones to political centralization and domination. It is in this sense that Wallerstein considers Rome, Mesopotamia, and other earlier powers as essentially empires – doubtless, world-systems – but not world-economies.

So, there is a difference between *world-system as empire* and *world-system as world-economy*. The world-system that Wallerstein accounts for in his works is unmistakably the "modern world-economy." In what follows, the terms "modern world-system" and "modern world-economy" will be used interchangeably to refer to one and the same reality. To be sure, this system is the world order that originated as "European" world-economy in the sixteenth century, but later spread through virtually the entire globe at the turn of the twentieth century. Wallerstein emphasizes that this "European world-economy" that emerged in the sixteenth century was qualitatively "new" and different from any politico-economic order that may have served as its precursor. Unlike empires, city-states and nations-states, it is not a political entity. It is essentially supranational and could embrace city-states and nations. In trying to articulate its nature, Wallerstein further specifies:

> It is a "world" system, not because it encompasses the whole world, but because it is larger than any juridically-defined political unit. And it is a "world-economy" because the basic linkage between the parts of the system is economic, although this was reinforced to some extent by cultural links . . . by political arrangements and even confederal structures.[120]

Wallerstein cannot overemphasize the economic character of the modern world-system. The relation among member states is primarily economic; where there are cultural and political ties, they are only meant to serve basic economic interests. Capitalism is the economic culture of the modern world-system. For Wallerstein, the relationship between the modern world-economy and capitalism is not accidental; it is essential. One notices a certain two-way reinforcement, or even causality, in the way Wallerstein argues the relationship between capitalism and the modern world-economy. On the one hand, he has "insisted that the modern world-economy is, and only can be, a capitalist world-economy."[121] On the other hand, he vehemently maintains that "capitalism is only feasible within the framework of a world-economy and not within that of a world-empire."[122] For this reason, the emergence of truly capitalist world-economy in the sixteenth century could only happen in Europe and not in China, which though had a relatively equal population with Europe at the time, operated as an empire.

As it were, capitalism could only be born in the womb that was the sixteenth-century Europe insofar as this womb was structured as a world-economy and not as an empire. Simultaneously – and in a somewhat "chicken-and-egg" situation – this womb, to the extent that it was structured as world-economy, could not but give birth to capitalism, and could not have survived if it were possible (at least conceptually) not to have given birth to capitalism. This seems a pun, but it expresses

exactly the way Wallerstein couches this relationship. Moreover, he thinks that the imperial structure is a "primitive," cumbersome and less effective way of economic exploitation and surplus accumulation. As soon as the "technique" of modern capitalism was invented, such political superstructure as empire became quite obsolete and wasteful.[123]

An important characteristic of the modern world-system is the international division of labor into the *core*, the *semiperipheral* and the *peripheral* states, based on the degree to which states, within a given historical epoch, are able to manipulate the inner dynamics of the system to their advantages. Expectedly, the "core" states accumulate the lion's share of the surplus while the "peripheral" states get a meager share. At any historical juncture, the core areas of the world-system are the strong states in the sense that there exists an efficient state machinery to not only compete but also outsmart other states in the game of surplus accumulation. "It follows then," Wallerstein argues, "that the world-economy develops a pattern where state structures are relatively strong in the core areas and relatively weak in the periphery."[124]

Having a strong state machinery is the ability to sustain a production enterprise that is high-ranking and therefore well rewarded by the system as a whole. The opposite is exactly what reduces some states to a peripheral status, while still belonging to the system:

> The periphery of a world-economy is that geographical sector of it wherein production is primarily of lower-ranking goods (that is, goods whose labor is less well rewarded) but which is an integral part of the overall system of the division of labor, because the commodities involved are essentially of daily use.[125]

The semiperipheral states are intermediary states which at once manifest the features of both the core and peripheral states. They are not strong enough to accumulate as much surplus as the core states; however, their fortunes within the system are not as bad as those of the peripheries.

To say that the world-economy is a system within which an inter-state division of labor occurs is to suggest that it has boundaries. Indeed, it had boundaries, at least up to the period around the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century when it became a truly global structure. Having boundaries further suggests that there are bound to be external arena. Wallerstein sees the existence of the external arena (at least up to the point when the world-economy covered the entire globe) as yet another important feature of the modern world-system. At any given historical period, the external arena to the modern world-system represents those parts of the world that have not yet been incorporated to it, largely because they are a parallel, self-contained world-system with their distinct dynamics and boundaries. As Wallerstein notes, "The external arena of a world-economy consists of those other world-systems with which a given world-economy has some kind of trade relationship, based primarily on the exchange of preciosities, what was sometimes called the 'rich trades.'"[126] The fact that they are "external" does not mean that no trade

contact exists. There might well be trade relations, provided that one world-system does not dictate to the other nor drag it into its internal logic.

On this note, Wallerstein thinks that, up to the point they were eventually incorporated into the modern world-economy, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, the Indian Ocean areas, and many African kingdoms and principalities belonged to the external arena. It is not about geographical contiguity, for Russia which was quite similar to Poland and Eastern Europe at the time was *out* while Eastern Europe was *in*; Indian Ocean areas were *out*, but far-off Latin American coasts were *in*. The difference is that those external realms were independent, self-contained systems in their own right, while those *within* found themselves or were "roped into" the inner dynamic of the modern world-system at the time. Those external realms were equally strong, parallel systems – other "worlds," as it were.

The point that areas which used to be at the external could be "incorporated" brings us to a last characteristic of Wallerstein's conception of the modern world-system that I wish to explore in these introductory outlines: namely, its fluid hierarchical structure. Part of this fluidity is that it is ever expanding to claim more areas. Another aspect is that the system as a whole experiences cyclical period of overall economic expansions and contractions, in obedience to certain economic laws. But the most important element of its fluid hierarchical nature for our present purposes is the fact that the categories – core, semiperipheral, and peripheral – are not fixed but continue to change at given historical moments, in line with the extent to which particular states/nations position themselves to amass the surplus flow from the system. In other words, in the ebb and flow of the capitalist world-economy, individual states/nations experience shifting fortunes; they rise and fall on the ladder of wealth and prosperity. An important passage in the second volume of *The Modern World-System* adequately captures this trend:

> One constant element in a capitalist world-economy is the hierarchical (and spatially distributed) division of labor. However, a second constant element is the shifting location of economic activity and consequently of particular geographic zones in the world-system. From the point of view of state-machineries, regular, but not continuous, alterations in the relative economic strengths of localities, regions, and states can be viewed (and indeed most often are viewed) as a sort of upward and downward "mobility" of the state as an entity, a movement measured in relation to other states within the framework of the interstate system.[127]

Wallerstein further observes, in light of the previous passage, that, although fluidity in terms of regular "alterations" belongs to the system as a whole, "Semiperipheral states are the ones that usually decline and ascend."[128] As we shall see in the course of our analysis, when core states like France and Britain eventually perfected the art of taking advantage of the system by fortifying their internal state machinery, the chances of falling in the "ladder" became rather slim; semiperipheral states are the ones who experience periodic cycles of strength and weakness.

In what follows, we shall see how these features we have described in broad outlines would actually play out in Wallerstein's analysis of particular events, periods, and phenomena of the modern capitalist world-system.

The Emergence of the Modern World-Economy

Wallerstein locates the emergence of the Modern/Capitalist World-Economy in the last decades of the fifteenth century but, to put it more accurately, the turn of the sixteenth century. Before then, the Medieval Europe was predominantly feudal. To say that Europe was feudal means that it "consisted of relatively small, relatively self-sufficient economic nodules based on a form of exploitation which involved the relatively direct appropriation of a small agricultural surplus produced within a manorial economy by a small class of nobility."[129] In the aforementioned depiction of feudalism, one sees the most important elements that would distinguish it from the emerging capitalist world-economy.

First, it was basically an agricultural economy. Second, it was relatively small in the sense that the manors were the primary centers of economic activities. Third, surplus appropriation was direct and controlled by a small class of nobility. Fourth, there was little emphasis on marketing surplus and, where such markets existed, they were mainly local. Despite the contrast, Wallerstein sustains an argument to the effect that feudalism or, better still, the crisis of feudalism was an important prelude to the emergence of capitalism: "We have discussed the crisis of western feudalism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as the background for, prelude to, the expansion of Europe and its economic transformation since the sixteenth century."[130] In other words, feudalism provided the context for the emergence of the capitalist world-economy.

Yet once this world-economy had emerged, there was something undeniably and qualitatively new. It was a decidedly capitalist economy. It has been shown in the preceding outline that Wallerstein sees an inextricable link between the modern world-economy and capitalism. This link is such that, once the modern world-economy had emerged, then any semblance of feudal arrangement within it cannot indeed be termed "feudal," for feudalism has no place in a capitalist new world order. This apt remark summarizes Wallerstein's take on this matter:

> We have insisted that the modern world-economy is, and can only be, a capitalist world-economy. It is for this reason that we have rejected the appellation of "feudalism" for the various forms of capitalist agriculture based on coerced labor which grow up in the world-economy.[131]

It is true that the various forms of coerced labor were characteristic of feudalism, and that capitalism places a premium on free labor based on the proven belief that the latter maximizes profit, after all. Yet forms of coerced labor might still occur within the modern world order, but they cannot be called feudal because they still possess a decidedly capitalist character. As Wallerstein insists, "What is clear is

that in the sixteenth century a 'capitalist era' emerges and that it takes the form of a world-economy."[132]

With the advent of the capitalist world-economy in Europe, a number of features emerged, which, for Wallerstein, were concomitant to the capitalist world order. First – and with respect to production relations – there was a stress on free/priced labor (as opposed to coerced labor). As soon as capitalism discerned that free labor secured greater productive output than coerced labor, production relation shifted more to the former. In fact, as early as the sixteenth century, the adoption of free labor patterns became a determinant factor that decided a state's status in the whole world-system:

> The periphery (eastern Europe and Hispanic America) used forced labor (slavery and coerced cash-crop labor). The core . . . increasingly used free labor. The semi-periphery (former core areas turning in the direction of peripheral structures) developed an in-between form, sharecropping, as a widespread alternative.[133]

Second, the purpose of production became primarily for inter-state market within the world-economy.

Third, state (as opposed to feudal or empire structures) emerged as the most auspicious political arrangement. Highlighting these tendencies, Wallerstein writes:

> The distinctive feature of a capitalist world-economy is that economic decisions are oriented primarily to the arena of the world-economy, while political decisions are oriented primarily to the smaller structures that have legal control, the states . . . within the world-economy.[134]

States, especially nation-states, became the central economic actors in the world-economy because of their special abilities to pursue economic ends. The strong states (in terms of strong state machinery) were simultaneously the strong economies. In fact, Wallerstein would further suggest that the connection between capitalism and statism is not "accidental" but belongs to the very "essence of capitalism."[135]

The fourth concomitant feature of the emerging capitalist era is the geographical expansion of Europe in the sixteenth century, for Europe "expanded into the Americas,"[136] effectively bringing the latter into the domain of the world-economic market – largely for exploitative ends. It is noteworthy that Portugal would play a trailblazing role in this process of expansion. The significance of this overseas venture initiated by Portugal for the world-economy is that it would set the pace for similar enterprises by Spain and England, leading to the colonial incorporation of the Americas into the sixteenth-century capitalist world-economy.

Once created, the inter-state struggle for hegemonic control became an inherent characteristic of the capitalist world-economy. Though Portugal initiated the overseas enterprise, Spain soon became the first truly hegemonic state in the first half of the sixteenth century, given its vast empire in Latin America. It emerged the

victor in the long hegemonic battle with France, another aspiring giant of the era. But Spain miscalculated when it began to aspire to an *empire* status. Wallerstein considers the "internal logic" of the capitalist world-economy such that is particularly unfavorable to an imperial political arrangement. By aspiring to be an empire, Spain craved for political domination rather than economic domination, thereby failing to "profit from the creation of a European world-economy,"[137] despite the initial foothold and advantages it had gained. A combination of Spain's miscalculations would contribute to its gradual slide into a semiperipheral status in the world-economy. Holland would take Spain's place in the last half of the sixteenth century well into the middle of the seventeenth century.

To sum up, the overall state-of-affairs of the modern world-system at these early stages was as follows: "By the end of the extended sixteenth century, northwest Europe had become the core of the world-economy, eastern Europe the periphery, and southern Europe slipping fast in that direction."[138] The Americas would occupy the peripheral status, having become an "extension" of Europe. The external arena consists notably of Russia, China, the Indian Ocean regions, the Ottoman empire, and Africa. These places were, at the time, strong states, empires, or kingdoms that could neither be subdued nor incorporated through trade; they ran parallel systems and were "world-systems" in their own rights.

The Struggle for Hegemonic Control of the World-System

The struggle for hegemonic control of the world-economy could be seen in the context of mercantilism and the attendant "economic nationalism." And this constant struggle for control belongs to the very nature of the capitalist world-economy. With respect to this hegemonic struggle within this historical period, three countries belonging to the core area of the world-economy stood out – Holland, England, and France: "The core of the European world-economy was by 1600 firmly located in Northwest Europe, that is, Holland and Zeeland; in London, the Home Counties, and East Anglia; and in northern and western France."[139]

Before delving properly into the key elements of this struggle, it is germane to see how Wallerstein actually conceives of hegemony. The passage here is quite informative:

> Hegemony is a rare condition . . . Hegemony involves more than core status. It may be defined as a situation wherein the products of a given core state are produced so efficiently that they are by and large competitive even in other core states, and therefore the given core state will be the primary beneficiary of a maximally free world market . . . The problem with hegemony . . . is that it is passing.[140]

In Wallerstein's estimation, there is more to being hegemonic than the mere fact of being a core state. Hegemony is, in effect, a situation of economic preponderance; it is a condition of dominance of the world-economic market and appropriation of a disproportionately huge share of the surplus thereof. However, it is a transient

status, as Wallerstein maintains, often lost as soon as it is gained. In what follows, I shall briefly present Wallerstein's account of the short time-span in which The United Provinces (Holland) occupied this hegemonic status. This will be followed by an account of the protracted struggle for hegemonic control between England (or Britain, more broadly speaking) and France, a struggle in which the former outstripped the latter – and repeatedly did.

In a chapter titled "From Seville to Amsterdam," Wallerstein tells a story of how Spain failed to consolidate its initial strategic advantages in the European world-economy. In the second half of the sixteenth century, Amsterdam would take advantage of the failure of Seville (Spain) to gradually establish itself as a hegemonic power in the world-economy of the time. In a period of widespread economic stagnation that spilled over to the better part of the seventeenth century, Holland managed to carve out for itself an economic haven by strategically positioning itself. Wallerstein quotes with approval a passage from Cipolla that captures Holland's relatively fortunate position among the other European powers of the time: "The seventeenth century was a black century for Spain, Italy and Germany and at least a grey one for France. But for Holland it was the golden age, and for England, if not golden, at least silver."[141]

The Dutch enjoyed hegemony in the true sense of the word within the period between 1625 and 1675. But hegemonic status is, as has been noted, always transient. As soon as it is reached, there are bound to be forces within the world-system itself that would challenge it. Even while Holland enjoyed it, Britain and France most notably challenged it, as they strove to eliminate Dutch's advantages. By 1689, Holland had effectively lost its hegemonic status to the two contending forces, Britain and France. Thereupon, there ensued a century-long hegemonic struggle between the two, a struggle in which Britain emerged victorious, after withstanding a gallant fight put up by France.

There is a sense in which the history of the European world-economy from the late seventeenth century (i.e., the end of Dutch hegemony) well into the early nineteenth century may be summed up as a history of Britain–France rivalry. Wallerstein places a lot of emphasis on this rivalry. As will be elaborated in the next sub-section, he sees the two momentous events of this period – the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution – mainly in the context of this rivalry. The Britain–France rivalry has three phases: 1651–1689, 1689–1763, and 1763–1815. It is not the interest of this work to present the massive historical details Wallerstein musters in accounting for this rivalry, details which span through two out of the four volumes of *The Modern World-System*. We shall only highlight the most important.

As could be seen, the first phase of the rivalry began right from the time both countries were attempting to wrest hegemony from the Dutch. Having succeeded with that, both countries took different paths and labored under quite different conditions, each trying to outstrip the other in a bid to be the hegemonic power. However, they share some common elements that indicate that they were indeed strong states, quite stronger than the rest.

> We must start with what was the same in England and in France. Both countries were thriving centers of agricultural and industrial production in the

> European world-economy of the time. In both countries, the feudal aristocracies had largely reconverted themselves into farmers and were playing a large role in nonagricultural activities. In both countries, those who were not aristocrats also played significant roles as capitalist entrepreneurs in agriculture, commerce, and the industry, and the economic success of these bourgeois was sooner or later rewarded with access to higher status.[142]

The point that cannot be missed from the aforementioned picture is that the social, economic, and even political conditions (including the political tensions of the time) in both countries were such that must produce strong states and put them in good positions in the European world-economy. Although England mostly had an edge over France, as Wallerstein reports, the latter was indeed a force to reckon with.

After a long spell of rivalry on different fronts, involving trade wars, political skirmishes, and confrontations, sometimes in overseas territories, Britain emerged triumphant as the new hegemonic power. This victory was gradual but took on a more definitive form by the first decade of the nineteenth century. Even in areas, as enumerated earlier, where both countries had great strength, Britain still demonstrated some remarkable superiority. For instance, while both were agricultural giants, Britain had an edge over France, given its metallurgical superiority. In Britain, metallurgy boosted agriculture and vice versa, and the constant rivalry with France is considered by Wallerstein a "stimulus" to Britain's metallurgical industry.[143] It has been said that in both countries, feudal aristocrats morphed into capitalist bourgeoisie and that this factor secured for both countries an enviable position in the new capitalist world order. But Wallerstein suggests that the British aristocrats were better at this, given the greater incentives provided not only by the British social system but also by the British state. In fact, for Wallerstein, Britain's stronger state factor was the most decisive factor for its emergence as a hegemonic power.[144]

A strong state such as Britain would be able to provide state support to its bourgeoisie to compete with their counterparts in other parts of Europe. Britain had a fair share of the total European bourgeoisie of the time, aided by the benefits of a strong state. For "Britain was politically able to create and enlarge the socioeconomic margin British entrepreneurs had over competitive forces rooted in France."[145]

To sum up, it was in light of the aforementioned factors that Britain would outdistance France in the hegemonic struggle. It was no surprise. Wallerstein describes these factors as "accumulated advantages." In the third volume of *The Modern World System*, which features the "phase three" of this hegemonic struggle, Wallerstein provides this picture of the end of it all: "Thus it was that the accumulated advantages of Britain in the world-economy that were hers after 1763 increased in the 1780s to become definitive by 1815."[146]

In line with the thematic, rather than chronological, approach to Wallerstein's account, as I earlier proposed, let us now look closely at two phenomena of global significance that must be read in the context of British–French hegemonic rivalry. They are the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, to which I shall now turn.

The Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution

To say that the history of the modern world would be incomplete without the two great revolutions of the late eighteenth century – the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution – is an understatement. In the section on Taylor, we saw that the French Revolution figures prominently in his discussion on the modern Western social imaginary. It is no surprise that, here again, Wallerstein unmistakably brings it within the purview of his analysis, as he contextualizes both the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution in the struggle for hegemonic control of the modern world-economy between the British and the French.

Let us first take the Industrial Revolution. This revolution had its home in Britain. It has been said earlier that among the chief factors that accounted for Britain's economic preponderance, according to Wallerstein, was its industrial superiority over France, a superiority which impacted not only agriculture but also the economy as a whole. For all practical purposes, Wallerstein is here referring to the Industrial Revolution.

But what precisely does the Industrial Revolution amount to? How does Wallerstein characterize it? In the third volume of *The Modern World-System* he writes:

> What industrial revolution? The answer is, of course, that a series of innovations led to the flourishing of a new industry in cotton textiles, primarily in England. This industry was based on new and/or improved machines and was organized in factories. Simultaneously, or soon thereafter, there was a similar expansion or mechanization of the iron industry. What is said to have made this process different from that associated with any previous set of innovation in production was that "it triggered a process of cumulative, self-sustaining change."[147]

This passage captures the kernel of what the Industrial Revolution was about. It originated in England, triggered by the environment of competition provided by modern world-economy. Production was organized around factories. The factory set-up was considered an efficient mode of mobilizing the relations and forces of production. Factory workers were wage laborers, a fact that came with its socio-economic implications. To be sure, factory production went hand in hand with mechanization. Better machines were produced, and there were great innovations in the iron industry.

Regarding the question of the "novelty" of the innovations associated with the Industrial Revolution, Wallerstein takes a position in line with his overall thesis regarding the world-economy as a whole. He does not doubt that there was something "self-sustaining" about the innovations at work in the Industrial Revolution. However, he argues that the changes that have come to be defined as industrial "revolution" and assigned an effective date around the latter half of the eighteenth century must not be isolated from the overall socio-economic conditions provided by the modern world-economy right from its emergence in the sixteenth century. As he notes, "It is, for example, a central thesis of this work that

cumulative, self-sustaining change in the form of the endless search for accumulation has been the leitmotif of the capitalist world-economy even since its genesis in the sixteenth century."[148] On this view – and in line with the thesis Wallerstein has always defended since the first volume – the Industrial Revolution cannot be divorced from the capitalist world order and the rat-race for accumulation, the British–French rivalry being a typical case.

The Industrial Revolution is associated with technological inventions. And Wallerstein lists a number of them.[149] Factory production that was its hallmark increased overall productive output which made Britain dominate the international market. The rail system, thanks to the iron industry, had a massive positive impact on the economy, not just on Britain but also on the world-economic system as a whole. Hence, Wallerstein cannot tell this grand story of the modern world without giving the Industrial Revolution a deserving place.

The French Revolution was almost contemporaneous with the Industrial Revolution. While the Industrial Revolution sprouted in England, the French Revolution (as the name already suggests) was primarily a French phenomenon. The significance of the French Revolution to modern politics and society cannot be overstated. For, as Wallerstein argues, "The French Revolution incarnates all the political passions of the modern world."[150] This remark is rich in meaning and consistent with Wallerstein's holistic approach to such events, that is, explaining the French Revolution in terms of a world that was being shaped since the beginning of modernity. The reader might recall that Taylor also sees the French Revolution in terms of modern social imaginary because the revolution bears the mark of modernity. In contrast to scholars who tend to limit the French Revolution to the exact historical period of its occurrence, Wallerstein's holistic approach

> is to insist upon looking beyond the event-period of the French Revolution itself to the longer sweep, backward and forward, of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, which encompasses "a slow but revolutionary mutation" resulting from the "plurisecular" development of capitalism.[151]

An important question that Wallerstein tries to address is the question as to whether or not the French Revolution was a "bourgeois revolution," as some scholars tend to call it. Scholars who take the French Revolution to be a bourgeois revolution lean towards "social interpretation,"[152] as Wallerstein calls it. They point to the overthrow of the feudal order and its key beneficiaries, the aristocrats. They claim that the revolution signaled the effective transition from feudalism to capitalism, and that the capitalist regime was nothing but the regime of the bourgeoisie. They assume that it was the bourgeoisie who mobilized the support of the peasant by appealing to their sentiments with the intention of supplanting the aristocrats and appropriating massively the benefits hitherto enjoyed by the feudal aristocrats. The picture being presented is that the whole process was masterminded by the bourgeoisie. They argue that the structure of French society was essentially feudal even by the end of the seventeenth century, and that capitalism in its true sense was never enthroned until the French Revolution.[153] Sometimes, those who subscribe to

this "bourgeois revolution" thesis might even be ready to strike out the term "bourgeois" but insist that the French Revolution was at least essentially anti-feudal and anti-aristocratic.

Wallerstein would have no problem conceding that something radical actually did happen to French society and political. He accepts that there was an anti-feudal tinge to the French Revolution, in that, serfdom was eradicated, the guilds were abolished, and aristocracy and the clergy ceased to be privileged positions. Yet he insists that to term it a "bourgeois" revolution not only belittles its significance but also fails to recognize the overall socio-economic conditions that made this possible, conditions that had their origin since the emergence of the capitalist word-economy in the sixteenth century. Moreover, feudalism was effectively routed at the dawn of the capitalist world order in the sixteenth century, such that all semblances of feudalistic practices that lingered afterwards might not be called feudalism in any true sense. The following passage aptly expresses Wallerstein's stance.

> The transition from feudalism to capitalism had long since occurred. That is the whole argument of these volumes. The transformation of the state structure was merely the continuation of a process that had been going on for two centuries . . . Thus, the French Revolution marked neither basic economic nor basic political transformation. Rather, the French Revolution was, in terms of the capitalist world-economy, the moment when the ideological superstructure finally caught up with the economic base. It was the consequence of the transition, not its cause nor the moment of its occurrence.[154]

On this view, Wallerstein links the French Revolution back to the emergence of the capitalist world-economy. As the reader may have observed, this is quite typical, for he strongly believes that the emergence of the modern world-economy holds such an immense explanatory power and plays a great causal role in much of what happened in the world ever afterwards. So, the French Revolution was an event that only tried to align ideological superstructure (namely, politics and society) with the economic transformation that had only begun some centuries ago with the dawn of a new world-economy. Seen in this light, the term "bourgeois revolution" is quite a misnomer because the truly revolutionary event (in the Wallersteinian sense), the dislocation of feudalism and the dawn of the capitalist world-economy, had occurred some centuries earlier.

Our discussion so far has centered on Europe for the obvious reason that it was the cradle of the modern world-economy that Wallerstein makes his subject-matter. But, as earlier hinted at, it belongs to the internal logic of the world-economy to expand and incorporate vast territories of the world into its domain. This refers to the processes of incorporation and peripherization, which shall be our next theme.

Incorporation and Peripheralization

It is important to refresh the reader's mind on the initial state-of-affairs within the capitalist world-economy. It was as follows: Countries of Northwestern Europe

were the core countries and strong states within the world-economy. Holland, Britain, and France were the strongest, among whom the struggle for hegemonic status raged for centuries. Spain, Portugal, and Northern Italy slid into the semiperipheral status after initial advantages, while Sweden and the Scandinavians gained a semiperipheral status. Countries of Eastern Europe and the Americas (North and South) were the peripheries of the world-system. Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Asian empires, and African principalities belonged to the external arena of the world-economy. This was the situation until the period around 1750 when the incorporation and peripheralization process began.

Incorporation, in the Wallersteinian sense, refers to the systematic inclusion of those vast external arenas into the domain of the world-economy. Wallerstein argues: [T]hese incorporations took place in the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries . . . eventually by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the entire globe . . . were pulled inside.[155] Most of the time, with the exception of Russia which fought its way to a semiperipheral status upon entry,[156] these areas make their entry as peripheral countries; so, incorporation is at the same time a peripheralization process. And all this belongs to inner logic of the capitalist system and its modernization process. As Wallerstein writes in *The Essential Wallerstein*, a work written in hindsight, with an in-depth reflection of the elaborate world-system theory he had erected:

> And once capitalism was consolidated as a system and there was no turn-back, the internal logic of its functioning, the search for maximum profit, forced it continuously to expand – extensively to cover the globe, and intensively via the constant (if not steady) accumulation of capital, the pressure to mechanize work in order to make possible still further expansion of production . . . This is what modernization is about.[157]

For Wallerstein, therefore, modernization, the process of capitalist expansion and incorporation of vast areas into the global division of labor, and the peripheralization process are all intertwined.

What basic strategy did Europe adopt to bring these hitherto strong, parallel "worlds" into its domain? We must recall that trade relations had already existed between Europe and these countries in the external arena. But they were considered external arena because they could neither be subdued nor subjected to the dynamics and internal logic of the European system. They were strong systems, and so did business with Europe on equal basis. But before a realm of the external arena is incorporated and peripheralized, the state structure must be sufficiently weakened in order to make for an unequal trade relation. This would give Europe an undue advantage, effectively making the counterparts dialogue from a position of relative weakness. Europe therefore had to embark on this gradual process of weakening their trade partners through trade maneuvers which in some cases paved the way for conquest and settler colonization, as we shall shortly see.

Since this work pays more attention to Igboland, a part of West Africa that underwent this incorporation and peripheralization process, let us now see how

Wallerstein accounts for this dynamic within the framework of his world-system thesis. To begin with, it is instructive that Wallerstein gives a significant attention to Igboland (the Aro people) and the areas around the Niger Delta within the schema of the Trans-Atlantic trade. Indeed, the Igbo (Aro) story could not have been left out in the story of the spread of modernity on the continent of Africa, seen through the Wallersteinian prism of the incorporation and peripheralization of Africa in the modern world-economic system. The importance of the Igbo in the story of modernity in West Africa once again counts to the overall significance of the present work.

For centuries, but more precisely, since the dawn of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century, there had existed trade relations between European states and West African kingdoms and principalities (Igboland being part of the West African Sub-region). At the early stages, the two related strictly as equal trading partners. And this was because West African principalities were relatively strong states, world-economies in their own right that could not be subjected to the dictates of European world-economy. Though there were other commodities, slave trade was an important aspect of this trade relation. There were slave-raiding communities, who transacted a steady supply of slave, ferried across the Atlantic to the American plantations.

Igboland participated massively in this Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Aro (a clan in Igboland) were famous in this respect. It is no surprise that Wallerstein includes this in his account:

> Northrup, speaking of the development of the Atlantic commerce in the Niger Delta observed that at first the Aro traded in "luxury items – slaves, horses and cattle for ritual purposes and beads" and that such commerce was not conducted in the local market.[158]

It would also be of interest to mention that the famous narrative of Olaudah Equiano, Igbo by origin, is linked to this particular period of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.[159] Since slave labor was a major source of capital accumulation for the European world-economy at the time, Europe, especially Britain, initiated the process of incorporation and peripheralization of West Africa to maximize this accumulation. This process started around 1750 or sometime later. Wallerstein relates this scenario thus:

> West Africa was different from all the other three zones in that there was, as of 1750, no world-empire in the area comparable in scope of organization to the Ottoman, Mughal, or Russian Empires. There were instead a number of strong, largely slave-selling states, and a plenitude of small entities which were militarily and politically weak. We have been arguing that incorporation into the world-economy requires states that are neither too strong nor too weak, but ones that are responsive to the "rules of the game" of the interstate system.[160]

West Africa (and Igboland to be specific) fitted well into this criterion of not being "too strong nor too weak." To be sufficiently "strong," from the perspective of the European world-economy, is to have at least a working state structure in which commerce like slave trade could thrive. To be "weak" from this viewpoint is not to have enough military and political structure to resist incorporation. West Africa (Igboland to be specific) was thus incorporated, effectively entering into the world-economy as a peripheral region.

The incorporation and peripheralization of West Africa, Igboland included, happened as from 1750 (or little later). And if modernity in the strict Wallersteinian sense is nothing more than incorporation into the modern/capitalist world-economy, it could then be safely argued that Igboland became modern around this time. This would mean that all pre-incorporation trade contacts with European mercantile states could not have introduced modernity. Modernity begins with the actual belongingness and participation, even as a peripheral area, in the inter-state capitalist world-economy.

One last bit of information is that incorporation, according to Wallerstein, paved a way for settler colonization. What was the reason for this? Wallerstein argues that slave declined as export between 1800 and 1850, especially when it was discerned that slave labor was not a really effective source of labor. Moreover, as the fortunes of slave trading dwindled, attention shifted to raw materials and agricultural produce. Wallerstein specifically mentions the palm oil export in the Niger Delta, which includes parts of Igboland. As he writes, "Palm oil eventually began to replace slave raiding as the major productive enterprise. Its expansion began as early as the 1770s in the Niger Delta region. By the 1830s it was a steadily growing traffic along the coast."[161] With this shift of attention to raw materials and natural resources, European powers especially Britain, began an aggressive move to grab as much as possible from African territories. To do this, they had to "settle down" and control the wheels of power in those territories. This was officially endorsed by the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 with its infamous "Scramble and Partition of Africa." This was the birth of settler colonization. Igboland, therefore, became colonized.

In the foregoing, I have weaved together the story of the modernity (and eventual colonization) in Igboland with its incorporation into the modern world-economy, using Wallerstein's framework. Capital is the driving force in the whole dynamics of expansion of the world-system.

Conclusion

Drawing on the works of Habermas, Taylor, and Wallerstein, I have tried to show that modernity is a distinct time-frame, defined by an unprecedented transformation of society and ways of conceptualizing society, a complex process manifest in the increasing complexity of societal forms, whose dynamics *account for* (but are not to be *equated with*) the emergence of systems with overbearing tendencies.

In Habermas, this societal transformation that goes by the name "modernity" is expressed in the language of "uncoupling" of the lifeworld and systems and the eventual "colonization" of the former by the latter. I tried to show that, for Habermas, modernity represents the decisive moment when economic and administrative subsystems "uncouple" from the lifeworld and subsequently colonize the lifeworld, triggering the various pathologies that attend modernity.

I have shown how Taylor theorizes the unprecedented societal transformation that goes by the name "modernity" from the explanatory standpoint of "social imaginary." Taylor complements Habermas' insights by describing the process by which transformed "social imaginaries" concomitant with capitalism at the turn of the sixteenth century accounts for the vast ways of thinking and practices that have come to be defined as "modern." What Taylor diagnoses as the "malaise" of modernity derives, directly or indirectly, from the workings of an overbearing capitalist system and the social imaginaries that go with it.

I have also explored Wallerstein, paying attention to how he understands the transformation that is modernity squarely in terms of the emergence of the capitalist economy at the turn of the sixteenth century. Capitalism is so decisive that none of the earlier societal changes could be called "modern." Wallerstein accounts for the gradual development of capitalism into a monolithic system, following its inner logic. Once this capitalist system emerged, it became truly hegemonic, eventually covering the entire globe. Nations of the world have had to be drawn into it, and their fortunes as nations depend on their varying capacities to exploit the resources and advantages of this single system.

Having furnished a heuristic concept of modernity and discussed some of its important aspects – cultural, economic, etc. – the next chapter will dwell on the epistemic dimensions of modernity.

Notes

1 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2.
2 Ibid., 72.
3 L. Thomassen, *Habermas*, 58.
4 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. I), 86.
5 Ibid., 95.
6 Ibid., 75.
7 Ibid., 119.
8 Ibid., 17.
9 J. Habermas, *The Theory Communicative Action* (Vol. I), 335.
10 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 119.
11 Ibid., 126.
12 Ibid., 137. See also, 121–130.
13 Ibid., 138.
14 Ibid., 137–138.
15 Ibid., 400–401.
16 L. Thomassen, Op. Cit., 59.
17 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 118.
18 Ibid., 151.
19 Ibid., 243.
20 Ibid., 235.

21 Ibid., 151.
22 Ibid., 232.
23 Ibid., 155.
24 Ibid., 154.
25 Ibid., 171.
26 Ibid., 282.
27 Ibid., 318.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 355.
30 Ibid., 305.
31 L. Thomassen, Op. Cit., 13.
32 J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 355. There is a similar summary of this whole process in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 356.
33 While Habermas' theory of rationalization may reasonably be applied to the transformation that occurred in the Igbo society, this should not be exaggerated or seen as exactly the same trajectory Western Europe took. For instance, in Western Europe, lifeworld itself was already on its way to becoming rationalized when systems began to "colonize" lifeworld. But in the Igbo case, lifeworld may have been far from being rationalized or simply at a different level of rationalization at the time colonialism arrived.
34 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 355.
35 *Legitimation Crisis* is Habermas' 1973 work that addresses the problematic of legitimation generated by the impacts of systemic mechanisms on the lifeworld. The far-reaching effects, as highlighted by Habermas, are felt in political disaffection and trust deficit towards government, family crisis, educational crisis, etc.
36 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 188.
37 J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 40.
38 Ibid., 47.
39 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 357.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 368.
42 J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 363.
43 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 363. See also, 347–348; 364.
44 Ibid., 347.
45 Ibid., 322. See also, 350.
46 W. Outhwaite, *Habermas*, 10.
47 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 347.
48 Ibid., 347–348.
49 Ibid., 386–389.
50 Ibid., 388.
51 J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 80.
52 Ibid., 72.
53 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 371–372.
54 Ibid., 362.
55 Ibid., 392.
56 J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 364.
57 In 1980, Habermas gave a paper titled "Modernity: An Unfinished Project" on an award occasion in which he received the Adorno Prize. In the paper, he acknowledges the pathologies of modernity. But, unlike his predecessors in the Critical Theory tradition, he maintains that modernity is yet an "unfinished project" that could tap into the immense resources of communicative rationality to create a better future for society. In many ways, that paper lays the foundation for his work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, and such subsequent work as *The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity,* in which he continues to engage the subject of modernity.
58 W. Outhwaite, Op. Cit., 153.

59 E. Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," in *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*, 65–77.
60 W. Outhwaite, Op. Cit., 113.
61 T. McCarthy, *Ideals and Illusions*, 152–180.
62 W. Outhwaite, Op. Cit., 113.
63 J. Habermas, *A Berlin Republic*, 82.
64 R.A. Morrow, "Habermas, Eurocentrism and Education," in *Habermas, Critical Theory, and Education*, 64–65. See also, E. Mendieta, "Communicative Freedom and Genetic Engineering," 135.
65 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 137.
66 Ibid., 362.
67 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 1.
68 Ibid., 23.
69 Ibid., 165.
70 Ibid., 23–26.
71 Ibid., 29.
72 Ibid., 31.
73 E. C. Eze, "Toward a Critical Theory of Postcolonial African Identities," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, 343.
74 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 6.
75 Ibid., 2.
76 Ibid., 11.
77 Ibid., 18.
78 Ibid., 173.
79 Ibid., 17.
80 Ibid., 49.
81 Ibid., 64–65.
82 Ibid., 62–63.
83 Ibid., 167.
84 C. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 31.
85 Ibid., 22.
86 Ibid., 98.
87 Ibid., 117.
88 Ibid., 112–113.
89 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 195.
90 Ibid., 49.
91 Ibid., 214.
92 M. Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World*, 101.
93 Ibid., 66.
94 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 187.
95 Ibid., 194.
96 Ibid., 157.
97 C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.
98 Ibid., 3.
99 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 69.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 72–73.
102 Details will be discussed in the later part of this chapter, which deals with Immanuel Wallerstein's account of the economic dynamics that resulted in the rise and fall of many nations in the modern capitalist world-system.
103 Ibid., 73–74.
104 Ibid., 163–164.
105 C. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 5–6.

106 Ibid., 7.
107 Ibid., 109.
108 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* IV, 11.
109 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 138.
110 Ibid., 133.
111 Ibid., 111–112.
112 Ibid., 110.
113 Ibid., 115.
114 Ibid., 127.
115 Ibid., 129–138.
116 Ibid., 138–139.
117 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Vol. I), 347.
118 Ibid., 348.
119 Ibid., 15.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., 350.
122 Ibid., 52.
123 Ibid., 15–16.
124 Ibid., 355.
125 Ibid., 302.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 179.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid., 36.
130 Ibid., 33.
131 Ibid., 350.
132 Ibid., 129.
133 Ibid., 103.
134 Ibid., 67.
135 Ibid., 134.
136 Ibid., 128.
137 Ibid., 191.
138 Ibid., 153.
139 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Vol. II), 37.
140 Ibid., 38.
141 C.M. Cipolla, "Introduction" to *The Fontana Economic History of Europe* (Vol. III), 12.
142 I. Wallerstein, *Modern World-System* (Vol. II), 119.
143 Ibid., 263.
144 Ibid., 284.
145 Ibid., 258.
146 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Vol. III), 86.
147 Ibid., 22.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid., 23.
150 Ibid., 34.
151 Ibid., 40.
152 Ibid., 35. Also see: 42, 45, 101.
153 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Vol. II), 35.
154 Ibid., 52.
155 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Vol. II), 129.
156 Ibid., 187.
157 I. Wallerstein, *The Essential Wallerstein*, 108.

158 Ibid., 132.
159 Olaudah Equiano was a lad of Igbo origin, sold to slavery at the age of 11. He was shipped across the Atlantic to Barbados and eventually to Virginian plantations where he worked as a slave. By a twist of fate, he passed from one slave master to another, some of whom admired him and treated him with some dignity. He eventually built a career for himself in England, became quite influential, and apparently regained his freedom. He disliked the deplorable condition of black African slaves at the time and passionately denounced the evil of slave trade. He has a famous personal memoir, "The Interesting Narratives of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself" (1794) (Henry Louis Gate, Jr. (ed.), *The Classic Slave Narratives*. London: Penguin, 2002). This memoir has become a classic and provides some earliest insights into premodern Igbo society, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and earliest struggles for the abolition of slavery.
160 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Vol. III), 187.
161 Ibid., 147.

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3 The Epistemic Ramifications of Modernity

Coloniality, Decoloniality, and Subaltern Epistemologies

Introduction

In this chapter, I draw on the insights of Quijano, Mignolo, Dussel, and Sousa Santos, to argue the point that modernity is inseparable from coloniality, whose epistemic/epistemological ramifications are encapsulated in the subjugation and, sometimes outright epistemicide, of knowledges and knowledge-productions from those parts of the world that have already been shortchanged economically by the capitalist system. What I have just stated is the central argument of this chapter, and the discussion and exposé that follow will only serve to buttress this point. It will be shown that the modern capitalist system that emerged in the sixteenth century sustains and reproduces itself not only through economic maneuvering, as elaborated in the preceding chapter, but also through epistemic violence.

It was the Peruvian sociologist and philosopher, Anibal Quijano, who first coined the concept that could be considered pivotal for analyzing the epistemic/epistemological dimensions of modernity. This is none other than the all-important concept of "coloniality of power" (or simply, "coloniality"). This concept becomes, as it were, the fountain from which the other thinkers drink. Quijano argues that a new global power model or structure emerged with capitalist modernity that is "colonial" in character. Therefore, coloniality is a term that represents this new model of power. It is fundamentally epistemic, as Quijano claims.

In contrast with mere colonialism, which involves the physical administrative presence of foreign powers in colonies that disappears with political and military resistance, coloniality is a structure, a dynamic of power and domination that seems to have become a perennial feature of the modern world since the sixteenth century. The fact that it is essentially and structurally epistemic explains why it resists processes of political decolonization. Coloniality, according to Quijano, accounts for the European (or more broadly, Western) epistemic hegemony. The emergence of the "race" category is also traceable to it. The underlying rationalization was that the "conquering" people, those who took the earliest advantage of the capitalist world-system, must at the same time possess "superior" knowledge (epistemology) and

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be of a "superior" stock (race). Coloniality is, thus, the link between capitalism, racism, and epistemic hegemony.

Walter Mignolo picks up on the Quijano's concept of coloniality when he speaks of the "colonial matrix of power," a power structure that he also considers inherently epistemic. The colonial matrix of power has two interrelated dynamics – the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being. These are the mechanisms through which modernity exercises control over knowledge and the subject. Mignolo claims that modernity is based on a rhetoric that tries to present only its positive features while hiding its "darker" side. It is for this reason that he sets for himself the task of exposing this "darker" side, namely, the fact that modernity is inseparable from the coloniality of knowledges and subjectivities. This coloniality entails the stifling of knowledges from the peripheries of the modern capitalist world.

The coloniality at work in modernity is given a similar emphasis in the works of Enrique Dussel. Dussel provides an account of the origins of eurocentrism as a mode of thinking. Birthed in the sixteenth century with the dawn of capitalist modernity, eurocentric thinking refuses to recognize that the non-Europe *other* is co-constitutive of modernity. Instead, it attempts to occlude and subsume the alterity of this non-Europe *other* under its categories. But Dussel insists that the alterity of this non-Europe Other is sacred and must be kept as such. He considers that, despite its totalizing postures, eurocentric modernity is too narrow and provincial to properly account for the non-Europe/non-Western *other*. Hence, he proposes "transmodernity" as a project capable of expanding modernity from narrow eurocentric confines, while preserving the alterity of the Other that has been subsumed by eurocentrism.

In the works of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, coloniality takes the form of an "abyssal line" that presumably separates knowledge from non-knowledge, humans from non-humans, civility from vulgarity, metropolitan from colonial – all decided by Western epistemic standards. Sousa Santos considers this abyssal line the most basic epistemological fact of modernity. The abyssal line promotes and validates knowledges/experiences to the "North" of it, as it subjugates knowledges and forms of life to the "South," often dismissing them as non-knowledge. To address this epistemic injustice of modernity, Sousa Santos proposes that the epistemologies of the South must be promoted. This "South" is not a geographical South (though it roughly corresponds to it), but an epistemic South. Unlike Eurocentric epistemology which tends to separate life and thought, the epistemologies of the South are knowledges born of struggle; they are lived knowledges – corporeal, experiential, commonsense, and communal. They are knowledges born in the struggle against the unholy alliance of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. In other to preserve these "endangered" knowledges in their diversity, Sousa Santos suggests that we must be engaged in "ecologies of knowledge."

The idea of coloniality runs through these thinkers, and coloniality is basically epistemic. I explore these epistemic issues of modernity in the discussions that follow, beginning with Anibal Quijano, who lays the foundation for our discourse.

Coloniality of Power and the Genesis of European (Western[1]) Epistemic Hegemony

"Coloniality of Power"

The Peruvian philosopher and sociologist, Anibal Quijano, argues that a new model or structure of global power emerged with the dawn of modernity and capitalism in the sixteenth century. He refers to this as "coloniality of Power" (or simply "coloniality"). Among members of the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Project, it is Quijano who captures the earliest dynamics of this new global power, linking it up with the emergence of the "race" category and the genesis of Europe's epistemic hegemony. In the section on Wallerstein, it was said that capitalism is the modern world-system, and that this system is a lopsided one, where countries belonging to the "core" areas (mainly Europe) enjoy an undue advantage because they control the economic levers of power. Quijano uses this idea as his point of departure, taking the idea further by calling the new structure of power by its proper name – the "coloniality of power."

Quijano finds the term "coloniality" apt because he thinks that the control of labor at play in capitalism can only take a "colonial" form. He thus argues that the economic advantages that capitalism/modernity placed on Europe (or more precisely, Western Europe) at its earliest stages was "constitutively colonial" – where "colonial" means oppression, subjugation, and control of the labor power of other areas of the world.[2] Elaborating the privileged position enjoyed by Europe at the outset, he writes:

> [T]he coloniality of power is tied up with the concentration in Europe of capital, wages, the market of capital, and finally, the society and culture associated with those determinations. In this sense, modernity was also colonial from its point of departure. This helps explain why the global process of modernization had a much more direct and immediate impact in Europe.[3]

Two points stand out from the previous passage. First, it becomes clear that the power that Europe still wields over the rest of the world is not "natural," as some theoretical myths of "superiority" would have it, but only derives from the coloniality of power which originated around the sixteenth century with the emergence of capitalist modernity. Second, when Quijano remarks in the previous passage that "modernity was also colonial from its point of departure," he essentially links modernity with coloniality. Walter Mignolo, who later advances this idea, would put it more pointedly and repeatedly: "[T]here is no modernity without coloniality."[4] Modernity is coterminous with capitalism, and the power at work in capital is essentially "colonial." The exploitation and control of labor upon which capitalism is based likewise takes on a "colonial" form.

While capitalism is the codification of exploitation and control of labor, the idea of race is the codification of relation of domination. According to Quijano, racism is an important dimension of coloniality of power. As he notes, "both race and

the division of labor remained structurally linked and mutually reinforcing."[5] The point that "race" as a category emerged with coloniality/modernity is prominent in a passage that I consider Quijano's most elaborate definition of coloniality of power.

> The specific element of the new pattern of world power that was based on the idea of "race" and in the "racial" social classification of the world population – expressed in the "racial" distribution of work, in the imposition of the new "racial" geocultural identities, in the concentration of the control of productive resources and capital, as social relation, including salary as a privilege of "Whiteness" – is what basically is referred to in the category of coloniality of power. It affected the entire distribution of power among the world population . . . "race" and "racist" relations in the everyday life of the world population has been the most visible expression of the coloniality of power during the last 500 years.[6]

Quijano unmistakably identifies modernity with capitalism because it was the capitalist impulse that gave impetus to the colonial conquest that was foundational to modernity – namely, the conquest and colonization of the Americas. So, capital is the new power which distributes labor and the gains thereof according to certain classificatory category that would later go by the name "race." To Quijano, therefore, coloniality of power and "race" as a classificatory identity is inseparable.

Quijano cannot overemphasize the role played by the conquest of the Americas by European powers in the institutionalization of the coloniality of power as well as its racial ramifications. In fact, he insists that the story of modernity/coloniality/capitalism cannot be told without reference to the invasion and conquest of the Americas. Modernity, he notes, "refers to a specific historical experience that began with America."[7] The significance of the Americas in the very process of producing modernity is further described in the following passage:

> The new historical totality, in whose context modernity was produced, was constituted at the beginning of the conquest and was the incorporation of what was to become Latin America into the world of Europe. The process of production of modernity has a direct and inextricable relationship with the historical creation of Latin America . . . I refer only to the fact that the conquest of America was the first moment of the formation of the world market as the real context within which capitalism and its world-logic would emerge as the material foundation of the production of European modernity.[8]

The aforementioned idea resonates with Wallerstein's submission, in the previous chapter, to the extent that the conquest and colonization of Americas by the Portuguese and Spaniards in the late fifteenth century (effectively the sixteenth century) is the decisive origin of the capitalist world-system and, ipso facto, modernity. From this standpoint, therefore, Quijano's position that America is central to the production of modernity/coloniality is incontrovertible.

Furthermore, the conquest of the Americas was a crucial factor for the production and entrenchment of the idea of "race." Quijano acknowledges that, from time immemorial, the relationship between the conqueror and the conquered had always involved a sense of superiority of the former over the latter. He argues, however, that it was not until the conquest of the Americas by the Europe that the notion of "race" was for the first time encoded in the relationship of conquest. In this regard, he submits:

> Coloniality of power was conceived together with America . . . Unlike in any other experience of colonialism, the older ideas of the superiority of the dominant, and the inferiority of the dominated under European colonialism, were mutated in a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior.[9]

One last important point to note regarding coloniality/coloniality of power is that it did not disappear with the political decolonization of former colonized territories of the world. Direct political colonization may have been over, but the relationship of coloniality between the developed and the developing parts of the world persists.[10] It is on this account that Quijano considers coloniality the most general form of domination today:

> Coloniality, then, is still the most general form of domination in the world today once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed. It doesn't exhaust, obviously, the conditions nor the modes of exploitation and domination between peoples. But it hasn't ceased to be, for 500 years, their main framework[11]

On this distinction between colonialism and coloniality, Ramón Grosfoguel, a Latin American scholar, who also engages himself with questions of coloniality/modernity, elaborates:

> The old national liberation and socialist strategies of taking power at the level of nation-state are insufficient to the task because global coloniality is not reducible to the presence or absence of a colonial administration or to political/economic structures of power . . . We continue to live within the same colonial power matrix. With juridical-political decolonization we moved from a period of global colonialism to the current period of global coloniality.[12]

The relation between political colonialism and coloniality is seen in the fact that the disadvantaged parts of today's world are largely the same that were handicapped and traumatized by past colonial experience. However, with Quijano's distinction between colonialism (i.e., direct political domination) and coloniality, it thus makes sense to think of coloniality as the current general framework or form of domination, such that, wherever there is domination, coloniality is generally at play.

Quijano's important notion of "coloniality of power" has been appropriated in varying degrees by Mignolo, Dussel, and Sousa Santos who bring out its full epistemic ramifications. But Quijano already initiated this move of drawing out the epistemic implications of the modern/colonial world order established in the sixteenth century.

The Genesis of European Epistemic Hegemony

Quijano traces the genesis of European epistemic hegemony to the coloniality of power. He suggests that the combination of economic leverages gained by the capitalist world order and the emergent myth of racial superiority soon began to have some implications in the domain of knowledge and knowledge-production. It would be assumed, then, that the "conqueror race," with huge economic and social advantages, would also naturally have "superior" rationality. Furthermore, Europeans would "imagine themselves to be the culmination of a civilizing trajectory from the state of nature . . . as the new, and at the same time, most advanced of the species."[13]

Quijano thus uses the term "Eurocentric knowledge" to describe this supposed "superior" knowledge. Indeed, he treats "Eurocentrism" basically as an epistemology. But, when he uses the term "Eurocentric knowledge" or "Eurocentrism" as an epistemology, he wants to be as precise as possible. It does not describe all European past knowledge, for different shades of knowledge have appeared in Europe's long history that did not take on a hegemonic or colonizing dimension. So, he refers specifically to the modern capitalist knowledge and knowledge-production that emerged in the sixteenth century.[14] Quijano is able to point his fingers firmly on capitalist rationality, having already established the link between modernity and capitalist rationality.

But what does this "Eurocentric knowledge" or Eurocentrism consist in? What form of rationality is at play in Eurocentrism? What are the basic elements of Eurocentric epistemology, according to Quijano?

First, Eurocentric epistemology produces and thrives on a certain binary/dichotomy. The binary/dichotomy refers to the distinction between rational and irrational, civilized or primitive, and so on – a distinction which allows Eurocentric knowledge to occupy the privileged status, on its own terms. Eurocentric epistemology operates on the assumption that modernity is inextricably associated with rationality, and that rationality is an exclusively European experience. As Quijano writes:

> That perspective imagined modernity and rationality exclusively European products and experiences. From this point of view, intersubjective and cultural relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world were in a strong play of new categories: East-West, primitive-civilized, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern – Europe and not Europe.[15]

This binary/dichotomy allows Europe to claim a "patent" on modernity/rationality, as Quijano puts it.

An important aspect of the binary/dichotomy which characterizes Eurocentric epistemology is the subject–object dualism. Quijano points to this dualism as the foundation upon which the status of "subject" is denied non-Europeans. In this cognitive paradigm, there is no reference to any other "subject" outside the European subject. All other humans could only be cognized or apprehended as mere objects of knowledge. In this respect, it may be helpful to quote elaborately a passage from Quijano's "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality."

> And such inequalities are perceived as being of nature: only European culture is rational, it can contain "subjects" – the rest are not rational, they cannot be or harbor "subjects." As a consequence, the other cultures are different in the sense that they are unequal, in fact inferior, by nature. They only can be "objects" of knowledge or/and domination practices. From that perspective, the relation between European culture and the other cultures was established and has been maintained, as a relation between "subject" and "object". It blocked, therefore, every relation of communication, of interchange of knowledge and of modes of producing knowledge between the cultures . . . Such a mental perspective, enduring as practice for five hundred years, could only have been the product of a relation of coloniality between Europe and the rest of the world.[16]

The previous passage clearly articulates the most important attributes of Eurocentric paradigm of rationality highlighted by Quijano. A key consequence of the disregard for other cultures that the passage highlights is the fact that it precludes the opportunity of mutual interaction and learning from other cultures. To Quijano, missing this opportunity for interchange is particularly tragic because knowledge is essentially an intersubjective experience and therefore requires an intersubjective relation. But if the subjectivity of the "other" is denied and "the other is totally absent; or if present, can be present only in an 'objectivized' mode,"[17] g the richness that intersubjectivity would have brought is forfeited.

The arrogance that Quijano perceives in Eurocentrism is indeed a symptom of another characteristic of Eurocentric epistemology – the hierarchization of knowledge. One way of viewing this penchant for hierarchization is the subject–object polarity, whereby the being on the "subject" pole considers himself/herself superior in hierarchy to the being on the "object" pole. The "subject" is considered the bearer of rationality while the "object" is considered as mere "nature." Besides, the penchant for hierarchization in Eurocentric epistemology manifests itself in the higher value it places on spirit/mind over the body in terms of cognition. Of course, this thought-pattern has Graeco-Christians origins, but Europe is the direct heir to it. The body is considered inferior to mind/spirit. The body is not considered rational and could not be a subject of knowledge. In the Eurocentric epistemic paradigm, the body "was installed in the rational knowledge as a lower-status 'object' of study. It is only the 'subject' that counts as the protagonist of the cogito."[18] Here again, the racist element would resurface, for the European subjects

would be likened to the rational mind/spirit, while the non-Europeans would be equated to the body, that is, mere objects, irrational and only fit to be exploited and dominated.[19]

I end this section by considering some proposals Quijano makes towards addressing the epistemic issues produced by coloniality.

Addressing the Problem of Epistemic Coloniality

Having located the source of the epistemic Eurocentrism in the "coloniality of power" (which began in the last 500 years or thereabouts) and identified the key elements of Eurocentric rationality, the proposal Quijano puts forward would expectedly involve the eradication of the coloniality of power. Quijano thus recommends that the production of knowledge must be liberated from the stranglehold of European rationality. To this project, a critique of the European paradigm of rationality is "indispensable." Coloniality of power must not only be questioned but also be destroyed.

> The alternative, then is clear: the destruction of the coloniality of world power. First of all, epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way . . . Nothing is less rational, finally, than the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnic people should be taken as universal rationality, even if such an ethnic people is called Western Europe, because this actually pretends to impose a provincialism as universalism.[20]

Quijano's submission is quite clear. The eradication of coloniality of power and European epistemic hegemony must proceed from recognizing the fact that European rationality, despite its power or even scientific merits, is only an "ethnic rationality" that should not be elevated to the status of a universal rationality. To him, this fact is important, lest we end up universalizing what is at best a provincial thinking.

Elsewhere, he speaks of a search for an "alternative" form of rationality. But, while he insists that coloniality of power must be eliminated, he cautions that this search for an alternative rationality should not involve a blanket rejection of modernity. He acknowledges that the "idea of a simplistic rejection of all modernity and rationality has its attractions in many quarters"[21] among colonized peoples, given the historical link modernity/rationality has had with colonialism and imperialism. Yet he urges them to resist this temptation, and rather explore the path of a "liberationist rationality." Regarding this "liberationist rationality," he writes:

> It is fed from the wellsprings of ancient achievements of rationality in these lands, achievements which produced reciprocity, solidarity, and the joy of collective labor. These sources conjoin with those that emanate from the African experience and together they preserve the integrity of the tree of life . . . preventing rationality from being distorted into a thin and superficial rationalism.[22]

The reference to Africa may point to the fact that there is something about "liberationist rationality" that goes beyond the narrow confines of any particular culture. Once rationality is dissociated from "rationalism" and the hegemonic claims of any particular knowledge system or culture, we may begin to see something about rationality that appeals to human experience as such. Though this liberationist rationality may feed from the wellsprings of the past, it actually points to the future, being a "non-Eurocentric rationality that can be part of the future horizon."[23]

The reference to time-honored achievements of rationality which produced reciprocity, solidarity, and the joy of collective labor is of particular importance for this work, given that the argument that will be advanced in Chapter 5 will draw on the achievements of Igbo solidaristic rationality and its relevance for modernity.

As mentioned earlier, Quijano provides the methodological context for the ideas elaborated by Mignolo, Dussel, and Sousa Santos. Let us now advance our discussion on the epistemic ramifications of modernity/coloniality by turning to Walter Mignolo.

The Darker Side of Modernity: Decoloniality and Epistemic Disobedience

It will be observed that, though Quijano was the first to draw attention to the epistemic implications of the modern/colonial world order established in the sixteenth century, Mignolo provides some more detailed insights into possible emancipatory pathways, encapsulated in the concepts of "decoloniality," "delinking," "border thinking," and "epistemic disobedience."

The Darker Side of Modernity

Like Quijano, Mignolo believes that the sixteenth century was a defining moment in the making of the modern world. The modern world took shape with the emergence of capitalism as a world-system. A new power structure emerged which is "colonial" but at the same time "epistemic." Where Quijano uses the term "coloniality of power," Mignolo frequently uses the "colonial matrix of power." As will be elaborated, Mignolo thinks that this "matrix of power" makes all the difference – what he calls the "colonial difference." It explains a whole range of epistemic advantages of the First World over the Third World. But also, it will eventually generate and animate the epistemic "insurrection" and responses of endangered knowledges from the Third World/Global South.

Mignolo sets for himself the task of exposing the "darker" side of Western modernity. Western modernity has always paraded a certain "rhetoric of modernity." The rhetoric advertises such beautiful ideals as progress, reason, freedom, and emancipation. Mignolo challenges this rhetoric as one-sided, drawing attention to its "darker" side – "coloniality." Hence, he argues that modernity is based on a "complex narrative whose point of origination was Europe; a narrative that builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time

its darker side, 'coloniality'."[24] He maintains that there is no modernity without coloniality. But coloniality is adjudged "darker" because it is more insidious. Like Quijano, he defines "coloniality" along the lines of the "coloniality of power," insisting that it goes deeper than "colonialism," the obvious and direct administrative presence of foreign powers on a colonial soil: "Coloniality, remember, is much more than colonialism: it is a colonial matrix of power through which world order has been created and managed."[25] As such, coloniality is a "logic" (as he frequently calls it), a state-of-affairs, and a world order.

Mignolo reckons that it is this logic of coloniality that constitutes the fertile ground for the imperial control of knowledge and subjectivity. Capitalism, which is inseparable from the colonial power matrix, is "not only a domain of economic transactions and exploitation of labor, but of control and management of knowledge and subjectivities."[26] The management of knowledge refers to the "coloniality of knowledge," which accounts for the epistemic subjugation of the Global South by the Global North. In turn, the management of subjectivities refers to the "coloniality of being," which, according to Mignolo, accounts for the classification of certain "bodies" as "superior" while others are classified as "inferior," "less valuable," mere "objects." In fact, it is the "coloniality of being" that decides which "bodies" may be considered "humans" or "subjects." Coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being are complementary forms of coloniality. Upon closer reading, one finds out that much of Mignolo's analysis of modernity and the colonial matrix of power falls under any of these two broad categories.

Regarding coloniality of knowledge, Mignolo mentions a number of epistemic issues that modernity has thrown up, for there is a "complicity between the structure of knowledge and the modern world system."[27] Among the most prominent of these epistemic issues is the question of the "zero-point epistemology" or the "hubris of the zero-point," an idea introduced by the Colombian scholar, Santiago Castro-Gomez. This refers to a certain "hubris" or arrogance on the part of Eurocentric knowledge system that presumes its absoluteness or objectivity. It presumes that European/Western knowledge is founded on a certain "ground-zero" that presumably provides support for other forms of knowledge and does not itself require a support. It is, as it were, ungrounded. As such, it is self-assured and secure – indeed, apodictic.[28]

Ramón Grosfoguel makes a similar observation regarding Western knowledge tradition. "Unlike other knowledge traditions," he says, "the western is a point of view that does not assume itself a point of view. In this way, it hides its epistemic location, paving the ground for its claims about universality, neutrality and objectivity."[29] Holding such a high opinion of itself, Western epistemology at the same time repudiates other epistemic traditions. In the framework of this "zero-point epistemology," therefore, it is assumed that the First World has "knowledge" as such, while the Third World could only produce "cultures" and "wisdoms."[30] As it were, modernity has redrawn the "geography" of knowledge. Hence, Mignolo speaks frequently of the "geopolitics of knowledge/knowing." Implicit in this "geopolitics" is an "epistemic racism," for, as Mignolo notes, "Epistemic racism was part and parcel of Western epistemology."[31]

According to Mignolo, the zero-point epistemology goes hand in hand with what he calls the "Theo-and-ego politics of knowledge" (usually contrasted with the "Geo-and-body politics of knowledge"). The concept might sound a bit weird, but the overall idea is that Eurocentric knowledge, proceeding from the premises of the Cartesian subject (ego), assumes that it is the "God's eye view," an Archimedean point of a sort. As "God's eye view," all the attributes of God are applied to the Cartesian ego, the Western subject – disembodied, unlocated, neutral, and objective. On the basis of this theo-and-ego politics of knowledge, Western experience comes to define human experience as such, and Western epistemic experience takes on the attribute of universality.[32]

Mignolo counters the aforementioned epistemic standpoint with the "Geo-and-body politics of knowledge," which acknowledges the fact that knowledge is located and embodied and that emotions and affects, particularly those of the oppressed, are essential ingredients of knowledge-making. As we shall see, this would form the bedrock of his important notions of decolonial option, epistemic disobedience, and border thinking that he uses as a bulwark against the "epistemic racism" of modernity.

There is a strong relationship between linguistic geographies and the coloniality of knowledge.[33] Mignolo refers to the dynamics of how languages of the world gain or lose power and influence. Linguistic hierarchization follows the pattern of the production and distribution of knowledge. Unsurprisingly, this pattern is steeped in coloniality, a people's standing in the colonial/capitalist matrix of power. Mignolo insists that the gravitation towards "powerful" languages like English and French has nothing to do with the "superiority" of their grammar and syntax; it has everything to do with power – the colonial matrix of power.[34] Overall, the geography of language privileges Western languages and epistemologies – thanks to the coloniality of knowledge.

Mignolo uses the categories of "Humanitas" and "Anthropos" to describe the coloniality of being. It has been said earlier that the colonial matrix of power not only seeks to manage/control knowledge but also seeks to manage/control subjectivities. The attempt to manage subjectivities involves a classification of bodies along racial lines, a hierarchical structure whereby the value of each class of bodies is determined by its standing in the colonial matrix of power.[35] On the one hand, humanitas represents the privileged subjects, whose humanity is considered undeniable and who have arrogated to themselves the task of classifying the rest of humanity. Western subjects have allotted this category to themselves. Anthropos, on the other hand, represents the class of those considered "lesser" humans (or even non-humans) by humanitas, and this generally refers to people of the Global South.

In the foregoing discourse, it has been shown how modernity produces and reproduces coloniality of knowledge and being. The difference between the values placed on different traditions of knowledge and classes of bodies/subjects in the modern world can only be explained in terms of coloniality. Mignolo calls this the "colonial difference." As we shall see shortly, any attempt to redress the epistemic imbalance in modernity must first recognize and diagnose this "colonial difference."

Decoloniality and the Decolonial Option

To make sense of "decoloniality," Mignolo distinguishes it from "decolonization." The difference is akin to that between "colonization" which refers to some direct administrative presence of a foreign power in a given time-frame and "coloniality" which goes beyond physical presence and given time frames. In other words, while "decolonization" might simply refer to a "complex scenario of struggles" and expelling occupying powers/forces from colonial territories, "decoloniality" is a complex process of reorientation, often epistemic, with a view to establishing justice and a holistic emancipation, not only of the individual but also of society as such.[36] In fact, Mignolo thinks that it questions something more fundamental, namely, the very logic of coloniality at play in the colonial matrix of power – and so aims to reshape the world: "Decoloniality, therefore, means both the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds will coexist."[37] The point has several times been made, both in the previous chapter (Chapter 2) and this chapter that modernity thrives on hegemony. The logic of coloniality aims to centralize the world. But here we see Mignolo positing a counter-logic that aims at a de-centered world, a pluriverse, a "world in which many worlds will coexist," each in its own right. This is precisely what the decolonial option is all about.

Decoloniality is, in the main, an epistemic project. In other words, the decolonial option is an epistemic option. As such, it proceeds from the basic premises that knowledge and knowledge-making in the modern world are under the sway of coloniality:

> Why decolonially? Because one of the basic hypotheses of decolonial thinking is that knowledge in the modern world was and is a fundamental aspect of coloniality . . . Knowledge itself is an integral part of imperial processes of appropriation . . . Thus, coloniality of knowledge means not that modern knowledge is colonized, but that modern knowledge is epistemically imperial and . . . devalues and dismisses epistemic differences.[38]

Thus, the fact of coloniality of knowledge in the modern world justifies the "decolonial" approach which is basically the decoloniality of knowledge.

Mignolo makes an important distinction between decoloniality/decolonial option and other intellectual or cultural currents that have similar objectives. He refers here to such notions as dewesternization, "postmodern," "postcolonial." How does Mignolo distinguish the decolonial option from dewesternization? He first admits that both share something in common: the rejection of Western epistemic privileges and the refusal to be told who they are and how to think from the standpoint of Western epistemology. However, they diverge on the ground that, while dewesternization does not question the core premises of Western capitalism and even subscribes to the same capitalist logic, the decolonial option fundamentally questions the logic of capitalism, in the understanding that there is more to life than capitalist production.[39] For instance, countries like China, Japan, and India

might pursue an aggressive policy of dewesternization by rejecting Western epistemic hegemony. Yet their policies may not be considered "decolonial" if they still subscribe to the capitalist logic of economic maneuvering and profit maximization at the cost of economic justice.

Mignolo further distinguishes the "decolonial" from the "postmodern." While both challenge modernity, effectively unearthing its "darker side" and "pathologies," Mignolo describes postmodern thought as "Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism."[40] This description might sound pejorative, but it is quite easy to understand why Mignolo would hold this view of postmodern thinkers. It has been said earlier that, to Mignolo, the "colonial difference" is decisive. The locus of enunciation matters a lot. Mignolo considers that postmodern thinkers are mostly Westerners/Europeans, who could not but speak from a "privileged" standpoint – the "hubris of the zero-point." They do not speak from the standpoint of the "colonial wound," and might not appreciate enough the experience of poverty, exclusion, and domination.[41]

Also, "decolonial" must be differentiated from "postcolonial." Mignolo recognizes that decolonial thinkers and postcolonial thinkers both share in the "colonial difference," being people from marginalized regions of the world and have had to live with the colonial wound. But he finds the prefix "post" (before "colonial") rather problematic, something that still ties "postcolonial" to the logic of coloniality/modernity. In this sense, there is only a temporal difference between "colonial" and "post" (after)-colonial, and mere temporal difference does not suffice. Mignolo also observes that postcolonial theorists were mainly intellectuals "writing in English and in the domain of the British Empire and its ex-colonies (Australia, New Zealand, India)."[42] This excludes not only the Americas, his immediate domain, but also the Caribbeans and Africa. He therefore thinks that "decolonial" provides a better platform that embraces all people who have suffered and have continued to suffer the "colonial wound."

Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience

Walter Mignolo prescribes "border thinking" as an important way through which "subaltern" knowledges and subjects could respond to coloniality/modernity. Border thinking is a veritable decolonial option. He justifies the term "border thinking" by suggesting that it is somewhat self-evident, given that people of the Global South have already been pushed to the margins, the periphery – the "border." One cannot pretend that there are no borders; the "colonial difference" has already established the borders.[43] Border thinking finds its home in what is considered the "exterior" from the standpoint of Western hegemonic epistemology:

> Therefore, border epistemology emerges from the exteriority (not the outside, but the outside invented in the process of creating the identity of the inside, that is Christian Europe) of the modern/colonial world, from bodies squeezed between imperial languages and those languages and categories of thought negated by and expelled from the house of imperial knowledge.[44]

Finding themselves already at the "border" of the modern/capitalist world-system, it would be unwise to seek inclusion in the same system from which they have been

banished. Therefore, the urgent task of anthropos, that is, those "bodies" that have been designated as "inferior" by humanitas (the supposedly "superior" subjects) is no longer that of "claiming recognition by or inclusion in the humanitas, but engaging in epistemic disobedience and delinking from the magic of the Western idea of modernity, ideals of humanity, and promises of economic growth and financial prosperity."[45] In other words, the task of "subaltern" peoples is to validate and value their position in the "exteriorities," validate their knowledges and knowledge-making, refuse to be tutored by the West on how to think properly or to be "better" humans. This stance is basically what links up border thinking and epistemic disobedience.

When "subaltern" people refuse dictation from the Global North, they would also reject being told what, for instance, such notion as "development" means. More radically, they would begin to question the very idea of "development" as an ideal or goal. By questioning the very logic of "development" as an ideal, they are indeed changing the terms of the discussion. They are delinking from the logic of modernity, for delinking means "to change the rule of the game . . . to change the terms of the conversation."[46] Along these lines, and following Arturo Escobar, Mignolo proposes, not an alternative development, but "alternatives to development." This latter concept poses the question as to why "development" would qualify as an ideal of life, in the first place. Perhaps any hopes of achieving the much-needed "alternatives to development" might rely on what Arturo Escobar refers to as "nonmodern circuits of knowledge, and forms of meanings" which do not "spell the systemic destruction of nature."[47] In this connection, the Igbo "subaltern" knowledges I shall later explore in this project, belong to this "nonmodern circuits of knowledge" that Escobar speaks of.

What is therefore required is "an other thinking." The epistemological potential of border thinking precisely lies in the fact that it makes possible the release of "an other thinking."[48] Commenting on Mignolo's concept of border thinking, Ramòn Grosfoguel clarifies that its stress on "an other thinking" does not amount to "rejecting modernity to retreat to fundamentalist absolutism"[49]; it is not a shy recourse to a sort of Third World fundamentalism, a move that is likewise undesirable and counterproductive. He urges that border thinking be seen as a subaltern response to Eurocentric modernity which operates with a narrow and merely provincial understanding of what constitutes "modernity."

Border thinking, delinking, and epistemic disobedience are inseparable. They are all processes that belong to the decolonial option. "Decolonial thinking presupposes delinking," Mignolo affirms, as he adds: "Delinking means also epistemic disobedience."[50] They all work in concert in the project of achieving a pluriversal (as opposed to a "uni-versal") world; a pluriversal world is indeed a polycentric world.[51]

Alterity, Transmodernity, and the Philosophy of Liberation

In this section, I show how the emergence of modernity is concomitant with the destruction of non-European (or more broadly, non-Western) alterity ("other-ness"). For this, I rely on the works of Enrique Dussel, another prominent member of the

Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Collective. While Quijano accounts for the origins of coloniality and Mignolo focuses on emancipatory potentials of border thinking, delinking, and epistemic disobedience, Dussel pays a special attention to the fact that the alterity (i.e., "other-ness") of people of the Global South has been obliterated by the modern world-system.

Alterity and Exteriority

Like Mignolo, Dussel thinks that modernity is based on a myth. Where Mignolo calls it the "rhetoric of modernity," Dussel speaks in terms of "myth" – "the myth of modernity." In this "myth," modernity is portrayed as the dawn of a new era of human rights, liberties, economic emancipation, and the light of reason that shatters the darkness of ignorance of earlier epochs. But this hides the soft underbellies of modernity – modernity's "underside," as the title of his work calls it. There is no more eloquent testimony to this "underside" than the eclipse of the Other, perfected by a Eurocentric modernity. And so, against the claim that Descartes' "cogito" (I think), referring to the exaltation of reason, inaugurates modernity, Dussel contends that "ego conquiro" (I conquer) "precedes the Cartesian ego cogito by about a century,"[52] indicating that conquest, violence, and the eclipse of the other are the founding moment of modernity. "Modernity is born," he says, "when Europe . . . begins its expansion beyond its historical limits."[53]

The invasion of the Americas occupies the center-stage of the making of modernity, a modernity whose constitutive feature is the destruction of alterity. With the invasion of the Americas, Dussel recounts, "the Other, the American Indian, disappeared. This Indian was not discovered as Other but subsumed under categories of the Same."[54] In this connection, Dussel devotes a number of pages to challenging the widely accepted use of the word "discovery" to describe the activities of Christopher Columbus. He insists that Columbus never "discovered" the Americas but rather "covered" the Americans.

Furthermore, he argues that the best term that describes what Columbus did was "invention" not "discovery." The title of one of his major works indeed encapsulates his main argument – *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*. There are two ways to understand this "invention." The first, as stated by Dussel, is the fact that Columbus mistook the "New World" (the Americas) for Asia. His destination was India, but through some nautical miscalculations, he found himself in the islands of the Americas. Columbus lived and died under the illusion that he had reached Asia. In other words, he "invented" America as Asia.[55]

America only existed in the "aesthetic and contemplative fantasy" of European navigators. In this fantasy, the supposed act of "discovery" was nothing more than covering over and subsuming the Other. I suggest the second, a probably more significant way of understanding "invention" which also resonates with Dussel – that is, in constituting its modern self, a self that is considered the "center" and endowed with such positive attributes as reason and progress, Europe had to simultaneously invent the "Other" (non-Europe) belonging to the periphery and lacking the great attributes Europe claims for itself. In this sense, "non-Europe" and later,

"non-Western" (Global South, Third World) becomes the "Other" that exhibits all the imperfections that the West or Global North would most assuredly disown.

If the Other was so essential to Europe's constitution of itself, if Europe so much relied on the non-European Other in the very definition of its identity, why then is this co-constitutive role of the Other not recognized? Why would the Other's fate be that of exclusion and occlusion? Dussel, therefore, wishes to assert that the non-European Other is coeval with Europe, for Europe "originates in a dialectical relationship with non-Europe. Modernity appears when Europe organizes the initial world-system and places itself at the center of world history over against a periphery equally constitutive of modernity."[56] He buttresses this point elsewhere when he argues that "Latin America, since 1492, is a constitutive moment of modernity . . . They make up the other face . . . the alterity, essential to modernity."[57] Wallerstein, whom we discussed in the previous chapter, has shed sufficient light on the fact that peripheral areas of the modern world-system are indispensable and co-constitutive of the system as a whole. It just needs to be added that this "other face" is the face of alterity that must be recognized and accorded its right to remain the "other face," as Dussel canvasses.

Dussel suggests that it was the failure to recognize the Other's right to be "Other" that gave rise to the appetite to conquer, dominate, subsume, and even to "modernize" and "civilize" the Other. Had Europe recognized this, the invasive activities of colonizing the lives of the Other would have been avoided.[58] Dussel's lamentations in the *Philosophy of Liberation* are indeed apt in this respect:

> The other, who is not different (as totality asserts) but distinct (always other), who has a history, a culture, an exteriority, has not been respected; the center has not let the other be other. It has incorporated the other into a strange, foreign totality. To totalize exteriority, to systematize alterity, to deny the other as other is alienation.[59]

To Dussel, alterity and exteriority are sacrosanct; indeed, he uses the term "sacred exteriority"[60] to highlight this fact.

It is obvious from the foregoing that Dussel sees alterity (i.e., Other-ness) and exteriority as inseparable. Alterity belongs to the exteriority and vice versa. To be sure, the Other originally denoted the "non-Europe," but later began to connote the "non-Western," the Global South, the Third World, the Developing Nations (as contrasted with the West, the Global North, the First World, the Developed Nations). Dussel further expands its meaning to embrace "the non-hegemonic, dominated, silenced, and forgotten."[61] This basically refers to the poor (usually of the Global South), women, and people who find themselves in different forms of systemic oppression. Therefore, exteriority has no definite skin color or geographical location (though some skin colors and locations are more prone to suffer exclusion). "Exteriority," says Dussel, "is the unfathomable spring of wisdom, that of the commonplace, dominated, poor peoples."[62] To these people, Dussel's philosophy of liberation promises hope and emancipation, because this philosophy is a "weapon of the liberation of the oppressed."[63]

Now that alterity and exteriority have been established as a fact, the next step is to fashion out an emancipatory framework that will take alterity and exteriority as a point of departure. This is embodied in the concept of "transmodernity," a constitutive moment of the philosophy of liberation.

Transmodernity and the Philosophy of Liberation

The point has already been made that Dussel regards the philosophy of liberation as the only available lifeline for all that are oppressed and excluded by the modern system. Liberation philosophy philosophizes from the exterior of the modern capitalist system. It is a philosophy of the Other, a philosophy that gives individuals and peoples at the periphery a voice. Finding its home in the periphery, liberation philosophy must proceed by first identifying "who is situated in the Exteriority of the system, and in the system as alienated, oppressed."[64] In short, its goal is to affirm the existence of the Other.

The key problem Dussel finds with the Eurocentric conception of modernity is that it is too narrow and provincial, despite its totalizing pretentions. It does not account for the non-European (non-Western) Other and, where it does, it merely subsumes the Other, failing to recognize the Other as co-constitutive of modernity. From Habermas through the so-called "postmodern" critics (Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida) to Charles Taylor, the shortcoming has remained the same in Dussel's estimation – narrow eurocentric conception of modernity. For instance, the punchline of Dussel's critique of Taylor's "sources" of the modern self reads thus, "The non-consideration of this Other in the constitution of the modern Self invalidates Taylor's entire philosophical analysis, given its eurocentric character."[65] He passes a similar verdict on other theorists who limited their analysis to Europe and the West.

Dussel, therefore, sees the need to rescue modernity from the clutches of eurocentric provincialism and place it on a planetary horizon. This is precisely what the concept of "transmodernity" does for him. By choosing "trans," he hopes to transcend the shortcomings of the premodern and postmodern:

> Our project of liberation can be neither anti- nor pre- nor post-modern, but instead trans-modern. As a rational critique from the Exteriority of modernity, the "other face" of modernity, trans-modernity (Amerindians, Africans, Asians, etc.) criticizes the irrational myth of violence against the colonies, peripheral capitalism, against the South.[66]

The story of modernity has to be retold to include the Other that was co-constitutive of it. Transmodernity thus aims to arrive at an inclusive Totality, a totality that factors in those placed at the periphery or the exterior of the modern world-system.

As a counterpoint to Eurocentric reason, Transmodern Reason recognizes that Europe is the "visible part of the iceberg" but not the whole of it.[67] Transmodern Reason is also a counterpoint to the logic of violence present in Eurocentric reason. Transmodern Reason is not "non-reason," as Eurocentric reason might want to call it. It proudly proclaims itself "the reason of the Other, that of the genocidally

murdered Indian, of the African slaves reduced to merchandise, of women as sexually object, of the child as pedagogically dominated."[68] Belonging to the oppressed, Transmodern Reason thus refuses to participate in the same logic of violence that oppresses people.

How does the Other who dwells in the periphery or exterior of the system make the fact of his/her existence known to and felt by people at the "center" of the system? Dussel pinpoints that it happens through *interpellation*. Interpellation is a speech-act by which the poor and excluded break into the system with the demand, "I am hungry; give me food!" He explains that no one can "banalize or trivialize their own hunger; much less can the 'interpellation' that emerges from the suffering of poor be taken in a comic spirit."[69] Hence, interpellation is a "life-or-death struggle"[70] on the part of the Other. Interpellation is an interjection, a breaking-into; it is also a demand. The Other demands a number of rights – the right to be heard, to be recognized, to be included. In order to draw sufficient attention to his/her distinct exteriority beyond merely making his/her voice heard, the poor/oppressed has no other choice than to interject.[71]

It has earlier been mentioned that Dussel tries to distinguish transmodernity from a number of theorizations on and critiques of modernity. The common charge he levels on them is Eurocentrism, a type of provincialism that makes an unfounded claim to universality. Weber's eurocentrism as regards the theory of modernity lies in his somewhat a priori presupposition that the cultural phenomena produced in the "soil of the West" were not only evolutionally superior but also had some "implicit universality."[72] Habermas, according to him, was not only guilty of Eurocentrism[73] but also oblivious of the fact that hunger and conditions of oppression can never make an ideal condition for "discourse" and "deliberation" – thus undermining Habermas' faith in their efficacy.

Remarkably, Dussel also criticizes the so-called "postmodern" critique of reason, undertaken by Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault. He thinks that their attack on reason as such is not necessary. He, therefore, believes that transmodern reason provides a more fruitful way of transcending modern Eurocentric reason.

> I seek to overcome modernity not through a postmodern attack on reason based on the irrational incommensurability of language-games. Rather, I propose a transmodern opposition to modernity's irrational violence based on the reason of the Other. I hope to go beyond modernity by discovering . . . other face of modernity . . . This Other encompasses the peripheral colonial world, the sacrificed Indian, the enslaved black, the oppressed woman, the subjugated child, and the alienated popular culture – all victims of modernity's irrational action in contradiction to its own rational ideal.[74]

The shortcoming of all postmodern critique precisely consists in the fact that there is no place for the reason of the Other in postmodern theories. Hence the suspicion cast on reason as such is misplaced; what matters is that the reason of the Other is affirmed.[75] The reason of the Other thus becomes the basis for transmodernity, for it primarily seeks to "go beyond" the Eurocentric confines of modernity.

The Abyssal Line, Epistemologies of the South, and Ecologies of Knowledge

The Portuguese scholar, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, is no less engaged with the epistemic issues of modernity than the members of the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Collective that have so far been presented. Using different conceptual tools, Sousa Santos tries to show that modernity has been structured to draw a decisive dividing line, the "abyssal line," between "knowledge" and "non-knowledge," as it were. While individuals belonging to the "epistemic North" supposedly inhabit the zone of knowledge and subjectivity, others have been pushed by the dynamics of modernity to the "epistemic South," that is, the zone of non-knowledge and non-being. He canvasses for the insurrection of the "epistemologies of the South," which depends so much on knowledge "ecologies," that is, the conservation of subjugated knowledges.

The Abyssal Line

Sousa Santos analyzes the epistemic marginalization of individuals and groups in the dynamics of the modern world in terms of what he refers to as the "abyssal line." As the name suggests, the abyssal line is an imaginary abyss, a gulf that, as it were, divides the world into two incommensurate zones inhabited by two classes of people. On the one hand, those who inhabit the "Northern" zone are considered (or better, consider themselves) fully humans, their knowledges are considered valid, and their culture civilized. On the other hand, the humanity of those who inhabit the "Southern" zone is routinely called into question, their knowledges are considered invalid and dismissed and their culture considered primitive. In other words, the North is the zone of being, knowledge, humanity, and civility while the South is the zone of non-being, non-knowledge (ignorance), inhumanity, vulgarity, and primitivity. In terms of sociability, one represents the zone of metropolitan sociability while the other represents the zone of colonial sociability.[76]

Though the abyssal line is an imaginary line, in that it cannot be seen with the physical eyes, the exclusion it creates is real and felt in the physical bodies of individuals that inhabit the Southern zone. It is so real and perceptible that it cannot be wished away. It is no surprise that Sousa Santos calls it the "most fundamental epistemological fiat of Western-centric modernity."[77] The reference to Western modernity points to the fact that it is produced and reproduced by Western modernity as a fact, indeed a "fiat." Another point to note in this regard is that the abyssal line is not a geographical or cartographical line. So, when Sousa Santos talks of the "North" or "South," he is not making any geographical claims. "South" is an "epistemic South" and "North" is an "epistemic North." Though "South" and "North" are non-geographical terms, Sousa Santos concedes that they "partially overlap" with the geographical South and North.[78] This means that it is still people of the Global South that generally suffer the worst forms of epistemic subjugation, thus corresponding approximately to the "epistemic South." But the "South," in Sousa Santos' sense, also includes women, the poor, and peasants – in short, all who are oppressed by the unholy alliance of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.

What is at issue here is exclusion or non-exclusion. A line serves to either include or exclude. What is included possesses certain "desired" features or qualities; what is excluded lacks those qualities. Even from the ranks of things that are included, there could be further divisions, depending on the qualities or attributes at stake at each given moment. Thus, there may never be an end to lines, divisions, and exclusions – as dictated by what is desirable at any given instance.

Sousa Santos differentiates between non-abyssal and abyssal exclusions. For instance, while people to the North of the abyssal line may be differentiated within themselves along the lines of status, wealth, social ranking, etc., such lines are not abyssal because they do not radically call the being of the lesser-ranked individuals into question.

This point needs to be buttressed. I understand Sousa Santos to be saying the following. For whatever reason, a Belgian may disregard an Italian (or vice versa); there might be different restaurants and neighborhoods for an Italian billionaire and an Italian middle-class fellow, but such "lines" or exclusions between them are not necessarily abyssal but a mere question of status and perception. This is why Sousa Santos speaks of "metropolitan sociability" and "colonial sociability." The Italian billionaire acknowledges deep down his heart that he shares the same "metropolitan sociability" with the Italian middle class. Despite some social power differential between them, he recognizes that "the metropolitan world is the world of equivalence and reciprocity among 'us,' who are, like us, fully humans."[79] Put simply, he would not find it degrading to associate with the Italian or Belgian middle-class persons. But the scenario is different between him and a peasant in Northern Nigeria. Avoiding any essentialist insinuations, we may be able to admit that the "line" between the Italian billionaire and a peasant in Northern Nigeria may rightly be called "abyssal." Someone might even be a victim of a form of abyssal exclusion but not the other. For instance, a poor white woman may be a victim of patriarchy and capitalism, but not of racism. But a poor black woman is a victim of all three – patriarchy, capitalism, and racism. As it were, the "abyss" in which a poor, black woman finds herself is most pitiable.

Sousa Santos focuses on the epistemological dimensions of the abyssal line. As a matter of fact, he thinks the abyssal line is epistemological in nature. This is why he frequently speaks of "abyssal thinking." As he argues, "the difficulty is an epistemological one, since abyssal thinking, prevalent today, excels in rendering non-existent, irrelevant, or unintelligible all that exists on the other side of the abyssal line."[80] In fact, he unequivocally states that "Modern Western thinking is an abyssal thinking."[81] This claim amounts to the following. First, as abyssal thinking, Western thinking is premised on the idea that truth and knowledge reside on one side of the line (the Northern zone) while what exist on the other side of the line (Southern zone) may at best be described as plebeian, lay, backward, and indigenous forms of thinking. Second, the very propensity in Western thinking to generate disputes and tensions between "scientific" and "nonscientific" truths is a symptom of its abyssal, exclusionary character. Third, this Manichaean thinking (reminiscent of the distinction between supposed "good" and "evil" in Manichaeism) extends to all other categorizations – civil/barbarian, legal/illegal, scientific/magical – the South permanently retaining the undesirable attributes.[82]

Abyssal lines and abyssal thinking are still prevalent today. It would be delusional to think that they disappeared with the end of historical colonialism. They are rather ubiquitous and evident in our modern society: "Civil wars, irregular wars, rampant racism, violence against women, massive surveillance, police brutality, persistent xenophobic attacks, and refugees across Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa – all are witnesses to the multifaceted presence of the abyssal line."[83] As Sousa Santos repeatedly suggests, they are produced and reproduced by the ever-present unholy alliance of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.

The picture is not entirely bleak, however. Sousa Santos has begun to recognize and celebrate the emergence of "postabyssal thinking," as encapsulated in what he calls the "epistemologies of the South." He in fact thinks that these epistemologies have already "come of age," as the subtitle of his work, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*, suggests. On this note, I shall now proceed to present his elaboration of the "epistemologies of the South."

Epistemologies of the South: A Profile

Sousa Santos argues for an "epistemological shift" that will be able to address the cognitive injustice inherent in abyssal thinking; abyssal thinking is a thinking pattern synonymous with the "epistemologies of the North." He states that "such a shift lies in . . . the epistemologies of the South."[84]

How does he define the "epistemologies of the South?" The epistemologies of the South "concern the production and validation of knowledges anchored in the experiences of resistance of all those social groups that have systematically suffered injustice, oppression, and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy."[85] The aforementioned definition provides a clear idea of who belongs to the "South." Though roughly corresponding to the geographic "South" (given their historical experience), the epistemic "South" is essentially "non-geographic." In what follows, I shall attempt to construct what might be called a "profile" of the epistemologies of the South, based on the aforementioned definition and the various ways in which Sousa Santos characterizes them in his writings.

The first thing to note – and this forms part of its very definition – is that epistemologies of the South are knowledges born in struggle and resistance. Struggle and resistance are at the root of the epistemologies of the South. Sousa Santos unmistakably identifies the "foes," so to speak – capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. From Quijano and other scholars discussed earlier in this chapter, "race" as an oppressive social phenomenon is traceable to capital. Needless to say, capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy reinforce each other, and explain a wide range of oppressive conditions that epistemologies of the South contend with. Since "South" is non-geographical, epistemologies of the South are found anywhere there is resistance and struggle against the three bogeymen of modernity – that is, capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.

Second, epistemologies of the South must always be contrasted with epistemologies of the North and abyssal thinking; they must be seen as polar opposites. While the epistemologies of the North are characteristically abyssal, producing

and reproducing abyssal divides and dichotomies, the epistemologies of the South are decidedly postabyssal. As "postabyssal," it strives to do away with the existing abyssal divides, build bridges where there were "gulfs," and so construct a world where divisive gulfs and abysses no longer exist. While the epistemologies of the North are "premised upon an abyssal line separating metropolitan societies and forms of sociability from colonial societies and forms of sociability,"[86] the epistemologies of the South seek simply to do away with the dualism and hierarchical structure and not to put the South in the place of the North.[87] The point to note here is simply that the two kinds of epistemologies have contrasting aims, objectives, and dynamics.

Third, epistemologies of the South should not be understood in the "academic" sense. Academic epistemology concerns itself in intellectual hairsplitting about criteria that justify and separate supposedly valid and apodictic knowledge from mere belief. Sousa Santos says that epistemologies of the South have no such academic pretensions. They are simply experiential knowledge, knowledge born out of experiential struggle against oppression.[88] It makes no distinction between life and thought. As experiential knowledge, they are avowedly corporeal, in that, they valorize the senses. Epistemologies of the North are notorious for distrusting the senses. But epistemologies of the South cannot underestimate such valuable source of knowledge as the senses, for the oppressed feel and understand their objectionable conditions in their very bodies, through their senses.

On the outlined grounds, Sousa Santos calls them "lived knowledges." Lived knowledges are not academic; they are not specialized knowledges. They are rather plebian, artisanal (like an artisan), practical, folk, vernacular, common knowledges[89] Sousa Santos speaks of an "emancipatory commonsense,"[90] for the reason that they are not expert knowledges but commonsense knowledges. Epistemologies of the North make pretentions to neutrality and objectivity, but epistemologies of the South make no such pretentions. In fact, they do not care about neutrality since the condition in which they are produced requires emotional and passionate responses. Hence, epistemologies of the South are decidedly corporeal; they are a knowing-with and not knowing-about; they are non-neutral knowledges.[91]

Fourth, while the epistemologies of the North lay an undue emphasis on authorship, the epistemologies of the South do not care so much about authorship. If the epistemologies of the South ever speak of "authorship," it is certainly a kind of "collective authorship" that represents the collective wisdom of a community and not in the sense of Northern epistemologies, whereby an "author" is a supposedly "all-knowing" individual who magisterially dishes out information on a specialized subject to a presumably ignorant audience. To Sousa Santos, the fact that epistemologies of the South speak in terms of collective authorship is explainable by the fact that they are produced from experiences that are collective.

It is for this same reason that epistemologies of the South are largely oral knowledges rather than written knowledges, the type emphasized in "Northern" epistemologies. Orality, or what Sousa Santos frequently calls "orature," is vital.[92] "Sage philosophy" of Odera Oruka provides a good example not only of orality but also of "collective authorship." It is instructive that Sousa Santos acknowledges and

makes a special reference to Oruka's "sage philosophy."[93] The key idea is that African sages (or sages in general) masterfully express the collective wisdoms of the community but are also able to adopt a critical stance regarding such wisdoms, their interpretation, and application. For this reason, he thinks that sage philosophy is philosophy in its own right, despite being mostly oral and an expression of collective thought.[94]

On this note, Sousa Santos cites such indigenous philosophies as *ubuntu*, *sumak kawsay*, and *pachamama* (*sumak kawsay* and *pachamama* are Andean ideas) as instances of epistemologies of the South.[95] Ubuntu as a concept, rooted in the Bantu language-group of Africa, has become one of the most celebrated indigenous concepts in African philosophy. It represents a belief in the bond of humanity that connects all persons, a belief that inspires the virtues of mutual support and kindness towards others.[96] *Ubuntu* represents the principle of interconnectedness that I identity in Igbo thought-pattern. But one of the distinctive features of this book (as I shall argue in the next chapter) is that, while African philosophers have mostly treated the notion of interconnectedness as metaphysics, this work, following Sousa Santos and the members of the Coloniality/Modernity Project, considers it an epistemology, a mode of knowing. Once again, I cannot overemphasize the relevance of the epistemological discourses of these scholars for the present work, considering that they provide the much-needed epistemic framework.

Having run a profile of the epistemologies of the South, it remains to be shown the processes that make it possible for epistemologies of the South to not only disclose themselves but also accomplish their historic tasks of emancipating the oppressed persons of the "epistemic South." I conclude this section by looking at the way Sousa Santos addresses this concern.

Ecologies of Knowledge

Like the scholars I have been discussing in this chapter, Sousa Santos laments the subjugation and sometimes outright destruction of indigenous knowledges by structures of modernity, epistemologies of the North being the main culprit. But he is the one that calls this process by its proper name – "epistemicide." He goes ahead to give this subtitle to one of his books: "Justice against Epistemicide." Denouncing epistemicide as "the murder of knowledge,"[97] he considers it an injustice. As a result, he repeatedly insists that "there is no social justice without cognitive justice."[98] Indeed, this demand for cognitive justice has become an important hallmark of our times; endangered knowledges are now demanding their right to exist.

This is precisely where the practice of "ecologies of knowledge" becomes a lifeline of a sort. As the name suggests, ecologies of knowledge, according to Sousa Santos, have the primary aim of conserving "endangered" knowledges and experiences. These endangered knowledges are those of the epistemic South that face the threat of extinction through epistemicide. Ecologies of knowledge are premised on the idea that there is a diversity of knowledge and experience that need to be preserved, just like the idea of biodiversity signals the recognition and preservation of

endangered plant and animal species. They may be viewed as an acknowledgment and a response to the fact of epistemological diversity. "Throughout the world," Sousa Santos writes, "there are not only very diverse forms of knowledge or matter, society, life, and spirit but also many and very diverse concepts of what counts as knowledge and the criteria that may be used to validate it."[99]

Given the need to conserve endangered knowledges and ways of life, ecologies of knowledge work hand in hand with what Sousa Santos calls the *sociology of absences and emergences*. The aim of this sociology is precisely that of "excavating" hidden knowledges and social experiences. It uncovers what is hidden and renders it visible.[100] In short, "The sociology of absences is the cartography of the abyssal line. It identifies the ways and means through which the abyssal line produces nonexistence, radical invisibility, and irrelevance."[101] As has already been said, the abyssal line is biased against all knowledges and experiences to the South of the line. It tries to subdue and cover them. But through the process of ecologies of knowledge, aided by sociology of absences and emergences, these knowledges and experiences are being rendered visible.

Sousa Santos' ideas may be summed up as follows. The modern world is defined by an abyssal line (dividing "South" from "North") that is epistemic in character. The clamor for social justice in the modern world is squarely and necessarily a call for epistemic/cognitive justice. Epistemic justice involves the uncovering and validation of subjugated knowledges, that is, the epistemologies of the South. In turn, this is possible with the ecologies of knowledge, mediated through sociology of absences and emergences, whose task is to conserve, disclose, and valorize endangered knowledges.

Some Evaluative Remarks

Having presented the thoughts of the four scholars, I shall proceed to make a few evaluative remarks. I shall point out in a generalized fashion some of the limitations in their theoretical approach. I do so without undermining or discounting the significance of their thoughts, individually and collectively, for the present work – namely, drawing attention to the epistemic implications of modernity, backed up with important conceptual tools.

For methodological reasons, I start off with Dussel. Starting with Dussel, whose limitations are somewhat remedied by Mignolo, would allow me to state precisely how Mignolo does this, which in turn serves as a good transition, as I work through Mignolo and others.

Let's take Dussel's "transmodernity." As we have seen, the essence of Dussel's transmodernity, as the prefix "trans" (i.e., beyond, transcending) highlights, is to place modernity on what he calls a "planetary" horizon, thereby countering the Eurocentric framework that defines modernity in exclusively European/Western terms. With this as his goal, it is no surprise that the chief criticism he levels on most of the thinkers he engaged with was that of "eurocentrism," as he tries to provide a narrative of modernity that recognizes the co-constitutive role of the Other (non-Europeans, non-Western, subjugated peoples in general).

However noble Dussel's "planetary" and inclusive project might be, it leads Dussel inadvertently to venture into grand-narratives. Dussel's notion of transmodernity is indeed a grand-narrative, and grand-narratives have become rather suspect in philosophy. One of the major problems with grand-narratives is that they involve macro-identities or macro-subjects – "the poor," "blacks," "women," "Indians," etc. – identities that are themselves not easy to define and categorize. Linda Martín-Alcoff calls attention to Dussel's invocation of "group identities through impossibly large, amalgamated terms familiar in modernist representations, without any nods to the fragmentation, intersectionality, or constructed character of group identities."[102] We risk fetishizing problematic, and sometimes constructed, identities under the all-encompassing banner of the "Other" (of Europe).

Despite pointing this out, Martín-Alcoff still appears to be holding brief for Dussel by trying to justify his adoption of a macro-frame. She explains that Dussel's transmodernity is "inclusive more than it is denunciatory,"[103] adding that it "is meant, in part, to allow for a broad, even global relationality among elements, so none are irreducibly local."[104] While Martín-Alcoff's charitable remarks are understandable, I do think that, in the quest for inclusion, coupled with the suspicion for "irreducibly local" identities, Dussel inadvertently plays into the hands of those same postmodern thinkers he once criticized – Lyotard and Foucault – for rejecting modernity on the ground of its totalizing claims. So, this places Dussel's transmodernity in a rather precarious position, sandwiched, as it were between modernity and postmodernity.

Relatedly, he does not adequately handle the theoretical challenge of affirming, on the one hand, the distinctness of the Other and, on the other hand, the need to include the Other in one comprehensive transmodernity. The challenge, then, is that of maintaining the elements of identity and difference/distinctness in a less problematic manner. To my mind, Dussel does not quite handle this dilemma elegantly, at least, not with the introduction of the language of "inclusion" as the method of "interpellation" suggests. By "interpellation," the excluded Other is expected to "break into" the same system that excluded him/her, with a disturbing demand, "I am hungry – I need food!" I do think that, while interpellation may be able to call attention to the existence of the Other and the disturbing reality of hunger, there is a risk that it may give rise to the same paternalism, patronage, condescension, and disrespect that could obliterate the identity of the Other. Interpellation, in the sense in which Dussel uses it, ends up moralizing relation with the Other, making him/her a mere object of compassion, a beggarly recipient of material handouts. As a matter of fact, this was how the Other lost his/her identity in the first place. My point is that, with bowl in hand, asking for food and inclusion, the Other cannot dialogue from a position of strength. The Other risks losing whatever is left of his/her identity and distinctness. If this happens, the very aim of the project of transmodernity would be defeated.

While Dussel's idea of transcending the Eurocentric or Western paradigm of modernity is brilliant, at least in principle, I do think that Mignolo's notions of epistemic disobedience, border thinking, and delinking represent a more dignifying approach that refuses to beg for "inclusion," alms bowl in hand. Mignolo insists,

as we saw earlier, that so-called "subaltern" people are not asking for "inclusion" in the hegemonic modern world-system; they only demand for the right to be different. Dussel likewise subscribes to this vision in his excellent theorization about "alterity." Yet he inadvertently slides into the language of "inclusion," a demeaning kind of inclusion that would clearly not guarantee a dignifying alterity. When we remove the ambivalent language of "inclusion," it becomes easy to imagine a planetary transmodernity where cultural and epistemic "borders" might still exist as a deterrent to homogenization. Mignolo's idea of border thinking and epistemic disobedience may well come in handy to supply for the shortcomings noticeable in Dussel, so that the two may form a coherent theory in which "borders" exist to safeguard alterity on a transmodern scale.

But Walter Mignolo's approach itself suffers from a deficiency observable in all four theorists – the tendency to hang ideas up in the air at the theoretical level. Concrete examples are sometimes not furnished, and this undermines the capacity of their theorization to serve as a powerful template for practical socio-political actions or, at least, concrete transformation in thinking and attitude. One finds this dearth of concrete examples and down-to-earth analysis quite disappointing, considering that their discourse is originally intended to elicit liberating praxis from the oppressed and marginalized. From the titles of their works and the actual contents thereof, Quijano, Mignolo, Dussel, and Sousa Santos have not hidden their intention to serve as "spokespersons" for the marginalized Third World, railing against Western epistemic hegemony and trying to elicit appropriate responses from the Third World. But how could any concrete emancipatory praxis be derived from the abstruse and idealized jargons they deploy?

The remarks by Silvia Cusicanqui Rivera, also Latin American, are noteworthy. To her, they have only succeeded in creating "jargon, a conceptual apparatus, and forms of reference and counter-reference that have isolated academic treatises from any obligation to or dialogue with insurgent forces." Continuing, she submits:

> Walter Mignolo and company have built a small empire within an empire, strategically appropriating the contributions of the subaltern studies schools of India and the various Latin American variants of critical reflection on colonization and decolonization . . . Neologisms such as decolonial, transmodernity, and eco-si-mía proliferate, and such language entangles and paralyzes their objects of study: the indigenous and African-descended people with whom these academics believe they are in dialogue.[105]

I think the issue is not so much the use of neologisms as that of thoroughly explaining them in a down-to-earth and usable fashion.

Furthermore, there is a propensity for sloganeering and rhetoric. This is more noticeable in Dussel and Mignolo. Their critique of such intellectual currents as postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonial theory, dewesternization, etc., seems to be based more on rhetoric and slogans and less on substance. The disproportionate attention devoted to distinguishing their "decolonial" project from similar intellectual traditions could have been invested on elaborating their own

"decolonial" project more robustly. Hence, much of what one gets in terms of elaboration is what "decolonial" (or "decoloniality") *is not* rather than what *it is*.

Their propensity for slogans and clichés makes it difficult to clearly spell out what their theoretical stances might translate to when put into use, in other words, the real difference their theories could make. Their invocation of the concept of "right" brings this point into sharp relief. These scholars passionately advocate the *right* of marginalized people to epistemic justice and dignity, claiming that modernity has been structured to deny these rights to some parts of the world. But the issue is that the language of "right" is largely seen as a "modern" concept, belonging to the modern Western social imaginary, as we saw with Charles Taylor in the previous chapter. The problem is not that there are no conceptions of rights among subaltern peoples, but that these authors seem to be evoking the same specifically Western conception of right, a fact that sets their theoretical stance (i.e., delinking) at variance with practical claims (i.e., a Western type of rights). Could non-Western subaltern peoples achieve the needed emancipation using Western conceptual framework? Such an ambivalence tends to contradict what the scholars purport to stand for, to wits, a thoroughgoing epistemic or conceptual emancipation.

Well, my take on this is that, though the West seems to have systematized and popularized the language of "rights," the very notion of "rights" (much like the idea of "improvement" or "development" as some call it) is not exclusively a Western/modern intellectual property. In other words, the West does not have a monopoly in this regard. Indeed, indigenous peoples of all parts of the world, from time immemorial, possess their various notions of right, dignity, improvement, etc. But what these notions mean for the indigenous peoples needs to be properly spelt out, lest they be confused with the Western conceptions. Mignolo and Sousa Santos try to do this with the notion of "development" when they distinguish the modern idea of "development" (which is linear and propelled by scientific invention and violence to nature) from the indigenous Andean notion of *sumak kawsay* (which conceives development as "good living," or "living in fullness and harmony" and all it entails).[106] This attempt to distinguish *sumak kawsay* from modern ideas of development is important and should have been followed through for some other crucial concepts.

The enumerated shortcomings notwithstanding, Quijano, Dussel, Mignolo, and Sousa Santos have a great merit of underscoring the epistemic dimension or implications of modernity. The epistemic dimension of modernity consists in the fact that modernity is founded on and reproduces an epistemic imbalance that subjugates knowledges emanating from what is now referred to as the "Global South," as it valorizes and promotes those emanating from the "Global North." This reality, this "epistemological fiat," as Sousa Santos calls it, has continued to define modernity as we know it.

Therefore, their discourse is important for this project. In fact, it complements the discussion in Chapter 2, given that this epistemic dimension to modernity, especially as it affects the "Global South," is scarcely explored in Chapter 2. Habermas and Taylor left it out completely, while Wallerstein did not sufficiently elaborate

the argument that liberalism as a key feature of modernity is not only an ideology but also an epistemology with immense implications for the way "science" is organized in the modern world.[107]

It has been earlier said that the theorizations in Quijano, Dussel, Mignolo, and Sousa Santos suffer from some lack of concrete examples that could provide impulse for emancipatory praxis. Maybe I should qualify this statement by admitting that Mignolo and Sousa Santos actually made references to such indigenous epistemologies as the Andean *pachamama* and *sumak kawsay* and the African *ubuntu*. So, the problem is not that they are not mentioned, but rather that the attention given to them is merely descriptive and not thorough enough to make them usable. Therefore, the task that will be undertaken in the remaining parts of my work may now be seen in the light of complementing these efforts. I do so by not only providing a concrete instance of indigenous knowledge (namely, the Igbo sense of interconnectedness) but also showing that the solidarity derived from it could be relevant for (Igbo) modernization.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to make the case that modernity is inseparable from coloniality and that coloniality is essentially epistemic. I did so, relying on scholars like Quijano, Mignolo, Dussel, and Sousa Santos. I have made the point that epistemic coloniality is a complex systemic process that perpetrates and perpetuates the stifling of knowledges and knowledge-productions from the "epistemic South."

It was Quijano who originated the concept of coloniality and pointed out its epistemic character. In presenting Quijano, I explained how he conceives coloniality as a new model of power that emerged with the capitalist world order. It was noted that this model of power was at the same time the origin of European (or more broadly, Western) epistemic hegemony.

Mignolo draws on Quijano, as he attempts to analyze and address the problem of coloniality. Like Quijano, he adopts the coloniality framework, which he calls the "colonial matrix of power." The colonial matrix of power colonizes both knowledge and being (subjectivities). As a remedy, Mignolo proposes the "decolonial option," which involves the processes of "border thinking," "delinking," and "epistemic disobedience" – processes that operate outside the imperial logic of Western epistemology.

Dussel appropriates this same theme of coloniality, focusing more on how modernity/coloniality is concomitant with the destruction of the alterity of the non-Europe Other. This non-Europe/non-Western Other is co-constitutive of modernity, but modernity has been designed to occlude or subsume the non-Europe/non-Western Other, creating the false impression that modernity is an exclusively European/Western phenomenon. The Eurocentric conception of modernity is too narrow and parochial. Therefore, the concept of "transmodernity," as part of the philosophy of liberation, serves to expand the horizon of modernity to include the non-Europe/non-Western Other.

This chapter continued its exploration of the theme of coloniality under the analytical device of the "abyssal line," as propounded by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Sousa Santos postulates that modernity produces and reproduces the "abyssal line" – indeed a gulf – between "North" and "South." This line is essentially epistemic and not necessarily geographical, though it roughly corresponds to the geographical North and South. Sousa Santos calls it the "most fundamental epistemological fiat" of modernity, a "fiat" that separates what it considers knowledge from non-knowledge, subject from object, being from non-being, civility from barbarity, metropolitan from colonial. But Sousa Santos envisions the emergence of "postabyssal" thinking that is not founded on these dichotomies. "Epistemologies of the South" and "ecologies of knowledge" must be promoted as a counterpoint to hegemonic influence of Northern (Western) knowledge system.

Some general evaluative remarks were made vis-à-vis key ideas and overall approach of these scholars. An important objection I raised regarding Dussel's analysis is that he tends to adopt a language of "inclusion" (as encapsulated in the concept of "interpellation"). I argued that a theory that cares so much about preserving alterity and distinctness should be wary of the language of inclusion. Worse still, this quest for inclusion is done in a beggarly manner, which could only serve to reinforce the same prejudice of inferiority that people of the Third World are trying to overcome. I considered Mignolo's approach more assertive and more effective for preserving alterity.

Yet I pointed out that Mignolo, Quijano, Dussel, and Sousa Santos have a general shortcoming of hanging up some of their idea at the theoretical level, making them less actionable in the real world of struggle for epistemic justice. Furthermore, their propensity for sloganeering and the use of clichés leaves certain notions not properly spelt out. For instance, by not spelling out what the term "right" might mean in their context, the reader might have trouble figuring out what real difference some of their ideas could make.

The shortcomings notwithstanding, their contributions remain relevant for this book because they have stridently drawn attention to the epistemic issues thrown up by modernity. They have also made the right call for the resuscitation, promotion, and validation of endangered knowledges. Therefore, I intend in the next chapter to complement their efforts by exploring the idea of interconnectedness in Igbo (African) thought.

Notes

1 To all intents and purposes, "Europe" is interchangeable with the "West" in Quijano's writings.
2 A. Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 539.
3 Ibid., 548.
4 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 85.
5 A. Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 536.
6 A. Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," 218.
7 Ibid., 220.
8 A. Quijano, "Paradoxes of Modernity in Latin America," 149.

9 A. Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 171.
10 Ibid., 169.
11 Ibid., 170.
12 R. Grosfoguel, "A Decolonial Approach to Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Border Thinking and Global Coloniality," 21–22.
13 Ibid., 542.
14 Ibid., 549–550.
15 Ibid., 542.
16 A. Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 174.
17 Ibid., 73.
18 A. Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," 221.
19 Ibid.
20 A. Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 177.
21 A. Quijano, "Paradoxes of Modernity in Latin America," 166.
22 Ibid., 168.
23 A. Quijano, "The Return of the Future and the Question of Knowledge," 85.
24 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 2–3.
25 Ibid., 171.
26 Ibid., 33.
27 W. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 276.
28 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 80.
29 R. Grosfoguel, "A Decolonial Approach to Political-Economy," 11.
30 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 118.
31 Ibid., 201.
32 W. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Thinking," 19.
33 W. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 247.
34 Ibid., 210.
35 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 85.
36 Ibid., 53–54.
37 Ibid., 54.
38 Ibid., 205.
39 W. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," 3.
40 W. Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," 63.
41 W. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," 3.
42 W. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 91.
43 Ibid., 338.
44 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 20.
45 Ibid., 119–120.
46 Ibid., 190.
47 A. Escobar, "Cultural Politics and Biological Diversity," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, 221.
48 Ibid., 67.
49 R. Grosfoguel, Op. Cit., 26.
50 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 143.
51 Ibid., 23. See also, 176.
52 E. Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, 20. See also, 217.
53 Ibid., 52.
54 E. Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 32.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 9–10.

57 Ibid., 26.
58 Ibid., 35. See also, 39 and 45.
59 E. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 53.
60 Ibid., 54.
61 E. Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 137.
62 E. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 180.
63 Ibid., 189.
64 E. Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, 8.
65 Ibid., 138. Also see, 131.
66 Ibid., 53.
67 Ibid., 136.
68 Ibid., 21.
69 Ibid., 118.
70 Ibid., 31.
71 E. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 124.
72 E. Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, 133.
73 Ibid., 135–136.
74 E. Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 137.
75 Ibid., 26.
76 B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 20.
77 Ibid., 3.
78 Ibid., 1.
79 Ibid., 20.
80 Ibid., 84.
81 B. Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 118.
82 Ibid., 119–122.
83 B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 297.
84 Ibid., xiii.
85 Ibid., 1. See also, *Epistemologies of the South*, x.
86 Ibid., 6.
87 Ibid., 7.
88 Ibid., 2. See also *Epistemologies of the South*, 12.
89 Ibid., 43.
90 B. Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 159. See also, 158.
91 B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 15. See also 13 and 44.
92 Ibid., 61.
93 Ibid., 192.
94 O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy*.
95 B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 8–12.
96 Mogobe B. Ramose has carried out an extensive treatment of Ubuntu in his important work, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu* (2005).
97 B. Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 92.
98 B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 6. See also *Epistemologies of the South*, 237.
99 B. Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 192.
100 Ibid., 172.
101 B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 25.
102 L. Martín-Alcoff, "Enrique Dussel's Transmodernism," 60.
103 Ibid., 64.
104 Ibid., 65.
105 C. S. Rivera, "Ch'xinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization," 98–102.
106 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 306–312; see also B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 9–12.
107 I. Wallerstein, *Modern World System* (Vol. IV), 219ff.

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4 The Idea of Interconnectedness in Igbo Thought

Society, Politics, Religion, and Morality

Introduction

Following the strident call made in the preceding chapter for the promotion and valorization of endangered knowledges, I now explore the idea of interconnectedness in Igbo thought. For the Igbo, thought and lived experience are not divorced from each other. The sense of interconnectedness is a mode of knowing or an epistemological standpoint that perceives realities as interrelated with one another. The world, according to this mode of knowing, is composed of realities mutually impinging on one another. The subject considers himself/herself inextricably linked to the *other* (human, material, or spiritual world), such that he/she cannot validly posit his/her own existence in isolation from these other realities. The individual also acknowledges that his/her very epistemic accessibility is tied to that of the *other*. Epistemic accessibility here refers to the very possibility for something/someone to be recognized as such.

The key argument of this chapter is that the Igbo have an indigenous mode of knowing, steeped in a sense of interconnectedness, and that an analysis of the various dimensions of Igbo life – social, political, economic, religious, moral, etc. – would *disclose* this underlying sense of interconnectedness. A corollary to the aforementioned claim is that this notion of interconnectedness is not some theoretical or abstract form of knowledge; rather, it is a "lived knowledge" (to use the term Boaventura de Sousa Santos applies to such knowledges[1]), for it indeed informs life as lived in Igbo society. It has a social-ordering effect and thus impacts politics, religion, morality, and diverse aspects of Igbo life. It should be noted right away that the terms "social," "political," "religious," etc., are only employed here for "convenience of analysis,"[2] to use Ifemesia's expression. Otherwise – and thanks to the Igbo sense of interconnectedness – all belong to the barely differentiated Igbo lifeworld, where these aspects interpenetrate.

This idea of interconnectedness finds a particularly interesting social expression in the Igbo *sense of solidarity*. The significance of the *other* in the subject's very self-understanding translates into solidarity on the social sphere. Solidarity in the Igbo context refers to the mutual solicitude that exists between individuals in the Igbo community, a kind of solicitude that, as will be shown, goes beyond mere show of concern, charity, or humanitarianism. There is an element of *interpenetration* of

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lives and shared goals among members of a community. And this element harkens back to the Igbo belief that person and community are *co-constitutive*. Since solidarity is not a mere social ideal or theory but "lived knowledge," various institutions and practices like the age-grade, marriage, sharecropping, land tenure (to mention but a few) all serve to reproduce it.

Furthermore, the sense of interconnectedness and solidaristic thinking animate Igbo premodern politics. A close look at premodern Igbo political structure would *uncover* their understanding of power or, if you like, "political epistemology." Unlike most of their neighbors, one of the most distinctive features of Igbo premodern political arrangement is the absence of monarchies (with a few fringe exceptions) and political superstructures. There is no pan-Igbo centralized government; the highest political unit is the village and, in some cases, autonomous village-groups. In the absence of kings and monarchs, the village assembly is the highest decision-making body.

Governance is carried out through a synergy of political forces comprising of elders and titled men, and semi-political forces like the age-grade and the womenfolk (*umuada* and *umundom*), aided by strong customs. Thanks to the sense of interconnectedness, political decisions result from a synergy of political forces and not from isolated powerful individuals. The remarkable commitment to the sense of interconnectedness supports the emphasis on *kinship* and solidarity, rather than *kingship*. The thinking behind their famous aversion for monarchy or any form of absolutism is that the individual is a constituent of a larger whole without which he/she cannot assert his/her individuality; and so, the individual cannot arrogate too much importance to himself/herself. This means that the individual can only be as powerful as the community, and, conversely, the community is as strong as its individual members.

The sense of interconnectedness also pervades the religious and moral spheres. These spheres are treated under the same heading, given the overwhelming interpenetration that exists between them. Moral norms often wear a religious outlook because, for the Igbo, there is no clear-cut distinction between the "sacred" and the supposedly "profane." As it were, the Igbo religious and moral world is a theatre where the gods, ancestors, and humans perform on the same scene. The world of the gods and ancestors is not different from the world of men, and there is a heavy traffic in the form of death and reincarnation between them. Earth Goddess (*Ala*) is the foundation of morality in the Igbo world. Every moral infringement (*aru*) is first and foremost an offence against *Ala*, the mother from whose riches all derives its nourishment. Hence, for any offence, *Ala* must be appeased through a painstaking process of ritual cleansing (*ikwa ala*).

Concomitantly, an offence takes on a fundamentally social/communal character; every offence upsets the social balance of the community. It not only upsets social balance, but it also upsets cosmic balance and harmony – another major moral concern in Igbo thought. This largely explains why certain animals are made totems (basically to prevent their extinction), some forest reserves are kept as "sacred forests," and land is allowed to lie fallow to make for regeneration. At first sight, all these might appear "notoriously religious,"[3] to use Mbiti's famous expression, but

my analysis will demonstrate that there is a *mode of thinking* that takes precedence, a veritable epistemology that places humans (not gods) at the center.

It is also vital to state here that, though "endangered" by the hegemonic knowledge systems of the world, the epistemic resources and cultural forms I analyze in this chapter have continued to impact Igbo society today. If they had not substantially survived the onslaught of epistemic coloniality, the present effort in this work to incorporate and accord them a central place in (Igbo) modernization would be futile.

Before I proceed with delineating the contours of the idea of interconnectedness and disclosing its dynamics in Igbo life and society, there is a genuine and urgent methodological question that must be addressed. It may well be a "specter" of sorts that must be dispelled – the specter of "ethnophilosophy."

An "Ethnophilosophy"? Some Methodological Clarifications

This is a question as to whether the entire project (but more especially this chapter and the next) may be viewed as an exercise in "ethnophilosophy." In other words, could one rightly describe as "ethnophilosophy" a work that seeks to explore the sense of solidarity (that flows from the Igbo notion of interconnectedness), disclosing its dynamics in Igbo life and society, and showing that it is relevant for Igbo modernization?

I consider this question germane because there is a sense in which a "specter"[4] of "ethnophilosophy" still haunts much of philosophical productions emanating from Africa. "Ethnophilosophy" now means different things to different scholars, and there is hardly any agreement among practitioners of African philosophy in this respect. For our purposes, however, I shall pay more attention to the sense of ethnophilosophy provided by the renowned philosopher, Paulin Hountondji, who popularized the term and discussed it extensively. In other words, it is against the background of the Hountondjian critique of ethnophilosophy that I provide these methodological clarifications.

Before focusing on Hountondji who largely uses the term pejoratively, there is at least a neutral sense of the term "ethnophilosophy" described by D. N. Kaphagawani and J. G. Malherbe in a paper titled "African Epistemology." Here they note, "The ethnophilosopher, for instance, examines features of a culture like language and religious ceremonies, for clues to its philosophical systems, and so too its epistemology."[5] If we operate with this sense of ethnophilosophy, then this project may identify as one – and unashamedly so – because the project sets out to disclose and analyze a certain epistemic resource (note: not some metaphysical "essence") at work in Igbo life and culture. Certainly, this task is in line with the overall business of philosophy as a discipline.

To be sure, the epistemic resources I explore in this work are not systematized knowledges in the Western sense. They are not rarefied, water-tied intellectual systems. As Achebe puts it:

> Since Igbo people *did not construct a rigid and closely argued system of thought* to explain the universe and the place of man in it, preferring the

> metaphor of myth and poetry, anyone seeking an insight into their world must seek it along their own ways, some of these ways are folk tales, proverbs, proper names, rituals and festivals.[6]
>
> (My italics)

Igbo knowledges are social epistemologies, "common sense" knowledges. They are social imaginaries.

Understanding them as social imaginaries helps address the equally important question of how one might gain *access* to them and the ability to philosophically disclose them. Social imaginaries are accessible because they disclose themselves in concrete social institutions and practices. In this respect, what it takes to gain access to them is to be *hermeneutically immersed* in the culture. By "hermeneutic immersion," I mean being socialized in a culture in a manner that at least generates a sort of first-hand, pre-philosophical understanding in order to *make sense of* the meaning system behind social practices.

However, it takes much more than a hermeneutic immersion to be able to *philosophically disclose* social imaginaries. Indeed, one requires a set of analytic-hermeneutic tools to be able to philosophically articulate or disclose the *pre-philosophical* (hermeneutic) cultural materials. In other words, not everyone that is hermeneutically immersed in a culture is able to philosophically disclose and articulate its social imaginaries. Charles Taylor writes about "Western" social imaginaries, not by mere fact of being born in the Western world nor yet of being hermeneutically immersed in Western culture but because he has a certain set of *analytic-hermeneutic tools* at his disposal, tools acquired through some "formal" engagement in the discipline of philosophy. From this standpoint, therefore, the authority this writer possesses to philosophically articulate or disclose the imaginaries at work in Igbo culture is derived not only from a hermeneutic immersion of being born and socialized in the Igbo culture, but crucially from an analytic-hermeneutic skill bestowed by "formal" engagement with philosophy. It is also on this ground that this work is able to engage and dialogue with such intellectual frameworks as those of Habermas, Taylor, Wallerstein, and the Coloniality/Modernity Collective.

Thankfully, too, this work is written at a period when there are sufficient scholarly materials on Igbo culture and Africa in general, such that one would rely not only on one's own hermeneutic immersion with the Igbo culture but also on an analytic-hermeneutic engagement with relevant Igbo and African scholarship. These elements of engagement with Igbo/African scholarship and a hermeneutic immersion will complement each other in the course of my analysis.

In terms of methodology, therefore, this project is steeped in *epistemology* to the extent that it focuses on imaginaries. This is precisely why the preceding chapter was entirely dedicated to preparing the ground by engaging the epistemic discourses of the members of the Coloniality/Modernity Collective. Again, I use the term "epistemology," not in the "academic" sense of preoccupation with concepts of truth and criteria of belief but in the sense of "lived epistemology," where thought is not estranged from life. Moreover, by adopting the epistemic framework, I hope to overcome the propensity for essentialization or hypostatization which marks ethnophilosophical writings. On this note, my method differs markedly from those of

Placide Tempels, Leopold Senghor and all such pioneering works (that Hountondji rightly criticizes), who set about looking for metaphysical essences in the name of "vital force"[7] and "negritude," respectively.

Now, turning to Hountondji's famous critique of ethnophilosophy – that is, the pejorative sense of ethnophilosophy – I identify some of his concerns that are most relevant to this work. Hountondji raises the question of *audience*, arguing that ethnophilosophy is mainly targeted at European or Western public, who are assumed to be the only people capable of providing an intellectual response.

> Contemporary African philosophy, inasmuch as it remains an ethnophilosophy, has been built up essentially *for a European public*. The African ethnophilosopher's discourse is not intended for Africans. It has not been produced for their benefits . . . In short, the African ethnophilosopher made himself the spokesman of All-Africa facing All-Europe at the imaginary rendezvous of give and take.[8]

The work of Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, provides a typical example of this default posture of "facing" Europe. Tempels' motivation for writing *Bantu Philosophy* was perhaps the urge to prove to his European audience that those "poor" Africans among whom he worked had some "rationality" after all. Perhaps it was meant to be a missionary "handbook" to future evangelizers that might furnish a rough guide into the "soul" of the African. Alexis Kagame, who was himself Rwandese, fared better, but "remained *on the whole* the prisoner of an ideological myth,"[9] Hountondji insists. In many ways, Kagame, the philosophers of the "negritude" movement (especially, Césaire and Senghor), and similar pioneer scholars in African philosophy still found themselves "facing" Europe. They could not break loose from the bounds of ethnophilosophy, as they wanted to prove a point to the likes of Lévy-Bruhl that Africans did not possess a "primitive mentality" after all.

Now, this default apologetic attitude does not define this project, since it primarily tries to analyze an element of Igbo epistemic resources (i.e., solidaristic thought-pattern), making a case for its incorporation into the modernization process. It is addressed to the scholarly community, widely conceived, and does not "face" scholars of any particular geographical location. Igbo public will conceivably benefit from it, too.

Another vital frustration Hountondji expresses with the methodology of ethnophilosophy is its apparent lack of political potential. To him, any work of African philosophy lacking in emancipatory potential might as well be deemed ethnophilosophy. He argues that African philosophers

> cannot afford the luxury of self-satisfied apoliticism or quiescent complacency about the established order unless they deny themselves both as philosophers and as people. In other words, the theoretical liberation of philosophical discourse presupposes political liberation.[10]

I corroborate Hountondji by adding that it is this apparent lack of political motivation, a classic case of which I see in J. S. Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*

that makes such works susceptible to mere descriptive and eclectic approach. It is what makes such works more ethnological and anthropological than philosophical.

Admittedly, my work is not meant to serve as a political manifesto of any kind. But it can potentially open up a new path, a vision, or a horizon. Besides, it is immersed in the emancipatory discourse of the members of the Latin American Coloniality/Modernity Collective (in Chapter 3), a discourse which challenges the epistemic hegemony of Western knowledges and tries to render endangered knowledges like those of the Igbo more visible.

One of the major weaknesses of ethnophilosophy is its propensity for sweeping generalization. This concern has been voiced by Hountondji and a number of other critics of ethnophilosophy – and I consider it valid. A classic ethnophilosophical work like Mbiti's *African religions and Philosophy* makes the entire continent of Africa or large parts of it a "case study" of some sort. Such works are shot through with homogenizing claims about African peoples as though the entire Africa were just a village.

On the contrary, the present work focuses on the Igbo (and not on such wider entities as Nigeria, West Africa, or Africa). No doubt, this makes the project manageable and its claims more credible. But I am not just dwelling on the Igbo in a generalized fashion; I am analyzing the workings of a certain imaginary, a thought-pattern, namely, the sense of interconnectedness in its social expression in solidarity. Admittedly, there is a sense in which Igbo might even be considered too vast a context. Yet a work on the Igbo is sufficiently realistic, at least on the basis of identifiable cultural "family resemblances" (as Wittgenstein would call it) but, more crucially, a unifying *language*. To sum up this point, I argue that Igbo is a valid, feasible, and genuine context for philosophy, whereas all larger geopolitical entities, possessing multiple languages and cultures, may be rather too big for any valid philosophical claims. Therefore, the task I undertake cannot be called ethnophilosophy in the sense in which ethnophilosophy treats a continent as big as Africa as though it were a tiny village.

Epistemic resources find expression in language; language is a social property. Using the epistemic framework, therefore, makes it possible for me to overcome not only potential statistical challenges but also the challenge of venturing into some sort of ethnological and anthropological investigation. This work is not an ethnological or anthropological research, but rather a philosophical one. As a matter of fact, one of the weaknesses of ethnophilosophy is that it lacks a self-understanding that marks it off from sociological and anthropological research. Ethnological or anthropological studies would only present facts and not the underlying meaning system which explains these facts. On the contrary, the epistemic framework allows me to philosophically disclose the underlying meaning system behind Igbo culture and social practices.

Finally, I wish to quickly address one more hallmark of ethnophilosophy – its tendency to canonize and romanticize on the "past" with an implicit call for a return to a presumably idyllic past. We saw this propensity in Senghor's "negritude" in Chapter 1; it is also identifiable in Nyerere's "ujamaa socialism" which invites a return to the "former attitude of the mind" when the African presumably did not attempt to grow rich at the expense of his/her neighbor.[11]

Now, it would be inappropriate to describe the method I adopt as ethnophilosophy in this sense. This work does not intend to take a moral inventory, as it were, of the good and the bad in the Igbo culture.[12] The project is essentially forward-looking and not backward-looking. If ethnophilosophy seeks to return to the past, my task, on the contrary, is to make Igbo epistemic resources relevant for the present and the future. Moreover, I treat these resources not as some "relic" of the past that must be "canonized" but as knowledges that have continued to impact society today, despite being "endangered" by hegemonic knowledge systems.

The Idea of Interconnectedness: A Theoretical Delineation

In this section, I shall attempt to theoretically delineate the idea of interconnectedness. This initial move is of paramount importance because the task I undertake in subsequent sections, namely, analyzing the actual dynamics of this sense of interconnectedness in the various spheres of Igbo life, would be impossible without a proper understanding of what interconnectedness in Igbo thought represents.

The Concept and Its Basic Contours

Interconnectedness is a distinctive attribute of the Igbo mode of knowing. In this mode of knowing, realities are perceived, not as isolated individuals, but as entities in mutual relationship and interaction with other entities. This mode of grasping reality recognizes the distinctness of each entity but emphasizes or focuses on its interconnectedness with other realities. It considers all things that exist as "missing links" of one and the same reality, to use Innocent Asouzu's description.[13] At the heart of this sense of interconnectedness is the intuition that each entity or event has its condition of possibility in other entities or events, and none could possibly stand outside the somewhat universal web of interaction. One distinguishing mark of this mode of perception is that the subject is not some isolated Cartesian "cogito" but rather considers himself/herself intrinsically linked with other subjects. The subject cannot validly assert his/her existence in isolation from the *other*. The physical and the spiritual world (i.e., the world of the gods and ancestors) are perceived to be mutually impinging upon each other; humans mutually interact with the physical world, that is, celestial bodies, water bodies, trees and animals, mountains and hills, etc.

A vital element of this thought-pattern is that there is no clear-cut distinction between the religious and the supposedly "profane." As Isichei notes, "To the Igbo, the secular and the sacred, the natural and the supernatural are a continuum. Supernatural forces continually impinge on life and must be propitiated by appropriate prayers and sacrifices."[14] The political, the social, the economic, etc., as they are now being used in the modern (Western) categorization, are hardly differentiated. These spheres, if we may allow such differentiation, all belong to the scarcely differentiated Igbo lifeworld. What presents itself as, say, a religious phenomenon at the surface level might have political, economic or social motivations, explanations or implications. And what presents itself as political on the surface level might have a deeper religious significance.

On this note, I announce from the outset that categories like "social," "religious," "economic," and "political," adopted in the present discourse are only meant to facilitate analysis and must not be hypostasized. Ifemesia's submission in this respect is quite apt:

> The other point to emphasize . . . is that, although we shall be discussing what we have, for convenience of analysis, called the traditional social and political organization and institutions of the Igbo, life cannot, in point of fact, be compartmentalized . . . Igbo ideas and beliefs . . . were very closely interwoven, their institutions and practices most intimately connected; and all of them constituted integral parts of the society in which they were established.[15]

The fact that Igbo institutions and practices are interwoven and not "compartmentalized" is indeed a function of the characteristic manner of perceiving things in their interconnectedness. I shall dwell on this point in detail in the subsequent sections. But suffice it to say at the moment that the organization of the entire Igbo life and society reflects this basic Igbo mode of perception.

The idea of interconnectedness is steeped in pervasive complementaristic thinking.[16] This complementarity is so entrenched that a good number of nouns (names) and ideas in Igbo lexicon appear in pairs. The following are only but a few: Igwe-na-ala (heaven and earth or up and down), nwoke-na-nwanyi (man and woman), ikwu-na-ibe (relatives and acquaintances), ewu-na-okuko (goat and chicken, referring to wealth in general). [Note: "na" is a conjunction that stands for "and."] Each reality immediately evokes a complementary reality, as though it depends on the latter for its own existence. It should be noted that this pattern goes beyond merely putting words side-by-side each other; on the contrary, realities are *actually* perceived as standing in complementary relation to one another, and this reflects in Igbo language. The justification for this idea of complementarity is voiced in the saying, "Ihe kwuru, ihe a kwudebe ya" (which literally means, "Whatever stands/exists must have something else that stands/exists beside it")[17] – a knowledge or belief quite taken for granted among the Igbo.

The concept of time also expresses interconnectedness. It is no surprise that the Igbo notion of time is not linear (as is the case with the modern Western notion of time) but cyclic. While the linear notion of time emphasizes a chronological sequence in which events succeed one another looking steadily forward, the cyclic notion of time does not emphasize chronological sequence but keeps an eye on a repeat, a connection between *what is* and *what was*. I suggest, once again, that this is a function of a thought-pattern structured, as it were, to consider realities in their interconnectedness. The notion of a distant and detached future imagined to be "qualitatively" different from the present, as the modern mind is wont to think, would be quite absurd to the Igbo mind, who would think in terms of seasons appearing and re-appearing in predictable sequence. Planting time and harvest time, the four days of the traditional Igbo "week" (Nkwo, Eke, Orie, and Afo), festivals and ritual commemorations, succeed each other in endless cycles. "They've no idea of years . . . They understand seasons . . . But ask a man how old he is, and he doesn't begin to have an idea,"[18] remarks a British colonial administrator.

Though it has a supercilious and derogatory undertone, this submission of a British colonialist official, who was assigned to the Igbo country, expresses the fact that the premodern Igbo did not keep record of a past totally disconnected from the present. What the British official failed to understand was that the Igbo had a cyclic notion of time, and that any past unconnected with a tradition that is meant to be reenacted in the present does not seem to be relevant to them. The passage here bears an eloquent testimony to Igbo notions of time, recurrence, and interconnectedness:

> The idea of recurrence is fundamental in Igbo thought. It reflects a community closely linked with the land and nature . . . its attitudes molded by the shorter cycle of the Lunar month, the longer cycles of the seasons and the farmer's year . . . The ancestors, the ndichie, are "the returners," and by returning they incarnate the past among the living.[19]

Members of the community exit the present life, not definitively as in the Christian or Muslim doctrine of heaven but are reincarnated in the community from the ancestral world.[20] The aforementioned points are not meant to serve as a value judgment as to why the cyclic conception of time might be more reasonable than the linear or vice versa; they only serve to highlight the fact that the Igbo cyclic conception of time is a function of interconnectedness in Igbo thought-pattern.

At this juncture, a number of theoretical considerations and clarifications are necessary for a more accurate understanding of the Igbo sense of interconnectedness.

Some Theoretical Considerations

The Igbo sense of interconnectedness is *at bottom* an imaginary; it is *not* metaphysics or religion; the religious or metaphysical outlook it sometimes wears is mere façade. It is a thought-pattern, a mode of knowing – terms I have consciously deployed in the course of my discussion so far. As a mode of knowing, it epistemologically predisposes the Igbo person to perceive reality in a certain manner, which in turn expresses itself in beliefs and societal practices.

So, it makes more sense to locate it at the realm of knowledge. Though this type of knowledge is so enmeshed in life as actually lived, Igbo sages are still able to discern that it is basically a question of knowledge or way of knowing. When the white man came with schools to spread Western civilization, the Igbo unmistakably discerned that they were, at bottom, confronting a form of knowledge or mode of knowing different from theirs. As Achebe narrates, "One of the great men in that village was called Akunna and he had given one of his sons to be taught the white man's knowledge in Mr. Brown's school."[21] Though Akunna would not himself go to school, he recognized the importance of having someone in his household acquire a type of knowledge – "the white man's knowledge" – different from the Igbo knowledge and manner of perceiving reality.

The epistemological base is sometimes garbed in religion; at other times, it appears as folklore, myths, pithy sayings, adages, songs, names, etc. In other

words, beneath all these lies a particular worldview or mode of perceiving the world – indeed an epistemology – marked by a sense of interconnectedness. On this note, one of the foremost Igbo scholars, A. E. Afigbo, urges that we should go beyond the surface level of Igbo tales and folklore to unearth the epistemology loaded beneath.

> When fully researched and properly interpreted, it is likely to be found that the great teaching and message of the tales is that Igbo culture and civilization is man-made rather than received, and that it is based on historical experience: that is on the message, knowledge and lessons which the mind of the Igbo man absorbed from happening (natural and non-natural) around him . . . Gaining information, knowledge and wisdom from experience is science. In other words, the inner teaching of these fairy tales is that the Igbo world, the world as constructed by the Igbo man, is based on science – that is on what the Igbo call mee lete (try and see).[22]

In Afigbo's submission, it could be seen that the Igbo person produces knowledge, not from some other-worldly religious dictates, but from knowledge and wisdom gained from actual life experiences. The knowledge gained from perception informs religion and not the converse. Through observation, the Igbo person gained the knowledge that a piece of land needs to lie fallow for a period of time to regenerate its nutrients and guarantee rich harvest; he/she observed that some species are endangered and need to be protected. If the cosmic balance is not maintained, humans would also bear the brunt of it because reality is interconnected. He/she did not need the gods to tell him that; he/she rather tells the gods what to say, as it were, to make sure some checks are enforced. As I have been arguing, it is fundamentally at the sphere of epistemology.

Although the sense of interconnectedness belongs to the sphere of epistemology, this should not be understood in the "academic" sense in which epistemology concerns itself with hairsplitting arguments regarding what may or may not pass for valid knowledge. Rather, it belongs to the species of epistemology that Sousa Santos calls "epistemologies of the South" (as distinguished from "epistemologies of the North"). An important characteristic of such epistemologies is that they are "lived knowledges" and not theoretical knowledges. They are non-specialized, practical, folk, common sense knowledges.[23] The Igbo do not distinguish *life* from *thought*. Like all such "Southern" epistemologies, the Igbo sense of interconnectedness is an "embodied" type of knowledge insofar as the Igbo do not despise the senses and emotions but validate them as legitimate sources of knowledge.

This does not make it any less philosophical. For, as Kwame Gyekye maintains, "It would be inconsistent, therefore, to recognize the fragments as embodying our earliest intimations of Greek philosophy, and then to refuse to accept (some) African proverbs and sayings as a source of knowledge of African traditional Philosophy."[24] In light of Gyekye's argument, Igbo lived knowledges cannot be denied the status of "philosophy" or "epistemology" in their own right, if these terms are not to be restricted to complex Western systems like those of Kant and

Hegel. Therefore, the task of the "professional" Igbo philosopher would be that of uncovering the knowledge-pattern beneath the supposedly "folk" through an analytic-hermeneutic[25] engagement, a method that goes beyond the style of "ethnophilosophy" (the pejorative sense) seen earlier. In doing this, one must however bear in mind that Igbo knowledges belong to the "species" of lived knowledges that should not be measured with the standards of other species of knowledge. The thinkers we discussed in the preceding chapter have warned of the futility and absurdity of such comparison.

As noted earlier, lived knowledges may be said to take the form of "social imaginary" (in Charles Taylor's sense[26]) insofar as they represent a confluence of ideal and life as actually lived. Taylor suggests, for instance, that it is now the case in the modern Western society that an "authentic" human person is measured by the extent to which one is able to assert one's individual rights, freedoms, and autonomy. This "vision," so to speak, is inseparable from the actual pursuit of authentic existence along the lines of individual self-assertion and self-realization.[27] It forms part of modern Western social imaginary. In the same vein, the vision of the world as a nexus of realities, of community and individual as co-constitutive, represents the Igbo imaginary. To the Igbo, authentic existence is one lived in community. Even the individual's "epistemic accessibility," to use the expression of the Igbo philosopher, Ifeanyi Menkiti, is made possible by the community. As Menkiti explains:

> It is in rootedness in an ongoing community that the individual comes to see himself as man, and it is by first knowing this community as a stubborn perduring fact of the psychophysical world that the individual also comes to know himself as a durable . . . fact of this world.[28]

It is on these grounds that Menkiti speaks of the "processual" notion of personhood in Africa, a term that suggests that Africans do not see personhood as a mere biological fact but one that involves a "long process of social and ritual transformation until it attains the full complement of excellencies seen as truly definitive of a man"[29] – and the community plays a vital role in these rites of passage. Since his/her authenticity as an individual is measured by the extent to which he/she integrates himself/herself in the life of the community, an entire lifetime is committed to this pursuit. Solidarity is an Igbo social imaginary; a community is considered as community insofar as it maintains solidaristic bond among members. Therefore, from the standpoint of the Igbo person, the greatest damage done to the Igbo clan by modernity – a damage that spells an "Armageddon," the collapse of the clan as such – is that this solidarity is threatened. The danger, as they see it, is that the white man (modernity) "has won our brothers and our clan can no longer *act like one*. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have *fallen apart*"[30] (My italics).

The final point I wish to make in the attempt to theoretically delineate the Igbo sense of interconnectedness is that it is not a metaphysics. Igbo philosophers have developed a wrong-headed tendency of couching Igbo thought in metaphysical terms – and they even employ the outright terms, "metaphysics" or "ontology" to

define it.[31] But, as has been earlier argued, the sense of interconnectedness belongs more properly to the realm of lived knowledges. Asouzu's "Ibuanyidanda" philosophy, which also touches upon the sense of interconnectedness in Igbo thought-pattern whereby "all that exists as missing links of reality,"[32] surprisingly ends up adopting the language of "metaphysics" or "ontology." And he uses these terms to describe his project. Asouzu sets out to criticize what he calls a "philosophy of essence" for "polarizing" reality but quite inadvertently resorts to the same "ontology" (philosophy of essence) that generates the polarizing tendency: "It is for this reason that while a philosophy of essence in approaching reality seeks to divide and polarize it, Ibuanyidanda ontology seeks to harmonize, complement, and unify the same."[33] The phrase "in approaching reality" already suggests that it is a question of grasping reality in an epistemological sense. If we eliminate the language of "metaphysics" or "ontology," it becomes easy to see "Ibuanyidanda" as a social epistemology used to emphasize solidarity and the force it carries in Igbo life and society.

In the next section, I discuss solidarity as the social dimension of the Igbo sense of interconnectedness.

Solidarity: The Social Dimension of the Sense of Interconnectedness

Solidarity is the social expression of a sense of interconnectedness, for the perception of interconnectedness has an important implication for the way in which the Igbo person understands himself/herself in relation to other members of his/her community. The discussion in this section will not only show how solidarity is the basis of Igbo social life, but it will also explore the practical day-to-day aspects of Igbo solidarity.

Solidarity – The Bedrock of Igbo Social Life

In the last section, I alluded to the fact that the threat on solidarity – the *thing* that holds the people "together" and makes them "act like one" – was rightly captured by the Umuofia clan of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as the total collapse ("falling apart") of the community as such.[34] But to equate the very life and existence of the community with the ability of its members to act in solidarity demonstrates the high premium placed on solidarity. Solidarity is not merely one among many social ideals and virtues; it is unmistakably the very *soul* of the Igbo community.

To understand this sense of solidarity, one needs to take cognizance of the Igbo concept of the human person. Like in many African societies, the community plays a decisive role in the Igbo person's self-understanding. This idea has appeared in various variants among African scholars,[35] and it is not very important to go through the vast literature here. However, the Igbo scholar, Ifeanyi Menkiti, brings up some insights that deserve special attention for our purposes. He makes an important distinction between the Igbo (African) notion of personhood vis-à-vis community and any Western notions that make similar claims to interconnectedness. Menkiti suggests that, in both cases (i.e., the Igbo/African and the Western),

there is a sense of unity. However, he argues that, in the Igbo (African) case, the individual understands himself as "organically" linked to the community, whereas in the Western "understanding of human society as something constituted what we have is a non-organic bringing together of atomic individuals into a unity more akin to an association than to a community."[36]

I recognize that Menkiti's claim regarding the West may have been exaggerated. Yet we might give some credit to Menkiti if we consider the Western emphasis on the individual from the standpoint of modern Western social imaginary, as Charles Taylor calls it. A "social imaginary" does not represent the attitude or disposition of every single person or group of persons in the West. So, we must consider, as we saw in Chapter 2, that one of the key transformations in the Western society that go by the name "modern" is the social vision of the "authentic" human person as an individual able to assert himself/herself and freely pursue individual development and well-being. This is so much so that in the West "we find a construal of things in which certain specified rights of individuals are seen as antecedent to the organization of society; with the function of government viewed, consequently, as being the protection and defense of these individual rights."[37]

When we come to the Igbo, there is a more proper way to make sense of "organicity" than what Menkiti suggested. For instance, while he rightly identifies the "organic" ties between person and community, I take issue with his claim to the effect that community is ontologically prior to the individual. From my knowledge of the Igbo, a better way to conceive this "organicity" is not that of ontological or epistemic priority of either community or the individual but a kind of *co-constitutiveness*. This notion of co-constitutiveness will be taken up in the next chapter, drawing on the insights of M. O. Eze. In the meantime, let it be stated right away that the Igbo person asserts his own existence, not *in spite of* but *in virtue of* the community. Similarly, the Igbo community is what it is *in virtue of* the individual. The two are mutually constitutive. For all practical purposes, the identity of the Igbo person lies in his solidarity with the community and the identity of the community is intrinsically linked to the solidarity it demonstrates to individual members.

In light of the premium placed on solidarity in the Igbo society, as it implicates the very identity of the person and the community, whole epistemological investments have been made to foster solidarity. Over the centuries, epistemological resources have been deployed to stress solidarity, not merely as an ideal or a culture, but indeed as a locus of identity. The epistemological resources consist in folklore, pithy sayings, proverbs, myths, anecdotes, names of persons and groups, titles, and a host of others – all emphasizing the centrality of solidarity. Great lessons of solidarity are drawn from such names as: *Igwebuike* ("Unity is strength"), *Onyeaghalanwanneya* ("Never forsake your brother/kinsman"), *Umunnawuike* ("The kinsfolk is an embodiment of strength"), *Ofuobi* ("Unity"), *Obinwanne* ("Fraternal spirit"), *Maduka* ("A human being is worth more than anything"), *Maduakolam* ("May I never lack kinsfolk/friends"), among others.[38] These names are given to individuals; sometimes they belong to groups, associations or are adopted as titles.

Folktales and anecdotes, mostly drawn from the animal kingdom or some imaginary distant lands, serve the same purpose of stressing solidarity as the foremost

social virtue and entrenching same in society.[39] Lessons of togetherness/solidarity are drawn from the following sayings (to mention but a few): *Ibu anyighi ndada* ("No load is too difficult for a group of ants"), *Mmadu nwere ike i hota enyi, ma a dighi ahota nwanne* ("One can choose a friend but cannot choose a brother/sister/kinsperson"), *Onye nwere mmadu ka onye nwere ego* ("It is more valuable to have a brother/kinsfolk than to have riches"), *O di nfe i gbaji otu aziza*, *ma o dighi nfe i gbaji ukwu aziza* "A strand of broom is easy to break, but it is very difficult to break a bunch of it"), *Anya na-ebe, imi a na-ebe*: "When the eyes cry, the nose cries as well." Meaning: what affects a kinsman invariably affects the rest), *Otu aka ruta mmanu, o zuo ha nile* ("When one finger is smeared with oil, it soon spreads to the rest." Meaning: what affects one also affects others), *A gbakoo nyuo mamiri, o gbaa ufufu* ("When people pool their urines together by urinating on the same spot, the resultant foams will be enormous" – used to emphasize the immense power of synergy and corporate effort).[40] [Note: I tried to be as literal as possible in the translation.] The kinsfolk is valued more than silver and gold:

> We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money because *we have kinsmen*. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him.[41]
>
> (My italics)

Igbo myths/legends of origin deserve special mention because they are a time-honored epistemological tool used to foster solidarity in the Igbo world. This refers to the use of legendary or mythical stories by a federation of Igbo villages or clans to foster a sense of unity, solidarity, peace, and mutual non-belligerence among themselves by pointing to a common ancestry in *illo tempore*. Given the premodern Igbo political landscape (which will be discussed in the next section), most of these myths or legends of origin are localized in the sense that the claim to common ancestry is at most between a group of villages – with no pan-Igbo pretentions.[42] In these myths/legends, villages are sometimes arranged in a certain order corresponding to the supposed birth order of the sons of the common ancestor; fond degrees of affinity are also forged so as to re-enact the affinity that existed between the original sons of the common ancestor from whom each village descended.

The point earlier made regarding these "folk" resources must be reiterated, namely that they are primarily epistemic, irrespective of the guises in which they may appear. Let us take the myths/legends of origin as an example. Although they are handed down from one generation to the next, the bond of unity ritually reenacted from time to time, there is hardly anyone under the illusion that a common ancestry necessarily existed in any literal sense. They are an epistemological tool used to foster solidarity or even used to validate an existing peace accord among villages or clans. Elizabeth Isichei's remarks about Igbo legends of origin are very instructive in this respect:

> Many of these traditions, however, are not narratives of events, but an explanation and validation of social relationships. What makes a group of scattered

> villages a unit, a 'town'? Their descent from a common ancestor – each component village being descended from a son. Why does a certain village claim seniority? Because it is descended from the eldest son.[43]

Isichei's remarks reinforce my argument that Igbo folk knowledges basically have an explanatory force – and belong to the epistemic sphere – a fact that does not undermine their intrinsic value, nevertheless. They are held as sacred; they mean a lot to Igbo communities where they exist. The sacred value attached to them is akin to the value Jews attach to the Biblical story of the "twelve tribes of Israel," whereby a mass of people of the Ancient Near East at some point in their history and evolution began to develop a sense of common identity and solidarity – and resolved to validate it by creating a sacred story of a common ancestry, pointing to "where it all began," as it were.

Sense of Solidarity at Work

To speak of "practical" aspects of the sense of solidarity is to delve into a rather inexhaustible area of research. Therefore, I shall limit myself to a number of cultural forms.

Mutual Solicitude, Team Spirit, and the Age-Grade Practices

Igbo solidarity finds expression in mutual solicitude. Mutual solicitude here refers to the care and concern that members of the Igbo family, extended family, village, village-group, and clan show themselves. From the standpoint of another culture, say Western culture, it might appear as indulgent, obsessive care or even meddlesomeness of sorts. But the Igbo person finds it normal, being socialized in a milieu of interacting needs and interests where one's needs and interests, though distinct, are not very divorced from those of others.[44] David Lutz argues with respect to the Igbo that it is not quite correct to say that "the good of the individual person is subordinated to that of the group, as is the case with Marxist collectivism." For the individual does not pursue the common good *instead* of his or her good "but rather pursues his or her good *through* pursuing the common good" (My italics).[45] This does not mean that minor frictions and conflict of interests do not exist; rather these needs and interests *interpenetrate*. The degree of solicitude and affinity tends to wane, and understandably so, as the circle of relationship expands in a rather concentric fashion.

Yet the underlying duty of mutual solicitude is ever present, a principle that perhaps goes beyond the Kantian notion of "duty" (the "ought"), for want of a better comparison. For though Kant's "categorical imperatives" commands the duty of treating others as ends in themselves, considering it a "supreme" duty, the demands of unconditional solicitude towards the kinsman might perhaps be more noble and more "supreme." The reason is that Kant's "duty" may be performed rather perfunctorily and in a somewhat depersonalized manner, whereas Igbo solicitude tends to care for the *other* in a more personalized context of the interpenetrating lives shared by those who consider themselves "kinsfolk."

It is not within the purview of this work to document individual instances of actions and events actuated by the Igbo sense of solidarity. Yet the two reports or testimonies I present here deserve special mention because they are extant, reaching back to a time when Igbo solidarity was on full display. The first is the famous account of Olaudah Equiano, the eighteenth-century Igbo boy, sold during the trans-Atlantic slave trade:

> Agriculture is our chief employment; and everyone, even children and women, are engaged in it. Thus, we are all habituated to labour from our earliest years. Everyone contributes something to the common stock; and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars. The benefits of such a mode of living are obvious. The West India planters prefer the slaves of Benin or Eboe . . . for their hardiness, intelligence, integrity, and zeal. Those benefits are felt by us in a general healthiness of the people, and their vigour and activity; I might have added too in their comeliness.[46]

From the aforementioned text, we could see that solidarity is the animating principle of Igbo industry and, indeed, all life's striving. People work, not for self-enrichment or self-aggrandizement, but to be able to contribute something to the "common stock."

This "common stock" has two inseparable senses: one, the literal sense of community granaries and barns where all who might have need could freely take from; two, the symbolic significance in which it constitutes an inspiration for honest striving to obviate possible social burden. In other words, every good work one does is noble and contributes to this symbolic "common stock," as a result of which "we have no beggars." It is not difficult to see from the above that Igbo solidarity which fosters a combination of mutual solicitude, team spirit, corporate effort, and synergy produced the enviable and responsible society that Olaudah Equiano was proud to identify with. Equiano indeed recalls life in his birthplace with an air of dignity and pride. It was a society where, in erecting houses, as he further narrates, the "whole neighborhood afford their unanimous assistance in building them and in return receive, and expect no other recompense than, a feast."[47]

The second report is even more impressive. It is contained in the *Memoirs of Captain Hugh Crow*. Hugh Crow was for several years a captain of slave ships involved in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. He renders the following intriguing testimony about Igbo solidarity:

> One slaving captain gives us a touching picture of the charity shown by Igbo captives to each other. "Their mutual affection is unbounded, and . . . I have seen them, when their allowance happened to be short, divide the last morsel of meat amongst each other thread by thread."[48]

As could be seen, even under the cruelest circumstances of slavery and starvation, where the instinct for survival would ordinarily make one selfish, Igbo slaves were able to muster and demonstrate solidarity, humaneness, and strength of character. It is noteworthy that they were leaving their homeland for the first time, and so could

not have derived their humaneness from any Western or Christian doctrines, at least at that point in time. Therefore, one could rightly suggest that they achieved such a moral feat, thanks to their formation in Igbo solidarity.

The age-grade[49] is one of the foremost social practices or institutions with which this sense of solidarity is inculcated; it also provides a platform through which this solidarity is expressed. An age-grade is composed of people born around a given time-frame (i.e., season in the premodern times and years in the modern conception of time) who, conscious of their being "mates," come together as an association/union, for their mutual benefit and for the benefit of the larger community. Members of an age-grade show a special kind of solidarity to themselves. Though the consciousness of being mates develops very early in life, mates become an organized body sometime during the adolescent stages and they accompany one another in a special way for the rest of their lives. The beauty of it is that a community is spread out into various age-grades, each person finding his/her place in one of the age-grades and enjoying a sense of belonging thereof. Members of an age-grade support one another in moments of sorrow but also share in moments of joy; they challenge and provide inspiration, compete healthily, and even discipline erring members in order not to bring shame to the age-grade.[50]

Community duties like paving roads, clearing farmlands, security, erecting houses, keeping community square clean, and leading a search for a lost person are parceled out to the younger age-grades, while older age-grades may be engaged in leading delegations and a host of other community assignments.[51] In the *Arrow of God*, Achebe narrates an instance when the labor of some age-grades was needed to widen a certain road: "They held a meeting and decided to offer the services of the two latest age groups to be admitted into full manhood: the age group that called itself Otakagu, and the one below it which was nicknamed Omumawa."[52] I have been discussing the age-grade as a social force of solidarity. In the next section, it will be discussed as a political force. But, before then, I shall round off this section by exploring the practical dimensions of Igbo sense of solidarity in the areas of marriage, farming (agricultural enterprise), and land-tenure practices.

Solidarity in Marriage, Farming, and Land-Tenure Practices

As in other cultures, marriage is an important institution in the Igbo culture. Because it is such a vast area of research, I restrict myself to pointing out a few elements of Igbo marriage that underline the Igbo sense of solidarity. The same goes with farming and land-tenure practices.

An important point to note about Igbo marriage is that it is characteristically exogamous. This means that marriage between people of the same village, and sometimes village-group, is forbidden. It is preferable and sometimes even recommended to marry from relatively distant places. Cultures that practice exogamy do so for different reasons, with some citing the genetic risks of marrying someone of the same bloodline of a recent generation. In the Igbo case, however, the basic rationale, *inter alia*, is the fact that a deep feeling of kinship exists between people of the same village or village-group, a consciousness that goes beyond any genetic

considerations. Uchendu corroborates this idea when he states: "Exogamy is not only based on biological principles. It also has a social foundation. It is the kinship principle in its social and biological sense that is applied."[53] On the basis of this consciousness, it is an abomination to be involved in sexual relationship with someone of the same lineage and, in most cases, village as well.

Given this strong bond of interconnectedness among members of a community (say, a village or village-group), marriage is purely a community affair rather than an individual affair. It is simply unimaginable for an individual to unilaterally contract marriage by excluding the community in the process. The entire community is involved at every stage in the complex ritual of getting a spouse. The solidarity shown by the community is just overwhelming – community appoints delegates/ representatives to the would-be in-laws, community members contribute foodstuff, the womenfolk help in preparing food for the accompanying feasts, the young girls fetch water and help in household chores, the young men do the more strenuous tasks, the service of community professionals (like palm-wine tappers, hunters, rain controllers) are engaged, various organs of the community also share in varying degrees in the gifts and accompanying bride-price. The list is innumerable.[54]

Marriage is a bond between communities. The woman married into a community is called "our wife" and not "his wife," and conscious (though not always successful) efforts are made to treat her well, given the massive implications it has for the relationship between the two "in-law" communities. In fact, the overall relationship between communities in Igboland is considerably defined by the "in-law" relationship that exists among them, or more precisely, the extent to which "in-law" rights and responsibilities are respected. But this, again, is thanks to the Igbo sense of solidarity.

Is the community factor in marriage overbearing? Does it have an adverse effect on marriage? Well, like every social practice, the risk of abuse in the form of meddlesomeness is quite real. However, as I see it, the community factor in Igbo marriage provides the much-needed checks-and-balances; community plays a "gadfly" role. And this is carried out in an overall atmosphere of goodwill for the success of the marriage. The couple enjoys a great measure of freedom to take personal decisions, so long as they do not thereby hurt themselves and the community invariably.

This is indeed a knotty question, given that the very concepts of "freedom," "individual good," and "social good" are themselves problematic. Moreover – and I do not want to sound relativistic here – there is no universally established benchmark of what might be considered "freedom" and what might constitute "interference." Even in Western societies, measures are taken by society or state to prevent people from committing suicide. The police still arrest people for the harm they cause themselves. No society allows its members to act as they wish in all things. My submission is that the community factor in the Igbo marriage is overall positive and solidaristic.

The agricultural enterprise is another important sphere in which the sense of solidarity finds expression. Farming and land-tenure practices are both grounded in a sense of solidarity. For instance, there is an extant culture wherein people give some portion of their share of the communal farmland to others who might

have more need of land (probably because the beneficiaries have more children) on solidaristic basis. Sometimes, though rarely, it could take the form of sharecropping, wherein some returns are expected at harvest time. But there are no cut-throat agreements to this effect; it is based on trust. Those who had poor harvest in the previous season receive seedlings and grains from neighbors to cultivate in the current year.[55]

In terms of labor, communities have extant practices that encourage members to help one another with the required tasks of the agricultural season. For example, young people of certain age groups frequently take turns to work on members' family farms. Also, regulations are put in place to ensure that people are on the farms at around the same times and days to provide one another the needed company, inspiration, and reinforcement. With this arrangement, it becomes unusual to find an individual toiling away at the fields alone. Viewed from this angle, farming in Igboland is a veritable community activity and not an individual enterprise. As it were, individuals do not farm; families and communities do. In light of the above, it is perhaps easier to make sense of Olaudah Equiano's eighteenth-century report on the Igbo world, where each person sees his/her effort as a contribution to the "common stock":

> Agriculture is our chief employment; and everyone, even the children and women, are engaged in it. Thus, we are habituated to labor from our earliest years. Everyone contributes something to the common stock; and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars.[56]

And this makes for the overall well-being of the community, as Equiano further attests to.

The land-tenure culture also reveals the underlying sense of solidarity. Communal land-tenure system is quite the norm in Igboland, a practice which derives from the notion that land does not belong to individuals but the entire community. Though communal land tenure at the village-level seems to be rather widespread, land tenure by inheritance at the lineage level is also practiced in some places. In the latter case, a man gets a share of his father's piece of land and he in turn hands it over to his own sons. Even in this latter case, the sense of unity is hardly compromised because the common "pool" of land still belongs to the extended family/bloodline/lineage, who keeps an overall watchful eye on each partitioned piece. Writing of the Afikpo parts of Igboland, Simon Ottenberg, who carried out extensive anthropological research on those parts, notes:

> Each lineage controls land in the farming areas of a number of villages, generally areas in which their members live. Each season it is to be farmed, the land is divided by the senior male of the matrilineage, who is its head.[57]

It is to be observed here that, though a lineage inherits land, it ensures that each member's tenancy to a piece of land is restricted to a farming season. And this is so because of the entrenched sense of sharing, which ensures that no individual

lays any absolute claim to a piece of land, quite unlike capitalist societies where an individual may lay such absolute claims.

Having provided the theoretical as well as the practical dimensions of the Igbo sense of solidarity, I shall, in the next section, give some attention to the political sphere.

The Sense of Interconnectedness in the Political Sphere

The present section will analyze the Igbo indigenous political structure with a view to disclosing the sense of interconnected at play. To say that the Igbo native political structure is, like other aspects of life, founded on the sense of interconnectedness amounts to the claim that the politics of the Igbo community draws its life from other aspects of Igbo life. It also means that each political actor is aware of his/her being a co-constitutive part of a community. Hence, political decision-making is a process involving a synergy of political actors rather than an affair of a supposedly all-knowing, all-powerful individual in the form of a monarch.

A General Note on Igbo Premodern Political Structure

It is relevant to provide a general picture of the Igbo premodern political set-up because this will illuminate the discussion that will follow afterwards. One of the most distinctive features of the Igbo premodern political structure was that it had little or no place for kings, monarchs, or any form of absolutist leadership. There was likewise no pan-Igbo central authority or political superstructure similar to such great African kingdoms and empires as the Ashanti Kingdom (of modern-day Ghana) and the Oyo Empire (in modern-day Nigeria stretching to parts of the present-day Republic of Benin) and a host of others.[58] “The Igbo, who never established a centralized kingdom like some of their neighbors,” writes R. C. Njoku, “were organized in small independent villages, which was also the highest unit of political organization.”[59] In some cases, there were village-groups, each comprising of a group of autonomous villages held together in quite a loose “confederal” arrangement, their bond reinforced by the kind of ritualized “myth/legend of origin” described earlier in this chapter. This is an arrangement Chieka Ifemesia rightly refers to as “village democracies,”[60] given the relatively small size of the political units and the republican political culture entrenched therein.

However, a number of Igbo scholars have different, though not fundamentally different, views vis-à-vis the idea that monarchy was quite unknown to Igbo indigenous political set-up. It is not within the ambits of this work to provide a detailed account of this important debate in Igbo political historiography. But it suffices to point out that some scholars believe that monarchy emerged in a few parts of Igboland at some point in the course of the political evolution of the premodern times. For instance, Oriji adopts the terms “mini-state” and “mega-state” not only as a polemical statement against the wrong-headed categorization of the premodern Igbo political organization as “stateless” but also as a suggestion that “mega-states” (i.e., those that later developed beyond the village and village-group levels) like Nri,

Igboukwu, and some Western Igbo clans later took on some monarchical or semi-monarchical forms.[61] It is argued that some Igbo clans like Aboh, Onitsha, Oguta, and Nri developed monarchical or semi-monarchical structures. There is also the case of the Igbo word, *eze* (presumably conveying the idea of "kingship"), a word whose origin in the Igbo lexicon is said to be extant, leading to the conclusion that the "concept of kingship is . . . so traditionally entrenched in Igbo culture, so deeply built into the Igbo language, that it cannot have been of alien or recent provenance."[62]

My take is as follows. First, I do not think that the antiquity of the word, *eze*, is enough to prove the existence of monarchical forms in premodern Igbo politics. I say this because "eze," as a word, does not denote "king" or "kingship" nor does it possess a clear connotation of monarchy. The most that can be said of "eze" is that it conveys a sense of "headship" or being at the helm of something. It also carries a sense of "mastery" in a certain craft or enterprise (e.g., *ezeji* carries a sense of dexterity in yam production or agriculture in general). It thus makes sense to argue that "eze" does not signify *royalty* or *monarchy* in any strict and direct sense. Therefore, the attempt to derive monarchy from the philology of the word "eze" is at best tenuous. Second, even if some Igbo clans developed monarchical forms, this would rather be an exception than the rule. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of communities and clans had none. Even in those places where monarchy developed, the Igbo default republican disposition still brought itself to bear on such a practice, for the powers of the so-called monarchs were kept under check. Isichei makes an interesting point to this effect:

> A few states, such as Aboh and Onitsha, which had a tradition of origin from elsewhere, were ruled by kings. These kings were regarded as sacred and lived in ritual seclusion. But they were not absolute, and took decisions in conjunctions with titled men, and representatives of other groups. Their decisions could be challenged, and their persons deposed.[63]

The situation described here was clearly a far cry from absolute power.

Third, the places that evolved into some form of "mega-state" (to use Oriji's term) like Igboukwu, Nri, and Arochukwu did not enjoy any real political power of a hegemonic form over large areas.

> Hegemony, as I. Wallerstein and other social scientists have noted, involved military, technological, economic, and politico-cultural dominance of a state over others. Nri was, then, not a hegemonic state. It had neither a government involved in making laws for the communities it ritually controlled, nor an effective means of coercion for enforcing them. Igbo communities are reputed for guarding their political autonomy jealously . . . Many communities . . . under the ritual control of Nri remained virtually autonomous in administering their local affairs.[64]

What is being emphasized is "ritual control" rather than administrative control, and this role was mediated through the famous priest-king of Nri. The Nri case

was no different from the Arochukwu mega-state, where the cult of the powerful deity, *Ibini-Ukpabi*, gave Arochukwu a certain ritual – not political – leverage over a relatively large area of Igboland.

I have enunciated a number of points in order to show that the objections raised by the dissenting scholars still do not undercut the fact that Igbo political sensibilities had no place for absolutism, and that political units were deliberately kept relatively small not only to guard against absolutism but also to make governance manageable at the grassroots. Perhaps, a telling evidence – and I take this to be the fourth point – is the monumental failure of the British Indirect Rule system when they appointed so-called local "Warrant Chiefs" to administer the Igbo people.[65] Indirect Rule failed because its basic principles were contrary to Igbo political sensibilities, which tolerated no political absolutes. If the Igbo had a history of absolutist monarchies, like some of their African neighbors, there would have been less resistance and more compliance from the people, and the overall colonial political atmosphere would not have been as chaotic as it was in Igboland. According to Isichei, "No Nigerian people resisted colonialism more tenaciously than the Igbo. The great Emirates of the north, once conquered, supported the British . . . The conquest of Igboland took over twenty years of constant military action."[66]

In light of foregoing, a number of questions crucial for this chapter have to be addressed. How may we characterize this imaginary or understanding of power that makes the Igbo so averse to political absolutism and centralized authorities? How then was governance carried out in the absence of centralized authorities and powerful monarchies? In what follows, I shall attempt to address the two questions concurrently. In other words, in describing the workings of governance, I shall simultaneously be disclosing the thought-pattern at work in the governance practices.

Dynamics and Practices of Power

I wish to demonstrate that any investigation into Igbo aversion to absolutism would most assuredly point to a thought-pattern that emphasizes interconnectedness and solidaristic complementarity rather than hierarchy. In other words, the sense of interconnectedness is the foundation of Igbo republican temperaments. This is because, and as explained in the earlier parts of this chapter, the individual is seen to be co-constitutive of the community. The individual therefore understands and appreciates his/her place as constitutive of a larger whole on which his/her very individuality depends; and so, the individual does not arrogate too much importance to himself/herself. Thus, the emphasis is on strong community and not strong individuals. No individual is greater than the community. The wisdom of Igbo ancestors must be upheld – "that no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgment against the clan."[67] Like in most African societies, respect for deserving individuals, especially elders, is not in short supply, but Igbo characteristic aversion to concentration of power in a single individual makes them more "concerned with kinship – with fraternity and solidarity – than with kingship just for its own sake."[68] This submission reinforces my position that

at the root of the aversion to monarchy is a social imaginary that stresses strong community, fraternity, and solidarity.

This leads us to the question: how then is governance organized around strong institutions and not strong kings? From extant sources, including the eighteenth-century account of Olaudah Equiano, we learn that the village assembly (*ogbako umunna*) is the highest governing/decision-making organ. This assembly is composed of every male that is reckoned to have reached manhood (having passed through the requisite ritual ordeals). In other words, this comprises of both youths and elders, the latter bringing their wisdom to bear on deliberations. Some internal power play may exist. The views of elders may enjoy some higher value but every man's opinion indeed counts. Eloquence and persuasive powers, even from the young, could sway opinion in a certain direction. It is not without a reason that the term "democracy" (or "ohacracy" from the Igbo word, *oha*, meaning "people") has been used to describe Igbo premodern political culture.[69]

One also begins to make sense of their preference for smaller political units to political superstructures. Smaller units tend to give free rein to Igbo republican temperament and make the culture of direct democracy possible. Hence, against analysts who see larger political units as a sign of more "advanced" civilization, Isichei argues, "In traditional Igboland enlargement of scale offered no obvious advantages, and the small scale of her political institutions made true democracy possible."[70] Uchendu corroborates this when he asserts:

> The picture of the Igbo political community which emerges from these settings is one that is territorially small enough to make direct democracy possible at the village level as well as representative assembly at the village-group level . . . and political cohesion is achieved by rules rather than by laws and by consensus rather than by dictation.[71]

Besides the village assembly, there are a number of political forces. In such a decentralized society with a deep sense of interconnectedness, it is perhaps more expedient to speak in terms of "political forces" so as to deflect attention from individual actors. Such "forces" include the family or lineage heads, village elders, titled men, priests, and traditional healers/diviners (*dibia*).[72] There are also semi-political forces (or what is seen as "civil societies" in Western society) such as the age-grade (*otu ebiri*), *umundom* (the womenfolk, i.e., women married *into* the community), *umuada* (daughters married *out* of the community), and secret societies (like masquerade groups – *mmanwu*). I shall first focus on the political forces and later delve into the semi-political or civil societies. It is important, however, to emphasize right away that these forces work in synergy, and in some cases several roles are combined in a single individual – once again underscoring interconnectedness as a defining element of Igbo mode of perceiving reality.

Now, let us consider the political forces. Each family or lineage has a head, the *Okpara* (the oldest living member) who plays the key leadership role in the family or lineage. He holds the *ofo* (the traditional staff of authority). The *Okpara*, as the *ofo*-holder, doubles as the spiritual head, who ensures that all the ritual obligations

to the gods and ancestors for the continued peace, security, and prosperity are carried out. He ensures that members of the family or lineage adhere to the laws and customs of the land and, if need be, he disciplines errant members to prevent them from bringing shame to the family/lineage. He also represents the family in the council of elders (largely comprising of other family/lineage heads).

The council of elders is not an entity independent from the village assembly, the highest decision-making body comprising of all mature males. But, given the premium placed on age in the Igbo society, it becomes a "specialized" organ, as it were, whose wisdom, experience, and counsel are needed in matters that may not be clear to the younger generations. So, the village assembly "outsources" some issues to the elders whose recommendations are highly valued.

Titled men are also a political force. These are men who have distinguished themselves in various ways in the community; they have taken the corresponding titles and are recognized as such in the community. Traditional titles abound in Igboland but the most common are the *ichie*, *nze*, and *ozo*, which are special marks of honor and distinction. Igbo people recognize hard work and excellence. Though deliberations take place in a general republican atmosphere in a village assembly, it cannot be denied that the voices of titled men carry some weight. Like all human gathering, power play, defined by age, rank, and knowledge, is not unexpected, but the fundamental republican culture reins in on all these to introduce a great measure of balance. And this is precisely why the village assembly, where all may air their views, remains the highest decision-making body in Igbo (indigenous) politics.[73]

Olaudah Equiano provides one of the most extant accounts of the political scenario I have tried to describe earlier.

> For every transaction of the government, as far as my slender observation extended, was conducted by the chiefs or elders of the place . . . My father one of those elders or chiefs I have spoken of and was styled Embrenche (sic); a term, as I remember, importing the highest distinction, and signifying in our language a mark of grandeur. This mark is conferred on the person entitled to it, by cutting the skin across at the top of the forehead, and drawing it down to the eye-brows . . . Most of the judges and senators were thus marked . . . Those Embrence, or chief men, decided disputes and punished crimes; for which purpose they always assembled together.[74]

Though some of the terms and categories employed by Equiano are not very accurate, as he understandably could not help using Western categories, one could sense a childlike candidness in his account. But it is not in doubt that the account states some fundamental facts relevant for our present discussion: *Mgburuichi* (Embrenche)[75] is an age-old mark of distinction among the Igbo; governance is carried out by titled men and elders who form part of the village assembly; and they meet frequently to administer justice and deliberate on matters affecting the community.

In the political scenario described in the foregoing, one sees bold imprints of the Igbo sense of interconnectedness, a worldview that ensures that political decisions

result from a synergy of political forces and not isolated and "powerful" individuals. Political decisions thus incorporate the best elements that age, wisdom, experience, persuasive skills, and achievements in community service confer – and in a balanced measure, too. In this sense of interconnectedness, the political is not distinctly differentiated from the religious and other spheres of life. Hence, priests and traditional healers/diviners (*dibia*), to the extent allowed by the customs of a given community, bring their professional inputs to bear on decisions in the village assembly. That is why, in a book whose theme is supposedly centered on Igbo "politics," Oriji could not help using the term "politico-religious" to demonstrate "the interconnectedness of religious and political power"[76] in Igbo politics. Indeed, the Igbo could not have achieved overall stability in the absence of strong monarchies without the interconnectedness between politics and other spheres of life, and without a robust solidarity among all political and semi-political forces, aided by strong customs.

I round off this section on Igbo politics by considering the semi-political forces (or "civil societies").

Otu Ebiri, Umuada, *and* Umundom *as Civil Society*

I have tried to show so far in this chapter that the Igbo political landscape is a theatre of interacting forces – rather than overbearing, larger-than-life individuals – with a republican temperament and inspired by a unique sense of solidarity. I wish to advance this idea by demonstrating how the aforementioned forces – *otu ebiri*, *umuada*, and *umundom* – interact with the "core" political forces, as they play the role of "civil society." In an interesting article titled, "Neoliberal Tradition in Pre-Colonial Igbo societies," R. C. Njoku pointedly calls these forces "civil society" and goes ahead to indicate the "neoliberal" dynamics in the Igbo precolonial times.[77]

The age-grade (*otu ebiri*) has earlier been treated in its capacity as a mechanism through which certain individuals in the community, namely those within the same age-bracket, demonstrate a more circumscribed solidarity. In this sub-section, the age-grade is being treated in its capacity as civil society of sorts. As civil society, the age-grade functions as a pressure group. As Uchendu notes, the age-grades "censor the morality of their members . . . and provide the essential pressure groups which make for change in political and social life."[78] Members of an age-grade bring their concerns, misgivings, hopes, and aspirations to the village assembly for wider consideration. For instance, a certain younger age-grade might set a date to meet with community elders to discuss matters that affect them or certain issues in the community they find particularly objectionable. The voice of elders will no doubt give their demands the much-needed force at the village assembly. The elders may also decline to represent some or all their wishes. And all this will, in turn, shape the general outcome of the assembly.

The same pattern plays out with the womenfolk, *umuada*, and *umundom*. *Umuada* refer to daughters of the community that are married to other communities, say, neighboring villages or even distant lands. Given the Igbo sense of

solidarity, these daughters maintain interest in the affairs of their native communities. Marriage does not come between their emotional attachment to the land of their birth. And so, there exist in most Igboland some form of "association" or "union" of *umuada* of each community or entity. They participate actively in funeral ceremonies of their native communities, they discipline errant wives to their kit and kin, and they sometimes make all forms of contributions to support their native communities. As Kamena Okonjo explains:

> Because of the exogamous nature of marriage in Igboland, the [Umuada] acted as arbiters between their natal lineage . . . and the lineages into which they were married. They were thus, able to prevent wars. They also took a keen interest in the politics of their natal lineage, and village. When necessary, they took a common stand on an issue, forcing the political authorities of their village to implement their wishes, or demands.[79]

Of interest in the present discourse is the civil society role they play. In this respect, they mount so much pressure on the elders, youths, and other political forces of their native communities to ensure that things are done right. This is because they share in the shame that falls on the community when scandals occur. In most communities, they are given so much free rein and are so powerful that the very thought of being confronted by a delegation of *umuada* helps to shape social behavior. To this very day, *umuada* are still a semi-political force to reckon with.

Unlike *Umuada* who are daughters of the community married *out* because of the exogamous character of marriage in the Igbo culture, *Umundom* (wives/womenfolk of a community) are the wives, that is, women married *into* the community. Though they do not participate in the village assembly, they are indeed a civil society force to reckon with. They are quite skilled in pressing their collective demands on the menfolk who are, as a matter of fact, their husbands and children. Their demands are taken even more seriously, considering the fact that elderly women are also members and, in most cases, leaders of *Umundom* in a society where age is given its due recognition, irrespective of gender.

Given the stabilizing role played by women both in the capacity of *umuada* and *umundom*, as I have illustrated earlier, I consider the rather bleak and pathetic image of the Igbo woman, mostly painted by Western researchers, quite misleading. Admittedly, there are African cultures where women are clearly subjugated. It must also be admitted that, even in the Igbo case where women enjoy considerable powers, there is still a need to conquer more political grounds. For instance, I see no reason they should not be part of the village assembly. Having said that, one might still frankly maintain that, in light of the great civil society role they have always played, women are indeed a force to reckon with in the Igbo society – to say the very least.

The famous Aba Women's Riot – a great blot on the history of British Colonial Administration – reinforces my position on the powers of the Igbo woman. In 1929, Aba women revolted against the heavy taxation imposed upon them by the British officials and their local agents, a revolt that generated vicarious support,

and so, spread through a significant part of Igboland.[80] A number of the women lost their lives as colonialist forces tried to quell the riot, but they succeeded in making their voices heard, prompting the British to set up a Commission of Inquiry and sponsoring several research focused on the Igbo woman's understanding of rights and power.[81] This would make for policy changes that might avert a recurrence. The crucial question is: if the Igbo woman were such an allegedly subservient, powerless, docile, and voiceless creature, how did she come about the notion of right and justice in 1929? As R. C. Njoku suggests, "Infringements on these rights by the colonial state of course explain the main reason Igbo women took on the colonial authorities in series of riots that dogged the colonial period including the famous Aba Women's Riot of 1929/1930."[82] Therefore, it is reasonable to submit that she had already been prepared to make her voice heard by the civil society role she had always played, a role that was now being undermined or ignored by the colonial administration.

To sum up, I have attempted to show that Igbo sense of interconnectedness and solidaristic thinking pervade Igbo premodern politics, and that this thought-pattern explains the adoption of a politics marked by an interplay of political and semi-political (civil society) forces rather than monarchies. The fact that the Igbo were able to achieve relative stability in the absence of centralized and despotic authorities, unlike their African neighbors who had kings and monarchs, shows that their native political epistemologies did not fail them.

In the next section, I discuss the dynamics of the sense of interconnectedness in the religious and moral sphere.

The Religious and Moral Sphere

Some Explanatory Notes

It's worthwhile to begin with some general clarificatory notes on the place of religion in Igbo life. This is intended to address the misleading assumption that religion exercises a certain "dictatorship" in African societies (including Igbo society). For our present purposes, this assumption must be dislodged to make it possible to see, first, how Igbo religious practices are actually preceded and underpinned by an epistemology (the sense of interconnectedness) and, second, how religion interacts with other spheres of life, as informed by this sense of interconnectedness.

It is the Igbo mode of perceiving the world – in other words, Igbo epistemological disposition to think in terms of interconnectedness – which actually informs their religious practices, and not the converse. As maintained earlier in this chapter, much of the practices that wear a religious garb in Igbo culture (and perhaps other African cultures) have epistemological underpinnings. Anthropologists, especially those from the Western world, are sometimes too biased and impatient to disclose these epistemological underpinnings, and so brand African cultures "superstitious." Surprisingly, too, one of the pioneer scholars of African religion, John Mbiti, began his seminal work, *African Religions and Philosophy*, with this now-famous assertion – "Africans are notoriously religious."[83] There is no doubt

that religion permeates every aspect of the life of the African. But the term "notorious" has not only occasioned the misleading conclusion that religion dictates other aspects of life, but it has also deflected attention from the epistemological underpinnings of religion itself.

There is no better way of explaining this than falling back on the Igbo, the context of this book. With respect to the Igbo, the most appropriate thing to say, using Isichei's expression, is that they are "profoundly religious"[84] (and not "notoriously religious" à la Mbiti). If, as I have shown in other spheres of Igbo life, that the Igbo are, by epistemological disposition, averse to absolutism, why would they allow that in the religious sphere? If the Igbo rejected the idea of an all-powerful king, why would they countenance the idea of all-powerful, overbearing gods? The wisdom in allowing so many gods in the Igbo pantheon precisely lies in the fact that it not only allows the Igbo a wide range of choices to express their levels of allegiance but also prevents any god from enjoying a monopoly. And, when necessary, certain communities, discard "old" and apparently ineffectual gods and "manufacture" new ones. For the Igbo, religion is made for man, and not man for religion. This was actually the drama that played out in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, when the Umuaro community perceived that the "god of the white man" (Christian God) might be more "powerful" than their god, *Ulu* – a consideration that eventually led to mass defection or, in the Christian sense, "conversion." The conversations at the village assembly that culminated in this defection reveal the typical Igbo mindset or attitude towards some of the gods and their representatives, the chief priests.

> Why should we rely on him [referring to the chief priest of Ulu] to tell us the season of the year? . . . Is there anybody here who cannot see the moon in his own compound? And anyhow what is the power of Ulu today? He saved our fathers from the warriors of Abam but he cannot save us from the white man. Let us drive him away as our neighbors of Aninta drove out and burnt Ogba when he left what he was called to do and did other things, when he turned around to kill the people of Aninta instead of their enemies.[85]
>
> [My parenthesis]

Much of the cited work indeed narrates this unfolding drama of defection from Ulu to the "god" of the white man, informed by the perception, whether right or wrong, that the latter might be more powerful, after all.[86] At critical moments such as making a choice between two gods, what was required was a sense of judgment and not diviners. The paramount consideration is what is best for humans (the community) and not what is best for the gods.

Furthermore, it should be noted that, for the Igbo, the sacred is not differentiated from the supposedly "profane," thanks to the Igbo sense of interconnectedness. Scholars who fail to appreciate this are misled into thinking that religion rules over other spheres of life, given the religious toga they often wear. But the true meaning of interconnectedness is that no aspect of life dominates others. The same Igbo phenomenon seen through the lens of religious could as well be perfectly interpreted from the standpoint of, say, Igbo solidarity. The fact that the Igbo do not

differentiate religion from morality derives from the mindset that the sacred is not set apart from the presumably "profane," the gods not too different from humans. This justifies their being treated under the same heading in the present work.

In light of the aforementioned submissions, the phenomena I shall analyze in what follows will disclose the pattern of interconnectedness at play in the spheres of religion and morality.

Ancestors, Gods, and Humans

Like in many cultures around the world, ancestorship is an integral part of Igbo belief-system. Ancestors are members of the community who shared their mortal lives in and with the community and have now crossed over to the ancestral world where they continue to participate in the life of the community, albeit on another plane. In line with the Igbo sense of interconnectedness, death does not sever the relationship between members of the community still living in the present corruptible world and those who have crossed over to the ancestral world. J. S. Mbiti consistently refers to ancestors as the "living-dead" to underline this belief that ancestors live on.[87] In Igbo thought-pattern, the ancestral world looks very much like the present world; the titles, prestige, and deeds accumulated in this world are carried over to the ancestral world. To the Igbo, "The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them . . . an old man was very close to the ancestors. A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors."[88]

Solicitude and care for loved ones and community is carried over to the ancestral world. It is believed that ancestors offer protection to the community against evil forces, while prayers, libations, sacrifices, and pieces of food items are offered to them in return. As Olaudah Equiano recalls:

> Those spirits . . . such as our dear friends or relations, they believe always attend them, and guard them from the bad spirits or their foes. For this reason, they always before eating, as I have observed, put some small portion of the meant, and pour some of their drink, on the ground for them; and they often make oblations of the blood of beasts or fowls at their graves.[89]

In the practices that Equiano depicts, we see once again the sense of solidarity underlying the very notion and institution of ancestorship.

B. Abanuka makes some interesting submissions on ancestorship in Africa, which have a particular relevance for the Igbo, since he, being Igbo, writes from a specifically Igbo standpoint. He includes ancestors in what he refers to as "levels of the real," noting that ancestors share things in common both with the level of the real directly above it, namely Ultimacy (God/gods), and the level directly below it, namely humans.[90] The belief in relationality between these levels of the real is a hallmark of Igbo thought-pattern.

Not all who die make it to the ancestorship status. Since it is coveted, it must be merited. On the one hand, the factors that qualify one for ancestorship inter

alia include serving the community diligently in one capacity or another (e.g., as a great hunter or a great herbalist), bringing honor and victory to the community (e.g., in wars and wrestling contests), being in good standing with the community by keeping its laws and customs, and dying at a ripe old age, preferably surrounded by many children and grandchildren. Though old age is generally seen as a blessing signaling good standing with the gods with whom ancestors interact, the community also recognizes as ancestors those members whose lives were already great though they were cut short, perhaps in defense of the community at war or in the course of other noble duties. On the other hand, the notoriously wicked, those who committed one form of abomination or the other and those whose lives are adjudged generally unenviable are not accorded the ancestral status.[91] We must not fail to recognize the great role played by community in the making of an ancestor. Community even decides member's post-mortem futures, as it were! This, once again, demonstrates the power of the community in Igbo social imaginary.

Related to the whole ancestorship institution is the Igbo belief in reincarnation. It has been explained at the beginning of this chapter that the Igbo have a cyclic, not linear, conception of time. Therefore, the idea of reincarnation may rightly be seen in the context of a cyclic notion of time. It is believed that the ancestors return to the community after spending some time in the ancestral world in a virtually endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Babies are named after deceased members of the community in the belief they are true reincarnates of such ancestors. Once identified as reincarnates of some ancestors, such children are treated with utmost care and respect, and mostly called "father" (*nna*) or "mother" (*nne*) even by their biological parents.

To the Igbo, belief in reincarnation is not theoretical; it is a "lived knowledge" to use Sousa Santos' expression. All lived knowledges entrench themselves in the life and consciousness of the people. Because the belief in reincarnation indeed took hold of the Igbo, there are innumerable accounts of Igbo slaves who jumped into the Atlantic as a bold step that would guarantee their "return" (reincarnation) to their native communities rather than live a demeaning life of slavery in the Americas.

> Says Captain Phillips of the Hannibal (a seventeenth-century slaver), "We had about 12 negroes did willfully drown themselves, and other starv'd themselves to death; "for," he explained, "tis their belief that when they die, they return home to their own country and friends again." This belief was reported from various regions, at various periods of the trade, but it seems to have been especially prevalent among the Ibos of eastern Nigeria.[92]

Oriji reports that these drowning episodes have continued to attract much interest among historians, with a historic landmark in Georgia known as "Ibo Landing" dedicated to Igbo slaves who jumped into the sea to drown themselves and facilitate their "return to their homeland" rather than slave away in faraway fields.[93] Obviously, this hope of a "return" is born out of the entrenched belief in reincarnation, which is in turn traceable to the cyclic notion of time in Igbo indigenous thought-pattern.

Just like there is constant interaction and traffic (in the form of reincarnation) between the Igbo and their ancestors, there is also a robust interaction between the Igbo and their gods. Igbo gods are near to the community. The Igbo pantheon is rich with many gods – *Chukwu, Ala, Anyanwu, Amadioha, Ahajioku, Igwekala, Ibini-ukpabi*, and a host of other deities – each with his/her own special abilities, idiosyncrasies, rules, and regulations. Each of the gods enjoys a sizeable number of devotees. It is remarkable that many of these gods are natural/elemental forces or have special affiliation to them. For instance, *Ala* is the Mother Earth, *Amadioha* is the god of thunder and lightning, *Anyanwu* is the sun god, *Igwekala* is linked to the skies, *Ala* and *Ahajioku* are linked to land and agriculture, *Ugwu* is the god of the mountains, *Idemili* is linked to the river, and so on. This quest to appease natural forces and be in harmony with them is a function of a deep sense of interconnectedness. Though the degree of devotion differs from individual to individual and from place to place, each man desires to be in good standing with as many gods as possible by offering ritual libations and sacrifices, even to anonymous ones in a generalized fashion.

There are also more personalized deities and fetishes, like the *ikenga*, which individuals or a small group of individuals regard as their own personal god. For all practical purposes, *ikenga* works in cooperation with *chi* (personal god), who accompanies the individual all through life, defending him/her against malignant forces. Crucially, *ikenga* is a ritual symbolism of individual enterprise, in that it represents the strength of the arm with which one realizes one's successes and destinies. There is always a physical representation of *ikenga* in the form of a graven image kept in some secret place and frequently attended to. Prayers are offered to *ikenga* and ritual sacrifices and libations are properly made. The individual maintains a close relationship with his/her *ikenga*, for the ability to accomplish one's purposes on earth depends so much on cooperation with *ikenga* through personal efforts and diligence.

Christopher Ejizu, an expert on Igbo religion, has made an interesting study on the status of *ikenga* as a symbol of hard work and diligence in Igbo thought-pattern:

> The concept together with the key ideas, values and some other features closely associated with Ikenga symbolism have persisted in Igbo consciousness. These continue to pervade and foster certain fundamental attitudes of the people towards life . . . The notions of individual enterprise, determination, and achievement are still the hallmarks of the Igbo personality.[94]

Ejizu's choice of "ritual enactment of achievement" for the title of his work is apt; that is what *ikenga* indeed represents.

Another significant element of Igbo "religiosity" is that there are important rites and ritual performed at critical junctures in life's journey. As it were, the journey of life is punctuated by these rites. What is remarkable about these rites and rituals is that they basically serve to enhance the bond between the individual and the community, and between humans and other forces, both spiritual and cosmic. Therefore, Igbo rites and rituals are not only informed by a sense of interconnectedness but also reproduced it. One of these rites is the burying of the umbilical cord (*alo*) of every child at the ancestral home, a practice that indicates the rootedness of each

person in the ancestral home and on the land that nurtures him/her.[95] Various rites of passage which usher individuals into full manhood/womanhood and take them through the various stages of life are all community-oriented, underscoring bodily and spiritual belongingness to the community. Even the covenants (*igba ndu*) that individuals and communities enter into at critical moments also serve the purpose of bonding, as they are often ratified symbolically with blood. And the Igbo world is not in short supply of priests and diviners (*dibia*) who preside over these rituals and take care of the overall spiritual well-being of the community.

The Moral Sphere

To map the moral world of the Igbo with the purpose of disclosing the sense of interconnectedness at play thereof, I start off with highlighting the significance of *Ala* (Earth Goddess) as the foundation of morality in Igbo thought-pattern. It has been earlier mentioned that, like their politics, the Igbo remarkably democratized religion, ensuring that there is a wide variety of gods in their pantheon, to which individuals and communities show varying degrees of allegiance and devotion. The cult of some deities is rather localized, whereas a number of deities enjoy a sort of pan-Igbo allegiance. *Ala* belongs to the latter class. The cult of *Ala* is pan-Igbo. To all intents and purposes, *Ala* enjoys the greatest allegiance among all the gods. This is quite understandable for a people whose primary occupation is farming. *Ala*, the Mother Earth, is the source of nourishment, and each person must strive to be in good standing with *Ala* to ward off all pestilence and guarantee a bumper harvest.

Seeing *Ala* in this light indeed explains why *Ala* is the undisputable foundation of morality in the Igbo world. As a result, “Ala” does not so much refer to land/earth as a physical reality as the embodiment of customs and traditions that support life itself. It is instructive that custom/tradition is called *omenala* which roughly means “what is tolerated by *Ala*/Earth.” Therefore, every moral infringement is primarily seen as a sin against Ala, the Mother Earth, from whose abundance we all get our nourishment. This is precisely why, in the Igbo thought-pattern, an offence is first and foremost a sacrilege, a blasphemy against *Ala* – indeed an abomination (*aru*).

For instance, at the point when Okonkwo in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* spills the blood of a kinsman, though inadvertently, he knows immediately that the only option left for him is exile:

> The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years.[96]

At that very moment, he has set himself up against the very land (*ala*) upon which he stands and derives his support. The bond of kinship that binds him and the community is automatically severed; in fact, the same space cannot contain him

and the clansmen. His house and other belongings are demolished. Okonkwo has committed an abomination, and the land would have to be cleansed. It is interesting to see that the men that come to demolish his house bear no personal malice against Okonkwo; to them, it is an automatic punishment to cleanse their land of such an abomination and appease *Ala*, the earth goddess. "They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman,"[97] reaffirms Achebe.

The significance of *Ala* as the foundation of morality in the Igbo world cannot be overemphasized. The Igbo scholar, J. N. Oriji, has made an important study in which he cites relevant sources to underscore this fact.[98] Cited in his study is C. K. Meek, whose submissions on the significance of *Ala* tend to link it to a point I explored earlier in this chapter – namely, the absence or near-absence of central authorities and monarchical structures in the premodern times.

> Ala is the fountain of human morality, and in consequence, a principal legal sanction. Homicide, kidnapping, poisoning, stealing, adultery . . . and all offences against Ala must be purged by rites to her. Ala deprives evil men of their lives, and her priests are the guardians of public morality. Laws are made in her name and by her, oaths are sworn. Ala, is in fact the unseen president of the community.[99]

So, in the absence of traditional monarchies, where an offence might be interpreted as an offence against the king or queen, *Ala* becomes the de facto "queen" of the Igbo community, to whom all offences are appealed. As Isichei asserts, "Ala, the divine Earth, has a key role in Igbo religion, reflecting the values of an agricultural community. Many offences were regarded as abominable, not so much in themselves, but because they offended her."[100]

Because *Ala* is the underpinning of morality, an offence or sin takes on a social character. It could be asserted that the Igbo sense of interconnectedness is put to service in the interpretation and punishment of crimes, using *Ala* as a framework. For instance, in the Okonkwo example given earlier, Okonkwo does not just sin against the clansman he inadvertently killed; he indeed kills the whole clan. The very ground (*ala*) of Umuofia can no longer support such a man. The Mother Earth (*Ala*) must be appeased; Ala was indeed appeased. At the instant the clansman's blood drops on the ground, he automatically forfeits the bond of solidarity that binds him and his clansmen. He has to be punished, despite the rapport that hitherto existed between him and the community. Of course, the clan understood that it was inadvertent, and so adjudged the offence to be of the "female" type (as Achebe puts it), and not the "male" type such as deliberate murder. We might call this a communal sense of sin, derived from the Igbo sense of interconnectedness.

The application of the sense of interconnectedness to morality places morality in the service of harmony and balance. The concern for harmony and balance is not just restricted to the human world; it is necessarily extended to the natural world. Morality is thus put in the service of cosmic harmony and balance, such that some rituals are immediately required to restore this balance in the event

that any human activity has upset it. But various efforts are made to prevent this. For instance, fishing activities might be prohibited in a certain river for a given period of time to allow reproduction and regeneration. More significantly, certain animals are taken as totems. This might appear superstitious at first sight, but, upon a closer look, it might simply be the case that such animals are highly valued by the community, and the totem laws prohibiting any harm to them might only serve to prevent their extinction. Even for non-totem animals that may be hunted, a number of restrictions and regulations are put in place to guard against indiscriminate hunting that will most assuredly deplete the fauna, and thus upset cosmic balance.

Writing in the eighteenth century, Olaudah Equiano seemed to be referring to this totem practice when he recounted:

> I remember two of those ominous snakes, each of which as thick as the calf of a man's leg, and in color resembling a dolphin in the water, crept at different times into my mother's night-house. I was desired by some of our wise men to touch these, that I might be interested in the good omens, which I did, for they were quite harmless, and would tamely suffer themselves to be handled; and they were put into a large open earthen pan and set on one side of the highway.[101]

Equiano was probably speaking of a species of python, *eke*, which, to this very day, is still taken as totem in many Igbo communities. Anyone who kills this "friendly" species of *eke* or any totem animal goes through a rigorous series of rituals, almost comparable to those meant for killing a kinsman, to make restitution and to restore cosmic balance. This ritual process is summed up in the concept of *ikwa ala* (literally, "appeasing the Earth/Land"), a concept that once again underlines the centrality of *Ala* (Earth) in Igbo morality.

Igbo thinking in terms of harmony and balance also underlies the practice of keeping forest reserves (usually seen as "sacred forests") and allowing the land to lie fallow for several seasons. Perhaps through experience, the Igbo have noted the deleterious effect of deforestation on the environment, which invariably affects humans adversely. Also, they never needed a diviner to make them realize the importance of allowing land to lie fallow in order to regenerate its nutrients and guarantee bumper harvest. They *know* that it is counterproductive to make excessive demands on *Ala*. Today, unfortunately, nature is not only endangered, but also the very mode of thinking that makes for harmony and balance is likewise "endangered" – and the consequences are already being felt.

Conclusion

I have mapped the Igbo idea of interconnectedness. The central argument I have tried to enunciate in this chapter is that the Igbo have an indigenous mode of knowing, one steeped in the sense of interconnectedness, and that the various dimensions of Igbo life – social, political, economic, religious, moral, etc. – disclose this underlying mode of knowing.

Interconnectedness is a mode of knowing or an epistemological standpoint that perceives the world as composed of mutually interacting realities, where the subject recognizes that he/she is inextricably linked to the *other* (in the human, material or spiritual world), such that he/she cannot validly posit his/her own existence in isolation from these other realities.

The Igbo sense of interconnectedness is not some detached, theoretical knowledge, but rather a form of "lived knowledges," which not only has social-ordering effect but also impacts politics, religion, morality, and multifarious aspects of Igbo life.

This sense of interconnectedness finds a social expression in solidarity. It is argued that a mode of knowing, which emphasizes the significance of the *other* in the subject's very self-understanding and the co-constitutiveness of the individual and the community, would translate into solidarity on the social sphere. Igbo solidarity refers to the mutual solicitude that exists between individuals in the Igbo community, a kind of solicitude that, as has been shown, goes beyond a mere show of humanitarian concern or charity, but rather possesses an element of interpenetration of lives.

In the realm of politics, Igbo political structure discloses the Igbo understanding of power. Governance is carried out through a synergy of political forces comprising of elders and titled men, and semi-political forces like the age-grade and the womenfolk (*umuada* and *umundom*), aided by strong customs. That political decisions result from a synergy of political forces rather than from isolated powerful individuals like kings and monarchs is indeed a function of Igbo political epistemology.

In the religious and moral sphere, the Igbo sense of interconnectedness expresses itself in diverse ways. The Igbo do not make a clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the presumably "profane." The Earth Goddess (*Ala*) assumes the status of the foundation of morality, for every moral infringement (*aru*) is seen primarily as an offence against *Ala*, the generous Mother who supports and nourishes all. Every offence, in Igbo reckoning, takes on not only a social/communal character but also a cosmic dimension. In other words, an offence upsets both social and cosmic balance, requiring *ikwa ala* (ritual cleansing) which is aimed at restitution and restoration of an upset balance. The unmistakable picture of the Igbo religious and moral world that emerges from my analysis is that there exists a robust interaction between the gods, ancestors, and humans, an interaction enacted in rites and rituals.

Once again, I maintain that all these cultural forms express an epistemology (and not a metaphysics or ontology), a mode of perceiving realities as interconnected.

Notes

1 B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 43.
2 C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, 33.
3 J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1.
4 This calls to mind the opening lines of *The Communist Manifesto*, where it was observed that a "specter is haunting Europe" at the time (K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 19).

5 D. N. Kaphagawani and J. G. Malherbe, "African Epistemology," in *The African Philosophy Reader*, 219.
6 C. Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 132.
7 P. Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 44–70. *Bantu Philosophy* is the trailblazing work of the Belgian priest and missionary, Placide Tempels, who lived and worked with the Bantu people. Though ethnophilosophical in style with discernible racist prejudices, Tempels' pioneering work makes a case to the effect that the worldviews and belief of the so-called "primitive" tribes are "philosophy" in their own right. Bantu is a linguistic subculture, cutting across much of Sub-Saharan Africa.
8 P. Hountondji, *African Philosophy*, 45.
9 Ibid., 43.
10 Ibid., 46.
11 J. K. Nyerere, "Ujamaa."
12 The Osu-Diala practice is one of the much-talked-about negative elements of Igbo culture. This practice is thoroughly reprehensible, no doubt. Yet scholarship has emerged to argue that it is a relatively recent corruption of the Igbo culture, occasioned by the advent of capitalist modernity. As E. Isichei notes, "evidence suggests that it is of relatively recent origin and adopted its present form in the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade" (E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 6).
13 I. Asouzu, " 'Ibuanyidanda' and the Philosophy of Essence," 102.
14 E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 24.
15 C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, 33. See also J. N. Oriji, *Political Organization in Nigeria since the Late Stone Age*, 183.
16 See, A. C. Obi, *Being as Duality and African Hermeneutics of Foundation*. In this recent work, Augustine Obi outlines the important elements of "dualistic" complementarity in Igbo thought-pattern (2017).
17 C. Ifemesia, Op. Cit., 68. Here, Ifemesia itemizes a number of principles in Igbo philosophy of life that demonstrate their entrenched belief in interconnectedness, taking on different forms such as the principles of reciprocity, complementarity, interdependence, and duality.
18 C. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 35.
19 E. Isichei, Op. Cit., 41.
20 The whole idea of ancestorship as an institution is anchored on the idea of interconnectedness. This will be fully explored in the section dealing with the religious dimension of interconnectedness.
21 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 179. Also see, Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 13, 46, and 84. In these passages, the way of life of a people, whether white or black, is acknowledged to be a function of their knowledge practices – epistemology.
22 A. E. Afigbo, "On the Origin of Igbo Civilization," in *Igbo Nation* (Vol. I), 44.
23 B. Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 43.
24 K. Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 24.
25 T. Okere also uses the word "hermeneutics" to describe the kind of engagement I refer to. This is the path he claims to have towed in his work, *African Philosophy: A Historico-hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its Possibility* (1983).
26 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004).
27 C. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 31–41.
28 I. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," in *African Philosophy*, 171–172. Menkiti's claim that community is indispensable for the individual's self-understanding and epistemic accessibility has merit. I think, however, that the idea that personhood is "procedural" is a bit of an exaggeration; subscribing to this would deny the personhood of infants and children who have not "come of age" in the African community. This is a conclusion we would not be prepared to accept.
29 Ibid., 171.

30 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 176.
31 See E. M. P. Edeh, *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics* (1985); *Igbo Metaphysics* (2014); B. Abanuka, *A New Essay on African Philosophy*. In analyzing Igbo/African phenomena, these scholars adopt the same kind of metaphysical language I take exception to.
32 I. Asouzu, "Ibuanyidanda as a Philosophy of Essence/Metaphysics," 102. Also see, I. Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Contemporary Ontology*.
33 Ibid.
34 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 176.
35 Some of the most notable are J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*; M. B. Ramose, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu* (2005); Julius Nyerere's concept of "Ujamaa" in *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (1968).
36 I. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," in *African Philosophy*, 180.
37 Ibid.
38 See S. Nnoruka, *Solidarity*, 221–222. Nnoruka has compiled a number of names and sayings emphasizing solidarity.
39 A collection of Igbo folktales is found in E. N. Emenanjo's *Omalinze: A Book of Igbo Folk-Tales* (1977).
40 F. C. Ogbalu's *Ilu Igbo* (1965) is a whole volume of Igbo proverbs and saying, much of which is a lesson in social solidarity.
41 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 165. Chinua Achebe's writings are replete with scenes, ideas, and expressions that demonstrate the premium placed on solidarity.
42 The most famous exception is the Nri Myth which lays claim to a pan-Igbo common ancestry.
43 E. Isichei, Op. Cit., 39.
44 To make sense of the fact that the Igbo child is socialized to think in terms of community, we may also consider that the entire community plays a great role in the child's upbringing. Senior members of the community are father or mother figures to the child, while younger kinsfolks are considered brothers and sisters. It is instructive that the Igbo language has no word for "cousin" or all such words that imply some distance in relationship; the term *nwanne* (brother/sister) covers "cousins" and other degrees of relationship.
45 D.N. Lutz, "African Ubuntu Philosophy and Global Management," 314.
46 O. Equiano, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African," 16.
47 Ibid., 15.
48 H. Crow, *The Memoirs of Captain Hugh Crow* (1801), 89–90.
49 This writer is not aware of any other culture, even in Africa, where the age-grade has taken on the form of an enduring social institution or a feature that defines society as such.
50 See V. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 63.
51 S. Ottenberg, *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays*, 230–231.
52 C. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 77.
53 V. Uchendu, Op. Cit., 54.
54 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 110. Also see 112–113. Similar forms of solidarity are demonstrated at sad moments like bereavement, where the different organs of the community are massively mobilized. The level of community participation and help attenuates the pain and horror of such moments.
55 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 21–22.
56 O. Equiano, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African," 16.
57 S. Ottenberg, *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays*, 309.
58 S. Ottenberg, *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays*, 55 and 70; See also G. T. Basden, *Niger Igbos*, 133; O. Equiano, Op. Cit., 14 and 19; I. Nzimiro, *Studies in Igbo Political System*; R. Henderson, *The King in Every Man*.

59 R. C. Njoku, "Neoliberal Tradition in Pre-Colonial Igbo Societies," 158.
60 C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living among the Igbo*, 39.
61 This is in fact the argument Oriji sets out to defend in his *Political Organization in Nigeria since the Late Stone Age: A History of the Igbo People*. He hinges much of his argument on the point that the premodern Igbo society was not static but that a lot of political transformations took place in the course of the premodern times.
62 C. Ifemesia, 53. See the entire discussion on 48–54.
63 Isichei, Op. Cit., 23.
64 Oriji, Op. Cit., 84.
65 Research alluding to the failure of the Indirect Rule system in Igboland abound. Here is only a few: A. E. Afigbo, "Revolution and Reaction in Eastern Nigeria, 1900–1929: The Background of the Women's Riot of 1929," in *Olaudah Equiano and the Igbo World: History, Society, and the Atlantic Diaspora Connections*; F. K. Ekechi, "Episodes of Igbo Resistance to European Imperialism, 1860–1960" in the volume mentioned above; E. Isichei, Op. Cit.; J.N. Oriji, Op. Cit., 171–182.
66 E. Isichei, Op. Cit., 119.
67 C. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 230.
68 C. Ifemesia, Op. Cit., 116.
69 See E. Njaka, *Igbo Political Culture*, 50–67. Also see: C. Ifemesia, Op Cit., 39; R.C. Njoku, Op. Cit., 161.
70 E. Isichei, Op. Cit., 21.
71 V.C. Uchendu, Op. Cit., 46.
72 Priests and *dibia* play essentially religious roles but their political influence depends on the extent allowed by the customs of a given community.
73 Works that provide important hints on the Igbo premodern political culture abound. Much of the above ideas were derived from the following works: Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* (2016), Basden's *Niger Ibos* (2005), Ottenberg's Igbo *Religion, Social life and Other Essays* (2006), Oriji's *Political Organization in Nigeria Since the Late Stone Age* (2011), Isichei's *A History of the Igbo people* (1976), Korieh's edited work, *Olaudah Equiano and the Igbo World* (2009), Uchendu's *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (2004), to mention but a few.
74 O. Equiano, Op. Cit., 13–14, 19; Also see, Isichei, Op. Cit., 22.
75 C. Acholonu has carried out an interesting research titled "The Igbo Origins of Olaudah Equiano" published in *Olaudah Equiano and the Igbo World*, 49–66. As part of the case she makes to establish the Igbo origin of Olaudah Equiano, she recognizes Equiano's "Embrenche" as the familiar *mgburuichi* practice, associated with *igbu ichi* (scarification).
76 J.N. Oriji, Op. Cit., 183.
77 R.C. Njoku, "Neoliberal Tradition in Pre-Colonial Igbo Societies," in *Olaudah Equiano and the Igbo World*, 157–177.
78 V.C. Uchendu, Op. Cit., 63. See also: Ottenberg, Op. Cit., 230–231.
79 K. Okonjo, "Women's Political Participation in Nigeria," in *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 98.
80 There is enormous literature on what has come to be known as the "Aba Women's Riot" and the general political climate of the Indirect Rule system in Igboland. Some of the most relevant include: A.E. Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs*; J.N. Oriji, Op. Cit., 161–182; F. Ekechi, "Episodes of Igbo Resistance to European Imperialism," in *Olaudah Equiano and the Igbo World*, 219–244.
81 The work, *Igbo Village Affairs*, by the British Scholar, Margaret Green, is a notable product of research commissioned by the British government in search of "natural leaders" of the local people but ended up providing some of the earliest insights on the Igbo woman and the self-understanding of her place in society and politics. Silvia Leith-Ross' *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (1965) also provides similar insights on the life of the Igbo woman.
82 R.C. Njoku, Op. Cit., 165.

83 J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1.
84 E. Isichei, Op. Cit., 24.
85 C. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 161.
86 In another passage (Ibid., 26–27), the embattled chief priest of the god Ulu, the Ezeulu, was bluntly reminded in the village assembly that the Igbo did not have kings and that his powers should be restricted to the custodianship of his god, *Ulu*. The god, *Ulu*, could even be replaced with another deity if he becomes to high-handed – and there are precedents from other Igbo communities.
87 J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.
88 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 122.
89 O. Equiano, Op. Cit., 17. Also see, 29.
90 For a full discussion on this, see B. Abanuka, *A New Essay on African Philosophy*, 36–56.
91 Ibid., 37–38.
92 D.P. Mannix and M. Cowley, *Black Cargoes*, 117–118 cited in C. Ifemesia, Op. Cit., 112.
93 J.N. Oriji, Op. Cit., 109.
94 C.I. Ejizu, "Ritual Enactment of Achievement: 'Ikenga' Symbol in Igboland," in *Pandeuma: Mitteilungen Zur Kulturkunde*, No. 37, 254. Important insights into the dynamics of *chi* and personal achievement are also elaborated in C. Achebe's "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," one of the essays in his *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (1976).
95 To this very day, efforts are made to preserve the umbilical cords of Igbo children born in diaspora pending the soonest opportunity to send them to the ancestral home. For details, see V.C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 59.
96 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 124.
97 Ibid., 125.
98 J.N. Oriji, Op. Cit., 44–51.
99 C.K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 25. Quoted in J.N. Oriji, Op. Cit., 50.
100 Isichei, Op. Cit., 27.
101 O. Equiano, Op. Cit., 19.

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5 Solidarity and the Challenge of Modernity

Introduction

The preceding chapter has rendered an elaborate account of the idea of *interconnectedness* in Igbo thought-pattern. Drawing on Igbo scholarship, I analyzed Igbo life and society as a whole with a view to disclosing a mode of thinking at work. In the social sphere, I explored the Igbo sense of solidarity and the associated solidaristic practices as rooted in the sense of interconnectedness, the wider outlook from which solidarity is derived.

Following the groundwork laid in the previous chapter, this chapter aims to show that Igbo sense of solidarity is *relevant* in today's contexts; indeed, it is a *desirable* element in modern socio-political contexts. As it pertains the Igbo, I argue that, if this sense of solidarity is judiciously incorporated into the Igbo modernization process, it could make for a less disruptive, more balanced, and wholesome modernity. This, to me, would be a useful way of responding to the challenge modernity represents.

The claim that Igbo solidarity is relevant in today's contexts invariably raises the question as to whether it might accommodate the liberal values of individual good, rights, and liberties. In other words, it raises the question as to whether the self-community dynamic that underpins Igbo solidarity would stifle the individual. The very notion of the self and the question of the identity of the individual vis-a-vis the community are also implicated.

To address this cluster of issues, I propose and explore the *thesis of co-constitutiveness*, drawing on insights from M. O. Eze. It is a thesis that captures the Igbo understanding of self-constitution and individual-community dynamics. I also elaborate the concepts of *chi/akaraka* and *ikenga* as the Igbo principle of individuation and philosophy of personal enterprise respectively. In a nutshell, the thesis of co-constitutiveness states that the self and the community co-constitute each other simultaneously, a fact that guarantees a balance of emphasis between the individual and the community, thereby ensuring that the former is not obliterated by the latter. In turn, I argue, based on the significance of *chi/akaraka* and *ikenga*, that a culture with a principle of individuation (*chi/akaraka*) and a robust philosophy of personal enterprise (*ikenga*) would not jeopardize the individual but rather support practices that cater for both individual and communal interests.

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By way of underlining the distinctness of the Igbo paradigm and its suitability for modern contexts, I put the Igbo in conversation with Habermas and Taylor. The choice of the duo would make for the narrative unity of the work as a whole, having used them to delineate the contours of modernity in Chapter 2. But, more crucially, the duo possesses some of the most philosophically elaborated insights on the modern self vis-a-vis society and could veritably serve as representatives of the Western standpoint. To fruitfully engage Habermas and Taylor for our present purposes, I would then have to analyze their insights on the themes of self, community/society, nation, state, citizenship, and solidarity.

I note the fact that the Igbo sense of solidarity has its underpinnings in the wider sense of interconnectedness (even with non-human realities), an element that is absent in both Habermas and Taylor. I also show that, for all his "communitarian" leanings, the interpenetration of lives, needs, and interests which characterize the Igbo community, could not have been imagined by Taylor, though his views align more closely with the Igbo standpoint than those of Habermas.

A point that will become clear from the conversation between Habermas, Taylor, and the Igbo is that solidarity is *at least* relevant in modern socio-political contexts. Therefore, it is a value that could be incorporated into Igbo modernization. To the Igbo in particular, it is a matter of bringing it up from the margins to the center of modern Igbo socio-political life. Thankfully, modernity has so far not been able to eradicate the sense of solidarity, for it would have been a much more difficult task resurrecting a dead way of life. But modernity only succeeded in pushing it to the margins by privileging Western thought-patterns. As will be argued, bringing solidarity to the center of modern life holds out a promise of a less disruptive, more balanced, and more wholesome Igbo modernity. And I initiate the process of centering the Igbo sense of solidarity by tentatively suggesting how it could be applied to some aspects of modern Igbo life. What we are trying to do in essence is to turn an "endangered" lived knowledge – solidarity – into a veritable philosophy for modernity.

Self, Community, and Solidarity in the Igbo Framework

In this section, I analyze the Igbo notion of the self-vis-à-vis community. To do this, I elaborate what might be called the *thesis of co-constitutiveness*, which points to the fact that, in Igbo thought, the individual and community constitute each other. Invariably, the Igbo concepts of *chi/akaraka* and *ikenga* will be analyzed to the extent that they represent the Igbo *principle of individuation* and *philosophy of individual enterprise* respectively.

I wish to state in no uncertain terms that the Igbo ideas of co-constitutiveness, *chi/akaraka* and *ikenga* that I develop here are all expressions of the wider *sense of interconnectedness* in Igbo thought-pattern. To be sure, the specific way in which the Igbo conceive the co-constitution of self and community, the human-divine character of *chi/akaraka* and *ikenga*, and their interaction with community factors are all steeped in the sense of interconnectedness as a defining feature of Igbo thought. Therefore, the Igbo sense of interconnectedness is the unmistakable root of these ideas, and the analysis organized around them will unravel this thought-pattern.

I start off with the thesis of co-constitutiveness, showing how it makes for a reasonable balance between the stress on the individual on the one hand and the emphasis on community on the other hand. By making this balance of emphasis between the individual and the community more visible, I hope to allay the misgivings that the Igbo sense of community would stifle the individual and is thus incompatible with modern values of individual rights and liberties.

The Thesis of Co-Constitutiveness

The most common mistake made by scholars, including Africans themselves, is that they exaggerate the strength and power of the African community to a point that it almost obliterates the individual. On this score, I agree with Paulin Hountondji that it partly arises from the craving on the part of the African intellectual to present something "exotic" and different, mainly to a Western audience, something of an "Africanist ghetto," where everyone supposedly looks like and agrees with everyone else in a form of "primitive unanimity."[1] It is a craving Olufemi Taiwo derogatorily refers to as the "metaphysics of difference" that Africans have helplessly and defensively embraced "to prove to the rest of the world that Africa is so different that any time African phenomena are to be talked about, new words and concepts must be fashioned for that purpose."[2]

I should add that this is not unconnected with the "hangovers" of colonialism from which African intellectuals still reel. So, in this craving to be "exotic" and "different," the African must posit a kind of "excessive communitarianism" because his/her Western counterpart has already posited individualism. Well, the fact that the community is a powerful force in Africa is not in doubt. But I contend that the Igbo do not place community at the expense of the individual; so, the free development of the individual is not stifled. Indeed, the individual is also an equal force to reckon with. Here, I use the Igbo as a point of reference for this argument because their epistemic resources, in my view, maintain the delicate balance between individual and community.

The first place to look for this balance is the very conception of the self vis-a-vis community. In Igbo social imaginary, the individual is *co-constitutive* and *coeval* with community. Now, we must pause a bit to understand the full implications of the two words, "co-constitutive" and "coeval." Co-constitutiveness means that the self is constituted by community, and community is constituted by distinct individuals (selves). Rather than a one-way traffic, it may be better described as a two-way traffic, represented thus: individual <=> Community. It is two-directional.

This process is also *simultaneous* in the sense that the formation of the self happens at the *same time* as that of the community, and not after. The Igbo scholar, M. O. Eze, has some invaluable insights in this respect. In a work titled "What is African Communitarianism?" Eze insists on the dialogical and coeval/contemporaneous character of the relationship between the individual and community. He uses the term "dialogical" to propose that "the identity or subjectivity of the individual and the community are mutually constitutive and hence none is supreme."[3] And "contemporaneity" means that "the community is not prior to the individual and vice versa."[4] Taking on a number of notable African philosophers like Wiredu,

Gyekye, and Menkiti, who sometimes inadvertently give a disproportionate emphasis to community, Eze vehemently defends this notion of contemporaneity between individual and community:

> To argue that the community pre-exists the individual is to argue that we can indeed have a community without a person, for the community is *necessarily* constituted by persons. And to argue that the individual pre-exists the community is ontologically contradictory for a person is necessarily a social subjective.[5]

Here, Eze gestures to the idea that neither the individual nor the community could claim any ontological or epistemological priority over the other. It makes sense to suggest, then, that the tendency among scholars to overemphasize community over individual, or the converse, results from a poor appreciation of this *simultaneity* on which the balance is anchored. Eze's stance on the "individual-community debate" among African philosophers mostly aligns with my intuition, and his critique of scholars who overemphasize community resonates with me.

I should add that the balance between the individual and the community lies in their contemporaneity, for to concede that one is ontologically prior to the other is to accept that the good and rights of one might likewise be antecedent.

This needs to be more carefully unpacked because it appears rather counter-intuitive. It is often taken for granted that community predates the individual, since the individual is born into an already-existing community. But, in the Igbo thought-pattern, the coming of an individual into the community (e.g., through birth) *redefines* the community. This redefinition is viewed, not in the trivial sense of numerical increase in population, but in terms of a qualitative transformation in the life of the community. In a sense, the arrival of the individual has automatically *re-created* a community in its wake, a community that is, as it were, (re)born at the arrival of the newborn. Community members restructure themselves and their roles accordingly – husband and wife become parents or grandparents, persons (say, other family members) become brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, kinsfolk, etc., as the case may be. In fact, the newborn may be said to have created a qualitatively "new" community at his/her arrival. It is not wrong to say that the community that exists *for* the newcomer is this community he/she has created and not anything that may have existed earlier.

The scenario described here might sound quite ordinary, self-evident, and applicable to every human society. I do not doubt this. But, in Igbo society, this rather obvious fact of life possesses a special grip on the self-image of the individual and the community and finds expression in their epistemic resources. It also finds expression in such social practices as naming ceremonies, where the names given to the "newcomers" clearly indicate that something qualitatively new has indeed taken place in the community. To Igbo people, therefore, the notion of co-constitutiveness is a "social imaginary." "Social imaginary" is a Taylorian term (as seen in Chapter 2) that represents the merger of ideas with social practices.

For a people to appreciate this "newness," such a people must possess a robust idea of *being as becoming*. A society that conceives itself as "static" – and such societies indeed exist – would not appreciate this "newness" as much as the Igbo. When the sense of interconnectedness was elaborated in the previous chapter, idea of flux in existence was underlined, using indigenous epistemic resources. I think it would be quite irrelevant to probe into the precise nature of the "newness," that is, to inquire if the newness ushered by the newcomer is *substantial* or *accidental*, as metaphysicians are inclined to ask. What matters is that something *qualitatively* new has happened – and the community appreciates it as such.

The foregoing submissions go to show that, in the Igbo community, the self is involved in the making of the community, and the community is simultaneously implicated in the making of the self. The two interpenetrate each other. For this reason, too, community is simultaneously undermined and compromised when the individual is undermined and compromised. The strength of the community is directly proportional to the strength of the individuals that constitute it. So, community is strong to the extent that individuals who *form it* and are *formed by* it are strong.

Eze's case against Menkiti is particularly relevant, since both are Igbo scholars, and their submissions point frequently to the Igbo world. Menkiti had argued that the African personhood is "procedural." For him, personhood is not automatically acquired at birth but, as it were, "conferred" by community, after a gradual process of integration in the life of the community.

> As far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories, whatever these may be. It is the community which defines the person as a person not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory. Personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed . . . As far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which the individual could fail.[6]

Anchoring his point on the position that individual and community are coeval, Eze retorts:

> Precisely because the relationship between the individual and the community is contemporaneous, the community in this context does not serve as a self-generating end but furnishes those values that will enhance human identity. This is the context of my disenchantment with African communitarians like Ifeanyi Menkiti who argues that personhood is not an automatic quality given at birth but necessarily achieved.[7]

It is understandable, of course, that Menkiti wishes to emphasize the undeniable factor of community in the making of the person. But as is often the case in philosophy, error results from exaggeration. It is indeed true that the Igbo do not define

the self in terms of Aristotelian "rationality" or other Western standards, as Menkiti notes. It is also the case that community is built into the making of the Igbo individual. But it is *not* the case that "the reality of the communal world takes *precedence* over the reality of the individual life histories." Menkiti thus subscribes to a species of "excessive communitarianism" which does not quite represent the Igbo who, as I shall demonstrate in the course of this section, subscribe to a moderate or "balanced" sense of community, based on the thesis of co-constitutiveness.

It seems wrong-headed to suppose that a solidaristic culture like the Igbo is *a priori* stifling to the individual, presumably allowing little or no room for individual freedoms, rights, autonomy, and good. Solidaristic values and personal development are not mutually exclusive; community good does not preclude individual good. The term "community" does not, by *analytic entailment* (i.e., a priori), preclude the individual. On the contrary, the very concept of community analytically entails the existence of distinct individuals, albeit organically constituted. So, I concur with Eze's view that "No community exists in a vacuum . . . for community is necessarily constituted by persons."[8]

The symbiotic interaction between the individual and the community could be described as a feedback loop in which one feeds into the other. The fate of one is tied to the other, for it is not a zero-sum game whereby one must suffer for the other to gain. The significance of the aforementioned argument for our present purposes is that the individual is not only *distinct* from community, but individual good is also identifiably *distinct* from the common good, though they *interpenetrate* each other in the Igbo world. More will be said on this idea of interpenetration of goods shortly.

In light of the foregoing, I think that Mbiti's now-famous quote pertaining the African concept of personhood vis-à-vis community stands in need of revision – "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."[9] The problem with this assertion is that it places far more emphasis on community than the individual; it is one-directional, as it hinges the "I am" on the "We are" without accounting for how the converse is necessarily true. More crucially, it doesn't seem to account for co-constitutiveness in its present formulation. It does not account for the indispensability of the individual in the constitution of the community as an organic entity. Dzobo's formulation may therefore be adjudged complete and balanced: "We are, therefore, I am, and since I am, therefore we are."[10] If we pay a close attention to Dzobo's formulation, especially the second part, "since I am, therefore we are," we would appreciate the fact that "we are" is now hinged on the "I am" to balance off the first part where "I am" is premised on "we are." Notice that, in Mbiti's formulation, this balance is lacking, as though the "I am" is so hinged on the "we are" that the converse was inconceivable. Dzobo recognizes that the community is considered as such not *in spite of* the individual but *in virtue of* the individual; likewise, the individual is considered as such only in virtue of the community. Any formulation that does not take cognizance of this fact might be misrepresenting the Igbo.

This is the thinking behind the solidaristic practices outlined in Chapter 4. This passage in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is also instructive. "As for me, I have only a short while to live," says Uchendu the old man, "But I fear for you young people

because you do not understand how strong the bond of kinship is . . . I fear for you; I fear for the clan."[11] Here, the old man, Uchendu, warns the younger folk of the threat to solidarity occasioned by the advent of the "white man." Notice that his concern ("fear," as he calls it) for the individual is at the same time that of the clan, because the two are co-constitutive. The idea of organicity comes into play. The individual-community dynamic is an element of Igbo life that cannot be reduced to an "either/or," "black or white" situation. Rather, it accommodates *greyness*, a greyness that has its rightful place in extant Igbo wisdoms. In a sense, what is at play is a "both/and" scenario. In all "both/and" scenarios, the distinctness of each entity, in this case individual and community, is preserved while shared features are recognized. Therefore, in Igbo solidaristic practices, distinctness is not obliterated by a presumably depersonalizing collectivism; it is rather secured, as I have been arguing in this section.

In the next section, I explore other angles to the Igbo idea of the self, which have their root in the sense of interconnectedness. I refer to the philosophically rich concepts of *chi, akaraka*, and *ikenga*, to which I now turn.

Chi/Akaraka, Ikenga, *and the Principle of Individuation*

In Igbo worldview, much of which has been elaborated in Chapter 4, the concept of *chi* (destiny) is of immense significance. It has various senses and could be understood in a number of ways. The most relevant for our purposes is the sense in which *chi* represents individual "destiny/fate" and, as I argue, the Igbo principle of individuation. And the significance for our purposes is to show that a worldview which possesses a principle of individuation, the notion of individual destinies identifiably distinct from those of the community, could support practices compatible with individual growth while remaining richly community-oriented.

The *chi*-principle embodies the unrepeatably unique destiny of each individual as distinct from that of the community. As Innes remarks that "the belief that at birth, each person acquires a Chi"[12] is a very "significant" aspect of Igbo thought. All one needs to appreciate this significance of *chi* in Igbo life and thought is to look at the ubiquity of "chi" suffixes and prefixes in Igbo names. This is why the renowned Igbo scholar, Chinua Achebe, once quipped that all that is needed to know how the Igbo man has fared in life is to look at the chi-suffixed names given to his children.[13]

The notion of *chi* is cognate with the concept of *akaraka* which literally means "lines/marks on the palm," but is basically taken to mean "destiny." In the wider Igbo conceptual scheme, destiny possesses both community and individual dimensions. On the one hand, the community is an indispensable factor that shapes the life histories of its members by means of social norms and expectations. On the other hand, the individual is still able to chart an identifiably unique course shaped by life choices, habits, and idiosyncrasies. If this were not the case, life in an Igbo community would indeed be a kind of "Africanist ghetto" that Hountondji speaks of, where everyone's life conforms to those of others. But this is not the case, for individuals are able to rise to greatness through diligence or fall as a result of some

unforced irresponsible habits. In fact, the thinking behind the notion of *akaraka* is that the marks/lines on each person's palm differ from those of the others, and no two persons have exactly the same design of marks on their palms. Personal identity and destiny are "inscribed" as it were on palm marks. This is supported by the common Igbo saying, *otu nne na-amu, mana o bughi otu chi na-eke* (which means "People might come from the same womb, but their destinies – *chi/akaraka* – are different"). From the Igbo standpoint, then, *chi* as *akaraka* (destiny) is, for all practical purposes, the locus of personal identity and the principle of individuation.

It might be helpful to point out, at least for the sake of elaboration, that *chi/akaraka* is a "divine-human" principle. But the "divine" element here is not "over-spiritualized." To say the very least, *chi/akaraka* is not equivalent to the Christian/Western notion of the "soul," a supposedly spiritual reality often opposed to matter. Rather, *chi/akaraka* represents some sort of "fusion" of the divine and the human. It is understood that the divine element works in *cooperation* with the human element to realize set objectives – hence the famous saying, *onye kwe chi ya ekwe* (If a man says yes, his *chi* will also say yes). Armed with the philosophy of *onye kwe chi ya ekwe*, the Igbo individual takes up the challenges that life presents with every fortitude he/she could muster. This point will shortly be elaborated with the idea of *ikenga*.

In the meantime, let us further analyze this notion of c*hi/akaraka* in order to tease out its implications for individual identity and responsibility. The *chi*-principle of *onye kwe chi ya ekwe* plays out in the life of Okonkwo, the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*, who rose to community stardom by dint of diligence and positive cooperation with his *chi*. Okonkwo had inherited a heap of humiliating debts from his father, Unoka, who is a notorious never-do-well. But he vows to be the exact opposite of his father and sets out to achieve greatness. In due course, he indeed achieves greatness, taking the greatest titles of honor in the Umuofia community. As the Igbo say, "If a child washes his hands well, he would be allowed to dine with elders." Okonkwo washed his hands well and was accorded a place of honor in the community. However, his quick temper, impetuosity, arrogance, impulsiveness, and impatience with less successful people led to his disastrous end – something the Igbo would consider a negative cooperation with *chi*.[14]

The life of Okonkwo serves to make the point that Igbo people have a well-developed notion of individual responsibility, the capacity to be a co-creator of one's destiny. If this were absent, some super-human forces would have been blamed for Okonkwo's disastrous end. But we could rightly say that the *chi/akaraka* principle is ultimately a function of human cooperation. Thanks to the dynamics of the *chi/akaraka* principle, the Igbo person is neither a puppet to the gods nor the community. Just as he/she makes sure that fellow humans do not exercise a disproportionate control over his/her destiny by rejecting monarchy, he/she also ensures that even the gods do not dictate his/her life.

> But power so complete, even in the hands of chi, is abhorrent to the Igbo imagination. Therefore, the makers of proverbs went to work again, as it were, to create others that would set a limit to its exercise. Hence the well-known *Onye kwe chie ekwe*. (If a man agrees, his chi agrees.) And so, the initiative, or some of it at least, is returned to man.[15]

As could be seen, the saying, *Onye kwe chi ya ekwe*, is an epistemological device employed by the Igbo to forestall a potential tyrannical control of the divine over human destiny. Having kept humans under check, as it were, the Igbo person has also managed to keep the gods under check. So, why would this creature (i.e., the Igbo person), who is neither hindered by community nor the gods find modern ideas of individual rights incompatible with his cultural temperaments? "This kind of creature," writes Achebe, "fearing no god or man, was custom-made to grasp the opportunities, such as they were, of the white man's dispensations. And the Igbo did so with both hands."[16] The "white man's dispensation" here refers to modernity.

Besides *chi/akaraka*, *ikenga* is another notion that reinforces a remarkably "liberal" orientation among the Igbo. *Ikenga* is a ritual object that the Igbo personalizes. *Ikenga* is, in the main, a depiction of the right arm. But beneath the artistic representation of the right arm lies a philosophy of hard work and enterprise. As C. I. Ejizu calls it, it is a "ritual enactment of achievement" because it celebrates and ritualizes strength of arm and achievement.[17]

> Specifically, the physical ritual object called Ikenga stands for a supersensible being of the same name. And it manifests itself as a dynamic cosmic force essentially connected with success and achievement in any and all life's pursuits leading to enhanced status and distinction in one's society and a sure hope of a blissful existence in the afterlife as a glorified ancestor. This is the primary thrust and signal import of Ikenga symbolism, the preeminent motif underlying its cult and a central theme of its major iconographic adornments.[18]

When we pause a bit to reflect on the *ikenga* symbolism, we quickly realize that the divine and human element required for success are fused in one ritual object – the *ikenga*. The depiction of the right arm is a pointer to the fact that it is by the strength of one's arm, commitment to crafts, and the agricultural enterprise that the individual constructs his/her destiny. The significance of *ikenga* for the argument I have been developing is that it is a feature of Igbo thought which has furnished the "liberal" temperament that balances the force of community. Its stress on diligence provides an incentive for personal development. A culture that reserves a place for titles (like the *nze*, *ozo*, and *ichie*),[19] based on personal merit and not on accidents of birth as in hereditary monarchies, is surely compatible with modern imaginaries. Admittedly, *ikenga* partly makes some appeal to the "divine," but this has not undermined the complementary human aspect.

Today, the Igbo person may have dropped the ritual object, but the very spirit of enterprise has accompanied him/her to modernity. Ejizu's submission can hardly be controverted:

> But the concept together with the key ideas, values and some other features closely associated with Ikenga symbolism have persisted in Igbo consciousness. These continue to pervade and foster certain fundamental attitudes of the people towards life, as well as underlie certain significant development in contemporary Igbo society. The notions of individual

> enterprise, determination, and achievement are still the hallmarks of the Igbo personality.[20]

Armed with the concept of individuality that *chi/akaraka* represents, the spirit of enterprise that *ikenga* provides and the sense of solidarity that community fosters, it makes sense to think that the Igbo could evolve a modern society that integrates a commendable blend/balance of liberal and communitarian ideals, exaggerating neither the liberal nor the communitarian strain.[21]

Admittedly, there exist a lot of African cultures that do not (or did not), for one reason or the other, develop a principle of individuation. In this case, one would expect that their variant of African communitarianism would be rather "excessive." It takes a reasonably developed principle of individuation to allow individual rights and destinies. But the Igbo possess it, as embodied in the concepts of *chi/akaraka* and *ikenga*. Therefore, one could rightly argue that the preservation of individuality on the part of the Igbo enables talk about individual rights, and the very idea of individual destinies goes with social practices that allow their realization. In Chapter 4, I pointed out a number of features, such as absence of monarchies and centralized authorities, that differentiate the Igbo from their neighbors. This preservation of individuality within the community milieu might yet be another distinctive feature of the Igbo culture.

So far, I have referred to aspects of Igbo worldview that support the notion of individuality. But it is one thing to possess a notion of individuality and yet another thing to ascribe certain rights and liberties to this individual. Drawing on reliable scholarship on Igbo history and society, therefore, I argue the point that personal rights and liberties are not stifled under a supposedly overbearing influence of community. Needless to say, the community dimension is not thereby undermined, as the copious evidence assembled in the previous chapter testifies.

Individual Rights and Liberties: More Attestations

Thanks to reliable scholarship that has emerged in recent years, especially from scholars of Igbo origin, it is now possible to correct some misrepresentations on Igbo premodern history and society. Some writings on the Igbo, especially by Western anthropologists, impute too much "collectivism" to the Igbo (a collectivism that had virtually no place for the individual), while others facilely assume that concept of rights was totally alien to the Igbo (and Africans in general) before the coming of the white man.

But in an interesting piece titled, "Neo-liberal Tradition in Pre-Colonial Igbo Societies," R. C. Njoku makes a compelling case to the effect that such "liberal" elements as pursuit of individual means and ends, rights, free enterprise, civil society were present in the Igbo past and have continued to flourish in the present. He points to the republican political culture of the Igbo and their stress on decentralization of power.[22] All this, according to him, dovetails with modern liberal ideals.

> Since the rise of African nationalist historiography in the 1950s, further objective assessment of the so-called "primitive" Igbo indigenous institutions and

> practices have shown that the social systems favorably compare with those propelling the recent transformations on the global stage . . . Igbo indigenous institutions, in many ways, reflect a miniature version of the evolving global quest for capitalism, liberalization and political decentralization.[23]

In the text quoted here, Njoku challenges the assumption that cultures that are derogatorily called "primitive" would necessarily be at loggerheads with modernity. Furthermore, he very much corroborates my earlier submission to the effect that *ikenga* represents the Igbo philosophy of enterprise and individual pursuit of excellence. On *ikenga*, he writes:

> The *Ikenga* institution helped to entrench and emphasize the peculiarity of individualism and free enterprise with the understanding that success and failure is a function of individual efforts and divine blessings. In other words, Ikenga helped to generate the healthy competition for which the pre-colonial Igbo were widely known. The Ikenga cult helped to underline in the Igbo culture that individuals were the architects of their own destinies and that they should not attribute too much to fate or the support of their families and lineages . . . In essence, the *Ikenga* is regarded as a spiritual alter, self-image or personality, and not necessarily an art.[24]

The point that the Igbo do not "attribute too much to fate or the support of their families and lineages" is consistent with my earlier claim that the Igbo try to balance the emphasis on individual and community. It does not amount to a denial of the ever-present support of family and kinsmen. Rather, it points to the fact that the Igbo person does not rely on community to an extent that incapacitates him/her. On this score, V. C. Uchendu notes that "Igbo individualism is not a 'rugged' individualism; it is individualism rooted in group solidarity."[25] One might as well complement this statement by saying that Igbo communal living is not "rugged," but one that allows the individual to flourish. And the *ikenga* philosophy is one of those indigenous resources that help to maintain this balance. This is the balance that could very much coexist with or even shape liberal ideals.

Two points that stood out when I discussed Igbo political history in the preceding chapter were Igbo republicanism and their disavowal of centralization of authority. Since that chapter dealt with them in detail, I need not repeat those historical facts. But I wish to state here that these features of Igbo premodern politics are particularly intriguing if one considers that the Igbo are surrounded by neighbors who practiced monarchies and different forms of political centralization. The peculiarity of the Igbo in this regard and their ability to reasonably resist political influences from their neighbors never ceases to amaze scholars. "Unlike the Hausa/Fulani he [the Igbo man] was unhindered . . . and unlike the Yoruba he was unhampered by traditional hierarchies,"[26] writes Achebe. On these grounds, Achebe thinks that the Igbo man is "custom-made" for the "white man's dispensations" – modernity.[27]

What Achebe captures in the catchy term "custom-made" for modernity is that Igbo extant political epistemologies makes for the flourishing of rights, liberties, and individual enterprise which are important modern values. I agree with Achebe.

Why would a people with a republican culture averse to all shades of dictatorship, who possess a principle of individuation in the form of *chi/akaraka* and a philosophy of enterprise (*ikenga*), who managed to keep the gods under check, now subject themselves to a supposed collectivizing "dictatorship" of community? My punchline is that the misgivings that the Igbo community would be "dictatorial" are quite unfounded. If we take the foregoing contentions seriously, then the Igbo are indeed "custom-made" for modernity, to use Achebe's expression.

If we turn to the concept of individual "rights," it is also noteworthy that the extant principle of individuation embodied in *chi/akaraka* carries with it the notion of individual rights. Perhaps this partly explains why the British had a tougher time dealing with the Igbo than with their neighbors. The reason might be that British colonizing practices, which sometimes involved forms of collectivization, often came in conflict with Igbo sensibilities about rights. An event that stood out in Igbo colonial history was the Aba Women Riot where Igbo women rose up against various forms of abuse and infringement by British colonialists and their local representatives.

Of course, a fight against injustice is not exactly the same as demanding *rights*, properly so-called. But those women indeed understood what was at stake, namely their *rights*. In a work with an intriguing title, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, the Igbo Feminist scholar, Ifi Amadiume, sets out to challenge the prevalent prejudice among scholars that African women were oppressed, miserable creatures with no rights in the precolonial times. Basing her argument on an Igbo community, Amadiume demonstrates the considerable powers and rights the womenfolk enjoyed in the precolonial Igbo society, attributing the decline of these powers and rights to structures and influences introduced by European colonialists who came into Africa with the patriarchal mentality prevalent in Europe at the time.[28] How then would a supposedly docile and "right-less" Igbo woman press demands for her rights in such an unequivocal manner at that juncture of colonial history if she had no concept of rights and was not already enjoying it in the pre-British era?

In any case, a number of those Aba women lost their lives in the frantic attempts by the British to quell the riots, but they succeeded in making their voices heard. This informed the setting up of commissions of inquiry and the funding of anthropological research aimed at understanding the indigenous political sensibilities of the Igbo woman and their notions of rights.

The explanation I gave in the previous chapter regarding the status and rights of *umundom* and *umuada* (the womenfolk) suffices to make the point that the Igbo possess a concept of rights compatible with liberal ideals. Commenting on the Aba Women's Riot vis-à-vis the question of rights, Njoku reinforces this argument:

> While women's rights have become an issue for development across the world today, pre-colonial Igbo women had enjoyed culturally sanctioned rights. Politically Igbo women exclusively managed their own affairs as well as participated, in matters affecting the entire kinship or village group. Writing about the Igbo decision-making process in 1789, Equiano explains that it was "separated into four divisions" comprising "the married men,

> the married women, the young men and the maidens." While this division allowed women the right to "self-determination," married women occupied a special position in the fabric of the culture and customs. Infringements on these rights by the colonial state of course explain the main reason Igbo women took on the colonial authorities in series of riots that dogged the colonial period including the famous Aba Women's Riot of 1929/1930.[29]

That Njoku supports his claims with the accounts of Olaudah Equiano,[30] published as far back as 1789, lends more credence to the argument.

The last issue I wish to explore in this section is Igbo receptivity to change. This is of particular importance because this positive attitude to change belongs to the cluster of values that is called "modern." While the Igbo, on the one hand, clashed with colonial officials when their rights were infringed upon, they, on the other hand, demonstrate a remarkable enthusiasm when it comes to grabbing what modern life offers, especially in education and lifestyle. Reliable sources, even from Western scholars, attest to this. Of the many ethnicities in Africa, the renowned anthropologist, Simon Ottenberg, compares the Igbo only to the Kikuyu of Kenya in terms of receptivity to change. But he singles the Igbo out as being way more receptive than the Kikuyu in this respect: "Both share many similarities . . . Both have reacted to direct European contact by migration to urban areas, rapid assimilation into jobs under Europeans, strong demands for education and political freedom."[31] But while the Kikuyu encountered a number of challenges in their enthusiasm to modernize,

> this has not occurred in the Ibo country. The British have rarely for long blocked Ibo aspirations in the direction of culture change, greater control over their own affairs, and advancement toward higher, more influential positions in the colonial administration.[32]

The chief explanation for this is that the Igbo culture is competitive, as it places a high premium on achievement and merit, based on the *ikenga* philosophy. The *ikenga* philosophy indeed belongs to the "important ideological factor" that V. C. Uchendu speaks of:

> A people who fear change and are ideologically opposed to experimentation might not act in the same way . . . The Igbo believe that change is necessary for the realization of their long-term goals. Whatever improves the individual's and the community's status is acceptable to the Igbo.[33]

As Achebe has also observed, "The Igbo culture, being receptive to change, individualistic, and highly competitive, gave the Igbo man an unquestioned advantage over his compatriots in securing credentials for advancement in Nigerian colonial society."[34]

Soon the inspiration for enterprise swiftly changed from the pursuit of traditional titles to the pursuit of Western education and the opportunities it offers. But the admirably solidaristic angle to this pursuit is that villages or lineages (depending

on level of affinity) pool resources to sponsor their bright children in education.[35] Communities take pride in and try to outcompete each other in the number of educated persons they have. People contribute money to attract schools, post offices, and other modern amenities to their communities. In response to the demands of modernity on the community, improvement unions and "human investments" have become part of the "self-help" progressive moves considered by the Igbo as "helping the town to get up."[36] This trend has continued to this day in the face of the failure of the state to provide adequate amenities.

To sum up this section, I reiterate the point that Igbo solidarity is relevant for modern contexts. Its underpinnings in the *sense of interconnectedness*, manifesting itself in the notion that the individual and community co-constitute each other, helps to secure a balance between individual good on the one hand and community good on the other hand. The force of community is counterbalanced by the resources of *chi/akaraka* as the principle of individuation and *ikenga* as the philosophy of individual enterprise. Community good itself is already warranted and underpinned by shared communal life, worldview, norms, and customs. Igbo receptivity to change, as attested to by countless scholarship, draws from the aforementioned cultural resources. And all these make the Igbo "custom-made" for modernity, to use Achebe's beautiful metaphor.

Insights From Habermas and Taylor

Having discussed the Igbo standpoint, it is important at this juncture to explore the insights of two important Western theorists discussed in Chapter 2 – Habermas and Taylor – on themes around self, community, nation, state, and solidarity. This will form the basis of a conversation aimed at teasing out the nuances in each of the frameworks – and ultimately the distinctness of the Igbo standpoint.

Habermas: Self, Nation, and State

To understand Habermas' view of the self vis-a-vis society, it must be placed in the context of his analysis of individuation through socialization, as well as his ideas about nation, state, and citizenship.

Individuation Through Socialization

Habermas relies on the thoughts of George Herbert Mead to analyze the dynamics of individuation through socialization. As I see it, his attempt to resolve the age-old question of the status of the individual vis-a-vis society in the history of social theory furnishes the very motivation to broach this topic. So, he inserts himself in the long history of intellectual engagement with the individual-community (society) conundrum. Though the previous attempts are not without some merits, he thinks that they could not break loose from what he derogatorily refers to as the "philosophy of the subject" or the "philosophy of consciousness," which proceeds from the premises of a spontaneously acting subject/consciousness.

But he considers G. H. Mead quite an exception, for Mead initiates the "only promising attempt to grasp the entire significance of social individualization in concepts."[37] In his view, the most invaluable element inaugurated by Mead is the role of language/communication in the constitution of the self. In the *Theory of Communicative Action II*, he gives Mead the credit of introducing this "communication-theoretic foundation" which is considered a "paradigm shift."[38] For Mead recognizes that "original self-consciousness is not a phenomenon inherent in the subject but one that is communicatively generated."[39] To be sure, Mead had made an earlier but unsuccessful attempt to reflexively arrive at some form of socially constituted self through the self-objectification of an isolated actor.[40] The breakthrough only came with the transition to the communicative paradigm of symbolically mediated interaction. As Mead writes:

> The "me" casts off the reifying gaze, however, as soon as the subject appears not in the role of an *observer* but in that of a *speaker* and, from the social perspective of a hearer encountering him in dialogue, learns to see and to understand himself as the alter ego of another ego.[41]

Habermas applauds this move.

How precisely does self-constitution happen under the new communicative paradigm? How does Habermas theorize the formation of what could be called the "self," drawing on the foundation laid by Mead? Citing Mead in approval, Habermas thinks that the normatively generalized behavioral expectations, derived from the forms of life and institutions of a particular society, become "anchored within the acting subject through more or less internalized social controls."[42] In other words, this is a mechanism of internalization of social values and expectations. The "me" thus becomes a "'generalized other,' i.e., as the behavioral expectations of one's social surroundings that have, as it were, migrated into the person."[43] It is a process Mead refers to as "taking the perspective of the other,"[44] upon which the self relies for its constitution. As Mead posits – and Habermas agrees with this – the "generalized other" in the subject's experience "provides him with a self."[45]

The account presented so far gives the impression that the subject is nothing over and above society in a manner that might preclude dissent, independent will, autonomy, and even eccentricity. So, how might individuation be accounted for?

Habermas insists that, the fact of social constitution of the subject as described earlier does not preclude but rather entails individuation, and autonomy can be "imputed" to it.[46] He grounds this idea of the individual on the very nature of the linguistic medium on which subjectivity is constituted:

> The individuation effected by the linguistically mediated process of socialization is explained by linguistic medium itself. It belongs to the logic of the use of the personal pronouns . . . that this speaker cannot *in actu* rid himself of his irreplaceability, cannot take refuge in the anonymity of the third person, but must lay claim to recognition as an individuated being.[47]

In other words, the fact that language is the medium of self-constitution guarantees that the subject is not obliterated in anonymity. The use of language makes the "selfhood" of the speaker undeniable. The idea of individuation finds support in Mead who suggests that each individual "slices the events of the community life that are common to all from a different angle from that of any other individual."[48] If the self is formed by the internalization of socially generated values, then no two individuals would conceivably process and internalize these values exactly the same way.

In light of the foregoing, Habermas thinks that individuation and socialization are not in conflict with each other but are rather complementary. He thus speaks of the "interlacing of individuation and socialization."[49] Basing his claim on Mead, he affirms that "the process of socialization is at the same time one of individuation."[50] And the explanation for this claim points to the complementarity between socialization and individuation, namely that the subjective world of experience "takes shape complementary to the construction of a common social world."[51]

At the background of this whole discussion on individuation through socialization is the important concept of the lifeworld. The lifeworld is composed of the pre-theoretical, taken-for-granted, quotidian elements that form the basis of our communicative interaction which, in turn, helps to feed and regenerate the lifeworld. When Habermas speaks of the internalization of social values and institution in self-constitution, he is basically pointing to a common pool of lifeworld resources of a society. The primacy of communicative interaction over strategic interaction is explainable from the fact of the self being socially constituted. The former is in fact the condition of possibility for the latter because those acting strategically must at least proceed from some preliminary or momentary common understanding afforded by a shared lifeworld. It is not without reason that Habermas suggests that the communicative "use of language with an orientation to reaching understanding is the original mode of language use,"[52] upon which all instrumental use of language could only be "parasitic." The upshot of all this is that, more than anything else, humans are socially constituted by lifeworld symbolic resources.

National Identity, State, and Citizenship

Habermas' treatment of the questions of national identity, state, and citizenship will shed light on his conception of modern community and solidarity. His treatment of these question cuts across a number of his writings. I pick out the most salient.

He develops a "genealogical" account of the modern constitutional state that follows a long trajectory from "nation" through "nation-state" to the constitutional state.[53] The term "nation," according to him, conveys a sense of a "political community shaped by common descent, or at least by a common language, culture, and history. A people becomes a 'nation' in this historical sense only in the concrete form of a particular form of life."[54] Notice that "nation" as used here has already acquired the connotation of a "political community." But he also acknowledges an earlier, "pre-political" sense of the term, pointing out that it was with the French

Revolution that the term definitively "transformed from a pre-political quantity into a constitutive feature of the political identity of the citizens of a democratic polity."[55] In turn, Habermas thinks of the state as a "concrete legal community,"[56] which exercises both "internal and external sovereignty" over a territory, its citizens, bound by a given set of positive laws.[57]

Now, Habermas thinks that the political form of the "nation-state" has become the dominant political formation in modern times, inspired by the French Revolution. The stability of the nation-state form owes largely to the incorporation of the best features of "nation" and "state" – the sense of collective identity being married to notions of self-determination and sovereignty.[58] Though the nation-state is "the first truly modern form of collective identity,"[59] it should give way to a "constitutional state" (or "democratic constitutional state" as he sometimes calls it), which gives full play to citizenship and drastically minimizes the threat of "nationalism."

As I see it, Habermas is *wary* of any political formation supported exclusively by nationalistic sentiments. He contends that "Nationalism appeals without any justification to the concept of solidarity" whose "credit of trust . . . is certainly less robust."[60] And in *The Inclusion of the Other*, he posits:

> The tension between the universalism of an egalitarian legal community and the particularism of a community united by historical destiny is built into the very concept of the national state. This ambivalence remains harmless as long as a cosmopolitan understanding of the nation of citizens is accorded priority over an ethnocentric interpretation of the nation as in a permanent state of war. Only a non-naturalistic concept of the nation can be combined seamlessly with the universalistic self-understanding of the democratic constitutional state.[61]

So, his preference for the constitutional state and his robust vision of supranational political arrangements may be seen in the light of the suspicion he has over nationalism. "Nation of citizens" points to the constitutional state and "cosmopolitan" refers to the supranational reality he envisions.

In a constitutional state, emphasis is placed on citizenship rather than historical or national ties. The constitution becomes the rallying point, and all who are bound by the constitution that embodies the will of the citizen form a people, a "community" of sorts. In fact, he makes it clear that, "democratic citizenship need not be rooted in the national identity of a people. However, regardless of the diversity of different cultural forms of life, it does require that every citizen be socialized into a common political culture."[62] Hence, he recommends "constitutional patriotism" over nationalistic patriotism, considering the former more open to cosmopolitanism than the latter. "Constitutional patriotism" becomes the case when citizens "make the principles of the constitution their own not merely in an abstract sense but also in the concrete historical context of their respective national histories."[63] He somewhat tries to preempt the objection that the constitution alone might not generate as much bond as historical and cultural affinities by suggesting that the political culture of a country "crystallizes" around the constitution. He suggests,

moreover, that there is no better way of coping with modern realities of globalization and immigration than making the constitution the basis of citizenship and solidarity.[64]

Only the idea of the constitutional state can support a political supranational formation that de-emphasizes nationalistic sentiments. Habermas shows so much interest in the vision of the "European community" that transcends nation-state borders, using the European Union as a case study for theorizing the supranational vision. He is aware that supranationalism is quite an ambitious vision, but he is quite sure that the "constitutionalization" of citizenship is the best way to go about it because it mutes the nationalistic tendency. Hence, he contends that the "transnationalization of democracy is overdue."[65] He recognizes the possibility of a solidarity deficit in a supranational order but insists that civic solidarity must not be reduced to the nationalistic sentiments.[66] The challenges notwithstanding, he thinks that Europe and indeed the modern world must continue to push for greater political integration. "Constitutional patriotism" not only supports this supranational project, but it is also capable of addressing the challenges presented by immigration, multiculturalism, and globalization.

Taylor's "Communitarian" Ideas

Charles Taylor's "communitarian" ideas are spread through much of his writings. To make for a more orderly and thematic presentation, it would be helpful to first consider his intervention in the famous liberal-communitarian debate, after which we delve more properly into his insights on the social constitution of the self.

Taylor's Intervention in the Liberal-Communitarian Debate

Taylor throws himself into the fray of the famous "liberal versus communitarian debate," a venture by which he not only elaborates his "communitarian" leanings but also introduces important nuances that would help shape any future debate.

An element Taylor introduces that I consider really pivotal is the distinction between the "ontological" level and the "advocacy" level in the debate. He thinks that the confusion and apparent lack of focus – what he calls "cross-purposes" – among scholars have arisen because they have "inadequately appreciated" the distinctness and the connection between these two levels.[67] The ontological level addresses questions of community, identity, and the social constitution of the self. As it were, it focuses more on "how things really stand" vis-a-vis the self and society; it is a social ontology. The "advocacy" level feeds off the ontological level by delving into normative issues of how to conceive social good against the backdrop of individual good. It refers to the normative stance, recommendation, or policy one adopts as a result of the basic social ontology one operates with. Taylor insists that, though the two levels interact, their basic distinction must not be missed: "Taking an ontological position doesn't amount to advocating something, but at the same time, the ontological does help to define the option it is meaningful to support by advocacy."[68]

The ontological sphere corresponds with the determination as to whether one is an atomist or a holist. On the one hand, atomism conceives of society as made up of essentially atomic individuals aggregated into a loose, non-binding whole called society. From the atomist standpoint, then, society is a fragmented structure. On the other hand, holism focuses more on the social whole than on individuals. It does not deny that individuals are distinct but rather places a far greater emphasis on the common, hardly differentiated social whole. Socio-ontological atomism presumably corresponds to individualism at the normative ("advocacy") domain and socio-ontological holism supposedly corresponds to "collectivist" ideas at the normative ("advocacy") domain.

Here is the crucial point that, in my view, defines the rest of Taylor's intervention – the idea that holism at the ontological level is compatible with liberal tenets. This means that someone could subscribe to holism and still be an advocate of the liberal ideals of individual rights and freedoms. He would even insist – and this is the position he defends – that "procedural liberalism" relies on notions of a common good that cannot be supplied by ontological atomism. On this note, one of the major problems with scholars on the "liberal" side of the spectrum is that they fail to see that the recognition of the mutual nexus between individuals in society does not undermine talk of individual rights and freedoms. This failure owes largely to what he derisively refers to as the "atomic prejudice" that took shape among scholars of the Anglo-Saxon philosophical culture.[69] This "atomic prejudice" involves a "vision of society as in some sense constituted by individuals for the fulfillment of ends which were primarily individual."[70] These constituent individuals are defined almost exclusively by rights.

It might be helpful, he suggests, to scrap the "liberal" and "communitarian" labels to enable scholars see more clearly:

> The portmanteau terms "liberal" and "communitarian" will probably have to be scrapped before we can get over this, because they carry the implication that there is only one issue here, or that your position on one determines what you hold on the other . . . It is astonishing that anyone should read a defense of holism as entailing an advocacy of collectivism.[71]

How precisely would a sense of community and the common good derived from holism support liberal ideals of individual rights and liberties? To address this question, Taylors turns to the analysis of the idea and practice of "republicanism" with a view to showing how it is indispensable for procedural liberalism. Republicanism is founded on a certain sense of common good and shared fate possessed by a people. Solidarity and patriotism are the operative republican terms. Taylor insists that such republican ideals could only be supported by something much more than ontological atomism.

> The very definition of a republican regime as classically understood requires an ontology different from atomism, falling outside atomism-infected common sense. It requires that we probe the relations of identity and community

> and distinguish the different possibilities, in particular the possible place of we-identities as against merely convergent I-identities, and the consequent role of common as against convergent goods.[72]

Republicanism indeed requires a kind of we-identity, which cannot be equated with a sum-total of "I-identities."

It is thereupon contended that the liberal values of rights and liberties *require* a republican form of solidarity. A corollary to this claim is that republicanism is the condition of possibility for liberal democracies because it supplies the patriotic motivations to insist upon the rights and liberties of compatriots, whose fates and destinies are largely interwoven. This informs the major criticism Taylor levels against "procedural liberalism" (which pretends to operate with little or no notion of the common good), a criticism to the effect that it is "non-viable," that is, impracticable: "A free society, which thus needs to rely on a strong spontaneous allegiance from its members, is eschewing the indispensable basis of this: strong citizen identification around a sense of common good – what I have been calling patriotism."[73] It should be recalled that Habermas is suspicious of "patriotism" on the ground that it could promote an exclusivist nationalism. I shall discuss this point in detail in the conversation that will be set up in the next section. But suffice it in the meantime to say that Taylor recognizes the risk of republican patriotism sliding into nationalism, but this does not take away the fact that liberalism depends upon patriotic solidarity for its viability.

A famous example he provides in this regard is the public outrage that accompanied the Watergate scandal, an outrage that eventually forced a sitting President of the United States to resign for abusing his office. Referring to this, Taylor writes that the "capacity of the citizenry to respond with outrage to this kind of abuse is an important bulwark of freedom in modern society."[74] And he believes that the source of this shared sense of indignation is republican patriotism, American people seeing that the very rights they hold dear and stand for as a people is being threatened. They were outraged because the shared values of rights, freedom, and self-rule that "America" represents for them were slipping away. Atomist sources such as egoism, self-interest, and even altruism could not have generated such outrage, in Taylor's estimation.[75]

In recognizing the danger of republican patriotism sliding into nationalism, Taylor clarifies that he does not refer to the purported "patriotism" of the Nazi regime, military junta, and all such authoritarian regimes. To be sure, he speaks of a situation, like in the American case, where a "free society requires a patriotism, one whose core shared value is freedom."[76] To those who argue that republican patriotism is outdated, he retorts that it is still relevant to the modern world. So, he writes:

> Full participation in self-rule means . . . to have some part in forming a ruling consensus, with which one can identify along with others. To rule and be ruled in turn means that at least some of the time the governors can be "us," not always "them."[77]

As could be seen from the foregoing intervention in the liberal-communitarian debate, Taylor rejects ontological atomism; he subscribes to a notion of the self that is socially constituted. To elaborate more on this notion of the self, I shall draw on a work that might rightly be called his opus magnum, *Sources of the Self*.

Self, Community, and Identity

In the *Sources of the Self*, Taylor sets out to explore the various "sources" of modern identity. This venture would entail a long history of social, philosophical, literary, and cultural factors that helped to shape the self-image of the modern person.

Taylor thinks that the best way to proceed is to first understand what it means to be a "self." On this note, he grounds the understanding of the self in morality. "Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes,"[78] he notes. For Taylor, therefore, an investigation into the self is invariably an investigation into a morally defined selfhood. This point is crucial for our purposes because, as we shall see, a morally defined selfhood is a socially defined selfhood. The good can only be socially defined.

In this attempt to define the self morally, Taylor finds it helpful to employ *spatial* metaphors. Such metaphors as "background picture," "horizon," belong to what Taylor calls the "inescapable framework" within which the self must be situated to make sense of itself. So, to that all-important question "who am I?" one does not need to indulge in a futile exercise of tracing one's genealogy or ancestry. Rather,

> To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.[79]

What Taylor is saying here is that when one defines himself as, say, a Catholic or Igbo, one is not only pointing to one's belongingness to these classifications but also suggesting that this belongingness determines where on stands on questions of what is good or valuable. In other words, it constitutes a moral framework or horizon within which one defines oneself. "To know who you are is to be oriented in a moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad,"[80] Taylor avers.

Given this spatial factor in the characterization of a morally defined identity, all forms of identity crisis, especially in the modern world, are squarely a case of disorientation. To be disoriented is simply to lose one's horizon, one's framework – indeed one's location/stand in the moral space. It is a wandering away from the moral community from which one defines the good. Moral disorientation is one of the symptoms of modern atomism or fragmentation of which Taylor laments in *The Malaise of Modernity*: "The danger is . . . fragmentation . . . Fragmentation arises when people come to see themselves more and more atomistically, otherwise put, as less and less bound to their fellow citizens in common projects and allegiances."[81] It could be diagnosed as a "fractured horizon."[82]

He brings in the element of language to substantiate his submissions on a socially constituted self. The sense of self is something deep and complex, formed by a cluster of social realities in which language plays a crucial role.

> My self-definition is understood as an answer to the question Who I am. And this question finds its original sense in the interchange of speakers. I find who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out.[83]

The importance of language lies in the nature of language itself. This is the reason Taylor posits that the "nature of our language and the fundamental dependence of our thought on language makes interlocution . . . inescapable for us."[84] Language (interlocution) is the domain of the social. In this respect, he writes:

> A language only exists and is maintained within a language community. And this indicates another crucial feature of a self. One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround him.[85]

Since the good is conceived and expressed in a language community, and the sense of the good (morality) is what defines the self, then it follows that the self is defined in and through language. Taylor sees the link between the self, the good, and language as a fact of life.

This fact of life can only be denied or underestimated under the influence of modern atomism. Modern culture has promoted a species of individualism whereby the self declares his/her "independence from the web of interlocution which have originally formed him/her, or at least neutralizing them."[86] Sometimes the lure for individualism presents itself in the form of the modern quest for "authenticity,"[87] but Taylor insists that declaring "independence" from our social "web of interlocution" could not possibly be a way of achieving the desired "authenticity." Rather, it makes it ever more elusive, such that we have paradoxically ended up as a society of mere conformists.[88] The attempt to bracket out "history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity" in the quest for "authenticity" is wrong-headed, for authenticity is not the "enemy" of demands that emanate from beyond the self but rather "supposes" such demands.[89] As a matter of fact, authenticity cannot be achieved narcissistically but rather by a recognition that we are integrally connected to a wider whole.[90]

Having sufficiently presented the thoughts of the Igbo, Habermas, and Taylor on the self vis-a-vis society, the ground is now well prepared for a conversation between the three.

A Conversation

This conversation will underline the points of convergence and divergence, the nuances, as well as the implications these ideas of self vis-a-vis society/community

have for the notion and practice of solidarity (i.e., the extent to which each might constitute a resource for solidarity) in our world today.

A remarkable common ground shared by Habermas, Taylor, and the Igbo (i.e., scholarship on Igbo solidarity) is the idea that the self is socially constituted. This idea may have been couched in different theoretical idioms, but this does not obscure the essential point that runs through the three. In Habermas, it takes on the form of individuation through socialization. Habermas, as we earlier saw, speaks of individuation and socialization as "interlacing,"[91] a process involving the interiorization of social norms and expectations by which "the ego finds its way to itself only along a detour way of others."[92]

The notion of a socially constituted self is no less present in Taylor and the Igbo, for individual identity is inextricably tied to that of the community. For Taylor, the self is morally defined. And, because the "good" belongs to the community, the individual who is defined by this "good" is invariably defined by the community. Community thus becomes the "horizon," the "framework," in Taylor's parlance, in which individual identity is located. For the Igbo, in turn, the self and the community co-constitute each other, as the thesis of co-constitutiveness elaborated earlier has shown. The individual, who "recreates" the community upon his/her arrival is at the same time formed by the norms and values of the community. His/her individuality is not obliterated because he/she possesses an unrepeatably unique *chi/akaraka*, but the community plays an essential role in the enactment and shaping of the *chi/akaraka principle*.

Irrespective of the conceptual tools employed, the thread that runs through Habermas, Taylor, and the Igbo is this recognition that the self is socially defined.

In line with this shared notion of a socially defined self is the vital role played by language. Habermas, Taylor, and the Igbo accord an important place to language in this respect – and this is yet another point of convergence. For instance, when Habermas speaks of the social world, he refers unmistakably to a social world where social norms and values are mediated in communicative practices drawn from the lifeworld. Self-consciousness is "communicatively generated" insofar as it "forms itself on the path from without to within, through the symbolically mediated relation to a partner in interaction."[93] In like manner, Taylor cannot overemphasize the role played by language. The moral values that define the identity of the individual belong to a community of speakers:

> We first learn our languages of moral and spiritual discernment by being brought into an ongoing conversation . . . The meanings that the key words first had for me are the meanings they have for *us* . . . So, I can only learn what anger, love, anxiety . . . are through my and others' experience of these beings for us, in some common space.[94]

In the Igbo world, language is a medium through which community defines the good and the bad. The Igbo language itself is structured in such a way that good (*mma*) and bad (*njo*) conveys the exact meaning as beautiful and ugly, respectively. In other words, there are no separate words for the good and the beautiful – the word, *mma*, represents the two. Similarly, *njo* stands for both bad and ugly. To the Igbo,

therefore, morality is inextricably tied to the aesthetic grasp of the world. By means of the Igbo language, the Igbo create a world, a social/moral world which roughly corresponds to the aesthetic world in which individuals in a community live and have their being. To say that Igbo individuals live and have their being in a social world structured by the Igbo language is to recognize the foundational role of the Igbo language in the socialization of individuals. This foundational role of language no doubt forms part of Igbo self-understanding, as expressed in Igbo pithy sayings that bind the individual and the social world by means of speech (*okwu*). The Igbo may not have developed this thought in "rarefied" theoretical idioms as found in Habermas and Taylor; yet it most assuredly forms part of Igbo self-understanding.

It may be observed that the points of convergence occur at the "socio-ontological" level, involving questions of structure of society and patterns of self-constitution from the matrix of society. But things become more nuanced as soon as we go beyond the socio-ontological level into questions of normative commitments, social solidarity, and relationships that could follow from basic socio-ontology. Even at the "ontological" level involving the identity of self/individual, there are important elements present in the Igbo case that are quite absent in both Habermas and Taylor. But these will be explored down the line. In the meantime, let us focus on the nuances present at what I might call the "second-order" level. At this level belongs talk about solidarity, patriotism, and citizenship.

Habermas is much more suspicious of solidarity based on identification with concrete historical communities than Taylor (and the Igbo, as a matter of fact). Put differently, Habermas subscribes more to a universalized form of identity and solidarity and less to particularistic commitments. His ideas in this regard may be summed up under the notion of "constitutional patriotism," which, as we have seen earlier, makes a demand for solidarity and patriotism based on "universalist constitutional principles"[95] and not on affinity to historical entities like nation or tribe. By placing patriotism beyond ties to historical communities and similar forms of identification, Habermas hopes to obviate the dangers of nationalistic intolerance and create the conditions for a more cosmopolitan modernity that supposedly lives up to the reality of modern migration patterns. He suggests that modernity itself has already created a more or less "universalized" form of ego-identity that is now quite incompatible with ego-identity in traditional societies, and this requires a corresponding kind of universalized patriotism and solidarity.[96]

But is it feasible or practicable to generate such a universalized form of solidarity, with little or no place for particularistic affinities? If it is indeed possible to produce such kind of solidarity, would it be generated in a sufficient quantity that might sustain modern political realities? Is Habermas' universalized patriotism/solidarity in any way dependent on some form of particularistic affinities to historical communities, no matter how subtle or unnoticed this might be? Addressing these questions, I believe, will help underline the nuances in Habermas and Taylor.

While Habermas is *wary* of solidarity and patriotism attached to historical communities, Taylor is much *more favorable* to it, and even considers such particularistic forms a condition of possibility for constitutional/universalistic patriotism. Taylor insists that modern constitutional states still have to "rely on a

strong spontaneous allegiance from its members," for "strong citizen identification around a sense of common good" is the "indispensable basis" for such a modern state.[97] Republicanism represents this sense of identification, shared destiny, and allegiance to the common good of a historical community, for example, a nation. Such republican sentiments could be, and has indeed been, deployed to defend rights and freedoms in modern society. Therefore, Taylor defends the "continued relevance of the republican thesis"[98] to the modern world, whereas Habermas finds this republican species of solidarity/patriotism rather outdated, as he proposes forms of supranational, universalistic, constitutional solidarity/patriotism. Indeed, this is one remarkable difference between Habermas and Taylor on this score.

Of course, there are overlapping areas in their positions. For instance, Taylor acknowledges the dangers of republicanism degenerating into nationalism and falling into the abusive hands of dictators,[99] and Habermas expresses some misgivings and uses "cautiously optimistic extrapolations"[100] on the feasibility of a supranational European citizenship. Yet I think it is not difficult to tell their default positions: Habermas endorses constitutional (universalistic) solidarity, while Taylor is inclined towards republican solidarity/patriotism.

Like Taylor, I subscribe to the view that the republican solidarity (with the associated notions of common good, shared destiny, and shared identity) is indispensable for modern politics. This is basically the Igbo standpoint. To substantiate this idea of the indispensability of republican particularistic sentiments, I draw on an interesting critique of Habermas' "constitutional patriotism" by Patchen Markell.

In the essay "Making Affect Safe for Democracy?", Markell challenges the pretentions in Habermas (and indeed scholars with similar viewpoints) of doing away with republican sentiments ("affects" as he calls it) in the quest for "civic nationalism." He accuses Habermas of employing a "strategy of redirection": "Such theoretical deployment of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism represents what I call the *strategy of redirection*. This strategy claims to render affect safe for liberal democracies by redirecting our attachment and sentiment from one subset of objects (the "ethnic") to another subset of objects (the "civic")."[101] But this "strategy of redirection" is not only wrong-headed but also tends to deny the fact that so-called "civic," universalistic principles are parasitic upon particularistic affinities to historical institutions and cultures. Hence, Markell makes this submission which might be considered his key claim:

> I argue that the strategy of redirection rests on a misleading picture of the dynamics of political affect and, in particular, of the relationship between affect and the universal principles that supposedly are represented by the civic. The project of making affect safe for liberal democracy, I claim, founders on the troubling fact that even the reproduction of civic affect proceeds from tying citizens to historical institutions and concrete cultures that never are quite equivalent to the universal principles they purport to embody.[102]

According to Markell, the supposed universal, civic principle towards which affects are to be redirected are not "self-sufficient." Rather, they "depend on and

are even threatened by a supplement of particularity that enables them to become objects of passionate identification."[103] Habermas wrongly assumes that his "civic" patriot would be thrown into the new context from nowhere and is thereby "insulated from the weight of history." He wrongly assumes that the reproduction of modern civic identity could be achieved by circumventing the "weightiness of the historical institutions and concrete cultures" rather than precisely "appealing" to it. Moreover, there is no proof that civic patriotism is a "safer" form of identification because it has no "filter" to screen out "undesirable" elements.[104]

Taylor is not liable to the aforementioned charges leveled against Habermas because he is, in my view, more realistic than Habermas on this score. Taylor resonates more with the Igbo standpoint than Habermas, though there are important nuances, as I tease out in what follows.

The Igbo Standpoint and Its Nuances

So far in the conversation between Habermas, Taylor, and the Igbo, I have indicated a number of points of convergence and divergence, involving either all three or at least two. But the distinctness of the Igbo standpoint is yet to be spelt out.

I have already stated that, on the sphere of socio-ontology, Habermas, Taylor, and the Igbo all subscribe to the notion of the self as socially constituted. Habermas, drawing on Mead, speaks of individuation through socialization; Taylor speaks of a selfhood that is morally defined, where "moral" points to the common good of a community; and the Igbo speak in terms of co-constitutiveness of individual and community. For all three, language plays an indispensable role in this process.

Now, a distinguishing element of Igbo socio-ontology of co-constitutiveness, which is quite absent in both Habermas and Taylor is that it is an expression of a larger worldview that basically sees interconnectedness in reality as a whole. In other words, co-constitutiveness is an expression of the Igbo sense of interconnectedness. And this point was elaborated in the preceding chapter where a whole range of Igbo social phenomena was explained as grounded in the sense of interconnectedness. Earlier in this chapter, too, it is unequivocally stated that co-constitutiveness is derived from the wider sense of interconnectedness. But there is *no clue* in Habermas and Taylor that the account of the social constitution of the self has a remote source in a wider sense of interconnectedness embracing non-human realities as is the case with the Igbo. Habermas and Taylor are only contented with accounting for self-formation through the socialization process or belongingness to a moral community.

The absence of this "primordial" epistemic source for their account stems from their Western background, which has a "compartmentalized"[105] view of reality (to use Chieka Ifemesia's term) or, to put it less strongly, does not possess as much vision of interconnectedness as the Igbo. A "compartmentalized" vision of reality sees aspects of reality – social, economic, political, religious, etc. – as separated, whereas the Igbo see a basic interconnectedness at play. It makes sense to suggest that a self-community dynamic derived from a wider and more "primordial" vision of reality might, ipso facto, be more reliably anchored.

Another distinctive feature of the Igbo standpoint vis-a-vis Habermas and Taylor is the divine-human (i.e., semi-divine) status of the self (the human being). There are no pointers to this in Habermas' and Taylor's conception of the self. But *chi/akaraka* is the semi-divine principle of selfhood in Igbo thought-pattern. This "divine" element should not be spiritualized away as in the Christian/Western soul-body duality. The Igbo case is a *chi(divine)-mmadu(human)* complementarity. The "divine" element is an epistemological resource for self-affirmation (i.e., affirming the "godlike" status of the self), the sanctity of the self (human life), and a pointer to the divine-human cooperation in the enactment of individual destinies. It is tied to the philosophy of enterprise, *ikenga*, inasmuch as it points to the far-reaching potentials and possibilities in this divine-human fusion.

So far, I have focused on the peculiarities of the Igbo standpoint at the socio-ontological level centered around the self. Now, are there nuances with regard to the question of solidaristic commitments derived from the overall socio-ontological conception of the self vis-a-vis the community? I refer here to normative commitments to such political entities as nation and state. For instance, how would the Igbo receive Habermas' gesture towards a universalistic "constitutional patriotism"? Are there any discernible differences, even if by degrees, between Taylor and the Igbo? Would the Igbo espouse what Taylor would rather not allow, or conversely, would Taylor advocate what the Igbo would rather not?

Like Taylor (and quite far from Habermas' views), the Igbo subscribe to a form of republicanism where solidarity and patriotism are linked to some form of historical community. It has already been argued, drawing on Taylor and Markell, that Habermas' civic or constitutional patriotism would quite inescapably rely on sentiments/affects based on solidaristic affinities to historical communities. Igbo solidarity is republican; politics feeds off the resources of solidarity – and in sufficient amount, too. But Igbo solidarity is not the form of primitive/primordial sentiments Habermas is wary of. To be sure, the Igbo society is not one of the supposedly "pre-political" communities that Habermas frequently uses as a basis for being suspicious of nationalistic patriotism. I showed in Chapter 4 that the Igbo village or village-group which is the basic political unit is not strictly composed of persons of the same bloodline. Indeed, they are composed of complex and multiple lineages. Common sense tells us that about 3,000–5,000 persons occupying a circumscribed locality could not possibly be of a common ancestry in any strict biological sense. There may have occurred complex and untraceable histories of migration among the inhabitants. But what unites them is a sense of "kinship" (not necessarily biological) and common destiny painstakingly constructed over time.

To buttress the aforementioned point, I draw attention to an eye-opening work on Igbo history and politics, wherein the Igbo scholar, J. N. Oriji, consistently uses the term "mini-states" to refer to Igbo political units (villages and federating village-groups).[106] This term is instructive, for it points to the fact that they are by essence political and not "pre-political." They are not a tiny mass of individuals and families with natural (biological), pre-political ties. Rather, they are state-like to the extent that there was more or less a sovereign moment, a moment of *constitution*, likely in a venerated distant past, when different bloodlines sharing the same

geographical space began to consider one another as "kinsfolk," enacting this bond in ritual covenants. In fact, in the case of a village-group, as I hinted in the previous chapter, there are ritualized myths of origination from a common ancestry which only serve to undergird the bond between federating villages.[107]

Igbo political units are kept relatively small to make for better manageability, but this does not mean that the solidarity between members is of a primitive/primordial type. I suggest furthermore that, if this solidarity is essentially political from the beginning, and if "kinship" is *constituted* rather than natural, then it could be judiciously applied to wider contexts. In other words, there is no reason to assume that the Igbo person is only given to particularistic identities and not quite capable of universalizing it judiciously. However, the extant wisdom in keeping political units relatively small and manageable, with solidarity supplied in big quanta by reason of their relative smallness, cannot be controverted. Surely, this might well be a good way of applying a "dose" of realism to Habermas' universalistic idealization.

Regarding the idea of republican solidarity linked to historical communities, Taylor's views resonate with the Igbo standpoint. Any difference, or better put, *nuances* thereof might well be a matter of degree of emphasis. I tend to view it as a spectrum in which the Igbo standpoint and the views of Taylor represent different shades of the scale.

For instance, Igbo sense of solidarity involves a kind of "rich interpenetration of lives," to use Nanette Funk's phrase, that is somewhat hard to conceive and replicate in any Western theories and life-settings, despite all "communitarian" posturing. This is why I have been particularly cautious in applying the term "communitarian" to Igbo social life, in order not to give the impression that it means the exact thing Western communitarians like Taylor and Sandel refer to. Funk provides a picture of community that describes the "rich interpenetration of lives" enacted in the Igbo community.

> By "community" I mean roughly an arrangement of institutions, practices, and social relationships of non-instrumental worth to its members which embodies shared values, is permeated by a *rich set of joint activities* with common ends and tends to promote non-instrumental, non-antagonistic cooperative relationships. Members of a community share not only values, but interests, goals, ethical and cognitive beliefs and a general sense of the good life . . . There is a rich *interpenetration of the lives* of each with the lives of others . . . Communitarian practices create strong common interests while leaving intact spheres of private interest. It is in these institutions and practices that the identity, dignity, meaningfulness and worth of an individual's life is in part constituted and the shared self-understanding of persons is reflected.[108]
>
> [My italics]

As described in this quoted text, a community in this "rich" sense is marked by a "rich set of joint activities" which guarantees this "rich interpenetration of lives" being referred to. In the Igbo community, it takes the form of community

festivities, rituals, masquerade displays, wrestling matches, marriage ceremonies, etc., which make for shared time, thus making it practically impossible for any member to isolate himself or herself. In Chapter 4, I pointed to the fact that even laws legislating farming activities restrict them to certain days of the Igbo week to ensure that no one is found laboring away in the fields alone. This is also true of a whole gamut of other activities.

We should also take cognizance of the capitalist culture of Taylor's Western society. The nature of work capitalism calls forth considerably reduces the time people share together. This fact would make any "communitarian" tendencies in the West fall short of the degree of interpenetration of lives (secured through a rich set of joint activities and a sense of common destiny) present in an Igbo community. Taylor and Habermas pontificate on the socially constituted self. But they refer primarily to the values of society, social expectations, and communicative practices interiorized by the self in the dynamic of self-formation. Taylor speaks of a "republican solidarity" within such a concrete historical community as Quebec, Flanders, etc. And Habermas speaks of a more universalized "community of needs and solidarity,"[109] where people are able to discuss and reach a consensus about their needs, interests, and common good,[110] as Seyla Benhabib interprets him. While Taylor's idea of community and solidarity placed at such national level as Quebec or Flanders is feasible and useful, it may not possibly guarantee the same level of "interpenetration" of lives found in a typical Igbo political unit, which is relatively smaller. The feasibility even wanes in Habermas' more universalized contexts.

Therefore, in terms of degree, one may safely suggest that solidarity in the Igbo sense is quite stronger from what could obtain in any modern Western society – and, ipso facto, different from what any Western scholar could possibly theorize. And this represents yet another nuance in the Igbo case.

Finally, and with regard to this argument of degree, there is a sense in which both Taylor and Habermas are still beholden to what I call the "liberal specter." By this, I refer to the "default" position among Western scholars to defend individual rights and interests in a rather "frantic" manner despite all "communitarian" posturing. Of course, this is not a great pitfall *per se*; after all, I was at pains in the earlier parts of this chapter demonstrating that the Igbo place an equal emphasis on community and the individual. But this attempt to "defend" the individual takes on a rather feverish dimension in the West; it has indeed become a "specter" haunting Western scholarship.

Let us take Taylor as an example because, as I have stated, his stance best approximates the Igbo standpoint. In "Cross-purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," the famous essay in which he throws himself into the fray of the "liberal-communitarian debate," with the pretensions of striking an informed middle ground, one still discerns this liberal "specter" at work. Taylor's concern is to show how possible it is to apply a "holistic" social ontology, which recognizes the inextricable bond between individual and community, to the defense of liberal democratic values of rights and liberties at the "advocacy level." Given their "atomistic bias" procedural liberals do not believe that one could subscribe to the inextricable

bond between community and individual (at the socio-ontological level) and still be a good "liberal." To this liberal challenge, Taylor invests a little too much intellectual energy to prove procedural liberals "wrong." He maintains that the recognition of shared socio-ontological identity "plays an essential role in maintaining our contemporary liberal democratic regimes."[111] And, when the public who recognize their social interconnectedness show outrage at certain governance malpractices, what the outraged public see as violated is "precisely a rule of right, a liberal conception of rule of law."[112]

While it is understandable that Taylor's mode of response is called forth by the nature of the challenge the debate presents, there is some liberal coloration to the argument. Or, to put it more dramatically, one notices a frantic attempt to "appease" a liberal "inquisitor," or at least to explain oneself to this hard-to-please "inquisitor." This, again, owes largely to the "default" liberal intellectual climate under which Western scholars still labor.

In the Igbo case, on the contrary, this specter is hardly present; the need to explain oneself to a liberal specter does not even arise. This is because the balance between community and individual is firmly anchored on the notion of co-constitutiveness and the interpenetrating lives of members of a political unit – all rooted in the wider Igbo sense of interconnectedness.

Mainstreaming the Igbo Sense of Solidarity in Modern Contexts: Some Preliminary Thoughts

From the foregoing conversation between Habermas, Taylor, and the Igbo, at least one important point stands out – namely, that solidarity is a *relevant* element in modern socio-political contexts. This is something that the three frameworks share in common. The shortcoming noticed in Habermas is not that he wishes to banish solidarity from politics (for he indeed endorses "civic" or "constitutional" solidarity and patriotism), but that he tends to "universalize" this solidarity in a manner that makes it rather weak and hard to concretely realize.

If solidarity is something of value, then it could be *judiciously* applied to modern socio-political contexts. Igbo solidarity has been shown to involve the interpenetration of lives, needs, and interests. The social practices which disclose the Igbo form of solidarity have been outlined in Chapter 4. Its theoretical underpinnings in the thesis of co-constitutiveness which, in turn, feeds off the wider sense of interconnectedness in Igbo thought-pattern, have been illustrated. It has also been shown that there is a balance of emphasis between individual and the community, thus dispelling the misgivings that individual good might be sacrificed at the altar of community good. If these submissions have been shown to be true of Igbo sense of solidarity, there is no reason to doubt its suitability for modern contexts.

Now, this dovetails to the question as to the form of adjustments that could be put in place for modernity to align more seamlessly with the Igbo solidarity framework.

Let us begin with the basic *mode* of seeing the world. Modernity may have to adopt a way of seeing/knowing (epistemology) that de-emphasizes the

dichotomization of reality to be able to enter into some meaningful intercourse with the Igbo paradigm. As has been illustrated in this work, the Igbo *mode* of seeing and knowing reality is one that emphasizes interconnectedness. And it is this basic epistemic *sense* that founds the whole gamut of the Igbo world – social, political, economic, religious, etc. The modern propensity to put reality in "pigeonholes" and compartments could be reviewed at the very least. To put it more ambitiously, the modern individual might do well to adopt a vision of reality that emphasizes more of interconnectedness and less of disconnectedness.

It may be useful to recall that, in Habermas' theory of modernity, it is precisely this "separating off" of systems from a hitherto scarcely differentiated lifeworld that defines modernity, resulting in social "pathologies" in the long run. Now, regarding the separation of "systems" from the "lifeworld," one might rightly argue that, though it is not bad in itself, the "colonization" of the lifeworld (with the attendant modern pathologies) occurs because a separation had taken place. Another phenomenon that comes to mind is how modernization is associated with the separation of knowledge, hitherto conceived as "philosophy," into the various sciences we have today. It is reasonable – at least hypothetically – to suggest that a more seamless intercourse between modernity and the Igbo solidarity paradigm could be entered into if the overall basic vision of reality is less dichotomized.

Another key feature of modernity that should at least be attenuated is individualism. To be sure, individualism is not the same as the recognition of individual good, rights, and liberties, which has been shown to have a place within the Igbo framework. Rather, individualism refers to a disproportionate emphasis on personal well-being to the detriment of others. It refers to an egotistic assertion of personal rights and comfort with a level of fanaticism that jeopardizes those of others. This creates the wrong impression that personal rights are antecedent to society itself. In its pursuit of self-interest, individualism does not take into cognizance the fact that our fate, needs, and interests are interpenetrate. It fails to take seriously the ties binding person to person in society.

Little wonder Taylor names individualism as one of the major "malaises" of modernity in a work with a telling title, *The Malaise of Modernity*. Taylor paints the following picture of modern individualism in the aforementioned work:

> The self-centered forms are deviant . . . They tend to center fulfillment on the individual, making his or her affiliations purely instrumental; they push, in other words, to social *atomism*. And they tend to see fulfillment as just of the self, neglecting or delegitimating the demands that come from beyond our own desires or aspirations.[113]

Taylor calls it "deviant" because nothing conceivably good could come out of it in the long run. It is exaggerated, destructive, and could spell the collapse of society as such. Since Igbo society is one that draws its life from solidarity on the basis of a balanced emphasis of individual and community interest, I, therefore, think that individualism, as described earlier, would not be compatible with Igbo solidarity framework.

I also think that certain sentiments and practices that pass themselves off as "solidarity" in our world today are rather too detached and depersonalized. More than anything else, solidarity in the Igbo sense has an interpersonal touch, involving the kind of interpenetration of lives that I have earlier highlighted:

> By "solidarity" I mean roughly a freely chosen support and concern between persons and identification between them . . . it is a concern and identification that presumes a sharing of important subset of needs, values, moral principles and sense of the good life.[114]

It is more than a mere psychological feeling of empathy or fellow-feeling. While the element of empathy cannot be dismissed, there is more to solidarity than the practice of dishing out monetary handouts and aids. The charity that proceeds from interpenetration of lives, needs, and interests is more solidly grounded and would most assuredly go beyond what one might call the "NGO-type" charity, rendered from a detached position, the "donor" standing aloof from the supposed "beneficiary." Charity should have a more interpersonal element – a human face. The "NGO-type" solidarity would hardly be sufficient for our world, faced with myriads of humanitarian situations.

Having addressed in broad strokes the key aspects of modernity that may be adjusted to enter into meaningful intercourse with the Igbo framework, I shall, in what follows, make some remarks with respect to the application of the Igbo sense of solidarity to current Igbo socio-political realities.

Solidarity has a far-reaching significance for Igbo modernization. The fateful encounter between Igbo culture and aspects of modernity did not come without some disruptive effects, seen in terms of "things falling apart."[115] The fact that solidarity is value now in high demand in modern socio-political contexts should bear a special significance for Igbo people, for solidarity is a value so dear to them. Hence, it must be lifted up from its marginalized status and made the animating principle of Igbo modernity.

But the challenge as to how to judiciously incorporate Igbo solidarity into modern realities cannot be ignored. It has already been demonstrated that it is indeed compatible with modern realities. It has also been shown that the thought-pattern that grounds Igbo solidarity is still alive; indeed, it has not been destroyed despite being pushed to the margins of modern scheme of things. It is perhaps correct to say that much of Igbo "endangered" way of life has been existing side-by-side with modernity – somewhat parallel to modernity. This claim is evident in the thesis by the Igbo sociologist, Peter Ekeh, to the effect that there now exist "two publics." On the one hand is the "public" operating a rather Westernized society, with institutions and structure inherited from the British colonial government. On the other hand, there is the "public," mostly found in the countryside, whose ways of life has had much less Westernized influence.[116] The problem, as I see it, is that the way of life of the "countryside public," grounded in solidarity, has not sufficiently penetrated the "city public."

The task of giving solidarity a center-stage is not impossible. It is not like resurrecting a "dead" way of life, nor yet like resuscitating something that is comatose.

It is a question of prudently reinstating what has been banished to the margins; it is that of preserving an endangered way of life and giving it a place at the center.

Bringing the sense of solidarity to the center-stage of modern Igbo politics could address the problem of political representation and legitimation crisis that has jeopardized Igbo politics in modern times. The British began the process of pushing Igbo political *sense* to the margins, a process that has continued to this very day under the Nigerian state in which the Igbo and other nationalities are "trapped," so to speak. Lacking the patience to understand the dynamics of Igbo leadership and political sensibilities, the British set about creating "mushroom" authorities to serve their colonial interests.[117] The Nigerian state has followed the same pattern in what has become a messy culture of political representation quite alien to indigenous ethnicities of Nigeria. The result has been disastrous, to say the very least! It verges on a "legitimation crisis" which Habermas so eloquently theorizes.

The status quo markedly contrasts with the Igbo indigenous political epistemologies – currently pushed to the margins – whereby true leaders (not kings and career politicians!) emerge naturally from among the people in a complex matrix of solidaristic practices. Leaders and representatives in whatever capacity are all steeped in the interpenetration of lives and goals that defines the community. In such a solidaristic milieu, representatives are committed to the common good, for a service to the community is at the same time self-service and representing community in any capacity is self-representation.

The problem of corruption and irresponsible leadership could be addressed from the resources of Igbo solidarity. In Chapter 1, we saw Fanon and Basil Davidson diagnose the problem of corruption in contemporary Africa. They attribute it to the "acquired taste" of Africa's "petit-bourgeois" elite, whose only leadership agenda is to enjoy the privileges of erstwhile colonialists without accepting the corresponding responsibilities. From this standpoint, corruption, as we know it today, is a modern phenomenon. Today, Igboland has these "petit-bourgeois" in their numbers occupying key offices. The link between the slow development of Igboland with the corrupt leadership of the so-called elite is obvious. But what is actually at play is that the Nigerian state (and all the political realities associated with it), founded on the Western model, cannot generate enough solidarity that could combat the "acquired taste" of the petit-bourgeois elite.

Having banished indigenous political senses to the margins, the present political configuration of the Nigerian state finds itself handicapped, helpless, and in an awkward situation. Since this "acquired taste" is a modern reality that cannot be wished away, only a rich sense of solidarity could constitute a sufficient counterpoint that may make political representatives continue to act responsibly. In other words, the recognition of co-constitutiveness and the interpenetration of lives and needs among citizens could rein in on corruption and political recklessness.

No doubt, this touches upon the vexed question of the political reconfiguration of Igboland into smaller and manageable units. Realizing rather belatedly that over-centralization does not resonate with a people whose native political sense relies so much on big quanta of solidaristic practices, so-called "Autonomous Communities" (as they are called) have been created in Igboland in a bid to possibly re-enact the precolonial order.[118] This is quite a step in the right direction. But

it has not produced the desired fruits because it has been marred by elements of bad faith, political dishonesty, and self-interest. How "autonomous" are the so-called Autonomous Communities when they are artificially created by an overly centralized system and are beholden to this system in a rather stifling manner? To what extent do they make for solidaristic affinities?

As I earlier said, creating "Autonomous Communities" is a step in the right direction, since it recognizes that Igbo politics relies on a huge solidarity capital. But a necessary step that should follow would be to dismantle all artificial "communities" and allow true communities to identify themselves. Solidarity is never in short supply in all true Igbo communities. These should then be allowed to flourish as key political units in a decentralized Igboland, suffused with strong solidaristic political units. Where appropriate, a weak and non-obtrusive center may exist, perhaps for the purpose of coordinating inter-unit affairs. Since the Igbo tend to do much better with smaller political units, as credible sources discussed in Chapter 4 show, it makes sense to do away with the top-down approach to politics that has so far yielded little or no fruit in Igboland. And the "trick" is that small units make for the sufficient interpenetration of lives, needs, and interests that goes by the name of Igbo solidarity.

Modernity comes with certain realities that cannot be wished away. For instance, it presents the challenge of providing modern amenities. Scholars have noted how the Igbo kindreds and villages have risen to this occasion by contributing their own resources to build schools, provide electricity and water supply, and even give scholarships and bursaries to their intelligent sons and daughters to further their education. W. Schwarz unmistakably interprets these efforts in terms of Igbo solidarity.

> Solidarity has its positive sides, and its good effects can be scattered liberally throughout Iboland and wherever Ibo live. Many a village has its post office, or maternity clinic, or approach road, or school, built by communal savings and often communal labor. Communities club together to send their abler "sons" to university. Away from home, solidarity is even more marked. Whether in Lagos or in London, few Ibo seem to have their Sunday afternoons to themselves: there is always a clan or village meeting, with problems to solve and, inevitably, money to raise.[119]

In the cited passage, one sees the Igbo *already* taking the initiative to adapt their solidaristic practices to modern life. It is also remarkable that in a work that studies Nigeria as a modern state, the author uses the Igbo, among myriads of Nigerian ethnic nationalities, as an epitome of solidarity and its possible application to modern contexts. For our present purposes, it is noteworthy that, at every turn, there are important works, even from Western scholars like Schwarz, corroborating my claims about the Igbo people of Nigeria. Now, if important steps have already been taken by Igbo people to adapt their native sense of solidarity to modern realities, I believe the gains are inestimable when Igbo solidarity is recognized as the "official" Igbo socio-political philosophy for modern times. Most assuredly, it will

remedy much of the leadership crisis and social challenges that arose as a result of its relegation to the margins of modern life.

Talking about modern exigencies, another thing that comes to mind is geriatric needs – that is, care for the aged members of society. Habermas has referred to this need as it relates to Western societies. In Chapter 1, I also acknowledged it as a problem that modernity has thrown up for Igbo society. The reason is basically due to rural-to-urban migration resulting from the need on the part of the younger folk to grab the modern opportunities in the urban areas. This minimizes the much-needed attention senior citizens in the villages and countryside should receive. In premodern Igbo society, the old received adequate care from their children and grandchildren who never had so much need to relocate elsewhere to ply their trades. The option of establishing senior homes as done in the Western world may not be well received by a typical Igbo person, given his/her emotional attachment to the "ancestral home." Poor disposition towards the idea of senior homes might undermine the overall well-being of whoever finds himself/herself by force of circumstance to be there.

But the solidaristic element could be brought to bear on this new reality in diverse ways if properly conceived. For instance, if Igbo solidarity were to be elevated into an official philosophy, some provisions in employment contracts and benefits could address the need for the young to pay visits to their aged parents at reasonable intervals. Extra-curricular activities could be designed to make school children develop a good relationship with their grandparents (and other senior members of society) and stay in constant touch with them. Such solidaristic gestures to the aged are perhaps all they need to find the twilight of life worthwhile.

I wish to finally point out a potential danger I see with the Igbo sense of solidarity. Like every philosophy that situates itself delicately at the center of a spectrum, there is a danger that one could inadvertently gravitate towards one polar extreme or another. I have consistently argued that Igbo solidarity balances itself delicately between the "liberal" side and the "communitarian" side of the spectrum. Its position somewhere at the middle is undergirded by the concept of co-constitutiveness. Now, given the precariousness of its position, the danger does not lie in *what it is* but rather in *what it is not*. It ceases to be Igbo solidarity the very moment one loses the middle ground. Therefore, care should be taken to not allow it to lose its cherished place at the "center" of the spectrum.

Conclusion

I have tried to demonstrate that the Igbo sense of solidarity is compatible with modern realities and thus relevant to modern socio-political contexts. I have argued that, if this sense of solidarity is judiciously incorporated in the Igbo modernization process, it could make for a more balanced and wholesome modernity.

The aforementioned claim not only begs the question as to whether Igbo solidarity would indeed be compatible with the modern value of individual rights and liberties, but it also implicates the notion of the self and the question of the identity of the individual vis-a-vis the community.

In a bid to address this cluster of issues, I have proposed and explored the *thesis of co-constitutiveness*, and I have elaborated the concepts of *chi/akaraka* and *ikenga* as the Igbo principle of individuation and philosophy of personal enterprise respectively.

By way of underlining the distinctness of the Igbo paradigm and its suitability for modern contexts, I placed the Igbo in conversation with Habermas and Taylor, the duo being veritable representatives of Western viewpoints. To fruitfully engage Habermas and Taylor for purposes of this conversation, I analyzed their insights on the themes of self, community/society, nation, state, citizenship, and solidarity.

It has been indicated that, like Habermas and Taylor, the Igbo subscribe to a socially defined selfhood, wherein the identity of the individual, though distinct, is intrinsically linked to the community. However, with regard to the commitment to solidarity derived from this basic social ontology, I have argued that the Igbo standpoint aligns more with Taylor. That is, the interpenetration of lives and needs that defines Igbo solidarity flourishes within a defined political unit, possessing a sense of a "people" with common destiny. I have challenged the assumption, from the Habermasian standpoint, that such solidarity might be "pre-political" and based on some "primitive/primordial" sentiments. I affirm that Igbo solidarity is decidedly political (and not "pre-political"), and could, ipso facto, be prudently applied beyond the borders of a typical Igbo political unit.

An incontrovertible point that emerges from the conversation between Habermas, Taylor, and the Igbo is that solidarity is *at least* a relevant element in modern socio-political contexts. On this basis, it could be incorporated in the Igbo modernization process. To the Igbo, it is a matter of bringing it to the center of modern socio-political life from the margins where it has been banished. Doing so holds out a promise of a more balanced and wholesome modernity.

Notes

1 P.J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy*, 54–60.
2 O. Taiwo, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*, 47.
3 M. O. Eze, "What Is African Communitarianism?," 388.
4 Ibid., 388.
5 Ibid., 389. Cf. K. Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, 15; K. Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought," 318 and 321.
6 I. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 171.
7 M. O. Eze, Op. Cit., 388.
8 M. O. Eze, Op. Cit., 389.
9 J.S. Mbiti, Op. Cit., 141.
10 N. K. Dzobo, "The Image of Man in Africa," in *Person and Community*, 132.
11 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 167.
12 C.L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe*, 6.
13 C. Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 135–136.
14 C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 9 ff.
15 C. Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 135.
16 C. Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 74.
17 C.I. Ejizu, "Ritual Enactment of Achievement," 242–244.
18 Ibid., 243.

19 These are Igbo titles and marks of distinction. They do not have Western equivalents and are not translatable into English.
20 Ibid., 245.
21 Note that I use the terms "liberal" and "communitarian" only because they are established conceptual categories but not because they *exactly* describe the phenomena predicated as such in the Igbo context.
22 R.C. Njoku, "Neoliberal Tradition in Pre-Colonial Igbo Societies," in *Olaudah Equiano and the Igbo World*, 157–177.
23 Ibid., 159.
24 Ibid., 171.
25 V.C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 103.
26 C. Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 74. The premodern political cultures of Igbo neighbors referred to in the passage are not without some merits, which might even outweigh those of the Igbo, depending on how one looks at it. Achebe simply wants to suggest, rightly or wrongly, that the Igbo socio-political culture perhaps gives more room for the flourishing of individual autonomy than those of neighboring peoples.
27 Ibid.
28 I. Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (2015 – First Published 1987).
29 R.C. Njoku, Op. Cit., 165.
30 Copious reference was made to this work in the previous chapter.
31 S. Ottenberg, *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays*, 185.
32 Ibid.
33 V.C. Uchendu, Op. Cit., 104.
34 C. Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 74.
35 In Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1994 – First Published 1960), Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist, is one of the beneficiaries of a community-sponsored scholarship, who is sent to England to study, return, and start giving back to community.
36 V.C. Uchendu, Op. Cit., 34–38.
37 J. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 151.
38 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 1.
39 J. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 177.
40 G.H. Mead, "The Social Self," in *Selected Writings*, 142.
41 Ibid., 146.
42 J. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 179.
43 Ibid., 179.
44 Ibid. Also see *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vo. II), 12, 37–40, 58.
45 G.H. Mead, "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control," in *Selected Writings*, 284.
46 Ibid., 183.
47 Ibid., 190–191.
48 G.H. Mead, "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control," in *Selected Writings*, 276.
49 J. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 185.
50 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. II), 58.
51 Ibid., 60.
52 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. I), 288. See also J. Johnson, "Habermas on Strategic and Communicative Action," 188.
53 J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 113.
54 Ibid., 107.
55 J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 494.
56 Ibid., 510.
57 J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 107.
58 Ibid., 105–106.
59 Ibid., 113.
60 J. Habermas, "Plea for a Constitutionalization of International Law," 11.

61 J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 115.
62 J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 500.
63 J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 106.
64 J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other*, 118.
65 J. Habermas, "Plea for a Constitutionalization of International Law," 8.
66 Ibid., 9–10.
67 C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 183.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 186.
70 C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 187.
71 C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 185.
72 Ibid., 92.
73 Ibid., 94.
74 Ibid., 196.
75 Ibid., 196–198.
76 Ibid., 199.
77 Ibid., 200.
78 C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 3.
79 Ibid., 27.
80 Ibid., 28.
81 C. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 112–113.
82 C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 305.
83 Ibid., 35.
84 Ibid., 38.
85 Ibid., 35.
86 Ibid., 36.
87 C. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 25–29.
88 C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 39–40.
89 C. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 40–41.
90 Ibid., 91.
91 J. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 185.
92 Ibid., 187.
93 Ibid., 77.
94 C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 35.
95 J. Habermas, *The New Conservatism*, 227.
96 J. Habermas, "On Social Identity," 94. See also, 100.
97 C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 94.
98 Ibid., 95.
99 Ibid., 95–96.
100 J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 506. Also see, 507.
101 P. Markell, "Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On 'Constitutional Patriotism'," 39.
102 Ibid., 39.
103 Ibid., 40.
104 Ibid., 44–45.
105 C. Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living among the Igbo*, 33.
106 J.N. Oriji, *Political Organization in Nigeria since the Late Stone Age*, 32. He employs the term "mini-state" all through the book arguably to stress the political (not pre-political) character of Igbo villages and village-groups.
107 E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 39.
108 N. Funk, "Habermas and the Social Good," 18, 21.
109 S. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, 339.
110 Ibid., 312. See also, 314, 353.
111 C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 196.
112 Ibid., 197.
113 C. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 58.

114 N. Funk, Op. Cit., 20.
115 This calls to mind the title of Chinua Achebe's seminal work, *Things Fall Apart*, to which I have quite profusely referred.
116 P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa."
117 J.N. Oriji properly accounts for this process in a work I used extensively in the preceding chapter, *Political Organization in Nigeria since the Late Stone Age: A History of the Igbo People*.
118 J.N. Oriji, Op. Cit., 181–182.
119 W. Schwarz, *Nigeria*, 353–354. Also see V.C. Uchendu, Op. Cit., 34–38; C. Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (1960). *No Longer at Ease* is placed in the setting of what might be called the second generation after the Igbo encounter with the "white man" (modernity). What plays out is the attempt by Igbo people to adapt much of their solidaristic practices to modern conditions through such acts as funding community projects, granting scholarships and maintaining robust diaspora communities that care for the home front.

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Conclusion

Birthing "Other Modernities" From Endangered Knowledges

Modernity could not have come to Africa without a substantial disruption of premodern thought-patterns and ways of life of African people. This is true of Igbo people, one of the largest ethnic nationalities in Africa. As in other parts of Africa, modernity has come with all-ramifying transformations in the Igbo society, and these transformations have resulted in *identity crisis*, both at the level of the individual and at the larger level of society. "Identity" is used here in the widest sense of the *entire way of life* of a people which, in turn, points to the multi-dimensionality of the crises.

Therefore, there should be a response. To be worthwhile and effective, this response must draw on native epistemic resources. This response must resonate with modern values and realities. It should be balanced and wholesome. The aforementioned requirements make the intervention embodied in this book not only necessary but also auspicious. For, as the title of the work clearly states, it is an attempt to offer a response to the challenge presented by modernity, drawing on the same knowledges that have been "endangered" by mechanisms of modernity.

The key point I have set out to argue in this work is that the sense of solidarity derived from the Igbo idea of interconnectedness is useful and relevant to modern contexts, and if built into (Igbo) modernization, it could give rise to a more balanced and wholesome modernity.

The work has been methodologically divided into distinct but mutually reinforcing chapters.

I began by placing the work in the context of similar attempts to make sense of the crisis of modernity in Igbo and African scholarship (Chapter 1). The conclusion reached from this exercise was that a better way to respond to the challenges of modernity was neither to withdraw to some presumably "idyllic" African/Igbo past, as some scholars tend to do, nor to jettison this past in a rather uncritical embrace of modernity, as other groups of scholars seem to advocate. Rather, a better way to proceed would be to build an important Igbo (African) epistemic resource into modernization, making it serve as a driving force and an equilibrating factor in this process.

Next – and since we needed a "heuristic" concept of modernity for our purposes – I drew on the insights of Habermas, Taylor, and Wallerstein (Chapter 2). It has been shown that modernity is a distinct time-frame, marked by an unprecedented

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transformation of society and ways of conceptualizing it, evident in the increasing complexity of societal forms, whose dynamics *account for*, but are not to be *equated with*, the emergence of systems with overbearing tendencies. For all practical purposes – and from the analysis of the scholars I drew on – modernity is closely associated with the effective emergence of the capitalist world-system in the sixteenth century.

Because this project has an epistemic bent, as announced earlier, I have tried to provide the epistemic dimension to the analysis of modernity, relying on the works of Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Boaventura De Sousa Santos (Chapter 3). Despite some identifiable shortcomings in their analyses, such as the tendency towards "sloganeering" (which undermines analytical depth) and the fact that their proposals are not very actionable in their present form, they have the overall merit of being able to underline the link between modernity and coloniality. Moreover, they unmistakably pinpoint and theorize the epistemic aspect to coloniality, namely, the subjugation of knowledges and knowledge-productions from the Global South. Indeed, my exploration of the idea of interconnectedness may rightly be seen as a response to the strident call made by these scholars for epistemic "decoloniality" in the Global South.

And so, the idea of interconnectedness (explored in Chapter 4) has been shown to be a feature of Igbo thought-pattern that recognizes the distinctness of realities while stressing their interconnectedness. It is at once a mode of thinking and a way of life; it is a "lived knowledge," a social imaginary. As such, an analysis of Igbo life and society discloses this idea of interconnectedness as the epistemic principle at work. Possessing a social-ordering effect, it finds expression in the Igbo sense of solidarity, an important epistemic resource.

The Igbo sense of solidarity has been found particularly interesting, useful, and relevant to modernity. As such, it could thus be incorporated into modernization (Chapter 5). But it must be guaranteed that the individual-community dynamic that founds this sense of solidarity allows, and does not stifle, the flourishing of individual good within a communal atmosphere. To establish this, the thesis of co-constitutiveness was elaborated – an idea that sees the individual and the community as constituting each other, with the implication that none takes on any ontological or epistemological precedence. This, it has been argued, makes for a balance of emphasis between individual good and community good in the Igbo society. To further establish that the individual is not stifled under the weight of the community, the concepts of *chi/akaraka* and *ikenga* have been analyzed as the Igbo principle of individuation and the Igbo philosophy of personal enterprise respectively. And it is thereupon argued that a culture that possesses these robust notions would give a substantial free rein to self-expression and individual interests within a community.

In the conversation organized between the Igbo paradigm and cognate Western ideas as found in Habermas and Taylor, it is underlined that the notion of a socially defined selfhood runs through the three frameworks. From this conversation, it becomes clear that solidarity is indeed a priceless value in modern contexts. However, the precise form it takes on and the reach (in terms of the political entity to

which one owes solidarity) differ. In any case, it is underscored that Igbo solidarity resonates more with the Taylor's "communitarian" vision than with Habermas' supranational vision.

It is this unique sense of solidarity that has been found useful and relevant to modern contexts. Politics and society in the Igbo society feed off the resources of solidarity. In a sense, it is *sine qua non* for the functioning of this society. Building Igbo solidarity into modern contexts is a vital way to address the crises and disorientation that arose from Igbo encounter with Western modernity (as seen in Chapter 1). This would most assuredly be a fitting and timely response to the challenge that is modernity, a "home-grown" response steeped in the resources of Igbo "endangered" knowledges.

It is relevant here to recall Charles Taylor's vision of "multiple modernities," a vision capable of dispelling the "illusion that modernity is a single process destined to occur everywhere in the same forms, ultimately bringing convergence and uniformity to our world."[1] As we saw in Chapter 2, scholars like Wallerstein think of a monolithic modernity – the single capitalist world-system – to which nations of the world may at best be "incorporated." On this view, African peoples, the Igbo included, could only be admitted as "latecomers" in a single monolithic system, already dominated by more experienced European players competing for over 200 years earlier. African kingdoms and peoples had existed as parallel systems in their own right before they were gradually weakened and eventually incorporated to play a subsidiary role in the monolithic system that Wallerstein speaks of.[2]

Therefore, there is a need to create and sustain the vision of "multiple modernities." I prefer to call it "other modernities" to underscore the element of *alterity*, thus creating room for *differences* and *eccentricities*.

In doing so, we are effectively "provincializing Europe," as Taylor, citing Dipesh Chakrabarty's pithy title, suggests. Provincializing Europe

> means that we finally get over seeing modernity as a single process of which Europe is the paradigm, and that we understand the European model as the first, certainly, as the object of some creative imitation, naturally, but as, at the end of the day, one model among many, a province of the multiform world.[3]

Japan is a shining example. If Japan has effectively evolved into a truly modern society, creatively drawing on its indigenous epistemic resources, there is no reason Igbo people and indeed Africans cannot achieve similar feats.

Walter Mignolo speaks of "pluriversality," a concept or principle which is, in his opinion, embodied in the Zapatistas' Theoretical Revolution. Pluriversality reminds us of the possibility of building a "world in which many worlds would coexist."[4] In the same vein, it may be possible to think of co-existing modernities.

Now, the theme of "other modernities" is vast and opens up new vistas of research not envisaged in this work. It is a theme that deserves a more detailed attention in subsequent works. Concluding his ruminations on "multiple modernities" which are at the same time the final words of his work, *Modern Social*

Imaginaries, Taylor writes: "For me, this process [of birthing multiple modernities] has begun at home, in describing the social imaginary of the modern West. But I hope that in a modest way it contributes to the larger project"[5] (My parenthesis). I end on the same note. I take it that this book is a "home-grown" response to the challenge of modernity, a response that enriches the scholarly discourse on modernity with exquisite epistemic resources from Africa as well as contributes modestly to the larger project of birthing "other modernities."

Notes

1 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 195.
2 I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Vol. III), 187; Also see, *The Modern World-System* (Vol. II), 129.
3 Ibid., 196.
4 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 54. See also, 243.
5 C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 196.

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