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ONYE AGHANA NWANNE YA: TRADING BOUNDARIES FOR BRIDGES: A STUDY OF EDGELL'S *BEKA LAMB* AND JOHN'S *UNBURNABLE*

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Abstract: One of the primary markers of the Igbo nation is the belief in the necessity, potency and supremacy of the group. The Igbo person draws essential identity, value, support and nourishment from a functional group. The establishment, attachment to, and dependence on, community illustrates the concept of *ohaka* as it repudiates unadulterated individualism and exclusion. It also operationalizes and rationalizes the popular pan-Igbo maxim; *onye aghana nwanne ya*. *Onye aghana nwanne ya* is a philosophical statement which underscores the practice of inclusion and communality enshrined in the Igbo interpersonal and group relationship structure. Therefore, this paper represents an intellectual attempt at building further solidarity with Igbo diaspora societies, represented in this context by West Indian Igbo communities of Belize and Dominica, using Edgell's *Beka Lamb* and John's *Unburnable* as principal channels of discourse. The research derives its primary analytical insight from Adamson and Demetriou's (2007) notion of Diaspora as a society beyond a state boundary and which maintains a connection with its homeland. Furnished with these, it identifies Belizean and Dominican Igbo communities, mainly through religious beliefs and practices like funeral rituals, ancestors, gods and goddesses, masquerades, and magic. It further interprets these as mechanisms and methods of sustaining an essential oneness and constant communion with an original motherland. Finally, the research maintains that until the Igbo society at home becomes one, symbolically speaking, with her diaspora kinsmen and women, it does grievous injustice to the animating spirit of commonality aptly articulated in *onye aghana nwanne ya*.

Key Terms: Igbo, diaspora, territoriality, communality, cohesion.

INTRODUCTION

> When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyman can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so (Achebe 1958, 118).

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The Igbo functional relationship structure is conceptualized and constructed upon the group, as a principal agency of existence, identity, legitimacy, stability, and solidarity, for its members. Thus, the Igbo world exhibits an individuality that is deeply grafted into the group which is in turn crafted out of individuals. The belief in the supremacy of the group, on the one hand, licenses, regulates and activates cohesion and, thus, endorses the *oha ka* and *anyi bu ofu* tendencies. On the other hand, it proscribes and disables separation, unadulterated individualism and exclusionism, embossed in *onye na nke ya, onye na nke ya*. The consciousness, configurations and protocols of such commonality, and its inclusionary ethos, are axiomatically uttered in the Igbo term onye aghana nwanne ya; literally 'let no one abandon his/her brother/sister.' It is important to note that among the Igbo, the concept of *nwanne* (brother/sister) displays flexibility as it is broadened to accommodate those outside the usual boundaries of blood and marriage. This research exploits the enlarged idea of *nwannehood*, which is defined by the bonds of ethnicity and is often demonstrated wherever the Igbo are, at home (rural and urban spaces) and in the diaspora.

The diasporisation of the Igbo is one of the major consequences of involuntary, and to a lesser degree, voluntary dispersal of Africans globally, especially through the notorious Trans-Atlantic slavery. Therefore, Trans-Atlantic Slavery compels a little more attention within the context of this study. The event, which formally ended in the nineteenth century, began in the middle of the fifteenth century with the Portuguese while the "most important development" occurred in the sixteenth century (Rodney 1970, 3). Establishing the precise number of Africans transported and enslaved in America and the Caribbean is almost an impossible task but it is estimated that more than fifteen million Africans were involved (Rodney 1970). Chambers (2019, 5) notes that by scholarly consensus, based on available statistics derived from 1662 and 1867 voyages, ten to twelve million Africans were shipped from Africa to the Americas and the Caribbean, to supply slave labor in gold and silver mines as well as agricultural plantations of sugar, cotton, tobacco and timber. Migrant-sending regions include West Central Africa, Gold Coast, Bight of Benin, and Bight of Biafra. Slaves from the Bight of Biafra were from Ibibio, Ijo and Igbo groups of present Nigeria. Igbo society was "one of the greatest exporters of slaves" and, thus, a significant percentage of slaves "belonged to the Igbo tribe" (Rodney 1970, 19; Patterson 1969, 143).

For Igbo, Trans-Atlantic Slavery caused an irreversible severance of an essential symbiotic link, geographically, between the diaspora population and their original home, in present Nigeria. For humanity, it also engendered an extensive reconfiguration of the human population and racial constitutions, particularly in slave-receiving societies of America and

the Caribbean Islands. The slavery-induced dispersal initially bifurcated Africans into two differently structured but culturally similar groups - "territorially concentrated" (Coakley 2016, 1) majority at home and "territorially scattered" (Nimni 2013, 13) minority abroad. The trade, therefore, marked the formal beginning of diaspora societies of Africa, exemplified by Dominican and Belizean Igbo societies. Consequently, Africa takes the "center of any discussion of the Diaspora" (Chambers 2019, 1). Over the years, the diaspora communities consciously maintain identifiable and analyzable cultural systems and patterns, which demonstrate propinquity to speech, cuisine, arts and sciences, world view and especially religion, of identifiable ethnic groups, like Igbo, in Africa. The subsisting cultural systems express diaspora subjects' profound desire for rootedness. Such yearning is externalized in the popular Black-American Pastor, T. D. Jakes's "indescribable" feeling at the revelation that his "ancestors were Igbos" from West African Nigeria and admission that it provides "something … black Americans don't have, which is roots" (n.p.). These similitudes are concrete illustrations of "the shared history … historical connection" between territorially separated Africans (Achebe 2012, 98-99). The unmistakable African influences survive into the present twenty-first century and testify to the pertinacious cultural linkages between Africans at home and in the diaspora.

The robust and multi-dimensional corpus of literary and non-literary Diaspora literature demonstrates an extensive politicization and intellectualization of the diaspora reality, condition and experience, as well as the attendant territoriality (deterritoriality and reterritoriality). In other words, the diaspora has persistently engendered a "tenuous debate" within academic and popular contexts (Chambers 2019, 1). Waterbury (2010, 131) notes a substantial rise in the number of countries "constructing ties" to their Diaspora populations as well as a "concomitant explosion of academic interest" in those relationships in the past two decades. Indeed, a review of studies available to this research manifests primary and tangential interests in the subject of diaspora and from different perspectives; ethnicity, geographical, historical, cultural, and religious. For example, Honychurch (2014) and Caryl Phillis (2012) discuss the slavery dimension and attendant place and displacement in West Indies and Hall (2001) calls attention to the indispensable role of religion in understanding black culture in diaspora societies.

Furthermore, Adetugbo (2001) establishes cultural, historical and linguistic proximity between Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups in Nigeria and the Caribbean countries of Cuba and Jamaica. Again, Nwadike's (2008) undertakes a linguistic and historical study of the cultural connection between West Indian and Nigerian Igbo. Anyanwu (2019) explains the role of the diaspora Igbo in the survival of the Igbo nation but disregards the

contribution of literary productions to that cultural project. These attempts partially or completely, disregard certain significant aspects. King-Aribisala (2012) bemoans the inadequate attention accorded to religious properties copiously present in black American and West Indian literature and thus expresses the observation of this research, in relation to the marginalization of religion and literature in the diaspora discourse.

Diaspora study, which is primarily interested in the historical, cultural, connectivity, and identity, cannot afford not to assign a central position to a major cultural production like literature. This is because literature is, indubitably a vital instrument for "expressing identity" and stimulating social transformation and writers "within small groups" perform within the "institutional level" (Broomans 2015, 9). Thus, fictional reinscriptions of communal recollections and visions of small groups, like the West Indian diaspora Igbo, need to be centrally involved in a study as this. Ogundipe (in Ajeluorou 2012, 37) summarises it thus:

> Literature is very important; we have to value our memory, as part of Africa society in perpetuating continuity … The Africa Diaspora has preserved a lot of things for us. We're actually connecting. We try to keep literature to keep culture; literature carries culture and it preserves values … we in Africa have to find our way back to who we really are.

Attempts at providing for this apparent lacuna are observed in critical essays. For example, Kia-Parsons (2016, 5) and Misrahi-Barak (1997, 133) individual analyses of *Beka Lamb* note "Belizean ethnic hierarchy" peripheral position of creoles and the need to maintain their "rich cultural heritage," as well as the character and communal essence of Wake, as part of that heritage. Renaud (2018, 130); Newson (1999, 186); Brooks (2010, 1); Hillhouse (2006, 1) respective examinations of *Unburnable* observe that the author's narrative authority originates from "oral tradition" and marginalized West African "folk culture," including Nine Night, religion, spirituality and history. Nevertheless, a careful examination reveals similar total disregard or inadequate attention to ethnicity, internal social cohesion and cultural linkages, especially from religious and Igbo perspectives in several readings of both primary texts.

The conversation with selected diaspora literature, although very insightful and invaluable, suggest significant under-utilization of critical ethnic, communality, cultural, religious and connectivity elements of diaspora which find heightened articulation in literary representations of West Indian societies hosting Igbo communities. Considering the huge population of Igbo in the diaspora, especially in the West Indies where historical records tell of Igbo communities, and attendant cultural, espe-

cially religious, remnants, the ethnic group deserves more attention within the context of Diaspora discourse. In addition, due to the enormous potential of cultural productions in scholarship, Diaspora discourse cannot afford to assign a subordinate status to that imaginative category. This research, therefore, becomes necessary.

METHODOLOGY AND MOTIVATION

To achieve its objectives, this research primarily employs two West Indian novels, *Beka Lamb and Unburnable*, respectively set in the twentieth century countries of Belize and Dominica, to provide a comprehensive and comparative basis for the necessary analysis. The choice of texts is guided by thematic and setting (place and period) dynamics. Again, both West Indian authors, individually, lived in Eastern Nigeria and are, as such, immersed in the Igbo culture at home and its remnants abroad. The research engages in a close reading of both texts and analysis is primarily based on settings and cultural/religious contents. Though the texts' attention to the religious includes evil forest, kola nut, scarification, orality (tales and chants), arts and architecture, for manageability, examination concentrates on belief in ancestors, afterlife, masquerade, gods and goddesses as well as Obeah. It pays attention to origins, status, functions and imports of those, in terms of how they express the spirit of *onyeaghananwanneya*, through internal social cohesion, connectivity with an identifiable homeland and suggest developmental, particularly collective, opportunities and possibilities.

The study is principally motivated by Adetugbo and Ngugi's call to researchers, in relation to African continuities in migrant-receiving societies. Adetugbo (1972, 7) challenges researchers to "find out more about ourselves before the sources of information dry out." Ngugi insists that 'we must find … the most enduring links between us and all our brothers scattered over the world. We can then build on these links' (Ngugi 1972, xix). This research is a means of participating in the intellectual attempts at discovering, identifying, classifying, analyzing and building on such cultural links between Ndigbo at home and their West Indian diaspora kinsmen and women, before the extant veritable and invaluable sources go extinct.

THEORETICAL COMPASS

Due to its crucial position and function within the context of this research, Diaspora needs to be properly situated. Derived from the Greek 'diasperein,' which means 'disperse,' it initially referred to the sixth to eighth century BC dispersal of the Jews outside Israel and then adopted to de-

scribe the dispersion of people, including Africans, outside their original homelands, especially through Slave Trade. With the end of the trade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term acquired a practical and precise implication as it designates geographical spaces occupied by descendants of African slaves in the western worlds. The twentieth century political activism and quest for racial equality politicized the concept. Influenced by globalization, it acquires a tremendously intensified attention as a "social-political and ethnocultural phenomenon" (Askhat 2017, n.p.). The present twenty-first-century scholarship exhibits a consistent commitment to Diaspora and among scholars that display unwavering and extensive engagement with the concept are Adamson and Demetriou.

Adamson and Demetriou's concept of the Diaspora is proposed in the scholars' 2007 study of the relationship between practices and politics of contemporary diaspora and state structure and technique, using the United Kingdom Greek-Cypriot diaspora and German Kurdish diaspora, as entry points. Their assumption delineates "two differently structured organizational forms … (1) deterritorialized and network-based collective identities, such as diasporas (2) … territorially defined and institutionalized collective identities, such as nation-states" (491). Both are linked by comparable national, cultural and or other identity markers. The concept notes that the link between home and diaspora societies are "largely ignored" until lately when "growing awareness" of its implications motivates researchers' interest (500 and 501). This identifies the research potential and contemporary relevance of such a connection and as such validates researches as this. Adamson and Demetriou's postulation adds that the term is a method of constructing "conceptual links between migration-sending and migration-receiving states" (504). In defining it, they assume that:

> A diaspora can be defined as a social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to (1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland and (2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organizational framework and transnational link (497).

By encoding and emphasizing the territorial/geographical, time, cultural, cohesive, connective, ancestry, and political contours of diaspora, the concept provides a holistic framework for identification and examination of the relevant diaspora communities. The comprehensiveness of their conceptualization undergirds its acceptability within scholarship. For

instance, Koinova (2010, 150) "adopt(s) a definition used by Adamson and Demetriou" as it encompasses "both positivist and constructivist elements." According to McDowell et al. (2018, 8), the concept has "proven useful" because it emphasizes distinctive and group values. These positions explain the adoption of Adamson and Demetriou's concept of Diaspora by this study.

Furthermore, Adamson and Demetriou's theorization note that Diaspora, as a concept, has been broadened to include "ethnically defined groups" as ethnic groups are becoming progressively diasporised due to increasing global migration and associated longing for "connection with the homeland" (498). The scholars' statement is illuminated by Anteby-Yemini and William's interpretation of the longing as attempt at preserving their "ethnic tradition (and) a strong feeling of collectiveness" (2005, 262). Moreover, the scholars note the development of migration-induced "transnational communities," with regional boundary-resisting existence, identities and relationships. For them, such oversea "co-ethnic populations" effectively transform separate spaces into one community and contribute to the development of both (2005, 501 and 502). Thus, the notion identifies the obligatory migration/dispersal elements of diaspora, push to the front burner the ethnic/communal, and associated identity-constructing and linking dynamics as well as the strategic relationship essentiality, all explored by this study from the Igbo angle.

Adamson and Demetriou's hypothesis, for a number of reasons, can bear the analytical burden of this study. First, its postulation on migration and subsequent development of transnational communities explains the existence of Belize and Dominican diaspora Igbo of the primary texts. Second, the ethnic perspective facilitates the identification and classification of the communities as Igbo, based on the dramatized cultural/religious heritages, like worship of gods/goddesses, belief in ancestors, eschatology, masquerades, Nine Night and Obeah. Third, its attention to internal social cohesion and cultural connection offers a robust conjectural basis for an examination of the communality and connectivity expressed in such cultures and their supporting architectures. Last, the concept's interest in strategic relationships between home and diaspora groups provides an explanatory framework for the conclusion of the need for trading geographical boundaries for cultural bridges.

ONYE AGHANA NWANNEYA

The heterodiegetic narratives, *Beka Lamb* and *Unburnable*, individually, participate in African diaspora discourse, by their portrayal of West Indian communities with religious cultures that exhibit correspondence with those of the Nigerian Igbo ethnic group. The eponymous and bildungs-

romanic *Beka Lamb*, set in mid-twentieth century Belize under British colonial rule, begins from the end, like *Beyond the Horizon* by Armah Darko. Events in *Beka Lamb* heavily depend on flashbacks and so the story possesses recollective merit, mostly dependent on Beka's reminiscences. It thematizes socio-political and cultural issues including racial and class discrimination, education, ethnicity, community, and religion/spirituality. *Unburnable* presents a more extensive picture of the West Indies through its past and present two-level narrative pattern that covers early, middle and late twentieth-century Dominica. It discusses family lineage, ethnicity, migration, revenge, racial and class intolerance, community, ancestral tradition and religion and spirituality. Consequently, *Unburnable* discusses "almost every aspect of the African Diaspora" (Doig 2006, 1). The texts' communities are archetypal ethnic-based diaspora settings.

Beka Lamb's Belize is characterized by racial and ethnic plurality. It is constituted by "at least six races with their roots" in Africa, the West Indies, Central America, Europe, North America, Asia, and others (11). Parsons (2016, 14) classify the six as "ethnic groups" and holds that their racialization exhibits Edgell, and her "speech community['s] … hypersensitivity to 'difference'" *Unburnable*'s comparable historicization records the occupation of Dominica's towns and villages of Roseau, Colihaut and Noir, from the 1600s, by Europeans, Africans, Americans, Lebanese, Chinese, and the extensively decimated aboriginal Caribs (*Unburnable* 31). The hybridity and identity dimensions undergird Hall's delineation of West Indian islands as, each, containing "elements of other ethnic cultures [and] the first, the original and the purest diaspora" (2001, 283-4). Both novels accentuate the raciality, migration (involuntary for Africans and voluntary for Europeans), ancestral and historical components of diaspora by identifying Belizean blacks as descendants of "African slaves" (*Beka Lamb* 68), tracing the "tribal identity" of most Dominican Blacks to West Africa and 1600 and 1796 influx (*Unburnable* 134). Consequently, the two narratives respectively emphasize the migration reality upon which the condition of diaspora is erected and account for the beginning of diasporisation of Africans.

Deepening the racial dimension, as color is a concomitant quality of race, both texts make most of their diaspora conversations using black characters, families, and communities. In *Beka Lamb*, the protagonist, fourteen-year-old Beka, is a "black girl" from one of the two "black families" on Cashew Street, and Granny Straker was a member of a black community (147, 8, 20-21). On the pages of the text are also found a "black policeman," Gordillo "a big black man" and an "absolutely black" old masseur, Mr. Rabatu (14, 39, 144). The textual world of *Unburnable* equally employs a black protagonist, Lillian, and her boyfriend, the black African American Teddy, Pope, "an illiterate black … black washerwomen …

(and) ordinary black people" and Sylvie's pure black grandfather (212, 117, 190). In *Unburnable*, the politics of colour is explicitly intensified in the "infinite blackness" (of) very black' Matilda's breasts and in her unadulterated Noir Village (56, 222). Matilda parallels other fictional blacks like Fisheye's great-grandfather who is an unblemished black man directly from Africa, in Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*. The setting portrays gradability and variability of blackness in the text's categorization of the entire Noir population as completely "dark-skinned, black … not African-American kind of Black," using the verbal report of a police inspector (260-261). The observable instrumentalization of color depicts acute racial consciousness, which is a recurring decimal in black American and West Indian imaginative literature. The authors' attempt at reminding blacks of their common source performs a deterritorialization function. Again, it represents attempts at reinterpreting and reconstructing the substance of their blackness and diasporanness to portray attendant rootlessness. The foregrounding of Africa, through race and color, provides the platform for the dramatization of African communities in Belize and Dominica.

The race and color narratives provide a form of backdrop for the texts' reproduction of racially/ethnic conscious communities. In *Beka Lamb*, British settlers and African slaves "established residence" on Belizean island to aid in timber harvesting (45). In addition, African slaves escaped from the plantations to St Vincent where they "established towns and villages" and mixed with Caribs whose cultures they assimilated without losing their "African traditions" (68). Edgell's creativity here suggests that Ndigbo should, obligatorily, preserve their culture even in the face of contemporary westernization and globalization. This is very a critical issue, especially as the 1995 *UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages* includes Igbo. Similarly, John's narrative regresses into the past to excavate Noir village modeled after an eighteenth-century African village. Noir is a maroon community established by women abandoned by their men after the British raided their black camp known as Jacko's Flats (281, 272). It is exclusively populated by off-springs of slaves, of uncontaminated African lineage who, for two hundred years, resisted British domination (275, 282) and situated within the larger Dominican Colihaut society populated by Europeans and other racial and ethnic groups. The dense diaspora temperament of the setting is ingeniously expressed by Phillip's definition of the West Indies as "an artificial society … where Africa met Europe on somebody else's soil" (1992, 10). Again, the self-sustaining Noir Village interrogates Africa's socio-political and economic dependence on the West. It equally demonstrates what Africa, and Igbo, can achieve as a corpus. The British-sponsored and supervised demolition of Noir tends to be remedied in the recently simulated seventeenth-century Igbo village, of mud houses, in Staunton, Virginia USA, by American Igbo diasporas,

from Anambra State of Nigeria. This dramatizes the relationship of reciprocity between arts and life. The Virginia phenomenon demonstrates the possibility and importance of physical, and even virtual, memorabilia for historical and cultural purposes. It also flays the conspicuous absence of history, as a subject, in Nigerian schools. The deterritorialized collectives of the texts are based on ancestry and social condition. The embedded communality evinces a strong sense of brotherhood and performs an identitarian function. It says '*anyi bu ofu*' *and* projects the *onye aghana nwanneya* mentality as an essentiality for the survival of the Igbo nation, at home and in the diaspora.

Furthermore, the ethnic essence of diaspora is invoked in the texts' individual fictional conversations. *Beka Lamb* portrays "people … known as red Ibos" and assigns an Igbo religious nomenclature for God, "Chuku," abbreviated to "Chuks," to Beka's brother (11, 12 and 25). Nnedi Okorafor's creativity, in *What Sunny Saw in the Flames* (2011, 5), borrows from Edgell's, by its assignment of the name "Chukwu … Supreme Being" to a character. *Unburnable*, using dialogues, asserts that "the Igbos were here (Dominica) for sure" (134) and substantiates the assertion, principally, in Noir. It also locates voluntary migrants in Dominica and America in Father Okeke "from Nigeria … Igbo" and Nigerian women in D.C "mostly Igbos" (238). The cleric, like the red Ibos of West Indies, is accessorized with a reddish-brown face that says '*anyi bu ofu*.' The priest and women, by their social relevance, functions in the identification of globally relevant diaspora Igbo, like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Philip Emegwali. These Igbo have the capacity to contribute significantly to the development of their two societies. As ethnicity is an indicator of identity (Chambers 2019), the portrayals suggest a deliberate attempt at classifying those communities as Igbo to announce their existence to their kinsmen/women in Nigeria as they express a desire for connection with a lost ancestral origin.

The fictional constructions of Igbo communities in the West Indies are backed by historical accounts of Igbo known as Iboe, Ebo or Eboe, as well as Igbo residential areas called Eboe Town in West Indian and American societies. In fact, John reveals that Noir is an artistic reconstruction of Jamaican and Dominican "maroon communities" in historical accounts of the Dominican Honychurch, (*Unburnable* 'Interview' 298). The village displays correspondence with Honeychurch's account of a "free and sufficient … more equitable community" built out of cultural elements and fragmented remnants of blacks' "ancestral experience" (2014, 16). Notably, the historical reality and experience of marronage gives eloquence to Honeychurch's intellectual productions, including his 2017 book, *In the Forest of Freedom: The Fighting Maroons of Dominica*. Caribbean fiction is characterized by a constant occurrence of marronage as theme, plot and

trope, and is employed by writers, including Edgell and John, as a literary technique for the expression of an identity that goes back across times and spaces to Africa. Marronage facilitates a portrayal of "alternative community [and] fringe cultures and ideologies … extant indigenous values, cultures and beliefs" that interface with dominant, and other subsidiary ones, in the islands (Renaud 129 and 130). By ethnicizing their settings, the novels construct stages for dramatizations of Igbo cultural and religious beliefs and practices, especially belief in ancestors and afterlife, gods and goddesses, masquerade, and magic.

The Igbo communities of Belize and Dominica, represented in the two primary texts, like their kith and kin at home in Nigeria, host an eschatological system with belief in ancestors. The belief manifests in *Beka Lamb*, within the context of a religious Wake convoked for the late Granny Straker by her black community. The traditional and communality characters of a Wake are embossed in its description as "a custom" which, more than several other events:

> Commanded the total attention of the community … In a way, it was a small lesson in a community history, and everyone, … was a diligent scholar … at funerals of the very aged, through the use of innuendos and euphemisms, a feeling was communicated, and this was understood (62-63).

The typical traditional Igbo community of texts like Achebe's *Arrow of God* in its cohesiveness and where anyone's business is everyone's business is reflected in Beka's. Patterson (1969, 198) explains that the religious ritual is found "among the Igbos" and that clarifies the comparability. Notably, in Anglophone Caribbean fiction, exemplified by Cliff's *Abeng*, Edgell's *In Times Like These* and Thelwell's *The Harder They Came,* Nine Night, like Obeah, is a recurring trope. The communal reverential treatment of the dead, and its associated significance, is conveyed in the image of Wake as a "get-together to… pay respect to the dead" and put the spirit of the dead to rest (71 and 66). Misrahi-Barak (1997, 133) describes it as a "traditional form" observed by the entire family and community, on the night of the ninth day, to protect 'the living from the dead' and involves collective eating and drinking, music, and dancing, folk tales and memory of the dead and community. The beliefs in ancestors and life after death are intensified in Aunt Tama and Miss Eila's perception of Beka as a "picture of Mama Straker (whose) spirit will live with Beka" (73), and in a conversation context that dramatizes the process of socialization through orally delivered historical, cultural and folk tales. The eschatological implication is apparent. The Wake goes further to validate the pan-Igbo *ohaka* mindset as Lilla's aversion for the ritual bows before the group en-

dorsement of same. Nine Night is not only a funeral ritual, it is also a celebration of community as it expresses "collective identity … communal memory" and reverence for ancestors (Booker and Juraga 2001, 96). Funeral ceremonies also perform correspondingly in Nigerian Igbo society. Remarkably, Edgell employs the Nine Night to illustrate the eroding impact of time and space on African cultures in the West Indies, project Caribs as models of cultural preservation and advocate the preservation of traditions that "don't do any harm" (67). These areas call for more attention.

Unburnable displays more devotion to ancestors and expands the discourse scope by including worship of gods, hardly touched by *Beka Lamb*. Both heighten the theological temperament of the text. *Unburnable*'s speech on ancestors manifest in Matilda and her people of Noir who "lived in expectation of … their everlasting lives as ancestors" (272). Again, Lillian is welcomed by her ancestors in the defunct Noir and her intended suicide, like the actual mass suicide of her forebears, is motivated by a profound trust in the "role of the ancestors in the afterlife," (John, 'Interview' 6). The implied afterlife submission of *Beka Lamb* is here covertly uttered. *Unburnable* also dramatizes the worship of gods and goddesses and associated sacrifices, pejoratively classified by a Catholic inspector as "he-devils … she devils, devilish idols carved out of wood" (265). The biased interpretation articulates Said and Freud's respective concepts of Othering and Selective Perception and represents a censorial statement on the injury and injustice served the pre-Christian method of spiritual connection of Ndigbo, at home and abroad.

The representations of both novels, *Beka Lamb* more, imply communality and internal social cohesion as they close the spacio-temporal gap between home and diaspora Igbo societies. Remarkably, these portrayals transcend the terrestrial and include the hereafter, in a manner that suggests that the *onye aghana nwanneya* dictum cuts across the three departments of existence known to the Igbo – living, dead and unborn. The religious element, as such, becomes a principal unifying cultural framework that contributes considerably in lubricating group consciousness for the benefit of the living and dead Igbo at home and in the disapora. The eschatological hermeneutics appeal for a reconstruction of the bridge that facilitated "coming and going" (Achebe 1958, 85) between the land of the living and dead. Perhaps, the renditions are atonement sacrifices for the inexcusable negligence of the hitherto revered Igbo ancestors who have been largely replaced by their foreign Western and Christian counterparts termed saints.

The belief in ancestors is accorded an extension in the masquerade polemics contextualized within the carnivals, in both texts. In *Beka Lamb*, the

post-Christmas annual carnival is woven into the Nine Night episode, through Beka's memory, and it encapsulates the masking tradition. The carnival, with its colorful costumes, bells, drumming and dancing, street performances, is traced to escapee African slaves and described as a consciously preserved remnant of the masquerade institution, an aspect of "African tradition," through the voice of Beka's class teacher, Miss Beguche (68).

Unburnable, like *Beka Lamb*, traces the origin of the Dominican carnival to Africa (130). However, it amplifies *Beka Lamb*'s abbreviated commentary on African masking tradition by observing its sacred and secular significance and status in telling that masquerades appear during sociopolitical and religious ceremonies as "embodiment of the gods … representations of the spirits of ancestors, wherein lay the highest authority" (130-1). Then, Alfred Drummond, an elderly white colonial officer, is planted in the heart of the Dominican carnival to provide necessary cultural education on the revenge-seeking Dominican Igbo masquerades. Drummond's migrant experience, including an accidental and clandestine encounter with an uncommon masquerade "somewhere in Nigeria … in Igboland" (141), equips him for his cultural assignment. Thus, Drummond's trained eye observes the raffia costume, whips, drums, "serpent and the bird wooden carvings (as) common theme[s] among the Igbo" (135). In addition, the culturally competent analysis of the colonialist hardly omits typologies and functionalities. He distinguishes "dangerous masquerades … war masks," as instruments of "definite social control," rather than entertainment (138). In other words, songs, rhythms, musical instruments and street appearances are obvious influences of Nigerian Igbo masquerade on its Dominican equivalent. Thus, through the masquerades, the streets of Dominican Roseau embrace the footpaths of Nigerian Igbo land closing the geographical gaps with cultural bridges. The masquerade episode is, arguably, the most pulsating and petrifying scenes of *Unburnable* and is reminiscent of the retaliatory outing of Umuofia masquerades against Christianity after Enoch's abominable unmasking of an Egwugwu in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Drummond's prodigious knowledge of the Igbo masquerade system illustrates the role of cultural immersion in the detection, comprehension, interpretation, and analysis of fragments of Igbo culture in diaspora societies. Moreover, more than any other episode in both texts, the masquerade episode demonstrates the dictum: 'an injury to one is an injury to all,' as their communal planning and vengeful performance is elicited by John Baptist's offence against a citizen of Noir. Consequently, the Igbo masquerade institution is imbued with communal teeth to cater to individual interests of members. It, therefore, functions as part of the *onyeaghananwanneya* bonding and support mechanisms for Belizean and

Dominican Igbo societies of both novels. The event exemplifies the need for the Igbo to stand up for one another, especially in societies where they are, blatantly and or surreptitiously, suppressed and marginalized.

Furthermore, Obeah, like Nine Night and masquerade, contributes significantly in revealing the 'Igboness' in the geographically separated diaspora societies of the primary texts. Obeah "unquestionably develops" from West African religion and originates from Igbo ethnic group (Patterson 1969, 188; Eltis and Richardson 1997, 8). It involves competent deployment of charms, spells, spiritism and herbalism in counseling and consultation. *Beka Lamb* assigns an ancillary space to Obeah within a larger framework of Nine Night and employs a cultural dialogue to emphasize the mutual African source of both, in Lilla's statement that both are "all connected" (66). Thus, Edgell extensively exploits the Nine Night by compelling it to serve as a frame for masquerade and Obeah narratives in a manner that articulates the mutual provenance of the three. *Beka Lamb*'s muted account experiences a noticeable shift in *Unburnable*'s vociferous rendering. The text reconstructs "powerful Obeah practitioners" from Guadeloupe, voodoo priests of Haiti and Santeria priestesses of Cuba (34). Again, through the black Dominican Mrs. Richard's perception, black American Richard Liverpool's interpretation and black Matilda's image, Obeah is represented as an exclusive property of blacks.

Both texts represent Obeah, and its counterparts, as markers of identity and agents of internal cohesion for the represented Belizean and Dominican Igbo communities and Caribbean blacks as it expresses cultural/religious compatibility between diaspora and home Igbo societies. Notably, the religious system, despite the secrecy and hostility attached to it, is robbed in potency and enjoys visibility and prominence in Caribbean literature. Thus, Munroe (1998, 14) describes it as a "focal point and a metaphor for Caribbean cultural experiences." The unapologetic reverberation of Obeah in *Unburnable*, interrogates the progressive marginalization of such religious heritages in African countries like Nigeria. In addition, its celebrated efficacy presents it as a viable option for the spiritual, mental and physical challenges of contemporary Ndigbo. Notably, respective beliefs and practices, as the Nine Night, ancestors, masquerades and Obeah, are valuable in the proposed reconceptualization and reconfiguration of formidable Pan-Igbo macro cultures and structures towards creating a united nation unbound.

No objective analysis can afford to ignore the apparent departures maintained by depicted cultural remnants of Belizean and Dominican diaspora Igbo communities of *Beka Lamb* and *Unburnable*, as well as the suggested areas of attention and collaboration. The modifications are functions of geographical and spatial distances. For instance, in *Beka Lamb*, Miss Janie and Miss Winny's reminiscences suggest that the desirability

and value of wake have diminished over time and hold formal education responsible for such alteration. In *Unburnable*, the judicial system of Noir is operated by masked women when women are totally excluded from the masquerade cult in Nigerian Igboland reflected in texts like Achebe's *Arrow of God*. There are also other modifications in beliefs and practices like evil forest and kola nut. Sister Gabriela's view that "things are taking a different shape" (*Beka Lamb* 116) articulates the conceptualization of such mutations as hybridity and third space, in Homi Bhabha's intellectualization. The implication is that the diaspora Igbo culture represents something close but different, in form and content, from its Nigerian parent. Therefore, the bridge-building agenda should be based on nearness, rather than sameness.

Both novels also suggest arrears of possible collaboration between home and diaspora Igbo societies. These include herbal medical enterprise, oral sources, and re-orientation across territorial borders. For instance, the medical collaborative possibility is recreated in *Unburnable* using African Matilda and Carib Simon's enormously successful medical partnership, based on their "combined knowledge of forest's secrets" as well as specializations and expertise (32). The effectiveness of the practice interrogates our uncritical acceptance and dependence on western healthcare systems. The incident also calls us back to our abandoned and decimated forests in a way that says that Africans do not need to wait for left-overs from the West and China to combat killer infectious diseases, including Ebola and Corona Virus.

In addition, both texts' attention to oral sources, domiciled in very old characters Mr. Ribatu, and Granny Ivy Bird (Beka Lamb) and Bird and Sylvia's grandfather (Unburnable), establishes the cultural relevance of the unscripted and disregarded oral perspectives in the reconstruction of scripted African history. Orality is, thus, invoked and invigorated to facilitate an establishment of a more authentic identity and relationship patterns between geographically separated African societies of the same cultural background. The relevant characters' old ages and death suggest the necessity of harvesting the invaluable "old memories … stories" (*Unburnable* 268) of "time before" (*Beka Lamb* 62) left untapped in our different communities before they go extinct. These literary images also present fertile fields for such studies.

Specifically, the purpose and necessity for urgent intervention is adroitly worked out in Drummond's proposed letter to the British Anthropological Society for "further study [into] the survival of … African masking traditions in the islands of Dominica, including retentions and variations" (*Unburnable* 143). His cultural advocacy is motivated by the preventable cultural ignorance he observes in Dominican blacks, represented by Mrs. Richard and reveals the value John places on remnants of

Igbo cultures in Dominica. Perhaps this type of proposal preceded UNESCO's 2018 donation, in funding, to the University of Zambia towards developing a degree program in Intangible Cultural Heritages, including orality, traditional craftsmanship, knowledge and techniques, rituals, festivals, and even witchcraft. *Beka Lamb* tows the same line using Sister Gabriella's insistence that Beka, representing young black Belizeans, should "understand a little more" about their national and personal identities which are not adequately catered for in the "present curriculum" targeted at "London examinations" (94). To achieve her aim, she established an essay competition that sent her students into the field to make them participants in the cultural project of re-scribing history using orality. Sister Gabriella's conclusion on the British curriculum represents an unmasked indictment of western formal education, and its foreign form and content, in non-western societies like Nigeria, Belize, and Dominica. It suggests that foreign education can hardly develop solutions to indigenous challenges. It calls for a review of such demonstrations of mimicry toward developing a version more receptive to local content. Sister Gabriella's philosophy of time suggests the urgency of the task.

The identified research gaps underscore the immense academic potential of retentions and variations of African culture and its supporting architecture in the West Indies. Both texts also assign that crucial task to educational and research institutions, like National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria, and cultural organizations like UNESCO. This makes the cultural project the primary responsibility of teachers and researchers. The idea also synchronizes Africa and the West Indies as well as Western scholarship and African culture in a manner that suggests that the different civilizations in Black societies are not mutually exclusive after all.

CONCLUSION

Communality is one of the foremost indicators of the Igbo nation wherever they are found. The ardent belief of Ndigbo in strength in unity is figuratively expressed in pan-Igbo sayings like *igwe bu ike*, maduka and *ofu ukwu a naghi awa uzo*. This principle is manifest in literary texts set in Igbo societies of Nigeria and West Indies Belize and Dominica exemplified by *Beka Lamb* and *Unburnable*. The Igbo societies of Belize and Dominica, represented in the primary texts, compellingly demonstrate the presence of Igbo communities outside the territorial boundaries of Africa and Nigeria and the role of slavery in the compartmentalization of Igbo into home and diaspora groups. The imaginative accounts dramatize the establishment of ethnic-conscious residential areas, cultural and religious beliefs and practices, including gods and goddesses, ancestors and afterlife, masquer-

ades and magic, as manifestations of internal social cohesion and solidarity as well as unyielding connection with an original homeland. These suggest the need for establishing a dynamic and strategic interface between specific territorialized and non-territorialized Igbo ethnic groups of the world. The literary discourses as well challenge Ndigbo at home and in the diaspora, to recover their invincibility by embracing the ancient spirit, chant and practice of *onye aghana nwanne ya*.

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