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Permanence, Temporality and the Rhythms of Life: Exploring Significance of the Village Arena in Igbo Culture

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Abstract

The village arena (or 'square' or '*Otobo*' in Nsukka Igbo) is at the physical and socio-cultural centre of Igbo life, south-east Nigeria. It is a space where intangible Igbo cultural heritage is played out, and also serves as a virtual museum where heritage materials are kept. The arena performs its roles in two very different ways: as a sacred space hosting initiation rites and religious rituals; and as a profane space for meetings and ceremonies. Either way, these uses see the arena transition between permanency and temporality, following routines and rhythms which themselves give the practices meaning and significance, and contribute to their inscription on the landscape. This paper explores the complexities associated with these village arenas with a particular focus on their socio-cultural, political, economic and religious functions through time, and the way those complexities are manifest in material cultures that serve to characterise the village arena.

Keyword: Village arena, Nigeria, Temporary space, Permanent space, Rhythmanalysis, Igbo

Introduction

The Igbo are found in the southeast part of Nigeria, western Africa and occupy an area of c. 41,000 square kilometres (Uchendu 1965; Ofomata 2002; Oriji 2011). The area is made up of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states with some Igbo living in small parts of Delta, Rivers, Cross River and Akwa Ibom states in the south. The Igbo population is placed at around 16 million (NPC 2006).

The origin of the Igbo people is contested, with three schools of thought suggesting different backgrounds: as autochthons, and according to either a Niger-Benue confluence theory, or an oriental hypothesis. The autochthonous model suggests that the Igbo are indigenous, with evidence including environmental change in the area over a long period (Sowunmi 1991) combined with archaeological (Shaw 1970, 1977; Chikwendu 1976; Anozie 1979; Okafor and Phillips 1992; Eze-Uzomaka 2009; 2010), and more recently by ethnolinguistic evidence (Acholonu 2005; 2009). Archaeology provides a date for earliest settlement from pottery at 2555 BC (Hartle 1965). The Niger-Benue confluence theory is derived from the linguistic model of glottochronology and lexicostatistics (a linguistic model that compares the percentage of lexical cognates between languages to determine their relationship). According

to Greenberg (1963), who applied this technique to undertake a linguistic grouping of African societies, Igbo belong to the Kwa family within the Niger-Congo stock (see also Armstrong 1964). By this model, it is estimated that the Igbo speakers arrived at their present location after 8000 B.C (Manning 2005; 2006; Webb Jr. 2005). The ‘oriental’ theory of Jewish origin is derived from the Biblical trace of descent through Jacob to his son Gad and to Eri, one of Gad’s sons (Gen. 46: 16). Apostles of this model argue that some cultural traits among the Igbo are found among Jewish people, suggesting to some that they may have migrated from Israel (Equiano 1789; Jeffreys 1956; Isichie 1976; Onwuejiogwu 1981; Onyesoh 2000; Nwaezeigwe 2007).

Figure 1: Map of southeast (core Igbo states) Nigeria

Either way, the Igbo today live across the region in independent villages. A village among the Igbo comprises groups of people tracing descent to ancestors who lived in their current location, or to more distant towns and villages from which they emigrated. Exceptions include settlers adopted into the ancestry on the basis of good relationships or because they possessed a particular and useful skill or craft. These people maintain quasi-independence and have their own *Otobo* or village arena but pay allegiance to the first settlers. Their origin/migration narratives are woven into that of the autochthons, requiring careful and sustained enquiry to uncover their differences.

These complexities over indigeneity define who controls what based on migration, birth, innovation and war strength. By migration, emphasis is on the first to settle on the land; by birth, focus is on the ancestor(s) born in the land before or after others; by innovation, interest is on the person(s) that founded or brought a particular skill, knowledge or practice; and by war strength, who led the war that brought the people to the land or who helped in conquering the enemies that troubled them in their place of settlement. These factors shape how the people of Nsukka Igbo understand indigeneity. It confers prerogative right(s) on people to have control over a particular cultural or heritage object/material, place or practice.

Amongst their many characteristics, each village has an arena, variously called *Otobo*, *Obodo*, *Ọnọkọrọ*, *Ọfu*, *Ilo/Iro*, *Ama*, or *Ezi*, according to dialectal differences. *Otobo* is the

more centralised name for the arena among the Nsukka Igbo. The arena is central to the Igbo social structure and social processes and was present in the founding of all Igbo villages. It provides the frame around which the architecture of the village and/or town structure is constructed (Aniakor 2002). In scores of ethnographic, historical and archaeological studies on Igbo life and culture, the arena is viewed as a centre of unity (Aniakor 1980; 2002; Okolie 1992; Anigbo 1996) used for village meetings (Ajaegbu 2014). It is also a theatre for ceremonies and masked performances (Achebe 1958; Nwabueze 1984), religious tabernacle (Shelton 1971; Metuh 1973; Okolie 1992), and a place for judicial proceedings (Onyeozili and Ebbe 2012). Consequently, Okolie (1992, 18) notes that, “it is the theatre for the practicalisation, in all its ramifications, of [an] Igbo worldview whether it is on socio-cultural, politico-religious, economic, educational or judicial levels. It is the centre that holds all the communities together, without which things are bound to fall apart”. Thus, it is a place for negotiation and renegotiation of social institutions for the survival of all the communities. The village arena is vital within the Igbo landscape.

According to Cresswell (2004, 12), “place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power”. In his phenomenological study of ‘existential anxiety’, Giddens (1991) established that one’s ontology is that of the environment within which s/he was raised and nurtured. Referencing Altman (1992), Lewicka (2005) argues that place attachment forms, maintains, and preserves identity and fosters individual, group, and cultural self-esteem, worth, and pride. So, “when we look at the world as [a] world of places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see [a] world of meaning and experience...” (Cresswell 2004, 11). Cresswell further argued that “places are never finished but produced through the reiteration of practices - the repetition of seemingly mundane activities on a daily basis” (ibid., 82).

These views promote the idea that the tangible and intangible nature of spaces is found within and gives significance to specific places. Mazunder and Mazunder (2004) observed that within some communities, religion is one of the more obvious means for forging attachments between people and place. Spiritual leaders and elders teach place ritual, give value to artefacts, and expose people to significant places through rituals. Stories and myths, dramas and plays, songs and hymns all become important strategies in the teaching of place

attachment and identity. In New Zealand, Schroder (2008) found that social relations based on family, friendship, and participation in community life are the major ties for attachment. Mazunder and Mazunder (2004) may be correct in stating that religion is one of the strongest bonds that sustain social relations. In this way, place attachment constructs identity on the one hand and creates heritage on the other.

The relationship between landscape and time is also relevant here. Ingold (1993, 152), for example, describes how, “human life is a process that involves the passage of time...this life-process is also the process of formation of the landscapes in which people have lived”. This position aligns with cultural relativist anthropology and its observation of life activities existing in its rhythms and spatial context (Durkheim 1954; Malinowski 1927; Evans-Pritchard 1940; Geertz 1973; Munn 1992), and with the view that such activities also exist in linear and cyclical time, which combine in many cases (Bloch 1977; Appadurai 1981; Howe 1981; Schaepe, Angelback, Snook and Welch 2017). This combination creates the transitional movement of a space from permanence to temporality, a characteristic of *Otobo* – the Igbo village arena. This paper concerns itself with this transition, the intangible aspects of the arena, as well as the material manifestations, and how its use is negotiated through time.

To help understand these complex relations between people and place and how they play out in the village arena, fieldwork was conducted and data collected between October 2016 and June 2017 from the region of Nsukka Igbo comprising Nsukka, Udeno, Igbo-Etiti, Isi-Uzo, Uzo-Uwani, Igbo-Eze North and Igbo-Eze South local government areas in Enugu state. Seven villages, one from each of these local government areas was studied. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on two villages: Umu-Obira Nkporogu and Amokpu Uhunowerre in Uzo-Uwani and Igbo-Eze South local government areas respectively. An ethnographic method was applied, and the techniques used for data collection were primarily: field observation, in-depth interviews and focus group panel (FGP) discussions. Nine months were spent carrying out ethnography in the region, additional to more than three decades of one of the author’s life experiences as a member of this culture, where he was born and brought up. Good ethical principles were adopted and anonymity was granted to all participants. Accordingly, individual and group narratives are presented in coded reference.

Permanent and temporary places of the village arena

The multi-functionality of the village arena render the permanent physical place also a transient place regarding the values and belief systems associated with it at different times of the day, week, month and year. Values attached to the arena itself have assumed a permanent position as a collective identity in the hearts of the people. Yet, the activities that occur are temporary and cyclical. Touw (2006) argues that the “intervals between successive cycles” define the position of the arena at any particular point in time. ‘Time’ is a very significant variable in the transient periods of such successive cycles. Rhythm also provides a helpful context for understanding the complexities of the arena, recalling Lefebvre’s *rhythmanalysis* and the central premise that, ‘everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm’ (2004, 15). Edensor (2010, 3) further suggests that despite fluidity and dynamism in the ways that we use space, and the potential for disruption and destruction, ‘many rhythms offer a consistency to place and landscape over time.’ We shall see clear examples of this in the case studies that follow. These are highly complex places and this short paper can barely touch on that complexity. But we recognise that concepts of place attachment, time and rhythm provide helpful frameworks within which to appreciate and begin to understand it.

We now turn to assess some of the values and significances associated with the arena, and notably socio-cultural, political and religious significance. Attempting separate discussions of these roles of the arena is difficult as these functions are inextricably combined. Although we may attempt specific identification of these different roles, the discussion is simultaneous, covering each in turn, creating an integrated and thus complex narrative.

The Igbo village arena is empirically defined as the “general compound of all members of the village” (FGP, ObiraSAs, 21 January 2017), “where young people learn what they do not know about their history and tradition” (interview, AmokpuME, 18 May 2017). It is the “meeting point for human and spirit, for the dead and for the living” (interview, AmokpuME, 18 May 2017), the “religious tabernacle of the people” (FGP, OnichaRA, 17 March 2017); “a place where communal cultural properties are kept, where important communal monuments are also located” (interview, OgorON and OgorAA, 28 November 2016). Otobo is the “symbol of *Nkpuru* - an independent village” (interview, EborOU, 06 December 2016;

AmokpuOU, 26 May 2017), a “centre of unity” (interview, ObiraSAj, 11 February 2017), and a “leisure and recreational centre of the village” (interview, UsehPN, 03 January 2017). In the views of all the participants in the research, the village arena was in the past and (in some places) is at present the centre for political, cultural, religious and economic meetings. It provides space for cultural rites, festivals/ceremonies, and juridical proceedings. It is “our native court, a place where ‘*Itarigba*’ (meaning ‘strictly of a people tracing descent from a known ancestor’) meet to make laws/policies and resolve crises” (interview with AmokpuJU, 25 May 2017). In the words of OnichaIU2 (interview, 16 March 2017), “*Ofu* is the village”. His position agrees with those who see the arena as the symbol of an independent village. The arena is the ‘Whole’ of the village, the heartbeat of the community. This core definition accounts for the reason for locating some important monuments outside the village arena, yet, they are regarded as being part of the arena. They also express the civic role of the arena and represent a system that connects the ‘Whole’ - the village. These definitions also illustrate ways in which the arena has become a significant landscape in the political structuring of the Igbo, where the decisions in all aspects of the life are made. In the past, life radiated from the village arena. Consequently, an independent Igbo village must have one or more such space that asserts its sovereign identity. The process of establishing the village arena is in part profane and in another spiritual. It either begins when the people arrived on the land or when there is expansion that leads to founding a new independent village. Either ways, land acquisition is central to the establishment.

There are two classifications of the Igbo village arena based on ownership and functions. According to ownership, there are those owned by the entire village and those that belong to the lineages that make up the village. Those owned by the entire village also confer identity to a specific lineage within which the arena is located. Village arenas found in this category also serve as the political, cultural and to an extent religious headquarters of the village or the confederacy. Examples of this in the two case studies to be examined are Otobo Umu-Agbo in Amokpu Uhuowerre and Otobo Ifu in Umu-Obira Nkporogu. The arenas that serve only the lineages in Umu-Obira are Otobo Ugwuenechi, Ogbara, Amaozaka, Akpachi and Uwani; and in Amokpu, there are Otobo Amauzu and Amaegu. Looking at categorisation by functions, all the village arenas in the first category also belong here. Those with special functions are found in Umu-obira - Otobo Ogwudinama (Ogwu in short form) and Otobo

Amambokwe. The first is dedicated to the great deity of Ogwu which led to locating other vital shrines here, such as *Ọnụ Al'*, *Ọnụ Enyanwu Ezechitoke*, and *Ọnụ Umụada*

In summary, the village arena is established among the Igbo to be used for one or more of the reasons below. A village may have one arena that embodies these responsibilities, or more with specific functions assigned

1. To stand as a symbol of an independent village.
2. To provide space for keeping or locating shared cultural materials and monuments respectively.
3. To provide a venue for meetings, where laws/policies of the land are made and reviewed.
4. To serve as a civic space for inculcating values, ethics and traditions of the land.
5. To serve as a religious centre/tabernacle of the village.
6. To serve as a native court for the people, where cases are tried and judgments delivered.
7. To provide space for carrying out performances, festivals, ceremonies, initiations and all kinds of communal feasting.
8. To provide space for leisure, games and sporting activities.

Two case studies will now examine these various roles in more depth and over time.

Umu-Obira Nkporogu

Otobo Ifu is the cultural and political headquarters of the Umu-Obira village and Nkporogu town, a confederal arrangement with a cluster of villages that share descent and/or cultural interests. It assumes this position because the descendants of *Dimara* whose lineage arena is *Otobo Ifu* hold the royal stool (*Eze*) of Nkporogu. Also, the location was the first settlement of *Diugwu Idu*, the founding father of the Nkporogu people. In *Ọnwa mbụ* (first month in the Igbo calendar), the arena hosts the *Ika Ezugwu* rite - a pronouncement of the festival of the great *Ezugwu* deity. On this day, the Igbo calendar is counted by *Ọsha/Ọha/Idi* Nkporogu (council of elders) to mark the beginning of a new year. Other cultural or heritage rites/ceremonies are also scheduled for the year at this meeting. Mini celebrations take place, and prayers are made in the *Ifu Diugwu Idu* (shrine) located on top of the settlement mound of the founding father of Nkporogu, *Diugwu Idu*.

Figure 2: Settlement mound of *Diugwu Idu* in *Otobo Ifu* (the arrow points to *Ifu Diugwu Idu* - a shrine dedicated to the founding father of Nkporogu)

Source: Photo by the author, January 2017

Similarly, *Qsha/Oha* Umu-Obira and that of the larger Nkporogu confederacy hold their meetings to settle disputes and discuss matters that affect the communities. In *Qnwa iteg'na* (ninth month in the Igbo calendar), during the festival of the *Ogwudinama* deity, the priests of *Ogwu* perform the rite of *Ite Ushue* (dancing to the music of *Ushue* - a wooden gong). *Ite Ushue* is a celebration that signifies the people's reconciliation with the *Ogwu* deity and includes a successful cleansing of the land for the year. The reconciliation and cleansing rites are performed around *Otobo Ogwu* throughout the night before the *Ite Ushue* is done the following morning. Later in the afternoon, masked performances are observed in most of the arenas, and the entire village is thrown into a celebration.

In *Qnwa eno* (fourth month in the Igbo calendar), during the *Ikpa iyi* festival, a group of *Umuada* (daughters of Umu-Obira), made up of elderly women, assemble maidens who are to undergo the rite of passage to adulthood in this arena before proceeding to *Obunyiko* (the village spring) at midnight. The women and the girls return to their various lineage arenas to perform the final ceremony. Monumentally, there is a village hall, masking house and masking paraphernalia, *Ifu Chi Ogwu* (an extension of the *Ogwu* shrine), *Ifu Diugwu Idu*, and *Qmu* (a public sharpening stone) in *Otobo Ifu*.

Otobo Ogwu is an arena dedicated to the *Ogwu* deity. This space is central to the cultural and religious life of the people as it holds the shrines of the *Ogwu* deity, *Al'/Ani* (earth goddess), *Enyanwu Ezechikwoke* (the sun of the supreme God), and *Umuada* (a shrine depicting powers of the daughters of the land). Others are shrines of *Dimgbokwe* (the deified medicine man whose help settled *Ogwu* in Umu-Obira), *Odiokara* (the medicine that *Dimgbokwe* applied in making *Ogwu* settle) and *Obu* (palace) of the head priest of *Ogwu* (for information on *Ogwu* history, see Ugwuanyi 2017). There is a mound of pots and potsherds, and some of the pots contain 'healing' water. Significant also are the daily rituals that take place within the landscape of *Otobo Ogwu*. According to ObiraASj (interview, 11 February 2017), "*Ogwu* protect and prosper our people. When someone's property is missing, *Ogwu* is called upon to help look for it. If one is shortchanged or deprived of his property, *Ogwu* is used to seek justice". These activities allow the people to experience the space on a regular basis through daily rituals and supplications (meaning humble requests and prayers).

Figure 3: A map showing *Otobo Ifu*, its contents and other arenas in Umu-Obira Nkporogu

Otobo Amamgbokwe is used for an annual legislative meeting, where *Qsha/Qha* Umu-Obira meets on the day of *Izu Amamgbokwe* (a yearly legislative session) during the *Ogwu* festival in *Qnwa iteg'na* (ninth month in the Igbo calendar). At this gathering, the council of elders make and mitigate laws/policies of the land. On that day, heads of lineages assemble at a particular point carrying the *Arua* of their lineage (an ancestral symbol of authority) and a large bell. The head of a specific family leads the procession from that point to the *Otobo Amamgbokwe*. The *Aruas* are mounted in the arena as deliberations on laws/policies and other important matters of interest to the land begin. In the end, they will individually remove their *Arua* and the laws/policies and other issues will remain as agreed and cannot be negotiated until the next *Qnwa iteg'na* in the following year. It is believed that the dead ancestors meet with the living elders on this day and at this venue. Conspicuous monuments in *Otobo Amamgbokwe* are *Qgbu (Ficusthon ningii) Otobo* and a buried stone where the person that led the procession to the venue sits.

Figure 4a: Section of *Qsha/Qha* Umu-Obira during *Izu Amamgbokwe* (annual legislative session) in *Otobo Amamgbokwe*

Source: Photo by the author, January 2017

Figure 4b: Complete view of all the participants in *Izu Amamgbokwe*

Source: Photo by the author, January 2017

All other *Otobos* (*Otobo Ugwuenechi*, *Otobo Uwenu (Ogbara)*, *Otobo Uwani*, *Otobo Amozaka* and *Otobo Akpachi*) belong to the lineages that make up Umu-Obira where they hold various meetings and ceremonies.

These *otobos* comprise a hall, masking house and masking paraphernalia, *Ifu Chi Ogwu* (an extended shrine of *Ogwu*), and *Qgbu (Ficusthon ningii) Otobo*. During most of the festivals, dancing and masking activities are typical, and the village arena also provides space for spectators. The cow-killing rite of passage for the dead is carried out in the lineage arenas. Initiation of young men into the masking institution is also done in this space when the *Iba Mmowu* rite (initiation into masking society) is organised. At different meetings, rites, and ceremonies, individuals usually attend with different cultural objects/materials which are

either then deposited or lost within the landscape. These physical manifestations become the archaeological signatures from which ritual behaviours may later be inferred and interpreted.

Amokpu Uhunowerre

Otobo Umuagbo is the socio-cultural and political headquarters of Amokpu village, Uhunowerre town (the cluster of villages with traceable descent and shared common interests), and the Eketeker confederacy (the cluster of towns that have traceable ancestry and shared common interests). Oral narrative has it that the Umuagbo people were the first to settle in the area. As the first people, they hold the leadership position in indigenous culture, politics and religion and their arena was elevated above others. Also, *Otobo Umuagbo* is said to be a holy place where the gods and the ancestors attend meetings and all participants are expected to speak truth to avoid being cursed.

Figure 5: A map showing *Otobo Umuagbo*, other *Otobo* and heritage sites in Uhunowerre

Umuagbo people are trusted with the observation of the moon and counting of the Igbo calendar. In this way, every new year in the Igbo calendar, the *Onyishi* (the oldest man and head of the village) and *Qha* (council of elders) of Umuagbo assemble here for a ceremony called *ipa mmanya ahua* (literarily translated as ‘carrying wine for the year’). It is at this event that they count the calendar and schedule cultural rites/festivals for Uhunowerre people for the year ahead. Prayers are made in *Qnu Al’* (shrine of earth goddess) and *Qnu Enyanwu Ezechitoke* (shrine of the sun of the supreme God). But more recently, this rite has moved from the arena to *Obu* - the palace - of *Onyishi* because of Christianisation and modern influences that have combined to reduce the number of participants. *Qha* Umuagbo, *Qha* Uhunowerre and *Qha* Eketeker previously had their meetings in this arena, but these have also now been moved to the *Obu Onyishi* of Umuagbo for the same reasons.

Every four years, in *Qnwa ebo* (second month in the Igbo calendar), the *Qmabe* mask spirit enters the village from *Agu/Egu* (farmland), before settling in and operating from the arena. Festivals associated with *Qmabe* ranging from arrival, a rite in *Qnwa ise* (fifth month in the Igbo calendar) to departure in *Qnwa ishi* (sixth month) are done in the arena. The *Qmabe* shrine, the musical instruments and all the masking paraphernalia are found in the *Otobo*.

Figure 6a: Hall Umuagbo

Source: Photo by the author, June 2017

Figure 6b: *Onu Omabe* in *Otobo Umuoagbo*

Source: Photo by the author, June 2017

Onwa eto (third month in the Igbo calendar) is the *Egba Eze* festival, when the *Akatakpa* masking performance is observed. Within this feasting period, an *ikpu Ebule* (ram) rite is organised in *Otobo Eketeker*. *Ikpu Ebule* is the most popular ceremony in *Egba Eze*. This is marked with cane whipping and merriment. On that day, many of the masked *Akatapka* in *Uhunowerre* come to perform in *Otobo Eketeker*. Prizes such as an *Ebule* (ram) for the first position, an *Oke Okukọ* (rooster) for the second and some *Ji* (tubers of yam) for the third place are made available and distributed among the most beautiful and performed *Akatakpa*. But because of the crisis caused by sharing these prizes in the past, the prizes now rotate annually from one village to another. A day following *ikpu Ebule* is the *Ula Akatakpa* (the day that the *Akatakpa* spirit departs from *Uhunowerre*). *Ula Akatakpa* is marked with a rite that sees all the masked *Akatakpa* in *Uhunowerre* place their whipping canes in *Onu Akatakpa* (popularly called *Igbudu Akatakpa*) located in *Otobo Umuagbo*.

Figure 7: *Ikpu Ebule* (ram) ceremony during *Egba Eze* in *Otobo Eketeker*, *Uhunowerre*

Source: Photo by the author, May 2017

Onwa Esato (the eighth month in the Igbo calendar) is the *Uke* (agricultural/new yam) festival. There is *Uke Eguru* (*Uke* for blacksmiths) and *Uke Oha* (*Uke* for general public). *Uke Eguru* is carried out by blacksmiths in *Amauzu* before the general public would do same after *Nkweizu* (one native week, 4 days). *Amauzu* has this privilege because they produce the agricultural implements. In the past, this festival involved a wrestling competition in the arena. *Oriri Chukwu* (celebration of the supreme God) is in *Onwa iri* (tenth month in the Igbo calendar). On the appointed day, all members of the village bring food, meat and wine to the arena to feast together. Prayers are made in the shrines of *Onu Enyanwu Ezechitoke* (shrine of the sun of the supreme God) and *Onu Al'* (shrine of the earth goddess). It is important to note that *Oriri Chukwu* is separately organised for men and women. *Onwa iri* is for the women while men celebrate in *Onwa iri ne na* (eleventh month in Igbo calendar).

Onu Al', *Onu Ugwuoburu*, and *Onu Oshu-Idenyi* are shrines situated outside the boundaries of *Otobo Umuagbo* but have some link to the rituals and activities taking place in the arena. Apart from the shrines mentioned above, there are *Onu Abere (Ikpōnyi)* and *Onu Umuada* in *Otobo Umuagbo*. *Abere* is the wife of *Ikpōnyi*, a night masking performance that reveals to society individual ways of living. AmokpuPO (interview, 01 May 2017) narrates his encounter with *Ikpōnyi* thus: “just [a] few days ago when *Ikpōnyi* was performing, it passed beside my house, called me and I answered. It started by telling me that I am a drunkard; that I go to market and return late every day because of my drinking attitude.... I am lucky because if I were living a life that is considered very bad in the society, it would have exposed me to the public.... But friends were praising me after that encounter.... *Ikpōnyi* told my neighbour that he is a trouble maker, that he should conclude his brothers funeral rites, avoid making trouble with people and stop sleeping about with different women”. The goal is to expose people that have bad and dubious attitudes and to appreciate those with positive behaviour. This masking performance involves a procession that sets out from the arena after some rites are carried out in *Onu Abere*. Thus, *Onu Abere* is found in virtually all the lineage Otobos - Amauzu and Amaegu.

Onu Umuada is a shrine associated with womanhood, particularly the daughters of the land. Prayers are made in this shrine during the assumption of office as a new *Onyishi Umuada* also known as *Ede* (eldest person among the daughters of the land). In a separate context, when a married daughter of Umuagbo or Uhunowerre dies, the *igba oba* rite is carried out for her. *Igba oba* is one of the rites of passage for women in Uhunowerre. In *igba oba*, the children of a dead woman arrange an *Oba* (a small basket containing some money and materials that signify their mother's place in society) which they take amidst dancing to their mother's people. The *Oba* is received by the first son of their mother's family. Some prayers are made in *Onu Umuada* and the *Oba* is hung around the shrine. The practice is gradually diminishing and faces extinction due to the influence of Christianity. However, there are some women who insist that the rite should be performed for them when they die.

Otobo Eketeker houses the *Eketeker* customary court and provides space for many festivals/ceremonies. There are *Onu Omabe*, *Onu Abere* and other shrines associated with the lineage that own *Otobo Amauzu* and *Otobo Amaegu*. As such, meetings of all kinds are also

held in them. Nevertheless, *Otobo Umuagbo* remains the headquarters of all the social institutions in Uhunowerre, and to some extent, in *Eketeker* confederacy.

Discussion and Conclusions

As we have seen, time is positional in the transitional movement of the arena from permanent to temporary states. Time in Africa according to Animalu (2011, 27), “depicts the world as an immortal regenerative cycle of birth, death and re-birth of all things in nature in which time – the ‘African Time’ – is cyclic and irreversible...”. Ifesieh (1989) asserts that time among the Igbo is marked with reference to traditional landmarks, “in the life of the community” such as cultural festivities and events. Time in Igbo is *oge*, which if specifically applied means *mgbe*. Because time, whether as *oge* or *mgbe* according to Ugwuanyi (2017) is organised by the Igbo in a non-sequential and variegated manner across space, cultural events/rites transiently occur within the Igbo cyclical cosmos.

Igbo cyclical time organises all the events/rites that happen in the Igbo village arena in these temporal perspectives. They occur periodically and follow an established course. Similarly, attention given to monuments and events in the arena is also framed by these same rhythms. Though the space and its contents are physically fixed - permanent, the time of the event/rite occurrence is fixed in its rhythm, but temporary in nature. Take for instance, the *Ika Ezugwu rite*, *Izu Amamgbokwe*, and *Ogwu* festival in *Onwa iteg’na* in Umu-Obira and *ipa mmanya ahua*, *egba eze*, and *Omabe* festival in Amokpu; these events are temporarily carried out in the arena within the Igbo cyclical cosmos. By contrast, *Igba Oba* in Amokpu is more fluid and unpredictable, as is the death which brings it about. What seems permanent about the rites/events is that they are found within the cyclical experience or rhythms of life, which characterise the lives of the Igbo people. The shrines permanently sited with the arena, and the associated materials form archaeological signatures that contribute to understanding the complexities of this important space in Igbo life. Further and extensive enquiries into the use of the arena among the Igbo will help to understand and better appreciate Igbo history and heritage.

Going by the cyclical temporality of the village arena, the landscape is a space where the inter-generational behaviour of the Igbo, from the ancient, through the present to the future

manifest. Ingold (1993, 152) noted that “landscape tells - or rather is - a story. It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, has moved around in it and played their part in its formation”. This essay not only affirms Ingold’s findings; it shows how such landscape – human entanglements express indigeneity and confer rights to heritage control.

While the majority of village arenas are vibrant and active spaces, some examples are physically abandoned. Yet even in these abandoned arenas prayers continue to be made at the shrines within them. Equally, the hosting of major festivals will often lead to re-activation of many of the monuments within the arenas. These are therefore fluid places, transitioning between states of abandonment and active use over time, but always characterised by uses that are transitory and ephemeral. They are in a sense therefore ambiguous spaces, the meanings and significance of which depends on the various perspectives of participants and observers, of the time of day, month, or year. Such spaces likely transcend time and space, from prehistoric Europe to the contemporary city. But here, in rural West Africa, their uses and significance are highlighted through the persistence of ritual behaviours and ceremony, where materiality and memory are central components. We can learn much from these spaces, about ancestors, others and ourselves. And a helpful framework for that understanding is one that recognises patterns of behaviours and the rhythms of daily life. This temporal perspective can give shape and clarity to complex patterns of behaviour. By this means, the village arena comes into sharper focus.

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