

Migration, Family Values and Continuity: A Study of Igbo Diaspora in Italy

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Abstract

Every ethnic group has distinctive features or characteristics. The continuity of those features is assured, notwithstanding some socio-political interruptions like the case of migration and other causes. To be an Igbo man, just like as is predominant in many African cultures, is to be identified with and by one's culture. But the continuities of these cultural traits and features seem to be hampered by migration which has taken a more universal dimension. Does this migration actually affect the culture of the people or does the Igbos remain with their culture and values irrespective of migration? Migration actually disorients people and as such, tampers with the continuity of their cultural values. The purpose of this paper is to discuss migration and its impacts on the age-long values of the Igbo people living in Italy. It tries to define what migration is, the people known as the Igbos and their family constitutions and the impact of migration in the general lives of the people but in a specific way on their values of lineage continuity, mutual interdependence and valorization of personal achievement. The specifics and daily existential challenges of the Igbos living in Italy were given an adequate attention. This paper does not in any way condemn migration but rather cautions of the negative effects if not properly handled. It also points out the dangers it poses to the collective values and sense of community and continuities among the Igbos in Italy in particular and Igbos in general as a nation

Key words: Migration, Igbo people, Family Structure and Values, Igbo diasporans in Italy.

Introduction

Sir Edward Burnett Tylor defines culture as that, “complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society”¹. Being influenced by the Darwinian evolutionary theory, Tylor contends that, there is an evolutionary relationship between primitive and modern cultures as such, a process of continuity even in the so-called modernity. This evolution takes place with its concomitant diffusion as it is being transmitted from one generation to another. The Igbo people of Nigeria remains a proof of the facticity of the progressive transmission, diffusion and transfer of cultures from one place (Igbo land) to every place they (Igbo people) find themselves and from one generation to the other. It is not new to hear of various cultural festivals of the Igbos being celebrated in other parts of the world by the Igbos and their admirers like the New Yam (Iri Ji Ofuu) festival among others².

J.S. Mbiti contends that, the African’s attachment to culture, traditional values and religion could be termed sentimental or fanatical³. The Igbos are proudly African and can bear eloquent testimony of this opinion of Mbiti. The depth of Igbo cultural heritage is better appreciated when we watch the original Igbo setting before the modern trend of migration. The continuities of these cultural practices are to a great extent protected by the family members being together and if any will travel it is mostly seasonal and not to last long before they will be united at home. Be that as it may, the current willful and sometimes forced migration has among other things separated the strength of this cultural bond of togetherness. The overwhelming influences of the Umunna (kinship) and other cultural institutions have been greatly and negatively affected by migration and so are also the values. The effort in this paper will be to look at the family values and their continuities in the face of this unprecedented migrations. Thus, a little look on migration, the Igbo people in Italy, their sense of the family and values and how they

¹ E. B., TYLOR, *Primitive Culture* Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1871, 1.

² Cfr. F. C. UKPOKOLO, O.C. OKOYE, and O.B. LAWUYI, “Cultural Reconstruction of Iwa Ji Festival in Igbo-Ukwu, and Fractured Igbo Identity”, in *Synthesis Philosophica* 65 (1/2018) pp. (149–164)

³ Cfr. J.S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., London 1976.

are faring, will be the primary focus of this paper. What then is migration especially in the context of our discussion?

Migration

The density or scarcity of population in a given area of human or animal habitation is actually determined according to anthropologists on the tripod demographic processes of fertility (birthrate), mortality (death rate) and migration. While the first two factors have purely biological reasons, the third, migration is entirely different from the rest in terms of the reason for its occurrence⁴. Migration is influenced by the social, cultural, economic and political factors. The term migration has as its synonyms: relocation, resettling, population movement, moving, moving abroad, emigration, expatriation, posting, exodus, departure, defection, trek, and diaspora among many others. In a general sense, it refers to the movement or relocation of people and animals be it temporally or permanently from one place (in most cases home) to another place. But our concern here is human migration⁵. Pope John Paul II, gave a precise definition of migration which also specifies some reasons for it. He defines the term migration as the summation of the phenomenon of all of human mobility.

The term "migrant" he contends, is intended first of all to refer to refugees and exiles in search of freedom and security outside the confines of their own country, it also refers to young people who study abroad and all those who leave their own country to look for better conditions of life elsewhere⁶. Thus, why migration is the act of this movement as explained above, the person or persons involved in the act are referred to as migrant(s). Migration can be international; thus, from one country to another, there is also intra-national migration which is a movement from one location to another within the same country. From the topic of this research, it is obvious we are

⁴ Cfr. H. CASTAÑEDA, Migration is part of the human experience but is far from natural, *Nat Hum Behav* 1, 0147 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0147>

⁵ Cfr. MULTILINGUAL DEMOGRAPHIC DICTIONARY (United Nations publi ... graphic and Social Characteristics of the Population (United Nations publication, Sales No. 58'xVII.6), p. 76.

⁶ Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *The Pastoral Care of Migrants, a Way of Accomplishing the Mission of the Church Today*, Message of the Holy Father for the 87th World Day of Migration, Vatican City 2 February 2001).

discussing international migration. From Igboland of Nigeria to Italy. Where is this Igboland and who are the Igbos?

The Igbo People of Nigeria

The Igbos today are found majorly in the five South Eastern states part of Nigeria: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states, they are also found though not in majority in other adjoining states like Rivers, Delta, Cross-River, Bayelsa, Benue and Kogi. They share a common language called “Igbo”, a common culture, a common social and religious background. They can be referred to as either “Igbos” or the “Igbo” speaking people of Nigeria, as a people or in the sense that they speak the same language, though with some dialectical differences. They occupy a continuous tract of territory and have many features of socio-political structure and culture (omenala) in common, with understandable varieties among the various groupings⁷. To be an Igbo man is to be identified with the tradition of the people and they live communal life and kinship commensality to the full. To be ostracized from the (Umunna) kinship is termed as almost being “dead” because it is the basis of every relationship⁸.

The bond among the Igbo people and heritage was succinctly put by S.O.C Okenwa, as people of great culture and custom, with a republican life style, which makes them a strong people that value personal liberty and choices. It is this republican disposition that makes some critics describe them as difficult to govern (Igbo enwe eze). They are fiercely independent and economically indomitable. They have deep convictions and extremely proud of their heritage and descent, down the historical ages⁹. The cherished values of the Igbos are many but for the sake of our research we concentrate on the family values and sense of continuity among the Igbos. Before going into the details of family values of the Igbos, it may be necessary to examine the basic familial structure of the Igbos from which originates the bond and the continuities of these values.

⁷ Cfr. D. FORDE –G.I. JONES, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking people of South-East Nigeria*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London 1950, 9-10.

⁸ Cfr. D.U. AGBO, *Traditional Love and Christian Charity in the Igbo Community*, Leberit, Rome 1982, 23.

⁹ Cfr. S.O.C. OKENWA, “The Baby Business in Igbo Land”, in *The Village Square*10 (2012), 59-75, 62.

Basic Family structure of the Igbos

The family is the basic unit in the Igbo society and there is an ontological bond of family relationship amongst them. D. Agbo argues that, the family for an Igbo man, means something wider than a man, his wife and children. It means this and more, comprising the families of the sons who are married and their own children as long as direct line continues on the same patriarchal line. All these are known and addressed as one family¹⁰. For Uchendu also, this familial bond makes it imperative that every Igbo person belongs to an agnatic group which is a lineage with unbroken continuity of male line. This agnatic group is predominantly patrilineal, as well as all its members, or agnates, is called by the same term *Omonna* (Umunna)¹¹. Just like in many other African contexts, the Igbo man realizes himself within this network of patrilineal blood relationship. His identity and dignity come from the family¹². So that, for an Igbo man, his social, religious, political and economic life and status begins in his nuclear family, grows through the traditional structures of *Umunna*, to the village in their various groups, to the town and even outside the town¹³. Nuclear Family....1, Extended Family....2, Umunna that is the kingship (Obi)....3, Village....4, Town...5.

The first in the ladder is the nuclear family, which a times in the pre-Christian Igbo era is bigger than what we know today of nuclear monogamous family because polygamy was not only acceptable but laudable among the Igbos in the past. Nuclear family may mean a man, his wife or wives and all their children as well as their dependents, if any. This is the most basic structure in Igbo society¹⁴. The extended family is headed by the eldest man among the many nuclear families that make up extended family. He is called "Okpara" or Di-okpara a socio-religious title-of honour, respect, ritual, authority and recognition. He exercises authority over the rest¹⁵.

A number of these extended families make up the (Umunna), the agnatic group, people of the same father. Here also, seniority by age regulates the

¹⁰ Cfr. AGBO, *Traditional Love*, cit.,19.

¹¹ V.C. UCHENDU, *The Igbo of South East Nigeria*, National History Press, New York 1975, 68.

¹² Cfr. B.N. IFFIH-P.C. EZEAH, *Sociology of The Family*, John Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd, Enugu 2004, 74.

¹³ Cfr. AGBO, *Traditional Love*, cit., 23.

¹⁴ Cfr. S.N.C. OBI, *Ibo Law of Property*, Butterworths, London 1963, 17.

¹⁵ Cfr. OBI, *Ibo law*, cit., 25.

social placement¹⁶. The eldest is also called the Okpara who holds the “Ofo” symbol of authority over all the nuclear families and “Umunna” members. A conglomerate of the “Umunnas” constitute a village whose head is the oldest of all the “Okparas”, but being a democratic society, he rules together with the other Okparas. In majority of the cases, the bond usually ends with the village. They are knitted together and it is expected that they cannot marry or harm each other. A times some myths or legends may establish bond between two villages but it is not a principal bond. To be an Igbo man you must be fully identified with these groups. One is not treated individually but reference is always made to the patrilineal line or side. It is there that one gets his identity as a member of a community¹⁷. At this point, a look at the Igbos in Italy becomes necessary.

Igbo diasporans in Italy

Italy is located in southern Europe. She is bounded in the east by the Adriatic Sea, in the west by Tyrrhenian Sea or the cost of Mediterranean Sea, in the South by Ionian Sea and in the North by the countries of France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia. It has twenty (20) regions: Aosta Valley, Abruzzo, Molise, Apulia (Puglia), Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Liguria, Piemonte, Lombardy (Lombardia), Marche, Sardinia (Sardegna), Sicily (Sicilia), Tuscany (Toscana), Trentino Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Guilia and Umbria. It has more than 95 major cities. Although an independent state, within Italy is also the Vatican City state where the Roman Catholic Church has her headquarters. It is interesting to know that in all the cities of Italy you will find at least two or more Igbo people, but there is a higher concentration in some regions like: Abruzzo, Apulia (Puglia), Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardy (Lombardia), Marche, Sardinia (Sardegna), Sicily (Sicilia), Tuscany (Toscana) and Umbria¹⁸.

The location of Italy and its closeness to the Mediterranean Sea makes it a soft target for migrants. There are two groups of migrants in Italy just like in any other country of the world. We have those migrating legally who use the airport and have the requisite documents but a major percentage of the migrants come in through Libya and through the Mediterranean Sea. The

¹⁶ Cfr. UCHENDU, *The Igbos*, cit., 85.

¹⁷ Cfr. AGBO *Traditional Love*, cit., 25.

¹⁸ See, <https://italybest.com/20-regions-of-italy/> visited 10/05/2022.

prevalent instability and hopeless future in African and other countries have made Europe and especially Italy the route of exit. So that, to be precise about the numbers of Igbos in Italy may take more than a rocket science. The chart below gives credence to the number of illegal or irregular migrants to Italy from 2014 to 2021.

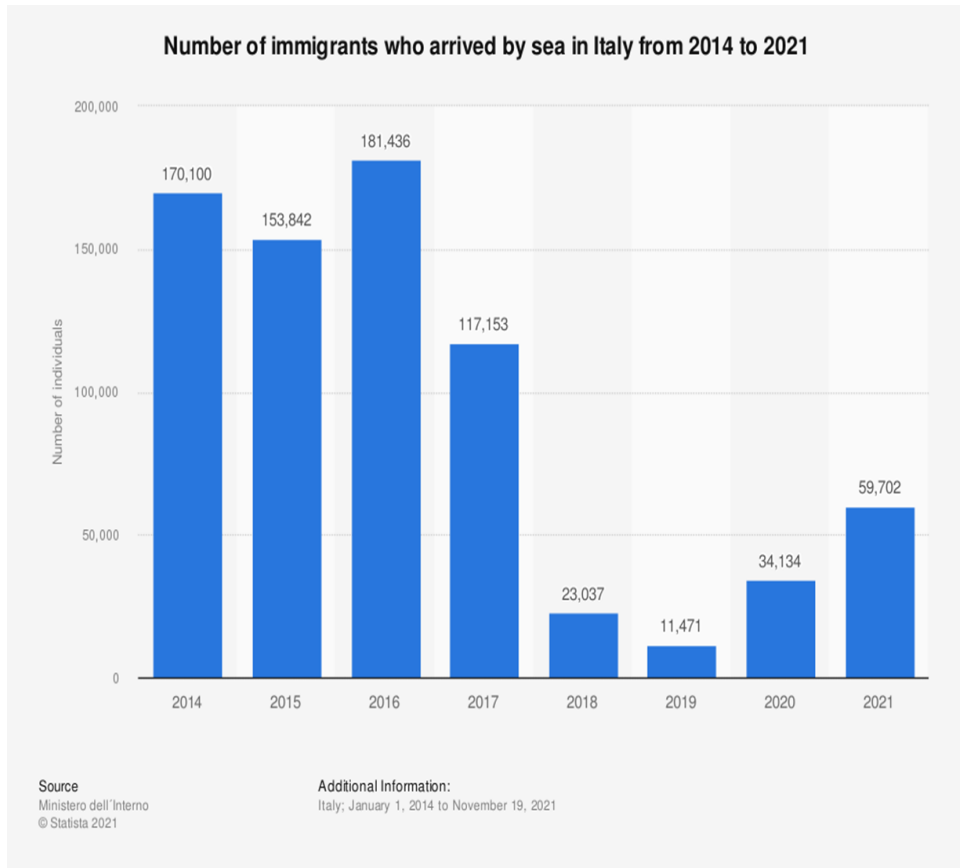


Figure 1. The chart was published on November 19, 2021 by Simona Varrella, who is a Statistic researcher specialized in economy, education, and demographics. Her geographical areas of expertise are Italy and West-Africa, with a special interest in Nigeria. Some of her most recent publications focus on business enterprises, migration, terrorism and the impact of the pandemic on the economy. Besides, she has been writing about digitalization in Nigeria as well as generally in the whole African continent, with vivid attention on the social-economic effects of the digital markets.

An effort to find out the possibility of knowing Nigerians who are among these groups, we consulted a more detailed statistics made available by the National Commission for the Right to Asylum (*Commissione nazionale per il diritto di asilo*, CNDA). This is under the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of Interior which publishes monthly statistical reports on asylum applications and first instance decisions. From the table below one can see the number of Nigerians seeking asylum in Italy:

Table 1: The number of Nigerians seeking Asylum in Italy

Total	AP.2020	P.2020	R.S.	S.P.	RJ.	R.R.	S.P.R.
R.R. T.	26,963	33,636	4,924	4,310	34,949	10%	12%
77%							
Pakistan	5,515	:	298	654	5,185	5%	11%
83%							
Nigeria	3,199	:	1,317	180	5,235	19%	3%
76%							
Bangladesh	2,745	:	70	57	2,831	2%	2%
95%							
El Salvador	1,068	:	454	567	745	26%	32%
42%							
Tunisia	1,024	:	34	4	906	4%	0%
95%							
Venezuela	834	:	167	711	75	17%	74%
8%							
Somalia	764	:	130	242	115	27%	49%
23%							
Peru	739	:	106	29	1,155	8%	2%
87%							
Gambia	699	:	46	31	1,105	4%	3%
92%							
Senegal	696	:	68	37	1,663	4%	2%
92%							

Source: National Commission for the Right to Asylum (*Commissione nazionale per il diritto di asilo*, CNDA) 2021.

Applications and granting of protection status at first instance: Breakdown by countries of origin of the total numbers year 2020: Applicants in 2020 (AP.2020), Pending at end of 2020 (P.2020), Refugee status (R.S.), Subsidiary protection (S.P.), Rejection (RJ.), Refugee rate (R.R), Sub. Prot. Rate (S.P.R.), Rejection rate total (R.R.T.).

Statistics on decisions cover the decisions taken throughout the year, regardless of whether they concern applications lodged that year or in previous years. “Rejection” also covers inadmissibility decisions. “Applicants” refers to the total number of applicants, and not only to first-time applicants¹⁹. The table gives us at least a glimpse of Nigerians who are seeking asylum among other considerations.

Our research to know much about the Igbos in Italy was based on the various processes:

There is a big presence of Igbo priests, sisters and other religious in Italy. Many are studying in the various Pontifical Universities scattered in Italy. We have an umbrella organization which dates back to the 70s after the Nigerian/Biafran civil war (1967-1970). It is called “Izu Nwanne” which is literally “the assembly of brothers and sisters”. Here we get many priests and religious of Igbo extraction. Still in the religious sense we have Anglophone Catholic communities scattered all over Italy. While we find many brothers and sisters from other areas, Igbos are the most dominant among this group. Others from some other states have more presence in some Pentecostal churches but Igbos dominate many of the communities to the point that in some they even say Masses in Igbo. It is on this various Anglophone catholic communities and some of their Igbo members that I based my findings about the impact’s migration have on the Igbos in diaspora in Italy as regards family values and continuity.

My contacts with them

I was sent to study in Rome by June 2012. By 2013 I had my first contact with two of these African catholic communities: *Comunita Nigeriana Cattolica di Sant’Ambroggio, Roma*, they celebrate their Masses in the Church of Saint Ambrose Rome and *Comunita Cattolica di Casilina Roma*, they celebrate their Masses at the Church of Saints Simon and Jude in Casilina, Rome. Apart from these two, I have had some research and pastoral contacts with the following community: San Sebastiano Prato, The community in Perugia, Ravenna and many others. Although I have not been officially a chaplain but I have held brief for more than two of the Chaplains in different communities at different times and occasions. Although not all

¹⁹ Source: MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, I numeri dell’asilo, available in Italian at: <https://bit.ly/2SBSwbn> visited 10/05/2022 10pm.

the Igbos in Italy come to Church or attend the Masses but anytime there are functions and ceremonies they are found in many numbers. From the office of the National Chaplain, Fr. Dr. Matthew Eze, as of the last official record 2020 before the outbreak of the covid 19 pandemic there are more than thirty-five (35) of such communities in Italy and many are still springing up²⁰.

Peculiarity of Italy

Italy, though of ancient civilization and culture, has a relatively poor assimilation rate to foreigners especially blacks. It is a common feature and quite acknowledged that majority of those living in Italy especially blacks cannot be seen in many professions: Police, Army, serious office attendances, Bus drivers and the likes, postal agencies except as delivery men. Italy, unlike United Kingdoms, United States of America, Canada and other parts of the world that has English as official language, has Italian language. They are so attached to the language that even those who can speak English among them decline to do that either because of fear of making mistakes or they do not need it. So, upon arrival in Italy amidst other cultural shocks language stands tall more than others. One's ability to master and speak fluently the Italian language is the most successful process of integration and the best tolerance strategy among the Italians or the natives. Being able to discuss with them gives them some confidence in you. Among many African migrants, because of the circumstances surrounding their entries to Italy, many are either too impatient to learn the language, afraid or lack the resources for language schools which can be costly too. Those who speak the language always have better opportunities.

²⁰ See, [Conferenza Episcopale Italiana \(C.E.I.\)](#), Elenco di Capellani e Comunita Anglofoni Africani in Italia, www.conferenzaepiscopaleitaliana.it, visited 10/04/2022.

Research carried out on mutual cultural intolerance between the migrants and the natives brings out the picture clearer:

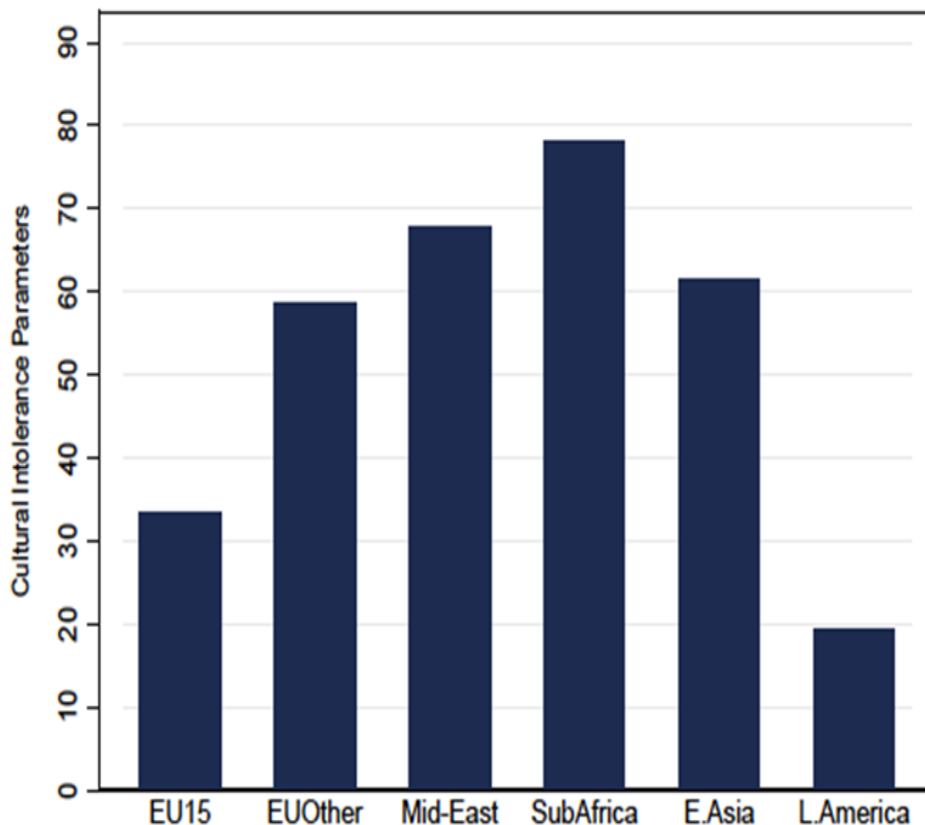


Figure 3. Cultural intolerance parameters
Natives towards migrants

The graph estimated cultural intolerance of natives with respect to the minorities' migrant populations. From the graph, Sub Saharan Africa which unfortunately is the highest in intolerance by the natives houses Nigeria from where the Igbos form part of the Country. As reported in Panel, it also estimates the highest cultural intolerance of the Italian majority towards immigrants originating from sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East (three times as high as that towards immigrants from the EU15 <https://voxeu.org/article/marriage-fertility-and-cultural-integration-immigrants-italy>. Bisin, G. Tura, 26/11/21

The above charts show high degree of mutual intolerance between majority of the Sub-Saharan Africans and the native populations. Apart from deficiency of language as we discussed above, the life styles, values and sometimes lousy nature of our brothers and sisters help to widen the gaps.

There is also the nature and educational status of majority of Igbos in Italy: A conclusion reached from my interactions with some of the Catholic communities and some Igbo associations shows that, apart from the priests and other religious who are in Italy for studies or missions, great majority of the Igbo migrants in Italy have little or no academic qualifications neither are they in Italy for any study. Even those who have good academic qualifications in Nigeria, the language barrier makes those certificates null and void as far as Italy is concerned. Among the lay Igbos in Italy, their major occupations include very small percentage working in many factories as low skilled or casual workers and greater majority are into what is technically called “Sharroti”²¹. It is a business where they set off in the morning to some strategic business centers, offices, restaurants and the likes to sell few articles and beg for help from the people. It is another subjugated experience but because money comes from it they are not bothered.

Because Italy serves as an entrance route to Europe, many who arrive in Italy have usually the intention for short term stay to move to better countries according to them like UK., U.S.A., Germany or other countries for greener pastures. Upon arrival especially among the illegal migrants, some will end up in the various refugee camps which may take years before acceptance and documentations. Some are sent back to Nigeria even after such years of integration. But this “short stay” may take between ten to twenty years or even more. The implication of this short-term intention

²¹ During my research I tried to get to the proper meaning of this word (sharroti). I discovered that it is not an Italian word and is not really used by the Italians. One can conclude that it is a mild way of describing the practice of going about and begging or selling few articles, it also includes helping those shopping with the carts and other ways of eliciting their sympathy for a gift from the people. The paucity of the language by the immigrants can be seen from what the natives regards as “vu compra” instead of the correct “voi comprare” meaning “will you buy”. Cfr. G., FRANCESCO, *Communicative strategies in the Italian of Igbo-Nigerian immigrants in Padova (Italy): a contact linguistic approach*, University of Manchester Press, Manchester (UK) 2005.

comes with a lot of procrastinations: delaying of marriage or even forced marriage to get papers, those already married and have their wives at home may stay five to ten years without being able to travel home, the style of life is affected thus delayed gratification, careless and frustrated life styles, some may take to excessive drinking and other substance abuse, the females among them are not left out.

Igbo Diaspora in Italy, Family Values and continuity: Family values among the Igbos

T. Eze, arguing from the point of view of Igbo traditional worldview, cosmology and social structure identified three core values which one could argue integrates all the other values of the basic Igbo family. These are mutual dependence, lineage continuity and valorization of personal achievement²². The basic Igbo family works hard to realize these values. For the purpose of this research, a critical look will be taken of these values in the Igbo setting with a view of knowing how the Igbos in diaspora in Italy have fared. We begin with lineage continuity:

Lineage continuity (marriage, childbirth and ancestorship)

Life among the Igbos is a continuum. It is from birth through marriage to adulthood and after death to ancestor position. Achebe expresses the disaster that awaits a family without continuity: Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his father crowding round their ancestral shrine in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days²³. For the ordinary Igbo man, marriage is the lawful living together of man and woman of different families for the purpose of begetting children after some rites have been performed. It is regarded as a milestone in the life of a man and a woman. It is this (marriage) that will enable them to immortalize their remembrance through their children²⁴. This is seen in every aspect of their lives. Children occupy the central point in Igbo marriage. The first and foremost consideration is the fertility of the couple. Parents long for this and the father of the family requests this every

²² Cfr. T. E. EZE, *Beyond the Scrapyard: An Ethnography of Igbo Migrants in Germany*, Ulb Munster, 2021, 73-77.

²³ C.A. ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, Heinemann Ltd., Edinburgh 2008, 18.

²⁴ Cfr. C.A. OBI, *MARRIAGE Among the Igbos*, Unpublished Doctoral Theses submitted to Urban University, Rome 1979, 3.

morning in his kola nut prayer. The mother begs for it while giving cult to her *chi* during annual festival²⁵. An example of such prayers can be also with the morning kolanut, asking God always for the gift of the fruit of the womb and the general protection of the family²⁶. Marriage and begetting of children whose presence assure us of lineal continuity is a core family value among the Igbos. For one not to marry on time or not to marry at all, spells a disaster not just for the individual but to the family in general. Here also, the religion of the family is of utmost importance. Religion among the Igbos play a significant role. As we pointed above a change from the religion of the ancestors is considered a taboo and will deny the forefathers their morning rights of libations and homages. The language of the people remains of utmost importance because it is the vehicle of communication. It is taken for granted that every person from the Igbo cultural zone will be able to communicate in the language. How has it been for the Igbos in Italy and this value?

Igbos in Italy vis-à-vis lineage continuity

This value suffers most of all the other Igbo values enunciated. In a Catholic community which I used for the evaluation which for some personal and pastoral reasons, I would not like to mention the name, we have about 200 (Two Hundred) members: Only 10 (ten) complete families, that is: father, mother and Children. About 140 (One Hundred and forty) are single but unfortunately among them the youngest will be close to 35 years of age and we have some amongst them more than 50 years who are not yet married or have marital problems pending. More than 30 are on contract marriages for papers including being married to women or men that are more than 60 years of age. For some, there is no chance or hope for childbearing, others are entirely disorganized for life because they have children out of such union. While the remaining are married and have their wives or husbands in Nigeria and some have been here for more than ten years without visiting home. Funny enough, some have very young wives when they left and after ten years they either cannot go home or will not like to because going home means not coming back. Their language difficulties affect the children born

²⁵ OBI, *MARRIAGE Among the Igbos*, Among the women folk is this famous Song “Olisa nyem nwa nyem ego kama I ga awom nwa woo m ego mgbe nwam tolitere ego m ezugo.” Asking God for both child and wealth, but instead of denying her child let money be denied her. This is because once the child grows up the money is there. Children were actually riches and the splendor of life among Nsukka people. Pg. 3.

²⁶ ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, 15, 132, 12.

here greatly. Very many of them are either impoverished in Igbo Language or some do not even speak it at all. What happens to family responsibilities and collective care and custody of the children? Is it right to leave a young girl hanging for ten years, or what of Igbo core value of marital fidelity? In the absence of either of the parents how will those basic values of the family be transmitted? The next to be considered will be mutual dependence.

Mutual dependence

The Igbo basic cosmology as we indicated earlier makes it imperative that mutual dependence must be a family value. It begins as Eze argued, between the parents and children, where the parents love and care for their children and the children in turn will obey their parents. The children's obedience with the passage of time when the children are grown turns to filial piety. With the death of the parents and their becoming ancestors it transforms to ritual obligation. This confirms the Igbo traditional cosmology which sees the family as a unit of three groups with constant mutual interaction of: the living, living-dead (ancestors) and unborn²⁷. This singular attitude was greatly praised by Pope John Paul II about Africa in general, but it has a special appellation for the Igbos: "In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God. The sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints?"²⁸. Even as Christians, the Igbos treat their faith as familial issue so that, even when one is digressing or attends other denominational activities, the family's faith and religion is paramount as we can see where marriage is still today not encouraged by parents between two people of different denominations. There is also the issue of the caste system which unfortunately is still hampering beautiful conjugal unions among young people. This also forms part of the family values.

Apart from these intricate mutual dependences and obligations, the value of mutual dependence highlights also fraternal solidarity which is fundamental

²⁷ Cfr. EZE, *Beyond the Scrapyard*, 74.

²⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On the Church In Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Toward the Year 2000 *Ecclesia in Africa*, (14.09.1995) n. 44.

to the Umunna agnatic group. In the Igbo family setup, there is a belief that “Igwe bu ike” unity is strength’ should be ‘there is a belief that “Igwe bu ike” which means “unity is strength”. The wealth, successes and failures of a member affect the others. That is why in the Igbo basic family structure, one’s wealth is always distributed to all the members of the family and when the contrary becomes the case there is always enmity, jealousy and rancour. In fact, it takes the position of right that one should help the other instead of being a charitable act. The success of a man in Igbo familial setting is measured by the collective successes of the group, not that of the individual in question because “ofu osisi adighi emebe ohia” meaning “a tree cannot make a forest”²⁹. Even the rich in typical Igbo familial environment needs the praise and encomiums of the poor, so occasionally he throws parties, brings gifts and does some projects for the family and the community. These are sometimes rewarded by the community conferring some titles on those individuals.

Igbos in Italy vis-à-vis the value of Mutual dependence

This value seems to be much integrated to the average Igbo, “Aku rue ulo” which means that one’s riches must be evident at one’s home or origin is a maxim very much common amongst the Igbos. Igbos in diaspora in Italy practice very well transnationalism. S. Vertovec defines transnationalism as a contemporary phenomenon that involves migration of people from one country to another, but they retain ties with their home countries. Thus, technically speaking, being here and there at the same time³⁰. This basic value is also one of the greatest reasons why so many of the diasporans become either useless in life or even die just to make a good impression amongst home people. Some of them who are doing “Sharrotti” have lists of people very healthy and at times better than them that they pay salaries every month. Some who have their wives at home make them live like queens but they themselves here live three in one room, eat “Pannini”, (A type of bread prepared with some ingredients inside) some are thrown out of the house almost every month because they could not pay rent or other bills yet at home they are big boys and girls. In fact, one brought the wife here and she was unhappy by what she saw and hopes to travel home soon. She never knows that her husband will leave as early as 5.am, to go and

²⁹ Cfr. R.C. NJOKU, *African Cultural Values: Igbo Political Leadership in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1966*, Routledge, New York 2006, 13.

³⁰ Cfr. S. VERTOVEC, *Transnationalism*, Routledge Press, London and New York 2009.

stand in front of a business center in a chilling cold to beg for money while in Nigeria they have many high rising buildings with tenants and live very ostentatious lives. The continuity of this value has also made many people in Nigeria lazy as all are waiting for “Ego obodo oyibo” which means remittances from the diasporans. The other aspect of this is that those who cannot meet up to these standards of living, resort to some dubious means; and they share some terrifying stories of “isa aru” meaning literally, “to bath” but in the real sense it is a reference to how many years they have been in prison. It is also very awkward to know that even some in prisons, because they are given a token some will find a way of sending home something to those who may not be his parents or immediate responsibilities and who are free and healthy. This takes us to the last point, valorization of personal achievements.

Valorization of personal achievement

For the Igbos, an important family and societal value is personal achievement. The Igbo proverb *Nwata kwocha aka, o soro ogaranya rie nri* meaning, “when a child washes his hands clean, he will dine with the elders” betrays a flexible and accommodating mindset that rewards achievement and industry. People work hard to break the so-called jinx of poverty line and to upgrade the standard of living of their families. In Igbo family, the son who is doing well is loved by all (‘Nwa ana amuru oha’), while the “never do wells” (“efuluefus”), are despised by all except the mother, in majority of the cases³¹.

Destiny or success is achieved among the Igbos not ascribed as we have in many other parts of Nigeria. Be that as it may, in this quest for success, the family morality or good name is placed first before every other consideration because “Ezi afa ka ego” meaning “a good name is better than riches”. So, while the sense of industry and success are cherished, when one becomes rich through immoral or illegitimate means, the family in many cases may disown such a person and of course his wealth and gifts are avoided.

Igbos in Italy vis-à-vis Valorization of personal achievement

This family value has a string attached to it. The Igbo family appreciates personal achievements greatly but not at all cost. Unfortunately, both in

³¹ Cfr. OBI, *MARRIAGE Among the Igbos, cit.*, 35.

Igbo homeland and in the diaspora, this penchant for personal achievement and fame has taken away the Igbo famous dictum “Ezi afa ka ego” meaning “Good name is better or more valuable than wealth”. Today in Italy, what is the occupation of our young men and women? The family moral values are long dead and forgotten especially among those in diaspora. There are some terms now in use like: “Ibute ike” which means “Making money as the end, the how may not be necessary”. Going overseas means money and you are welcome home only if you made the money even at all cost. To this end, many are cooling their heels in the various prisons scattered in Italy and beyond. To enable them act without remorse many will even stop going to Church let alone the sacraments. When one compares the sacramental lives of those living abroad with those at home the difference is clear³². These three areas of trying to make it at all cost have really dealt with the Igbo values and morals: Sharotti: literally begging from place to place. As we explained earlier, most of our brothers just to make the money have even jettisoned the idea of work but have decided to make begging permanent work. Too many dangers abound in this choice. Some have met untimely death, gone to jail then one can imagine the swallowing of pride to be treated with ignominy. The second of the three is the avarice of dealing on drugs or other substances. This alone has contributed to the incarceration of many of our young men and women. A trip to any correctional center in Italy will reveal how many of our promising young men and women who are in prisons for drug related cases. Either trading on them or using and in majority of cases abusing them.

The third and most shameful is prostitution. In Nigeria, there is a common knowledge high rate of prostitution in Italy. Because of language barriers, illegal entries and generally the high cost of living, majority of Nigerian girls in Italy are deep into prostitution. Too many documentaries have revealed their ordeals in the hands of fellow Nigerians and even among the other nationalities. The terrible aspect of this is the destruction of the dignity of men and women, which is against the Igbo values, the health implications and in many cases their inability to remain with one man after marriage.

³² Cfr. S.O. AREJI, “The Negative impacts of Migration on the Sacramental lives of Catholic Christians: A Pastoral Concern for Pastors of Souls and the Family”, in the *Shepherd Newspaper*, April edition 2022.

Too bad also is the fact that some of our young men are into prostitutions in many dimensions both as gays and some are “servicing a times women who are more than 70 or even 80 years just to make the money. One wonders the essence of such monies after all these dirty lives. Be that as it may, there are some who live decent lives, have organized families and even when the family members are not together, they visit home frequently. In fact, some of our brothers and sisters here in Italy are really making us proud, very religious and virtuous, obeying the laws of the land and are highly respected among the Italians.

Conclusion

The family values in Igbo land are sacrosanct. From African Traditional Religion to Christianity and in their various cultural manifestations the Igbo man or woman will stick to these values. Although a lot of good things and benefits have gotten to Igbo Land because of migration, a lot has also been lost as regards Igbo core values of Lineage continuity, Mutual dependence and Valorization of personal achievement. But our point has been that all these notwithstanding, the Igbos in Italy more than other counterparts in other parts of the world are finding it difficult to be faithful to these values. Those at home can to a great extent, help their relations in diaspora to live a good moral and value-oriented lives by demanding less from them. Our candid submission is that, there are some other persons of different nationalities who are doing well, the Igbo People in Italy should learn from them how they conduct their affairs: decent life styles, obedience to the laws of the land and giving full attention to their individual comforts and health. Their today should be given more attention than tomorrow which they are not sure of arriving at. There are exceptions but being in diaspora has contributed to the loss of many family values and as such endangered their continuity.

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