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# When the Kola Nut (*Cola Acuminata*) Meets the Electric Slide: Constructing Transnationalisms

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# When the Kola Nut (*Cola Acuminata*) Meets the Electric Slide: Constructing Transnationalisms

Rita Vivian Offiaeli, Ph.D.

University of Connecticut, 2015

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how Igbo men and women who live in the United States, through membership in hometown associations (HTAs), collectively align, organize and reshape their lives around their ancestral hometown identities as they settle down in the USA. It explores, from an anthropological perspective, the role of hometown associations in cultural reproduction, and the thesis that migrant groups, through hometown associations, effectively re-locate, maintain and reconstruct forms of ancestral hometown traditions and identities in diaspora. Rather than examining Igbo hometown associations as sites for the provision of kin and economic support that facilitate migrant acculturation in host societies, this research analyzes hometown associations as sites for cultural maintenance, albeit in modified forms. I examine the hometown association and its social space as an institutionalized site for the maintenance of cultural difference by analyzing the retention and blending of Igbo and Anglo-American<sup>1</sup> practices during life cycle events as Igbo immigrants socially interact with each other as well as members of the broader community in the places where they are settling down.

I argue that hometown associations provide an institutionalized site, where as both Igbo and Anglo-American life cycle events are marked, migrants' cultural traditions converge with

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<sup>1</sup> Anglo-American as used here refers to those practices considered to be part of mainstream American culture, e.g. wearing jeans, eating pizza, the celebration of high school graduations, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, bowling parties etc.

Anglo-American practices and co-exist or intersect and react to produce a bricolage of modified traditions and identities. The hometown associations provide a site where ancestral village solidarity and cultural heritage are not just shared and celebrated but are re-villaged, reconstructed, and when necessary, added to by borrowing from Anglo-American practices. Revillaging as used here refers to the desire to not just belong to one's ancestral village by virtue of lineage but the process of practicing one's village identity and publicly identifying with the village collective. By practicing their ancestral village identity as a collective, they form an obodo<sup>2</sup> (village) community that is distinct and different from those of others who are not from their ancestral village. This study seeks to examine, primarily through ethnographic research, how Igbo migrants produce new village localities as they collectively align, organize and reconstruct their lives through the socio-cultural institution of the hometown association.

Rita Vivian Offiaeli – University of Connecticut, 2015

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<sup>2</sup> Obodo is the Igbo word for village or hometown

When the Kola Nut (*Cola Acuminata*) Meets the Electric Slide: Constructing Transnationalisms

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B.A., University of Saint Thomas, 1987

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APPROVAL PAGE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Ken, and my children, Kenny, Maxine, Kendra and Chelsea. Thank you for being shining beams of light that always illuminate my path.

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the hometown associations that welcomed me into their midst to carry on my research and I am deeply grateful for their generosity.

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This doctoral program has been a journey of sorts. During the course of this journey, I lost my only son, Kenny, my mother, Agnes, my sister, Uche, and my brother, John. Thank you



to my husband, Ken, and my children for being co-pilots on ‘this journey’ and for helping me to stay the course. This is much your accomplishment as it is mine. Thank you to my children, Kenny, Max, Kendra and Chelsea for always filling my life with joy and making my life complete. You are my blessings from God!

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# WHEN THE KOLA NUT (COLA ACUMINATA) MEETS THE ELECTRIC SLIDE: CONSTRUCTING TRANSNATIONALISMS

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## **CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW**

In chapter one, the research study, *When the Kola nut (Cola acuminata) Meets the Electric Slide: Constructing Transnationalisms*, is introduced. The project is described and the literature review is carried out by discussing existing literature on hometown associations and explaining how this research complements existing literature. Chapter one ends with background information on the studied group, the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria and a discussion of the research methodology.

### **Introduction:**

Most studies indicate that the primary motive for the formation of hometown associations is to facilitate immigrant adjustment in the new community by providing immigrants a social network they can rely upon for employment, housing, socialization and various needs as they settle down. In recent times, with migrant economic remittances as the new development mantra (Caglar 2006), hometown associations are now mostly viewed through the intermediary broker and development optics and as shadow states that provide services which the state has failed to provide (Barkan, McNulty et al 1991; Honey and Okafor 1998b). Even though migrants continue to rank sociability and recreation as key motives for joining hometown associations, I contend that these aspects of hometown associations, which according to Caroline Brettell (2005) sustain bonding social capital, are being overlooked in the recent scholarly trajectories that examine the effects of HTA as shadow states and intermediary brokers that lobby and collaborate with the state and international agencies for home development.

Collective remittances for hometown development and political voice do not seem to be the *raison d'être* of Igbo hometown associations in the United States. It seems Igbo hometown associations in the USA are intensively socio-cultural, not necessarily transnational in their

activities and are institutionalized sites for the relocalization and reconstruction of cultural space and place ‘here’ in the new communities. Igbo hometown associations seem to provide a contemporary site for the retention and pragmatic reconstruction of ancestral village traditions and identities. As Dr. Ruth Landes theorized culture is “a dynamic process that involves not only the formulation of ideal values, norms, and patterns of behavior but also strategic practices by which individuals negotiate and contest cultural norms and adopt behaviors needed to meet changing conditions” (Cole 2002:537) and this study looks at the ‘strategic practices’ that enable Igbo immigrants to re-village in their new communities.

I contend that membership in hometown associations is sought by Igbo migrants because the hometown association provides a central and institutionalized space that acts as a modified ancestral village square in the new community enabling the selective appropriation, relocalization, reconstruction and re-authentication of village traditions outside the ancestral hometown — a process which could directly curtail transnational activities yet paradoxically yield multiplier effects on individual transnational life. This differs from the conventional view of HTAs which is that they are primarily transnational organizations focused on hometown development. My aim is, with a focus on the primary reason for membership in hometown associations, —camaraderie with ancestral kin as life cycle events are acknowledged and celebrated, to investigate how the social processes enacted in the institutional space of HTAs maintain or reshape existing identities and traditions, and to also examine the rearticulated power and gender structures resulting from these processes as members settle in their new environments. I understand here HTAs as sites of production and reproduction of “communities” in diaspora<sup>3</sup> based on shared ancestral hometown origins as well as based on shared experiences

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<sup>3</sup> Diaspora as used here refers to those living outside the ancestral village or hometown

with the host societies. I employ Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1966) concept of bricolage and Arjun Appadurai's (1996) concept of the re-localization of localities and local subjects through traditional celebration of rites of passage to analyze how the "stuff of cultures" changes as Igbo migrants re-village themselves.

I argue that for Igbo immigrants in the United States, hometown associations are not transnational organizations because though called hometown associations and named after existing and thriving hometowns in Igboland, most of their activities are not geared towards developing or maintaining formal ties with ancestral hometowns. The hometown associations are not the primary vehicles through which transnational life is actualized among members but instead seem to serve the purpose of acting as diasporic village squares where Igbo cultural identity and a 'bricolage'<sup>4</sup> of Igbo and Anglo-American traditions are practiced and passed on to offspring. I argue that Igbo hometown associations may curtail transnational life by providing a site, which acts as a replacement for the ancestral village. As a substitute site, it acts as an arena where traditions normally reserved for performance in the ancestral village can be relocalized and performed in diaspora by migrants. Though most activities of the HTAs are not transnational but localized and socio-cultural in scope, I argue that their socio-cultural activities lead to a multiplier effect on personal transnational activities by individuals that are hometown association members. This is because HTA members look towards the ancestral hometown for cultural goods or items to maintain their cultural selves as they participate in HTA affairs.

As such, hometown associations have to be analyzed through conceptual frameworks that shed light on the cultural, economic and social significances of those interactions which occur when Igbo and Anglo-American practices meet and co-exist or react to each other and the

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<sup>4</sup> Lévi-Strauss (1966)

resulting bricolage of cultural forms, identities, economic and power structures produced. How do the social processes and interactions enacted in the institutional space of hometown associations maintain or reconstruct existing identities, traditions, and what new or existing power, gender, and economic structures result from these processes?

The objectives of this research are:

- 1) to examine the roles and functions of Igbo hometown associations in the United States
- 2) to investigate the effects of the institutionalization of the hometown association as the social space for the marking of both Igbo and Anglo-American life cycle events and to examine the new spaces, power and gender structures created as traditions are maintained or reconstructed.

Findings from this study provide insight into how HTAs are sites of production of new “communities” in diaspora and how transnational identity and socio-cultural change are negotiated in the host community as well the degree to which daily life is lived within a transnational social field by immigrants and their offspring. This study also contributes to current debates on migrants’ agency in their selective socio-cultural incorporation into mainstream society, assimilation, multiculturalism, and the maintenance of cultural identity among first and subsequent generations of immigrants.

Fieldwork for this research was conducted over an eighteen month period. Three participant associations were selected from Igbo associations in the United States. The research methodology consisted of:

- 1) a survey questionnaire used primarily for demographic data collection
- 2) semi-structured interviews with members of Igbo hometown associations to elicit the role and functions of hometown associations in their lives, and the level of importance



attached to membership in hometown associations

3) participant observation of hometown association meetings and events.

## **Literature Review - The Project in Relation to Other Research**

Hometown associations are comprised of members who claim typically the village or town as a common ancestral location of origin. Until recent times, hometown associations were characteristically informal with membership being voluntary (Barkan, McNulty et al 1991; Caglar 2006; Fox and Bada 2008; Honey and Okafor 1998a; Little 1957; Owusu 2000; Gugler 1971). Worldwide, there are about 3,000 Mexican hometown associations, approximately 1,000 Filipino, 500 Ghanaian associations (Orozco and Garcia-Zanello 2009) and within the United States, there are approximately 164 Guatemalan, 200 Salvadoran, 30 Honduran, and 200 Guyanese hometown associations (Orozco and Garcia-Zanello 2009). As these numbers show, hometown associations are flourishing and most are analyzed through the development trajectory as they undertake projects to improve life at home by providing social welfare services and public infrastructure construction when government authorities are unable to fulfill their obligations (Fox and Bada 2008; Honey and Okafor 1998b; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Orozco 2004, 2005; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello 2009; Smith 2006; Waldinger, Popkin et al 2008).

The migrant's desire to socialize with ancestral brethren in the new community and to maintain socio-cultural, political, and economic ties with the ancestral home is realized through membership in hometown associations. Membership in the immigrant hometown association is a way of belonging<sup>5</sup> to that social field stemming from the ancestral village (Bersselaar 2005; Owusu 2000). Hometown associations are "social networks that are not localized" (Okafor and Honey 1998: 9). They are also "non-territorialized" and are "geographically dispersed" (Okafor

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<sup>5</sup> Ways of belonging means those "...practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group" (Levitt and Schiller 2004:1010)

and Honey 1998:15) but the basis for membership is geographically fixed because it is determined by origins in a specific location – the ancestral home. Hometown association members are able to belong and participate in home community affairs without physically being residents of the ancestral location (Fitzgerald 2008; Okafor and Honey 1998). Branches of hometown associations may exist nationally as well as internationally and may function individually or under the umbrella of an apex organization located either in the ancestral community, as with Nigerian hometown associations (Okafor and Honey 1998), or anywhere else members designate, as in the Zacatecan umbrella organization located in the United States, the ‘Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos Unidos’ (Goldring 2002). To the extent that members are interested in maintaining their cultural identity and developing their communities, hometown associations provide an avenue “for people to maintain their locus of commitment no matter how dispersed they are geographically” (Okafor and Honey 1998:10).

Igbo hometown associations can be likened to diasporic versions of the Ticuani Zocalo<sup>6</sup> or the Ijebu Ijesa Hall<sup>7</sup> where community members congregate to celebrate, share life’s tribulations, and discuss or act on community affairs. This membership does not replace the individual connections to home, however, most still gravitate to hometown associations to collectively reminisce, share achievements, seek status and recognition, and to deploy collective development remittances towards home (Fitzgerald 2008; Owusu 2000; Smith 2006; Waldinger 2008). The social field of hometown associations is part of other social fields that together makeup the “social world” (Waldinger, Popkin et al 2008:866) of migrants.

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<sup>6</sup> The Zocalo is a park in Ticuani, Mexico, where returnees and stay-at-homes interact and discuss the daily aspects of their social worlds (Smith 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Town hall in Ijebu Ijesa, Nigeria, where most socio-cultural, official, and civic activities are held (Aguda 1998).

As can be seen from the above descriptions, most studies describe hometown associations as entities providing both a socio-economic network to facilitate new immigrant's acculturation process in receiving communities (Babcock 2006; Barnes 1975; Little 1957, 1965; Massey 1986; Onwubu 1975; Owusu 2000; Portes and Walton 1981) and the deployment of collective or personal remittances for development of sending communities (Barkan, McNulty et al 1991, Caglar 2006; Dike 1982; Gugler 1971, 1991; Okafor and Honey 1998, Massey 1986; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Levitt 2001; Morrill 1963; Moya 2005; Onwubu 1975; Orozco 2004, 2005; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello 2009; Owusu 2000; Smith 2006; Waldinger, Popkin et al 2008). Recently, scholarly and political interest in hometown associations has surged due to the effects of migrant remittances on sending communities (Waldinger, Popkin et al 2008). As such, hometown associations are now mostly analyzed in their capacities to develop or broker development for sending communities (Barkan, McNulty et al 1991; Caglar 2006; Okafor and Honey 1998, Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Orozco 2004, 2005; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello 2009; Smith 2006; Waldinger, Popkin et al 2008) and also as political machines that give 'voice' to immigrants both in their receiving and sending communities (Barkan, McNulty et al 1991; Fox and Bada 2008; Okafor and Honey 1998; Smith 2006; Waldinger, Popkin et al 2008).

In addition to the focus of most studies being on the development and political aspects of hometown associations in the sending communities, there seems to be a lack of in-depth analysis of the role of women in hometown associations in the receiving communities. The role of women in hometown associations is mostly described as minimal, or mentioned in connection to culinary matters at times of celebrations (Denzer and Mbanefoh 1998; Honey 1998; Okafor and Honey 1998; Ramakrishan and Viramontes 2010). According to Rex Honey, "HTAs are really men's organizations when it comes to initiating ideas and controlling activities. Women play more an

auxiliary role, providing the domestic help for social gatherings rather than exercising real authority” (1998:148). Hometown associations not only remain a “bastion of male dominance” (Honey 1998:148) but “operate as instruments of patriarchy limiting the empowerment of women” (Honey 1998:152). Ramakrishnan and Viramontes’s (2010) study of Mexican hometown associations reveals the exclusion of women in leadership roles and decision-making processes. Waldinger, Popkin et al (2008) in their study of Salvadoran hometown associations also found that women were not in leadership positions except for the ‘occasional’ secretary. Though there is overwhelming focus on hometown associations as agents of progress and development, yet existing literature depicts women as marginalized within hometown associations. Hometown associations based on modified traditional forms of governance seem to render women invisible in the public domain removing them from the decision making realm in co-development, home community affairs, as well as limiting their exposure to civic participation that may facilitate their adaptation in their new homes.

This study examines all aspects of the functions and social interactions that surround the activities of Igbo hometown associations and joins the larger literature on gender relations and social change by looking at the different gendered roles and perspectives encountered within hometown associations. By so doing, it aims to shed light on the socio-cultural significances of the interactions that take place at the locations where Igbo and Anglo-American practices converge and the resulting cultural forms, identities, and gendered structures produced.

Though a lot of studies have been conducted on hometown associations, typically of Latin American countries in the USA (Orozco and Garcia-Zanillo 2009), as indicated earlier, most of these studies argue that hometown associations’s central focus is transnational. As such hometown associations become essentialized as shadow states and as providing forms of

governance in ancestral hometowns, where there is little or no government presence (Barkan, McNulty et al 1991; Honey 1998; Okafor and Honey 1998; Orozco 2005). Previous studies show that when governments are unable to provide basic services in ancestral villages or towns, hometown association members and leaders driven by “the desire to help one’s community and be recognized for such sacrifice” (Smith 2006:75) step in to help their ancestral villages. To accomplish this, hometown associations take on quality of life improvement projects such as building schools, hospitals, water wells, pipe borne water, roads, and providing electricity and telecommunications (Barkan, McNulty et al 1991; Fox and Bada 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Honey 1998; Orozco and Lapointe 2004; Orozco 2005; Orozco and Garcia-Zanello 2009; Smith 2006). As such, HTAs are described as shadow states because of their role in providing these functions and services which the state has failed to provide (Barkan, McNulty et al 1991; Honey 1998; Okafor and Honey 1998). Hometown associations are also viewed as intermediary brokers because they lobby, liaise, and collaborate with the government in their ancestral villages, as well as with international agencies to provide quality of life services to those left behind at home (Honey 1998; Orozco and Lapointe 2004, 2005). These shadow state and intermediary broker functions translate to ‘voice’ (Fox and Bada 2008; Smith 2006) for migrants and home community members. Most of the funds used by hometown associations for home development projects are raised through periodic associational dues or through project levies or fundraisers (Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Okafor and Honey 1998; Smith 2006) and since most hometown association members contribute to project funds, they hope to participate in project selection and prioritization and this process of negotiating project priorities enhances civic participation and promotes democratization processes in the hometown (Fox and Bada 2008; Smith 2006).

My study, on the other hand, starts from the premise that while Igbo hometown associations may exist because members share a common locale of origin (the ancestral hometown), the focus of their activities is not that single point ‘there’ (the ancestral village) but their current point ‘here’ – their new community. This research complements existing literature on hometown associations by examining the hometown association as a technology or an instrument of revillaging in diaspora – how do the social processes and interactions enacted within and around the social forum of hometown associations maintain or reconstruct existing identities, traditions, and what new or existing gender structures result from these processes?

Furthermore, most studies of hometown associations in the United States, which are typically of Latin American hometown associations, are of migrants who left rural hometowns for the United States through kin-network assisted migration (Fox and Bada 2008; Massey 1986, Waldinger, Popkin et al 2008, Smith 2006). Hence, once in the United States, they typically become involved in those kin based hometown networks or associations that facilitated their migration. Most of these international rural-urban immigrants typically have English language barrier issues that keep them reliant on kin and hometown networks for a period of time as they adapt and learn English, thus the emphasis on kin-networks as facilitating the acculturation of immigrants in the host society (Massey 1986). However, the Igbos in the United States differ. Igbo people who come to the United States typically come from an urban environment to an urban location in the US. Most have completed their high school education, are fluent in the English language and are used to living in cities as well as being familiar with modern technological advances. The main motivation to become a member in the hometown association is to seek out sociable events as the Igbo hometown associations do not typically exist to facilitate migrant acculturation or economic adaptation in their new environment (Reynolds and

Youngstedt 2004). The Igbo hometown associations in the United States are a form of technology which re-villages migrants. Members reshape their socio-cultural lives around the social arena of the HTAs which acts as a relocated and modified village square in their new environments. The social space of the HTA becomes a re-villaging arena where ancestral kin gather to share traditions and where socio-cultural functions previously deemed as ‘culturally’ authentic by its performance in the ancestral hometown (Bersselaar 2005), are now performed among ancestral kin in diaspora. This might curtail aspects of transnational life by members who may now view the hometown association as an arena where ancestral kin can congregate to carry out traditional ceremonies and rites.

Few studies have been conducted on hometown associations of sub-Saharan, recent African migrant groups in the USA characterized as mostly brain-drain immigrant professionals. Though some studies have investigated the socio-cultural, political and economic roles of home community<sup>8</sup> associations in the lives of West African migrants in North America, with the exception of Rachel Reynolds’ study (2002), these studies have been on regional, ethnic or national associations (Attah-Poku 1996, Owusu 2000) and not on ancestral hometown or village associations. In her study of an Igbo hometown association, though Rachel Reynolds (2002) described some of the social aspects of the Igbo association, her primary focus was on investigating education as the primary migratory order among the members. She found that the brain-drain immigrants in the association did not live in ethnic enclaves and though dispersed throughout the suburbs were active participants in the association. I argue that though dispersed in the suburbs, the HTA, provides a social space for them to re-village or come together as a

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<sup>8</sup> Home community associations as used here refers to immigrant associations formed by immigrants who share a common ethnic identity or identify as a group of immigrants from a common country of origin or a group who claim to share a common ancestry in a village or town.

community of people with shared ancestral origins. My research expands on Reynolds' study by looking at the implications of such active participation on cultural reproduction. Also, to complement existing research which mostly looks at the transnational activities of hometown associations, this research analyzes the activities of hometown associations in the places where the immigrants have settled. It also equally examines the roles of men and women in hometown associations to shed light on the cultural and social significances of the interactions that occur where Igbo and Anglo-American practices meet and co-exist or react to each other and the resulting bricolage of cultural forms, identities, and gender structures produced. How do the social processes and interactions enacted in the space institutionalized by HTAs maintain or reconstruct existing identities, traditions, and what new or existing power and gender structures result from these processes in the places where the immigrants are settling down and living their lives?

As Arjun Appadurai (1996) notes, hybridity complements the reproduction of locality among diasporic communities. The celebration of life marking events in traditional ways is in effort to produce "local subjects" (Appadurai 1996:179) or individuals marked as belonging to a particular community or kin. Appadurai describes the traditional celebration of life cycle events as "social techniques for the production of 'natives'" (1996:179) and life marking ceremonies as being "complex social techniques" for inscribing "locality onto bodies" (1996:179). The traditional processes to mark life cycle events are "ways to embody locality as well as to locate bodies in socially and spatially defined communities" (Appadurai 1996:179). Locality in this sense refers to "a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects" (Appadurai 1996:182). The particular forms of intentional activity are contemporary life



marking events and I employ Levi-Strauss' (1966) concept of 'bricolage' to reflect the intentional appropriation and combining of existing sets of Igbo and Anglo-American practices and ideas to produce modified forms of contemporary practices under the umbrella of Igbo tradition as migrants strive to reproduce and inscribe ancestral identity unto diasporic, contemporary and relocated subjects and offspring.

For Igbo immigrants, the socio-cultural space of the hometown association seems to be one that though created in reference, and can only exist as axial, to the ancestral village is however geographically relocalized and concretized as existing in their new environments.. Through the forum of hometown associations, Igbo migrants see themselves as forming relocated villages in their new environments. Igbo hometown associations provide an institutionalized platform through which members who share a common locale of origin (the ancestral hometown) gather to create a community within which Igbo hometown traditions are re-appropriated and materially re-localized and performed in diaspora , thus creating simulations of modified ancestral village squares and modified ancestral natives in diaspora.

The hometown association as a technology of re-villaging in diaspora creates new village localities –concrete spaces within which members seek to replicate ancestral village traditions in the places where they have settled. Such hometown associations are sites where bricolaging Igbo and Anglo-American traditions become entangled with the desire to maintain links to their ancestral identities. As such, members become translocated hybrid-natives.

Though a large number of Igbo hometown associations exist in the United States (at least 45 different HTAs exist in the greater Dallas Forth Worth area alone<sup>9</sup>), no ethnographic study

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<sup>9</sup> List of Igbo hometown associations on the Igbo Community Association of Nigeria, Dallas Forth Worth, Inc website. <http://icandfw.com/associations.htm>. Also a quick search of these HTAs show two have about 38 chapters in the USA, and the others average 10 to 15 chapters in the USA making for about 500 of them in the USA alone.

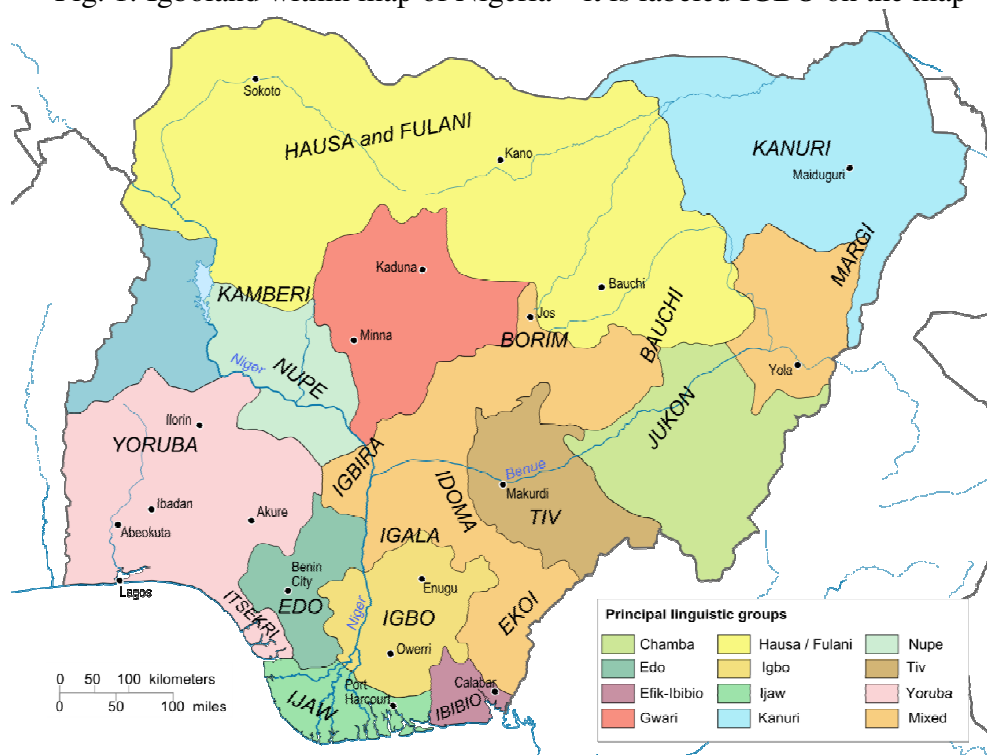
has been conducted on the functions of Igbo hometown associations and how Igbo migrants use them to create and or meet the needs of a socio-cultural space for the relocalization and maintenance of ancestral hometown traditions and identities as they settle down in their new environments.

### **Background on the Igbo People**

The origins of the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria remain an enigma for scholars (Afigbo 1983, 2005; Harneit-Sievers 2006; Uchendu 1965). As Afigbo writes, “the problem of Igbo origins is indeed ‘a very maze within a maze’. It boggles the mind” (1983:1). After evaluating the more popular traditions of oriental origin, origin from neighboring areas, or the tradition of origin claiming autochthony, Afigbo writes the Igbo people “originated in the course of a dialog between them and their god - as long as we understand that god to be their environment” (Afigbo 1983:10) and locates Igbo people and civilization (Igboland) as the “ethnic group which inhabits that portion of Nigerian territory bounded by the Igala,...the Idoma,...the Ekoid Bantu,... and the Edo” (2005: 141) and concludes that an Igbo person is one who hails from Igboland, and whose mother tongue is Igbo (Afigbo 2005). Other scholars after much research and debate, also conclude on the speculation that the Igbo people have always lived in present day Igboland and most agree on the unsolved mystery of the origins of the Igbo people (Basden 1966; Onwubu 1975; Uchendu 1965), however, the Igbos are often described as one of the most entrepreneurial groups in sub-Saharan Africa (Chukwuezi 2001), as very republican (Chukwuezi 2001; Onwubu 1975; Uchendu 1965) with an inclination towards migration for economic purposes that predates colonialism (Harneit-Seivers 2006; Basden 1966; Uchendu 1965).

The Igbo people totaling about 15 million (Harneit-Sievers 2006:2), occupy most of Southeastern Nigeria and are one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Harneit-Sievers (2006) writes that in precolonial times, the area currently referred to as Igboland was comprised of autonomous villages or village groups that did not share any form of centralized political authority; there was no Igbo empire or kingdom just autonomous village units. Members of different village groups may intermarry and members of the same village may intermarry so long as they are from different lineages. The Igbo word for each village is ‘obodo.’ In present times, village or hometown is used interchangeably by Igbo people to refer to their obodo and Igboland is a contemporary term used by Igbo people to refer to all the obodos or villages<sup>10</sup> of the Igbo speaking peoples.

Fig. 1: Igboland within map of Nigeria – it is labeled IGBO on the map



[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/51/Nigeria\\_linguistical\\_map\\_1979.svg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/51/Nigeria_linguistical_map_1979.svg)

<sup>10</sup> In present times, a lot of villages may now better be described as towns or cities due to economic growth.

Present day Igboland is comprised of 95 local government areas and occupies five of the 36 Nigerian states (Harneit-Sievers 2006). The obodo is a village or group of villages with a “common sense of identity” (Harneit-Sievers 2006). What this means is that members of the village or village group have a history of common beliefs, customs and traditions. The hometown has and continues to remain the main basis of identity for its Igbo people regardless of their place of birth or residence (Agbasiere and Ardener 2000; Harneit-Sievers 2006; Okafor and Honey 1998; Uchendu 1965). Each Igbo person who can trace their patrilineal ancestry<sup>11</sup> to a village even if born elsewhere is a member of that obodo (village community) and is referred to as an ‘indigene’ of the village. Others born or residing in the same village but whose patrilineal ancestry is tethered to another location are considered to be strangers and are viewed as ‘non indigenes’ of the village and cannot identify with the village community (Harneit-Sievers 2006; Uchendu 1965). As Honey and Okafor (1998b) note, Nigerians differentiate between indigenes and non-indigenes. An ‘indigene’ of a place within the Nigerian context, is one who traces their patrilineage or ancestry to that place while all others even if born in that place are viewed as strangers or non indigenes of that particular place (see also Harneit-Sievers 2006; Human Rights Watch 2006: 1; Kraxberger 2005: 18). Every Nigerian in addition to being a citizen of Nigeria is also viewed as an indigene of a particular village or town and this would be the individual’s ancestral hometown or village. As Lampert notes “indigeneity is constitutionally enshrined” and is commonly deployed to determine where one belongs (2009: 181). So, a Nigerian Igbo family that has lived for generations outside of Igboland, e.g. in Langtang, Nigeria, which is located in the lower section of Northern Nigeria and home to the Yergam people, are not considered

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<sup>11</sup> In present times, Igbo people can typically trace patrilineal ancestry four to five generations back through oral history passed down by oldest members of families. Grandparents talk about their own great grandparents to their grandchildren so their grandchildren may also someday pass the information on to their children and grandchildren.

indigenes of Langtang. That Igbo family is viewed as Igbo indigenes living in Langtang and the Igbo family would identify with their village or obodo in Igboland even though they have lived outside their obodo for generations. The Igbo family will view itself and other members of its obodo community, wherever they may reside, as “*ndi obodo anyi*” or “*ndi ebeke anyi*” which means people from our place. Their claim is one of “autochthony” which is a “term literally implying an origin ‘of the soil itself’ and meaning, by inference, a direct claim to territory” (Geschiere and Stephen 2006; 2). Though their claim to identity is rooted in the ‘soil’ of the ancestral village, living as immigrants away from home, they are part of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991) made up of members bound together by shared origins. However, because they live outside the primordial ancestral village, they are not content as an imagined community and are making concrete their obodo community by re-villaging in their new environments through membership in the HTA. For the purposes of this study, ‘hometowners’ will be used interchangeably with ‘obodo/village community’ to refer to people who share a common village ancestry. Hometowners are people who identify with each other as belonging to the same obodo community because their ancestry is traced to the same village or hometown in Igboland.

While most Igbo people may never have resided in their ancestral hometowns, and only visited on special occasions, the ancestral hometown remains the primary and sometimes the only basis of identity (Agbasiere and Ardener 2000; Harneit-Sievers 2006; Okafor and Honey 1998; Uchendu 1965) with strong village ideology and identity being important structures around which most Igbo people continuously construct their social lives wherever they live (Agbasiere 2000; Dike 1982; Onwubu 1975; Uchendu 1965). As Harneit-Sievers writes, Igbo local communities or hometowns are not imagined but have “well-defined locations on the map” and

though members who can trace patrilineal ancestry to these communities are dispersed all over the world, they have very “clear” concepts of “home”; their ancestral village or obodo (2006:10). The only place called ‘home’ for the Igbo person is the ancestral village and the home community is made up of all the people from ‘home’ or the ancestral village. For the Igbo people, there are two types of communities to which they belong. The first is the home or obodo/village community and an Igbo person has only one obodo community and that is their ancestral village community made up of ancestral kin who are either physically living in the ancestral village or are dispersed all over the world. Living outside the ancestral village in places like the suburbs of America, they come together as an ‘imagined’ obodo community under the auspices of the HTA. The second community is the ‘non-obodo’ community comprised of people who do not share their ancestry and with whom they interact in the various places they may currently live. The village community is made up of people who trace their origin to the same village regardless of where those individuals may currently reside. In present times, this group of people may barely know each other but because of their common ancestry as people from the same obodo/village, they identify with each other as members of the same obodo community. Typically, the one and only home community for an Igbo person is the obodo community either as imagined in diaspora or as may be physically found in the ancestral village. With this being the case, Igbo obodo communities are typically ‘translocal’ in that members do not have to be physically present in the obodo or village in Nigeria but belong and may identify with the obodo community if they trace patrilineage to the obodo/village, thus Igbo village communities are typically comprised of sons and daughters ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’ (Dike 1982; Geschiere and Gugler 1998; Harneit-Sievers 2006; Onwubu 1975; Uchendu 1965).

For the Igbo people, migration is viewed as a temporary economic necessity that takes one away from their one and only home because "... for the Igbo 'home' can be assigned one and only one meaning. ... it is the place where the individual hails from, and where his ancestors lived. Therefore, no single individual can have more than one 'home', strictly speaking..." (Onwubu 1975:406), and it is in the village or hometown that their truly authentic traditional culture thrives and is practiced (Bersselaar 2005). However, given present day diasporic realities, do the above still hold true for the Igbo people? As I will show in upcoming chapters Igbo migrants have begun to appropriate and relocate traditional culture and practices to their new communities bringing "the village" to them and their offsprings. The 'core' identity for the Igbo people is the village identity; it is that identity which is derived from one's patrilineal village. This core identity supersedes both the regional ethnic identity as an Igbo person and also the national identity as a Nigerian (Agbasiere and Ardener 2000; Harneit-Sievers 2006; Onwubu 1975). How and in what contexts has this strong ancestral village ideology been mobilized and transplanted in the United States as Igbo people strive to maintain their village identities while settling down in their new communities? Focusing on the 'here', this study examines membership in hometown associations and the activities that occur within hometown associations as well as the activities that occur outside hometown associations but are engendered by membership in hometown associations or by the existence of hometown associations to shed light on the significance of hometown associations in the receiving communities. This study of hometown associations was carried out over an eighteen month period (June 2012 to December 2013).

## METHODOLOGY

This section takes a look at the research methodology and gives an overview of the associations studied and the methods used in data collection. A mixed methods approach that included survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation was used to collect data. I collected quantifiable and qualitative data from three Igbo associations in the North Eastern part of the USA over a twelve month period and during return visits.

Data was collected from survey questionnaires on the roles and importance of hometown associations in the lives of members. Some survey participants then had the opportunity to expand (support, contrast or contradict) on these same issues in/during the semi-structured interview sessions. These sessions give study participants a 'voice' not just as subjects who provide data but as participants whose are heard in the process of data analysis. Also data collected on actual practices through participant-observations of associations' meetings and events adds more depth and dimension to data collection and analysis. This three pronged approach (survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation) portrays the roles and significance of hometown associations in the lives of members, by using a 'discursive style' of analysis that compares how individuals describe a traditional practice to what those individuals actually do as they carry out the traditional practice. The 'discursive' style of analysis is a Boasian style in which the researcher compares a stated tradition or cultural norm to observed actual behavior (Cole 2002:536). Following, Dr. Landes, this style of analysis will be used to examine the practices deployed as Igbo immigrants negotiate and reshape their identities, cultures and gender roles as they re-village in the US.

As Dr. Landes notes in her study of the Potawatomi: "it is one thing to say axiomatically that the culture borrows from others; it is another experience to witness individuals enacting the



process that blends the borrowed with the traditional... what arrested me . . . was . . . their creativity in meshing other-culture items with tribal traditions that they refused to abandon, ranging from mystic concepts to the kinship system” (Cole 2002:538). When the witness or researcher is viewed as a native by those among whom a study is being conducted, then the researcher’s positioning among the studied group has to be analyzed for a better understanding of the significance of that positioning. Thus, a section of the next chapter looks at my entry into the field to analyze how my position as researcher and a ‘native’ affected the field..

### **Participant Associations**

Three purposive associations were chosen from Igbo associations in North Eastern USA. Associations were identified through the researcher’s personal contacts. These associations were selected as they represent paradigmatic cases of the three main models Igbo hometown associations in the USA fall into: Psuedonyms are used as names of the HTAs and their members for anonymity.

Hometown Association 1, (**Ndi Umunwoke**) is officially run by men with women having informal membership through male family members or their spouses. This association has eleven chapters spread out in various states in the USA with a total membership of about 250. I studied one of their chapters in the Northeastern part of the United States. The chapter had 22 members of which twelve were men and 10 were women.

Hometown Association 2, (**Ndi Umuigbo**) is officially run by both women and men and has thirty five chapters spread out in various states in the USA with a total membership of about 1,000. I studied one of their

chapters in the Northeastern part of the United States. The chapter had 25 members of which twelve were men and thirteen were women.

Hometown Association 3, (**Ndi Nneji**) is a women's only association and has only one chapter in the USA with 14 members.

The first two associations were selected because hometown association 1 (**Ndi Umunwoke**) continues to carry on what their members explain to be the Igbo tradition of excluding women from active participation in hometown associations while hometown association 2 (**Ndi Umuigbo**) has deviated from this alleged traditional norm and allows women to actively participate in all affairs of the association. Hometown association 3, (**Ndi Nneji**), a women only association was added to the study because of the timing of its creation. Initiated by a woman from the hometown of Ndi Umunwoke, this association was created while I was conducting fieldwork and thus provided an opportunity to examine closely the reasons why it was created as well as the goals of the association.

## **Measures**

This study used both quantitative (survey questionnaire) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews and participant observation) methods of data collection.

### **Survey Questionnaire**

Quantitative data was collected on the associations, their missions and members' demographics, educational background, migration history, associational affiliation(s) and attitudes utilizing a structured survey questionnaire (see **Appendix A**). The survey questions were in English. English is the Nigerian Lingua Franca and all participants are fluent in English. Qualitative data

was also collected through the survey questionnaire on the roles, functions and importance of hometown associations in the lives of members. The survey questionnaire was administered to all members of the three associations. The survey questions were electronically mailed out to be completed prior to semi-structured interviews. A total of 140 members completed the survey. Some survey participants then had the opportunity to expand (support, contrast or contradict) on these same issues through semi-structured interview sessions.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews:**

Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted in Igbo and/or English as preferred by the interviewee. Interviews were sometimes tape recorded, with consent, and then transcribed for analysis. At other times, only handwritten notes were taken during the interview. The purpose of the semi-structured interview was to gather detailed information on association membership and attitudes, description of roles and importance of association in the life of the interviewed member and his/her family. In other words, what does membership in the association mean to the individual? The semi-structured interviews typically lasted about sixty minutes and were conducted in settings convenient for participants.

### **Participant Observations:**

Data was also collected on actual practices through participant-observations of hometown association meetings and events to add more depth and dimension to available data. Using an approach that takes into account the researcher's position in relation to research subjects as well as the studied people's life-ways, worldviews and material conditions, data was collected through ethnographic note taking by researcher.

## CONCLUSION

This research investigates how Igbo men and women who live in the United States, through membership in hometown associations (HTAs), collectively align, organize and reshape their lives around their ancestral hometown identities as they settle and live their daily lives in the USA. It examines the role of hometown associations in cultural reproduction, the retention or reconstruction of cultural difference and the thesis that migrant groups, through hometown associations, effectively re-locate, maintain and reconstruct forms of ancestral hometown traditions and identities in diaspora. It also investigates the effects of institutionalizing the hometown association as the social space for the marking of both Igbo and Anglo-American life cycle events and analyzes the new spaces and gender structures created as traditions are maintained or reconstructed. To accomplish this, the research looks at what the HTA means to members, how men and women participate in HTAs and the types of activities that occur within the socio-cultural arena of the HTA and their significance to members. Qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used. The qualitative methods, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic note taking through participant observations of HTA meetings and associated events were used mainly to collect information on the significance of the HTA to members and actual practices that occur within the social arena of the HTA. Quantitative data on HTA members' demographics and attitudes towards the HTA were collected through the use of a survey questionnaire. The survey results are used in conjunction with qualitative data to provide a more complete analysis of the roles and functions of HTA in the lives of members.

## **CHAPTER 2: FIELDWORK**

### **Entry into the Field**

To collect first hand data, anthropologists have traditionally ‘gone into the field’ and, for most researchers, going into the field typically entails leaving home and travelling to another location to live with and study a group for a period of several months before leaving the field and returning home. For those conducting research close to home, going into the field and returning home tends to be mostly scheduled events that may occur daily, weekly, monthly or at least based on a pre-determined schedule to a certain extent. For me, even though most of my fieldwork was carried out close to home, fieldwork was a mixture of travelling to locations both close and far away from my home for scheduled as well as unscheduled trips and events. An example of a scheduled event would be travelling to a city in the North Eastern part of the United States for a monthly or bi-monthly association meeting. An example of an unscheduled trip or event would be rushing to catch a flight to attend a quickly organized meeting of one of the associations and its visiting village chief 500 miles away. Entry into the field was also not a one-time event for me as I conducted this research, as I consider the initial meeting with each of the three associations a different entry into the field along with the accompanying initial anxiety that comes with meeting a new group and establishing good rapport. As Marcus notes, “following connections, associations, and ... relationships” (1995: 97) form the basis of a multi-sited ethnography. This study was multi-sited with each site that constituted the ‘multi-site’ having multiple sites as well. To better understand how HTA members re-village in their new environments, this research required ‘following’ each HTA group from site to site – from their various homes where they held meetings to the various sites where they celebrated life cycle events such as graduations or wakes to better understand their social practices and relationships.

As noted previously, most studies of hometown associations describe women as being excluded from full membership, not playing active roles or having roles subordinate to those of men in HTAs (Denzer and Mbanefoh 1998; Goldring 2001; Honey 1998; Okafor and Honey 1998; Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2010; Waldinger Popkin et al 2008). Honey goes as far as describing the Nigerian hometown association as a “bastion of male dominance” that limits the “empowerment of women” and “where women provide the domestic help” (1998:148). Here, I was a Nigerian woman going into the field to conduct research on Nigerian hometown associations. Would I be allowed into the ‘Bastion’? If allowed inside, would there be limitations on my access to members and events within the bastion? How am I situated within this bastion and how do I re-situate myself in this bastion so that I may conduct effective research? This particular question had far reaching consequences and acts as a window into earlier stated goals of this research which were to examine how Igbo immigrants use the HTA to produce and contest cultural forms and identities as well as gender roles and power structures.

### **Going Into The Bastion Of Male Dominance - The Path Not Expected of Women and the Path Less Travelled**

“I don’t think it will work. You know how our people are. They will say, who is this person here? Please let her leave so we can have our meeting. Also, on top of it, she is a woman. She is not a man. If it is a man coming to do this, they will probably welcome him. I don’t think it will work.” [comments made by male contact through whom I was seeking introduction to one of the associations that I was hoping to study, 5/26/12]

Igbo hometown associations abound in the United States and being an Igbo person, ( a ‘native’ by ancestry), fluent in the Igbo language and familiar with Igbo people who belong to

hometown associations, I thought my identity as an Igbo person would translate to easy access to key contacts within associations so that I would identify associations, receive approval and conduct my study. This was partially true but even though my identity and social contacts as an Igbo person helped with initial access to key contacts within associations, my identity as researcher was the overriding reason I was allowed access into the associations. My identity as an 'insider' or Igbo person complemented or complicated my status as researcher and my identity as an Igbo woman further complemented or posed problems to my position as researcher.

As discussed earlier, Igbo identity is intertwined with the village identity and since I was studying three different hometown associations, even though I was an Igbo person, in some instances, I was still an outsider because I was not from the particular hometown under study and most importantly, I was not a man. Though considered a 'native', my native positioning varied from one association to the other. Native is a fluid category that changes based on the social context (Kuwayama 2003:9). As Kirin Narayan notes, "the loci along which we are aligned or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux" (1993:671) and the researcher's gender, level of education, class, race among other factors may sometimes carry more weight than one's native identity (ibid. 672). Multi-sited research also implies the researcher is part of the research landscape, and as the landscape changes as the researcher moves from site to site, the researcher's identity and positioning is renegotiated (Marcus 1995). My entries into the field were obviously not typical. It was not the typical type of entry into the field where the researcher packs up his or her bags, travels to the research site and stays at the research site for months. I was going to be studying three different associations located in different states thus making for three different entries into the field. Additionally, because each of the three associations held

their meetings in the homes of members, following the people (Marcus 1995) meant following each HTA (a site in itself) to its multiple sites for meeting venues and celebrations of rites of passage. Establishing rapport at each entry point was eased by my being an Igbo immigrant, who was fluent in the Igbo language, and shared the same general Igbo culture as other HTA members. Sharing a common language, culture and having similar life experiences helps to create rapport and engender trust, however, this may also mean difficulties separating one's self, as a researcher, from expected cultural roles within the group such as those roles based on gender or age (Fahim and Helmer 1980:659). Though positioned as a 'native' or an insider as an Igbo person, my gender as a 'woman' had political and power implications as my study focused on a traditionally male domain a-k-a a 'bastion of male dominance'.

### **Into The Bastion as an Insider**

The first association that I approached, Ndi Umunwoke, was very welcoming and my contact asked me to forward the Internal Review Board (IRB) document describing my research so members would be informed of my interest in working with the group. If the members gave approval, I would then be formally invited to the association's meeting to meet with members, describe my proposed research in person and answer any questions members may have. However, after reading my project description, they unanimously agreed that I should work with their group without further formalities. I was rather surprised at this outcome for this is also the association with only male members and where women could only hold an informal membership through their husbands. In other words, women did not attend the bi-monthly association meetings and did not have any say in how the association is run. Why this turn of events? I had approached my contact tentatively and had explained my study but was not too sure of how my study and proposed presence within the group would be received. When my contact came back



with the news that I was fully welcome to conduct my study and attend all meetings and events, I wanted to make sure I had approval from all members as that was the only way my study could proceed, so I asked my contact if all the members had given their approval or if there were some members that were against my study and he replied that all the members were in agreement that I should conduct my study and attend their meetings because I am “Ada Ndi Umunwoke” (an Ndi Umunwoke daughter) and “an Ndi Umunwoke wife” making me “Ndi Umunwoke on both hands”. What this means is the speaker perceives my positioning to be one of a full insider. Ndi Umunwoke is a patrilineal society and since I am of Ndi Umunwoke patrilineage and also married to a man of Ndi Umunwoke patrilineage. Females may become Ndi Umunwoke citizens either by birth or by marriage. Women that are Ndi Umunwoke citizens by birth hold primary allegiance to their husband’s hometown after marriage which is typically interpreted to mean the woman’s Ndi Umunwoke or patrilineal citizenship is subordinate to her citizenship in her husband’s hometown. Not only was I born an Ndi Umunwoke female but by marrying an Ndi Umunwoke man, I, as a female, cemented my Ndi Umunwoke citizenship. My Ndi Umunwokeness derives from my two hands – one hand representing my birth hand and the other, my marriage hand. I hold allegiance to no other hometown but Ndi Umunwoke. My contact explained one member went as far as saying that I had “every right to attend these meetings and ask questions on anything I want explained or clarified”. The member went on to say my questions and study should not stop with their chapter in the North Eastern United States, but should extend to all the branches of their hometown association in the USA and asked their local president to put me in touch with the National President and Presidents of all the other chapters. This speaker was proud that a hometown indigenous person had chosen their HTA for study. This for me was an unexpected turn of events indeed. What does it mean to be Ada Ndi

Umunwoke (An Ndiumunwoke daughter), an Ndi Umunwoke wife and Ndi Umunwoke on both hands? As explained earlier, I understood the import of this but I wanted to hear the implications of this from my contact and also to see if I could gain new information about what it means to be Ndi Umunwoke on both hands. Though I feared being considered an ‘educated fool’ that is culturally naïve and detached (Jacobs-Huey 2002; Fahim and Helmer 1980), I still posed the question to my contact and he explained that, as I should already know, back home in Ndi Umunwoke, the tradition is that women are classified as either daughters or wives with daughters having certain rights that may not extend to wives and also having final say in family matters. In the family affairs of the patrilineage, daughters have superiority over wives. He also explained that Ndi Umunwoke wives are also a force to be reckoned with in the patrilineage and when the daughters and wives of the patrilineage stand together as women and make a decision on any issue, no one argues with them or their decision. Not just my contact, but other members seem to be saying that a female researcher was welcome in their midst by virtue of holding citizenship in the ancestral hometown by birth and marriage. Should this be viewed as a shift to including women in HTA meetings in these contemporary times? Is this paradigmatic of other HTA members who as they settle in their new communities are beginning to see the tensions between their notions of citizenship and mainstream American notions of equality in citizenship regardless of gender or was I accepted into their midst because of my role as a researcher? My contact went on to explain that I am a daughter (my father’s family lineage as far back as is traceable is from Ndiumunwoke) and a wife (I am married to a man of Ndi Umunwoke patrilineage) so that all rights extend to me from both sides. He asked me if he was correct on the issue of my patrilineage and marriage and I answered “yes”. There is no basis for me to be considered on the margins of Ndi Umunwoke citizenship under any circumstances since I am

both a Ndi Umunwoke daughter and wife. He further explained that as an Ndi Umunwoke daughter and wife, and most importantly as a researcher with authorization from my institution to go forth and conduct research that I am welcome to the association, its meetings and events. He confirmed my email address and cell phone number and told me I would be included in the association's distribution list so I would receive text messages and email announcements of upcoming meetings and events.

One's position in life as exemplified by age, race, gender, class, interests, history, culture and other factors determines one's situatedness (Haraway 1988). One's vision of the world is an "embodied vision" and is influenced by the social and physical spaces one inhabits in the world. The researcher's perspectives are embodied in a person that is "always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body" (Haraway 1988:589). The situatedness of any particular anthropologist accounts for complex and multiple positionings based on religious affiliations, gender, age, class, race, length of residence in community, language ability, and may among other factors span several continents and cultures due to migration and mixed parentage (Abu-Lughod 1995; Narayan 1993; Rosaldo 1993). This is a situatedness that the anthropologist acknowledges as individual 'particularities' (Abu-Lughod 1995) by recognizing that class, gender, age, education, politics and other factors influence the researchers' multiple positions and identities, the research process, as well as the positions of those being studied. Being concerned with individual particularities is not synonymous to overlooking external and historical processes, rather it sheds light on how external forces affect life at the local level (ibid. 1995). It also does not generalize or flatten out differences that exist within studied groups (Abu-Lughod 1995).

What are my various positionings in life and how have these situated me among the people with whom I am conducting research? As noted earlier, to identify with an obodo or village, one's patrilineage or ancestry has to be traced to that obodo. I am Nigerian and was born in Kaduna, Nigeria. Kaduna is not a part of Igboland and is in the predominantly Hausa speaking northern part of Nigeria. However, though born in Kaduna, I do not claim to be from Kaduna nor can I claim Kaduna as my obodo because my family does not trace their ancestral origins to Kaduna. I am an Igbo female because my mother and father were both Igbos – their ancestry is traced back to an obodo in Igbo land. More specifically, my father's ancestry is traced back to obodo Ndi Umunwoke which makes me an Ndi Umunwoke daughter. Ndi Umunwoke is a town in Anambra state which is one of the five states that comprise present day Igbo land. I have lived most of my life so far outside of Ndi Umunwoke and Igboland even though I have visited on occasion for periods of a few days to a few weeks. Since the age of six, which is as far back as I can clearly recall, I have visited Ndi Umunwoke or Igbo land for a total of about thirteen times with some visits lasting about two days and others as long as two weeks. At the most, since the age of six, I have spent not more than three months in Ndi Umunwoke and Igbo land as a whole. I am fluent in Igbo. I am also fluent in Hausa. I am very familiar with both Igbo and Hausa cultures. I am a naturalized American citizen and have lived in the United States since I was seventeen years old. Currently in my late forties, I am married to an Igbo man from Ndi Umunwoke and we have four children.

Within the Ndi Umunwoke association, I am positioned by my gender (as an Ndi Umunwoke daughter) and marital status (as an Ndi Umunwoke wife) as an insider. As an insider, I would have had the rights accorded daughters and wives of Ndi Umunwoke at this chapter, which is non-active membership in the association, if desired, through a male family member

which in my case would have been my husband. However, I approached the group and presented myself to the group as a researcher backing up my researcher position with documents from my University. The male members of the group acknowledging my qualifications as a researcher wishing to study the association primarily positioned me within the group as a researcher which meant I did not need to be a member 'by association'. Membership by association is best explained by reference to the phrase 'guilty by association'. A woman may become a non-active member if she is associated (patrilineally or by marriage) to an Ndi Umunwoke man. So, even though I was positioned by my gender and marital status as one who may only become a 'member by association' or 'an associate member' (as it is also popularly called by members), my positioning as a researcher lifted that barrier in this instance. My husband did not have to sign up as a member before I could become a member and not only that, I was allowed to be active within the association in the sense that I could attend meetings and sit and discuss issues with the men.

However my positioning as a researcher went hand in hand with my positioning as an Ndi Umunwoke woman on both hands (as daughter and wife). Once, my position as a researcher was established (through University IRB documents) and acknowledged through acceptance into the association, my positionings as daughter and wife came to the forefront. I was typically greeted as a daughter and a wife. Once a member referred to me as a guest and was chastised by others for calling a daughter 'a guest'. What Chou Cheiner (2002:464) refers to as 'normalcy of identity' for those conducting fieldwork among their own in contrast to the identity of a foreign researcher also meant that the norm was that I was expected to behave as an Igbo female in the midst of Igbo men most of whom were older. Even though I was there as a researcher, I found

myself conforming to the norm and taking on the role expected of women (daughters and wives) at these meetings such as passing out refreshments and helping out in the kitchen as needed.

What is also interesting here is that though I have spent less than one percent of my life in Ndi Umunwoke, this did not matter to the people of the Ndi Umunwoke association. I was tagged as an insider by virtue of my patrilineage and marriage - an insider in the bastion of male dominance to which women can only belong to as 'associate members'. My position as a researcher had provided entry and my patrilineage and marriage positioned me not on the margins of this group but fully on the inside in the sense that I was privy to all discussions of this Ndi Umunwoke association local chapter. However, this was not the case with some of the other Ndi Umunwoke Association chapters that I visited in other parts of the United States. Being that women did not attend the monthly meetings, I was sometimes asked to leave the meeting after opening prayers and the breaking of the kola nut and asked to return after the meeting discussions ended to observe the closing prayers and partake in the refreshments served. So even within the Ndi Umunwoke association where by virtue of my patrilineage and marriage, I had been labeled double insider by the members of one chapter, when I visited other chapters, my gender as woman trumped my position as researcher and I was situated as an outsider and not allowed to attend the meetings. Even though my position as a researcher enabled access to some of these associations, it was not enough to overcome the gender expectation that women are not allowed to attend the meetings and my presence was barely tolerated and was limited by some chapters.

At the first meeting I attended of Ndi Umunwoke, as I sat in a far corner discreetly jotting down notes and tucking my notebook away, I noticed someone approaching. It was one of the members. He sat beside me and said "I was pleasantly surprised when I got the email from the

President about your research. Wow, I am really impressed. So tell me, why did you decide to take the path less travelled?” I cocked my head to one side and said “the path less travelled?” and he said “yes, you know our people mostly study nursing or pharmacy” and he explained that this (the study of anthropology) is definitely not a path that our people here in the United States go down. He said “You are the only one I know studying anthropology”. I explained to him the path of anthropology though less travelled is the path of study that I find most interesting. This was a good enough answer for him and he then proceeded to fill me in on his own studies years ago. I was the lone female in the hometown association meeting - The Bastion of Male Dominance. Though the lone female, I felt at ease at the meetings of this Ndi Umunwoke New England chapter because they treated me as one of them – a member.

### **Into The Bastion – But As A Peripheral Insider**

I had to make another entry into the field to begin my work with the second association comprised of members of the Ndi Umuigbo Obodo. Being that my patrilineage is of Ndi Umunwoke and that I am married to an Ndi Umunwoke man, with my matrilineage not being of Ndi Umuigbo, I made this entry into the field as a female researcher of Igbo lineage. Membership in Ndi Umuigbo HTA is open to any individual whose matrilineal or patrilineal ancestry is traced to Ndi Umuigbo. Individuals that fall into these categories are welcome to identify with the Ndi Umuigbo obodo community and to participate in HTA affairs. I did not fall into any of these categories and was viewed as a non member of the Ndi Umuigbo obodo community. Ndi Umuigbo is also a hometown located in Imo state which is also another of the five states in Igboland. The Ndi Umuigbo hometown association is located in New England and though a different research site, it was one that did not require overnight trips. The Ndi Umuigbo Association New England is an Igbo hometown association where both men and women fully

participate in all the affairs of the association. As such, I figured, all things being equal, I would probably have an easier time not just gaining approval to conduct my study but also carrying out my study, as this is an association used to having women at their meetings. After several meetings with my primary contact and provision of IRB documents to the group, I was granted approval by the association to conduct my study and was given the date, time and venue of the next meeting of the association. The Umuigbo meetings are also held in the homes of members on a rotational basis.

On the day of the meeting, I left early enough to arrive at the meeting about fifteen to twenty minutes before the scheduled start time. There were two men and two women present so it was a low turnout for the meeting. The meeting as is typical started with an opening prayer by one of the members. Since this was the first time I was meeting with this group, I was introduced to members and asked to provide an overview of my study so members may ask questions if they were so inclined. Questions asked revolved around the scope of my study. A suggestion was made that I expand the scope of my research to include visits to other chapters so I may fully gather information. While some members agreed to this suggestion others disagreed saying I could gather all the information I needed from their chapter. I managed to end the argument by expressing my thanks at their input and explaining I only had approval to work with their chapter but to the extent they interacted with different chapters or held events together with different chapters then I would follow along and observe those events and interactions. I thought this was a good middle ground position to present to them and luckily the arguments stopped over this matter. But I was left with a feeling of unease as the meeting proceeded. This feeling of unease grew when everyone got a copy of the financial statement of the association during the meeting and the member passing it out looked directly at me and said “Mrs. Offiaeli, I will not be giving



you a copy of this”. This set the tone of my relationship with this association. I was welcome to attend the meetings and observe and listen to all discussions but printouts of their finances were off limits. It also seemed that my male contact would pick and choose which meetings and events to notify me of and invite me to attend. Additionally, my primary contact would not include me on their text or email list for meeting notifications so I had to constantly call and ask about upcoming events or meetings. Over the months, as I spent more time with the group, I noticed that I did not have to chase around so much for venues and dates of events or meetings but I was still not included on any distribution lists but some members would mention upcoming events with the hope that I will attend.

With this group, my gender, patrilineage, matrilineage, marital status or husband’s patrilineage held no sway. I was a researcher positioned on the inside of the group in the sense that they welcomed my study of Igbo people but once inside, I was positioned on the margins of the inside because I was not an Ndi Umuigbo person so my presence was not welcome at certain discussions even though I was there for research purposes and they had given their consent for me to carry on my research. So, even though this particular hometown association was not a ‘bastion of male dominance’ as both women and men actively participated in its affairs and one’s gender was not an issue, it seemed that I was positioned on the periphery by my role as a researcher and also my identity as a non Ndi Umuigbo person. My positioning within this group was not dictated by my gender but by my role as researcher and by my ancestry which located me as an Igbo person but as an Igbo person that did not belong to the Ndi Umuigbo obodo community. With this group, there was no doubt that I was seen as a guest and researcher and was typically introduced as a guest. As Narayan notes, researchers may have multiple and culturally tangled strands of identity that are sometimes put on full display or are at other times

hidden away (1993:673) and in this instance the cultural strand on full display is that of researcher.

### **Propelled into the Field by Ancestral Origins**

I received a call from a lady, Chika, from Ndi Umunwoke hometown inviting me to be a member of a hometown association that she was in the process of forming. This was one of those situations where I thought someone familiar with my ongoing research was playing a joke on me. I was not sure what to make of the invitation but asked a lot of questions starting with “this is not a joke, right”? Chika confused and somewhat offended by my question replied that it was not a joke. She explained that about ten years ago she had started to work on organizing this type of hometown association working closely with a friend of hers but her friend moved to another state unexpectedly and their plans fell through. Chika then abandoned her plans for while, and focused on raising her children, but now she was ready to start again. She was hoping to bring families with ancestry from Ndi Umunwoke and neighboring towns, who live in nearby suburbs together, to start a hometown association. She explained that it has been a challenge because though she is from Ndi Umunwoke (her patrilineage that is), her husband is not from Ndi Umunwoke (his patrilineage that is). Chika explained as follows:

- 1) Her husband’s people are very few in the suburb where she lives and so do not have their own hometown association chapter but travel to neighboring states to join the chapters there.
- 2) She chooses not to travel that far to join a hometown association.
- 3) There are quite a number of people from her own patrilineage (Ndi Umunwoke) in her suburb and neighboring towns and she would like them to come together and form a hometown association. She had looked into this and found out that there was a fledgling

Ndi Umunwoke association in her state but they had refused to allow her, an Ndi Umunwoke daughter, to join the association, because women were still not allowed to become members.

4) She is from Ndi Umunwoke and is married to a man from another village but that does not mean she is no longer from Ndi Umunwoke. She said “I am from Ndi Umunwoke. People do not throw their daughters away because they get married. I don’t understand why the Ndi Umunwoke association will not let their women to join their association”.

5) However, since in Igbo culture, when a woman marries she joins her husband’s hometown association, she found herself somewhat alone because she did not belong to any hometown association group and she “was tired of it” and was going to do something about it.

6) She wanted an association where people from her hometown and also her husband’s hometown could meet and enjoy each other’s company as kin. She explained that she had come up with a solution to the problem by aiming to start a hometown association that would be made up of a group of neighboring hometowns and since her husband’s hometown and her patrilineage hometown were neighboring towns, then, members from both places could join the association.

I asked how the neighboring towns would be selected and what towns would be included and what towns would be excluded and for what reasons? She explained that it has always been known that the towns surrounding Ndi Umunwoke always did things together “even way back before the white man came”. They traded together and visited with each other at times of celebrations and had similar ways of doing things and ‘omenani’ (culture). She listed the towns

and asked me if I knew other families from any of these towns in Connecticut so she would call them and invite them to join the association. The families I knew were already on her list so I was not of much help. Being aware that Chika already belongs to an ethnic association, (an Igbo association), I asked her again why she wanted to form a hometown association since she already belonged to a very popular Igbo ethnic association and she replied:

“I want to belong somewhere. I want to belong with my people. All these other people from other hometowns have their own hometown associations even though they belong to the Igbo association that is for all Igbo people. They do things together as people from the same hometown and help each other and I want us to be able to do that also. Don’t you see how at parties, the hometown people will come out dancing with the celebrant in their uniforms and all can tell that the celebrant is not alone – that he has his people behind him. I also want us to be able to do that both in good times and in bad times”.

Following up on her example, I asked why she wanted to belong to a HTA since the Igbo ethnic association she belongs to also supports members just as she had described. She answered “what are you talking about. You know very well it is not the same thing. An Igbo meeting is not same as hometown meeting”. Here, she makes the point that an Igbo meeting, which is an ethnic group meeting, is not the same as a HTA meeting. The Igbo ethnic group meeting is comprised of Igbo people that belong to different obodo communities all of which are within Igboland, and the point is that firstly, an Igbo person has to identify with an obodo community before identifying with the broader community either within Igboland or elsewhere.

I then said “so will membership be open to both men and women of these villages or hometowns that you just listed” and Chika explained that both men and women are welcome to join the association but that:

“as you know our people, you know the answer already so why are you asking. The men won’t join because they will say this is women’s meeting. And you know that if it is the woman that is from one of these villages and her husband is from a village that is not on the list, he will not join because he will not want people to say that he has joined his wife’s village meeting instead of his wife joining his village meeting. Heyyy, you know they’ll talk about the man. You know these men will refuse to join because of that, but that is their wahala (problem). As far as I am concerned, everyone, man or woman can join”.

In the above excerpts, Chika speaks to the issue of Igbo people’s desire to identify with, belong to and socialize with people from one’s own obodo or ancestral home. Such identification is thus publicly declared, and allows members to ‘stand behind’ the celebrant at life cycle celebrations. This undergirds the point about re-villaging and identifying primarily with the re-villaged obodo community tethered to one’s ancestral village. So, in other words, Igbo people may belong to an Igbo ethnic association but identifying with their obodo community through membership in the HTA is what makes them members of the broader Igbo ethnic community and Igboland.

Chika also points out the dilemma faced by women like her who may have identified with their patrilineage until marriage and find themselves at odds with the idea of abandoning or subsuming their patrilineal identity under that of their husbands. In these contemporary times, women in the diaspora often, such as the informant, contest such traditional notions of belonging. As Chika notes, a husband who joins his wife’s obodo community or ancestral HTA—which would be against custom as women are supposed to subordinate their ancestry to that of their husband’s— would be talked about and derided for deviating from custom. Living daily

lives in the suburbs here in the United States, where ambilineal descent is practiced and where individuals may choose to equally belong to both their mother's and father's families, western notions of ambilineal descent are beginning to creep into and challenge Igbo traditional notions of patrilineal descent. Immigrant Igbo women who may find themselves in cities where there are more immigrants from their mother's or father's villages as opposed to their husband's villages are striving to belong and to form ties with their ancestral groups, As such they are beginning to contest traditional notions of citizenship as understood by members of their various village/obodo communities.

Due to my ancestral lineage as well as that of my husband, Chika could not envisage my refusing to join the association because as she had earlier pointed out, my identity was tied to this hometown association "okpulu naa ni" (in all aspects). My matrilineage hometown is on the list of hometowns, as is my patrilineage and my husband's patrilineage hometown. I did not need much convincing either as I was interested in being a part of this association. I agreed to join the association for the following reasons:

- I was interested in joining this association and getting to know its members.
- If I did not join, I would have to come up with three reasons for my refusal to join – one for not joining this hometown association of my patrilineage and another for still not joining this hometown association of my husband's patrilineage and another for not joining this hometown association of my matrilineage.

In this instance, I was propelled into the field by a phone call. I found myself suddenly involved in the movement to form a hometown association – 'a hometown' redefined by members and I will expand on this issue in the next chapter when I discuss the meaning of 'hometown' to

members. I was situated on the inside on all fronts: gender, ancestry (my matrilineage and patrilineage) and marriage (my husband's patrilineage).

### **Conclusion: Positionings In The Bastion**

I am positioned in multiple ways by my 'particularities' within these various hometown associations. How I am situated by my various positions also means that I embody certain visions and perspectives that come into play as a researcher. My various particularities also mean that other variously situated individuals embody certain visions of my knowledge and power. So, for example when I ask if men and women can be members of the proposed association being formed, the answer I am given (based on the assumption that I have knowledge of Igbo customs) starts with 'You know' and progresses into - you already know the answer to this question so why ask the question. This embodied vision by others of my multiple positioning based on my particularities is also one that leads to the assumption (a correct one, in this case) that it is a taken for granted that I would join the association being formed. This vision of others about my multiple identities is also one that can be characterized as contradictory and shifting as in the case of the male member of one of the associations declaring that I as a researcher, a daughter and a wife have every right to be present at their meetings even though daughters and wives do not attend their meetings. My embodied vision and multiple positionings were also at odds in that I found myself putting my notepad away and going over to assist with food service when the wives of the male members hosting meetings came out and went into the kitchen to lay out the food for those at the meeting. I was typically the only that rushed to help with the food service, the men mostly carried on with their discussions. This led to conflicting feelings as to how to I should carry on within the bastion. As a researcher, I had come into the field having read the numerous articles written by scholars on hometown associations describing women as not being

active participants in the affairs of hometown associations with their roles mostly limited to culinary matters and the celebrated secretary at times. So having been granted access to the ‘bastion of male dominance’, should I not act as the men did at all times and sit with the men while the women handled culinary matters? Would joining the lady of the house in the kitchen as she attended to culinary matters diminish my role/legitimacy in the eyes of the men sitting in the bastion? After all, these men were already of the opinion that women should not actively participate in the affairs of the hometown association but had allowed me in as a researcher not as a woman, so did they expect me to behave as a man and sit with them at all times? If at each meeting, I, an obvious woman, sat with the men while the lady of the house was alone in the kitchen seeing to the food that would eventually be served to the men and I, how would these women feel about my presence? Did I run the risk of alienating myself from these women by sitting in on these meetings with their husbands?

I had to find some middle ground, for as a researcher in the field, in order to conduct an effective ethnography, I needed to observe and participate in all aspects and activities and had to figure out a way to do this so as not to diminish my role as researcher in the bastion by spending time in kitchen as well as maintain good rapport/relations with women so I could also interact and participate in those areas they were involved in. I found this middle ground by taking my notepad into the kitchen and typically positioning myself in the middle of the entrance between the kitchen and the living room where the men held the meetings and juggling taking notes, walking quickly back into the kitchen to stir pots of soup, serve up bowls of rice, set up plates etc. When the men objected to this level of multi tasking on my part saying “you do not have to get up to serve the food, you are here as a researcher”. I explained that the food aspect was also a part of the meeting and just as I was involved with sitting down in the living room, I also had to



be involved in the part that resulted in the lovely aromatic dishes served up for refreshment. This led to much laughter with the men agreeing that if this was the case, they looked forward to enjoying the food served up at the end of the meeting. They also commented on how I am a true Ndi umunwoke daughter and wife for realizing the importance of the food served at the meetings and wanting to also document that in my study. Another unexpected outcome of this that I noticed was that if I stepped into the kitchen or moved away from the entry way into the living room, the member speaking would either begin to speak louder so I could still hear them or they would wait for me to re-assume my position by the entry way before continuing with their speech or conversation. Over time, I also noticed that the male members hosting the meeting began to wait until all matters on the agenda were done with before calling out their wives to begin the food service so that I would not position myself between the kitchen and the living room. This in turn also had another unexpected outcome, which was that because all the agenda items had been discussed before the food setup began, sometimes some of the men, now free to move around, also came into the kitchen and helped with warming up the food and serving up the food.

As discussed earlier on, one's vision of the world is not created in a vacuum, it is an 'embodied vision' influenced by one's particularities and life experiences (Haraway 1988, Abu Lughod 1995). The structuring particularities and embodiments of the researcher, as well as of those being studied, situates the researcher and those studied in shifting and contradictory ways. Following Haraway (1988) the physical and social spaces that I inhabit and have inhabited over the years have produced a 'structured body' that continues to be structured when those particular physical and social spaces are re-encountered. So, I entered the field positioned in multiple ways based on my gender, education (i.e. as scholarly researcher), ethnic group, kinship, marital status,

and age, sometimes on the inside as a daughter and wife with one association and sometimes as an outsider based on my gender (as a woman) with other brother chapters of the same association. I was also positioned as an insider 'on all aspects' with the women's only association and as an outsider (as a non-indigene of the hometown) but on the peripheries of the inside as an ethnic group member with the hometown that allowed men and women to be members. Whereas I had shifting and sometimes contradictory positionings with the associations, my position as a researcher was acknowledged by all the associations and it was my positioning as researcher that situated me and was the constant aspect of my situatedness among all the associations. In the three associations I studied, my position as researcher gave me legitimacy to be present among members and to attend meetings and interact with members. Though I was positioned in multiple and sometimes complementary and other times contradictory ways, I had gone into the field as a researcher, on the path less travelled by all and on the path not expected of women, and my situatedness as researcher was constituted of my positionings, in varying degrees, as daughter, wife, woman, peripheral insider, insider and outsider, and this situatedness as researcher was constant and common to all the associations I worked with and it was this situatedness that provided a much needed stabilizing anchor so that I could conduct research as objectively as possible. This was the case because the researcher position transcended others such as gender, age and ethnicity.

The next chapter looks at what the hometown association is? What is a hometown association? How is it defined by members? How is the hometown association adapted to suit life in the new environments that immigrants live in and who or what factors are the key determinants of membership? What does the hometown mean to members? What are the roles and functions of the hometown association as defined by members?

### CHAPTER 3: THE HTA, NOTIONS OF CITIZENSHIP and ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The ‘hometown’ that an Igbo individual identifies with is the ancestral village or collection of villages physically located in an area of Igboland, Nigeria and the hometown association is a union or association of people typically living outside the hometown who share ancestral ties to that hometown physically located in Igboland and who identify themselves as being from that hometown. In this chapter, I analyze what a hometown association is and what it means to members. I do not differentiate between the three studied hometown associations as I do this, because the three associations do not differ on their reasons for coming together collectively to form a hometown association which were to socialize, maintain cultural heritage, to support each other in good as well as bad times and to raise funds for the development of the home community. So, as I discuss what a hometown association is, I draw from the survey questionnaire results as well as conversations with members of the three studied associations. The main difference between the associations lay in regulating ‘active<sup>12</sup>’ membership based on biological sex (male or female<sup>13</sup>) as follows:

- **Ndi Umunwoke Association** – Adult Ndi Umunwoke males are active members. Adult females are called ‘associate’ members by the HTA members. This means the females may not attend meetings and may not participate in discussions or the

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<sup>12</sup> Active refers to those dues paying members who may attend regularly scheduled HTA meetings and participate in discussions and vote on issues at meetings.

<sup>13</sup> All males are categorized as men and all females are categorized as women by the studied associations. In matters of the HTA, a male is a man and a female is a woman.

decision-making processes at meetings. They may cook and serve food at the meetings or events of the associations and at the invitation of male members, may perform cultural dances at events of the association. The local chapter in New England where I conducted my fieldwork had about 12 active male members and about 10 female associate members. All members were college graduates. Except for two of the active male members, all members were married and had children.

- **Ndi Umuigbo Association** – All adult males and females may be active members and may attend meetings and participate in discussions and the decision making processes. The local chapter in New England where I conducted my fieldwork had about 25 active members (12 males and 13 females). All members were college graduates. All adult members were married and had children.
- **Ndi Nneji Association** – Only adult females are members. This association was formed by females who were denied active participation in the Ndi Umunwoke association. I conducted my study of this association during its formative stages. The association had 14 members. All members were college graduates and were married with children.

What does the HTA mean to its members? Who may belong to the HTA as they re-vitalize their obodo community and how are notions of belonging articulated? I look at the functions of the HTA in the lives of members as I continue to explore notions of membership. I discuss the Ndi Umunwoke HTA and their notions of membership and their organizational structure. The Ndi Umunwoke HTA mostly adheres to the Igbo ‘traditional’ notion of membership and participation in HTAs. This traditional notion of HTA membership excludes women from the socio-civic arena of the HTA – full membership is extended to men only. I then

discuss contemporary or not so traditional forms of HTA membership as practiced by Ndi Nneji and Ndi Umunwoke. I examine the Ndi Nneji association which was formed as a result of the socio-cultural exclusion of women from Ndi Umunwoke and then proceed to an examination of Ndi Umuigbo Association which though has deviated from the traditional practice of excluding women from the HTA and fully allows women to participate in the affairs of the HTA find their attempt at gender egalitarianism at odds with Igbo traditions mostly revolving around the presentation of the 'Kola nut', (*Cola acuminata*), to people which will be discussed later in this chapter.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the traditional processes that surround the celebration of life cycle events are social ways for the production of 'natives' and techniques for inscribing "locality onto bodies" (1996:179). Appadurai notes traditional ceremonies are "...ways to embody locality as well as to locate bodies in socially and spatially defined communities..." (Appadurai 1996:179). The HTA is foundational to the processes that mark life events as it serves as the platform from which those HTA members striving to embody ancestral locality may launch these life-marking events. I also see the formation and collective belonging to a HTA as a primary way for 'embodying locality' and locating bodies as part of an ancestral obodo community. Using this framework, the next two chapters discuss how through membership in HTAs, members embody and locate themselves as natives of their ancestral hometown or obodo communities in diaspora. But first a look at the demographics of HTA membership. A survey questionnaire (*Appendix A*) was distributed to members of the three studied hometown associations<sup>14</sup>. A total of 140<sup>15</sup> members responded to the survey. The

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<sup>14</sup> The survey was electronically distributed to members of the three studied local chapters and also to members of other chapters within the United States

<sup>15</sup> Responses may not always tally to 140 as respondents sometimes skipped questions.

demographics of respondents reflect the typical make up of members of the three studied local chapters.

Outside the social arena of the HTA, most members of the studied HTAs may be characterized as mainstream American professional suburbanites. They hold party affiliations as Republicans, Democrats, Independents, etc. They are soccer moms and dads with pizza and soda loving offspring, they stand with their children in line formations to dance to the ‘electric slide’ at parties and they partake in the pursuit and consumption of the American dream. Most are highly educated and some are practicing their professions, while others, as is sometimes the case with immigrants, hold menial jobs despite their high levels of education. The following charts depict demographics of respondents:

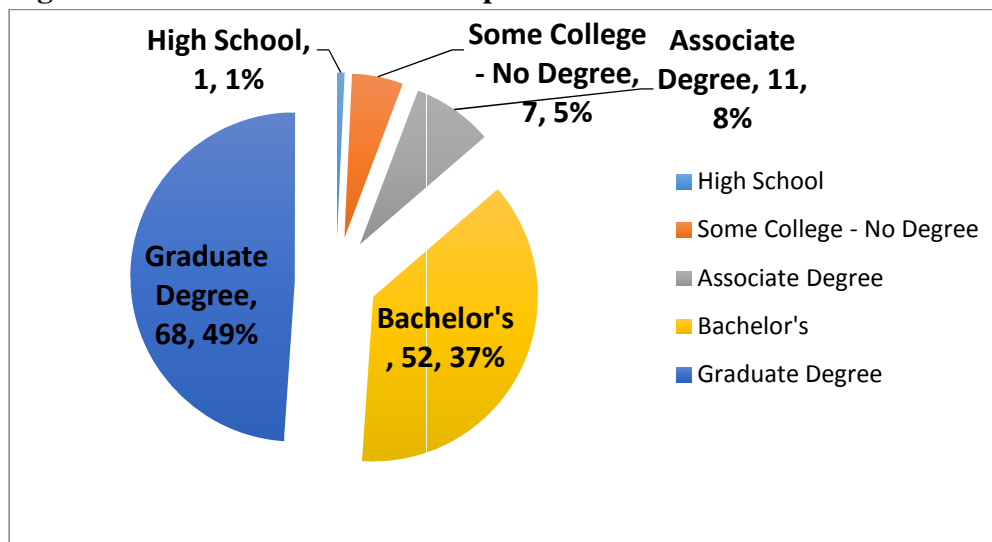
**Country of Birth and Citizenship:** Of the 140 respondents, 95% are Nigerian born Nigerian citizens and 77% are naturalized American citizens (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Country of birth and citizenship**

Nigerian Born	133 respondent s (95%)
Naturalized American Citizens	108 respondents (77%)
American Born	3 respondents (2.14%)
British Born	1 respondent (.007%)
Did not specify	3 respondents

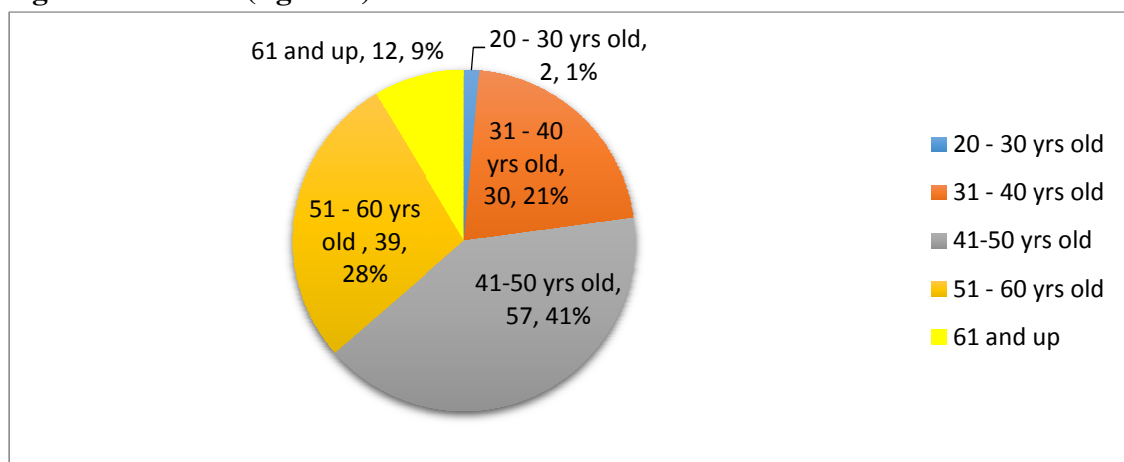
**Educational Level (Figure 1):** 138 respondents or (99%) have had some college education and 116 (86%) have Bachelors or Graduate degrees. Of the 140 respondents, 134 (96%) finished high school in Nigeria before migrating to the USA. 109 (78%) attended college in the United States.

**Figure 1: Educational Level of Respondents**



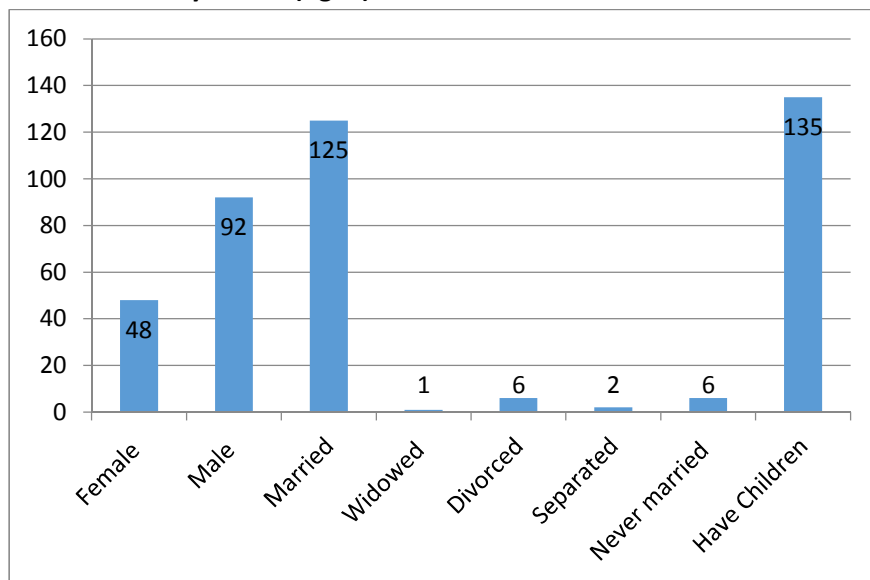
**Age Distribution of Respondents (figure 2):** Ninety percent of respondents were between 31 and 60 years of age with the highest concentration (41%) in the 41 to 50 years old cohort.

**Age Distribution (figure 2)**

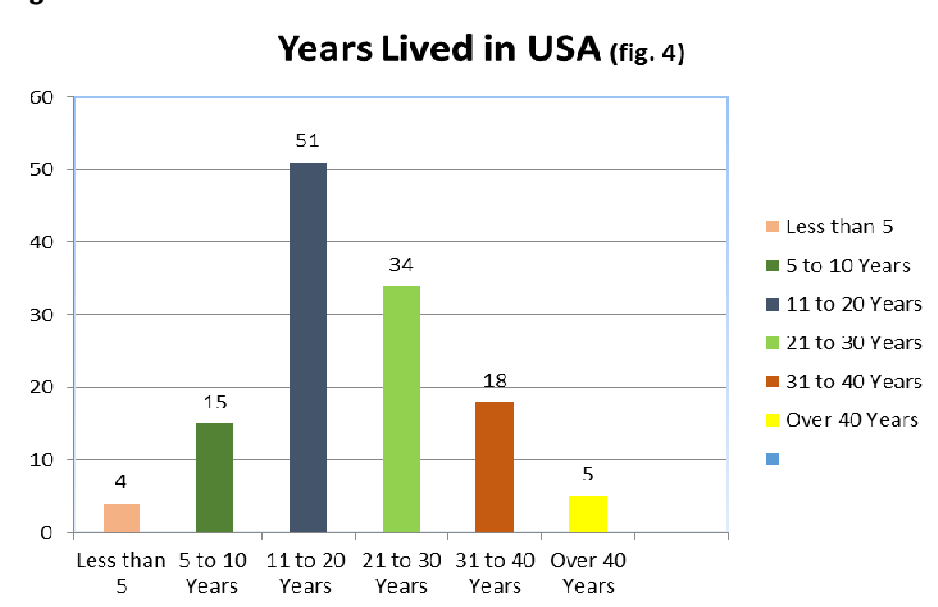


**Biological Sex and Marital Status of Respondents (fig. 3):** Ninety two (66%) of respondents were male and forty eight (34%) were female. Most respondents (96%) were either married or previously married with (89% or 125 respondents) still married at the time of the survey. Also 96% (or 135) of respondents have children.

**Sex and Family Status (fig. 3)**



**Fig. 4 : Years Lived in the United States**



Members of the HTA are mostly longer settled immigrants. 108 (77%) of the respondents have resided in the United States for at least 11 years. Members also confirm that all known



newly arrived immigrants are encouraged to join the HTA with most of the newly arrived seeking out the HTA and becoming members. The number for newly arrived is low because given that this is a study of a hometown association as opposed to a study of a Nigerian national association, it is expected that the number of immigrants from the particular hometown migrating to the USA in a given year may range anywhere from zero upwards.

‘Meeting’ is the common name or word used by members to refer to their HTA. For members, ‘meeting’ is a noun and a verb. When used as noun, the HTA is called ‘meeting’ as in Ndi Umunwoke meeting or Ndi Umuigbo meeting or ‘our meeting’ instead of ‘our association’ and when used as verb, the act of members coming together to hold a meeting is referred to as ‘meeting’. The phrase ‘our meeting will hold a meeting at the end of the month’ is another way of saying ‘our association will hold a meeting at the end of the month’. So, what is a HTA or meeting and what are the functions and roles of the HTA in the lives of members

### **What Is a HTA?**

“It is a survival instinct... a natural instinct” [Male 11/ 17/12]

“The essence of the association [is] to promote kinship and brotherhood” [Male, 2/10/13]

When I asked a HTA member to tell me in his own words what a HTA is, he explained “It is meeting of people descended from the same village. Meeting of people that claim ancestral patrilineage from the same village or hometown” [Male 6/11/12]. Another member describes it as a survival instinct, a natural instinct and explained as follows:

Wherever you are, you tend to organize yourselves. Even here in the United States, to take care of one another, you have to know one another and what is happening in one another’s lives... when there is such a network, then people will look out for one another and call on the phone to ask how you are doing. And because you belong to an association, you’ll be able to know when something is wrong with somebody or when you are not hearing from somebody, you call to ask questions. So, belonging to these associations is a survival instinct. You join an association whenever you are far away from home. When your brothers or your parents are far away, you form the association as

your closest relative. ... I think it is natural that when people travel far away from home, it becomes a natural instinct for them to gather themselves together, to reach out to one another, to make sure of what's happening to one another. [Male, 11/17/12]

An Igbo hometown association is an association of Igbo people who trace their ancestry to the same hometown or village in Igboland. For membership in a HTA, an individual's ancestral patrilineage has to be traced to that hometown. There are instances when one may be accepted as a member of the hometown association, if one's matrilineage can be traced to the hometown even if that individual's patrilineage is traced elsewhere. This would be the case in instances where a woman gives birth to a child outside of wedlock while living at home with her parents. Because the woman is not married by Igbo tradition to the father of her child, the child belongs to her patrilineage and may join the HTA later in life as an adult.

Since the HTA is made up of people who have ancestral ties to a particular hometown physically located in Igboland and who identify themselves as being from that hometown, I asked how claims about ancestral ties to hometowns are verified? I posed the question to a member and he replied:

If somebody claims to be Ndi Umunwoke, normally the starting point is that they have to be from a village in Ndi Umunwoke and members of that village know if you are from that village or not. But the thing is, I don't think any serious way, right now, of determining if the person is from Ndi Umunwoke or not, you just take the person's word. You know in the bigger communities, people can claim to be from there but in smaller communities it is next to impossible because roots are traceable very easily and people will know who your parents are. [Male, 11/16/12]

The hometown association in diaspora can be likened to the '*Home*' button on an Identity Positioning System (as in reference to the 'home' button on a Ground Positioning System - GPS). The hometown association anchors members to that singular 'ancestral home' identity that hometowners claim as their primary identity regardless of where one is or what one is doing. As indicated by fig.5 (appendix B), an overwhelming majority, 112 survey respondents (82%) agree the HTA serves as an anchor to the ancestral hometown and ancestral identity. While members

of the hometown association may have different, multiple and shifting identities, they claim the hometown identity or ancestral identity as foundational to the individual and it is from this foundational identity that their other identities sprout or take their origins. As a member explained:

I don't think...belonging to the association is an option. It's second to none. You have to. Because you coming here, it's just like you're in a strange land, but once you identify with the association, you have identity immediately. You have to, because you can't do without it. ... It's not just not being a part of village. It's that a part of you will be missing. Now let me put in a clearer way. If you don't belong to the association, you are actually alienating yourself from your roots and it's easier for you to be blown away. Those who are in the association, like I said before, tend to be accountable to their parent and their parent watch over them. ... The association is an important group. Other circles of friends outside the association are an important group. But, you see, it's like parents. The association is like your parents. Then the other circles you belong to are like friends. So this association treats you like a child, their own child. [Male, 11/9/12]

This speaks to the HTA acting as an anchor and the embodying of locality. In this case, the ancestral locality or identity and its relocalization in the new community through membership in the HTA. In diaspora and away from the ancestral hometown, the HTA provides roots that anchor members to their ancestral village or hometown, roots that act to stabilize their lives so they are not 'blown away' as they settle down in their new communities – roots that temper and shape their degree of assimilation in their new communities. The HTA acts as a technology of re-villaging that provides a socio-cultural platform upon which people from a common ancestral village come together to identify with each other as kin or fictive kin and it is within this social space that they come together as a transplanted village in diaspora. When asked in the survey if the HTA acts a replanted village square in diaspora or not, 100 respondents (74%) answered 'yes' while 36 (26%) answered 'no' (fig. 7, Appendix B). This shows that for most, the HTA gives 'residence' to that home identity outside of the ancestral hometown and becomes the technology for re-villaging ancestral identity: it provides members with the social space and ancestral kin with whom to discuss home affairs, and new ways of belonging to the

ancestral village and living their 'cultural' lives away from the ancestral home. Just as one may typically be surrounded by immediate and extended family members as one celebrates life events in the hometown, while away from home, members use the HTA as the platform upon which to stand as fictive kin as they identify with each other as hometowners and share each other's joys and sorrows. Membership in HTA is highly valued by members. When asked on a scale of 1 to 5 to rate the importance of HTA membership in their lives, a majority of respondents (89%) said the HTA is extremely important, very important, or important to them. Only one respondent answered the HTA is not important and fourteen respondents (10%) answered the HTA is somewhat important in their lives. All the other respondents answered the HTA is important (21%), very important (29%) and extremely important (39%) in their lives (see fig. 6 appendix B).

As often explained by members, socialization with kin, being supportive of one another, maintaining culture and celebrating life events with kin are important functions that take place within the social space of the hometown association. Hometown development though also a function of HTAs seems to be more of a secondary function of the HTA because, as I frequently observed at the monthly or bi-monthly meetings, discussions rarely had anything to do with developing the obodo or village in Nigeria. They may share and discuss recent news about the hometown but none of the chapter meetings discussed one single hometown development project. This speaks to the absence of the transnational dimension on the part of the Igbo HTA, as a collective body, that is typically found in other studies such as that of Latin American HTAs. The founder of Ndi Nneji association described their association as "...a meeting of sisters from the same hometown area who are coming together to be there for each other, to support each other in good and bad times" [Female, 11/4/12] while another founding member

explained that the cultural aim of the meeting is to teach and promote Igbo culture to members and offspring.

As earlier noted, most contemporary studies of HTAs view HTAs as hometown development ‘machines’ with the focus of most studies being not on the ‘now’ and ‘here’ but on ‘over there’ as they examine the benefits that sending communities derive from the development projects or the political influence of HTAs on sending communities (Somerville, Durana and Terrazas 2008). This study, however, argues the primary focus of Igbo HTAs is on re-villaging here and now in the new places they have settled. The survey results show that when members were asked to describe ‘in their own words’ the purpose of the HTA in their lives, respondents wrote in multiple answers or phrases and their answers revolved mostly around cultural socialization with kin. Socializing with kin, maintaining cultural heritage, looking after or supporting each other, cultural socialization of offspring, and identity and roots were the more popular answers with hometown development being one of the least phrase or reasons mentioned. Answers from 126 respondents are grouped as follows:

- **84 (66.67%)** respondents used the words ‘to socialize’ either with kin, or ancestral kin or with people from the hometown in their answer.
- **61 (48.41%)** respondents indicated the promotion or maintenance of culture and used the words “culture or cultural heritage or heritage” as in either to come together with kin or home people to promote or maintain their culture, cultural heritage or heritage.
- **36 (28.57%)** respondents mentioned member welfare – and used words such as to look after one another, to support each other or to be there for each other.
- **21 (16.67%)** respondents wrote cultural socialization of children
- **21 (16.67%)** respondents wrote to identify with each other, to promote or maintain identity or roots
- **19 (15.07%)** respondents wrote hometown development or to help people at home
- **7 (5.55%)** respondents used the words ‘to Network’ either with each other or with people from home

From the above summary of responses, there is strong evidence that for most, membership in the HTA is seen as a way to maintain social ties (66.67% of respondents) and promote cultural heritage (48.41% of respondents) with those viewed as kin based on shared ancestral descent. Socializing with kin and promoting culture or cultural heritage were the most popular phrases used. Member welfare was listed by 28.57% of respondents, the cultural socialization of children (16.67% of respondents) and promoting cultural identity or roots (16.67% of respondents). All of these phrases were used more times than hometown development (15.07% of respondents) to describe purpose of HTA in the lives of members.

In another instance in the survey, when respondents were given a list of three options to choose from to describe the main reason for belonging to a hometown association (see fig. 8, appendix B), members chose as follows:

- 86 members (**63%**) - To gather with ancestral kin for cultural socialization and to share life events (**option 1**)
- 28 members (**20%**) – To raise funds for hometown development (**option2**)
- 23 members (**17%**) - For collective political voice in hometown affairs (**option 3**)

Even when those options associated with developing the ancestral hometown (options 2 and 3) are grouped together for a sum of 37 percent, option one which is cultural socialization with kin is still considered by almost two thirds of the respondents (63%) as the main reason for membership in the HTA. These numbers not only support the claim but the observation of researcher that a majority of the HTA members are focused on re-villaging here and now with hometown development as a secondary reason for membership.

A HTA member offered this view of the HTA: “ebe onye bu, bu ebe onye na awachi’ (where one lives is where one takes care of) and that the likelihood of us completing our mission here soonest and going back to Nigeria is improbable. So ... we need to make here our home and start to think seriously of how we can network with one another” [Male 11/16/12]. Another

member who had been in the USA for about thirty years explained, his hometowners came together in the early 1980s in one of the cities in the North Eastern part of the United States and started a HTA with the primary aim of sending collective funds home for home development – mostly to build schools or medical facilities. In addition to home development, they also figured it would not hurt to have year-end parties to celebrate kinship with each other in their new environments. As he put it, most of his people then were very interested in home development because they had no plans to stay in the USA once they were done with their university education. He said, “all everybody talked about then was going home and going home so they wanted to send money home so that the home will be developed and things will be good when they go back. It was all about going, going home then”. As Victor Uchendu notes it has always been a thing of pride among the Igbo people for the ‘son abroad’ to help his town ‘get up’ or become more developed (1965). This informant then described how as they continued to send collective funds home to improve home communities and continued to socialize with each other because “after all, we have to enjoy ourselves as we send this money home also”, the HTAs transitioned to a phase where the HTA members became interested in helping new immigrants from their hometown adjust and settle down when they arrived in the USA. The HTA did this for a while and then transitioned to their current phase, which he described as follows: “after being here for so many years, we began to realize that ‘*going, going, no-go*’. We realized that *going* is not a *good-go* and we had to begin to think of how we will stay here and how we will live with our children in this country. What do we do with ourselves and our children” so the emphasis of the HTA transitioned to one of “trying to live like our people here in this country” [Male 10/14/12].

The studied associations were mostly in this phase where members acknowledge that *going* is not a *good-go*, and are taking steps to live like ‘their people here’ in this country; steps to embody and relocate their ancestral hometowns in their new environments. This member explains that whereas hometown development may have been the aim of their HTA at its onset, their present focus is on how to live their socio-cultural lives ‘here’ since *going* is no longer a *good-go*. ‘*Going is no longer a good-go*’ is a way of saying that most hometowners may have come to the USA for university education as illustrated by the survey result that shows 78% (109 out of 140 respondents) attended college in the United States (see also Reynolds 2009). After completing their university education, most chose to stay on and carve out new lives for themselves for varying reasons primarily the economic downturn, high unemployment rates and the consequential higher crime rates resulting from the structural adjustment programs of the 1980’s in Nigeria (Reynolds 2009).

Because the longer settled members strive, through their participation in the social arena of the HTA, to live like their village people here in the United States, newly arrived immigrants have access to an active obodo community upon arrival in the USA. The newly arrived immigrants may then be more inclined to join the HTA for the much needed kin network that helps immigrants handle the intricacies of life in an unfamiliar land while also lessening feelings of isolation that one may suffer in a new place. Though other institutions such as churches and non-governmental immigrant organizations may also offer programs or services that help immigrants settle in new places, the appeal of the HTA is not only that of the familiar but that it made of those considered as ancestral kin with whom newcomers share a common sense of belonging. The studied HTAs flourish as longer settled immigrants continue to use its socio-cultural space to achieve their aims of ‘living like their village people’ in diaspora while newly



arrived immigrants contribute to membership growth as their obodo community helps to cushion the feeling of alienation in their new environments. Organizations such as the HTA provide fields of belonging where social capital is “developed and husbanded” to create community and maintain cultural heritage (Brettell 2005:875)

Most HTA members echoed the sentiment that their current environments have become their homes where their offspring will continue to live for generations to come. Even when members seemed to think they may return to their sending communities after retirement, they also acknowledged that the prospect of doing so fully was most unlikely. A member explained this ‘not here nor there’ phenomena most adequately:

Our biggest focus within us, as you know charity begins at home, and home is here as in New England, ehmm, ... I think the Igbo man, the Umuigbo man, has always said I’m going to be going home one day so I’m moving all my treasures back to Umuigbo land but now the focus is changing. We may end up retiring here. ...So, our focus is that we have to maintain our life here and also back home because there is a great chance that we are not retiring to Nigeria a hundred percent. You want to establish a home there but you probably end up going back and forth [12/7/12].

In the past, the ideal place to retire may have been the village as most Igbo people view the city or their land of sojourn as the place to earn money and save up for retirement and the village as the place to retire to with one’s earnings (Onwubu 1975; Uchendu 1965; Trager 1998). In present times, given that ‘going is no longer a good go’ and that most Igbo immigrants have family as well as social and economic ties to their new communities, the ideal of fully retiring to the village seems far-fetched. While, according to the survey, it is true that most imagine return migration as a definite (51% of respondents), an equally high number, (44% of respondents), view return migration as a ‘maybe’ with five percent answering they will never return to Nigeria (see fig. 10, Appendix B). As Reynolds (2009) notes, Igbo immigrants have increasingly come to the realization that ‘repatriation’ to Nigeria is no longer a viable option due to economic and

political instability since the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s. Not hedging their bets, HTA members actively pursue re-localizing their obodo communities here in the United States through membership in HTAS. If as the above informant describes, they end up retiring neither here nor there, these retirees then constitute a continuous circular flow of peoples, ideas, and practices back and forth creating a transnational traffic that constantly breathes life into the socio-cultural space of the HTAs while also affecting life in the ancestral hometown in Nigeria. Sociocultural transnationalism which “is transnational practices that recreate a sense of community based on cultural understandings of belonging and mutual obligations” (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002:767) is integral to the lives of the studied immigrants and a by-product of membership in HTAS even though HTAs members may say they are focused on living their lives here and now. Coming together as an obodo community to practice their ancestral identity and traditions as they settle down in their new environments, lends a transnational theme to their lives. They are an appendage or extension of the ancestral village even though their focus is not on developing the village in Nigeria but on building up their obodo community here in the USA. How do these immigrants strive to embody their ancestral locality as they relocate their lives here and now? How do they strive to inscribe ancestral locality unto their children as they strive to live like their village people or an obodo community here in the USA?

### **Function of the HTA – ‘Trying to Live Like Our People Here in This Country’**

Hometowners form the HTA association so they may, as earlier described by a member, have the social arena to try to live like ‘their people here in this country.’ They do this by first identifying as ‘our people’, that is identifying as a hometown group and organizing themselves as a group – the HTA or ‘meeting’. The HTA provides the much needed social arena for those that identify with the hometown to come together and practice those traditions that not only sets

them apart from others but also culturally links them to the ancestral hometown as they settle in their new environments. How are cultural identities maintained and publicly lived through membership in the HTA? How do they embody ancestral hometown locality as they settle here?

The function of the hometown association is to unite those who claim to have origins in a common ancestral village or hometown. It acts as a platform for these individuals to not just come together as kin while living their lives outside the ancestral village but also to publicly identify as hometowners. The HTA acts as a site for the reproduction or maintenance of culture and cultural difference. As a HTA member explained:

The way it started was that in Houston, Texas, our people there decided that they will form a union that will hold all Ndi Umunwoke people in ‘Obodo Oyibo<sup>16</sup>’ so that if there is an occasion or event being done, there will be a name that can be called upon, so they started it as a branch. It started in Houston as a branch meeting then exploded into the big umbrella where we currently are which is Ndi Umunwoke Union. [Male, 7/15/12]

This speaks to not just embodying ancestral locality but also identifying with and locating collective bodies within the socially and spatially defined boundaries of the ancestral hometown. It is not enough they attend events as individuals or that they know about each other and visit each other, it is important to HTA members that they become known by other mainstream Americans in their new communities as Ndi Umunwoke people. It is important to be:

....recognized as Ndi Umunwoke people in America so we will leave Ndi Umunwoke footprints behind when we come out as a group in public or even when we are gathered as a group by ourselves. One person cannot do that so we have to do it as ndi obodo (our village people). This is very important. We need to leave Ndi Umunwoke footprints behind for all in America to see us as Ndi Umunwoke people and for our children to realize the importance of Ndi Umunwoke culture. They need to know their heritage. [Male, 7/15/12]

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<sup>16</sup> Obodo Oyibo can literally be translated to mean places, (cities or countries), of the white people. This is a common phrase used to refer to Europe, Asia, the Americas – typically those countries not in Africa.

To this member, the footprints are important because “without our footprints, we are nobody, we do not exist. That is why our footprints are important”. He clarified further that ghosts, (‘ndi nmuo’ – which means souls of the dead that appear formless), do not leave footprints behind because they float around and Ndi Umunwoke people do not float around. In this instance, the informant is explaining that though they have migrated to the USA and are no longer residing in their ancestral hometown in Nigeria, through membership in the HTA, they come together as an obodo community to live their cultural heritage so that they will not lose their heritage and become dead souls or ghosts or formless people without roots. He said Ndi Umunwoke “have very strong roots and their feet are strongly planted in those roots so they leave footprints” [Male, 6/11/12]. By coming together and re-villaging, they replant their ancestral village in diaspora leaving their footprints in their new communities so their offspring may follow the footprints. They strive to inscribe ancestral locality unto their offspring so they and their offspring may not ‘be blown away’ and they do this through collectively identifying through membership in HTAs as members of an obodo community and publicly portraying their ancestral identities and traditions as they re-village and ‘try to live like their people’ here in the USA. In my view, To leave their cultural footprints in their new communities, they come together as a group to form a HTA. Who is allowed into the HTA or group to actively identify with the group and to actively participate in the pursuit of leaving cultural footprints behind? In other words, who is considered a citizen of the hometown and who may become a member and actively participate in the affairs of the HTA?

### **Membership In HTAs – Who Is Considered Or Accepted As a Citizen of the Hometown?**

A fundamental difference between the three associations studied was the regulation of membership based on biological sex. This restriction based on biological sex is described by

members as 'tradition'. HTA members frequently explained the exclusion of women from the HTA is based on 'tradition'. I was repeatedly told that 'umunnwoke na umu nwanyi adi ro emeko meeting' (men and women do not have their meetings together). The Ndi Umunwoke association practicing tradition mostly allowed men only as active members. The Ndi Umuigbo association, deviating from tradition, allowed both men and women to be active members. Looking to overcome the feeling of abandonment, disaffiliation and cultural social isolation brought on by their exclusion from participation in the Ndi Umunwoke association, as mentioned earlier, a woman of the Ndi Umunwoke group formed the Ndi Nneji association. Ndi Nneji association is a female only group. As noted earlier, all those who claim patrilineal ancestry in the hometown are considered citizens of that specific hometown. However, this claim does not always entitle one to full participation in the affairs of the HTA in the USA. Though membership is typically open to both male and female adult indigenes, men and women do not hold equal membership status and women are not typically allowed full membership in the HTA (Okafor and Honey 1998). Members of the studied hometown associations agree that, traditionally, only men may belong to or fully participate in the affairs of the HTA. Both women and men associated with the studied associations agree that traditionally, the HTA is a 'bastion of male dominance'; only men attend meetings and only men participate in discussions about the affairs of the HTA. Reflecting this tradition is the Ndi Umunwoke association and deviating from this tradition is Ndi Umuigbo association, while Ndi Nneji association was formed as a consequence of this tradition.

### **Notions of Citizenship There and Here**

In discussing government and political participation at the village level in his ethnography on the Igbo people, Uchendu (1965) notes that the government of villages was

democratic with the amala (village general assembly) acting as its legislative body. Uchendu describes amala as follows: The amala was made up of all adult males of the village. Participation in the affairs or discussions of the amala was not a privilege that extended to women; women were excluded from the amala or village assembly. Amala meetings were either held in an open square centrally located in the village or in contemporary times in the village hall, if one has been built. When an issue came up for discussion in the general assembly, any adult male could participate and have his opinion heard. After the amala meets to carry out legislative activities and discuss issues, lineage leaders hold izuzu (consultation) to reach a decision acceptable to amala on the issues discussed. The privilege of participating in izuzu is also restricted to men (ibid.: 41). Matters handled by the amala range “from the control and regulation of economic affairs to questions of war, peace and defense. ... The village assembly is concerned not only with deliberative and legislative functions; it also deals with judicial, administrative and executive matters. There is no separation of powers involved” (ibid.: 42). The amala or village assembly not only made but also interpreted laws. It also had the power to delegate powers to sub groups for action (Uchendu 1965) as was then typically the case in women’s village affairs where power to handle those issues that mostly affected women were delegated to be handled by the women’s groups or ‘meetings’. This traditional approach of a village assembly which locates women as a sub group under men is replicated in the structure of HTAs. The “social location” of women within the socio-cultural arena of the HTA is subsumed under that of men. Social location is an individual’s position(s) within power hierarchies created as a result of historical, economic, kinship-based and other socially stratifying factors (Pessar and Mahler 2003: 816). Earlier I had likened the HTA to a transplanted village hall in diaspora where villagers gather to share in each other’s lives and discuss issues common to members. It

seems the studied associations also view the HTA as the village hall where members, albeit only privileged members—traditionally men— may congregate to share and discuss village affairs. Literature on Igbo HTAs reflect the separation of men and women of the hometown into different or gender segregated groups with the women's wings being in a subordinate position leading to the characterization of the HTA as a 'bastion of male dominance' reflecting and bolstering traditional gender hierarchies (Honey 1998).

### **Ndi Umunwoke HTA: Hegemonic Definitions of Membership and its Contestations**

The Ndi Umunwoke Association is registered as a non-profit organization whose purposes are to encourage and promote the following:

- unity among members
- positive socio-economic and political conditions at home
- peaceful coexistence of Ndi Umunwoke and its neighbors
- public policy for the development of of Ndi Umnwoke
- the preservation of Ndi Umunwoke cultural heritage
- welfare of all Ndi Umunwoke people in the USA

It has eleven chapters in the United States located in different states. Fieldwork was carried out at one of the local chapters located in the North Eastern part of the United States.

**Organization Structure and Principles:** The Ndi Umunwoke Association USA is an umbrella organization under which all the Ndi Umunwoke local chapters in the USA exist. The national umbrella organization is run by a National Executive Council that governs its affairs. The National Executive Council is made up of the national executive officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, Financial Secretary, Treasurer, Publicity Secretary, and Provost) and the local chapter Presidents. National officers may serve for two years after which national elections are held.

National officers may hold office for two consecutive terms. The local chapters are semi-autonomous. They establish their local by-laws that govern their affairs at the local level as long as those by-laws are not in conflict with the purposes, principles and by-laws of the umbrella union. Local chapters may elect officers to meet their chapter needs. Most local chapters typically have a President and Secretary.

According to the Ndi Umunwoke constitution, membership is open to all indigenes of Ndi Umunwoke and all members of the union are seen as equal and each member has the right to freely express herself, or himself, respectfully and democratically. The union expects members to be objective in discussions about the affairs of the union, to respect decisions made by the executive council and to settle and reconcile differences peacefully by mediation.

**Dues, Levies and Monetary Benefits:** Local chapters are required to submit their list of active members to the umbrella organization and to pay a fixed amount (\$60) as dues per active member to the umbrella organization yearly. All active members are also required to pay a bereavement levy (\$50), to the national umbrella association, at the death of any active member or an active male member's wife<sup>17</sup>. Bereavement levies collected are given to the deceased's family to alleviate funeral costs. Local chapters may also assess other local dues based on their chapter by-laws or as needed. Local chapters may also have additional chapter membership benefits, if they so choose.

**Membership:** The constitution and bylaws of the Ndi Umunwoke umbrella union state that membership in the national union is open to all adult<sup>18</sup> Ndi Umunwoke sons and daughters (by birth or adoption) and to all wives of Ndi Umunwoke men who live in the USA. However, membership has to be registered through a local chapter. One may not register as a member of

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<sup>17</sup> In most local chapters, women are restricted from active membership. In those chapters where women maybe active members, this death benefit does not accrue to their husbands.

<sup>18</sup> At least 18 years old



the national union unless one is a registered member of a local chapter. Adults from any of the following categories are entitled to membership:

- Indigenous<sup>19</sup> man or woman.
- Non-indigenous female married to indigenous male
- Indigenous female married to non indigenous man – however the female requires her husband's consent to join the union
- Individual born by an indigenous single parent (male or female)
- Individual adopted by indigenous person (male or female)

For members of the Ndi Umunwoke association, the definition of Ndi Umunwoke indigene means that one's patrilineage (by birth or adoption) can be traced to the town of Ndi Umunwoke. To the Ndi Umunwoke people, if you are an Ndi Umunwoke person through your patrilineage or if you are a woman and not of Ndi Umunwoke descent (patrilineally) but are married to a man of Ndi Umunwoke patrilineage then you have a right to membership in the association. The husbands of Ndi Umunwoke patrilineage daughters are not entitled to membership in the association and are also not entitled to the death benefit payouts as are the wives of Ndi Umunwoke men. Additionally, though the constitution clearly states equality of all members, the requirement that 'an Ndi umunwoke female married to a non Ndi Umunwoke male must have her husband's consent to join Ndi Umunwoke association' is inconsistent with the earlier claim of equality of members. This requirement however is based on the traditional view that at marriage, an Ndi Umunwoke daughter's primary alliance is to her husband's patrilineage and thus it follows that she should be first, a member of her husband's hometown association,

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<sup>19</sup> Indigenous is used to indicate a person of Ndi Umunwoke patrilineage

and then with her husband's permission, secondly a member of the hometown association of her patrilineage.

With Ndi Umunwoke association, where most chapters consider only men as active members, membership was based on patrilineal descent and one's patrilineage (or husband's patrilineage) had to be traced to Ndi Umunwoke for one to qualify for membership and register as a member of the association. Local chapters may make exceptions to this rule. In one instance, a local chapter of the Ndi Umunwoke association made an exception for a man whose parents had lived all their lives in Ndi Umunwoke to join the association even though his patrilineage is traced to a neighboring town outside Ndi Umunwoke. This member, however, was not recognized as an Ndi Umunwoke indigene or as a member of the association by the national Ndi Umunwoke umbrella union under which all the local chapters fall. This non-recognition means that any and all benefits due members at the national level will not accrue to the non-indigene and he is only allowed to participate as a guest at the national level. At the local chapter, he fully participates in local matters, events and benefits.

Though the constitution clearly states membership is open to male or female indigenes, in practice, only male indigenes were recognized as active members in nine of the eleven chapters in the USA at the onset of my research. At the time, of the eleven chapters in the USA, women as well as men were active members of only two chapters while only men were active participants in nine chapters and their wives held associate memberships. Associate membership means silent membership; associate members may not attend and participate in discussions at meetings or be a part of the decision making process in HTA meetings. However, females, as associate members, may cook and serve food at the meetings or at association sponsored events.

They may also at the invitation or with the permission of male members, perform cultural dances to raise funds at association events. The following excerpts explain associate membership.

Once my husband became a member, I became an associate-member. You know as associate-members we do not pay dues or any fees. Whatever our husbands pay as fees covers us. If our husbands pay then we have paid, that is what is meant by associate member. We are not part of those that make decisions in the meeting. [Female, 7/15/ 12]

Even though I don't go to the meetings with my wife but because of my presence and my dues paying status, she is also a member. If something happens to her, God forbid, whatever is due to a member is due to her. But our meeting here in New England is only men only that attend. However, since we rotate the meeting venue from house to house, the woman of the house hosting the meeting is expected to entertain us by cooking good food. Now this is the way we do it in New England but there are chapters where men and women both attend meetings. Even in our own, we have been talking about it that we might continue to meet, that is the men, but maybe two times a year maybe we need to meet with our wives and kids and have fun and discuss. [Male, 11/ 16/12]

The Ndi Umunwoke association is one that in most chapters adheres to the tradition of excluding women from the socio-civic space of the HTA. The hegemonic notion that citizenship is 'male' was pervasive. I was numerously told by members in very firm tones that 'men and women do not meet together' and women may form women's wings that exist under the 'main meeting'<sup>20</sup>, run by the men. Existing under the 'main meeting,' means they may not plan, execute or carry out any public activity or event without approval from the HTA. Being that only men could actively participate in the HTA, this meant they could not act publicly without approval from the men. They may meet as often as their schedules reasonably permit for 'camaraderie' but they may only act publicly as representatives of the hometown in conjunction with the men or with the approval of the male members of the 'main meeting'. Even though they did not have a women's wing at the local chapter where I conducted my research, a female member explained to me how one would work if it was in existence. She explained that they would set their meeting

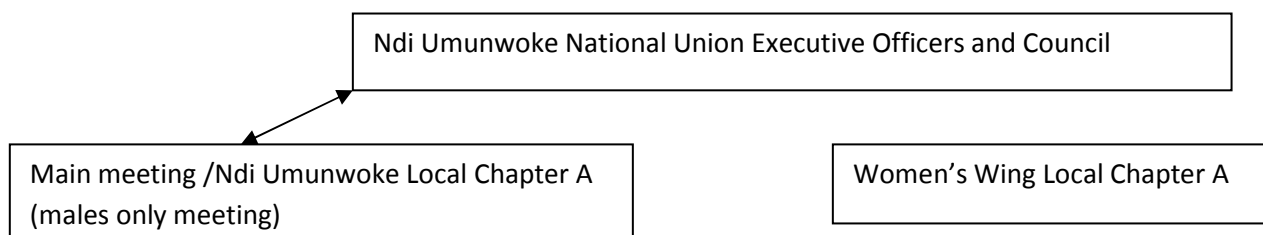
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<sup>20</sup> The HTA association where only men may be active members is viewed as the 'main meeting'.

days and times to not conflict with the meeting days and time of the ‘main meeting’. The refreshments and activities to be carried out at the women’s wing meetings would be under their control so long as these are activities that are done at the meetings and not in public as representatives of Ndi Umunwoke. She explained that:

when we have to go public with anything that we are doing, we have to notify the men and tell them what we plan to do and it has to be ok with them before we can do that thing. For example, if we plan a party where we will perform traditional dances to raise funds for any type of project, we can’t just go and do it. First, we have to tell the men what we plan to do and when and where we plan to do it and if it is ok with them, then we can go ahead with it. If it is not ok with them, we have to discuss with them to see what we need to change so that it will be ok. We are under the main meeting, that is the way the women’s wing works. [Female 9/12/12]

While I was visiting another local chapter which had a women’s wing, an elderly male member of the ‘main meeting’ explained the women’s wing was autonomous and not under the control of the main meeting. He explained the men’s group had no say in the affairs of the women’s wing and that the women’s wing is viewed as a part of their local Ndi Umunwoke chapter. As we chatted, he confirmed the women meet separately and the men meet separately and both are viewed as legitimate parts of the local chapter but the two groups never meet together. He confirmed the local chapter president of the HTA (i.e the male only main meeting) represents the local chapter at the National Executive meetings and teleconferences. Slightly confused, I confirmed with him that the women’s wing was truly autonomous and not under the control of the ‘main meeting’ and then asked how the women’s wing is represented at the national level of the Ndi Umunwoke Association. This was the diagram I pictured as we talked:



I asked if there is a National Women's Executive Wing or if the president of the women's wing calls in to the National Executive Council teleconferences or attends their meetings. At this point, the male member paused and looked severely at me over the rim of his glasses and I 'steemed' myself for a scolding. I was afraid I had mentioned the 'unmentionable' - representation of women at the national level. Meanwhile, I was only trying to piece together the structure of the organization and relationships between branches and members of the national executive body. After staring at me for what seemed eternity, the male member smiled and said "you know, I have never thought of that. Ehhhhh, they should be represented but they are not. Now that you mention it, I don't know why it is that they are not represented. I don't see why women should not be represented. I really don't know. You are right, ehbm you are right. I don't know. I am talking to you, a woman, and you bring up these issues because you advocate for women" [Male, 1/28/2013]. I replied I was trying to understand the bigger picture and the structure of the relationships between the different wings of the local chapter and the national body that governs the association and was not there as an advocate for women. In this instance, my positioning as a woman is politicized and used to deflect the question. Once my positioning as a female is brought up and the claim of female advocate attached to my position, not only did I feel pressured to refute the claim, I was also inclined to no longer pursue that line of questioning as the male member was no longer forthcoming with information. Though the national constitution of the Ndi Umunowke HTA clearly states membership is open to male or female indigenes, in practice, only male indigenes were recognized as active members in nine of the eleven chapters in the USA when I began my research. Also, at that time, there was also only one women's wing in existence at one of the local branches.

**Membership Status and Death Benefits:** To be an active member at the national level, one must be an active member of a local chapter and one must pay yearly national dues through the local chapter to the national apex organization. Within local chapters, requirements for active membership vary but typically involve being male, required attendance at a set minimum number of meetings per year and payment of all chapter dues and levies.

At the national and local levels, the one tangible benefit of membership in the HTA typically identified by members is the death benefit. The death benefit is the amount of money given to a deceased member's family. This amount of money is collected through bereavement levies paid by active members. When an active member dies, all active members in the USA are each levied a fixed amount and the total amount collected is given to the deceased's next of kin to cover funeral expenses which typically includes transporting the deceased to the ancestral hometown for burial. In addition to the collection of levies from all active members in the USA, the local chapter to which the deceased belonged would also hold a wake for the deceased, if the deceased's immediate family so wishes. At the wake, funds are also collected from attendees to supplement the monies collected nationally. As explained by members both the active member, (typically the male as only males may be active members in nine of the eleven chapters), and his wife, (the associate member), are entitled to this death benefit.

### **Contemporary Redefinitions of HTA Membership - Ndi Umuigbo and Ndi Nneji**

The other two associations studied (Ndi Umuigbo and Ndi Nneji) have deviated from the traditional definitions of membership. Ndi Umuigbo deviated from tradition in that both men and women actively participate in the HTA in all their chapters. Ndi Nneji which was formed by those women excluded from the socio-civic space of the Ndi Umunwoke HTA at one of the New England local chapters deviated from the traditional definition of the hometown association by

forming a women's HTA not affiliated in any way with the 'main meeting' or the Ndi Umunwoke local chapter and by redefining the geographical boundaries of the hometown to suit their purposes.

### **Remapping the Hometown – Ndi Nneji**

Ndi Nneji was founded by an Ndi Umunwoke female, Chika, who after years of feeling socio-culturally isolated from the social arena of the HTA acted to create an association for women from her 'home' locale so she could also share in the joys of belonging to and identifying with a hometown group. Chika's local Ndi Umunwoke HTA chapter, which had constantly struggled over the past decade to establish itself as a fully functioning chapter and which despite its very low membership, (averaging three active male members over the years), practiced the tradition of excluding women from active participation in the association. Chika's inquiries and requests for the inclusion of women, over the years, met with rejection. Striking out on her own, Chika decided to call together the other females of Ndi Umunwoke to start a 'meeting'. She reached out to all the females she knew from Ndi Umunwoke and also from neighboring hometowns. Chika did this because she wanted to include the females from her husband's hometown (which is a neighboring town to Ndi Umunwoke). However, rather than limiting membership to her husband's hometown and her patrilineal hometown (Ndi Umunwoke), she figured it would be good to include towns that bordered with her patrilineal hometown and her husband's hometown. Her rationale was that these neighboring towns typically came together to identify as being from a close knit region of Igboland that shared the same traditions. So though called a hometown association meeting, it is comprised of members from at least six different but neighboring villages and towns. These women all agreed to come together to form this 'hometown meeting' to identify as kin and support each other in times of joy and sorrow.

## **Ndi Nneji Association Structure**

The Ndi Nneji association is a standalone association comprised of about fourteen members. It is not affiliated with any apex umbrella organization and members pay monthly dues to fund organizational expenses. Offices held by members are minimal. There is an acting president, a secretary, a social secretary and a treasurer. The acting president sets meeting dates and agenda and sends out email reminders to members about upcoming meetings. The secretary takes meeting minutes and distributes copies by email to members. The social secretary suggests and plans social activities or coordinates the role members may play at social events organized by members. The treasurer collects, keeps and disburses monies as agreed to by members. Meetings are held once every three months and are rotated primarily between the homes of two members who volunteered to alternately host meetings. At the time of my fieldwork, though this HTA was in its formational stages, members hoped to hold seasonal events such as summer picnics, Christmas parties and movie nights for their families and friends.

**Association dues and levies:** At one of the meetings, the women discussed the need for petty cash to handle issues that may come up such as sending flowers or fruit baskets to sick members and other like contingencies and agreed to collect monthly dues of \$5 per member to fund petty cash for such contingencies. Other levies agreed to by members are as follows:

Bereavement levies (collected per member) for death benefit payouts

- \$30 for parent of member
- \$20 for parent in-law of member
- \$20 for sibling of member
- \$50 for member
- \$50 for spouse of member
- \$30 for Member's Child

Other Levies or benefits are as follows:

25 <sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary	\$50 gift card from association
Wedding (member)	\$20 levy per member



Wedding (member's child)	\$10 levy per member
Member Birthdays	Birthday cake presented at meeting
Illness in Family	Will be handled on a case by case basis as decided by members

**Bereavement Levies/Death Benefits:** When a parent, parent in-law, sibling, child or spouse of a member dies, the appropriate amount of bereavement levy is collected from each member by the treasurer and given to the bereaved member to help allay funeral or related expenses. This is the only association of the three studied associations that collects bereavement dues for parent in-laws of members. Initially a lesser amount of \$10 per member had been proposed for a parent in-law but the women agreed that their members had to deal with the same types of funeral related expenses for a deceased parent or parent in-law and did not really wish to differentiate between the two. Members argued that upon marriage, parents in-law become 'parents', so it did not make good sense to have a much lesser bereavement levy for parents in-law. At the death of a member, bereavement levies are collected and given to the deceased's designated beneficiary to help allay funeral costs. For death related events, all members must contribute cooked food items for the event.

**Other Levies:** Levies collected for graduation, weddings, christenings are presented to the member at a celebratory event, if the member holds one, or are mailed to the member's home with a congratulatory card. For births, weddings, graduations, and anniversaries, monetary support in the form of levies were required of members and attendance at the ceremony was encouraged but left as optional. For death related events such as wakes or funerals, both the monetary levy and attendance are mandatory<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Members are expected to make all possible efforts to attend wakes or funerals. When a member is unable to attend, they are still required to provide cooked food for the event.

The Ndi Nneji association highlights an example of how feelings of socio-cultural exclusion and the desire to identify and belong to a home group leads to innovative ways of reorganizing and remaking identities in diaspora. The founder though calling the group a hometown meeting reached beyond the boundaries of her patrilineal hometown of Ndi Umunwoke including women from her husband's patrilineage as well as surrounding towns and formed a 'hometown' association not a regional association (even though it is regional by geographical definitions) that is recognized by others as a gathering of hometowners which in turn posed a dilemma to the male only 'main meeting' of the HTA as other Igbo groups began to wonder if the Ndi Umunwoke men were losing control of their women especially at public events where the women sat together or acted collectively to present gifts to celebrants.

Women's wings are typically formed as a sub group or a group that exists under the control of the main meeting run by men (Denzer and Mbanefoh 1998; Okafor and Honey 1998; Trager 2001). For a daughter of Ndi Umunwoke patrilineage to form an independent HTA meeting not in any way affiliated with the existing HTA raised eyebrows among Igbo people living close by in the surrounding suburbs . This move by the women also galvanized the male run HTA in that state to actively court the women and convince them to come back into the hometown fold and join their HTA chapter as fully active members which the women did but on the grounds they remain members of their newly formed women's HTA and retain the choice of prioritizing the affairs of their women's HTA over the affairs of the Ndi Umunwoke HTA if and when they so choose. Women play a central role in maintaining existing subjugating gender roles and in creating progressive ones (Boehm 2008). Though gender is embedded within the institution of the HTA in a way that subjugates women, in this instance the actions of the founder of Ndi Nneji, Chika, is instrumental in drawing the attention of the HTA to the importance of the

various resources and capabilities women may bring to bear on the affairs of the HTA. On the other hand, other female citizens, in keeping with tradition, acquiesce to their exclusion from the socio-civic space of the HTA but seek out other groups such as religious, ethnic and professional associations where they play active roles and hold leadership positions.

### **Kola Nut Mediated Equality in Membership – Ndi Umuigbo HTA**

Though members of the Ndi Umuigbo association acknowledge that traditionally, in village affairs and in HTAs in Nigeria, only men may actively participate in ‘meetings’, they have chosen to allow all males and females whose ancestral lineage (either through the mother or through the father) are traced to Umuigbo to be active members and participate fully in their association here in the United States. Though a patrilineal group, they seek to include every individual, male or female, whose mother or father is from Ndi Umuigbo. A member explained that they are very inclusive and everyone from Ndi Umuigbo is welcome to join the association “whether it is their mother or father that is from Umuigbo, it doesn’t matter, they can join our meeting” [Male 12/7/12]. The possible outcomes to qualify for membership are as follows:

- Child of Umuigbo man or woman
- Wife of man of Umuigbo patrilineage (regardless of the wife’s patrilineage)
- Husband of woman of Umuigbo patrilineage (regardless of the husband’s patrilineage)

Any Ndi Umuigbo person by birth, adoption or marriage can join and fully participate in the affairs of the association. Though a patrilineal group by tradition, here in the United States, they recognize all sons and daughters of Ndi Umuigbo as members and all are entitled to active membership in the hometown association. All active members may fully participate in discussions and in all affairs of the association. A member describes what active membership means as follows:

Attending events, ehmm well first of all attending the meeting, you have to attend at least three meetings a year, and you have to attend community events like we had a fund raiser a couple of months ago, back in late summer, you have to be a part of that. Convention<sup>22</sup> –once a year, it is not mandatory because it may be far away. ... But for the most part, active member is attending local meetings, you also have to be a part of the national body also. [Female, 12/7/12]

For this group, an active member is one who pays dues as levied both by the local chapter and the national apex organization, attends three of the six local chapter meetings held in any given year (meetings are bi-monthly), and also attends some of the local or national events or fundraisers. At the studied local chapter, there is a chapter president, treasurer, financial secretary, secretary, and a national council liaison. Chapter officials are elected every three years and any member (male or female) may run for office. There are also no limits on the number of consecutive terms for local chapter offices. At the local level, yearly dues are collected so the local chapter has petty cash and dues may also be levied for special events as needed. Each member of the local chapter is expected to register with the national body and to pay yearly dues to the national body. The Ndi Umuigbo association has 35 local chapters in the United States.

At the national level/apex organization, there is a national council and a national executive body. The national council is made up of representatives from the local chapters. Each local chapter has a member that represents them at the national council meetings and teleconferences. The national council convenes once a year at the national council meeting to set national priorities, goals and the national budget. The national executive body consists of the National President and Vice President, the National Secretary, the Treasurer, and a Cultural Officer. These are elected officials that hold two year terms and active members from any of the

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<sup>22</sup> An annual national convention is held by the association and maybe hosted by any of their local chapters in the United States. Conventions provide a social space for all Ndi Umuigbo in the USA to gather and socialize with kin as they celebrate their cultural heritage.

local chapters may run for national office. National executive and council members may hold office for not more than two consecutive terms. Though this HTA has deviated from the tradition of excluding women from active participation in HTAs, they still carry on some traditions that limit female participation in certain roles especially at the National level of the association. That tradition revolves around the rules that govern the presentation and breaking of the kola nut (*cola acuminata*) as will be explained in the following chapter on the kola nut.

### **Description of HTA Meeting - Generally Speaking**

HTA meetings are typically hosted by members in their homes on a rotational basis. A list of meeting dates and members that would host each meeting is drawn up either in alphabetical order or by having members pick dates that are convenient for them. If a member is unable to host a meeting due to unforeseen circumstances, the member is encouraged to trade dates with another member and to inform all of the change in venue. The basic format of HTA meetings are the same for the three studied associations. The President or oldest member would say an opening prayer to start the meeting. Kola nut, if available, would be presented and then blessed and broken by the oldest male member. The youngest male member would then pass the pieces of kola around to members. If actual kola nut is not available, a substitute item is presented as kola and members are invited to partake in the item. The meeting agenda is then passed out, if one has been typed up and copies made for members. If not, the President or presiding member calls out the agenda items as the meeting progresses. The last item on the agenda is typically matters arising and at this time members may make announcements about upcoming celebrations, their accomplishments or the accomplishments of their children, share news about home, raise concerns about the affairs of the HTA and any other issues they may choose to discuss or put on the agenda for the next meeting. Most meetings last about two to

three hours and end with a closing prayer after which the host or hostess of the meeting invites all to partake in the home made traditional culinary delights laid out in a corner or in an adjoining dining room. With the formal part of the meeting over with, members would typically sit back for an hour or two catching up with each other while enjoying the food. Traditional Igbo food or dishes are typically served at the end of the meeting. To serve non-traditional Igbo food such as pizza, Chinese take-away, or pasta dishes at the HTA meeting signifies that the obodo community is losing its identity. When pizza, pasta and other non traditional foods are served, it is typically in conjunction with other Igbo traditional dishes and it is also in an attempt to accommodate the more contemporary appetites of young offspring that are present at the meetings. Food is an important aspect of the HTA meeting and the process of carrying on the cultural heritage of the obodo community in their new environments. Attempts are made to also cook non-traditional dishes such as chicken wings and pasta with spices from home to give the dish a traditional flavor as hometowners borrow and blend practices from their new environments.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter looked at what the HTA means to member and discussed how members view the social space of the HTA as their ancestral village square where members identify with each other as they try to live like ‘home’ people here in their new environments. It also looked at how membership is defined based on ancestral lineage in the hometown in Nigeria and examined the organizational structure of the HTAs showing that traditionally the socio-cultural space of the HTA is dominated by men with the role of women subsumed under that of men. In those instances such as with the Ndi Umuigbo HTA where a more contemporary approach that views women as having equal status as men in the HTA is practiced, the HTA is still faced with

dilemmas revolving around the rules governing the presentation of kola nut which continues to limit the role of women in HTA affairs as members build obodo community here in their new environments. These kola nut traditions are delved into at the beginning of the next chapter as some background information on the kola nut is needed to better contextualize discussions about the HTA.

#### **CHAPTER 4: THE HTA AS A TECHNOLOGY OF RE-VILLAGING**

Since we can no longer go to the village with our children and be safe in the village because of armed robbers and kidnappers, we have to bring the village here to us in America [Male, 6/10/12].

##### **Through The Eyes of the Kola Nut**

In further discussing citizenship and socio-civic participation in the social arena of the HTA, I look through the prism of the kola nut (*Cola acuminata*). I use the kola nut because it is foundational to all Igbo meetings or gatherings. It is foundational in the sense that in Igboland, the official start of any meeting is marked by the presentation of the kolanut. The kola nut is always presented, broken, and shared by those present to signal the official start of a meeting. Fundamental to analyzing the HTA through the prism of the kolanut, is the tradition in Igboland that a female may not present and break kola nut at a 'meeting' or a gathering where men are present. A female is expected to bow down her head or semi-kneel when handing a bowl of kola nut to a male to present to those gathered at any occasion. A female may present and break kola nut at a gathering of only females but by tradition may not do so if males are present. Additionally, a female may also accept kola nut at a gathering after all males present at the gathering have accepted kolanut. So, if an eighty year old female is at a meeting or gathering of

males and females, when the kola nut is broken all males present, even if three or four years of age, must take a piece of the kola nut before it is offered to the eighty year old female. In a society, where age is highly respected, this kola nut ‘rule’ may shed light on how females are viewed as members of the HTA (the diasporic village assembly) or the extent to which they may participate as hometown citizens in comparison to males within the HTA.

**What is the Kola Nut (*Cola acuminata*)?**



Orji and Ose Orji (Kola nut and peppery peanut paste)



Broken and whole pieces of Orji (Kola nut) and whole pieces of Aki innu (bitter nuts) in a wooden bowl

As one informant described, and I paraphrase, it is a cash crop with many functions. It is also an item whose mention elicits excitement and makes people sit up to tell you what they



know about its cultural significance to Igbo people. Uchendu writes “the kola nut is the greatest symbol of Igbo hospitality. It always comes first. ‘It is the king.’ To be presented with a kola nut is to be made welcome...It is the host’s privilege to present a kola nut, a privilege denied to women and other social inferiors.” (1965:74). Uchendu notes that presenting kola nut involves three steps which are the presentation of the kola nut, the breaking of the kola nut and the distribution of the broken pieces of kola nut to those gathered. A woman may not carry out any of these three steps (ibid.: 74). Kola nut may be presented to guests that visit one’s home and in this type of scenario the male host will present the kola nut to his male guests. Kola nut is also presented to signal the official start of a ‘meeting’ and in this instance, the ‘hostess/host’ of the meeting gives the kola nut(s) to the male meeting facilitator who then presents it to the oldest male at the meeting to bless. Afterwards, it is then broken either by the oldest male or his designees (men only) before it is passed around to those attending the meeting. Regarding the HTA meeting, the member at whose home the meeting is being held is considered the host because she/he is providing the space and refreshments including kola nut(s) for the meeting. However, this does not imply a host/guest dichotomy among HTA members at meetings. The HTA members use the word ‘host’ to refer to the member at whose home any particular meeting is being held. Only members of the HTA obodo community may attend meetings and they all view themselves as hosts of the meeting because it is ‘meeting ndi obodo’ (obodo meeting) and obodo community members are not guests at their own meetings. When a non-member of the obodo community, for example a friend of a member, attends a meeting, she/he is a guest at the meeting.

The rules that govern the presentation and breaking of kola nut are complex depending on the age and status of males present at the occasion or event. These rules as they pertain to male

hierarchies also differ from village to village within Igboland. Though they may differ in reference to male hierarchies from one village to the other, the rules converge on the issue of women. Throughout Igboland, a woman may not present or break kola nut at a gathering where men are present. This overarching rule silences women and limits their cultural socio-civic participation in the public sphere in contemporary times. Thus, the kola nut seems an appropriate backdrop within which to view the HTA which is commonly referred to as 'meeting' by members; the HTA is the platform used to re-village and the presentation of kola nut formally signals the start of HTA meetings. As I talked with members, every time I asked of the significance of the kola nut in Igbo culture, the conversation became animated.

### **The Traditional View of the Kola Nut:**

Researcher: The Kolanut, ... what is its significance to you?

HTA Member: Ok, it is not just me. It is any Igbo man. There is a saying in Nigeria, that the Yorubas grow the kolanut, the Hausas eat the kolanut, the Igbos worship the kolanut. Yeah, it is a saying among Igbos. So kola nut is a very very – I think this is the most important question you have thrown to me today. Kola nut is not just kolanut. ... It has a lot of significance in Igboland. Say for example, if I come to your house, if I visit your house and you did not present kola nut to me, it is a signal that you did not welcome me. It is a very important part of our culture. ... If you attend any Igbo ceremony, occasion, you find out that before anything is done, probably the only thing that precedes the kola nut is regular prayer. Other than that, when the kola nut is offered there is a ritual that goes with it. You have to pray over it, you have to do certain things. You have to bless it and use that kola nut to bless the occasion and offer that kola nut to our ancestors by recognizing them at that occasion even though they are not there physically, they have passed on. You mention their names and you call upon them to be part of what is going on and you also ask them to bless the occasion even though they are not physically there and you offer a piece of that kola nut to them by biting off the little stem at the end of it and throwing it to the ground. It is a significance of giving them what is their's, their own right and their own share of the kola nut. So if I come to your house and if you welcome me, the first thing you offer me is a kola nut. You offer me a kola nut with a sort of peanut butter that they prepare to go along with it that is very pepperish. If somebody comes to your house, you offer him the kola nut, it is presented sometimes on a local

wooden dish along with the peanut butter or the alligator pepper. So there is this two things to go with it. ... it is not just anybody that can break the kolanut. For example, I don't mean to denigrate women or bring women down, we all know that we all share equal rights with women now in the modern world, but by custom, from time immemorial, women do not break kola nut and I think the same is still true today. You don't offer kola nut to women to break. That's number one. Number two, you just don't offer kola nut to any man to break. The kola nut is broken by the oldest male there. So the host presents the kolanut, he offers the kola nut to his visitors as a welcome showing he welcomes them with clear mind. The next thing is they bring water in a little container for the person who is going to break the kola nut to wash his hands for hygiene, it is just hygiene. You wash your hand. Sometimes a knife is needed to break the kola nut, sometimes people depend on their nail. But due to hygiene, knife is more preferable. So, you use knife to break the kola nut. But before breaking the kola nut, that is where the ritual comes in. The person breaking the kola nut will hold the kola nut up in the air and beckon the almighty God, the ancestors and welcome them and ask them to come in to be a part of this breaking of the kola nut and asking that this kola nut will bring all kinds of good fortune and drive away all evil spirits. All the bad things go and good things come in. You also bless the land where you are blessing the kola nut. You bless the house. If it is in the United States, you ask God to continue blessing this land which harbors us today because if the land that is harboring you is not doing well, you will not do well. So you bless the land and the house that harbor you. Bless the people that are living in the house. Ask for blessings for yourself and your guests. Your offer the kola nut and say those things and then top it off sometimes with a prayer. And then the kola nut is broken... It is an important ritual in Igboland.

Researcher: ... can there be Ndi Umunwoke culture without the kola nut?

HTA Member: ehhm, the kola nut is an important ritual something in Igboland. I don't know how to put it. It is a very important ritual. The manner that it is handled differs among Igbo people. In Ndi Umunwoke, in particular, you can't do anything in Ndi Umunwoke land traditionally [i.e. without breaking the kola nut], I know the Christians have come in and they have their own way, that is Christianity. But when it comes to the customs and traditions of the land, you cannot do anything without the kola nut. ... Yes, in Ndi Umunwoke town, you cannot do anything traditionally without the kola nut even among Christians, they recognize that fact. No matter what Christianity denomination you have chosen, Anglican, Catholic, Jehovah's witness, every Igbo man knows the significance of the kola nut. Yes, you cannot do anything without the kola nut. [Male, 11/17/12]

## **The Not so Traditional View of the Kola Nut**

Researcher: What does the kola nut signify to you?

HTA member: Number one, as an agronomist, kola nut is a crop [laughter]. It can grow as a cash crop. You know what I mean. That means you can use it as a raw material for various things. But when it comes to traditional culture, our people see kola nut as a way of telling someone that you welcome them during a personal visit. ... So my own observation is that the presentation of the kola nut is a symbol of welcome to a visitor or a symbol of acceptance to a visitor or people you invited that you acknowledge their presence. ... and in these present times that kola nut might be in the form of beer, coke [as in coca cola], all these are now regarded as orji (kola nut). If you come to my house, I may offer you malt while saying I present orji (kola). It is all part of the process of welcoming you and letting you know that your visit is ok. ... So the significance of kola nut in Igbo culture to me is, it is a symbol of welcome, symbol of acceptance of a meeting between two people.

Researcher: Is it possible to have Igbo culture or Ndi Umunwoke culture without the kola nut?

Member: It has been a tradition even though I don't know how that tradition came about and when you don't do the traditional thing then it looks like you have not done the right thing. ... So without keeping to tradition, it is then said that the people are doing things backwards.

In the same fashion, when you present kola nut, and a woman steps in to say that she will break the kola nut, there is nothing wrong with that in my own view, it is just like they say a woman cannot be fada [father/priest in the Catholic church] which then leaves one to ask, is a woman not a human being? Did Chineke [God] at any time say that this role must be done by a woman and this role must be done by a man. Do you see what I mean eh? So, if when we are all together, men and women that is, and you as a woman take the knife and say you'll break the kola nut, you know that those gathered will loudly protest. 'Mana orji amara onye waa lia' [But the kola nut does not know who broke it].

Researcher: That's true

Member: Orji amara onye waa lia [the kola nut does not know who broke it]. The only thing orji [kola nut] does is, when you break it, it breaks into pieces depending on how you apply the knife to it as you break it. Orji [kola nut], itself, at that material time, does not have a brain to distinguish whether it is being broken by a man or woman. So any other thing we do in regards to the kola nut is a creation of human thought and values or the ways tradition seeks to subjugate women by attaching certain things to men and certain things to women and that is gender discrimination eh. You see what I mean. Ehh heh. So, because of that it looks like

there is something out of the ordinary that surrounds orji but that is not so. ... there is no way to substitute that welcoming gesture of the presenting of kola without implying that we have lost our tradition. ...

So to answer your question, the only time kola nut will not be part of our culture is in centuries to come when people may have changed and then their views have changed, then they may not look at kola nut as significant as it is today in Igbo culture. Just as many things have also changed today in Igbo culture. Things are changing in our culture. [Male, 11/13/2012]

As explained by the above members and others, most meetings or formal events begin with the breaking of kola nut. In cases, where the kola nut is unavailable, another item, garden eggs or a platter of crackers, peanuts or a bottle of wine or liquor may be substituted and presented as kola. As explained to me by a member, in those instances where kola nut is unavailable, a woman may offer the bowl of fruit or substitute item to a man to present to the gathering without semi kneeling. She may give the bowl of fruit or substitute item, without going down on one knee, to a man who will then present the kola to those gathered and bless it as well. Substitutes to the kola nut are not encouraged and most people go the extra length to acquire the actual kola nut to be broken at the beginning of any meeting or event. The actual kola nut (*Cola acuminata*) may only be presented and broken by a man. What this means is that the role of women in the HTA may be stifled or limited by the traditions that govern the presentation or breaking of the kola nut and the extent to which women may participate in the socio-cultural arena of the HTA is discussed later in chapter 5. Nonetheless, having provided some background information on the kola nut, the following sections and the next chapter discuss the activities that occur in the social arena of the HTA. What happens at a HTA meeting? When hometowners come together at HTA meetings, what takes place? What do hometown association members do as they re-village in diaspora to leave their cultural footprints behind?

As the following members explained, the social space provided by the HTA is the primary arena for members to mark life events and socialize with each other:

Even though you may belong to other organizations, the hometown organization is basically the primary organization. So in the event that your wife has a child, they are the first people that it will occur to you to invite to celebrate. You understand. They are the first, also unfortunately if someone is to die, they are also the first organization that will rally around you to give you support and comfort. [Male, 11/16/2012]

The basis of this organization is to look after one another, in a foreign land, you don't stand alone. Like I said, in terms of bereavement, when somebody dies, we gather and organize ourselves, which I have witnessed one or two times. Basically, it is a social organization, taking care of one another and occasionally we organize a party to celebrate the organizations inauguration and a sort of yearly end of year party. When someone is getting married, we organize ourselves and perform some of our cultural activities like local masquerades that perform at wedding. We get ourselves together for cookouts like on nice summer days at park, we socialize and the kids come together and we eat with the music playing in the background. We just have a wonderful evening socializing and getting to know one another and the children get to know one another. You know, everything is geared towards the social. [Male, 11/17/2012]

The HTA members are the first group called when life cycle starts (at the birth of a child) and also the first group called at the end of the life cycle (when someone dies). They are also called to be a part of the celebration of the other rites of passage or life cycle events that come after life begins but before life ends such as graduations, anniversaries, birthdays and weddings. To paraphrase the above informant, one individual does not a village make. As such, hometowners come together to build obodo community and identify with each other as descendants of their hometown so they become the primary group, or the home people, that members first turn to share or celebrate life events. Survey results (see fig. 7, Appendix B) show 73% of respondents view the HTA as the primary site for the cultural socialization of their children. Sixty six percent of respondents (fig. 7, Appendix B) see the HTA as the most important association they belong to with 74% agreeing that the HTA acts as a replanted village square in diaspora and 84% viewing the social arena of the HTA as a substitute site for traditions and events they would have returned to the hometown to carry out in the past. To be in the

position to either call upon hometowners or to be called upon as a hometowner, people from the same hometown have to re-village so they may be identified as a group and be called upon under their group identity. They do this through membership in the HTA where they hold meetings and plan how to leave cultural footprints and perpetuate their hometown identity in diaspora. As Lilian Trager notes in her study of Yoruba HTAs, the celebrations of life cycle events provides opportunities for the HTA to “symbolically reinforce” those themes or issues important to them (2001:123).

The three studied HTAs carry out mostly the same activities at meetings or in the social space of the HTA but in varying degrees. They hold meetings, they plan local and national HTA events, they enjoy each other’s company, they share news about home, they seek to leave cultural footprints as they re-village in their new and ‘secure’ communities most importantly by collectively identifying and supporting each other at meetings and the celebrations of life cycle events such as wakes, births, graduations and weddings. I will draw on observations from the different HTAs to highlight these activities at the core of their diasporic identities.

### **Local Chapter Meeting - An Ndi Umuigbo HTA Meeting**

The first meeting I attended was an Ndi UmuIgbo meeting. Both men and women were present at the meeting. The meeting was held on a Sunday evening and was scheduled to start at 5pm. Mrs. Onyeka, my contact, had advised that I arrive between 4:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. at the meeting. Since this was the first HTA meeting I was attending and being an Igbo person, I was hesitant to show up in ‘Western wear’<sup>23</sup>. I decided to dress in a traditional outfit and I chose a conservatively made Nigerian outfit (ankle length skirt, blouse with sleeves and matching headtie all made from a Dutch Wax fabric ‘Aziza’ (broom) popular among the Igbos). Making

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<sup>23</sup> Nigerian phrase used to refer to Euro-American dress mode.

sure I looked as culturally Igbo as possible, I left for the meeting. This speaks to the dilemma 'natives' sometimes face when conducting research among their own. Some may feel pressured to act 'native' since this may be the expectation from one's people as the researcher being a native or insider is expected to know how to behave and act at all times (Fahim and Helmer 1980). In this instance, I felt pressured to make the right impression as a 'native' and to not offend members by showing up at a meeting where cultural heritage is center stage dressed in non-cultural attire or Western wear.

When I arrived at the venue, there were two men, two women and three children present. In the living room were Mrs. Maduka (our hostess) dressed in slacks and a blouse, Mrs. Azuka, holding an infant, was dressed in blouse and two piece wrapper, Mr. Onyeka was in Khaki pants and a short sleeved shirt and Mr. Nonso (the chapter President) was dressed in jeans and a shirt. I was welcomed by all and asked to a seat. I took in the room. It was a well furnished living room. There were framed pictures of family members (children, parents, grandparents on the walls and cabinets around the room). After about fifteen minutes of casual conversations, Mrs. Maduka announced it was time for the meeting to start and passed out the agenda for the meeting. The opening prayer was said by Mr. Onyeka who was the youngest member in the room after which Mrs. Maduka nodded towards the platter of crackers and peanuts on the coffee table and informed us that Kola has been presented to us. I looked closely at the platter to see if there were any kolanuts on it, but there were none. I wondered if this had to do with the tradition that a woman could not present kola nut to a gathering of men and women.

As this was the first time I was attending their HTA meeting, the chapter President introduced those present: Mrs. Maduka, the highest ranking member due mainly to her status as the wife of an Eze (Igbo village ruler/chief) and also her age; Mrs. Azuka who lives in New



England with her husband and has two adult children; Mr. Onyeka was introduced as Mrs. Maduka's son in-law. Mrs. Udoka,(the President's Mother in-law) and her daughter, Mrs. Nonso (the President's wife) arrived later on. After I was formally introduced to the group, the president addressed the group saying I should be able to gather what I need on the roles and functions of HTAs in their lives from their members. He said: "this nucleus group here serves to maintain ties with our ancestral hometown because Nigeria is so unsafe". Referring to a recent plane crash in Nigeria, he went on to say "One cannot travel by road in Nigeria for fear of armed robbers and kidnappers and one cannot fly within the country due to a mismanaged and corrupt aviation industry. So the HTA provides a space for adults to continue to be Ndi Umuigbo people and to get together and also for our children to become familiar with Ndi Umuigbo culture. We have to do this here because the days of looking to live abroad for a while and then retire to the village seem to be a thing of the past due to how unsafe the country has become". Everyone 'mmhhd' and 'ahhhd' as Mr. Nonso further elaborated, that "since we can no longer go to the village with our children and be safe in the village because of armed robbers and kidnappers, we have to bring the village here to us in America" and everyone nodded in agreement. He went on to say, "we are targets. Once they hear you are from America, they want to kidnap you so they can demand all the dollars they think you have. They don't know we are only managing to survive in America". As indicated by survey results in fig. 9 (Appendix B), most respondents migrated to the United States in search of some form of 'security'. Security as used in the survey refers to those processes that are a means to a better and secure physical and economic life. Some sought a better and secure life through migrating to acquire better education than is available within their sending country of Nigeria (51% of respondents), others already well educated migrated in

search of a better quality of life (27%) with the hope they will find employment and lead relatively secure lives in their new environments.

The issue of ‘security’<sup>24</sup> is a recurring theme or reason why HTAs are flourishing. In the past, most members travelled to the ancestral village with their families to visit with kin in the hometown and to continue to maintain ties with home people and also to show and teach Igbo culture to their children. However, as Mr. Nonso explains above, because the hometown has become increasingly unsafe with those returning from America as prime targets for kidnappers and armed robbers, members now see the HTA as their hometown village square in diaspora and look to bring the village to themselves and to their children through the social arena of the HTA in their new communities. As evidenced by the nods of members as Mr. Nonso spoke, there was consensus among those present that the village should be brought to them and their offspring in the United States through the social space of the HTA since it was now less safe to return home with one’s family. As members continued to nod and sigh in agreement over Mr. Nonso’s speech, Mrs. Maduka steered the meeting on to agenda items.

The group proceeded to move through the agenda items quickly. Minutes of their last meeting were read and adopted. The minutes were typed up in English but read in Igbo by Mrs. Maduka. Other housekeeping items on the agenda were discussed. First, was the financial report. Next were their non-profit status and national council meeting plans and the President provided an update on the progress made so far. Though Mr. Nonso was the Chapter President, Mrs. Maduka, the eldest member present seemed in charge of the meeting.

Next on the Agenda was ‘Matters Arising’, and minor issues were discussed but the conversation eventually turned to the issue of identifying collectively as members of their

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<sup>24</sup> Security as used by HTA members in their conversations refers primarily to personal physical safety.

hometown at a member's upcoming wedding. The communal display of ancestral identity at celebrations is one that is highly valued by members. If one is celebrating an event, it is becoming the trend, in most parts of the United States, for members of the celebrant's hometown to attend as a group and present a gift to the celebrant or acknowledge the celebrant's accomplishment or ceremonial event by making a congratulatory speech or by wearing aseobi<sup>25</sup> to highlight their communal identity and show of support. Both the member holding the celebration and those attending as hometowners typically look forward to this communal display of identity and support. It is an opportunity to identify with each other publicly as announcements are typically made that members of the celebrant's hometown have arrived or will lead the celebrant into the hall in a processional dancing to traditional music. Often, there is a public presentation of gift from members of the HTA to the celebrant as all the other guests in attendance watch the display of cultural identity and support. Others in attendance such as celebrant's co-workers, friends, neighbors etc, through this public display become aware of the existence of the celebrant's HTA group and ancestral identity. HTA members collectively carry out these acts to carve out a re-villaging space for themselves and their offspring as they make their ancestral identities known in their new communities.

It was then not surprising that Mr. Onyeka brought up the matter of a member's upcoming wedding and asked if HTA members would collectively attend and present a gift to the couple. After discussing the member's not so active status and non-payment of dues, it was decided the association would attend as a group and present one quarter of the regular gift amount as a wedding gift since the member had only paid up a quarter of his dues. The issue of communal show of support was further discussed as Mr. Onyeka wondered if, as is typically the

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<sup>25</sup> Outfits made from the same fabric or outfits of the same color or any type of uniform outfit that identifies people as a group at a Nigerian celebration.

case, members of the HTA would put on a cultural dance performance at the occasion. These types of cultural performances are typically highlights of events and are looked forward to by members, their offspring and others in attendance. However, this was decided against as the celebrant had not specifically asked them to do this at his wedding. Also this seemed to be a subtle way of making the point they will publicly support one of their hometown sons at his wedding but in a way that sends a message to him that his membership is precarious due to his lackluster involvement with the HTA. To put on such a cultural performance for one that rarely came to meetings seemed to go against the grain for those present even though every public communal appearance goes to establish their presence and identity as a group in their new community.

With the communal appearance at the wedding settled and with no other matters to discuss, the meeting wrapped up with a closing prayer by Mr. Nonso in which he thanked God for a good meeting and the safe return of members to their homes. The meeting had been conducted mostly in the Ndi Umuigbo dialect of Igbo with some English interspersed occasionally. Mrs. Maduka, the hostess, then announced there was food for all on her dining table and members helped themselves to the food as she called up her grandsons who were playing downstairs to come and join the adults. On the dining table was a crockpot of yam pottage (ji-awia). There was akara (fried blackeye peas fritters) with fresh tomato sauce for dipping, pasta salad and baked chicken. Members helped themselves to the food and went back into the living room to eat and converse. Conversations were mostly about the food and how delicious it was especially the yam pottage. Mrs. Azuka talked about how when she visits the village she eats yam every which way it can be made and Mrs. Udoka also agreed that she did the same when in the village. Mrs. Maduka gave us some pointers on how to buy good yam from the

African food store by insisting they cut the yam tuber in two so one can see the inside and make sure it is fresh and good. Mr. Onyeka suggested smelling the cut yam to make sure it had a fresh smell. Shortly after, members began to take their leave around 8:30pm.

The HTA meeting is a gathering where those who claim descent from the same ancestral hometown gather to re-village (become an organized group to maintain their culture, support each other, act as kindred, and very importantly socialize culturally with each other and identify publicly as an ancestral community) themselves and leave their cultural footprints. I left this meeting with the feeling I had not encountered much cultural footprints – non-profit discussions, financial discussions, wedding invitations and national conventions. At first look, it all sounded very mainstream American to me. As I mulled this over, I realized that because the cultural aspects were all familiar to me as an Igbo person, I was overlooking aspects of culture that had taken place at the meeting. I had to ask myself to look again. Where are the cultural footprints? The food, yes the food was all very cultural indeed and the discussions about where to find the best yams and members reminiscing about visits to the village as we all sat together and enjoyed the home cooking. The fact that Mrs. Maduka fluidly (without hesitations) read the minutes which were typed in English in Igbo was a remarkable feat – Yes, brilliant cultural footprint! The arrangements to host a national council meeting so that all that identify as Ndi Umuigbo in the United States may attend to socialize and discuss mutual matters about how to continuously network with each other at the local and national levels epitomizes re-villaging in diaspora. I had to refocus on the subtle things I had observed from the mode of dress of the women, who were mostly in traditional outfits to the ease with which members communicated with each other in their Igbo dialect. Those in attendance had prayed together. Kola had been presented (crackers and peanuts) but there was no breaking of the kola nut. In this case, kola nut (*Cola acuminata*)

was not used. Instead crackers and peanuts were used as substitutes for the Igbo symbol of hospitality and to welcome guests to the home of the member, Mrs. Maduka, who was hosting the meeting. Since substitute items were used, there was no need for the formal offering of the kola nut to the oldest male to present to the group and subsequently bless and break. The kola platter, which contained crackers and peanuts was already on the table and was not lifted up and handed to any male member to present to the group. The hostess of the meeting who was also identified as the highest ranking member of the meeting had nodded in the direction of the platter as she announced kola was present for all to share. At this rather contemporary version of the HTA meeting, women and men actively participated in discussions, and even though the president of the association was a male, Mrs. Maduka who was the highest ranking member (by age and social status) seemed in charge of affairs and kept everyone in line ruling the meeting and guiding discussions. I also wondered if the actual kola nut was deliberately absent so the hostess and highest ranking member would not have to in a semi kneeling position ‘subjugate’ herself as she handed it over to the President, a younger male, to present to the meeting.

About nineteen members (76% of the overall membership) were absent. This may be due to the fact that it was summertime and some members were away on vacation while others with school age children were attending their children’s various sports activities. Nonetheless, in attendance, at this my first HTA meeting, were four women, two men and three children. The nine people present belonged to three families:

- Mrs. Maduka, her son in-law (Mr. Onyeka) and her grandsons (3 generations were present).
- Mrs. Udoka, her daughter and son in-law (Mr. and Mrs. Nonso) (2 generations were present).
- Mrs. Azuka

This group not only values, but practices the socialization of children within the socio-cultural arena of the HTA at every opportunity and not just at special occasions or celebratory events. They frequently bring their children to meetings so the children will not only get to know each other but so they may also soak up Igbo culture just from being at these meetings and begin to see HTA meetings as the norm. As several members earlier explained, they seek to live like home people here in their new communities and to bring the village to themselves and their offspring since they are no longer able to safely visit home. To live like their people here, they form the HTA to rebuild obodo community and take steps to ensure their obodo community is sustainable by involving their offspring in the HTA. As Brettell writes, the social arena of groups such as the HTA are not just important because they provide spaces for members to gather and act together, they also provide an arena where first-generation immigrant parents can impart a “transnational and transcultural commitment” to their offspring. If second and subsequent generation immigrants do not return to their ancestral homeland, it is in the associational space of organizations such as that provided by the HTA that they will continue to foster their cultural identity and heritage (2005:876).

### **The National Meeting - The HTA National Convention**

During the course of this study, I attended one HTA national convention. The convention is primarily a time for members from the various local chapters in the USA to convene in one location to socialize and celebrate their heritage. Dignitaries from the hometown in Nigeria are also invited and attend these conventions in the USA. At the convention I attended, all the dignitaries acknowledged as invited guests from the homeland were male and none attended with their wives. Also, when discussions about home development arise it is typically in connection to

HTA national conventions which take place bi-yearly or yearly in cities around the USA selected by members.

As part of scheduled activities at these conventions, home development projects are proposed and fundraisers such as formal dinners are held to raise funds to carry out proposed projects at home. At the local chapter meetings, these projects are typically not discussed prior to the convention and when they are discussed, members mostly object but then acquiesce viewing their convention efforts at fundraising as another way to further socialize with each other and the potential funds they may raise as a pittance compared to the funds siphoned off by corrupt government officials in Nigeria. Members propose to use their 'voices' not money from fundraisers to develop the home community in Nigeria. By their voices they mean the HTA should lobby government officials to be more transparent and to carry out projects to provide needed infrastructure to communities in Nigeria. Visiting dignitaries from Nigeria attending the convention also acknowledge their political voice is needed more than their hard earned dollars. However, there is no observed evidence of HTA efforts to harness their voice or political power to make a difference in hometown politics or governance.

The national convention is a time of much camaraderie and also a time for the HTA as an organization in diaspora to physically reconnect with the elite of the ancestral hometown in Nigeria who are able to travel to the USA and be a part of the convention activities. The national convention is a weekend affair of which the Saturday is dedicated to formal discussions about how to better re-villaging efforts, grow the association by including offspring and agenda items also include hometown development projects. Saturday night is typically reserved for the fundraiser dinner for hometown improvement projects. At this dinner, members and friends gather to celebrate their heritage amidst much eating, drinking and dancing while an eloquent 'Master of



Ceremony' calls on attendees to contribute funds to the hometown development projects proposed by the national leadership. The bulk of the funds raised are from the cover charges (\$40 to \$50 per person) to attend the dinner. Proposed projects range from drilling water bore holes, supplying medical equipment to clinics and rebuilding schools to building civic centers and libraries. However, the projects are proposed at the convention by the national executives and as one member explained, the projects typically stay at the national level as the local chapters are focused on those things they can actually accomplish such as coming together here as kinfolk and not on developing the hometown. He said, "once the convention is over, nobody talks of those projects till the next convention. Once in a while the president will announce they dug one bore hole or something like that but that is it. Nobody wants to be really involved in all of that because it is pointless" [12/7/13]. At HTA meetings that took place after the national convention, there were no follow up discussions about the funds raised for the projects or progress on any of the projects. In a follow up conversation after the national convention, a member explained members do not object to paying the cover charge to attend the dinner and dance the night away afterwards with kinfolk and some may even contribute more money to the proposed development projects. However, most members understand their donations are token amounts that will make little difference to the home community. As was explained:

"it is not that there is no money in the village ... but the officials steal the money to come to America for vacation and to buy houses all over the world. What is needed is for the money that is there to be spent there and not our hard earned money to be sent over there. The money we raise is so small the big guys won't even bother with our projects. It is not up to what they deal in. It is the little guys that bother with our projects so, you see, this is not about raising funds. How much will we raise? Five, six or even ten thousand dollars?

That is nothing compared to the money that local government officials steal on a daily basis so we have to try to get these officials to be honest and to do their work not send a few dollars back for bore holes. We have to hold these people accountable, but instead they come here to our conventions and we wine and dine them, why? Why do we do that?

[Male, 12/7/13]

This HTA member continued to explain most members understand their offspring will probably not be ‘return migrants’ and have a goal of re-villaging here to ensure they and their offspring will be able to practice their heritage here comfortably. As he put it “you know before when we come out in our traditional outfits, other people look at us like we are dressed in Halloween costumes but now that is no longer the case, they are getting used to seeing us in traditional clothes. Even our children want to wear it to parties and that is what we want” [12/7/13]. This member pointed out this is why they are members of the HTA. Not only is their goal to be able to live and practice their Igbo heritage but for their Igbo heritage to become a part of and be accepted as part of the mainstream multicultural American life and society. By publicly appearing as a collective and practicing their obodo identity at every opportunity, they seek to familiarize all with their identity and to embed and make their obodo identity a part of the multicultural American landscape.

A visiting hometown dignitary who had flown in from Nigeria for this event also explained to me that he could not see his hometowners raising enough money to pay for the first class airfares and accommodations of the visiting dignitaries much more fully carry out a project at home. This dignitary explained that what is needed from hometowners is not their money but their unified voice in calling for an end to corruption and mismanagement of funds allocated for infrastructure and various other projects by government officials in Nigeria. This is in line with

the opinion of the earlier informant and also the opinion mostly heard at HTA meetings when fundraisers for hometown development projects are brought up.

The dignitary also explained that Nigeria is experiencing a high degree of brain drain and encouraged those abroad to not only return home for visits but to prioritize making sure their offspring in diaspora are socialized in such a way that they are aware of their roots and may someday return to their roots to contribute as citizens. Emphasizing the importance of this issue, he explained it is the responsibility of parents to make sure their offspring ‘are in constant touch’ with their hometown. Setting aside hometown development as a main purpose for the HTA in diaspora, the dignitary stressed the cultural socialization of offspring to make sure offspring in diaspora have strong ties to home should be an important function of the HTA. As he put it, “kids in diaspora, pursue it, prioritize it and work on it...involve children, have programs for children” [12/7/13]. Here, the emphasis is not on helping the hometown get up by donating and sending collective funds home for projects but on helping the town get up and stay up here in their new environments by taking steps to ensure that hometown immigrants and offspring in diaspora do not lose their cultural and ancestral identity. This visiting dignitary prioritizes the involvement of children in the social arena of the HTA over raising funds to develop the hometown in Nigeria. As highlighted in the next section, HTA members also see the importance of involving offspring in the affairs of the HTA. Survey results show that 73% of respondents (98 out of 134) view the HTA as the primary site for the cultural socialization of their children, (see fig. 7, Appendix B), and forming the HTA Youth wing is a major initiative to involve children in the HTA.

## **Forming the HTA Youth Wing: Developing the Hometown Here in Diaspora**

Our focus need not be on giving and sending back to Nigeria when we are losing the war here with our own kids. [Male, 11/25/12]

At a subsequent Ndi Umigbo meeting, Umuigbo offspring in diaspora were center stage. At this meeting eleven adult members and a dozen of their offspring were in attendance for the official formation of the youth wing. In keeping with the general format of meetings, opening prayers were said, kola presented (peanuts and crackers were used as substitutes), and main agenda items discussed. During ‘Matters Arising’, the President asked some of the older teenagers present to stand up as he announced that he would like to form a youth wing with the three oldest teenagers as the youth leaders. The President then proposed and assigned the positions of President (boy), Vice President (girl) and Secretary (girl) and charged them with organizing the young ones and coming up with activities and projects for the youth wing. He explained that since most of their offspring already come along with their parents to meetings, his vision is for the young ones to hold their own meetings in a different room at the meeting venue while the adult meeting is ongoing. He said “this type of organization and leadership by the young ones will ... give them much needed leadership opportunities while involving them in the Ndi Umigbo meeting”. All the members thought this was an excellent idea and a discussion ensued on how to make this a reality. When called upon to describe their feelings about the youth wing and the leadership positions assigned to them, the young man who had been made president described how whenever they go to the Ndi Umuigbo national convention with their parents the adults at the convention tell the youth to return home and carry out Ndi Umuigbo culture and to continue to learn and practice their culture. He said “we are part of this culture and we are ready to show you what we have.” The young lady who had been appointed Secretary suggested organizing workshops where they can learn about various aspects of Ndi Umuigbo culture such

as the language and cooking traditional foods. Another teenager also addressed the adults saying, “we have been coming to these meetings since we were this small (made gesture to indicate low height), it is time that we became involved because this is also our culture”.

As their meeting protocol demanded, the idea to form the youth wing was made a motion which was unanimously carried and the Youth Wing was born. The President then further elaborated on his vision for the association and the involvement of their children in the association and spoke about looking into the possibilities of ‘partnering for exchange programs’ that would involve trips to Nigeria for their own Ndi Umuigbo children as well as ‘mainstream’ American children sometime in the future. He concluded by saying “Our focus need not be on giving and sending back to Nigeria when we are losing the war here with our own kids”. This implies a contestation or a shift away from efforts to send funds back home to develop the hometown in Nigeria. The speaker calls for their efforts to be on re-villaging here or ‘developing’ their hometown here in their new environments under the collective umbrella of the HTA. This is not to say the HTA does not involve itself in efforts to develop the home community but instead highlights the earlier noted shift away from ancestral hometown development to building obodo community here and now and developing relocated ancestral villages here in the new places where they are settling down.

At the next meeting, a lot of the youth were in attendance and the Youth Wing leaders joined the adults briefly for discussions on activities planned by the Youth Wing. As is typically the case, the meeting started with an opening prayer and the breaking of the kola nut. With the launch of the Youth Wing at the previous meeting and the emphasis on teaching Umuigbo culture to the youth, the breaking of the kola nut at this meeting was an elaborate process meant to educate the young people watching on the kola nut protocol. The teenage son of one of the

members was asked to present the wooden bowl containing several kola nuts to the oldest male member who prayed over the kola but then instead of breaking the kola nut as was expected, saw a teachable moment, and took the time to educate the teenager who had presented the kola about the etiquettes of breaking kola. He asked the teenager if he knew how to break the kola and pass it around. The young man said ‘no’ hesitantly and was rescued by his father who offered to walk him through the process starting with going into the kitchen to wash their hands before handling the kola. After washing their hands, the wooden bowl containing the kola was presented to a titled man (Mr. Nkani) who was in attendance, so he would pick out a whole kola for himself before the others would be broken into pieces and passed around. The young man was encouraged by his father to break the kola nuts along their natural lines (cotyledons) as much as possible. As they were breaking the kola nuts, one fell to the ground and the teenager picked it up and went into the kitchen to wash it. When he came back, he was asked by Mr. Nkani not to put it back into the bowl of kola pieces. Mr. Nkani explained to the young man and to all present that “the reason for this is that back in the day, back home, if the kola once presented left everyone’s presence, it was not trusted when it came back. The person that left the room with the kola could have gone out of the room to put something bad (like poison) in it before bringing it back”. He asked the young man to put the kola aside on the table and not add it back to the one presented to the group. According to Mr. Nkani, he did this not out of fear of what the young man could have put in the kola but to teach the young man the right way that kola is broken and presented at any occasion. Led around the room by his father, the young man passed the bowl of broken kola pieces around to members deviating from the gender rule on kola nut where all males present would pick a piece of kola before any female. In this instance, among members of this HTA, which has adopted a somewhat progressive approach, age not gender was used to rank

how the wooden bowl of kola was passed around. The young man was directed to present the kola pieces to the older members (male and female) before presenting it to younger members.

Having taken care of the kola, more time was spent discussing how to continue their efforts to bring their children into the social space of the HTA. A member suggested recreational events, planned trips or outings for members and their children so the children will continue to observe and learn cultural behaviors from the older members of the group at these events. As this issue was being discussed, the chapter President, Mr. Uwa, reiterated they should strive to consistently include activities for their children during meetings such as Igbo classes, the reading of Igbo books or cultural DVDs for the children to watch during the meetings. Igbo language use and retention by the second and subsequent generations was a concern for the adult members and they hoped to come up with ideas to foster the use of the language. The President of the youth wing also updated the meeting on the progress the youth were making in their discussions and plans for the year. The teenager saluted the group using the same salutation adult men use when they stand up to address the meeting – “ndi ba anyi mma mma nu” which means ‘people of my hometown, it is well, it is well with all of us.’ After salutations, he explained that at the last national convention, there had been classes to teach Ndi Umuigbo culture and traditions to the children – classes to teach simple things such as the proper ways to greet and address elders. He assured the meeting their youth group would continue to build on that and learn more Ndi Umuigbo culture. He elaborated on the group’s plan to organize a bowling event but that this would not be a free event and parents would have to pay for their children to attend. The other option would be a not so expensive outing such as a game night at the home of a member with parents contributing towards pizza and soda for the young ones. This seemed a more do-able and

less expensive option and the parents agreed to this option. Members then thanked the young man and encouraged him to continue with his leadership of the youth group.

At this meeting also, Mr. Nonso, (former chapter President) briefed members about a recent national executive event he attended in a neighboring state. He explained he was very impressed by how a member of the executive had reached out to members of the Ndi Umuigbo Professional Association to ask them to come down to this event and to address the gathering. The Ndi UmuIgbo Professional Association is made up mostly of second generation offspring who feel left out of the traditional style hometown association meeting but seeking to identify with their ancestral roots have formed an Ndi Umuigbo Professional Association so that as professionals they may still gather collectively under their ancestral identity. The Ndi Umuigbo professional association is an autonomous association that does not exist under the umbrella of the apex Ndi Umuigbo HTA or national body in the United States. As a female member of the local HTA chapter later explained, this group of young professionals, mostly in their early twenties to mid forties, feel the regular hometown association meeting is a poor fit for them primarily because they are a younger generation, are mostly unmarried and do not relish sitting through the family style hometown association meetings. This seems to be a cohort of young professionals who as they grew up were not involved with the HTA because their parents did not take them along to the HTA meetings. Now grown up, they find the ‘traditional’ HTA style meeting not the norm in comparison to the contemporary Euro-American way of conducting meetings. For example, they do not see a need for the lengthy and gendered process involved with the breaking of the kola nut. Some of them prefer to hold meetings at private rooms in restaurants or public libraries rather than in their homes because of the elaborate efforts that go into preparing traditional foods to serve if one hosts a meeting. They formed their own group



made up of Ndi Umuigbo people more of their age range with whom they have more interests in common. She however, emphasized their ancestral heritage is still the primary tie that holds together these professionals with their identities as professionals secondary. She explained this is one of the reasons their local chapter is actively including their young children in the HTA so there would be no gap to bridge in the future. Mr. Nonso in briefing the meeting about his trip explained the representative of the young professionals described themselves as Ndi Umuigbo young people who welcome the opportunity to bridge the gap between them and the traditional HTA. The young professionals some of whom are savvy grant writers talked to the HTA executives about grants and how the association as a non-profit can begin to seek some of these grants to promote their events and encouraged the HTA not to exclude them in anyway but to tap into them as they are a wealth of resources that can be put to good use to benefit Ndi UmuIgbo people in the USA. Another member, who was also at this event said “the most memorable line of the night” was when a young man in his speech told the gathering of HTA members who were of his parent’s age cohort “You have paid for our American education, now it is time for you to realize your investment”. In this instance, the Ndi Umuigbo young professionals are exhorting their parents to not overlook them and the resources they bring to bear in the social arena of the HTA and to be more inclusive of them even though they may not be active members of the HTA and to tap into their skills and knowledge base which are consequences of the expensive education received at their parent’s expense.

Rather than the less direct approach of hoping that offspring exposure to the HTA and collectively appearing and showing socio-cultural support at offspring’s celebrations to give the offspring a strong sense of their culture and roots so they may eventually join the HTA as adults in the future, the Ndi Umuigbo association takes a more direct and proactive approach by not

only bringing their children along to the meetings but by forming a youth wing and charging the children to emulate their parents in forming a cultural collectivity, based on their ancestral roots to promote their ancestral identity, under the auspices of the HTA. The adults encourage their offspring to network with each other and to proudly identify as Ndi Umuigbo people in their social interactions with others in their new communities. They seek to organize all Ndi Umuigbo associations in the USA (Professional, Youth, Dance Troupes) under the umbrella of the HTA so their collective activities and efforts will be better coordinated and will further foster their consciousness as a re-villaged people in diaspora. Learning from their current experience with the young professionals who do not exist under the HTA umbrella, they strive to be more inclusive of young people earlier on so that if, eventually, they choose to form other groups either as college students, Christian groups or professional associations, they will hopefully be more inclined to do so under the HTA umbrella. The idea is to have a contemporary obodo community or HTA which provides a social arena where members of the obodo may gather to primarily maintain their cultural heritage but under which they may also pursue different aspects of their lives including those aspects that may not be cultural. Their aim is to have within the overarching obodo community, hometowners that also make up sub communities of professionals, religious groups, sports groups etc. This way, even those hometowners that may not be primarily interested in the cultural aspects are brought under the obodo umbrella and given avenues to interact with obodo community members in other aspects of their lives. With that as a driving force, they include their offspring in ways that are suited and workable in their new communities here and now so they plan bowling parties and other non traditional Ndi Umuigbo activities. The young professionals, though organized as an autonomous group, also eager to belong tell their parents not to exclude them because though they may be viewed as

American educated professionals, they are very interested in remaining a part of their cultural group and seek to bring their professional resources to bear on the affairs of their hometown group. They call on their aging parents to trust them as Ndi UmuIgbo people and they also call on their parents who have paid for their 'American' education to bring them into the Hometown fold 'on their own terms as professionals' and then trust them to embrace life as Ndi Umuigbo people and maintain their culture here and now in America. Though they seem to want to do this on their own terms and in ways that suit their lives here and now in the USA, this does not seem to create a conflict between them and the older generation (their parents) as the older generation acknowledges that they are also members of the American community just as they are members of Ndi Umuigbo community. In the survey, 90% of respondents agree that within the social arena of the HTA, traditions are modified to suit life in the new communities (see fig. 7). Rather than maintain a rigid stance on only having Igbo culture or cultural activities occur within the social space of the HTA, members recognize the need for a more flexible approach to attract and sustain the interest of their offspring. As a member described, "half a loaf is better than none..." This member explained they run the risk of alienating the children from a HTA they eagerly want to be a part of by arguing over the inclusion of American style activities such as bowling when such activities are already a part of their lives. As the member said, "we, ourselves, go bowling with our children and enjoy it. It doesn't stop us from being Ndi Umuigbo people" [1/26/13].

The chapter president emphasized their strategy to be one of involving the children in the activities of the HTA 'here and now' in their new communities; to re-village here and take steps to pass on their cultural identity to the children so they can carry on their lives here in their new communities maintaining and practicing their ancestral identity. In his speech to the group, he

drew attention to the fact they are losing the war here with their kids and prioritizes cultural identity maintenance here and now especially among offspring over sending collective funds back to Nigeria for hometown development. Though this is the first time the formation of a HTA youth wing is being formally articulated and implemented by this chapter, it seems they are ahead of the curve because they have always allowed and encouraged members to bring their children to meetings. They view their meeting as a ‘family meeting’. The children accustomed to attending these meetings also seem eager to emulate and follow in the footsteps of their parents in promoting their culture and cultural identity. Re-villaging and maintaining their culture or leaving their cultural footprints in their new communities seems plausible as their offspring may be more inclined to transition to the adult wing of the HTA and in turn bring along their children (when they have them) to the HTA meetings so they may also join the youth wing and continue the cycle of HTA membership and maintaining the relocated village in the new places they now live. This is already evidenced in one family, which had three generations attending meetings and participating in the socio-cultural arena of the HTA. Because the children from an early age, (infants, toddlers, as well as pre teens and teenagers) are always brought along by parents to the HTA meetings, the children see networking and identifying with members of their hometown in their new communities as the norm. So when they graduate from school, or have a birthday or wedding celebration, they would in turn practice the norm of surrounding themselves with their hometown members at these celebrations. As a female second generation member explained, because she always attended meetings and celebratory events of HTA members with her parents, once she began wedding plans, she formally joined the HTA. She could not imagine starting out her married life without having her ‘hometown people’ present at her wedding. She described how the ceremonial dance procession of the bride and groom into the wedding

reception hall surrounded by hometown people gives one such a strong sense of cultural identity letting all present know the bride and groom identify with their ancestral roots.

This is not to say that only hometown association members attend these celebratory events but instead to say that by having non hometowners at the event, the hometown group identity is highlighted in contrast to those of others present and thus popularizing the hometown identity. Events such as birthdays, graduation and weddings, though very Euro-American, become an arena where ancestral identity is showcased and where cultural kin gather around the celebrant to promote identity and cultural heritage. For this HTA, members recognize that collectively identifying as members of their ancestral hometown and trying to live like home people 'here' in their new communities means acknowledging the 'here' which is their new communities and borrowing and blending aspects of lives from home and here to promote and enhance their cultural heritage and identity. This speaks to Lévi-Strauss's concept of bricolage (1966) and Landes' view that individuals capitalize on strategic practices that enable the negotiation and adoption of behaviors to accommodate culture change processes (Cole 2002). The blending of cultures is strategic. They reproduce themselves culturally by borrowing and mixing aspects of mainstream American culture with their Ndi Umuigbo culture. The older members or parents encourage mainstream American activities for their offspring under the auspices of the HTA so that in planning or carrying out these activities, they may seize all available opportunities to practice and teach their culture to their offspring so their culture becomes not just something that may be practiced in the privacy of their homes or at cultural gatherings. Instead, their culture becomes part of the 'mainstream' to their offspring and members of the mainstream also become familiar with Ndi Umuigbo culture, thus making for a more multicultural America.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the basis of the HTA which is to ‘stand together’ and take care of each other as kinfolk as they go through life. To take care of each other as kin, they first have to stand together as kinfolk, an obodo community, which they do through membership in the HTA where they organize themselves and hold meetings. As a member noted earlier, the HTA is the first group notified a birth and also the first group notified when death occurs, so having looked at the various forms of ‘meetings’ that are carried out formally by the HTA – the monthly or bi-monthly chapter meeting, the National Convention and the formation of the youth wing, the next chapter continues to discuss what goes on in the socio-cultural arena of the HTA by looking at the celebration of life cycle events.

## **CHAPTER 5: RE-VILLAGING AND LIFE CYCLE CELEBRATIONS**

### **The Beginning of the Life Cycle: The Birth of a Child**

As explained by a member, besides the immediate family, HTA members (especially the women) are the first on the scene when a member gives birth. The father of the child notifies all the members, typically through the chapter President, of the newborn. Members call to congratulate the parents of the newborn. Within days of arriving home from the hospital, the female members of the HTA pay a visit to the home of the newborn to celebrate the arrival of their newest member. They take cooked food items and gifts for the new child on this visit. The women coordinate their plans very well so they all arrive at the same time for the visit and make their entrance into the home as a group singing and dancing loaded down with gifts for the family. They stay and visit for a while, eating, singing and dancing to traditional songs, taking

care of the newborn and pampering the mother of the newborn. They take pictures of the newborn and also pictures of the group with the newborn and her family; they begin to compile hometown identity memories for the newborn right away. This is the first step in inscribing ancestral locality unto offspring in diaspora. They claim the newborn as a member of the ancestral hometown group in diaspora by surrounding the newborn as kinfolk. During their visit, they hold up the child while calling on the parents of the newborn to raise the child proudly as a Ndi Umuigbo person. They tell the newborn that he or she is like a child to them and they can be counted on as kinfolk for support. They encourage the parents of the newborn to bring the child to HTA meetings so the child will always know his or her people and the people will also know their child.

Besides this group visit by the women, individual HTA members also visit the newborn's family taking gifts to welcome their newest member. If the parent's of the newborn hold a christening or naming ceremony later on, HTA members also feature prominently in the celebration. If the parents of the newborn ask for their help, they may help to cook for the celebration, set up the party hall or serve food at the celebration. During the celebration, they also claim the child as a member of their kin group by formally introducing the child to friends and well-wishers at the celebration. This formal introduction process starts with the HTA members dancing into the hall in a processional with the parents of the newborn in front and the HTA members following behind. Once the processional makes it unto the dance floor, HTA members form a dancing circle around the newborn and parents. Holding their newborn, the parents continue to dance in the middle of the circle, while HTA members shower dollar bills on the parents and newborn. When the processional dance ends, the President of the HTA or the oldest member makes a speech in which he welcomes the newborn as their newest member

among other felicitous remarks after which he presents a monetary gift in an envelope to the parents of the newborn. At this event, members of the HTA may also wear some form of uniform outfit or aseobi (such as same color headties for women and same color traditional outfit shirts or scarves for men) that identifies them as a group.

### **During Life - A College Graduation**

HTA members promote their ancestral identity and culture among their children also through the less direct approach of not asking offspring to join the association (through youth wing membership) but through carrying out cultural activities at offspring's life cycle celebrations so the attending public at these events witnesses the ancestral identification of the group with the celebrant. By so doing, they seek to inscribe ancestral locality on their offspring in the public eye and to continue the practice of surrounding themselves and their offspring with kinfolk at life cycle events. This is to inculcate in offspring the practice of surrounding oneself with kinfolk (i.e. people from the ancestral hometown) as one goes through life.

The graduation party for the daughter of a HTA member was held at a banquet facility and the celebrant's mother had earlier issued an invitation to all members of her HTA to come as 'her hometown people' to identify with and support her and her daughter at this occasion. The celebrant's mother had also asked all the hometown women to attend her daughter's graduation party wearing yellow headties. The yellow headtie would identify and set 'her hometown people' apart from others at the party. This member belonged to the newly formed Ndi Nneji HTA and with the HTA in its early stages, the founder encouraged all the members to wear yellow headties so they would make their public debut by standing out as a group at the party. As the founder explained, "we don't want to go there and look like we don't know what we are doing. We want to come out in a way that people will be asking who are these women in yellow



headties? Then, our sister can proudly tell everyone that these are her hometown people” [female 6/16/13]. This created a scramble for yellow headties among members. Fortunately, all the members were able to acquire yellow headties for the event. The founder of the group encouraged members to sit together at the party to create the effect of a sea of yellow headties to further promote or showcase the hometown kinfolk of the celebrant. The professional photographer covering the event took several photographs of the hometown association members and as the founder of the association explained, this is so the young graduate will have proof “her hometown people were solidly behind her showing her their support for graduating from college” [Female 6/16/13]. After dinner at this event of about 250 attendees, the young graduate was ushered onto the dance floor in a processional by her family members and all the members of the HTA as others watched. First, it was announced the graduate would be led into the hall by her family members and members of her hometown. With Igbo music playing in the background, the processional which started at the back of the hall led by the celebrant’s mother with her young graduate by her side followed by family members and then the HTA women in their yellow headties proceeded down the center aisle of the hall to the dance floor where the young celebrant danced while her family and the HTA members formed a circle around her and showered her with dollar bills. After the celebrant’s first dance ended, an announcement was made thanking the HTA members for their show of support and the dance floor was then opened to all other attendees. The celebrant also visited the various tables at which the HTA members sat to thank them for coming to her party while the professional photographer continued to take pictures of her as she talked with the women.

This public show of collective pride and support by the hometown group is one way to not only identify with the hometown group but also to inscribe ancestral locality or locate bodies

spatially within the ancestral hometown. A college graduation is a mainstream American celebration and HTA members are using this American celebration to publicly showcase the celebrant's ancestral roots and to identity and mark the celebrant as belonging to the hometown; to inscribe ancestral identity and spatially locate the celebrant as a member of the ancestral hometown in order to distinguish them culturally from other groups of people that comprise American society. Though, this is not an Igbo traditional celebration, HTA members appropriate the celebration and use it to 'mark' the celebrant and her family as 'natives' of their ancestral hometown. The announcements and processional of the celebrant into the hall for her first celebratory dance surrounded by HTA members locates celebrant and participants socio-culturally and spatially as members of the ancestral hometown. These intentional activities have the effect of setting HTA members apart as culturally different from other attendees. They present themselves to the public at this event as 'natives' who share a common ancestral hometown; natives that are proud to embody their ancestral identity while partaking in mainstream Euro-American lifestyle.

The memories captured by the professional videographers and photographers and the public show of solidarity and identity are all ways of reminding offspring about their ancestral roots and that though they may live far away from their ancestral hometowns they are still surrounded by ancestral kin and should practice their ancestral identity and heritage. The yellow headties, worn by the women, acts to set the HTA members apart and to remind attendees the celebrant belongs to and identifies with her ancestral hometown group which takes pride in its ancestral roots and maintains its cultural heritage here in the United States.

The bricolaging of Euro-American and Igbo traditional identities and practices are part of strategic practices to inscribe ancestral identity and locality unto offspring and to form

attachments to the HTA as immigrants spatially locate offspring as members of the ancestral hometown in Nigeria as well as the re-villaged ancestral hometown in their new communities. The goal is that as offspring age and start their own families, they continue to see themselves as members of the hometown and practice their identity through sustained membership in the HTA. This is a more indirect approach practiced by the Ndi Nneji HTA to inscribe ancestral locality unto offspring and encourage offspring to join the HTA as they begin to set up their own households as young professionals. Not hedging their bets, the Ndi Umuigbo HTA as previously described takes a more direct and proactive approach by forming an Ndi Umuigbo Youth Wing with the hope that in later years, as the children grow older, the transition to the ‘main meeting’ will become the norm. They also do this so if and when their offspring choose to belong to other associations such as religious, professional or recreational groups they may choose to form these associations with their kinfolk under the umbrella of the HTA further institutionalizing the HTA as the socio-cultural arena through which members relocalize their ancestral lives as they come together as an obodo collective in their new places of living.

#### **At the End of the Life Cycle – When Death Occurs: The Condolence Visit and Wake**

“unfortunately ... wake keeping ... it is like a fund raiser because you know that for most people, either the body is being shipped home or the body is already there and people are going to be travelling from here to there and it’s like pulling together our resources to help the bereaved” [female, 12/7/12].

#### **The Condolence Visit**

A condolence visit occurs when a member dies or when a member loses a family member and it entails a visit or visits to the affected member’s home. When a HTA member (active or associate) dies, members of the HTA take turns paying daily visits to the home of the

affected family to console the family and deliver cooked food and refreshments for the family and other guests that may stop by to condole them on their loss. These daily visits continue until the member's remains are shipped back to the ancestral hometown for internment or a funeral is held here in the USA. The HTA will organize all funeral arrangements and levy its members to pay for all funeral costs if the member is to be buried here in the USA. If the member's remains are to be shipped back to the ancestral hometown, the HTA makes all appropriate arrangements and pays for all costs to get the remains to the final resting place in Nigeria. Regardless of the location where the deceased member is to be interred, a wake is organized by the HTA here in the United States to give HTA members and other well wishers a formal opportunity to pay final respects to the deceased. At the wake, the HTA features prominently as will be described later. The HTA will also handle the death of the child of a HTA member in the above manner.

If a condolence visit is for the loss of a member's loved one, members take cooked food, soda, beer, wine and 'hot drinks' (liquor) to the bereaved member's home at a previously agreed to time, to spend some time with the member to console him or her. In the case of this condolence visit and wake, a member had lost his mother who had lived all her life in Nigeria. The condolence visit provides an opportunity for the hometown members to visit with the bereaved and to pay respect as kinfolk. Under the coordination of the chapter President, HTA members volunteer to bring all the food items and refreshments that may be needed as they sit, chat and reminisce with the bereaved. Members are expected to be on time for this visit (no Nigerian time<sup>26</sup>) and to bring the cooked-food item and/or drinks assigned to them so there is a strong show of collective support by the kinfolk to the bereaved.

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<sup>26</sup> Nigerian time is a common phrase used to explain that Nigerian guests typically show up hours late to an event. Hosts and hostesses of events have been known to print two invitation cards – one given to Americans with the actual start time (e.g. 8pm) of the event and the other given to Nigerians with a start time hours earlier (e.g. 5pm).

At this visit, there were nine men and five women present in the basement family room where a side table was overflowing with food. There were foil pans of fried ripe plantains, jollof rice, fried rice, Abacha Ncha (shaved cassava mixed with palm oil, pieces of fish and other condiments), fried chicken, bitter leaf soup with stockfish, chicken and beef, Nkwobi (tender soft steak cut pieces of cow leg sautéed in diced red peppers and onions) and buns. On a shelf above the table were several bottles of wine and liquor and on the floor were cases of soda, Heineken and Guinness Stout. On the wall at one end of the room was a wall TV which was on an ESPN channel. Members sat around chatting and watching some TV.

The nine men present were all active members of the HTA. Four of the women were associate members and the fifth woman was a member's mother on a visit for a few weeks from Nigeria. Two of the men were dressed in Nigerian Kaftans and matching trousers and two of the women were also dressed in Nigerian traditional flowing gowns that were ankle length. Once all the guests had arrived, the host and hostess (the bereaved member and his wife) stood up and welcomed all to their home and thanked all for coming and for all the food that members had provided. They presented the gathering with their own food item, which was a well-sized plastic container of grilled fish and Abacha-Ncha with pieces of fish in it. This is a highly appreciated Igbo delicacy made with re-moistened thinly sliced pieces of Abacha (dried thinly shaved cassava pieces) mixed with palm oil, spices and fish. Members thanked them for the delicacy and the host and hostess invited all to begin eating. As members ate they chatted with each other while some watched a tennis match on ESPN.

Eventually the topic of discussion became visits to the hometown in Nigeria and steps one should take to be safe especially with the bereaved's impending visit back home for his

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The rationale being that since Nigerians are on Nigerian time, when they show up hours late they end up being on time.

mother's funeral. A member said it is unsafe to go home as armed robbery and kidnapping are rampant with those returning home from abroad being prime targets. The older woman who was visiting from Nigeria described how armed robbers had once visited her home in Nigeria and would not stop beating her until her husband brought out all the money they had at home to appease the robbers. Another member talked about how a prominent and titled man in the hometown had been recently kidnapped and fortunately had escaped though naked from his kidnappers. Another member, Mr. Ike, was of the opinion that Ndi Umunwoke is unsafe because Ndi Umunwoke citizens and residents are afraid to defend what is theirs – their homes, livelihoods and their lives. He explained he is not afraid to visit home and visits home whenever he wants to and is not afraid to take on armed robbers or kidnappers. He continued "go and ask on my street and they will tell you that our street is safest when I am home because I am not afraid to exchange gunfire with anyone that tries to break into my home. I have done it several times, go and ask". He described his home as a walled fortress with a penthouse view from which he can look down and shoot at anyone who tries to attack his home. As he described how he is armed to the teeth at night in his home at Ndi Umunwoke, some members hailed him as the "John Wayne of Ndi Umunwoke". One member asked why he would visit Ndi Umunwoke, if at night he has to sleep with a machine gun by his side and said that was no incentive to visit home. Another said it was just unsafe. But Mr. Ike went on to explain to them that "once you take on the armed robbers and kidnappers, they will run and not come back because they know you are not afraid of them". When you are in Ndi Umunwoke, you have "to think like a criminal to stay one step ahead of the criminals". He continued that one has to "be unpredictable" at all times and if one has been out of one's house and is heading back, one should call ahead to have their gateman open the gate and look up and down the street to make sure no cars are lurking around

before one even approaches one's street much more one's home. He further explained that once one drives into one's compound, the gateman should quickly lock the gates. He told members to not be afraid to visit home but once home to "arm yourselves, fight back, protect yourselves".

Another member, Mr. Agu, advised members on how to comport themselves when they visit home. He said "disguise yourself, blend in, keep low profile". Mr. Agu described how the last time he visited home he wore mostly jeans and T-shirts and took public transportation instead of driving around in a flashy SUV. After his advice, another member, Mr. Oba, asked him "what about your big house? Cover it with tarp" and laughter broke out. Mr. Oba went on to say it is hard to blend in when you have built yourself a big house at Ndi Umunwoke and everyone knows the man that lives in the big house is back from America.

Mr. Ike agreed explaining once you arrive, word gets out to both the good and the bad people but that should not make one to run away from their hometown. Armed robbers and kidnappers are criminals and should be treated as such and "since law enforcement will not protect" Ndi Umunwoke people, the "people have to protect themselves". He continued that when an armed robber leaves home to go to work, he is armed to rob and/or kidnap, "there is no accidental armed robbery". His approach is when armed robbers come "to shoot one and create pandemonium" among the robbers as they run for cover. Describing how at night, he dresses up in only black so he blends into the darkness in his home and always has his gun by his side. He said he knows how to quickly move from nook to nook in his home and how to peek out around corners to take aim at an intruder without being seen. At this point, Mr. Oba interjected with "is it Ndi Umunwoke or Afghanistan that we are talking about?" and another member Mr. Uka, added "we are not all John Wayne" as laughter ensued. Mr. Ike was not to be deterred and said "This is a very serious issue and we cannot solve problems through convening in the USA. We

need to convene at Ndi Umunwoke”. Mr. Ike proceeded to describe how Ndi Umunwoke Union USA and Canada should hold their bi-annual convention, which has always been held here in the United States at Ndi Umunwoke so the Union can “lobby the government in Nigeria to address the issue of security”. He explained that he has been pushing for this now for several years – “Ndi Umunwoke in America need to convene at Ndi Umunwoke to tell the government that they need to secure Ndi Umunwoke”. Another member added that another thing that needs to be done is to “demystify the myth of being in America” which is that hometowners in America are very rich and lead a life of luxury without much hard work whereas that is not the case as most hometowners are hardworking members of the middle class who sometimes have to hold down two or three jobs to make ends meet. He also noted that working two or three jobs so that one may live among the middle class in the USA while building a mansion fit for a king in the village does not help demystify the myth of being in America and only makes immigrants more of a target for criminals when they visit home.

At a lull in the conversation, the chapter President, Mr. Eze addressed the group saying “we are gathered to console our brother and his family on the death of their loved one” and that he was proud of everyone’s effort to come and spend some time with the family. He announced a wake has been scheduled at the home of the bereaved and will take place in a few weeks, at which time he hopes to see everyone again publicly “showing support to our brother”. He encouraged members to please continue to eat and drink and chat with each other, which they did. At about 8:30pm, members began to leave and around 9pm, when most had left, Mr. Eze and I helped the host and hostess pack up the extra food, beer and soda and then said goodbyes and left. As I rode back with Mr. Eze, he explained it was a good turn out as most members came with their wives and brought their assigned food or drinks. This was not a regular HTA



‘meeting’ but instead was one of the more common social events that occur within the social space of the HTA – the condolence visit.

The condolence visit<sup>27</sup> is typically followed by a wake to honor or mark the death of a HTA member or an immediate relative of a HTA member. When a member loses an immediate relative, the member informs the president of the chapter of his loss. The president sends out a text message to all members informing them of the loss and providing the member’s phone number to all so that all may call and sympathize in a show of support to the bereaved member. The condolence visit is seen as a time when only members of the HTA gather around the bereaved to support and sympathize with their member over the loss of a loved one. Only HTA members and their families may attend the condolence visit. The bereaved may not invite other friends or well wishers that are not members of the HTA to come to his home at the same time as the scheduled visit from members of the HTA. It is a way for the hometown members to identify with each other as insiders and close kin (albeit fictive kin) to the bereaved setting themselves apart from others that may wish to condole or visit the bereaved. It also differs from the wake because hometown association members as well as other friends and well wishers who are not from the hometown are invited and may attend the wake.

The condolence visit is to be a time of camaraderie to alleviate the feeling of loss or anxiety that one experiences when a loved one dies. At this visit, the HTA members watched TV and chatted about home in a lively manner. A lot of food and refreshments were provided by members and some of the associate members (wives of the men) came along so the bereaved member’s wife would also have some women to keep her company and chat with her during the visit. However, the number of women was small in comparison to the number of men present.

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<sup>27</sup> These condolence visits are mostly limited to the death of members, their children, parents or siblings.

One of the women (an associate member) who had cooked two different types of food for the visit left to go to a friend's party after staying for about an hour. I also noticed that except for the visiting mother from Nigeria, the women associate members rarely contributed to the discussions. They also did not seat with each other and chat away. They sat by their husbands but did not really partake or contribute to the lively discussion that was going on around them. Could it be that because this is not a social space they frequently participated in, the women were not at ease or eager to socially interact within this social arena? The women had cooked the food and their husbands had thanked them for the delicious food. Some women could not come but had sent food through their husbands. To that extent, they had participated by providing the food for the condolence visit. It seems that because they are not used to being active participants in the social arena of the HTA, when they are eventually invited to participate there is low turnout. The few women that show up are not actively engaged in the camaraderie or conversations probably because they are not as familiar with each other as the men who regularly meet together are with one another.

Discussions about 'security' in the hometown in Nigeria frequently come up at most HTA gatherings. As earlier mentioned, the lack of security in the hometown has spurred the growth of the HTA as a technology of re-villaging in diaspora as hometowners look for avenues to bring the village to themselves and their offspring as they mostly now view taking their offspring to the village as a less safe alternative. While some shy away from the hometown and look to re-village in diaspora and by so doing bringing as much of the village as possible to their offspring in diaspora, others argue that travelling to the hometown should continue and hometowners should seek to secure their hometowns by any means possible such as arming themselves with machine guns and slinking around their homes at night in anticipation of attacks

by armed robbers. At this condolence visit, one member advocates taking the law into their own hands and securing their lives while continuing to visit the village. This suggestion prompted one member to ask if they were discussing their hometown or Afghanistan. Another member advocates 'blending in' and trying to look and behave just like a regular villager as opposed to a hometowner visiting from America driving around in a 'big SUV'. To this option, one member asks if members should cover their big houses with tarp to give locals the impression they are regular folk. At this condolence visit, the 'support', 'being there for each other' 'acting as cultural kin' all aspects that members have described as the main reason for forming the HTA were on display. Members ate together, chatted, argued and laughed in an effort to support and soothe Mr. Ndu's anxiety over losing a family member.

#### **An Ndi Umunwoke Wake: (Two Weeks Later)**

The wake at which other well wishers (neighbors, co-workers, church members, friends etc) besides members of the HTA gather, provides an opportunity for all who are unable to travel to the hometown, to publicly pay their respects to the deceased and donate funds to the bereaved to cover some of his travel and funeral expenses. It also has to be noted that there are instances where the bereaved member is unable to travel to the hometown in Nigeria for a loved one's funeral and the wake that takes place here acts as a substitute for the one the bereaved is unable to attend in Nigeria. In this case, the bereaved is able to undertake the trip to Nigeria for the funeral of his mother. A flyer providing the venue and time (4pm to 8pm) for the wake and which included a photograph of the deceased was printed and distributed to well wishers. This event was expected to be on 'Nigerian time'<sup>28</sup> and would probably start by 5:30pm or 6pm at the

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<sup>28</sup> On Nigerian time is a popular way of saying the event would be starting much later than the start time indicated on the invitation.

earliest. I arrived at the wake with my informant (Mr. Eze) and his wife (Mrs. Eze) around 6pm and there were about five cars parked in front of the house.

Mrs. Eze remarked that just as she predicted only a few people had arrived even though it was supposed to start at 4pm. As we proceeded to the backyard, the bereaved member came out to meet and greet us. We put the pot of spinach with smoked turkey and case of beer that were Mr. and Mrs. Eze's food contribution on the food tables set up under the porch. There were two long tables under the porch with eight chafers. On the chafers, were fried chicken, fried cut-up turkey, spinach soup, moi-moi (steamed black eye pea pudding), jollof rice, and fried rice. More pans of moi-moi, buns, salad, fried rice and different types of spinach dishes were also on the table. On a side table were disposable plates, cutlery, and napkins. In front of one of the tables, were three oversized plastic containers – one filled with soda on ice, the other with bottled water on ice and the third with beer (Heineken and Stout) on ice. Between the food tables and a white canopy under which were tables and chairs was empty backyard space eventually used as a dance floor. To the side of the white canopy, was a red patio umbrella mounted over a table behind which there were two chairs followed by two rows of five chairs each. The two chairs in front were for the bereaved member and his wife (Mr. and Mrs. Agu) and the rows of chairs behind were occupied by the male members of the HTA to show they are the group closest to the bereaved in a show of kin solidarity. In front of the table was a poster sized framed photo of the deceased. To the right of the red umbrella was the DJ's table and the DJ kept up a constant supply of Nigerian contemporary religious hip-hop music through two large sized speakers mounted at different ends of the yard.

The wake started with an opening prayer by a priest. At the start of the wake, there were about fifteen men, ten women, and about a dozen children sitting either under the canopy or

standing around the yard chatting. Most of the men and women were dressed in Nigerian traditional outfits. From the start until the end, there was non-stop music from the Disc Jockey, (DJ<sup>29</sup> as they are popularly called) as more well wishers continued to arrive throughout the event. About a half hour after the wake started, Mrs. Agu picked up the poster sized photo of the deceased (her mother in-law) and started to dance Igbo women's style of dance in the space in front of the canopy. She danced around in circles for a while, then she danced around the tables under the canopy and then she went back to the space in front of the canopy and continued to dance sometimes holding the photo up above her head and at other times holding it in front of her chest. She danced from around 6:30pm to about 8:30pm taking breaks of about five to ten minutes every twenty minutes or so. Sometimes she danced alone and sometimes a group of about five ladies would dance with her. Intermittently, one or two people would walk up to her and put dollar bills on her as she danced. At around 8:45pm, I noticed that almost all the ladies in the yard (about twenty) and about fifteen men had gotten up to dance in the space in front of the canopy with Mrs. Agu. Mrs. Eze and I joined the group and danced with the group in a circle around Mrs. Agu who danced in the middle of the circle still holding on to her deceased mother in-law's photograph. After a while, the dancing intensified and the bereaved would dance towards a guest and the guest would join her almost in the middle of the circle doing Igbo style dance – bending down and gyrating to the hip-hop style religious music blaring loudly from the speakers. As the dancing intensified, more dollar bills were sprayed on Mrs. Agu by the guests. Meanwhile, Mr. Agu sat under the red umbrella surrounded by his kin – members of the HTA.

After the dancing had gone on for about fifteen minutes, the music was turned down and the President of the HTA picked up the microphone to address the gathering. He started out by

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<sup>29</sup> At most celebrations or wakes, a Nigerian disc jockey is hired to provide a constant supply of Nigerian music. Most of the disc jockeys have regular professional jobs and perform as disc jockeys at events during the weekends.

calling all members of the HTA to come and stand behind him. There were about fifteen people standing behind him. The HTA secretary took the microphone and thanked all for showing up to support ‘our brother’ and his family at this difficult time. He said, “we are all brothers and sisters because we are from Ndi Umunwoke so we share the best of times and the worst of times.” He then handed the microphone back to the president who said we “as Ndi Umunwoke People” were gathered together “to show some support and love to one of us”. He then passed the microphone around to the HTA members to say a few words of support to the bereaved family. Most encouraged the family to bear their loss. An envelope containing collected bereavement dues from members was then presented to Mr. Agu after which Mr. Agu took the microphone and thanked them for their brotherliness and thanked all for coming. The president took back the microphone and also thanked all and asked all to continue with the celebration of a life well lived and the music was turned up again and the traditional dancing continued until about 10pm when most people began to leave.

Later as Mr. Eze discussed the wake, he explained that it had gone well and that it was a good thing that most of the Ndi Umunwoke HTA members were there to show their support especially in this case where the wife of the bereaved is not from Ndi Umunwoke – “It was good for Ndi Umunwoke to have a strong presence and to show the in-laws that Ndi Umunwoke was present at the wake and gave strong support to one of theirs ... It is very important that Ndi Umunwoke showed a strong presence to all.” This was why he had called up all Ndi Umunwoke people present to stand in unity and support around him as he made his speech and gave the money envelope to the bereaved member. He went on to say that “it is not good at all for it to seem that Ndi Umunwoke does not know how to show support and that Ndi Umunwoke presence will be felt more in the New England area soon because it is his vision that Ndi

Umunwoke HTA will host a gala night where not just Ndi Umunwoke people from surrounding towns and states but all Igbos from other hometowns will be treated to Ndi Umunwoke hospitality. As he put it “Ndi New England ga ama na Ndi Umunwoke nou na New England” (the people of New England<sup>30</sup> will know that Ndi Umunwoke people live in New England). This speaks to their desire to stand out as a distinct cultural community set apart from all the other ethnic groups that comprise mainstream America and to show their ancestral roots as they solidify their obodo community in their new environments.

Having visited and consoled their kin privately two weeks earlier privately, the wake provides a public opportunity for HTA members to collectively identify and claim the bereaved as kin by sitting in rows behind him under the red canopy. This seating arrangement was made by the bereaved and was proudly accepted by the HTA members. The HTA President addressed all those gathered pointing out that they as his kinfolk stand behind him to show emotional as well as financial support through the public presentation of the money envelope. This public display of support from the HTA at this time of sorrow is a significant way of letting the broader community know of the bereaved’s ancestral roots and that his roots and kinfolk are vibrant and flourishing. These public acts show how the hometowners embody their ancestral locality and also how they strive to maintain that embodiment or re-inscribe ancestral locality unto members and their families in their new environments. By these very public acts, they are not just inscribing ancestral locality unto bodies (that is the bodies of their members) but also unto their new environments; they begin to re-village and leave their cultural footprints behind in their

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<sup>30</sup> The people of Boston here refers primarily to Igbos and other Nigerians in Boston as well as the broader Boston community.

suburbs. As the chapter President described, New England will know that Ndi Umunwoke people are in New England by their public acts.

The concept of a wake thousands of miles away from the place of the deceased's death or the location of the funeral may seem strange to some people. But for Igbos in diaspora it is common-place, because they participate in a transnational socio-cultural space. The wake conducted for the sake of a deceased loved one that passed away in Nigeria gives family members, kinfolk and well wishers, who may not be able to travel home for the funeral, the opportunity to gather and mourn the loss of a loved one or in cases where the deceased is elderly to celebrate the well lived life of the deceased. This promotes or sustains their ancestral affiliations and heritage. It also provides the opportunity at an important life cycle event for kinfolk or members of one's hometown to publicly and collectively identify with the deceased family showing emotional and financial support, carrying out cultural performances if they so wish, as they continue to re-village in the USA sending the message to hometowners their village space is available 'here and now' through the social arena of the HTA.

The wake is a bricolage of Euro-American, Christian, and Igbo traditions. This is not to say the wake in the ancestral village would not have 'Western' or Christian practices incorporated into the Igbo practices, it would as we live in globalized and interconnected worlds. However, the point here is the relocation of a duplicate wake to the new community here in the United States. With this relocation of the wake, the HTA members act as kinfolk and the primary group surrounding the bereaved just as would be the case in the ancestral village. In most cases, this duplicate and relocalized wake is the only opportunity for the second and maybe third generation offspring of the deceased to observe or be involved in funeral rites for their deceased grandparent. Typically, most of these second and third generation offspring are unable to travel



home with their parents for the actual funeral due to a myriad of reasons such as safety/security concerns and financial constraints. However, the wake provides an opportunity for them to participate in a transnational social field while the social arena of the HTA relocalizes and makes concrete their experiences to become a distinct and re-villaged community, Obodo Ndi Umunwoke<sup>31</sup>, here in the United States. They are settling in their new environments partaking in 'mainstream' activities and ways of life but they also want to be recognized as a distinct obodo community set apart by their identity yet part of multicultural 'mainstream' American society.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter looked at the celebration of life cycle events and the different ways that members come together to create new village localities in the places they live here in the United States. Under the auspices of the HTA, they then carve out a socio-cultural space through or within which they then act as kinfolk as they resettle and go through life in their new communities. As a member describes, the HTA is the first group notified at birth (when life starts) and the first group notified at death (when life ends). Additionally, because HTA members are in the process of re-villaging, carving out the socio-cultural space of the HTA and supporting each other are simultaneous and complementary activities. To carve out their socio-cultural space within which they maintain their identities, they carry out private as well as public acts where they collectively identify, practice their traditions and customs while supporting each other as kinfolk. By the continuous public show of group support to each other at life cycle events, they establish themselves as a socio-cultural group in the public eye. They embody their ancestral locality publicly and by so doing inscribe their ancestral locality unto their new communities. Their aim is for their new communities to eventually reflect this inscription of ancestral locality through its

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<sup>31</sup> Ndi Umunwoke community in America

embodiment of their transplanted villages, which they achieve by carving out a socio-cultural public space under the auspices of their HTA and associated activities.

HTA members seize opportunities to publicly identify as a relocated village group at every event so they typically attend as a hometown or village group and highlight their cultural identity through traditional uniforms, through reserved seating arrangements where they seat together as a group and through dancing processions where they lead the celebrant unto the dance floor in a strong show of solidarity as they encircle the celebrant during the first dance by celebrant at events. They publicly showcase their obodo identity and culture both of which have international origins, and by so doing they collectively participate in a transnational socio-cultural space especially through events or acts such as funeral arrangements for a deceased member or wakes for the loved ones of members. They do these to maintain ties with kinfolk in their hometowns in Nigeria and to carry on their cultural heritage but more importantly they also do this to sustain themselves as a distinct group in contrast to the various other groups found within American society. The conversations at meetings are mostly about member's lives here while they reminisce about life at home or past visits home. The one recurring aspect of what can be viewed as HTA transnationalism or home development that may be of interest to members is lobbying government officials to 'secure' the hometown so they may be able to visit with their families without fear of their physical safety. This is also the one aspect of their lives that drives their desire to create a new village locality here in their new environments. They seek to bring the village to themselves and their offspring here because most think it has become increasingly unsafe to travel home with one's family due to the high incidences of kidnappings and armed robberies targeted mostly at those on visits from abroad.

As stated earlier, the focus of the HTAs is on re-villaging here in the United States. Transnational circumstances (lack of security at home) are triggers for their focus on the here and now. Because as individuals, they actively participate in a transnational social field made instantaneous through modern technological advances, such as cell phones, the World Wide Web, and the news media all of which provide instant information on kidnappings, armed robberies and other crimes against return migrants, HTA members seek to reproduce their obodo communities as part of the multicultural milieu here in their relatively secure new places of living. Ancestral hometown development is rarely discussed at chapter meetings as members are more interested in maintaining their culture and ‘trying to live like their people here in this country’. In her study of Guinean immigrants in Lisbon, Michelle Johnson concluded that though other studies found cell phone usage facilitated communications between immigrants and friends and families at home making it possible for both sides to become more familiar with current events (personal and otherwise) in both places, her findings differed. She found that Guinean immigrants were using cell phones to construct new village localities in their new communities. She writes “mobile phones as imagined and used by the Guinean immigrants I met in Lisbon revealed less about transnationalism and globalization than they did about constructing community and identity in a new locale. As Guinean immigrants... struggled to make their way in a new, multicultural Europe, they used their mobile phones to engage local networks, shape local identities, and transform Lisbon’s sprawl into an African migrant village” (2013:163). Likewise this study finds the HTA acts as a technology of re-villaging in the new community with less of a focus on sending collective funds home to develop the home community. HTA members use their cell phones, just like most mainstream Americans, to communicate among themselves here in their new communities as well as with loved ones in faraway places. For the

studied group, the cell phone and other technologies of communication facilitate transnationalism as it means HTA members are in constant touch with those at home. Because immigrants are able to keeping abreast with current events at home through technological innovations such as the cell phone and cable news networks, blogs, and also given the high rates of crime made available through the news media, the HTA as a technology of re-villaging thrives as people resettle and try to live like 'home' people in their new communities. The main function of the HTA is no longer sending funds home to develop the HTA but re-villaging diasporic villagers. However, given the limited role of women in HTAs, are their efforts at re-villaging sustainable? To what extent do women participate in the socio-cultural arena of the re-villaged obodo community? These questions are answered in the next chapter which discusses women and the limits placed on their participation in the social arena of the HTA.

## **CHAPTER 6: WOMEN IN THE HOMETOWN ASSOCIATION**

- A woman may not present kola nut
- Most meeting starts with the presentation of the kolanut
- If there is no kolanut, there will be no meeting
- In Igboland, a woman may not call men to a meeting

### **Women and The Kola Nut Ceiling – Ndi Umuigbo HTA**

This chapter takes a further look at the implications of kola nut traditions on female participation in the affairs of the HTA and also explores the reasons for gendered notions of belonging and analyzes some of the consequential inequalities that result from the exclusion or subsuming of women under men in the HTA. As discussed earlier, kola nut may only be

presented and broken by a man at a gathering where both men and women are present such as the HTA meeting and what this means is that the role of women may be stifled by the traditions that govern the presentation or breaking of the kola nut. Such was the dilemma faced by members of the Ndi Umuigbo association that practiced equality in all hometown affairs for men and women, when it came to holding the highest office in the association. The ‘kola nut ceiling’ meant that a woman could run for the office of National President but stood a dismal chance of being elected to that office because some members were of the view that a woman president would not be able to call the meeting to order with the breaking of the kola nut because by tradition a woman may not break the kola nut. With most men expecting the woman to hand over the plate with the kola nut half kneeling in respect – a woman as president of the HTA would then have to semi kneel on one knee to hand over the bowl of kola nut to one lesser in authority than her (her male vice president) so that he may present it to the gathering. This also implies that two women may not be elected as president and vice president. If a woman is elected president, the vice president is expected to be a man so the HTA may not go too low on the rungs of authority or leadership to find the right gender to present the kola nut. Though the Ndi Umuigbo association in the United States has adopted a more contemporary approach that includes women in ‘amala’ which is the HTA’s decision making body or the diasporic village assembly, the traditions surrounding the presentation of the kola nut limits the extent to which women may participate in that sphere.

The following conversation between researcher and a male and female member of the HTA captures the predicament surrounding female membership or socio-civic participation in Igbo HTAs so much so that even those HTAs that redefine membership to include full participation by women find themselves at odds with the kola nut and its significance in Igbo culture:

- Male: ... You know how we have this HTA meeting and men and women meet, it is because we are not at home. At home, the men have their village meetings and the women have their own meetings separate. As far as I know, there is not like a general meeting. Women are not considered part of Amala. Amala is men.
- Researcher: What is Amala?
- Female: Amala is the community, like the decision making body. Like the Umunna. It is another word for community.
- Male: They believe the women are not the decision making power.
- Female: Amala is the men in the community
- Male: And they have this body that on the women's side that makes decision for women. On our side, they call ehmm, I forget the name they call them but they keep the order on the women's side. There's a name for the women. ... The women have their own, and the men have their own and the women don't attend it. The women go to their own.
- Female: And if there is ever an issue, that the women want discussed, then they will have their chair lady come over to the amala meeting [the men's meeting] and voice their concern. Sometimes, they may have a combined meeting but the women seat in the background and they are not addressing that meeting. They don't have an input in that meeting.
- Researcher: So how did you come about meeting together here?
- Female: Mostly because, I won't say it is a Western thing. I think it is because, you know, we are not in the village. We are trying to have a meeting to represent, I don't know how to put this. If it were just to be a meeting of only the men, I think it is just like you know, once you leave the village, we have more rights, more privilege than the village women do.
- Male: For example, like this last election that we had, ehmm, there's a woman that was running for president. A lot people will not vote her because she is a woman and they believe that back home a woman does not call the community for a meeting or for anything.
- Female: As a matter of fact, I'm glad you brought that up because during this past election, for the Umuigbo e-group, it was like the hottest topic. Somebody had made the comment saying 'how will a woman present kolanut?'

- Male: And that's another thing. A woman does not present kola nut in Umuigbo land.
- Female: [Excitedly] And there was an explosion once that person made that comment, the internet was on fire! Faaayaaa! [fire drawn out] Because typically at home, 'nwanyi adi hie eche orji' (a woman cannot present kolanut).
- Male: That's true.
- Female: A woman does not present kola. In any Igbo community, it doesn't happen. For example, there was a wedding we went to, ... At the reception, the MC called for the kola nut and the groom's sister brought the plate of kola and handed the MC the plate of kola. This man took the the, oh my God, the English that he used. He said that 'you must subjugate' yes oh, yes oh, ... eh, we were all like eh!. It was dead silence when he said that. What she did was she had to then hand him the kola as she semi knelt [shows semi kneeling position] and then he took it from her. She just couldn't hand it to him like that.
- Researcher: Well, that is an improvement on a woman not being able to present it at all.
- Female and Male: [in raised voices] She was not presenting! She was just giving it to him to present!
- Female: He was saying that you can't just hand it to me. You have to bow in respect to give him the kola [she demonstrates semi kneeling and head down position again] because at home that is how it is done.
- Researcher: ohhhh.
- Female: A friend of ours got married last October and when he was going to present the kola to the guests and to the elders that were there. The plate was on the table so he picked it up, took the mic and started talking, and someone, one of his home people, got up and told him, 'sit down!'. Told [him]... to sit down, that his wife has to give him the kola that he will present to them. So, he was like, ok. And his wife got up and took the plate and gave it to him. They told her no!, that she must kneel down and hand the plate of kola to him. So essentially, a woman that is as far as her role will go with the kola. You will hold the plate and kneel and pass it to your husband to give to the elders but you cannot actually say 'my people, here is kolanut'. You can't do that. So, at our national level, the lady that

was running for president that was one of the big things. A lot of the elders and the men said that if she is President, that they will never accept kola from her because it is unheard of and without kola, nothing can start.

Male: So even if she had won, even if she is president, she will give the kola to the vice, who is a male.

Female: Because the audience will not hear her because she is a female, therefore nothing will start until kola is presented. Of course, we weren't that happy about that because we are in a western society but culturally 'that's what it is!'. There are certain things that cannot be changed, just can't be changed. That's just how it is!

Researcher: So the kola nut issue is one area where there can be no movement.

Female member: Yes, that is major...

Researcher : But a woman can work for the government and can call village elders together for meeting.

Male: But that is government. A woman can be governor but there is a great chance that her deputy is a male.

Female: For example, there was a comment made "how can we have a female president, so it will be her husband in the background telling her what to do. It will be her husband running the show. It will be her husband telling her what needs to be done". So indirectly, he's the president and she is just his mouthpiece and I replied "what are you trying to say?" It just came down to pure pure Umuigbo culture, a woman cannot be at the head. You know, we have had female vice presidents and it has never been an issue but this is the first time a woman is running for presidency.

Researcher: What was the debate like over this issue?

Male: In our chapter, we talked about it in at least two to three meetings and people were airing their views about her becoming president. There was a lot of concern.

Female: ... But because it was a woman, the woman who had been vice president for the past six years, during this past regime, peaceful regime, everything was calm, so if anything she would have been attributed as a prime candidate but because she is a woman, it didn't happen. Yep, nwanyi adihi eche orji, nwanyi adihi akpo oku! (Yep, a woman does not present kola, a woman does not call a gathering of the people). [12/7/12]



At a subsequent meeting, as members chatted about their upcoming elections to the National Executive body, a discussion ensued about the possibility of having a woman as the National President when a male member asked when they would for the first time have a woman as their national president. For the upcoming elections, a woman was running as candidate for National President. A male member, Mr. Nonso, answering this question described the issue with having a woman as president to be that the woman would have to be their spokesperson not just here in the USA but also in Nigeria and particularly within Ndi Umuigbo land. He then asked if it would be possible for a woman to summon a meeting of Ndi Umuigbo chiefs to discuss issues. Another male member said: "I don't see why not as there are women senators and representatives within the Nigerian government" and went on to explain that women seem to know how to govern and handle projects so "it is about time that we start to change things". Mr. Nonso argued that "our culture is not one that will allow a woman to be effective when dealing with hometown chiefs- women cannot summon chiefs to a meeting". At this point, another male member joined the conversation insisting "this thing called our culture should not get in the way". This member explained that women can run the association just as well. Mr. Uwa agreed but said that in this case, he thinks the woman candidate may not win because she is not the better candidate and not because she is a woman. He said he would vote for a capable and qualified female candidate if one is to run for office. He explained how even though he is for having a woman president, if you have Sarah Palin running against a male candidate, chances are he would vote for the male, but if you have Hilary Clinton running against a male candidate, he would vote for Hilary because she is qualified to be president. The female candidate did not win as President but as indicated by Mr. Uwa, she may have lost because she is not qualified for the job. However, as explained by Mr. Nonso, it is an 'issue' to have a woman as the individual that

represents and speaks for Ndi Umuigbo in the USA because among some in the USA and most especially in Ndi Umuigbo land her authority in discussing or handling village matters may not be recognized because she is a female.

The kola nut or the rules governing the presenting and breaking of the kola nut shape participation in the social arena of the HTA. Noting the kola nut and the rules governing its presentation are intrinsic aspects of Igbo cultural gatherings or village assemblies, most HTA members agree the kola nut rules supreme and its rituals may not be tampered with. The consensus is there is little likelihood of Igbo culture without the kola nut and its rituals. It then seems that to the extent the HTA is about gathering and re-villaging, the kola nut which rules over the traditional socio-civic space of the village assembly and excludes women from its rituals also limits the participation of women in the affairs of the HTA – the obodo socio-civic space within which they seek to relocalize their lives as they practice their ancestral identity and maintain their cultural heritage.

### **Ndi Umunwoke and The Socio-Civic Exclusion of Women**

When I asked Ndi Umunwoke HTA members why females were excluded from active participation in their HTA, it was explained by several members that in the hometown association meetings in Nigeria women were not active members of the ‘main meeting’ but were allowed to form ‘women’s wings’ that operated under the authority of the ‘main meeting’. As I sought the answer to this question, I was repeatedly told by various informants that is just how things have always been and that women may form women’s wings but may not belong to the main meeting. Noting that the name of the Union is not Ndi Umunwoke Men’s Association but Ndi Umunwoke Association giving the impression it includes all the citizens of Ndi Umunwoke

and their constitution clearly states that all citizens (male and female) are entitled to membership in the association with full participatory rights and that only one of the nine chapters that excluded women had a women's wing, I decided to dig further for explanations about what seemed an institutionalized exclusion of women in the socio-cultural arena of the HTA. As I pondered women's socio-cultural integration or lack thereof in the social arena of the HTA, I asked a male member how their wives shared in belonging and identifying with the hometown and our conversation proceeded as follows:

Member: As you know, men and women do not hold meetings together. That is our tradition in Nigeria so that is also what we do here in America.

Researcher: I see, ... So, do you know how this tradition came about?

Member: I'm not sure but that is the tradition from Nigeria.

Researcher: I am under the assumption that hometown associations were formed in the cities by people that left the village to seek employment in the cities. So, when they got to the cities and formed hometown associations, did they always leave women out of their meetings?

Member: They say that women are very quarrelsome and disruptive at meetings so it is better for them to meet on their own so they don't disrupt discussions and bring their quarrels to the main association meetings.[1/3/2013]

After thinking this answer through, I then asked if it meant the tradition, at a time in the past, was that women were active participants in the HTA meetings but were at some point excluded from active participation because they were quarrelsome and disruptive and the member paused for a while thinking it over himself and then said, "I don't know but I will find out. I will ask some older members because now I am also curious about how this tradition of excluding women from our meetings came about. ... I'll make some calls and see if someone can give me an answer" [1/3/2013]. In a follow-up conversation a few days later, the member explained that he had asked some older members and they explained that is the tradition but no

one could explain how the tradition came about. He sounded frustrated saying “if there is no reason for the tradition, then maybe it is time to revisit that tradition” to see if it really is a problem to have women as active members in the association [1/20/2013]. I did not know what to make of this turn of events. I was only trying to find explanations for the institutionalized exclusion of women from active participation in the ‘main meeting’. It was not my intention to start a movement or dialog about including women. I wanted to hear directly from members to see if I could add more to the literature on the marginalization of women in HTAs besides the explanations of traditional gender power structures or patriarchal subordination of women. Not wanting to reach the wrong conclusions for the marginalization of women based on my observation, it made sense to ask HTA members about this issue. So I continued with my conversations with HTA members on this issue.

However, when I asked a female associate member to tell me about the tradition of excluding women from active participation and how she felt about the practice, she explained that she likes the tradition. Her mother and father did not hold meetings together during their own time and her mother belonged to the women’s wing that operated under the authority of the ‘main meeting’ run by men. She described as follows:

But when the men go to the meeting, they come back and tell their wives what was talked about at the meeting so the wives know what is going on at the meetings but they do not attend the meetings. The wives are what we call associate-members. If there is an event, the men will let us know so that we may cook for them or perform dances for them. ... I, myself, support that old fashioned way of thinking. I don’t believe that men and women should meet together. Men should meet on their own and women should meet on their own and if the women decide to have arguments and quarrels at their meetings on any given day then they can do that to their hearts’ content and then go home afterwards. Ehhhhhh, yes, I don’t believe that men and women should hold meetings together. [Female 7/15/12].

To these informants the main reason behind the tradition of excluding women seems to be the framing of women as quarrelsome and disruptive with the implication being that men are not quarrelsome and disruptive but conduct orderly meetings as such the behavior of women would be detrimental to the well being of the association. However, there were some disagreements on this issue as put forward by a male informant in the following excerpt:

... why is it in Ndi Umunwoke they say that women should have a different meeting and men a different meeting. I don't see the rationale for it. We are not that many. If we were at Ndi Umunwoke, I can see how because of the large population, men may meet separately and women meet separately so that population is manageable. But here we are not many so much so that we are even looking for members. Do you understand? So, if you are looking for people so "ka meeting di ka meeting", (so that a meeting will look like a meeting because there are people present and it looks like a meeting), how do you then turn around and ban some people from attending. If we were at Ndi Umunwoke, and there are separate meetings then it is because there are too many people attending the meeting. But here in America, we are not in Ndi Umunwoke, we can meet together for the purpose of meeting together. Because if you say women should not attend the meetings, then automatically those women born in Ndi Umunwoke but married outside Ndi Umunwoke, for example if you are married to someone from Enugu-Ukwu, you will now focus on the Enugu-Ukwu meeting and so we have lost you as your focus is no longer Ndi Umunwoke. We have lost you. Your focus is now Enugu-Ukwu. ...

My own opinion is that men and women should have their meeting together in America and that is where I stand. But, I said that at the next meeting [national convention<sup>32</sup>- my clarification], I'll ask a question which is, if women start to hold their own separate meeting, so now women can then organize their own annual convention separately? ... how will that look like to others? Do you understand what I'm saying? ...

If Ndi Umunwoke women in America hold their own meetings separate from the men, then automatically they can hold their own separate convention and if that happens you'll find out that the women will achieve more than the men because women mostly come together with one mind when they are trying to achieve a

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<sup>32</sup> The National Convention is a bi-yearly event where members from all the chapters in the USA come together for a three day period to celebrate their heritage and discuss hometown affairs.

goal and they achieve goals as a group better than men. ... The way I see it, if women want to do something, like build a hall, it takes them two years. They'll come together and piam, piam, piam, [quickly, quickly, quickly] they'll finish building that hall. But if you ask men to build the hall, before they even start building the hall, they'll start fighting among themselves due to accusation of embezzlement of project funds. Someone will embezzle the funds and "kwelu ike" (arrogantly stand firm while acknowledging they embezzled funds). ...

I believe that women are a factor of progress in any association. I don't know why Ndi Umunwoke people are saying that they don't want women in their meeting. I believe that at a point, those men will regret that decision. They will come a time when they need women to be involved, what will they do? Rent women. If they will rent women, let them rent women and we'll see how that will work out for them. ...

There is something else those men are hiding which is why they don't want to have their women at the meetings. Meetings have agendas and people should follow the meeting agenda and if issues need to be voted on they are voted on and then people go home. What else is there to it? ... They have not said the main reason for separating the men from the women. That's where I'll end. [Male 11/13/12]

This member captures some of the present dilemmas of excluding women from active participation in the HTA. The member brings up the issue of 'numbers' and wonders if it is reasonable to exclude females from active participation when they are looking for members to come to their meetings so the meetings would look like a gathering of people or hometowners. Also, pointing out that not only does the union not fully garner and utilize the resources women may bring to the table in pursuit of the purposes of the association, this informant notes that women, from his experiences, get along better at meetings and accomplish set goals more efficiently than men. He also raises the issue that if women are continuously excluded and the women join other organizations where they become invested, there may come a time when the women may no longer be available when summoned by the men in the 'main meeting' to cook and perform dances and the other tasks reserved for women. The member asks what they will do

at such a time and wonders if they will then rent women. It seemed this member's concerns about losing the women and the resources they may bring to the social arena of the HTA is becoming reality at some local chapters. At one of the special occasion meetings I attended in New England where the men brought along their wives, the issue of their wives attending meetings and becoming active members was raised by a member. As he put it, "should our women attend our meetings? They seem to have a calming effect on us men" [2/10/13]. This is in reference to their meetings sometimes becoming mired in heated discussions about trivial matters. All the men present thought this a good idea as they laughed and said it would be good as they were enjoying the evening of discussions with their wives but one of the women speaking on behalf of the women explained the women would rather not join as active members, as the women had other obligations to other associations they had already joined and would not want to commit to attending the HTA meetings on a regular basis. The men can always invite them for special occasions or discussions about special issues and they would do their best to attend on those occasions and all the other women present nodded in agreement.

During the course of my research, in an effort to overcome the feeling of disaffiliation and cultural social isolation, one of the women excluded from a chapter of Ndi Umunwoke called the other excluded women together to form an association so she could also socio-culturally identify with a 'home' group. In forming her organization, she remapped the ancestral hometown to include neighboring villages to be more inclusive of other women she had marital and other forms of kin ties with. The women's association was formed and within a few months had successfully carried out a scheduled activity, 'cultural movie night' where the women gathered to watch a Nollywood movie about life in Nigeria. As the above male member noted, the issue of numbers which was very much a reality in that local chapter as they only had three

active (male) members and were barely meeting twice a year forced the male only 'main meeting' in that state to change their approach and to actively court the formerly excluded women and persuade them to come and join the main meeting so that as the preceding male member had said 'meeting will be like a meeting'. The women eventually joined the main meeting but only after requesting that the scheduling of chapter meetings and events take into consideration their time commitments to their newly formed women's meeting. The excluded women took their resources elsewhere and carved out an association that accommodated their need to belong and identify with people from 'home'.

The preceding male informant's worries about how much control the main HTA can have over the women's wings and the appearance to other communities that there is a split or segregation in Ndi Umunwoke between men and women were beginning to come true. As a male informant from the chapter that had eventually sought out the women noted, "the other day, Mrs. Mma's daughter graduated from college and our women were there representing us because they have their own 'meeting' while the one or two of us in attendance just sat there and other Igbo people were now wondering what is going on and why the women were out there but not the men" [12/7/13]. Noting that women are a factor of progress, the preceding male informant also worried that Ndi Umunwoke women will affiliate with other groups and Ndi Umunwoke men may not only regret their decision but may eventually have to rent women to fill the vacuum left by the absence of Ndi Umunwoke women. As he ponders the exclusion of women, he notes the men are not forthcoming with their real reason for the exclusion of women, but he declares he will say no more on the issue leaving me with the impression that he had said too much already and I should seek further answers elsewhere.



Another male informant offered the explanation that some members feel “these women come to America and become nurses and begin to make money, sometimes more than their husbands, and all of a sudden they think they can sit with men and discuss with men and point their fingers at men”. He explained some men feel women do not belong in the ‘meeting’ and should “not be allowed in at all” and that “the women drive big cars like Escalade and Mercedes SUV and think they are now men...”. This informant felt that half of their population, (the women), were being left out. He said the women are “highly qualified women, some of them are doctors, some pharmacists, some lawyers, some successful business women and this is how these women will stop being a part of us just because we don’t like the size of their cars and the size of their bank accounts” [1/20/2103]. These sentiments tie in to the one before it. However, in the one before it, the informant sees women as a factor of progress that will help the HTA achieve its goals while in the later, some see women as ‘female stallions’<sup>33</sup> who having achieved financial success and independence in their new communities seek to usurp the position of men in the HTA or emasculate men by their active presence within the socio-cultural space of the HTA. Migration undermines rigid gender roles in a manner that is progressive for women but though it may bring about positive changes in the form of more autonomy and power for women, migration may also lead to increased male dominance as men reassert their dominance over women to compensate for their loss of prestige and power as immigrants (Boehm 2008; Goldring 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Though most chapters of the Ndi Umunwoke association practice the tradition of excluding women from the HTA, it is a tradition that seems to be at odds with the desires of some members who see no reason for the tradition and worry that in

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<sup>33</sup> Female stallion is a caustic Nigerian phrase sometimes used derogatorily and at other times positively to describe high achieving and financially successful women who hold feminist views or view themselves as having the same rights as men.

contemporary times, Ndi Umunwoke women will take their resources elsewhere and participate socio-culturally in the public sphere but not under the umbrella of the Ndi Umunwoke group resulting in the public impression that there is a gender rift in Ndi Umunwoke.

So far, the discussion has centered on married women and membership in the HTA, the following are excerpts from conversations on how the exclusion of women from active participation in the HTA applied to unmarried women, or the wife of a Ndi Umunwoke man who does not belong to the association:

On the dilemma faced by the wife of a man who chooses not be involved with the association:

Researcher: What then happens to a woman of Ndi Umunwoke patrilineage or not that is married to an Ndi Umunwoke man who is not a financial member of the chapter?

Female member: What it then means is that the man is not fully a member so the woman is not really a member. The husband has to fully join before the wife can now be involved along with her husband.

Researcher: What if the woman herself is a Ndi Umunwoke person. Isn't a Ndi Umunwoke person entitled to membership by virtue of being from Ndi Umunwoke?

Female member: A Ndi Umunwoke person is a meeting member. But my understanding is that you have to be a financial member who pays dues and participates in meetings to be a member.

Researcher: So if the husband is not a registered financial member then, eh

Female member: Then the wife cannot be involved. [7/15/2012]

Female associate or 'silent membership' is regulated through male membership. A woman is only entitled to silent membership through her husband's membership and where her husband chooses not to be a member, she may not participate or be 'associated' with the HTA. This holds true both for women of Ndi Umunwoke patrilineage as well as for women from other patrilineages outside of Ndi Umunwoke married to Ndi Umunwoke men.

On the issue of the unmarried Ndi Umunwoke woman, the following explanation was given:

Researcher: What of the case of the single lady that is not married?

Male member: Rigghht. Now we have a current case. Because she is not married we encourage her to come to the meeting and our hope of encouraging her is maybe she will meet a suitor. Maybe she'll meet a suitor. And also because we know that if we don't accept her, she'll not find another town organization to join with. A single woman technically, at our Ndi Umunwoke branch, is allowed to be a member of our meeting. [11/16/12]

This informant also confirmed the single lady would be welcome as a fully active member who may fully participate in discussions at meetings. I also asked another member of the chapter about single women and membership and he explained they currently do not have any single woman that wishes to come to their meetings so they have not had to grapple with the issue. He, however, noted that "it would look somehow" to include single women in their meetings while excluding their wives. To him, single or married, "a woman is a woman" and he thought it would lead to problems between men and their wives if they were to welcome single women while excluding their wives [1/20/2013].

I pondered the reasoning behind this and the first explanation that jumped out at me was a 'resource' explanation with this being a strategy to keep Ndi Umunwoke daughters within the Ndi Umunowke hometown and hold on to whatever resources they may bring to bear on hometown affairs by including them in meetings while trying to match them up with the single men of the association. However, that wives (who were once single ladies) and whatever resources they may have are excluded from full participation in the affairs of the HTA seemed to contradict this resource notion. Members also frequently alluded to the women benefiting equally as men from the HTA because they are entitled to death benefits based on their husband's active membership. As one member explained "everything that accrues to a man, also accrues to a woman, when a man dies, we send him home, when a woman dies, we send her home. That is the benefit you see with the naked eye. What else is there? There is no difference, the only thing is that women don't come to the meeting" [1/3/2013]. To some members, the

tangible benefit, (the monetary death benefit), is seen as the primary benefit of membership and to the extent that this benefit is somewhat available to men and women, then women are seen as equally being members of the HTA regardless of the extent of their exclusion from full participation in the socio-civic and cultural arena of the HTA. The ‘good’ woman or wife should be content belonging to the HTA as defined by her relationship to the male citizen of the hometown. In this instance, that associate membership may heighten feelings of socio-cultural isolation and exclude females from the democratizing benefits of participation in the socio-civic arena of the HTA seemed to be a negligible issue as long as the death benefit also accrued to the females. However, the claim that death benefits accrue equally to men and women does not stand in the face of close scrutiny. The following analysis of how death benefits are handled shows that in Ndi Umunwoke HTA ‘everything that accrues to a man does not equally accrue to a woman’ even if one goes with the narrow definition of death benefits as ‘everything’ as illustrated in the following section on membership and death benefits.

### **Ndi Umunwoke Women and Death Benefits**

At the time of my fieldwork, at the local chapter in New England where I spent most of my time, active membership was open to only men while their wives were associate members. Unmarried women were excluded from both active and associate membership. What this meant for the death benefit was that if an active male member died, local chapter levies and national union levies would be collected and given to the deceased’s next of kin, typically his wife. If an associate member (the wife of an active male member) died, local chapter and national levies would also be collected and given to the next of kin, typically her husband. Trying to understand how this really would work, a member explained possible scenarios as follows:

**If a wife (associate member) predeceases her husband (active member)**

Mandatory national and local levies are collected and given to her husband

**Then if the surviving widower\* (active male member) dies after his wife**

Mandatory national and local levies are collected and given to next of kin (his children or designated relative)

\*If the surviving widower remarries, his new wife regardless of her patrilineage becomes an associate member. The surviving widower at this time is once again entitled to collect obligatory death benefit if this wife predeceases him. If he dies before his new wife, the new wife is entitled to the death benefit levies collected at all levels

**If a husband (active member) predeceases his wife (associate member)**

Mandatory national and local levies are collected and given to his wife

**Then if the surviving widow\* (associate member) dies after her husband**

National levies are not mandatory. Local dues are left to the discretion of her deceased husband's local chapter.

\*If the widow remarries, her new husband may only become an active member if he is from Ndi Umunwoke.

**If an unmarried or single lady dies**

National levies are not mandatory unless the single or unmarried lady is a member of one of the local chapters where women are active members.

These different scenarios show unequal benefits to women based on their biological sex and the claim that whatever death benefit is due a man is also due a woman is a misrepresentation of facts as illustrated above. Though this false claim is made in reference to the one tangible benefit (the death benefit) constantly referenced by members to indicate the equality of membership, there was also no equality of benefits when it came to the intangibles

such as socio-cultural affiliation and the democratizing effects of full participation in the socio-civic arena of the HTA. Additionally, given the unequal access to the socio-cultural arena of the HTA, it seems newly migrated single women are excluded from the very same social arena that is fully accessible to single men and which serves to cushion the feeling of alienation that may result from trying to adapt to life in a new community. Also, longer settled women who may become divorced or widowed may also find themselves cut off from the comforts of the socio-cultural arena that may also cushion the difficulties of life.

While Ndi Umunwoke HTA chapters mostly practice the exclusion of women from active participation in the socio-cultural arena of the HTA, the other studied association (Ndi Umuigbo) takes a more contemporary approach to notions of citizenship and membership and because females are fully recognized as active members, any and all death benefits that may accrue to a male member also accrues equally to female members. This matter is a non-issue for the all female Ndi Nneji association as benefits accrue equally to all active members.

## **Conclusion**

With the Ndi Umunwoke HTA, female participation is muted because it is exercised through ‘association’ or ties to male members. Where a Ndi Umunwoke female has no male relative in the United States or her male relative chooses not to be involved with the HTA, the female finds herself unable to become an ‘associate’ member and is then totally excluded from the social arena of the HTA. On the other hand, with the Ndi Umuigbo association which proactively seeks to involve all Ndi Umuigbo descendants, young, old, male, and female in their HTA and who have taken a progressive approach in their inclusion of women in all HTA affairs, the kola nut continues to rear its kingly and subjugating head over women limiting their participation especially in leadership positions. At the apex national organization, one’s sex as a

female becomes an obstacle to the highest office of the National President - the national leader and one who may speak for all Ndi Umuigbo people here in the United States. The traditional rules or customs governing participation in the village general assembly and presentation and breaking of kola nut restrict female participation at the higher levels of leadership such as the office of the National President. Due to traditions that govern the presentation and breaking of kola nut, a female may generally be accepted as second in command, the National Vice President, but not the President. Though there are some members who disagree with the notion a woman may not convene an assembly of Ndi Umuigbo people in the United States and will support a female as National President, these same members balk at the notion of a woman presenting or breaking kola nut. The consensus is that the female President would always have to delegate that function to a male.

Within the Ndi Umuigbo HTA, which adopted an all inclusive, gender neutral approach to membership, the kola nut limits female participation in the association. The women are not judged on their ability to participate and lead instead their roles are structured by the traditions that govern the presentation of the kolanut. In the socio-civic space of the HTA – where hometowners gather to socialize culturally and maintain their heritage, the kola nut seems to rule supreme. During the course of research, every time I asked about the kola nut, discussions became animated and revolved around the significance of the kola nut which is ‘hospitality’ or ‘welcome’ and the rules that govern the presentation of kola nut with all agreeing that a ‘woman’ may not present kola nut at a gathering where men are present such as the HTA meeting or any type of socio-cultural celebration. Among members of the Ndi Umuigbo association who mostly still hold ‘men only’ HTA meetings, there is also general consensus that women may not present or break kola nut at any gathering where men or a male is present. Since all gatherings,

meetings or events of Igbo people start with the presentation of 'kolanut', this traditional restriction on women translates into a 'kola nut ceiling' in present times because no matter a woman's abilities, she is expected to 'subjugate herself' in a semi kneeling position and turn to a male to call the gathering to order and present the kola nut. As members gather together to build obodo community in the new places they have settled and leave their cultural footprints behind through membership in HTAs, the kola nut regulates those footprints allowing mostly men to participate while restricting the extent to which women may be involved.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Ahhhhh, this title [the dissertation title] is good oh. No need to explain it to me. I understand! When kola nut and Electric slide collide, my dear, the atmosphere is charged well well, and if you stand in the way you go get shocked well well, no two ways! The power of orji [kola nut] is here, there, everywhere you find our people and it is electric! [female12/7/12]

What happens when the kola nut (*Cola acuminata*), the symbol of Igbo culture and hospitality used to initiate or bless any gathering of Igbo people, meets the 'Electric Slide'<sup>34</sup>? Electric slide as used here represents mainstream American practices or ways of life. When the kola nut meets the electric slide in the socio-cultural arena of the HTA, what identities, traditions and power structures are maintained and/or reshaped? What are the roles and functions of the HTA in the lives of Igbo immigrants and what are the effects of institutionalizing the HTA as the social arena for carrying out life cycle events?

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<sup>34</sup> Electric Slide is a popular song by Marcia Griffiths which is a mainstay line dance at Igbo parties here in the USA. Men, women, and sometimes children would line up as equals, side, by side, shoulder to shoulder to participate in the line dance.



Though the HTA has roots that emanate from the ancestral village in Igboland, its collective activities are on developing not the ancestral hometown but a re-villaging diaspora. The transnational activities which HTA members carry out are mostly on an individual and personal basis and not on a collective basis under the auspices of the HTA. The paradox is that the continuous look towards the ancestral village, so members may re-village properly in their new environments, mostly occur outside the arena of the HTA. These activities are typically individual acts by members and not collective acts carried out under the auspices of the HTA. However, these acts are triggered by HTA membership and related acts to 'live like home people' here. HTA members practice active socio-cultural transnationalism as they stay in constant touch with kin at home as they seek ideas and items from home in their quest to live like home people here. From kin at home, they request and acquire food items to be cooked at the various HTA events or life cycle celebrations, traditional outfits, or other cultural items or items depicting their cultural heritage such as musical instruments, music CDs, and Nollywood movies, that may be used to enhance their obodo community building activities as they gather as kin under the umbrella of the HTA. Additionally, because ancestral village identity and ideology are mobilized to re-village members, traditional gender and power hierarchies also dominate within the social arena of the HTA though they are contested and sometimes strategically modified as immigrants pragmatically blend Igbo traditions and Anglo-American practices as they re-village in their new communities.

Discussing the context of migration and how it affects immigrant adaptation, Guarnizo, Portes and Haller write that those coming from rural areas to cities in the United States will have a harder time adapting and are more likely to remain attached to home communities (2003: 1217). The Igbo groups studied in this research are made up of mostly highly educated

immigrants who lived in urban centers prior to migration. One would then expect that most of these immigrants would easily adapt to life in the United States and would be less likely to remain attached to home or kin networks in their new communities. However, while members of the studied groups have adapted to life in their new communities they have also remained attached to 'home' and 'kin' networks in their new communities. The highly educated, urban to urban immigrants are choosing to dictate the terms of their selective socio-cultural incorporation in their new communities. This study found longer settled immigrants comprise most of the membership in the HTAs supporting this study's claim that as immigrants resettle they see the HTA as an institution used to relocalize their lives and as a way to bring the village to their offspring in diaspora. The HTA is not a transitory institution or phase used temporarily to familiarize new immigrants to the new community or that is used to cushion or overcome feelings of alienation experienced by new immigrants or to acculturate new immigrants. It is an institution that gives new meaning to home development. It serves as a platform to husband ancestral identities and develop the home community here in the United States. The HTA endures and flourishes as a means of re-villaging for both newly and longer settled immigrants.

The HTA is an association where those that view themselves as kin based on ancestry come together to create and institutionalize a social arena so they may as an ancestral collective share, partake in and maintain their ancestral identity and cultural heritage. As described by members, belonging to a HTA is a natural instinct, a survival instinct, and the essence of the HTA is to promote kinship and brotherhood. As noted earlier, for the Igbos, there is only one home and that is the ancestral home. All other homes are considered temporary homes with most Igbos aiming to return with their families to the ancestral hometown after their sojourns abroad. However, in contemporary times, given the socio-economic complexities of life as migrants in

the United States, a far away land deemed a ‘secure place’, in contrast to the view of the hometown as increasingly unsafe with return migrants as prime targets for armed robbers and kidnappers, Igbo people are transposing their ties to home in innovative ways. They seek to bring the village to their offspring in diaspora through the socio-cultural space of the HTA.

### **The Function of the HTA is to Re-village Members**

HTAs were primarily used for the social welfare of newly arrived immigrants in receiving communities, to raise collective funds for home development and also to raise funds to repatriate remains of deceased members back home when necessary. Camaraderie among members is also typically highlighted as a function of HTAs. The studied HTAs still carry out these functions in varying degrees. The degrees of these various functions are important in this study because they reveal building obodo community as most significant to members. Findings from this study indicate the HTAs primarily function to meet the socio-cultural needs in the lives of immigrants and offspring in their new environments. Their focus is not on ancestral hometown development but on home development of a different nature: home development in their new environments – re-villaging and relocalizing the ancestral village here in their new environments. HTA meeting agendas revolved around promoting and maintaining their socio-cultural lives here. A common thread running through HTA meetings is lack of discussions about projects to improve the hometown in Nigeria. In the rare instance when hometown development was brought up for discussion, it was laid to rest by protests from members who are quick to point out there is much money in Nigeria, albeit mismanaged by government officials, and those at home should be sending money to immigrants who are struggling to survive in the United States.

HTAs are primarily concerned with ‘place’ and ‘place making’ and that is identifying with a place, (the ancestral hometown), and then place making by carving out, institutionalizing, and publicizing the socio-cultural arena of the HTA as their translocated village square in diaspora so they may use this social space to privately and publicly embody, promote and maintain their cultural heritage. Put differently, they are developing their ancestral hometowns here in their new environments. They seek to bring the village to themselves and their offspring in diaspora and they do so through the ‘publicly recognized’ social space of the HTA. Here, hometown development takes on a new meaning; Hometown Development = Developing a Relocalized Ancestral Village in Diaspora or Re-villaging in Diaspora.

### **Re-villaging – Developing the Hometown Here and Now**

HTA members ‘afraid of losing the battle’ of maintaining and passing on ancestral identity and heritage to their offspring here in their new environments, are striving to embody and inscribe ancestral locality unto their children through membership and involvement in the socio-cultural arena of the HTA. To embody and reflect their cultural identity, said identity is contrasted with an ‘other’ or various other identities found within their new environments. This is where institutionalizing the HTA and its socio-cultural space is of importance to members. Through membership in the HTA and standing together as a collective, embodying or reflecting identity is made publicly visible or is highlighted at life cycle events or celebrations in their new environments. Their embodied ancestry or identity is then seen in contrast to other cultural identities found within mainstream American society. Though the celebrations of life cycle events may have Euro-American overtones, celebrations act as the arena for the public display and recognition of ancestral identity and traditions. As those invited to the celebration watch, ancestral identity is acknowledged by celebrants and put on display for public consumption

through kola nut rituals, speeches, traditional dance processions, the traditional foods served as well as the traditional outfits worn by celebrants and HTA members. Thus, the HTA acts as a technology of re-villaging – it becomes the tool or the institution through which members gather as a collective to be recognized as ancestral kin and to practice and maintain their ancestral identity in diaspora. Leaving cultural footprints behind and putting down ancestral roots so they and their offspring may not float away from their ancestry is the primary reason members belong to HTAs.

It seems because the history of HTAs is one that may have its origins in developing the hometown or, as Uchendu put it, to help the town “get up” (1965:34), members still feel a certain obligation to carrying out charitable projects in the hometown even though most members acknowledge their hard earned American dollars are not what is needed to help the town get up. Though they agree on political voice such as rallying together and collectively asking for transparency in the allocation and management of government funds for infrastructure and other projects in their ancestral communities, little effort is made by the HTAs to carry out any form of collective political action on government transparency in Nigeria. Members of the HTAs here in the USA and visiting dignitaries invited as guests to events agree that the focus of the HTA should primarily be on ensuring their obodo or village community gets up and stays up here in their new environments through involving offspring so their efforts to build obodo community can be sustained for generations to come.

HTA members share the view that involving their children should be a priority. However, how they carry out this priority varies. One HTA (Ndi Umuigbo) is proactively taking steps to involve their children by the creation of an Ndi Umuigbo youth wing and by calling their HTA meeting not just ‘meeting’ but ‘family meeting’. Ndi Umuigbo HTA members see their meeting

as ‘family’ meeting and by so doing, differentiate and acknowledge their HTA as a gathering of all people (adult males and females as well as children) that constitute the Ndi Umuigbo citizenry in the United States. The qualification as a ‘family’ meeting is also to differentiate from ‘meeting’, which evokes traditional village general assembly which may only be comprised of village male adults. Calling their meeting a family meeting signifies that all are considered full citizens and all are welcome – a deviation from the hegemonic notion that citizenship in the HTA is reserved only for males. Having adopted the family meeting approach, they are more successful in their efforts to involve offspring in the affairs of the HTA and to organize themselves as a village in their new community; men, women and children as citizens are actively involved in the social arena of the HTA.

Ndi Umunwoke HTA continues mostly to adhere to the traditional gender ideology that excludes women from the socio-civic space of the HTA. While successful in their efforts at organizing as a HTA, they are building a village community in which mostly men are citizens and women and offspring merely passers-by. A type of village that is not sustainable in the USA given the prevailing notions of equality between the sexes. The women of this HTA, most of whom are successful professionals, have sought out other more receptive associations such as religious or social clubs within which they actively exercise citizenship. Their offspring, for the time being, are not involved in the affairs of the HTA. While Ndi Umuigbo which uses a family meeting approach may be able to sustain itself as a village community in diaspora, Ndi Umunwoke is building an unsustainable village community because its citizenship ideology is one that excludes women (about fifty percent of its population) and offspring. It is an unsustainable approach because the women are taking their resources elsewhere which led to the remark by one of their members that they would one day regret their approach and may need to

‘rent’ women when their wives fully involved in other groups are no longer willing to cater to their culinary needs. Additionally, with their offspring not actively involved in the meetings as children or teenagers, they are unable to actualize the goal of cultural socialization of offspring even though it is a priority for them.

HTA members are worried that as their offspring mature and start their own families, they may not gravitate towards membership in the HTA because they were not involved earlier on with the HTA. With the family meeting approach, membership is open to all citizens meaning that from an early age, offspring (males and females) may begin to view membership in the HTA and the public identification with and practice of their culture as a normal activity carried out within mainstream American practices and ways of life. Through this process, they aim to ‘get up’ and to achieve hometown development here in their new environments; to re-village and relocate their ancestral traditions here under the auspices of the HTA. As noted earlier by a member, most members may not permanently return to their hometowns to live out their lives even after retiring from active employment here in the USA and may circulate back and forth between their ancestral hometowns and the United States where their offspring are settled. They seek to institutionalize the HTA and its social arena as their new ancestral village square in diaspora so they may continue to feel at home here with their offspring if and when they begin to circulate back and forth between the United States and Nigeria.

Through the platform and the socio-cultural arena of the HTA, members are bringing the village to themselves and their offspring in their new environments. Gathered under the auspices of the HTA, they view each other like kin and see the celebration of life cycle events as opportunities to publicly identify as a village group. By identifying and acting as a village

through membership in the HTA, they create a socio-cultural arena within which members collectively gather to practice their identity and to celebrate and share life events.

### **Re-villaging and Gender**

In most sending communities, men typically dominate the public or political sphere and typically hold higher public status in their sending communities than women (Goldring 2001; Guarnizo, Portes, Haller 2003). While men in receiving communities experience downward mobility through loss of status as they adapt and seek employment, women experience upward mobility as they improve their education and economic circumstances through employment outside the home (Goldring 2001; Guarnizo, Portes, Haller 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994 Jones-Correa 1998). The men seeking to reassert themselves and reacquire status turn to the one place (the HTA i.e.) where prevailing ideologies prop them up and imbue them with status (Jones-Correa 1998).

Coming together as an obodo community in their new environments under the auspices of the HTA, the traditional notion of Igbo village civic membership is derived from those rules that regulate membership in the village general assembly or decision making body, (amala), in the ancestral hometown. These traditional rules exclude women from equal participation in village civic and political affairs but give women control over those issues that pertain only to the lives of women but even then women control those issues under the supervision of men. If the mission of the HTA is to maintain 'culture' and associated traditions – traditions which include gender ideologies that promote male dominance over women, the HTA finds itself caught between maintaining tradition and practicing notions of gender equality found in mainstream American thought and practices. In these contemporary times, in their new communities, while the traditional notion of membership poses a dilemma to some hometown members who are looking to include both male and female citizens in the affairs of the HTA, to



others it is seen as the norm leading to tensions between the old and new; tensions between Igbo village traditions and mainstream Euro-American notions of equality and full participation by adult citizens in the public sphere regardless of sex.

The tensions between tradition and contemporary mainstream American view of who may participate and occupy the socio-civic arena are highlighted by the contradiction between the Ndi Umunwoke constitution and what they actually practice. Their constitution states that all adult citizens of Ndi Umunwoke may fully and equally participate in the affairs of the HTA. In practice, only adult males fully participate and attend the meetings of the HTA. Women are allowed to participate as associate members. Associate membership derived through ties or being ‘associated’ as wife or daughter to a male member who may represent and speak on behalf of his women excludes and silences women within the socio-cultural arena of the Ndi Umunwoke HTA. While the exclusion of women may take its origins from village assembly traditions, the framing of women as quarrelsome continues to structure and discipline the terms of female participation. When some women challenge their exclusion and framing as quarrelsome, their behavior is viewed as disorderly conduct thus corroborating the framing of women as quarrelsome. Some women in order to disprove the ‘frame’ or that their gender is not prone to disorderly conduct, do not challenge; they act ‘the good wife’ and accept the status quo so as not to cause disorder.

At most of the local chapters of Ndi Umunwoke, female membership in the HTA is by virtue of the female’s association or marital ties to a male member and any benefits that may accrue to women as associate members are lost when the woman’s association or tie to the active male member ends either through divorce or at the death of the male member. Associate membership silences and alienates women from the socio-civic arena of the HTA and limits their

cultural participation and exposure to democratizing practices that may influence their roles in other aspects of the public sphere in their new environments. However, the women are not passive recipients of this form of discrimination. Most belong to more receptive groups such as ethnic, religious, or professional associations where they actively network with others and are able to hold leadership positions. For Ndi Umuwoke, though their constitution clearly states membership is open to all adult citizens, the HTA continues to remain a ‘bastion of male dominance’ and an arena where prevailing gender ideologies are maintained as such women are relegated to domestic roles such as cooking or cultural dance performances for fundraisers. The practice of restricting membership also means that offspring are excluded from being involved in the HTA except on those few and special occasions such as yearly picnics or Christmas parties when women and children are invited to attend. With this approach, women and children may be more inclined to seek and form affiliations with other groups and by so doing have lesser interest in the HTA.

On the other hand, even though Ndi Umuigbo HTA has modified traditions to suit life in their new communities, by recognizing women as full citizens that may actively participate in ‘meeting’, ‘kola nut’ tensions between the old and contemporary definitions of citizenship continue to exist. The traditions governing the presentation and breaking of the kola nut limits the extent to which women may actively participate in the socio-civic arena of the HTA. So, while one HTA recognizes women as silent members who may participate through representation by their husbands or other male relatives, the other HTA having deviated from this tradition allows women to participate in the association. However, their level of participation is limited by kola nut traditions. As much as HTA members want to maintain their cultural heritage, some see the need to do so pragmatically so that culture or traditions do not

impede or restrict membership or contradict well accepted American notions of equality between the sexes; HTA constitutions are written and filed under American law. With the Ndi Umuigbo HTA, citizenship and socio-civic participation in the village assembly typically restricted only to men is modified to accommodate female membership. This modification has its limits or the kola ceiling for women, this limitation is being contested by both male and female members with some agreeing that 'culture' should not limit the role of women in the HTA. The traditional realm of the HTA in the United States though viewed as a ceremonial sphere comprises hegemonic gender ideologies that may structure actions, expectations and performances within and outside the HTA arena, and this could further perpetuate gender stratification in the personal and public lives of immigrants. Additionally, it has to be noted that with the current interest in viewing HTA as agents of development and good partners for non-governmental organizations in projects to bring progress and change to home communities, the tradition that excludes women from active participation and leadership in HTAs may mean the needs and voices of a majority of the female population are being muted and overlooked as the part to progress is charted.

### **Insecurity and Re-villaging in a 'Secure' Community**

Security or its lack in the ancestral homeland is a recurring theme at hometown meetings with the consensus being kidnappings and armed robberies targeted at return migrants make it less attractive to visit home especially with one's family. Some members prefer to undertake the trip by themselves to limit the number of family members exposed to crime. Others described hiring private armed security to guard their homes when they visited with their families and some have utilized the home community vigilante groups that provide security services. While most agree that the hometown has become increasingly unsafe to risk taking one's entire family back home for a visit, a few are of the opinion that the best option is to visit and arm oneself for

protection against kidnappers and armed robbers. Regardless of where the opinion falls on how best to protect one's self when visiting, members are bringing the village here to their offspring in diaspora through the institution of the HTA. HTA members seek a secure environment for themselves and their offspring and to the extent the sending community is becoming less secure (physically and economically), Igbo HTA members who only view one locale as home (i.e. the ancestral hometown) seek to develop or reproduce the ancestral hometown in their new, and relatively safe and secure communities.

While most HTA members imagine return migration as a definite or as a 'maybe' the question that remains unanswered is whether their offspring will view return migration as a 'definite', a 'maybe' or a 'never'? Not sure of what the future holds with regards to return migration especially as it pertains to their offspring and afraid of 'losing the battle here' in the sense offspring may begin to view their traditional identity, practices and heritage as unfamiliar, and not a part of their mainstream American lives, HTA members strive to reproduce the ancestral hometown in diaspora through the institution of the HTA. By institutionalizing the HTA and its social space as the new village square in diaspora where kin may frequently gather to practice their identity and traditions safely and without the hardships and risks associated with international travel, they rebuild obodo community making their cultural identity and heritage familiar aspects of mainstream American life both for their offspring and other groups that comprise the American landscape. They do this so their offspring who may now see their new communities as their primary home may have a form, though a modified form, of their ancestral villages in their new communities to enable them to continue to practice and carry on their identity and cultural heritage. While they adapt to life in their new communities, they

institutionalize the HTA as a way to maintain their cultural heritage and to carve out a space, both privately and publicly, for themselves and their offspring in their new communities.

### **Strategic Socio-Cultural Assimilation**

An underlying premise of the characteristics affecting assimilation based on the “canonical” view (Alba and Nee 1997 cf Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003) is that the world is divided into separate and defined nations and “migrants move from Country A to B and either settle for good (i.e. become ‘immigrants’) or move back home after reaching their economic objectives (i.e. become ‘sojourners’)” (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003: 1215). ‘Immigrants’ are then assimilated into the receiving society’s “socio cultural and economic system” and by so doing shed their own culture (Warner and Srole 1945; Gordon 1964; Alba 1985 cf Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003). The outcome is that longer settled immigrants become fully assimilated and ‘disengaged’ from the home country and though the role of education remains ambiguous, some theorize education facilitates assimilation while others disagree. (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003: 1216). This study found the studied groups made up of highly educated transmigrants are practicing strategic socio-cultural assimilation; socio-cultural assimilation on their own terms. According to Glick Schiller, Basch et al, transmigrants are not ‘uprooted’ and ‘disengaged’ from their home or sending communities. Transmigrants are firmly established in the places where they have settled yet maintain strong and multiple ties to their sending communities. Transmigrants are not sojourners in the sense that they have settled down in their new communities and are involved in its economic, political and social institutions. Though settled down, they remain engaged with their sending communities and may also continue to partake in its various religious, political and other institutions. Their life activities straddle two or more communities called ‘home’ and transmigrants are ‘simultaneously embedded’ in these communities (1995).

Forming and institutionalizing HTAs as technologies of re-villaging and publicly practicing their identities and cultural heritage, members of the studied HTAs are not only able to manipulate their level of socio-cultural assimilation into their new environments but are also taking steps to ensure their village identity and cultural practices are recognized and normalized within mainstream American purview. They are not ‘shedding’ their own cultures because HTAs are flourishing as these transmigrants seek to pragmatically maintain and carry on forms of their cultural heritage through the strategic bricolaging of Igbo and Anglo-American practices. Though HTAs as translocated village squares may be seen as disengagement from the home country because their primary focus is on building obodo community ‘here’, such is not the case because the HTA is rooted in ancestral village identity. The rootedness of the HTA in village identity yields multiplier effects on transnationalism as members look towards the hometown in Nigeria to maintain their cultural selves as they constantly communicate with home people requesting for traditional items such as foods, spices, clothing and musical instruments so they may successfully carry out cultural activities within the social arena of the HTA in their new environments

As this study proposed, the studied hometown associations are not transnational organizations because though named after existing and thriving hometowns in Igboland, their activities are focused on developing their socio-cultural lives as a village or obodo community here and not on carrying out welfare projects in the ancestral hometown in Nigeria. The hometown associations are not the primary vehicles through which transnational life is actualized among members but instead seem to serve the purpose of enabling members to come together and to pass on their cultural identity and traditions to their offspring. These hometown associations may curtail transnational life by providing a site in the new places where the

immigrants live, which acts as a replacement for the ancestral village. As a substitute site, the social arena of the HTA acts as a space where traditions can be performed. Traditional weddings typically requiring travel to the ancestral village are now taking place in the United States as members substitute HTA members for blood relatives and carry out traditional weddings in their new communities. Wakes for deceased kin who passed on in Nigeria and may never have visited the United States are now commonplace as HTA members come together as a collective to console bereaved members and pay last respects to deceased hometowners without the pressures of having to visit home to partake in the funeral activities.

The contemporary HTA for the Igbo people has taken on a new function. It does not primarily serve the functions of a shadow state seeking to provide services the government has failed to provide to home communities (Barkan, McNulty et al 1991, Okafor and Honey 1998). Since the home community (Nigerian) government has failed to provide security or to secure their ancestral hometowns, the HTA serves to bring the home community to members in their new and relatively secure communities. HTA flourish because as other scholars noted (Agbasiere 2000; Egboh 1987; Harneit-Sievers 2006; Onwubu 1975; Uchendu 1965), the Igbo person has only one home – the ancestral home. And where access to that home seems precarious to the well being of Igbo families and their offspring, they are choosing to bring that ‘one home’ to themselves in diaspora. HTA members realizing as one member described that their chances of fully retiring and returning to Nigeria with their offspring is less likely, or as another member said ‘half a loaf is better than none’, are actively pursuing building obodo community ‘here’ so they will continue to belong and have access to their hometown community and traditions in their relatively secure American suburbs.

## **HTA Activities Yield Multiplier Effects on Individual Transnationalism**

As HTA members re-village, though their focus is on living like their people ‘here’ in their receiving communities, their activities and their efforts to practice traditions here yield a multiplier effect on individual transnational life as members use technology to keep in touch with the home community or to teach their offspring about the home community. Nigerian video-films, (Nollywood movies), are a staple in most homes as HTA members seek to bring the village into their homes through Nollywood movies. They seek out those video films shot in the rural areas or the ancestral villages in Nigeria so offspring may observe village life and traditions. Some HTAs also plan movie nights or activities where these movies are watched and discussed.

Another way the HTA has had a multiplier effect on transnational life is the HTA uniform and Aseobi economy which encompasses several continents. HTA uniforms and aseobis (the uniform outfits worn by groups at events) have become an industry of transnational proportions. For most events, aseobis are sewn and worn mostly by HTA women. At a minimum, the celebrant may request only a headtie Aseobi in which case HTA women would tie the same color headtie. Most of these headties made from silk, damask and other fabrics may be directly ordered from Nigeria, England, The Netherlands, China or India. At the other end, the celebrant may request ‘head to toe’ aseobi – headtie, blouse, wrapper or skirt all of a color specified by celebrant. The process of acquiring these garments spans several countries such as India (for the George fabric), the Netherlands and England (for Dutch wax print), China, and England (for lace) and most importantly Nigeria for all of them as well as for sewing the latest fashions. The uniform or aseobi economy means that Igbo women and men in the United States have their hands on the pulse of the latest fashions coming out of Nigeria as HTA events have



become the arena where these fashions are showcased. It is not unusual for a celebrant and her aseobi group(s) to change their traditional attires several times during celebrations.

Another multiplier yield on transnational life is that evidenced by the efforts to acquire traditional food items that are used to cook foods by those hosting HTA meetings or those celebrating life cycle events. The food items are either sent directly from Nigeria either through the mail service (USPS, DHL, FEDEX, UPS etc) or are bought from the African food stores who do brisk business supplying food items to celebrants or their caterers. Catering for HTA meetings, year-end parties and member celebrations have also become a booming business as most prefer an abundance of traditional foods at these events. While HTA members are focused on re-villaging here, their focus 'here' paradoxically yields multiplier effects on transnationalism as members continuously look to the homeland for traditions that suit life in their new communities.

### **The Kola Nut and the Electric Slide**

The HTA is the first group notified by members at the onset of life (the birth of a child) and at the end of life (when someone dies). They are also notified and expected to partake in various life cycle events that take place such as graduations, weddings etc, as members or their offspring go through life. In belonging to and participating in the social arena of the HTA, members build obodo community in diaspora. Their aim is to leave their cultural footprints in their new communities so their offspring and subsequent generations will follow these footprints as members of their HTA and continue to practice and maintain hometown identity and cultural heritage here in their receiving communities. At the HTA meetings and as these major life events are celebrated by hometown members, when Igbo culture symbolized by the kola nut meets American culture symbolized by the electric slide, is the kola nut still king? Does it still reign

supreme or does it slide sideways to accommodate the variances in life in the new communities? In some instances, as with the Ndi Umuigbo HTA, the kola nut and its traditions are sliding sideways to make room for women to partake in relocalized village or hometown affairs. In other instances as with the Ndi Umunwoke HTA, the kola nut and its traditions maintain and define citizenship and continue to exclude women from full participation in HTA affairs but it must be noted the excluded women have found other outlets for socio-cultural and civic participation such as regional or ethnic social clubs where they may fully participate. However, as it pertains to the HTA and full participation by both men and women, the kola nut still reigns supreme as it continues to limit the role women may play in ancestral hometown association affairs. Some women are contesting this gender ideology either by breaking with tradition and forming their own women's only HTA not affiliated with and not under the control of the men's main meeting. They are also contesting this by joining other non-village associations and fully applying their resources there. While their socio-civic exclusion from the HTA may have its drawbacks, the women are not sitting by passively. They are actively participating in other social and civic fields and by so doing are acquiring needed civic and leadership skills. Their involvement in other organizations is also highlighting the plethora of skills and abilities the women have that are not being harnessed by the HTA and HTAs are beginning to realize this and are taking steps to be more inclusive. By the end of this study, two additional chapters of the Ndi Umunwoke HTA had opened up active membership to women.

**Parochialism and Assimilation:** On the broader issue of HTAs promoting parochialism and not promoting a sense of Nigerian or American national identity, the survey found that more HTA members (37%) identify as Nigerians as opposed to primarily identifying with their hometown (28%) (see fig. 11, Appendix B). Those that identify either with the ancestral village or the Igbo

ethnic group, which the ancestral village falls under, the total (44 respondents) closely compares to those who identify as Nigerians (47 respondents). This may speak to a lack of strong national identity as Nigerians and an even lesser identity as Americans. Even though 108 respondents are naturalized American citizens, not one respondent (0%) identified as an American, however, 36 respondents identified as hyphenated Americans (Nigerian Americans, hometown name – American, Igbo - American).

While the local chapters of these HTAs may all not be formally registered associations, their national or apex organizations, which they fall under in the USA are typically formally registered associations. Each village or HTA has local chapters that exist under the apex organization but the different apex HTA do not operate under the umbrella of any one Nigerian national association in the United States nor are they typically affiliated with one. This holds true not just for the Igbo HTAs but also for the different HTAs for the various Nigerian ethnic groups in the United States. Though well organized in their HTAs, their HTAs exist as segments without a broader nationally identified central structure through which their voice may be deployed in the United States or Nigerian politics. While hundreds of Nigerian HTAs thrive and flourish in the USA socio-culturally, their numbers are not reflected on the political landscape of HTAs here in the USA or in Nigeria either because of their decentralized and segmentary nature.

Most HTA members may be described as average American ‘soccer or lacrosse moms or dads’ who seem to partake in mainstream middle class suburban ideals. Most are highly educated, hold professional jobs, are well versed in American politics and actively discuss and participate in politics as much as would be expected of average Americans. Viewed from the outside, they may be seen as well assimilated into the American mainstream but at a closer look, they are dictating the terms of their socio-cultural assimilation. They pragmatically pick and

choose what cultural practices and traditions to appropriate, maintain and deploy at different times or circumstances in their lives. They hold on to their ancestral identities and strive to pragmatically practice their cultural heritage in ways that may not alienate their offspring. Caught between the ideals of Anglo-American notions and their ancestral traditions, they struggle to strategically accommodate both in their new communities. Having settled into life in their new environments and given the challenges of travelling to their ancestral homes to familiarize their offspring with their ancestral identities, they are re-grouping under the auspices of the HTA to ensure continued familiarity and closeness of their offspring to their ancestral identities. They choose to do this privately as well as publicly to normalize their traditions within mainstream American purview so their offspring as well as other Americans may become familiar with their traditions as they seek to reproduce their villages in their new communities further making mainstream America more multi-cultural.

## Hometown Association Research Survey

**1. Are you male or female?**

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

**2. Are you now married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married?**

- ☐ Married  
☐ Widowed  
☐ Divorced  
☐ Separated  
☐ Never married

**3. Which category below includes your age?**

- ☐ 17 or younger  
☐ 18-20  
☐ 21-25  
☐ 26-30  
☐ 31-35  
☐ 36-40  
☐ 41-45  
☐ 46-50  
☐ 51-55  
☐ 56-60  
☐ 60-65  
☐ 66 or older

## Hometown Association Research Survey

### 4. What is your country of birth?

- ☐ Nigeria  
☐ USA  
☐ Canada  
☐ United Kingdom

Other (please specify)

### 5. What is your country or are your countries of citizenship? (please select all that apply)

- ☐ Nigeria  
☐ USA  
☐ Canada  
☐ United Kingdom

Other (please specify)

### 6. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- ☐ Less than high school degree  
☐ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)  
☐ Some college but no degree  
☐ Associate degree  
☐ Bachelor degree  
☐ Graduate degree

### 7. Country or Countries in which you attended high school? (please select all that apply)

- ☐ Nigeria  
☐ USA  
☐ Canada  
☐ United Kingdom

Other (please specify)

## Hometown Association Research Survey

**8. Country or countries of higher education (college, university - if applicable)? please select all that apply**

- ☐ Nigeria  
☐ USA  
☐ Canada  
☐ United Kingdom

Other (please specify)

**9. How many children do you have and what are their countries of birth?**

Number of children

Country of birth - child 1

Country of birth - child 2

Country of birth - child 3

Country of birth - child 4

Country of birth - child 5

Country of birth - child 6

Country of birth - child 7

Country of birth - child 8

**10. In what language do you mostly communicate with your child or children at home?**

- ☐ English  
☐ Igbo  
☐ Hausa  
☐ Yoruba

Other (please specify)

**11. What is the main purpose/function of the hometown association in your life (please type in your answer in the box below)**

## Hometown Association Research Survey

**12. Would you say your hometown association is the primary site or space for the cultural socialization (Ancestral culture that is) of your child(ren)?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**13. Does your hometown association act as a replanted village square in your new community here in the United States?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Comments

**14. What language is mostly spoken by members and families at hometown association gatherings?**

- ☐ English  
☐ Igbo  
☐ Pidgin English

Other (please specify)

**15. Do you see your hometown association as providing a social site for you to carry out traditions and/or functions (such as traditional weddings, wakes etc) that you would normally return to the hometown to carry out?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No



## Hometown Association Research Survey

**16. Would you say your membership in your hometown association keeps you and your family anchored to your ancestral hometown and ancestral identity?**

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Agree

**17. Does membership in your hometown association make you feel a closer bond to -  
(Please select all that apply)**

- ☐ Your Igbo roots
- ☐ Your Ancestral roots
- ☐ Your country - Nigeria
- ☐ Your Igbo friends
- ☐ Your American friends

Other (please specify)

**18. On a scale of 1 to 5, (with one as not important and five as extremely important), how important to you is your membership in your ancestral hometown association?**

- ☐ 1 -Not important
- ☐ 2 - Somewhat important
- ☐ 3 - Important
- ☐ 4 - Very important
- ☐ 5 - Extremely important

## Hometown Association Research Survey

**19. Which of the following would you say is the main reason you belong to your hometown association?**

- ☐ To have a social space where ancestral kin can gather to culturally socialize and share life events
- ☐ To come together with kin to raise funds for development of ancestral hometown
- ☐ To come together with ancestral kin for collective political voice in hometown affairs

Other/Comments:

**20. Would you say that in the social arena of your hometown association that your ancestral traditions and practices are sometimes modified to accommodate the variances in life in your new community?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**21. Is your hometown association the most important association you belong to?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Comments

## Hometown Association Research Survey

### 22. How do you primarily identify yourself?

- ☐ With ancestral hometown
- ☐ With Ethnic group (as an Igbo person)
- ☐ Nigerian
- ☐ American
- ☐ Nigerian American
- ☐ Ancestral hometown name - American
- ☐ Igbo American

Other (please specify)

### 23. Are you a member of any of the following (please select all that apply)

- ☐ Ancestral Hometown Association
- ☐ Religious Association
- ☐ Professional Association
- ☐ Pan-Igbo Association (men only membership)
- ☐ Pan-Igbo Association (women only membership)
- ☐ Pan-Igbo Association (men and women membership)
- ☐ Nigerian Association

Other (please specify)

### 24. Prior to migrating out of Nigeria, did you ever live in your ancestral hometown?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

## Hometown Association Research Survey

**25. If you lived in your ancestral hometown prior to migrating out of Nigeria, please specify number of years lived in ancestral hometown (e.g, 0, 2, 5, 10, 12 etc - only numbers accepted in this field). PLEASE SPECIFY 0, IF DID NOT RESIDE IN ANCESTRAL HOMETOWN BUT ONLY VISITED.**

Years of residence in  
ancestral hometown

**26. If prior to migration you did not reside in your ancestral hometown but only visited, please SELECT ALL REASONS for visits THAT APPLY**

- ☐ Birthdays
- ☐ Marriages
- ☐ Festivals
- ☐ Funerals
- ☐ Religious celebrations (Easter, Christmas etc)
- ☐ To visit family and friends
- ☐ To become familiar with ancestral hometown

Other (please specify)

**27. At what age did you migrate out of Nigeria?**

Age at migration

**28. Reason for migrating out of Nigeria**

- ☐ Higher education
- ☐ Employment
- ☐ Better quality of life (better economic prospects)
- ☐ To join family
- ☐ Asylum

Other (please specify)

## Hometown Association Research Survey

### 29. When you left Nigeria what country did you migrate to?

- ☐ USA
- ☐ Canada
- ☐ United Kingdom

Other (please specify)

### 30. Please choose all that apply below

- ☐ Own home in ancestral hometown
- ☐ Own home elsewhere in Nigeria
- ☐ Plan to build home in ancestral hometown
- ☐ Plan to build home elsewhere in Nigeria
- ☐ Do not own home in Nigeria
- ☐ Do not plan to build a home in Nigeria

Other (please specify)

### 31. How long have you lived in the United States?

Number of Years

### 32. How many times have you visited your ancestral hometown since migrating to the United States?

Total number of visits to ancestral hometown since arrival in USA

## Hometown Association Research Survey

**33. If you have visited your ancestral hometown since migrating to the United States, PLEASE SELECT ALL REASONS for visits THAT APPLY**

- ☐ Weddings
- ☐ Funerals
- ☐ Birthdays
- ☐ Festivals
- ☐ Religious celebrations (Christmas, Easter etc)
- ☐ To visit family members and friends
- ☐ To familiarize children with their ancestral village
- ☐ To implement project funded by your hometown association

Other (please specify)

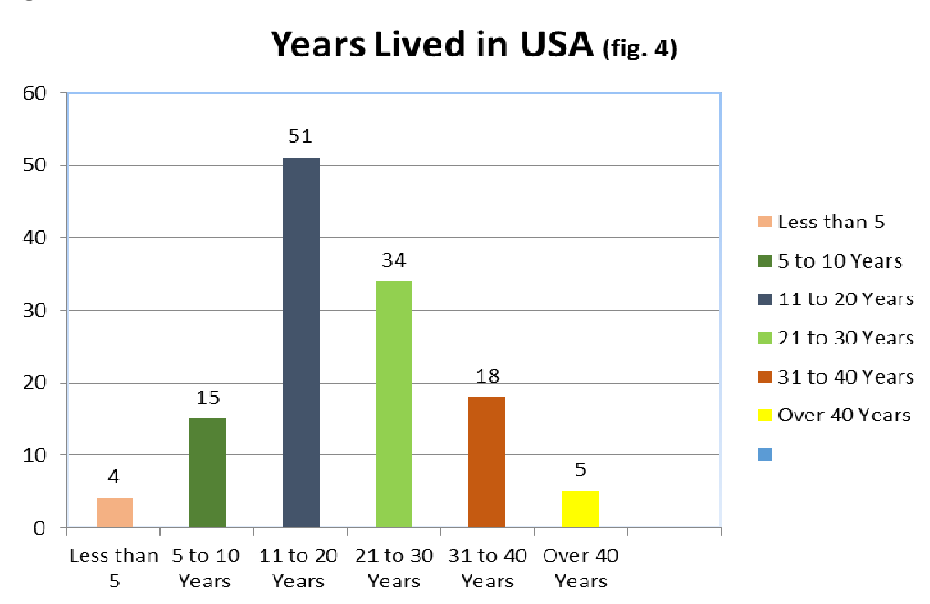
**34. Possibility of return migration to Nigeria**

- ☐ Definitely
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Never

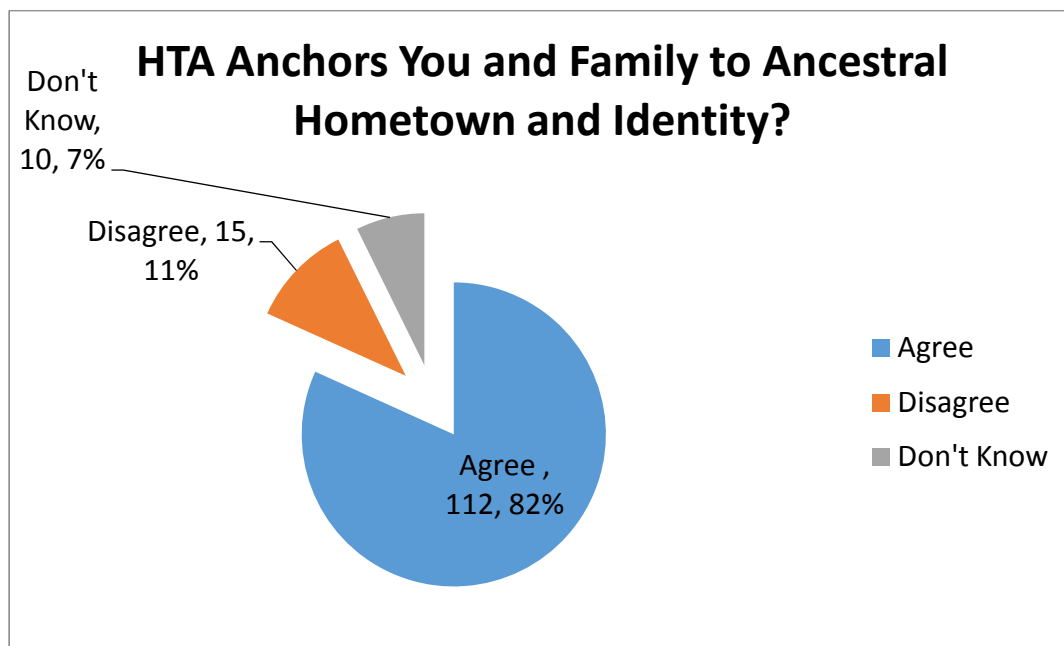
Other (please specify)

## APPENDIX B: FIGURES

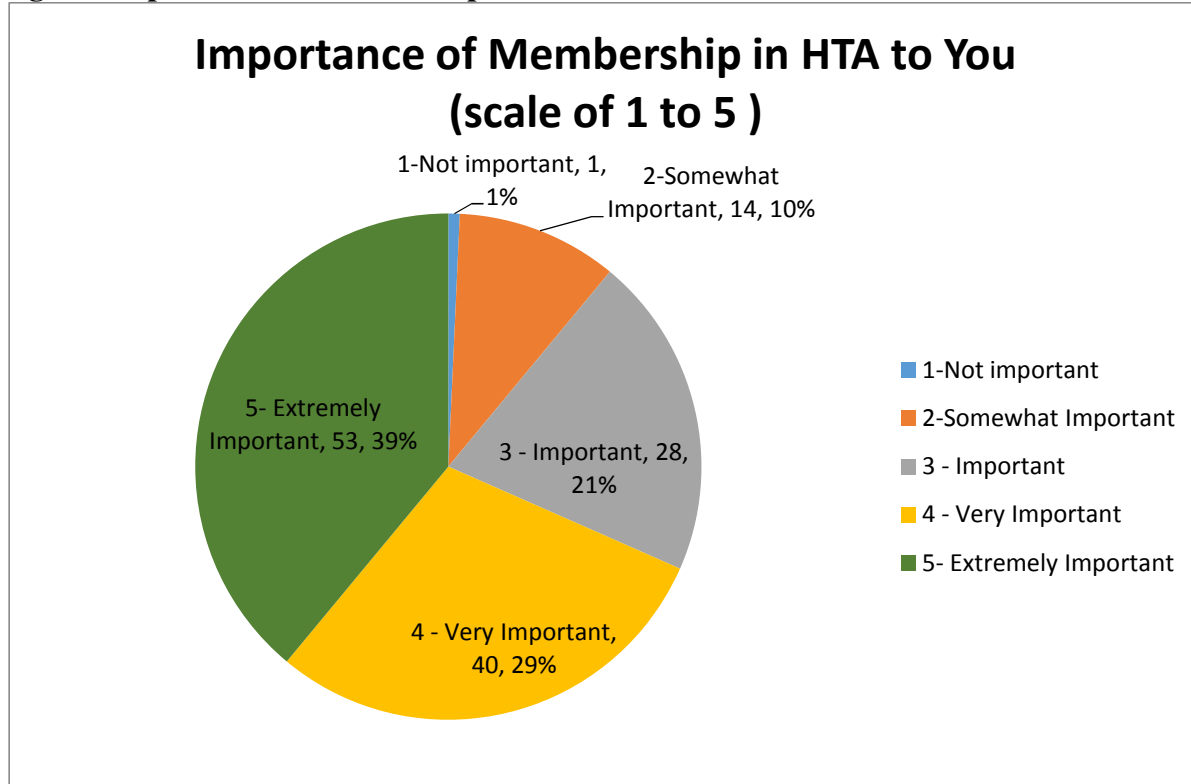
**Fig. 4 : Years Lived in the United States**



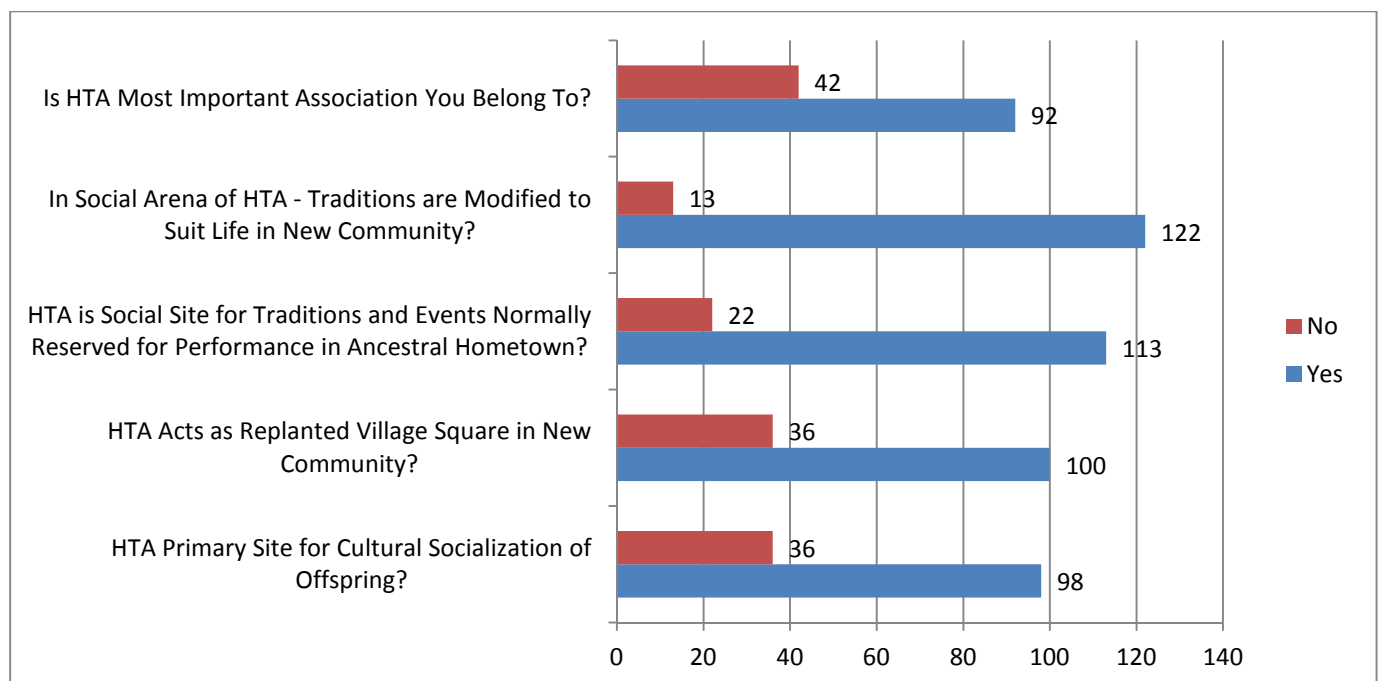
**Fig.5: HTA Acts as an Anchor**



**fig. 6 – Importance of Membership in HTA**



**(Fig. 7) Yes or No Answers to Questions about Membership and the HTA:**





(Fig. 8): Main Reason for Belonging to a HTA

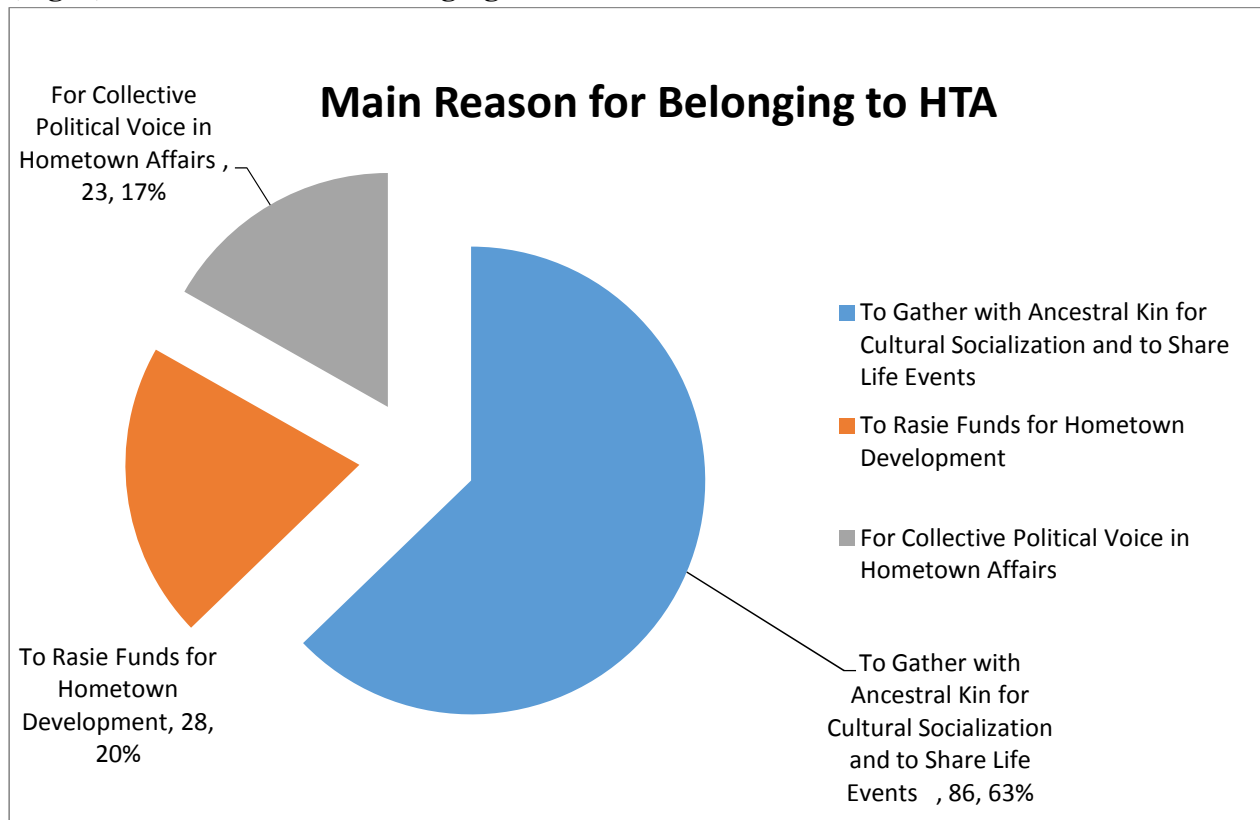
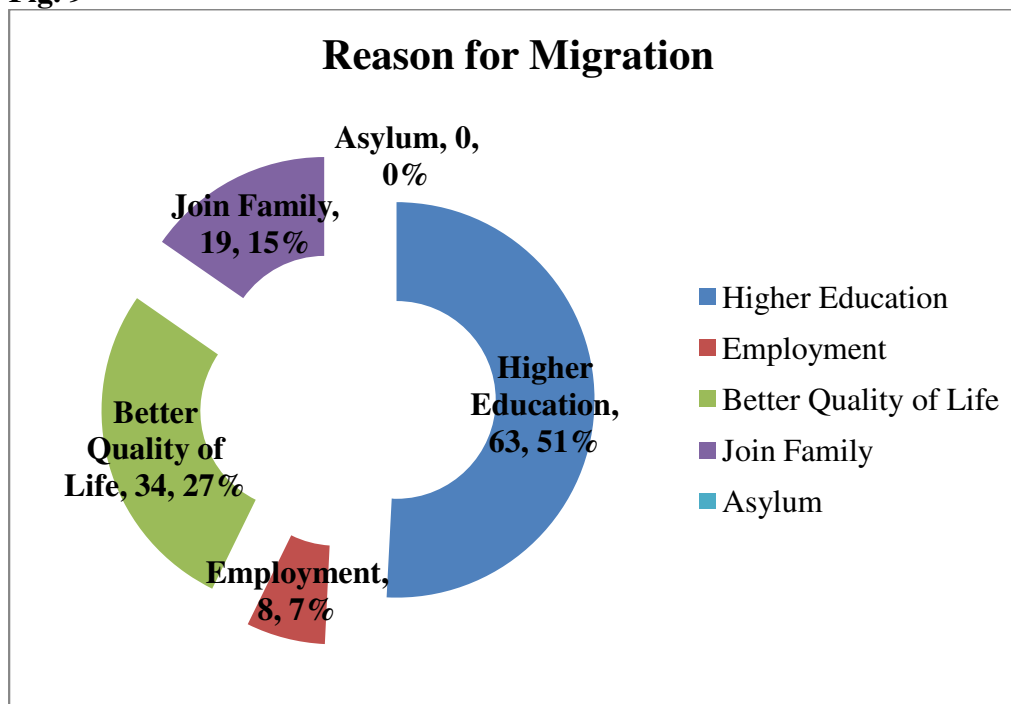
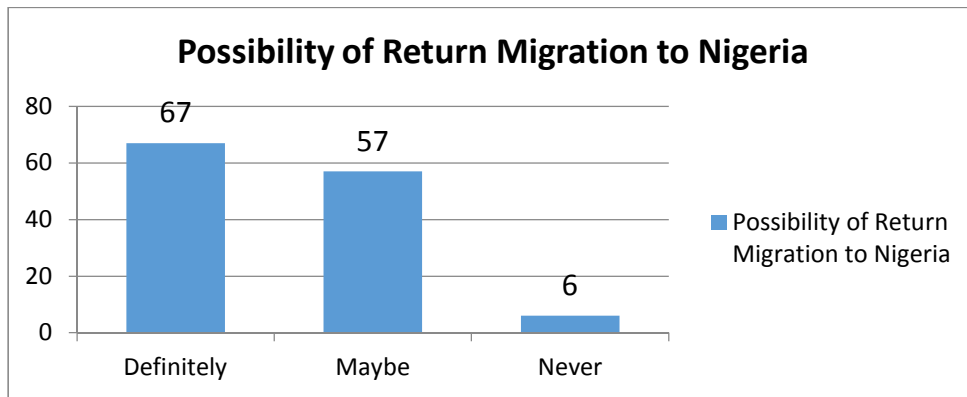


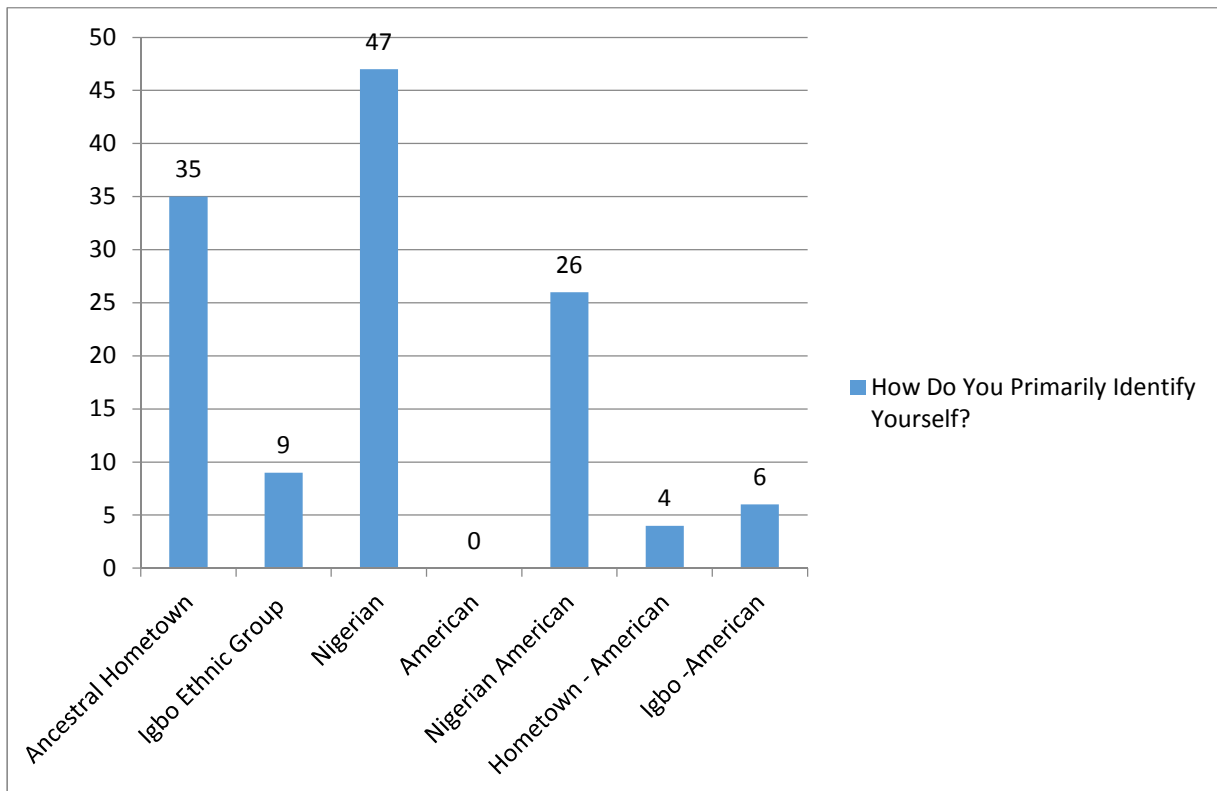
Fig. 9



**Fig. 10: Possibility of Return Migration**



**Fig. 11: Primary Identity**



## **APPENDIX C:**

### **Semi-structured Interview Questions – These questions are to be considered leading questions to generate conversations**

What is your age range (20-30) (31-40)(41-50)(51-60)(61-70)(71-80)(80+)

Highest level of education completed (High School Diploma, University Degree)

How long have you lived in the United States?

Are you a member of your hometown association?

When did you join your hometown association?

Were you a founding member?

- If so, what led to the formation of the hometown association?
- What was your vision of the functions and roles of the hometown association?
- Do you see the hometown association as providing the site (in diaspora) for those functions that one would typically return to the hometown for?

What are your reason(s) for membership in your hometown association?

Would you consider yourself an active member of your hometown association?

What does active membership in hometown association mean to you?

How many meetings does your hometown association hold each year?

How often do you attend meetings? On the average how many times a year do you attend meetings?

What types of activities or events take place within the social space provided through membership in your hometown association?

- Which of these do you consider important?

What purposes do you see the hometown association serving in your life?

Do you attend meetings more or member celebration of life marking events more?

- Would you say members typically invite all members of the hometown association to life marking celebrations?
  - Are members invited individually or is a blanket invitation issued to the association?
  - Describe the role of the hometown association and its members at life marking events.

Have you celebrated life marking events, such as child naming ceremonies, birthdays, graduations, weddings, etc, for yourself or your children here in the United States?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, what 2 groups of people played most important roles at the celebrations?

(Please check only the top 2 most important)

\_\_\_\_\_ Hometown Association Members

\_\_\_\_\_ Religious Association Members

\_\_\_\_\_ Friends and Family

\_\_\_\_\_ Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

How many life cycle events have you celebrated in a formal way here in the United States?

Would you say these are typically events that one would try to return to the hometown to celebrate?

If so, what factors led to the decision to celebrate the event here?

What (if any) was role of hometown association and its members in celebration?

Do you plan to celebrate other events?

If so, do you see the hometown association playing a role?

Do you know of anyone that has celebrated an Igbo traditional wedding here in the U.S?

If so, what was the role of your hometown association in that celebration?

Do you think it appropriate to now celebrate traditional life marking events here in the U.S. instead of making the trip back to the ancestral hometown for such celebrations?

Would it be possible to celebrate these events typically reserved for celebration in the ancestral hometown without the social space or forum provided by the hometown association?

If not for hometown associations, would it be possible to celebrate these traditional events here in the U.S.?

Does the hometown association serve as an important forum for the celebration of life marking events? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

What does membership in your hometown association mean to you?

How are your children involved in the activities, events, and celebrations conducted in the social space of the hometown association?

In what ways do you involve your children in activities of the hometown association?

How do you see the hometown association fitting into the lives of your children?

Is hometown development a major function of the hometown association?

How much of the time and resources of the association have been devoted to home community development projects since its inception?

What types of projects have been carried out? Could you describe the project process?

Why do you think your hometown association exists and thrives?

When you think of significance of hometown association to you, what key words come to mind?

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