

OMENUKO, OR LESSONS ON SOJOURNING FOR THE IGBO

ADA UZOAMAKA AZODO

Indiana University Northwest

Abstract

Sojourning in foreign land implies the inevitable return of the traveler, physically to the home of origin and spiritually after all earthly wayfaring to an eternal home. This paper recalls the penchant for global travel of Ndi Igbo, eternal sojourners, 'wandering Jews' in Nigerian parlance, the effect of such mobility and exploration on their destiny, and consequently the imperative of investing in and developing the homeland in anticipation of eventual return. Uche Ohia provides us with a theoretical framework in a paper titled, "Omenuko and the Igbo Conundrum," where he asks rhetorically and referencing Pita Nwana's 1921 literary exegesis, Omenuko, the first published novel in Igbo language: "To which homeland will the Igbo return even when age-old Igbo virtues and values have been desecrated and the language and culture that form the fulcrum of the Igbo essence have been moribund? This is the conundrum." Ohia's essay further provokes other realistic questions. First, how do mobility and movement shape and fulfil the traveler's life and story? Second, what is the role of travel as an escape from economic adversity and/or social sanctions? Third, what lessons does the variety of experiences gained provide the traveler, from the personal to the political, and from the physical to the spiritual? Fourth, where indeed is the homeland? Fifth, has the natural propensity of Ndi Igbo for world travel and diaspora creation along the way harmed or promoted their cause? These burning issues and concerns about 'the Igbo condition' will be addressed in this rereading of Pita Nwana's eponymous novel, Omenuko [He-who-provides-in-times-of-penury].

INTRODUCTION

Through mobility and movement, travelers gain wisdom and useable experiences in foreign land when they leave their home turf. This paper will examine travel as metaphor of exile and difference, even as it suggests how to understand and obtain knowledge of self, community, and nation. Travel opens up the mind and entire peoples come closer together for a fairer, more just and more moral world for all humanity. Increasingly, travel writing and travel theory are gaining interest, due to their link to the genre of autobiography, which makes it possible for travelers to recount their experiences. Scholars then study and theorize these impulses and issues such as colonization, nationalism, diaspora, identity and so on and so forth. Indeed, Edward Saïd's *Orientalism*, a monumental theoretical

work on the legacy of colonization and its impact on the ex-colonized and the ex-colonialists, examines inequality in the global marketplace,¹ not to mention the fluidity of blurred boundaries of the West as heaven and the rest of the planet as hell.² Pita Nwana's *Omenuko*, however, this first Igbo novel in the Igbo language, problematizes postcolonial practices of past western colonialists in ex-colonial spaces, and the assimilated ex-colonies in settlement in alien cultures in the metropolis of former colonialists' home countries.³ In this eponymous novel, the protagonist Omenuko journeys away from his native land, but later returns after having learned from his varied experiences along the way that the original home remains a primordial home, the last salutary post. Given that Omenuko's travels occur at the confluence of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, before full colonization of the African continent, as stated by Pita Nwana, this essay interrogates the 'pastcolonial' (the neologism is Smethurst's).⁴ Nonetheless, travel writing speaks about our world today, in this instance the protagonist's transformation from a ruthless, opportunistic merchant to a penitent, contrite human being. From the initial Call to Adventure, through the stages of Symbolic Death, Rebirth or Renaissance, and finally to a Return Home, the novel plot comes out as a veritable rite of passage. On his return at the end of his journey, the protagonist goes the extra mile to reintegrate into his community, helping his needy neighbors and with the development of the community. Our critical approach is therefore a mixture of literary and cultural analyses in which the fictional text (readerly text) becomes a writerly text.⁵ Travel in progression, travel as an ongoing activity focused on economic and political activities and educational and spiritual lessons makes up the story line. The author, Pita Nwana, is no longer the exclusive writer, but an agent of the narrative text on the biography of Omenuko, the protagonist, and of his travels that turn into theorizing on how to succeed when traveling in foreign land.

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL, *OMENUKO*

There are three possible ways to describe *Omenuko*, so that readers may better follow the analysis and interpretation of the novel: as a personal success story of a triumph after the clouds of adversity have cleared; as a stylized and well-structured novel in which the actions follow one another in a well-organized crescendo, leading to the climax and slowly falling down until the resolution of the plot, and finally as educational and instructive treatise for the youth on the imperative of never forgetting where you come from and on the moral admonition to always think of giving back.

On a personal level, Omenuko arrives at the summit of his earthly journey when he takes a title among his people, perhaps it is the Ozo title, if we go by the size of his affluence. His achievement and success as a trader, with apprentices and load carriers who looked up to him as mentor, got him to that status in his community. The families of his wards also adored him for employing and guiding their children to emulate him and become just as successful. His foibles notwithstanding, such as the crime of selling some of his wards into slavery to cut down his losses at a critical point in time, he is exonerated by his repentance and atonement when he buys back as many as he could of those he sold and offers sacrifices in his community to the living and the spirits of the ancestors for their appeasement.

Secondly, *Omenuko* tells the story of the principal character in a well-organized plot, running from the initial exposition that decenters the known world of the community by throwing the quotidian into disarray, through the next stages of the conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, and finally resolution in that order.



In the expository stage of the novel's plot, the characters are introduced and the basic situation is revealed. Omenuko leaves home, throwing off the accepted cultural and signifying mores according to which community members stay close to home, albeit without written documents. Omenuko journeys away in search of economic greener pastures, taking with him a number of his apprentices and load carriers. Conflict arises when he loses his goods to flood. He and his men are carried off a rickety bridge into the river. All his goods are lost in the tragic circumstance. To return home defeated or press on is the conflict that he and his men face. As the action rises, complication of the plot ensues. Omenuko oversteps his Hubris and transgresses morality by selling his apprentices and load bearers into slavery, in order to cut his business losses. He uses the proceeds from selling his men to purchase other goods to sell on his return home. At the climax, Omenuko grows from a small trader to a big mer-

chant, becoming politically powerful and influential, economically resourceful, and entrepreneurially a power with which to be reckoned. One ordeal follows another, though, and Omenuko faces the dilemma of continuing his residence abroad or making a decision to return home.

As the novel's plot begins to unravel, Omenuko becomes contrite, repentant and remorseful, perhaps wondering if his 'sin', his crime is not the cause of his travails. Penitent, he buys back as many as he could of the men he sold. In addition, at his return home, he declares *mea culpa*, and offers sacrifices of at-one-ment to his community men and women and the spirits of the ancestors and the living dead.⁶ Then he shares his boon, which is a stock of wisdom gained from travel. His people are overjoyed to have him back in the fold. The three-part intrinsic message of Omenuko's physical and spiritual itineraries for all travelers of all times could be that the world is secular and spiritual, therefore the world is complex and complicated, and that home will always be the best. When the world is secular and linear, actions manifest causative relationships. On the spiritual plane of salvation for life eternal, however, things take on a redemptive tone, for the observable activities below on earth are nolen mirrors of what is above in Heaven.

A third view of *Omenuko* is Uche Ohia's version,⁷ which casts the novel as a "timeless epic", a treatise on a stereotypical Igbo man, enterprising, sometimes to a fault, who must learn the lessons on sojourning in foreign land that he refuses to learn to his own detriment, and this again and again. Ohia opines:

(*Omenuko* is) the classical story of a quintessential Igbo man, Omenuko, who lived between the 19th and 20th centuries. He left home and escaped to a foreign land to escape social sanctions and economic adversity. In this new abode, he experienced various daunting challenges and suffered persecution but survived them all, prospered and rose to the apex of the leadership stratum. Eventually, he returned to a hero's welcome in his homeland. The story of Omenuko is a timeless epic. It depicts the life of the typical Igbo man - a resourceful and courageous man who takes great risks, migrates to strange lands, suffers discriminations and deprivations but bounces back at the end of every misfortune.

Ohia continues:

The message of *Omenuko* is encapsulated in a terse '*Isi ihe edere*' (introduction) which the author presents at the beginning of the book. It counsels every sojourner to remember that however long he may reside in his new abode, whatever fortune may come his way, he re-

mains an alien and must return to his homeland one day. From a spiritual perspective, the message is a universal reminder to all men of the inevitability of the eternal recall. In a secular sense, it is a message to the author's Igbo brethren - whose migratory tendencies are legendry - to think home, invest at home, and to develop the homeland because every migrant must necessarily eventually return to his homeland dead or alive.

Then, Ohia concludes:

With the benefit of hindsight, Pita Nwana was a prophet. He foresaw that Ndigbo (sic!), drifting out of the homeland in search of greener pastures, would in future need to be reminded of the old cliché: east or west, home is best. He foresaw the quest for integration by Ndigbo (sic!) which has become a solo project in Nigeria. Of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, only the Igbo have demonstrated such feisty commitment to integration. Even before the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme compelled young men and women from all nooks and crannies of Nigeria to live and work for a mandatory one year in another part of the country different from their own, Igbo families had sojourned to virtually every hamlet in Nigeria. Efforts of Ndigbo (sic!) to integrate into their places of sojourn have remained a mirage. Still, Igbo entrepreneurs continue to build industries and skyscrapers wherever they reside. No other ethnic group exhibits such optimism and tenacity.

Clearly, the narrative voice decries a life lacking in morality and spirituality, but embracing the reign of money and capital as the panacea for successful living. It states:

I have written this story concerning the life of Mr. Omenuko so that anyone reading it will be sure to learn something through it. There are both laughter and tears in the world, which will cause anyone seeking wisdom to become wise. Omenuko had had money from the time he was a young man, but when he became an adult his money was gone. Anger and sadness told him to go and die, and have rest, but peace and love told him to wait, not crying about something called death which was in the future.

The narrative voice then adds a moral lesson for all travelers, especially Igbo 'brothers' of Omenuko:

Omenuko is still alive today. He is still doing good deeds during all his long life. Any time he wants to do something, he looks for a suitable time so he can show his wisdom. Everyone will learn something about the scarcity of money these days. From the year 1929 until today, some people tied their money up with rope and hoarded it so it would not get away from them. Omenuko was one of those people. Some people cry about the scarcity of money, but I think Mr. Omenuko, any time he wanted to do anything, waited for the right time so he could show his wisdom. Now money is very scarce, it is true, but what this name Omenuko means in translation is, "One who can do things when wealth is scarce." That is the name his father gave him. On account of Omenuko having a name like this, anything he wanted to do, he was sure to do it wisely. Omenuko began to build a storied house in a year when money was scarce, so that he would live up to the name his father had given him: "One who can do things when wealth is scarce."⁸

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF OMENUKO

Five questions guide our study of the novel, *Omenuko*.

- First, how do mobility and movement shape and fulfil the traveler's life and story?
- Second, what is the role of travel as an escape from economic adversity and/or social sanctions?
- Third, what lessons does the variety of experiences gained provide the traveler, from the personal to the political, and from the physical to the spiritual?
- Fourth, where is the homeland?
- Fifth, has the natural propensity of Ndi Igbo for world travel and diaspora creation along the way harmed or promoted their cause?

First, how do mobility and movement shape and fulfil the traveler's life and story?

Every time the traveler leaves home he or she dies that much to the home left behind even as he or she gains in new experiences in the new home. The stereotypical Igbo man is the courageous one, who abandons home in pursuit of economic boon abroad, to the extent that, in Nigerian parlance, he would actually wake up from the slumber of death, if you should jingle a few coins close to his ears! Omenuko, he would not allow any obstacles to turn his hopes into impediments. His feeling of hope persists, as he (re)calculates his next move towards success, fortune and

achievement. His personal philosophy, imbibed from his master and mentor, Omemgbeoji (He-who-Acts-When-It-is-Opportune), is to press on and to endure to the end. After his emancipation, Omenuko goes on to have his own apprentices and load carriers. He sets out on foot with them, passing through many towns and villages—Umuduru, Nso Ofo, Umu Lolo, Ezi Nnachi. Unfortunately, at Ezi Nnachi he, his men and loads are swept away into the water by a flash flood on the bridge over Anyim River. All their loads are lost, but they all manage to escape unharmed. He continues on, asking his men to go back to Ezi Nnachi and await further directives from him. He does not allow them to go back to their families at Uzuakoli, the home they left behind, in order to avoid the risk of becoming a laughing stock to their people.⁹ Here, therefore, the lesson is that victory and success await those who press on diligently and assuredly at the end of the tunnel.

Second, what is the role of travel as an escape from economic adversity and/or social sanctions? Unfortunately, this overarching penchant for economic success against all odds could bring with it transgression of all morality, when care is not taken to consider the other's point of view as well. At Bende, Omenuko sells into slavery some of his load bearers, his apprentices and his half-brother, Obioha, and with the proceeds buys goods to go back home with the remaining load carriers. Back to Uzuakoli, his conscience would not allow him to exist in peace. As the saying goes, "the toad does not run in the afternoon for nothing." Tortured by his misdeeds, he transforms his penultimate younger brother into an emissary to the families of the sold men to meet with him in his house the following morning for an address from him. The lesson here is that travel could fetch you the greener pasture, but so also can it lead to cut-throat competition. The traveler must therefore be aware and check himself or herself at all times. You may run today and successfully evade social sanctions, but it may not be forever.

Third, what lessons does the variety of experiences gained provide the traveler, from the personal to the political, and from the physical to the spiritual? Experiences could be bad or good, depending on their nature or how they are used. Omenuko's crime is an offence against the Goddess of the earth, Ani, and it calls for death or at best escape into exile for at least seven years, in order to allow the needed cleansing to be done. Seven years of absence from the community is considered a life time, for in that period of time the community regenerates itself. Family members of the missing men who in their anxiety answer Omenuko's call the very night it is given rather than wait till the morning as directed are seen as "those who run to a fight do not know that fighting means death" (4). Callously, Omenuko dismisses them, asking them to return in the morning. Then, first he divulges his crime to his extended family, asking them to save

themselves from the impending doom, then to the families of the sold men.¹⁰ Full of regret and contrition, he considers a few options,¹¹ but embraces exile to Ndi Ogwugwu in Mgborogwu, the town with which Uzuakoli has reciprocity. He concludes, saying that you make the best out of a bad situation: “the broom that swept compound swept the house,” (4)¹² meaning that something that should never have been done happened and so had no remedy. Consequently, Omenuko settles down in Mgborogwu. Fortunately, he prospers, becoming powerful and influential in this new home. Unlike Okonkwo of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Omenuko does not choose the option to kill himself, but rather to take the bull by the horns and press on.¹³

Fourth, where is the homeland? It is often that the original home continues to beckon and call, no matter how long a traveler stays in the diaspora, making it difficult for many an immigrant to fully integrate. The same is true of Omenuko’s sojourn in Mgborogwu, where he rose to become the Chief spokesperson, thanks to his acute intelligence, wisdom and oratorical skills among other sterling qualities. When Chief Mgborogwu senses his end coming, he bequeaths his British warrant of leadership to Omenuko to keep until his son Obiefuna, the regent, would be old enough to inherit his throne. Meanwhile, Omenuko competently settles cases and his name spreads like wild fire in the Harmattan among the people. He is rich and a mentor to many, and has now seven wives.¹⁴ People pledge their services to Omenuko to pay off their debts. But, soon, an intrigue and a plot are hatched to dethrone the foreigner and replace him with Obiefuna, the regent and son of the soil. To avoid the conflict, Omenuko and his brothers work hard and relocate to the outskirts of the village into the evil forest of Ikpa Oyi. Omenuko works out an arrangement with the British to keep his warrant going from his new location. But, there is no doubt in his mind that this new place, which is so welcoming and comfortable for now, is steadily turning into a place fraught with problems.

Amidst all the travails, he continues to worry over the men he sold into slavery. As he put it: “the bow that shoots the small bird should be rewarded with twenty arrows” (1). He makes a pact with Igwe, his friend from Uzuakoli, to help locate the sold men, so that he could buy them back. He finds two of the men, Obioha, his half-brother, living with a Mr. Oji, and Elebeke Okoro, living with Mr. Ezuma. Oti had died the year before of stomach disease. Anisa, living with Mr. Okpara Udensi is critically ill. The slave owners demand a ransom of forty pounds for each of the three living slaves, for a total of one hundred twenty pounds. Okorafor, acting in place of his bigger brother Nwabueze bitten by a snake, pays the ransom for the slaves, emancipating them to travel to Omenuko in Ikpa Oyi. At Ikpa Oyi, Omenuko fetes them and their people, marries wives for

them, although his half-brother, treated with special attention, will have to wait until their return to Uzuakoli to get his own wives. Omenuko's longing to return home to his native land is an important message; the traveler and the sojourner will inevitably go back home, no matter his fortune and success in foreign land.

Omenuko's atonement at Uzuakoli is at once physical and spiritual. He says: "Listen now, I did a bad thing in our land against men and spirits a long time ago, because all my thoughts at that time that were not known to the people were known to the spirits. Therefore, I want to satisfy both men and spirits" (3). The physical atonement takes the form of a pact with the town chief and the villagers; food will be cooked and eaten.¹⁵ The spiritual atonement is a more complicated ritual with Iyiukwa and the spirits to absolve Omenuko's crime.¹⁶ As the Igbo say, "if the female sheep is to grow horns, the back of its head must be strong" (3). The role of Igwe the messenger as mediator between Omenuko and his people is cardinal. As the Igbo say, "when a human being has an itch, other people scratch it for him, but if a wild animal has an itch it goes and rubs its back on a tree" (25). Igwe will be paid at the end. All the cooked foods were placed on the Chief's Ofo, his wooden symbol of authority as judge and justice. Then he absolves Omenuko of his wrong doing in the presence of children and even vultures for, as he states, "the voice of man is the voice of the spirits" (7). The Chief appeases the spirits saying, "Priests of the Spirits, here are the things Omenuko brought ... These things show how sincere he is. Here are all of these things you listed" (7). Omenuko thus cleansed, the sacrifice is thrown into the bush (7). Then Omenuko is now at peace. He says to his people in Uzuakoli:

Since that time when I left my village, it is true that the places where I lived my life did not please me as they should, but now I am happier and if death should come to me now, I will not be afraid of it, because I will not feel remorse before I draw my last breath. That is all I wanted to tell you (9).

Then, Omenuko goes back to Ikpa Oyi and continues to govern his people with his warrant. Unfortunately, his advancement to the status of paramount chief earns him more jealousy and enmity from other chiefs, the court clerk and the messengers. They declare: "No, this will not happen in our land—a stranger being the head over all of us. If he is going to be the government, let him go to his own village he will not stay in our village" (1). They try to depose him. Some plan to do it with force or violence. Chief Ike, the landlord of Ikpa Oyi, charges him with nonpayment of rent, refusal to leave, and plans to evict him. Finally, despite his continued prosperity, Omenuko makes a decision to return to his native land, before

he dies in the strange land. He says to his following, "Then let us keep it in our minds that we shall surely return" (7).

The final straw that breaks the camel's back is the conspiracy by twenty-six villages to wage war against Omenuko. Proud and brave, Omenuko awaits them for a showdown, without the least inclination to make a report of the impending doom at government hill to prevent the war (1). But, then, to the District Officer who steps in to mediate the standoff, Omenuko declares: "It is better that we go home alive than go home dead" (3). Then he added "(...) truly, we shall not fail to return to our village, because if any man starts a fight, he will (...) eat the land of their ancestors and will eat it to their death" (6). Over nine days, with help from friends and family, Omenuko and brothers move back home. Seven gun salutes send him off from Ikpa Oyi, and other seven gun salutes welcome him back to Uzuakoli, Okigwi, like a big man should be, on October 10, 1918 (3). Contented, he does not ask for his warrant from the British government. Nonetheless, he continues to help the government and his people.

Fifth, indeed, does the natural propensity of Ndi-Igbo for world travel and diaspora creation along the way harm or promote their cause? Clearly, the physical and spiritual itineraries of Omenuko bring into focus issues of history and migration and sojourn and diaspora creation, which are part of the current debate on globalization.¹⁷ The expansive fields of literature and migration studies draw new attention to pan-Africanism,¹⁸ transnationalism¹⁹ and intersectionality.²⁰ Literature on migration defines how immigrants see themselves and are perceived by others, not to mention their concern with race and race relations and continued interactions and interest in their home of origin. In the past fifty years, since the 60s, many other Africans and others in the Global South²¹ have seen increasing number of persons relocate abroad, due to civil wars, lack of economic and social mobility of all sorts, political persecutions, religious discrimination, and need of educational laurels. Not the least of them are Ndi-Igbo who, like African immigrants after the Atlantic slavery, largely and voluntarily, engage in expedition as exiles or refugees. Omenuko's example shows that travel enhances one's outlook both as an individual and as a member of the human species.²² As Omenuko travels abroad and meets persecution and discrimination, he is forced to ruminate about his experiences, and like many who travel is able to see the need to maintain ties with the original home. On his return, his family prospers and he spreads his immense experience and wealth through sharing.²³ He shows up as a real "man of the people" and an activist for social justice. The fact that a number of people still do not love him does not debar him from doing what he has to do.

Clearly, today, the Igbo gain a lot of experience, wisdom and instrumental and spiritual wealth from mobility and travel. Alas! Quite often, like the protagonist of the eponymous novel, the Igbo suffer at the hands of those with whom they cohabit, due many times from their penchant to be boastful about their exploits.²⁴ Hence, *Omenuko* can be seen as a theoretical discourse for “Nidi-Igbo” particularly, and all immigrants generally, on humility in success and achievement and the need to prepare for the inevitable physical return home to the native land and at death to the home above in the bosom of Chi-Ukwu/Chukwu (God on High), home reserved only for those who have accomplished their earthly journey in true honesty, morality and respect for their fellow human beings.

- *Dr Ada Azodo teaches in African Literatures, African and African Diaspora Studies and Women's Studies in the Women's Studies Program at Indiana University Northwest. She is President, Women's Caucus of the African Literature Association of America and currently President of the Igbo Studies Association.*

NOTES

¹ In *Orientalism* (Vintage Publishers, 1994), Edward Saïd addresses inequality in the world, regionally and racially. He challenges the Western concept of East and West, Civilized and Uncivilized, Developed and Undeveloped to their advantage. From this angle of vision, *Omenuko's* journeys away from home to foreign lands would be simply business journeys, not particularly voyage to gain any kind of light from superior people to enhance his inferior situation. If anything, he goes as a business expert, who has learned well the art of retail, of buying and selling, as he calls it, from his mentor and master, Mr. Omemgbeoji. Hence, the concepts of ‘they’ and ‘us’, ‘theirs’ and ‘ours’, of the postcolonial perspective just do not apply here. Consequently, there is none of the misrepresentation of people who are not from the West in travel writing.

² *Ibid.* Web <http://renaissance.com.pk/FebBoRe2y6.htm>

³ An Igbo politician from Mbaukwu, Chief (Eze) Igwegbe Odum, furnished the story of the fictional text of the first Igbo novel, *Omenuko*, written in 1933 by Pita Nwana, a carpenter by profession. Like many internal migrants in the late nineteenth century who left their home for other corners of their tribal space, Odum, settled among the Aro people with his brothers, never returning to his homeland, Mbaukwu. He reportedly married many wives, one of whom was the sister of Ojiako Ezenne, a prominent warrant chief of Adazi-Nnukwu. The Mbadiwe family, including famed Nigerian politician Kinsley Ozumba Mbadiwe and his brother Green Mbadiwe, count among members of Odum's lineage. Until late into his life, Chief Odum's home was a popular tourist point for indigenous students and international visitors. Web. Accessed 01/21/2016. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igwegbe_Odum

⁴ This term, ‘pastcolonial’, is Smethurst's term for travelers before and after full colonization happened, be they white or non-white, from the West or elsewhere.

⁵ The concepts of ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’ texts are respectively translations from the French of Roland Barthes' neologisms, ‘lisible’ and ‘scriptable’. A readerly text has a meaning that is fixed ahead of time as in a traditional classical or realistic novel, which the reader has no other option than to receive. This kind of writing, popular in the nineteenth century, left the reader no room to become a producer of meaning. On the

contrary, in the twentieth century, we see a writerly text that leaves the reader the scope to explore, play with the text and come up with 'unauthorized' meanings, according to the fancy of the particular reader.

According to Barthes the writerly text is opposed to the readerly text, as explained in *S/Z* :

(The writerly text) is a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (5)

A certain opinion says that the readerly text is the *sine qua non*, classical, example of literature constructed under capital.

⁶ In Igbo cosmology, a person has four beings: his or her individual being, his eke as part of the community of the living, his part of the ancestors and the living dead, and finally his part of the Almighty, Chineke of Chukwu, which is his chi. Eternally, therefore, personhood in the community implies constant negotiation of these four principal beings in one person.

⁷ Uche Ohia, along with fellow visionary Dickinson Iroegbu and actress Onyeka Onwenu of Anya-Igbo Foundations are working on a film version of *Omenuko*, with the provisional title of *Omenuko-Ojemba* ('Ojemba' meaning in English 'World Traveler'), in order to contribute to the preservation of the Igbo culture, language and heritage in the world.

⁸ <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/igbo/omenuko/chap15.html> 12/4/2012

⁹ According to *Omenuko*, "If we turn back to our town without finishing the market journey we started, it will be what is called an abomination both in the eyes of our ancestors and in the eyes of God in Heaven (5).

¹⁰ Included in *Omenuko*'s entourage are the following: his three wives, one son and one daughter; his brother Okoroafor, his two wives and a son; his third brother, Nwabueze and his wife; *Omenuko*'s mother; two sisters, Nwanu and Udeola; the youngest brother, Ogbonnaya. In all, there were twenty persons in the entourage. They were received in the town of Mgborogwu, which was only too happy to grow their numbers with such eminent persons. There are a total of twenty persons in the entourage. (DELETE THIS REPETITION)

¹¹ Options considered by *Omenuko* include the following: 1. He could buy back the men he sold into slavery, but the slave owner, Mr. Oji, would not allow him to do that. 2. He could commit suicide by blowing himself up, along with his parents, and the family of the missing men, but his brothers would not hear of that. 3. He could go into exile somewhere else other than Uzuakoli, but his family felt thoroughly ashamed of the prospect. 4. He could go into exile to Mgborogwu with which Uzuakoli has reciprocity. It is this fourth and the most laudable option that he exercised.

¹² *Omenuko* uses many of these proverbs that are typical of the Igbo language and culture. I have counted up to eleven of them set down here with a transliteration of their meanings in the English language as follows:

- Awọ anaghi agba ọsọ ehie na nkiti (the toad leaves its abode (runs) in the afternoon for good reason).

- Oji ọsọ agbakwu ọgu amaghi na ọgu bu ọnwu (he who craves war (runs towards it) does not realize that war is about killing and dying).
- Uka akpara akpa eji isi ekweya (Further discussion on a subject already agreed upon is done with the nodding of the head).
- Egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibeya ebene nku kwaa ya (May the eagle perch and may the kite perch, but if one does not allow the other to perch may its wings break).
- Ukwu anaghi eji onye nọ n'ulo ya eche madu (One does not get tired waiting for a guest, when one is in one's home).
- Onye nwe ozu n'ebu ya n'isi (He who owns the corpse carries it on his head).
- Onye a na agbara ama ya n'añuri, onye e bolu ori o kwelugo? (While you rejoice at the deposition by an accuser, beware that the accused may not have pleaded guilty).
- Eme nwata ka emere ibe ya obi adi ya nma (mete equal treatment to a child as to his comrades and every one will be happy).
- Kama m ga-erijuo afọ dachie uzọ ka m kwuru agu (Rather remain hungry than eat to my fill and perish).
- Nwata ruru ogo ima akwa ma n'añu ara nne ya, gini ka anyi ga-eme ya? (What can we do with a child old enough to cover himself up with loin cloth, but nonetheless is tethered to his mother's breast?)
- Oko kowa madu o gakwuru ibe ya, ma oko kowa anumanu, o gaa n'akuku osisi (When a human being has an itch, he goes to another human being to scratch it for him, but an animal goes to the trunk of a tree).

¹³ There appears to be a close intertextuality between Chinua Achebe and Pita Nwana's novels. The storyline of the protagonist of Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* (1933), *Omenuko*, and that of Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo in *Things Fall Part* (1958) shows the protagonist build himself up from a beginning in poverty through servitude to a mentor and on to remarkable business astuteness and wealth, not to mention self-esteem. Then, he loses everything, due to misfortune. But, whereas Okonkwo kills himself as a "quintessential Igbo man," as Ohia identifies him, yet his suicide could be seen as elevating, an ultimate protest and defiance against the conquering British presence in Igboland in the late Nineteenth Century and beginning of the Twentieth Century, *Omenuko* chooses to return to his people, make atonement for his shortcomings or wrongdoings, and reintegrate into his community as a leader, an adviser and an activist.

¹⁴ At this time, the assumption is that *Omenuko* also helped his brothers to acquire more wives as well, a sign of affluence of the family. Okorafor now has four wives; Nwabueze has two wives, and Ogbonnaya who earlier was unmarried now has one wife.

¹⁵ *Omenuko* presents the Chief and his fellow villagers with a cow, eight chicken eggs, one cock, eight large yams, and eight small yams.

¹⁶ The provisions for the ritual atonement include the following: one female sheep, one hen, one cock, eight eggs, one duck egg, one basket of yams, one basket of cocoyam, one pod of kolanut, one pod of kolanut pepper, four kolanut, eighty pieces of native chalk (nzu), one pot of wine that has not touched the ground, one pot of raffia palm wine, and one pot of oil palm wine (3).

¹⁷ Globalization implies not only the movement of capital, but also populations and ideas. New push and pull factors of the new technological age differ from those of

earlier times. And Africans are not far removed from other nationalities that migrate today, as noted by Harley, Du-Hart and Sassen in 2007.

¹⁸ Recent or contemporary pan-Africanism, as opposed to the earlier political brand of the early twentieth century, sees all immigrants of black origin yoked together in a way that forces them to assume a common identity in the diaspora in spite of themselves, for survival. When they refuse to assimilate, if that is even possible for them, they begin to assimilate segmentally (that is not entirely) or retreat into their narrow immigrant enclave, or identify with oppositional groups, as has noted a number of scholars in the academic community.

¹⁹ Transnationalism implies commitment to the development of civic society in the home space of the diaspora and engagement in the economic development and otherwise of the home of origin.

²⁰ Intersectionality includes issues of class, age, sex, gender, race, etc. and how all these and more affect definitions of persons and groups.

²¹ Global South here refers to peoples of the Third World, of Africa, the Caribbean and Asia and beyond, linked together by inferior economy, political instability and poverty, as compared to the more affluent Global North that includes the West, Japan and China. A number of United States' laws have made it possible for new migrants to enter the country more easily than before. There is the Asylum permit for political victims, religious victims fleeing persecution, and social victims of, for example, excision, commonly termed 'genital mutilation'. In 1965, the US government instituted the Hart-Cellar Act, which effectively promoted transnationalism, or segmented assimilation, as opposed to assimilation, which meant that persons can relatively successfully live in two or more worlds. In 1982, the Immigration and Reform Act allowed employers to document their legal and illegal employees and to regularize those that needed to be, so long as they had resided in the country for up to two consecutive years without break. Then in 1990, the Diversity Program of the Immigration Act used the lottery as a means of bringing in underrepresented sections of the globe into America.

²² Paul Stoller has noted in his article, "West Africans: Trading Places in New York," in *New Immigrants in New York*, edited by Nancy Foner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), that West Africans excel in sending remittances home for the uplift of families at home.

²³ In "Transnational Social Relations and the Politics of National Identity: An Eastern Caribbean Case Study", Linda Basch identified transnational practices of immigrants as a "multi-stranded social relations along family, economic and political lines that link together migrants' societies of origin and settlement. In this way, migrants are said to build transnational social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders (Nancy Foner, ed., *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. 9).

²⁴ Chinua Achebe has noted this sad aspect of all achievers in his personal story of Biafra, *There Was a Country*.

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