

**THE *AKWALI* RITE OF PASSAGE IN NANDO, ANAMBRA STATE AND  
CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY**

**BY**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE  
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## CERTIFICATION

I, Obigwe, Cordelia Uju with registration number, 2012077005f, hereby certify that this dissertation is original and has been written by me. It is a record of my research and has not been submitted before in part or full for any Diploma or degree of this University or any other institution or any previous publication.

.....  
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Date .....

**APPROVAL PAGE**

We ratify that this dissertation carried out under our supervision, has been examined and found to have met the regulation of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. We therefore approve the work for the award of PhD Degree in Religion and Human Relations.(African Traditional Religion)

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my late father Sir Christopher Madubuonu. May your gentle soul rest in peace.

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## Abstract

The Akwali rite of passage, in pre-colonial times, played a central role in the socialization of girls, and the celebration of virginity, fertility and womanhood in Nando. Akwali, just like other traditional practices, collided with Christianity and colonialism when they were introduced in Igboland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively, as well as the forces of urbanization and globalization. This study took up this challenge by examining the Akwali rite of passage as practised in Nando community with the view of finding out the challenges facing Akwali rite and find ways of rediscovering its importance for the Nando girl child in the twenty first century. The objective of this study was to analyze puberty rite of passage among the people of Nando community in order to assess how it was done before the challenges and suggest ways this rite of passage can be rediscovered and better positioned in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Specifically, the study sought to: determine the nature of Akwali rite of passage, ascertain how Akwali rite of passage was performed before the advent of Christianity in Nando community, assess the significance of Akwali rite of passage, evaluate the impact of Christianity, colonization, globalization and urbanization on Akwali rite of passage and propose ways of reviving the Akwali rite of passage to meet modern challenges. Data for the study were collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data were derived from in-depth oral interviews. The secondary sources of data used for the study were from books, journals, unpublished dissertations and other materials and documents from the internet. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and area culture approach and historical analysis. This study adopted the term puberty rites because its focus is on young girls. This study used structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism and cultural relativism as useful in the explanation of the role of puberty rites of passage in Nando community. Akwali rite, just as other rites of passage contributed to the stability and holistic development of an individual which will aid in adapting well in the society values and norms of the whole society. It was discovered that Akwali rite of passage provided the means through which young girls were socialized, and prepared for adulthood and marriage. In this sense, therefore, this study will enable the public to see the overall functionality of *Akwali* rite of passage and how it engenders social integration, cohesion, and solidarity. It is against this backdrop that the study made the case to find those challenges and for a rediscovery of Akwali festival to save it from total extinction.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The life of man is a developmental process which involves stages and transitions. The life changes man encounters call for a high degree of social, psychological and religious adjustment; hence cultures all over the world have evolved ceremonies and rites through which they are marked. These ceremonies are referred to as rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1960). Most essentially, rites of passage are a part of human nature, honouring natural developmental stages, revitalizing and restoring the human experience, and connecting the individual to himself or herself to others and to the larger society of which they are a part (Grimes, 2000 and Akintan, 2013). Although rites of passage are universally practised, there are many stages associated with the cycle of life, viz birth, puberty, marriage, and death (Ray, 1976). In most traditional societies, there are three main inevitable stages of the life cycle around which rites of passage revolve, namely birth and childhood, puberty and adulthood, marriage and procreation, and finally death and ancestorship (Uchegbue, 2010). Sarpong (1974) affirms that the rites of passage held in high esteem in African Traditional Religion follows a certain order, namely

- (1) The time a person enters the world through birth, (Birth)
- (2) When he comes of age and enters the world of adults, (Adulthood)
- (3) When through death, he departs from this world and enters the world of his forebears.  
(Death)

Among the different rites of passage observed, perhaps none holds a greater importance than that which deals with coming of age, commonly referred to as “puberty rites” (Metuh, 1987). Puberty rites mark the key moments in the rhythm of individual life, which are also the rhythm of the community of which the individual is part. In marking the change in status of an individual

from childhood to adulthood, puberty rites of passage are predicated on the fact that the individuals involved have reached a point where they can transit into a sexual and more responsible world (Munthali & Zulu, 2003). For example, when a girl first experiences menstruation, it is believed that she is capable of getting pregnant and having children in addition to the responsibilities of motherhood. This accounts for the elements of education and socialization as well as celebration and festivals associated with puberty rites because they indicate and guarantee the continuance of the family in particular and the community in general.

Cultures around the world have evolved rites and rituals that celebrate this dramatic change in the lives of their young members. In ancient Egypt, for instance, puberty or “coming of age” rites of passages involving boys and girls were practised and the rites for the latter involved the gods of fertility (Lichtheim(1975), Janssen and Janssen (1990), Gay(1993) and Meskel, (2003). Among the ancient Japanese, the ceremonies marking puberty rites of passage date back to the Nara period (710 – 794 AD) and involved the Genpuku rite (for boys) and the Mogi rite (for the girls). For the Apache (native Americans), the Sunrise ceremony or Na’ii’ees was the puberty rite of passage for young girls which imbued them with the physical and spiritual power of Esdzanadehe, and enabled them to embrace their role as women( Annerino, 1999).

In African traditional societies, premium was also placed on puberty rites. According to Metuh (1987),

In some societies especially in the West Coasts of Africa – in West Africa and parts of the Cameroons, Gabon and the Congo, ‘puberty rites’ correspond and are integrated with initiation into ‘secret societies’. Even the term ‘secret society’ used in this connection is hardly adequate because entrance into these societies is open to all adult free born, male and female as the case may be. So that its secrets are

secret only to the uninitiated. Entrance is on a voluntary basis, but generally social pressure forces all who qualify to. (p.194).

In Ghana, elaborate puberty rites of passage are performed for the female children among the Akans, especially in the eastern and Ashanti regions where they are referred to as “bragoro” and “dipo” respectively (Quan-Baffour, 2009). The Massai are well known for the Massai lion hunt which serves as puberty rites for boys in Kenya and Tanzania. Among the Kho of Zutshwa (Botswana), there were also elaborate puberty rites for Kho girls (Nklekisana, 2017). Bemba girls also underwent Chisungu rites in Northern Rhodesia as they grew into womanhood (Richards,1982). The Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria are not an exception. Among the Igbo, there are festivals celebrating the coming of age of young boys and girls. The Edda people celebrate the “ipu ogo” puberty rite for boys. Iwa akwa is a very popular puberty rite of passage among the Obowo, Ehime Mbano people and their neighbours (Mbah ,1993 and Oguebue,2013).

For the people of Nando in Anambra State, the *Akwali* rite of passage serves as the only puberty rite of passage for young girls. The *Akwali* rite of passage, in pre-colonial times, played a central role in establishing marriage stability and motherhood in Nando. Not only did it prepare them for marriage (by providing the forum for the teaching of maternal roles and other life skills), it helped in the formation of identity of the girl child as full-fledged member of the community with privilege and duties (by informing them of the history, traditions and religious beliefs of Nando community). As an important bastion of Nando traditional culture and religion, *Akwali*, just like other traditional practices, collided with Christianity and colonialism when they were introduced in Igboland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively, as well as the forces of urbanization and globalization. The European missionaries and colonialists, being products of the cultures of their homelands, had their own ideologies and prejudices which made their attitude towards traditional Igbo puberty rites of passage such as *Akwali*, hostile, “negative and radically rejectionist” in the sense that they branded such rites as primitive, barbaric,

uncivilized, pagan, evil, demonic, heathenism and so forth (Idowu,1973). Consequently, rites of passage like *Akwali* were outright discouraged, jettisoned or watered down into insignificance. This has hitherto, raised some issues that need attention in this modern time about the place of our puberty rite.

Besides the above mentioned state of affairs of *Akwali*, it can be observed that nowadays, owing to Western education, puberty rites like *Akwali* have become almost irrelevant as the emphasis on enrolling the girl child into school where the curriculum only prepares them for a “modern” sophisticated life, relegates rites like *Akwali* to the background. Besides, globalization has opened up avenues for interaction with the wider world and the cultures of the West (Kasongo, 2010). This has enabled foreign conceptions of womanhood and individualism to erode the cherished *Akwali* rite of passage values which encouraged a balanced feminine identity and social solidarity. In view of the foregoing, there is need to rediscover the importance of the dying puberty rites of passage in Igboland.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Igbo rites of passage have received the attention of scholars because of their prominent place in Igbo traditional society. Yet, such rites of passage have continued to receive diminished patronage. The rites of passage that have been examined by most scholars include birth and naming rites, marriage rites, and death rites. In contrast, puberty rites have been less studied by scholars, despite their prevalence and importance in Igbo traditional societies (Mbah, 1993, Agwu 1994, Anyanwu,2004 and Ezenweke, 2012). *Akwali* rite of passage, for instance, enjoyed the wide participation of young girls in pre-colonial Nando community, but to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, *Akwali* rite of passage has been raped of its beauty and relevance.

On a more practical note, the introduction of Christianity in Igboland had a great impact on the life of the Igbo, especially their culture and religion. Madu (2011) writes that:

Christianity has also come in with its civilizing mission and thus society has indeed changed, now a new Igbo society has emerged subject to the assets and liabilities of modern society. Although rites of passages are still practised, these have also been fashioned within the framework of modernity. (p.49).

Beyond the obvious positive impact, the missionaries in the bid to achieve their purpose of converting the people to their new religion tagged Igbo cultural activities including rites of passage as uncivilized, fetish, pagan and satanic. Christianity relegated most traditional Igbo rituals, practices and values to the background (Odozor,2008). Akwali rites of passage were not spared. Such an attitude persists today in Nando and has been exacerbated by the Pentecostal movement that regard their mission as the liberation of Christians from the bondage created by unholy alliances with deities entered into during the performance of traditional rites whether by their forebears or themselves. In contrast, before the advent of Christianity, young girls were proud to go through *Akwali* rites of passage. Parents presented their daughters for the rituals. Mothers were proud that their daughter participated in these rites. Akwali rite of passage is well known for its role in reinforcing traditional mores and values but it has been affected by the wave of civilization and globalization sweeping through Igboland. Western norms and practices are marketed as global cultures and are now presented as the acceptable way of life (Kasongo, 2010 and Ezenweke, 2010). In Nando, the individualism and independence associated with adolescent culture strikes at the heart of the values of *Akwali* rite of passage that is, the fostering of communal living and interdependence. In contrast, Young people from Nando community are increasingly seeing Western ways of life as superior to Nando traditional practices such as *Akawli*. Today, these twin factors of civilization and globalization have attenuated the high regard Nando people had for *Akwali* festival as the festival is seen as “old fashioned”. *Akwali* rite of passage is associated with fostering of communal living and interdependence. Corollary to the above is the weakening of morality among young people in Nando. Nowadays, there is high incidence of

marital problems stemming from ignorance and lack of proper preparation for adulthood and what marriage entails. Ezenweke (2012) opines that:

African society does not lay emphasis on individual looks and wealth as the primary motivation for marriage but rather the basic focus is on quality of beings and their innate potentials for the achievement of the desired goals. This notion helps both parties to aim at living a moral life since divorce or broken marriage is highly despised and one of a marriageable age that remains single is also abhorred in many African communities and often taken as a taboo. More so, it is always desired to have marriages between individual within the same or similar orientations which is believed to have better potentials for the stability of Marriage. (p.135).

Akwali rites of passage prepared young girls for adulthood and marriage as well as the attendant vicissitudes, especially those relating to fertility.

In consideration of the above, the main thrust of this work is to examines the true nature of *Akwali* rite of passage, its meaning and significance in the life of the people of Nando community in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State. The study further evaluates the factors influencing the waning of *Akwali* rite in Nando in the bid to proffer ways of reinvigorating the rite of passage.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this work is to analyze puberty rite of passage among the people of Nando community in order to assess how this rite of passage can be rediscovered and better positioned in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- determine the nature of *Akwali* rite of passage

- ascertain how *Akawli* rite of passage was performed before the advent of Christianity in Nando community
- assess the significance of *Akwali* rite of passage
- evaluate the impact of Christianity, colonization, globalization and urbanization on *Akwali* rite of passage
- proffer ways of reviving the *Akwali* rite of passage to meet modern challenges

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study has a great significance for academic research as it provides an insight into the *Akwali* rite of passage as practised by the people of Nando in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State. This work adds to the existing literature on the importance of rite of passage which underpins womanhood in Nando community. Therefore, researchers in African Traditional Religion (ATR), anthropology, gender studies and other disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities will find the study useful in their studies on African or Igbo religious rites of passage in general and *Akwali* rite of passage in particular.

The study is a bold step towards projecting the values of *Akwali* rite of passage to the world. It highlights the importance of rituals and festivals as a way of reenacting and reconstructing past pre-literate societies. The study also recognizes the fact that *Akwali* rite of passage holds the key to the identity of women in Nando community because it provided the moral, educational, social and religious foundation which shaped the girl child in Nando and equipped her for womanhood. Understanding this will encourage Nando women to cherish the rite of passage and allow girls to participate in it.

The relevance of this study cannot be overemphasized as it contributes to the understanding in spite of the changes brought by Christianity, globalization and urbanization, certain features of the rite still persist in the traditional form. In this sense, therefore, this study



will enable the public to see the overall functionality of *Akwali* rite of passage and how it engenders social integration, cohesion, and solidarity.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This study focuses mainly on *Akwali* rite of passage which is a puberty rite of passage among the people of Nando in Anambra State. It centers on the form of the rite, its meaning and significance for the Nando people as well as the factors that have affected the rite over the years, bringing to the fore the ways of rediscovering this rite of passage. This study takes up this challenge by examining the *Akwali* rite of passage as practised in Nando community with the view to rediscovering its importance for the Igbo girl child in the twenty first century.

The work covers also the cosmology and worldview of Nando people. The socio-political organizations that make up Nando community are examined. The study assesses the festivals and title taking in Nando in order to find out their relatednesses to *Akwali* rite of passage. Nando community is an Igbo community located in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State. It is bounded in the west by Aguleri, in the east by Igbariam, in the North Anaku, in the south Nteje and Umueri. Nando community consists of eight villages namely, Agbudu, Akamanato, Abube-Agu, Abube-Uno, Isinyi, Ikem, Ubarunisioye and Umuawo.

### **1.6 Methodology**

This research work is qualitative in nature. The data collection, analysis and interpretation will be based on the interpretation of statements, comments and observations of the respondents and not based on quantitative variables. Data for the study were collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data were derived from in-depth unstructured oral interviews. At least one hundred elderly indigenes from various villages in

Nando community namely, Agbudu, Akamanato, Abube-Agu, Abube-Uno, Isinyi, Ikem, Ubarunisioye and Umuawo were interviewed.

Richardson (1995) identifies in-depth unstructured interviews as one of the major methods used by qualitative researchers. The rationale behind the choice of respondents is to achieve originality and elicit information from people versed in the traditional culture and religion from the community. This is important given that the riches of Nando culture and tradition (and by extension, Igbo traditional culture and religion) are mainly transmitted orally.

The secondary data used for the study were books, journals, unpublished dissertations, and other materials and documents from archives and the internet. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and analytical methods. The researcher's task was to synthesize the thoughts of the respondents and uncover the nature and importance of *Akwali* puberty rite of passage.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

### **Akwali**

The term "Akwali" as used among Nando people is a complex term which refers to more than one phenomenon. First, *Akwali* refers to one of the deities revered in Nando community, a fertility deity which is associated with children (*Akwali omumu*). In another sense, the term *Akwali* is used in reference to a rite of passage in which Nando girls between the ages of fifteen and eighteen participate in organized series of events and performances culminating in the change of their status from young girls to womanhood.

Akwali rite of passage can equally be defined as a rite that involved ritual activities and teaching designed to guide the young girls and prepare them for their new roles.

## **Puberty**

The word “puberty” is derived from the Latin word “*pubertas*” which means adulthood. Ezenweke (2012) captures it in this form when she writes that:

Puberty is the movement or transition from childhood to adulthood, from relatively unproductive life to productive citizen and from dependence to independence. It is the period of life at which a person attains the biological maturity necessary for reproduction. (p.133).

Quarcoopome (1987) defines puberty as: The transition from childhood into adulthood and in the West African context, it is an occasion for consideration in ritual and ceremony. It is a coming of age for boys and girls in the society (p.113).

For the purpose of the study, therefore, puberty can be defined as the process of hormonal, physical and social change that causes the young persons, especially young girls, to reach sexual and social maturity. puberty can be explain as the period of human development during which physical growth and sexual maturity occurs. Consequently, puberty refers to the age or period of physical changes in a child’s body at which he or she is first capable of sexual reproduction.

## **Rite**

Etymologically, the term rite is derived from “*ritus*” in classical Latin, which denotes the form and manner of any religious observance or ceremony (Klingbeil, 2007). Beyond the emphasis on form, a rite is symbolic, hence, (Cardita,2013) asserts that a rite can be seen as a pragmatic transcription of symbols. In this vein, therefore, a communicative value in symbols can be envisaged and it can be deduced hence that communication is based on the transmission of symbols and the interpretation of these symbols by the receiver of the communication.

From a pragmatic point of view, it can be asserted that rite is a distinctive human action in as much as it is associated with the word as the expression and realization of human beings in the cosmos. It can further be considered as a human action in which human beings apprehend themselves as religious beings (Bouyer,1963). Even though rites are defined by their very nature as actions of human beings, in these actions, man feels that he is deeply participating in a divine activity. It is also a religious action directed to obtain a divine blessing or favour from some mystical and supernatural power. What a man does in the rite is a divine action, an action which God performs through and in man, as much as man himself performs it in and through God. A rite is a set of form for conducting a ceremony, the liturgy of a church and a ceremonial act or action (Bouyer,1963). Fofie-Nimoh (2014) recognized this dimension and opined that rite means the ceremonies, prayers and functions of any religious body that are geared towards the service of God and the enhancement of the human person.

At this juncture, the operational definition of rite employed in the study sees it as a set form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony. It is a means of communicating something of a religious significance, through words, symbols and action.

### **Passage**

Passage refers to the transitional periods in the individual's life (van Gennep, 1960). It also refers to the movement from one phase or stage in life to another. These life stages represent important turning points in life which involve transition or crossing into a new stage of life (Uchegbue,2010). In the cycle of life, examples of the stages include birth, puberty, marriage, and death.

## **Rite of Passage**

With the combination of rite and passage, rites of passage can be defined as celebrating the movement of individuals from one social group to another. This stages of new statuses is crucial to the individual and to the community. Birth,Reproduction,the achievement of manhood or womanhood,marriage,and death are the principal worldwide occasions for rites of passage.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Rites of passage are ceremonies that mark turning points in a person's growth and development in a society, which are intended to shape and reshape the spiritual, mental and social life of those who go through them. Of all rites of passage, puberty rites have long been of interest to scholars. This interest has blossomed into scholarly works on such rites of passage by ethnographers, sociologists, psychologists, biologists as well as religious scholars from various parts of the globe. Within the continent, outstanding work has been done to present how puberty rites have been practised especially in the southern part of Africa, and West Africa. Igbo scholars have also made great efforts to account for the presence of such rites in Igbo traditional society. This review of literature, thus, seeks to present an overview of these works in order to lay a solid conceptual, theoretical and empirical foundation for the exploration of Akwali rite of passage.

In this chapter, the review of literature is carried out under the following headings; Conceptual framework, Theoretical Framework, Empirical studies, and Summary of Literature Review.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Framework**

##### **2.1.1 The Concept of Rites of Passage**

The life span of every human being follows axiomatically a certain order which can be seen as stages. Gennep (1960) explains:

Rites of passage as a transition rituals that move an individual from one social status to another in a three phased schema of separation, segregation and

incorporation. It is as though society conducts individuals from one room in a house to another, always passing over thresholds. (p.1).

Gennep (1960) narrates rites of passage as:

The transition rituals that move individuals from one social status to another in a three phased schema of separation, segregation and incorporation. It is as though society conducts individuals from one status to another, as from one room in a house to another, always passing thresholds. Rites of passage are ceremonial events, existing in all historically known societies that mark the passage from one social or religious status to another. Rites of passage are special rituals which the societies employ to assist their members at key times of biographical change. These life transitions follow a recognizable pattern of behaviour in many cultures. The life of an individual in any society is a series of passage from one age to another and from one occupation to another. (p.2-3).

From the above analogy, it indicates that rites of passage are not a new phenomenon. It is there with man from creation but it is the societies that develop it and it become pattern of behaviour.

Gennep further narrates that:

Transition from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings. Birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined. Since the goal is the same, it follows of

necessity that the ways of attaining it should be at least analogous, if not case the individual involved has been modified by passing through several stages and traversing several boundaries. (p.3).

In response to these phases in rite of passage, Madu (2011) notes:

The man's movement from the cradle to the grave is punctuated by the phases in one's growth, phases which among traditional Africans are ritually celebrated. It is believed that as one passes from childhood to adolescence, to adulthood and to death, one is associated with new roles, new responsibilities and new status (p.23).

He further states that:

Since rites of passage celebrate transitions from one phase to another, it means that one's movement involves separating oneself from the former status and thus transiting into another status. This, in a way, implies incorporation into another status. Thus, in rites of passage, we can discern separation, transition and incorporation. (p.25).

The term rite of passage indicates that it is a transition and also a change from former status to another. The above ideas present rite of passage to be a movement from one stage to another.

Mbiti (1970) writes that,

In African societies, the birth of a child is a process which begins long before the child's arrival in this world and continues long thereafter. It is not just a single event which can be recorded on a particular date. Nature brings the child into the world, but the society creates the child into a social being, a corporate person. For, it is the community which must protect the child, feed it, bring it up, educate it and



in many other ways incorporate it into the wider community. Children are the buds of society, and every birth is the arrival of “spring” when life shoots out and the community thrives. The birth of a child is, therefore, the concern not only of the parents but of many relatives including the living and the departed. Kinship plays an important role here, so that a child cannot be exclusively “my child” but “our child”. (p.11).

The common reference to the sequence of the birth of a baby, its growth to an adult who eventually dies is based on this “transitional” premise. The various stages a person goes through are very important hence they are regarded as critical stages (Munthali and Zulu, 2007).

Two major approaches have been used to identify the critical stages or transitions individuals make in the course of their lives are physiological and social perspective. Primarily, certain physiological markers such as menarche in young women, appearance of wrinkles and gray hair are observable signs of change from one stage of life to another. In more traditional societies like those in Africa, transitions are generally seen from a social perspective (Brooker and Woodhead, 2008). Physical shifts alone rarely confer the full embodiment of the passage from one stage to another (Van Gennep, 1960). Using childhood transitions as an example, Crivello and Woodhead, (2008) explains that,

In industrialized societies, childhood transitions are often conceived as developmental processes structured by educational institutions... biological age is widely treated as a proxy for readiness, maturation and competence. Yet, in many parts of the world where birthdates are not recorded and schooling still far from universal, biological age is not the most important structuring factor for transitions in childhood. Instead, social class or caste as well as gender and birth order may be

determinants of children's daily activities, life changes and expectations for present and future development. (p.15).

The latter perspective which sees transitions or stages of life as social phenomena gave rise to the concept of "rites of passage."

The term Rites of Passage by was used by (Gennep, 1960 and Rubin, 2004 ) to capture the idea that the life course of man is marked by series of special rites or ceremonies which accompany transitions from one situation to another and from one cosmic or social world to another such as birth, puberty, marriage and death . In order words, rites of passage refer to shifts in social status and indicate readiness (or social expectations) to take on new responsibilities. They are frequently related to an individual's social age, rather than to their biological age (Crivello and Woodhead 2008).

Despite the diverse applications of the concept of rites of passage over the years, rites of passage as originally conceived by ( Gennep, 1960) and later developed by (Turner, 1969) involve a religious element. Rites of passage and, indeed, the ceremonies that accompany them in traditional societies, are carried out under the auspices of the supernatural beings that make up the cosmological space of these societies. For (Gennep, 1960), In the least advanced cultures the holy enters nearly every phase of a man's life, and because of this passage from one group to another, assumes the special quality - the quality of acts whose major aspects fall within the sacred sphere (Balduk, 2008 and Van Gennep, 1960). In the same vein, Meade (1996) cited by Scott (2017) observes that during initiation the individual becomes bound through spiritual experience to the future of the society as well as open to the origins and ancestral beginnings of the group in the past. Okoh (2011) had this in mind when he describes what transpires in rites of passage:

The knowledge imparted to initiates is designed to create the awareness that henceforth, the individual does not live for himself alone. The community and divinities have a stake in his life, since his actions affect the very bond that binds the human and spiritual communities. Thus, the individual is taught that the structures of the community are divinely given and that the maintenance of the expected social role and relationship is a religious duty.(p.23).

As society progresses from the traditional to more modern and sophisticated, there is a tendency for this religious element to fade away or at best separated from the life of the person and the community. This inclination, in fact, may explain the absence of true rites of passage in more contemporary societies (Moyers,1990 and Bruce, 2002). Though this idea is not explicitly stated by (Van Gennep, 1960), he seemed to have acknowledged its possibility with his study's focus on semi-civilized peoples. Turner (1982) notes that increasing specialization in modern societies deemphasizes the religious aspect of rites of passage in contrast to what obtains in tribal societies.

In order to grasp the full meaning of rites of passage, Foster and little (1997) states that it is important to note that rites of passage comprise personal and communal elements. The personal aspect deals with the initiate's active participation in the process (during which he/she acquires requisite knowledge); while the communal aspect revolves around the society's recognition of the new status of the initiate often in the form of ceremonial activities. Scott (2017) opines that without the components of inner transformation and outer recognition, one may have simply gone through a passage a change but not a rite of passage, or initiation. Markstrom and Iborra (2003) affirms that rites of passage bring dramatization to major life events that convey individuals from one social status or role to another. Through social conveyance the self-perception of the initiate is changed as well as society's perception of the young person. Thus, in merging these two

elements of rites of passage, the society creates the platform for survival and regeneration (Lertzman, 2002).

Rites of passage, according to Van Gennep (1960), have a universal tripartite structure namely, rites of separation (or pre-liminal rites), rites of transition (liminal rites) and rites of incorporation (post-liminal rites). This structure has persisted in studies on rites of passage despite Grimes' (2000) caution about extracting patterns or generalizations (which may be product of over-simplification) about a concept and practice as complex and culturally disparate as rites of passage. Even so, the generally accepted structure of rites of passage involves a separation from one stage into a liminal stage (which is formative in nature) and the eventual transition to a new status (Grimes, 2000 and Grof, 1996). Madu (2011) expatiates thus :

Since rites of passage celebrate transitions from one phase to another, it means that one's movement involves separating oneself from the former status and thus transiting into another status. This, in a way, implies incorporation into another status. Thus, in rites of passage, we can discern separation, transition and incorporation. (p.25).

The separation stage marks the ending of a period or life stage. This may occur in a single moment or involve series of preparations that may take place over a period. The essence of this stage is to mark the symbolic death in such a way that the initiate is "weaned from everything outside of herself that has sustained, defined, or inhibited her" (Foster and Little, 1997). After the separation comes the transition stage. This stage is also known as the liminal stage from the Latin word "*limen*" which translates to the English word "threshold". Scott (2017), in his book "Rites of Passage and the Story of our Times" saw the transition stage as the all-important moment of suspension in which one floats in a liminal state which is only possible once an effective

severance has occurred. In the words of Iborra and Markstrom (2003), Liminality is a marginal status of not having the old identity or a new identity available.

Turner (1969) on his part described this stage as an 'interstructural' phase where "luminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial". Being in between "separation" and "incorporation", the transition stage represents that stage in which subjects often face taboos and they may have to be hidden because they are polluting from the principle that which is unclear is unclean (Turner, 1967). Balduk (2008) observes that this uncleanliness and uncleanness lead to the seclusion and/or exclusion of liminal persons. It is likened to death, darkness, invisibility and lowliness, but also to sacredness and comradeship (Turner, 1969). However, there is something positive in the transition stage in that the person transforms; he or she becomes, or grows in a sense. Liminal people are becoming better; they achieve a new 'essence' or 'nature'. The practice of liminality implies that such a passage is irreversible; one cannot become a boy anymore after having become a man. It also implies that the state of liminality is supposed to end. Importantly, this further means, that

liminality is something which is experienced by subjects that undergo these rites, and that it is related to characteristics ascribed to them (Balduk, 2008). The incorporation stage completes the cycle of rites of passage by confirming the newly acquired status. This stage makes the entire process meaningful. Though he or she may not know it when he or she departs, the primary reason for undergoing the separation and entering the threshold (the two previous stages) is to come back. Thus it is both a personal and social event, marked by ceremony whereby, as Iborra and Markstrom (2003) state: The initiate and the community recognize that the old identity has been abandoned and the new identity is emerging. The new identity is formed by the new roles, commitments, and responsibilities expected for the self and demanded by the community.

According to Grimes (2002), the completion of the rites of passage renders it impossible for the initiate to go back to what he or she was before, and equally impossible for the community to regard him or her as such. Certain facts can be deduced from the foregoing. One, none of these stages alone constitutes a rite of passage. Together they form a single entity – one fluid motion – each phase setting the stage for the next, ferrying the individual and the community along the path towards wholeness. Two, depending on the culture involved, some rites of passage ceremonies will emphasize one of the stages more than the others, and some may not follow this form in any tangible way (Van Gennep 1960 and Scot 2017). Three, it is also possible for a ceremony to follow all the prescribed patterns perfectly, but to fail utterly in its goal of authentic initiation.

In all societies where rites of passage are performed, they serve various purposes. First, they go to strengthen the emotional stability of individuals in particular and the community as a whole. Through them, the psychosocial pulse of the community is regulated. Those who are not yet initiated feel there is something higher and nobler to aspire to in their existence. Rites of passage have important religious significance. The rituals and ceremonies that accompany the rites of passage are imbued with the sacred beliefs of the community – supernatural beings are called upon to guide the process and empower the initiates, successful completion of the rites of passage is celebrated as a way of reaffirming the role of the sacred in the life of the community. During rites of passage, according to Kasomo (2009), a new relationship is struck with the ancestors, the deities and ultimately with God. These new relationships color the individual's perception of reality. He begins to perceive the sacred where he used to perceive only the profane. Okoh (2011) notes:

The rites or rituals are intended to remould the moral, mental and spiritual orientation of the initiates towards their world and their roles in it. The knowledge imparted to initiates is designed to create the awareness that henceforth, the individual does not live for himself alone. The community and divinities have a

stake in his life, since his actions affect the very bond that binds the human and spiritual communities. Thus, the individual is taught that the structures of the community are divinely given and that the maintenance of the expected social role and relationship is a religious duty.(p.123).

This is the educational function of rites of passage. It forms the platform that gives meaning to rite of passage which society uses to bring up a child. Rites of passage are also a way of socializing the members of the community. Through them, society hands on important cultural values and beliefs to the young generation for transmission to posterity (Uzukwu,1988). In this vein, Kasomo (2009) opines that as part of the rites of passage;

The initiate is taught to think with the community and to see the world as it sees it. He is given a cultural frame of work or grammar, a configuration of images and meanings within to confront the experience... This type of education is gradual and experimental not simply conceptual, it forms the initiates from his attitude and transforms him from his earlier inferior status to a higher one; from childhood to maturity, there is a radical change in thinking, talking, feeling and doing, based on world view (p.158).

Through the span of time and diversity in culture, it is germane to recognize that rites of passage, like all things, exist in a flux of change and, therefore, need re-invention and rebirth if they are to be effective vehicles for our development and belonging (Grimes, 2000). Acknowledging this, Teather (1999) states that there may be a latent need for certain rites (ceremonies) of passage to be reintroduced. Such ideas have blossomed into additions to the concept of rites of passage (Novato, 2017). For example, Nowadays, especially in the West where rites of passage in the traditional sense of the word is lacking, there is a trend towards the development of individualized rites of passage interwoven with certain activities (Castells 2000), with identity (Harvey,1989),

with bodies (Foucault,1977) and agency (Giddens,1984). Schouten (1991) opines that “people may create personal rites of passage, shaping new identities with such symbols and activities as are made available by our consumer culture”. Teather (1999) goes as far as seeing consumption patterns as a way individuals can choose to mark rites of passage in contemporary consumerist societies.

In Igboland, on the other hand, the concept and practice of rites of passage, though on the decline and in need of rejuvenation, traditionally maintains a communal characteristic – without it the individual is of no significance; without it the community’s cohesion and survival is in jeopardy. In other words, rites of passage in Igbo tradition guide a person’s holistic development through life’s transition using ritualistic ceremonies that bind the community together.

### **2.1.2 The Concept of Puberty Rites**

Puberty rites are one of the most widely known and practised rites of passage in the world (Lertzman, 2002). From China to Europe and the Americas, evidence abounds of the practice of this rite among traditional societies. The concept of puberty rites have received greater attention among scholars to the extent that rites of passage and puberty rites are used interchangeably. This need not be so as puberty rites are only a type of rites of passage as explained in the previous section. Nhlekisana (2017) sees puberty rites as rites of passage that mark the change in status of an individual. They mark a transition from childhood to adulthood. When a child/girl is believed to be physically and sexually mature, puberty rites are performed to help her transition smoothly from childhood to adulthood(p.1). Munthali & Zulu (2007), Metuh (1987) and Ezenweke (2012) share this view but emphasize that puberty rites mark the transition into a sexual world. From the definitions above, it could be gleaned that puberty rites are associated with sexuality and maturity that is, the attainment of the status of an adult. These elements reflect the physiological and social aspects of puberty rites. Brooks-Gunn and Graber (1994) acquiesce that,



The transition towards adolescence is marked by a multitude of events, some of which are biological, some of which are social in nature, and some of which contain elements of both. Puberty may be the best exemplar of a process that reflects the intersection of physiology and psychology. While the actual changes of the body are physical, the emergence of an adult form occurs in a societal context. (p.824).

During puberty, girls and boys experience various body changes such as: growth in height and weight; growth of pubic and auxiliary hair; genital development; development of acne and other skin eruptions; growth of facial hair and deep voices for boys; and growth of breasts for girls (Boxer, et al 1983; Swenson and Havens, 1987). The onset of menarche in girls and the ability to ejaculate seminal fluid in boys constitute major milestones marking the end of childhood and the beginning of the biological ability of boys and girls to have children. The timing of puberty rites, therefore, is mostly hinged on the appearance of the first signs of puberty. According to Grove and Lancy (2014), once the growth spurt, deepening of the voice, menses, breast buds or pubic hair become visible, these rites of passage are carried out. However, in some societies, “puberty rites” are delayed and may commence at later stage after the first signs of puberty.

In traditional societies, transitions to maturity and adult status often coincide with physical puberty or sexual maturity. For this maturity to be complete there must be social and psychological growth that transforms the dependent child into a functionally independent young adult. This is where rites of passage have a role to play. Kanu (2015) clarifies that,

Puberty rites on boys and girls are an announcement that they have reached adulthood. It introduces the child from the world of dependence to that of independence, and the rights, privileges and duties of adulthood. It is a sign that

they are ready for marriage and have reached the biological maturity necessary for reproduction. (p.6-7).

Puberty rites provide the fora for socialization of young girls and boys which equips them for their new roles as members of the society. In most cases, markers of adulthood such as marriage can only be undertaken if one has gone through puberty rites (Ezenweke,2012).

Hence, puberty rites for girls emphasize womanhood especially fecundity, and wifely duties like obedience to one's future husband (Richards 1956; Denbow and Thebe 2006). For the boys, puberty rites emphasize masculinity and broadening of abilities to manage households and the society. By pushing young boys against set boundaries they face their light and their shadows in order to taste their own capacities and begin to formulate an authentic, individuated sense of self (Scott, 2017). Within this context of maturation, the central psychosocial task of adolescence is the formation of a sense of identity (Markstrom and Iborra 2003). Eaton (2009) traces this basic role of puberty rites to primordial times when humankind lived in small subsistence societies. He asserts that the necessary initiations for the maturation of young men and women into adult roles were fundamentally interwoven with the survival of the species. For women, childbirth has been and remains the preeminent moment of initiation: a complete sacrifice of oneself for the betterment and continuation of all life (though through the modernization of childbirth practices, some argue that aspects of childbirth's initiatory quality are being lost (Davis-Floyd,1992). For men, the initiation into the great cycle of life took the form of the hunt: an act of life-taking rather than life-giving that nonetheless tied man through risk and self-sacrifice to the survival of his people, and bore him into intimate partnership and balance with the whole of man's ecological surroundings (Eaton 2009 and Scott 2017).

Puberty rites also provide occasions for the initiates to acquire new and deeper knowledge of the society and the mysteries of womanhood and manhood (Adibe, 2009). The secrets of the

society, carefully hidden from the uninitiated, are unfolded to them according to the societal demands placed on them. Metuh (1987) on his part observes that one of the functions of puberty rites is to,

Mark changes from passive to active membership in the community with the attaching privileges and obligations. During these rites, candidates are taught the implication of community life-living together, obedience to the elders, public spiritedness, endurance, and entrusted with the secret of the esoteric traditions and lore of the group. (p.194).

Although puberty rites serve the primary purpose of transitioning initiates into adulthood, they do not always take place at the time of physical puberty, especially in the case of boys.

Using data from Rome and Paris, Van Gennep (1960) argues that,

It is an error, to assume that ritual initiation and physiological puberty intersect. The methodical drumbeat of these religious and social ceremonies foreshadows the rhythm of reproduction that, in many ways marks the final stage of development. In many societies, puberty rites are elaborate and prolonged, especially where girls and boys are initiated into adulthood collectively rather than singly. (p.14).

This brings into focus the distinctions that accompany the conceptualization of puberty rites. Some scholars, such as, La Fontaine (1956), Eliade (1958), Bohannans (1958), Van Gennep (1960), Hoebel (1960), and Walter and Cohen (2016), distinguish between ceremonies initiating young boys and girls to adult status, and other ritual events of childhood and adolescence. This school of thought holds that the term puberty rites fails to capture the reality of the phenomenon being expressed and suggests initiation rites or coming-of-age rites as more appropriate terms.

Van Gennep (1960) identifies this problem and noted that circumcision and various other practices customarily called puberty rites frequently occur at times that make it impossible to connect them with physical puberty. In his words, physiological puberty and “social puberty” are essentially different and only rarely converge. Norbeck, Walter and Cohen (2016) echo that,

ritual events commonly called puberty rites by ethnologists are not only observed at greatly varying ages of life but also have diverse significance, marking transitions of several sorts—from the asexual to the sexual world, from the realm of women and children to that of males, from childhood to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood, and to varying social niches of adulthood. (p.24).

On the other hand, scholars such as Krige (1968), Calame-Griaule (1986), Lepowsky (1998), Munthali and Zulu (2007), Ezenweke (2012), Nanegbe (2016) and Nhlekisana (2017) show a preference for puberty rites. While most scholars who use puberty rites focus more on girls’ rites, there is an understanding that puberty rites in the context of rites of passage refers to “social puberty” not only to “physical puberty.” Ezenweke (2012) asserts that,

Puberty is the movement or transition from childhood to adulthood, from relatively unproductive life to productive one and from dependency to independency..... It (puberty rites) is primarily to welcome or introduce the new adult into the adult world with its rights, privileges and duties. One is recognized as an adult and fit for marriage only after successful puberty rite. In some communities, puberty rite are mainly celebrated for the girls while in some it are for the boys as well. (p.133).

Beyond those who canvass for coming-of-age rites or initiation rites, and puberty rites, there are groups of scholars who tend to use the two ideas to represent the same phenomenon such as Markstrom (2008), Lancy and Grove (2014), Hobson (2016), Palmer (2013), Boyer (2006), and others. Fofie-Nimoh (2014), Sarpong (1974) and Quan-Buffor (2009) see puberty rites as nubility rites given the emphasis and significance of the rites for marriage and procreation.

Overall, this crop of scholars tends to emphasize the form of puberty rites in specific cultures and their function. It is not easy to arrive at a consensus on which best describes the rites of passage young people go through at puberty (or even after puberty for that matter). This is because such rites do not have the same form all over the world. Each society or culture has a unique set of rites involving the transition of young people with varying degrees of emphasis.

This study adopts the term puberty rites because its focus is on girls' puberty rites. As highlighted earlier, girls' puberty rites are tied to the onset of menarche. Rarely do girls who have not experienced menarche participate in puberty rites (Sarpong, 1974 and Heinz, 1994). Therefore, the term puberty rites are appropriate for describing the phenomenon under study. Speaking of the form of puberty rites, since Van Gennep (1960) offered his "schema" (that is, pattern) on rites of passage viz separation, transition and incorporation, it appears that most works on puberty rites and rites of passage in general tend to fit their findings into this three-fold form. Lertzman (2002) and others point out, the key elements seem transcultural, and can be identified as a basic sequential pattern that is common in stable traditional cultures Mahdi (1996).

Grimes (2000) offers a particularly articulate warning about the tendency for the academia to over-simplify, romanticize, abstract and invent based on studies rather than direct experience, a trend that is especially dangerous when dealing with a topic as broad and nuanced as rites of passage. Regardless of semantics, the classic pattern of rites of passage holds true and inherently includes the metaphorical dying to or severance from one stage, the entrance into a liminal, especially formative time and space, and ultimately the taking-on, or birthing into the new role and social standing (Foster and Little 1989; Grof 1996). Scholars have made efforts to identify certain features of puberty rites all over the world. Whiting, Eliade (1958) highlights that features like seclusion and training which serve as introduction to the customs of the society, sexuality and the spiritual or mythical aspect of his or her society.

The following features of puberty rites can be gleaned from different works. First, puberty rites are mostly differentiated for boys and girls. This means that boys and girls do not go through the same puberty rites. Secondly, puberty rites involve social isolation and restriction of the behaviour of the participants (Meade, 1996). The third feature of puberty rites is the experience of ordeals aimed at testing the ability of the participants to take on their new responsibilities (Eaton, 2009). Fourth, the initiates also go through some form of education which equips them for the roles ahead (Plotkin, 2008). Genital operations are also conducted. The process culminates in a ceremony which introduces the girls-now-turned-women to the wider society (Grimes,2000).

It is germane to note that these characteristics may not be present in all puberty rites; in some societies, for instance, girls, puberty rites are given prominence than that of boys. In some other societies, both sexes may have their peculiar rites but the form may vary.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.2.1 Structural Functionalism**

Structural functionalism is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. The theory of Structural Functionalism is a broad perspective in sociology and anthropology which views society as a whole composed of inter-related parts that is, as a system assumes a tendency toward system equilibrium, considers how society or the social order is possible and, hence, views structures in terms of their contributions to the perpetuation or evolutionary development of the society, and sees pervasive commonalities or consensus as the ultimate basis of social order (Pope,1975). Apart from seeing the society as a structure or system of interdependent parts, structural functionalism holds that there are specific requirements that must be met in all social systems and these can provide the basis for the comparative analysis of social institutions (Holmwood,2005). structural functionalism studies structural items of the social system in an attempt to show how

they contribute towards integration or, inversely, disintegration of the system by either fulfilling or failing to fulfil some needs or sets of needs of the system and in an attempt to show how these contributions bear on the existence of the item in the system( Isajiw, 2000).

In other words, structural functionalism holds that the actions of individuals are not to be explained by the immediate meanings they have for actors. They are to be explained by the function they serve for the wider social group. On this argument, individual meaning cannot be understood independently of a wider system of collective practices and beliefs within which it is embedded. These collective beliefs and practices, in turn, are to be explained by the functions they serve for the system of social life as a whole. Different elements of social life depend on each other and fulfil functions that contribute to the maintenance of social order and its reproduction over time (Holmwood,2005).The roots of structural functionalism can be traced to the concept of organic analogy, used in the philosophy of Antiquity by Plato (B.C. 427-347) and Aristotle's use of the telos (purpose) of things as their final cause (B.C. 384-322). However, as a distinct approach, as a way of analysing society, structural functionalism emerged first in social anthropology in early twentieth century, and later in sociology, beginning in the 1930s. Earlier sociological theories of scholars like Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Émile Durkheim, who drew heavily on an organismic analogy to explain society – the idea that society is essentially a body that is composed of organs that are symbiotically interconnected – laid the foundations of structural functionalism. Society is made up of various parts that contribute to “the establishment of...general harmony’ in the society and that society is held together by shared values, languages and symbols. Every society or culture has its own identity, its own consciousness or in Durkheim's words, ‘collective consciousness (Durkheim,1895).

Durkheim (1895) focuses on the structures of society (i.e. social facts) and the function of social facts in a society. He believed that to study society, one must look beyond individuals to what he called social facts (Hurst,2017). Social facts are the laws, morals, values, religious

beliefs, customs, fashion, rituals and all the cultural rules that govern social life (Durkheim, 1895). Social facts cannot be altered easily by a mere act of the will as they are recalcitrant and require strenuous effort if they are to be changed. Far from being a product of the will, social facts determine it from without; they are like the moulds in which our actions are inevitably shaped. Social facts serves one or more functions within a society (Durkheim, 1895). Function is the contribution a part makes to the whole for its maintenance and well being. Thus, function is a positive contribution it is inherently good for society , for it ensures its continuity and healthy maintenance. By making its contribution, each part fulfils the needs of society. Once needs have been fulfilled, society will be able to survive and endure.(Durkheim, 1895).

In his celebrated study of religion, Durkheim begins with a consideration of Australian totemism as the most elementary form of religious life, but he does not start speculating it as the earliest form and then, as his predecessors had done, offering theories to explain it. He is rather more concerned with the structure and function of totemism and how its study can aid the understanding of the place of religion in complex societies. Religion creates social cohesion and integration by reaffirming the bonds that people have with each other. In the structural functionalist view, religious rites express the spiritual convictions of the practitioners and help increase the belongingness of the individuals to the group. Durkheim also believed that one of the roles of religion was to confer identity on the individual. He believed that religion allowed individuals to transcend their individual identities and instead identify as a larger group. It does this by defining proper and improper behaviour or standards for legitimate behaviour within the society. This sets social controls that help the society to function. The conceptualization of society as a set of coordinated parts – the “structure” of society was expanded by anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. They deemphasized the organismic analogy and focused instead on how societies meet certain needs or requisites, especially integration between their component parts. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) defined each society as a



“functionally interrelated system” in which “general laws or functions operate”. He accepted that Durkheim offered the first systematic formulation of the concept of function and that this concept is based on an “analogy between social life and organic life”.

Developing the idea further, Radcliffe-Brown (1952) avers that the concept of function...involves the notion of a structure consisting of a set of relations amongst unit entities, the continuity of the structure being maintained by a life-process made up of the activities of the constituent units. With reference to Durkheim’s use of the term “need” for the conditions that must be satisfied for a system to continue, Radcliffe-Brown held that this term would direct us towards a postulation of “universal human or societal needs”, and substituted for the word “need” the term “necessary conditions of existence.” Radcliffe-Brown’s structural-functional approach comprises the following assumptions:

- 1) A necessary condition for survival of a society is a minimal integration of its parts.
- 2) The concept of function refers to those processes that maintain the necessary integration or solidarity.
- 3) And, in each society, structural features can be shown to contribute to the maintenance of necessary solidarity.

Thus, for Durkheim, the central concept is of solidarity, while for Radcliffe-Brown, it is the “structural continuity” of society. In every civilization every custom, material object, ideas and belief fulfils some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable fact within a working whole (Malinowski, 1926).

Whereas Radcliffe-Brown begins with society and its necessary conditions of existence (that is integration), Malinowski’s starting point is the individual, who has a set of “basic” (or “biological”) needs that must be satisfied for its survival. Malinowski’s approach distinguishes between three levels: the biological, the social structural, and the symbolic (Turner, 1987). Each

of these levels has a set of needs that must be satisfied for the survival of the individual. It is on his survival that the survival of larger entities (such as groups, communities, societies) is dependent. The most basic needs are the biological, but this does not imply any kind of reductionism, because each level constitutes its distinct properties and needs, and from the interrelationship of different levels culture emerges as an integrated whole. Culture is the kernel of Malinowski's approach. It is 'uniquely human', for it is not found to exist among sub-humans. Comprising all those things – material and non-material – that human beings have created right from the time they separated from their simian ancestors, culture has been the instrument that satisfies the biological needs of human beings. It is a need-serving and need-fulfilling system.

Parsons (1951) contribution to structural functionalism is best known in terms of the "functional imperatives", the essential conditions required for the enduring existence of a system. Parsons major propositions on his structural – functional perspective came in the early 1950s in his theory "The social system", he tended to concentrate on the structures of society and their relationship to each other. He summarized how order or equilibrium was maintained among the various elements were considered to be mutually supportive and tending toward a dynamic equilibrium. Parsons also came up with 4 functional imperatives that are necessary for the survival of all systems known as the 'AGIL model'. These four functions help us to explain how a state of balance (i.e. equilibrium) emerges in a system. AGIL stands for Adaptation (A), Goal Attainment (G), Integration (I), and Pattern Maintenance, or, as Parsons later renamed it, Latent Pattern Maintenance—Tension Management, or simply, Latency (L). The underlying idea is that all systems need to accomplish these four functions in order to survive. Parsons explores the role of these four functions in giving rise to equilibrium in a system. In the case of society, Parsons submits that the institutions (or structures) maintain (or re-establish) equilibrium by fulfilling the 'needs', which must be satisfied if the system has to persist. Institutions (or structures) also solve the recurring problems in a manner similar to the way in which the units of the organism

comparable to the institutions (or structures) of societies do in their natural environment. The system ensures that these institutions (or structures) work appropriately on everyday basis, satisfying the needs. For achieving equilibrium, society requires the processes of socialization, the internalization of societal values, and the mechanisms of social control so that deviance is checked.

Merton (1957) in his path breaking essay, “Manifest and Latent Functions” sought to develop a more adequate model of the analysis of the structural functionalist theory. He first criticized the predominant postulates of structural functionalism and made his own postulation which emphasized the functional unity of society. He held that all standardized social and cultural beliefs and practices are functional for society as a whole as well as for individuals in society, implying that the various parts of the social system must show a high level of integration. He also contended that not all the standardized parts of society have positive functions and also not all structures are indispensable part of the working whole as postulated by Parsons. Merton (1957) focused his analysis on groups organizations, societies and cultures and went further to develop the idea of a dysfunction. Here, he emphasized that just as structures or institution could contribute to the maintenance of other parts of the social system, they could also have negative consequences. Merton (1957) argued that it was necessary to make a distinction between latent and manifest functions. The latter refers to the conscious intentions of actors and the former to the objective consequences of their actions, which were often unintended.

### **Criticism of Structural Functionalism**

Structural functionalism has faced scathing criticisms. It has been argued that it pictures the individual as having little or no control over his own actions. Rather than constructing their own social world, members of society appear to be directed by the system. For example, they are organized into families and systems of stratification because society requires these social

arrangements in order to survive (Bauman and Skitka, 2009). Many have questioned the logic of treating society as if it were something separate from its members, as if it shaped their actions rather than being constructed by them. This overemphasis on the society seems to undermine the place the individual in the society. The individual in structural functionalism is devoid of dynamism and creativity. He is simply a product of society and its forces constrain him at every juncture. The opposite view is that it is the individual who in fact initiates change in society. Individuals as much use the system as the system uses them. Those who subscribe to the interactional approach argue that functionalism has failed to conceptualise adequately the complex nature of actors and the process of interaction. One of the reasons why functionalism ignored the role of the individual in society was that it was solely interested in explaining the survival of society. It was interested in the collectivity and not the individual.

Another criticism of functionalism is that it is unable to deal effectively with conflict. Carey (2005) states that issues like this, raise that long-standing charge about which functionalists are most touchy that their methodology is conservative and defensive of the status quo". The basic reason for this charge is the tendency of some researchers in functionalism to overemphasize harmonious relationships and positive, integrative functions. They tend to exaggerate consensus, stability, equilibrium, and integration, disregarding the forces of conflict and disorder, and changes emerging from them. For them, conflict is necessarily destructive and occurs outside the framework of society.

Another criticism of functionalism is that it does not effectively deal with the contemporary processes of social change (Cohen,1968). Thus, because it is neither able to study the pasts of societies nor the contemporary change process, it is more suited to the study of "contemporary static structures", if there are any. Or, perhaps, it portrays the societies it studies as if they are static, which, in reality, may not be so. Societies in reality undergo changes. When the

parts of a society are seen as reinforcing one another as well as the system, and when each part fits well with the other parts (as held by structural functionalism), it is difficult to explain how these parts can contribute to or explain the changes the societies go through.

Another important criticism of functionalism is that it is inherently teleological, that is, explanations are given in terms of “purposes” or “goals”. With respect to this, Turner and Maryanski (1979) submit that teleology per se is not a problem. As a matter of fact, social theory should take into account the ‘teleological relationship between society and its component parts’ (Ritzer,2000). The problem comes when teleology is stretched to unacceptable limits, when it is believed that only the given and specific part of society can fulfil the needs. Teleology becomes illegitimate when it fails to take into consideration the idea that a variety of alternative structures can fulfil the same needs.

Functionalism has also been criticised for making explicit what is implicit in the premise; the technical term used for this kind of reasoning is “tautology”. For example, if religion exists, it must be functional, otherwise, it will cease to exist, and its function must be to contribute to social solidarity, because without it, society will not be able to survive. Many critics have pointed out that functionalism suffers from “globular or circular reasoning”. Needs are postulated on the basis of the existing institutions, that are, in turn, used to explain their existence.

Despite the above criticisms, this study sees structural functionalism as useful in the explanation of the role of puberty rites of passage in Nando community. Akwali rite, just as other rites of passage, contributes to the stability and holistic development of an individual which will aid to adapting well in the values and norms of the whole society. It provides the space for the (Nando) community to transmit its core values and confer the roles responsibilities appropriate to the initiate’s stage of life, thus ensuring cultural and societal continuity a sort of knitting together of the generations. Through it, young women are integrated into the society as women. Metuh

(1987) hints at this when he wrote that an individual is not introduced into the great family of a community by biological rites only. There are series of initiation rites which step by step incorporated a man into the full membership of various family groups to which he is entitled to belong by birth. Turner (1967) noted that rites of passage are not merely ceremonies of transition from one ascribed state to the next but also occur for achieved statuses. Each part of rites of passage and by extension the Akwali rite (as shall be seen later), functions in a way that maintains the stability of the whole society.

### **2.2.2 Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism is a theory which examines the meanings emerging from the reciprocal interaction of individuals in social environment with other individuals and focuses on the question of “which symbols and meanings emerge from the interaction between people?” Aksan, Kisac, Aydin and Demirbukan, (2009). Schenk and Holman (1980) defines symbolic interactionism as a dynamic theory in which objects feature meanings within themselves and individuals formulate their activities in the direction of their evaluation of themselves and also people and objects around them. Thus, it is the social actors that attribute meaning to objects.

The theory developed against the background of theorists such as Dewey (1930), Cooley (1902), Parks (1915), Mead (1938), and others. However, it received its fullest expression under Blumer. Thus, symbolic interactionists demonstrate differences in respect of their points of view, but there are commonalities. For example, all interactionists agree that the source of data is human interaction. Again, there is a general agreement among them that perspectives and empathy developing abilities of participants are the key subjects of symbolic interaction (Stryker & Vryan 2003 and Berg, 2000).

Blumer (1962), being the first to use the term “symbolic interactionism” is regarded its founder of symbolic interactionism. Blumer (1962) offers three core principles of the theory: Meaning, language (language provides means [symbols] for debating meaning) and thinking principle. The theory acknowledges the principle of meaning as the centre of human behaviour. Meaning in symbolic interactionism is based on three basic propositions. According to Poloma (1999) and Tye & Tye, (1992) state; (a) Humans develop their attitudes towards things according to the meanings that things propose to them.(b) These meanings are inferred from the “interaction of one of them from its addressees”.(c) These meanings change within an interpretive process.

Language provides a meaning to humans by means of symbols. Embedded in language and symbols is a foundational principle of symbolic interactionism: human beings are distinguished from other animals by their use of symbols (Blumer, 1962 and Mead, 1938). In fact, symbols have been understood as the very basis of social interaction, mediating between stimulus and response. Symbols are abstract representations of social objects that enable people to communicate both verbally and nonverbally and understand each other’s intentions and actions. Due to the fact that social action and interaction are symbolic in nature, people interpret the objects in their environment and the behaviours of others around them and, rather than reacting directly, respond on the basis of their interpreted meaning of those objects and actions (Blumer 1962, Charon 1992 and Meltzer 1972).

In a stable interaction, people respond to one another in the light of their shared understandings. Conversely, in circumstances in which people define the situation differently, conflict might arise until they are able to develop overlapping conceptualizations. Furthermore, person’s verbal and nonverbal communications might contradict one another, causing confusion or conflict for the receiver. Thus, symbols are socially derived and modified through interaction, rather than inherently attached to objects and events. Although symbols arise from social

interaction, at the same time, they shape social interaction and create social realities. Languages are a powerful symbol system that structures, the nature of what can be seen and considered.

As the last principle in the symbolic interaction perspective, thinking changes the interpretation of individuals pertaining to symbols (Nelson, 1998). This is related to another core concept in symbolic interactionism - the mind, which develops concurrently with the self. For symbolic interactionists, the mind is the process of internal conversation, of the individual in symbolic interaction with self. The mind is socially derived, arising from communication and association with others. Through this interaction and role-playing, the individual internalizes the definitions, symbols, meanings, and perspectives of others and is able to process information internally within a variety of contexts (Meltzer, 1972). It is the mind that enables people to understand and employ the symbols that make human society possible.

Mead (1938) recognizes three unique features of the human mind: (a) the use of symbols to designate objects in the environment, (b) the ability to rehearse covertly the alternative approaches to action toward objects and situations, and (c) the capacity to select appropriate courses of action. As people come into contact with objects in the environment, they begin to ascribe meanings, symbolic representations, to the objects. Thus, meanings of objects, rather than being innate, arise from, and are modified by, the social interaction through which people engage with them. Through experience of past interactions, and the present, people attend selectively to some symbols and disregard others. As such, perception becomes a matter of screening from the environment what is salient to one's needs at a given time (Mead 1938 and Meltzer 1972). This selectivity does not necessarily reflect conscious behaviour; nonetheless, it suggests that the individual plays a role in shaping his or her own environment. Minded behaviour is a process by which the person, in his or her own mind, sees a problem, explores alternative approaches, considers their consequences, and chooses an action. In this way, the mind serves a social



function and, rather than responding in a predetermined fashion, the individual constructs the act (Mead, 1938 and Meltzer, 2003).

Furthermore, a key concept of symbolic interactionism is the self. The self, as formulated by Mead (1938) and expounded by Blumer (1969), is a term used to indicate that a human being can act socially toward himself as he or she as she or he might toward others. This view of self as process is in contrast with the more static use of the term in behavioral sciences (Hewitt and Shulman, 2011). Individuals can see themselves in a variety of ways, such as male or female, good or bad, sick or healthy, and so forth. This self-reflection is the means by which one interacts with one's self, and becomes an object of one's own actions (Meltzer,1972). The self develops through a social process of interaction with the environment, as the human infant gains the capacity to interact meaningfully with others. The mechanism for this is role-playing and role-taking, in which children eventually learn to, put themselves in the place of others and view themselves from that standpoint (Blumer 1969, Hewitt and Meltzer, 1972).

In Mead's theory, the self is composed of two phases, the "I" and the "Me." The "I" is the self as subject, and the "Me" is the self as object as cited in Wallace and Wolf, (1986). The "I" is the part of the self that responds freely, creatively, and spontaneously. All action begins with the "I" (Mead, 1938). Shibutani (1991) describes "I" as "the impulse of an individual with a distinct personality". In contrast, "Me" is the organized and internalized set of attitudes, expectations, beliefs, understandings, and perspectives about the self that have been learned from others and is the only part of the self of which the actor is fully aware. As the internalized imperfect representation of the social group that surrounds the individual, "Me" is the socialized part of the self that exercises self-control and conformity (Ritzer, 1988). "Me" arises from the individual having learned the expectations of society both from particular others in interaction and from the

“generalized other,” in the form of culture. Consequently, an actor’s identity is associated with “Me.”

The self is not just the “I” and the “Me” added together; it is the relationship or ongoing interaction between the two. The self is the very process of interaction in which the “I” and the “Me” are engaged. This interaction between the “I” and the “Me” creates an internal dialogue that is known only to the individual. In this way, people are seen to be in constant interaction with themselves as they shift in their state of consciousness in self-reflection (Mead, 1938). Meltzer (1972) suggests that this perspective of the self defines the individual self as a society in miniature. In this way, people are seen to engage in interaction with themselves as two or more individuals might, in an internal representation of a social interaction.

Although the concepts of mind and self have been explained separately, even experienced symbolic interactionists find it difficult to distinguish between the two concepts because they occur simultaneously and are inextricably linked in symbolic interactionist thought. As explained by Weigert and Gecas (2003), the self is that part of the mind that is directed toward the self, that is, engaged in reflexivity. The self engages in a particular kind of internal conversation (between the “I” and the “Me”) for the purpose of evaluating, motivating, praising, or disapproving of itself.

Beyond the mind and the self, a major concept of symbolic interactionism is society. In symbolic interactionism, society is viewed as an organized process of ongoing, varied interaction among individuals. Thus, there is a constant and iterative interplay between people in interaction and the social context. When people interact, they do so within a socio-historical environment that provides certain meanings and shape to the interaction, at the same time as the interaction itself creates societal alteration (Katovich and Maines 2003). Due to the fact that human beings are biologically frail, cooperation is necessary for survival, yet such interaction can only occur under

certain conditions. Each individual must come to understand the intention of the acts of others and be able to guide his or her own response on the basis of that intention (Mead 1938 and Meltzer 1972). To understand another individual's intentions, the person must be able to understand the symbols and gestures used, and respond accordingly. This necessitates minded behavior and self-hood, because the individual is seen to respond to others on the basis of his or her internal understanding of the meaning of the behavior, which is derived from past interactions and anticipated future interactions. In classic symbolic interactionism, human society is viewed as consensus, that is, shared meanings in the form of common understandings (Meltzer, 1972) that provide for patterned activity and predictability. Nevertheless, people engaged in joint action and collective processes can introduce adjustments. Thus, society is perceived as a framework for interaction, rather than a determining structure (Katovich and Maines 2003).

### **Criticism of Symbolic Interactionism**

Although symbolic interactionism provides a rich insight into how people interact in small-scale situations that is, inter-personal relations, it is rather limited in scope and is as much psychological as it is sociological. A key criticism is that it fails to explore the wider social factors that create the context in which symbol, self and interaction all exist and the social implications of this context. This means that Symbolic Interactionism has no explanation of where the symbolic meanings originate from.

Symbolic Interactionism is also criticized as failing completely to explore differences between groups and individuals, and why these might occur. For example, it is a well known fact that power can be used to manipulate symbols. Becker (1963) in his derivation of Symbolic Interactionism demonstrated that more powerful groups are able to brand certain activities or

individuals as deviant, with consequences that are likely to benefit themselves and harm those labelled deviant.

Related to this criticism is that Symbolic Interactionism does not give proper attention to the motivations of individuals in interaction. This means that people who may be positively motivated tend to understand others' perspectives during interactions while people who are negatively motivated may tend towards manipulation or outrightly truncating the interaction process. Between these two groups, a third group of people may even struggle to have an interest at all in the perspective of others. All these scenarios go to prove that motivation for interaction is very important in understanding human interactions and how they affect the society.

Again, in paying more attention to individual and group interactions, Symbolic Interactionism does not address societal structures and how they affect society. (Beck 2002 and Wilber 1996) assert that this criticism is not important as the concerns of symbolic interaction by and large, are never going to be those of Structural Functionalism. When Mead and other scholars of his time were beginning to construct symbolic interactionism in the 1920s, the world was very different than it is now. This drastic difference is another criticism to the theory of Symbolic Interactionism. According to Lynch and McConatha (2006), societies focused attention on human to human interaction and were unaffected by media, advertising, and computers. Today, most societies live in a media-filled world, full of new technology that has changed the ways of basic communication. A major component of Symbolic Interactionism is that we form our self based on our perceptions and relations with other human beings in society. According to Mead, the self is subject to continual modification and improvement (Lynch and McConatha 2006). Individuals and by extension society is impacted by media from the very first years of adolescence. Instead of recreational activities with other children and engaging in rites of passage, an ever-increasing number of young people get their perceptions and ideas of society by watching television and

surfing the internet. Lynch and McConatha (2006) note that in television and advertising, value and profit are the main objectives, and modern society is influenced by the values and norms that are established by consumer-driven corporations. Identities change to conform to the ways things should be, which is based not on human to human interaction, but based on media to human interaction.

Symbolic interaction theory holds that, much of human behaviour is determined not by the objective facts of a situation, but by the meanings people ascribe to it Chrisman et al (2007). However, that is not the case now because technology is the large objective component of communication. Many operations now can be undertaken without people being right next to each other in work, shopping, and entertainment. Without the face to face interaction, however, symbols and meanings can be altered while in transition without much room on the table for clarification. With technology being a substantial part of the current environment, theorists need to alter the Symbolic Interactionism theory in order to incorporate the idea that it significantly plays a role in the way people view themselves and others Chrisman, Chu, Hucke and Nelson (2007).

In relation to the study, Akwali rite of passage is a rite of interaction. It provides forum for young men to interact with young girls of marriageable age. Interactionists are interested in how people see themselves in the broader social context. This theory of symbolic Interactionism suits Akwali rite because it seeks to encourage human interaction and at the same time discourage actions that are not morally accepted. Akwali rite of passage through its various symbolic aspects impresses on the minds of the young women who participate in it a sense of self – that is the attitude and mindset that they are now mature and responsible women. It is against this backdrop that this rite of passage highly treasured chastity before marriage.

Furthermore, passing through this rite provides the initiates with a constant reminder that they are no longer children or adolescents but women capable of fruitful interactions with the opposite sex and other full-fledged members of Nando community. Turner (1967) notes that:

The passivity of neophytes to their instructors, their malleability, which is increased by submission to ordeal, their reduction to a uniform condition, are signs of the process whereby they are ground down to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to cope with their new station in life. (p.101).

In sociology, interactionism is a theoretical perspective that derives social processes (such as conflict, cooperation, identity formation) from human interaction. It is the study of how individuals shape society and are shaped by the society through meanings that arise in interactions (Blumer,1962).

This theory forms the basic foundation of Akwali rite of passage in the sense that every aspect of this rite was geared towards interaction and socialization for both the elders and young women in Nando.

### **2.2.3 The Theory of Cultural Relativism**

Despite the fact that cultural relativism is recognized as an important theory in sociology and anthropology, it is regarded as a very controversial theory in definition and practice. According to Hartung (1954) it is the theory which claims that, "any set of customs and institutions, or way of life, is as valid as any other."(p.6) For Gellner (1985), cultural relativism is a theory which asserts that there is no absolute truth, be it ethical, moral, or cultural, and that there is no meaningful way to judge different cultures because all judgments are ethnocentric(p.4). Scholars like Zechenter (1997) are of the view that in practice, it is rather meaningless to speak of the theory of cultural relativism today, since there are several different variants of the theory, ranging from descriptive relativism (also known as weak relativism; amounting to a

commonsense observation that cultures vary), through normative relativism (or strong relativism; positing that since all standards are culture-bound, there can be no trans-cultural moral or ethical standards), up to the most extreme form of relativism, known as epistemological relativism (or extreme relativism), exemplified by Geertz and his followers, claiming that humans are shaped exclusively by their culture and therefore there exist no unifying cross-cultural human characteristics (Jarvie 1983 and Spir 1986).

The rise of cultural relativism to prominence started with Franz Boas and the theory flowered with the work of Boas's (1928) students, including Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Melville Herskovits. As formulated by the Boasians, cultural relativism encompasses several axioms. First, each culture is said to constitute a total social world that reproduces itself through enculturation, the process by which values, emotional dispositions, and embodied behaviors are transmitted from one generation to the next. Enculturation is the process by which a culture conditions man's mind, thus influencing his conceptual make-up (Schmidt 1955). Collectively, all of a group's core beliefs, rituals, traditions and other customs make up its distinct culture. Pelto (1965) opines that, culture is a total life way, not just a superficial set of customs. It largely shapes how man feels, behaves, and perceives as he adapts to his world.

Zechenter (1997) maintains that: cultures inculcated their members with moral and ethical rules through involuntary socialization and enculturation and few, if any, individuals were consciously aware of the arbitrary character of beliefs that were ingrained into them. There are two defining aspects of the enculturation process. First, enculturation is "involuntary": Second, it is in large part unconsciously accepted. Resultantly, any conviction of an individual or group is inherently "arbitrary" because they are determined solely by accident of birth. Thus; the starting point of cultural relativism is an assertive epistemological claim about man's nature. Judgment, it holds, is reliant on experience - experience that is inseparable from its cultural context. Since

man's judgments are culture-bound, so too are his methods of reasoning and knowledge. Karenek (2013) clarifies that: Cultural relativism...begins with the notion that experience is man's primary connection to reality. It is through experience that man comes to know about the world, and it is from this experience that judgments are derived. Herskovits (1972) states: The principle of cultural relativism, briefly stated, is as follows: Judgments are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation.” For him, "evaluations are relative to the cultural background out of which they arise', this does not solely pertain to value judgments, but to all reasoning and to all knowledge. Herskovits (1955) continues, “Even the facts of the physical world are discerned through the enculturative screen, so that the perception of time, distance, weight, size, and other 'realities' is mediated by the conventions of any given group (p.9). As such, reality is interpreted according to each man's inherently culture-bound perceptions. Reality is not objective, but rather subjective in that its nature is determined by and dependent upon its perceiver.

Bidney (1959) sums up the cultural relativist's view of reality and man's knowledge of it this way:

All experience is culturally mediated. There is no reality known to man beyond, or in addition to, cultural reality ... it follows a priori that all modes of perception and all value judgments are also culturally conditioned ... This thesis implies that culture is an absolute reality... and that all modes of human experience and thought are relative thereto because they are functions of culture and dependent on it for their form and content.(p.17).

Consequently, the philosophic basis of cultural relativism becomes quite clear. Man's mind-in content and form-is inevitably culture-bound and arbitrarily defined. Also, there is no such thing as objective reality, truth, or reason. This informs cultural relativism's socio-political claim for the “unqualified tolerance of all cultures” (Zechenter,1997). Given that its foundation is mutually



exclusive with any objective cross-cultural standard, value, or method, cultural relativism thus eliminates the possibility of cross-cultural judgment.

There are, in fact, innumerable cultures and thus innumerable realities, each with its own truths and moralities. There can be no universally "good" or "bad" practices since what constitutes "good" and "bad" is relative to each culture. For example, food, clothing, language, and driving rules are different within cultures, and it is important that these relative differences remain (Pelto 1965).

Therefore, societies and cultures cannot be ranked on an evolutionary scale. Each must be seen as *sui generis* and offering a satisfying way of life, however repugnant or outlandish particular aspects of it may seem to outsiders. Given the assumed integrity of each culture, anthropologists are obliged to show a tolerance for the traditional practices of other peoples and to encourage similar tolerance. Accompanying sensitivity to cultural context is the combination of empathy and detachment that Lowie (1981) calls "seeing within." Even in regard to the vast bodies of knowledge and progress science has brought to mankind, cultural relativism asserts that science is no more than "a culturally biased way of thinking that is no different from magic or witchcraft". Considering that understandings are relative to enculturation, the ethnographer must interpret a culture on the basis of its own internal web of logic rather than through the application of a universal yardstick. This principle applies to everything from language and kinship systems to morality and ontology.

### **Criticism of Cultural Relativism**

Critics have noted that proponents of classical cultural relativism are inclined to contradict their own axioms by subjecting the institutions and social practices of Western industrial societies to criticism deemed unacceptable when assessing non-Western, preindustrial ones. As Le'vi-Strauss (1972) declares, the anthropologist is fated to serve as "critic at home and conformist

elsewhere.” The justification for this sensibility is that the technological and economic dominance of the West gives it a vastly greater capacity to impose its own varieties of ethnocentrism on others Herskovits (1972).

By definition, cultural relativism does not just dismiss even the slightest possibility of objectivity; it vehemently scoffs at any attempt to integrate knowledge beyond one's own culture-bound reality. The premises, upon which cultural relativism is based, as well as its assertive claim about the equal validity of all cultures, are anything but vague on this issue. This is the first way in which cultural relativism emphatically denies reason and objective reality. Cultural relativism holds that all convictions, even the laws of physics, are culture-bound. These convictions have neither applicability nor truth outside of the cultural context from which they originate. Such a conclusion must then apply equally to cultural relativism. If cultural relativism is valid then we should regard all theories and beliefs, including cultural relativism, as culture-bound phenomena. Cultural relativism is, in fact, a predominantly western theory situated primarily in the subculture that is the ivory tower. It would be wrong, by its own accord, to apply cultural relativism cross-culturally since it is just another culture-bound theory. Indeed, some cultures hold cultural relativism to be valid while many others hold it to be invalid. According to cultural relativism, it is necessary to conclude that both views are equally valid.

Another area of cultural relativism that has been subjected to great criticism is its view on man's volitional nature. Cultural relativism regards man as a product of enculturation and involuntary and uncritically accepted process by which the content of man's mind is determined by his culture. There can be little room for volition in this framework since man is unaware of, let alone able to challenge, the force that is determining his conceptual make-up. Everything men "choose" to value, believe, and pursue, is simply a product of his cultural conditioning, and as such, is inherently arbitrary. Such an assertion cannot hold water (Karenek 2013).

On the contrary, Karenek (2013) asserts that man's mind is not a ball of clay on which incontestable and unknown forces exert themselves. Man is undoubtedly a volitional being. That is, he is able to choose his values, ideas, and actions. In every issue and with respect to every idea, he can choose to evaluate it or not, and he can choose to accept it or not. This is fundamental to man's "metaphysically given nature. Rand (n.d) cited in Karenek (2013) elucidates that:

A man's volition is outside the power of other men. What the unalterable basic constituents are to nature, the attribute of a volitional consciousness is to the entity 'man: Nothing can force a man to think. Others may offer him incentives or impediments, rewards or punishments' they may destroy his brain by drugs or by the blow of a club, but they cannot order his mind to function: this is in his exclusive, sovereign power. (p.13).

Cultural relativism sanctions the worst manifestations of violence and oppression. It does this in two ways. First, it makes the innocent morally defenseless against those that wish to do them harm. Second, it morally sanctions the actions of the aggressors. In regard to the first, to be morally defenseless is to be without any valid moral ground by which one can justify his actions, convictions, or character. Cultural relativism disarms men by proclaiming that there are no standards, whether moral of any other form, by which cross-cultural judgment is at all possible. Logically, in lieu of any standard, judgmental proclamations of any kind are meaningless. Karenek (2013) asks: what weight can be ascribed to the proclamation that something is good or bad without a criterion for determining what constitutes the good and bad?

Cultural relativism, still, goes a step further in that it morally sanctions the aggressors. It does so by ascribing validity to their actions. If all ways of life are equally valid because there are various cultural ideas and practices and there is no way to adjudicate them, then the source of their validity lies in the fact that they are cultural practices. In other words, an idea or practice is valid precisely because it is an idea or practice in some culture. As a result, One is compelled to

accept any cultural pattern as vindicated precisely by its cultural status: slavery, cannibalism, Nazism, or Communism may not be congenial to Christians or to contemporary Western societies, but moral criticism of the cultural patterns of other people is precluded (Zencheter, 1997). This means that practices such as forced female genital mutilation, which affects millions of women around the globe and often leads to severe physical and mental ailment, infection, and death, is valid and has value because it is a practice.

Relating cultural relativism to the study, the theory is relevant in the sense that most cultural practices in Igboland and more specifically the Akwali rite of passage, have suffered from ethnocentric biases of Western views. The advent of colonization and Christianity saw the disparagement of the cherished culture of the people of Nando of which Akwali rite was an integral part. Metuh (1987) captures this standpoint when he opines that,

African Traditional Religion during this period was not studied for its own sake but rather seen as the form of religion which was still in one of the early evolutionary stages of religion. It was, therefore, variously labelled 'primitive Religion, Magic, Fetishism, Animism, Polytheism, Primitive monotheism which evolutionists believed represented religion in its most primitive manifestations (p..3).

From the foregoing, the need arises to study the culture of Nando community based on its merits, not with the lens of foreign scholars.

Therefore, this study takes up this task and seeks to present Akwali puberty rites as practised by the people of Nando, in Anambra State. The researcher, being from the community, is better positioned, as espoused by cultural relativism, to examine the subject matter. The rediscovery of the Akwali rite of passage, which has been affected by Christianity amidst other factors, is in line with the tenets of cultural relativism which hold that no elements of a culture is

superior to that in another culture. In the spirit of rediscovery, this study recognizes the criticisms of cultural relativism regarding cultural practices like female genital mutilation and other forms of scarification which may be harmful to the initiates and proposes alternatives to these practices.

### **2.3 Empirical Studies on Puberty Rites of Passage**

In this section of literature review, some works that have been written on rite of passage are reviewed.

Van Gennep (1960) studies the concept as a social phenomenon among preliterate and literate societies and observed that primitive people regard life as a journey from one stage of existence to another. In the course of the journey, rituals and ceremonies are observed and used to aid them to move from one transitional stage or phase of life to the other. These ceremonies are also employed to handle life crises and life cycles which every individual and society encounters. He called these ritual ceremonies “rites of passage.” He therefore defined “rites of passage” as rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age. He also extended his definition to include a change in space and time. Apart from marking the transitions of an individual’s life, rites of passage reflect and bolster the dominant religious views and values of a culture.

From his study, Van Gennep held the view that when activities associated with such rites were examined in terms of their form and content, it was possible to distinguish three major consecutive phases or stages which he referred to in French as “separation”, “*marge*” and “*aggregation*” translated into English as separation, transition and reincorporation. He calls rites marking these stages as preliminal rites, liminal (or threshold) rites, and postliminal rites respectively. In addition to defining the basic structure of rites of passage, Van Gennep was also the first to emphasize that rites associated with the transition from childhood to adolescence, though often occurring around puberty, were focused primary on a social – as opposed to a

biological – transition. Though these rites do tend to occur around puberty, Van Gennep argued that the physical changes of puberty were rarely the focus of the rites, which may occur well before or well after puberty depending on the specific goals and meanings associated with this transition.

Van Gennep's work is a classic and usually indicates the starting point of most studies dealing with rites of passage. Apart from coining the term rites of passage and bringing the attention of sociologists, anthropologists and ethnologists to the phenomenon, there are certain gaps in his study. For example, his study was preoccupied with identifying forms and patterns in rites of passage, especially puberty rites, and in doing this, Van Gennep identified the three phases which are evident in all rites of passage viz separation, transition and incorporation. However, a thorough reading of Van Gennep and assessment of rites of passage as obtained in various societies show that not all rites of passage follow the above pattern. In some societies, there may be an absence of a phase, while in other societies, certain phases are more elaborate than others.

Furthermore, the study is silent on the great influence external factors have on the practice of these rites despite the prevalence of imperialism and ethnocentrism at the time he carried out his study. This study fills this gap by examining the influence of factors such as Christianity, Western education, urbanization and globalization on Akwali rite of passage which is a puberty rite of passage among the people of Nando in Anambra State.

Following van Gennep's work, a number of scholars have attempted to explain the existence of initiation rituals through cross-cultural analysis and using Freudian or neo-Freudian theory. Whiting, et al (1958) conducted a large-scale, cross-cultural comparison of male initiation ceremonies at puberty that offers a specific interpretation to account for the presence and absence of these ritual events and generalizations on the significance of the rites that presumably apply to

all societies. Using data from the Human Relations Area Files, Whiting and collaborators compares 56 societies and offered an interpretation, presented in quantitative form that was derived largely from psychoanalytic theory concerning the Oedipus complex. A close relation is reported to exist between customs fostering intimacy between mother and infant son, on the one hand, and male puberty rites on the other. Puberty rites were seen to control hostility toward the father or adult male authority which, although held in check during childhood, may dangerously manifest itself with the onset of puberty unless measures are taken to prevent it.

There are the dilemmas of choice of which societies to include in studies when carrying out cross-cultural studies of the kind which Whiting and his group did. There is a danger incurred by failure to examine for each society the cultural context of the phenomenon or variables concerned, which Norbeck, Walter and Cohen (1962) called “including in a single category, phenomena of different universes.” Cohen (1964) also challenges the application of Oedipus complex in this study because studies like this fail to prove the existence of a universal conflict between the sexes.

A keen look at the study reveals the gap that with the exception of generally skeletal references to puberty rites, nothing is presented of the manner in which socialization during puberty rites is conducted. This study fills this gap with a detailed account of how participants are socialized during Akwali rite of passage.

Raum (1939) in his study among the Chaga of Northern Tanzania examines female initiation rites and their educational component. In his detailed account, he describes the various “lessons,” provided in the female initiation rituals regarding adult life, including lessons about puberty, marriage and childbearing, and suggests that education is a “fundamental motive” of initiation. Raum’s suggestion that education is the “fundamental motive” of initiation does not

explain why elaborate rituals must be used when the primary goal is simply transmission of knowledge.

Though education may represent one important aspect of initiation rituals, analyses such as Raum's, which focus exclusively on the "educational" aspects of initiation rituals, often fail to address the physical, social and psychological importance of these rituals beyond simply "learning." In contrast, this study adopts a holistic approach towards the phenomenon of puberty rites.

Richards (1956) records that the Bemba initiation ceremony for girls and brides-to-be in what could be described as "idyllic detail." Before delving into the ceremony, he provided a background to Bemba ideology and dogma; Here he stressed the importance that the Bemba people accord to sex, fire and blood. For the Bemba people these three things are important and dangerous at the same time dangerous because, as Richards noted, if they are brought into wrongful contact with each other, they can bring about disastrous results. Since the three (fire, blood and sex) are a woman's responsibility, a woman has to receive instruction on how to handle these and many other taboos through the teaching she receives during the puberty rites known as imbusa.

Richards points out that much of what girls "learn," in the context of initiation does not represent new information, but a change in the expectations of the girls themselves as to their responsibility and responsiveness to duties as adult women. He argues that the girls' initiation rituals were concerned more with growth than with education, and involved both facilitating and celebrating the physical, psychological and social transformation the girls' were experiencing as they made the transition to adulthood.



Richards then gives a detailed account of the Chisungu ceremony she attended in 1931. During the time when she attended this ceremony, it was imperative that as soon as a girl reached puberty and went through the ritual, she was ready for marriage. While Richards (1956) provided a systematic overview of the ceremony, she did not deal with the ways in which these teachings function to promote women's subordination or liberation. Again, the study downplays the educational component of puberty rites. This study takes this up and argues that elaborate puberty rites like Akwali rites emphasize the education and training of girls to acquire new knowledge, and skills not readily available to non-initiates and which give the girls a sense of pride.

Acquah (2009) writes that puberty rites of adulthood are the second major initiation rite and it is nowadays the most popular among the set of rites. He goes on further to say that, most people today assume that "rites of passage" only refers to initiation into adulthood, and that they are often not aware that adulthood rites are only one set of rites within a larger system of rites. Adulthood rites, according to him, are usually done at the onset of puberty age (around 12-13 years of age in many cultures) and they are to ensure the shaping of productive, community-oriented responsible adults.

Acquah (2009) avers that there is nothing automatic about youths being productive members of society, nor is there anything particularly difficult about transitioning from a child to an adult. This transition to adulthood is exceedingly difficult in Western societies because there are no systems of adulthood rites to systematically guide and direct the young person through this important stage in his or her life cycle.

Acquah again elucidates that, African societies on the other hands systematically initiate boys and girls. They often take the young initiates out of the community, and away from the concerns of everyday life, to teach them all the ways of adulthood, including the rules and taboos of the society; moral instruction and social responsibility; and further clarification of his/her mission or calling in life.

The fact that Acquah stretches himself into the elaborate consideration of the various rites of passage in African societies leaves him no room to give a detailed account of female puberty rites other than generalizations. Asserting that puberty rites do not automatically make initiates de-facto productive members in the society and that there is nothing difficult about transforming a child into an adult oversimplified the matter and show the dangers of generalization – that is, misrepresentation of facts. This study does not take information about puberty rites for granted but takes steps to ascertain the nature of a specific puberty rite of passage. The information it presents about the Akwali rite stems from the first-hand accounts of participants.

Lanoue (2001) in his on the First Nations women explored how “seclusion rituals at puberty” and other observed taboos play a role in the construction of social identity and power. Acknowledging the importance of the ritualization of young women’s reproductive capacity, he uses a combination of what he described as “old and traditional” data and fieldwork to examine women’s puberty rites among northern and north-west coast peoples of Canada. Interestingly, Lanoue (2001) laments that initial information of women puberty rites were provided by mostly male anthropologists who highlighted the differences between the male and female rites in the society in order to justify that men were socially and politically superior to women.

In view of this misrepresentation, Lanoue’s study compared puberty rites among Tlingit, Nootka and Kwakiutl and he found that girls’ puberty rites involved a period of seclusion that varied from 2 or 3 months to 2 years (for the Tlingit) and 4 to 10 months (for the Nootka). Other features included a major gift-giving ceremony, the potlatch and a mini feast held at the end of the girl’s seclusion. Other characteristics of the puberty rites are: the symbolic control of a woman’s gaze, her genitals and blood, and her food and water. The aim is to create a powerful metaphoric signs (for example between the vagina and menstrual blood); between gazing and blindness; between affirming one’s humanity by consuming food or by denying it by fasting; which symbolically transforms the faster into prey) It is no accident that many rhetorical justifications

and descriptions involved to explain the components of the ritual stress how young women will acquire specific adult qualities as a result ( for example her milk will be abundant, her body “dry” etc).

On the whole, Lanoue’s work provides an important glimpse into the presence of puberty rites in far flung societies, in this case, Canada; and the meanings attached to seclusion as a crucial part of puberty rites. Beyond outlining the unique characteristics of puberty rites among the tribes of the First Nations, the study underscores not only the changes in organizational structure of the tribes occasioned by these rites, but how they serve a functional role in positioning women for strategic marriages and as “symbolic linchpins” facilitating the survival of the tribes.

In spite of the above, Lanoue does not do justice to the phenomenon of puberty rites among the tribes studied. Probably, this is due to the data used for the study as he admitted. Lanoue explicitly concedes that his study was “superficial and incomplete” hinting at one of the problems of studying extinct puberty rites of passage. This study fills this gap by collecting information from actual participants of Akwali rite of passage. This makes it possible to present accurate accounts of the rite.

Markstrom and Iborra (2003) carries out a study on girls, puberty rites (Kinaalda) among the Navajo. The study sheds light on how such rites aid the formation of feminine identity of American Indian adolescents. Approaching the study from a psychosocial and anthropological perspective, Markstrom and Iborra describes the 4-day Kinaalda (which occurs during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> menstrual cycle) as a rite of passage for Navajo girls that is a celebration of entry into womanhood and firmly establishes them within the context of family life and Navajo society. In addition to the reproductive and social function of the Kinaalda, it serves as an expression of Navajo worldview and religious beliefs in the changing woman, who embodies the ideals of the

Navajo womanhood. Mensuration, seen as a powerful state which prepares the girl for the rite, is the essence of changing woman that permits the transformation of the girl into an important supernatural figure.

Markstrom and Iborra notes, that the Kinaalda had experienced changes due to European contact. They identified that the prevalence of non-Native education and the increasing proficiency in English language have affected the understanding of Kinaalda rituals and the “degree” to which young girls understand the words of the Navajo songs during the ceremony.

A keen examination of Markstrom and Iborra’s work reveals a gap. It fails to evaluate the changes the Kinaalda had undergone as well as the factors that propelled those changes. Moreover, the authors used mostly information obtained from contemporary practices of the ceremony. This study fills these gaps by taking into consideration the factors that have influenced Akwali rites of passage using information from people who have participated in the rite.

Agbasiere (2000) devotes a section of her study on *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* to female puberty rites in Igboland. She does not use the term “puberty rites” but preferred the term “rite of seclusion” and offers the various local names for the rite such as *ibaulo*, *ibamkpa*, *ibamkpu*, *nkpu* and *mgbede*. Citing Nsofor and Eze (1977), Agbasiere made a weighty observation on the whole, Igbo culture, unlike other Nigerian cultures (particularly Ketu, Yoruba, discussed in detail in Babatunde (1980), does not feature spectacular transitional rites between maidenhood and marriage.

Agbasiere asserts, however, that the onset of menstruation is followed by a “prescribed maturing ritual” a crucial characteristic of which is seclusion. The rite of seclusion entailed withdrawal from involvement in social and domestic activities and confinement within the parental home of the girl. The period of seclusion varies from 7 native weeks to 7 native months (about 6 calendar months) and culminates with an organized parade of participants around the

main marketplace. She noted that this parade is a usual sequence identified with most Igbo rites of passage. Moreover, a girl is expected to be betrothed within 6 – 12 months of performing this rite.

Agbasiere maintains that the period of seclusion function as a means for the intensive education of young girls and involved serious initiation into “female secrets” of married life in general and formal lessons in wifhood and motherhood in particular. For example, major values for successful conjugal relations taught include resourcefulness, wifely subjection, and restriction on sexuality, premarital chastity and fidelity with marriage. Thus, the rite of seclusion offers an opportunity to give maidens a traditional form of marriage guidance and counselling.

Associated with the above is the subjection of the girl to forms of body decoration such as *igba mbubu* – tattooing, particularly of the navel and surrounding areas; *ipi-eze* – tooth-filing, and *igba nja* – wearing of brass spiral leg rings. Agbasiere (2000) avers that while *igba nja* was practised in Ibi and its environs (and terminated with the end of the Nigerian Civil War), the custom of tattooing is still prevalent in some areas of Awka (for example, Nneni Nri) in Anambra State. Other decorative elements of the rite include elaborate coiffure, body dyes et cetera. Evaluating the status of the rite of seclusion, Agbasiere notes that,

In many areas of Igboland the extrinsic dimension of the custom of seclusion, the purely physical constraint has been greatly modified, if not totally abandoned within the last few decades. However, there is plenty of evidence to show that the intrinsic dimension, the moral constraint, is still prevalent in male-female relations.

Although Agbasiere’s study illustrates female puberty rites in Igboland, there are gaps that require attention. First, her statement that most Igbo communities lack spectacular transition rites is a generalization that does not truly represent the reality. Probably, because she does not set out to examine puberty rites, she did not take time to present concrete examples of puberty rites in Igbo communities that go beyond seclusion. Second, in the study, she totally neglects the

religious dimension of puberty rites. This study fills these gaps by exploring Akwali rite of passage which is also a specific rite of passage for girls in Nando community of Igboland. This study also goes beyond looking at the social dimensions of Akwali rite and examines the religious dimension which underpins the rite.

## **2.4 Summary of the Literature Review**

Rites of passage have received scholarly attention since the van Gennep's (1960) seminal work in this area. Attempts to clarify the concept of rites of passage mostly dwell on or elaborate the tripartite structure espoused by van Gennep. Literature on rites of passage have also been examined using different lenses ranging from the psychoanalytic to functionalist. This review of literature investigated structural-functionalist and symbolic interactionist perspectives in addition to the theory of cultural relativism as the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study on Akwali rite of passage.

It was established that rites of passage do not only cover transitions from one stage to another, but encompass transitions from one status to another. Essentially, rites of passage involve ceremonies marking these transitions. Of all the transitions human beings go through, puberty rites have greatly fascinated scholars. Initial forays into this field drew distinctions between male and female puberty rites with the former garnering most attention. However, with time, female puberty rites were given considerable attention in literature and their role in the life and survival of societies was recognized. This informed the focus of female puberty rites in the review.

Nevertheless, there is still a dearth of scholarly work dealing specifically on Akwali rite of passage. This study takes up this challenge and aims at providing the much-needed information on Akwali rite in Nando community.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NANDO: LOCATION AND PEOPLE

#### 3.1 Situating Nando in Igboland

The Igbo people of South-eastern Nigeria are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. Currently, they are mainly found in Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo states. Ononuju (1996) maintained that the Igbo people are also in some parts of Delta State, Rivers and Ojoja in Cross-river State. Their major occupations include fishing, farming, trading and craftwork. They occupy the eastern part of Nigeria. Slattery (2017) observed that the area called Igboland is divided by the River Niger into two unequal sections – the eastern region (which is the larger) and the Midwestern region. The Igbo are surrounded by the Bini, Warri, Ijaw, Ogoni, Igala, Tiv Yako and Ibibio. Having occupied these areas for thousands of years, the term Igboland is used to describe the region (Ohadike, 1991).

While the territory occupied by the Igbo could be easily ascertained, their origins have been the subject of much speculation. Afigbo (1975) opines that real work on the origin of the Igbo is a recent phenomenon triggered by the effects of colonialism on Igbo identity. Two major schools of thought can be identified regarding the origin of the Igbo. The first school is based on the opinion that the Igbo are from Israel and due to one reason or the other, left Israel and wandered, until they got to where they are today (Ononuju 1996). Corroborating this school of thought, Ekwemmuor (2003) wrote that,

There are many legends about the origin of Igbo race which describe different stages in its development . One of them is the Eri legend which traces the origin of the Igbo to the Jew who reached Nigeria during the period of Eri migration. According to the tradition, Eri ,the son of Gad and grandson of Jacob (Israel) migrated from among the stock of Israel in Egypt at the time of Exodus .After long

wandering he and his men came to settle at the location of the confluence of the River Ezu and Anambra (Ezu na Omabala).(p.1).

The other school of thought is grounded in archaeology and traces the origin of the Igbo using data from excavations of sites in present day Igboland. Accordingly, Nzomiwu (1999) quoting Ifemesia, avers that,

The Igbo of the pre-colonial era lived in self – sufficient communities more or less isolated from each other .Each community averaged about five thousand people. The remarkable excavation recently made in Igboukwu in Aguata Local Government Area revealed that by the ninth century AD, the Igbo had already a rich and dynamic culture. (p.1).

Nando is a town in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State According to Maduawia (1999), Nando is located 06:20° and 06:57°NE of Onitsha. It is at kilometre twenty eight on Onitsha-Nsukka road. It is about twenty square kilometres in landmass with population spanning over two hundred thousand people. Nando is bounded in the South by Umuleri and Nteje,Igbariam in the East,Aguleri in the West and in the North Anaku. According to Madubuonu (2016)Nri had five sons and a daughter. The names of his sons were Agulu-eri, Agukwu-nri, Igbariam, Amanuke, and Igala. Iguedo was his only daughter. Iguedo, had four sons, Ogbunike,Awkuzu, Umueri and Nando.

Nando, on his part, had three sons called Ikenga, Ezi and Ivite. These three sons of Nando are collectively called Nando “Akwukwo na ato”. Ikenga gave birth to Agbudu, Umuawo and Abube. Ezi gave birth to Ubara-isiioye, Akamanato and Isinyi, while Ivite known as Ikem gave birth to Dagama and Akato.



Figure 2: Map of Nando



Source: Fieldwork, 2016

There is the absence of a pronounced hill in Nando, but the topography is characterized by rainforests. Nando has clay loamy soil and this explains why they cultivate rice, *akidi*, yam, cassava, coco yam and so on. Nando people experience two seasons every year, the dry and the rainy season. The rainy season usually begins slowly in April until the month of September. October marks the onset of the dry season.

According to Obiora (personal Communication, February 2, 2015) Nando people are engaged in many occupations like farming, fishing, hunting and different kinds of “*dibia*”. *Dibia* (medicine men) in Nando are called “*oje na mmuo*”. Obiora (2016) confirmed that Nando people excel in fishing which is done on Ezu River, located at the boundary of Nando and Anaku. Today, the people of Nando are engaged in contemporary professions like teaching, medical and legal practice etc.

### **3.2 Origin of Nando**

The origin and history of Nando is steeped in oral tradition and myth. Concerning myths, Madu (2008) noted that; Some myths are popular stories. They could be drawn from ideas and facts familiar to the people. The fact enhances their values as vehicles of people’s religious beliefs. Such beliefs will enjoy an appreciable degree of authenticity. In preliterate societies, myth would therefore conserve, preserve and transmit religious ideas and beliefs (p.30).

Madubuonu (personal communication, March 10, 2016) recounted the myth surrounding the origin of Nando people stating that a certain man called Nri had five sons and a daughter. The names of his sons were Agulu-eri, Agukwu-nri, Igbariam, Amanuke, and Igala. Iguedo was his only daughter. Iguedo, as history has it, was a beautiful woman and equally a great medicine woman. She had four sons, the first son “Egbunike”, who today is known as Ogbunike. While pregnant with Egbunike, she was maltreated by her husband to the point of death. This explains the logic behind the name “Egbunike”, which means “do not kill by force”. This means that

Iguedo was not pleased with her husband who maltreated her and entreated him not to kill her and her baby by force.

Iguedo had another son named Umu-eri, which she named after her father Eri. Umu-eri has been known by other names such as Umuleri. She was again blessed with another son called Na-ndo, which means “under the shadow.” Iguedo blessed her last son exceedingly. When she died, she was buried at Ubarunisioye Nando. Her burial place was later elevated to the status of a shrine. Eze-Iguedo became the title of the priest in-charge of her shrine.

Nando, on his part, had three sons called Ikenga, Ezi and Ivite. These three sons of Nando were collectively called Nando “*Akwukwo na ato*”. Ikenga gave birth to Agbudu, Umuawo and Abube. Ezi gave birth to Ubara-isioye, Akamanato and Isinyi, while Ivite known as Ikem gave birth to Dagama and Akato. In Nando, respect is still accorded Ikenga by virtue of his seniority, hence the seat of power is reserved for his descendants.

### **3.3 Cosmology and Worldview of Nando People**

A people’s world view is the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the whole of the individual’s or society knowledge and point of view.

Madu (1997) views

Worldview is the totality of a people’s assumptions. It can be said to give a sense of direction and purpose to our lives, and enables us to act purposely in, and exercise a measure of control over our environment. It is our sub-conscious guide through life. In other words, it is the complex of a people’s beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, the nature, structure, organisation and interaction of beings in the universe with particular reference to. ( p.1).

The cosmology and worldview of Nando people is anchored on the beliefs and practices handed down by their ancestors and, in most aspects, reflected the wider Igbo cosmology and worldview. They have a concept of God as the Supreme Being. According to Udemba (personal communication, February 2, 2015), Nando people called God Chukwu Abiame, which means Almighty God. The people see God as the Supreme Spirit that is greater than other spirits, the Creator God whose abode is in the sky. He went further to state that Nando people strongly believe in divinities, spirits and the cult of their ancestors. This explains why most of the houses in Nando have *obu*. This is a place dedicated to the dead *ndi-iche* (a name for the ancestors). Ogbukagu (2008) captures the ontology of the people of Nando when he stresses that,

The major divinities are gods, which by the true nature of existence cannot be said to be created. They share aspects of divine status with God. Minor divinities can be grouped into personified and deified beings. Because this class of gods also belong to the domain of the supernatural forces and as well by the nature of their substantiality cannot be said to be created, they too are primordial and close associates of God, but at a lower level. (p.353).

Nando people also believe in spirits and acknowledge that spirits can inhabit natural phenomena such as trees, bushes and water. In Nando, one can easily observe that some trees and bushes are clothed with pieces of white cloth around them that is a sign that spirits inhabit such trees and bushes. This belief was clearly pictured by Idowu (1973) when he affirms that:

Spirits, according to African belief, are ubiquitous; there is no area of the earth, no object or creature, which has not a spirit of its own or which cannot be inhabited by a spirit. Thus there are spirits of which can be inhabited in trees. There are special trees which are considered sacred by African and these are believed to be special residences of spirits. (p.174).

The belief that Nando people have in spirits is functional in nature in the sense that spirits are perceived to play different roles. For instance, they are expected to ensure the successful growth of crops, protect the members of the community from external aggression, and even guide individuals in their daily lives. For Offiong (1991)

Those spirits responsible for social function, foster reproduction, health, and longevity by protecting the members of families and each of the traditional associations. A significant number of them serve each of the types of religious practitioners by maintaining contact between them and the deity, to install souls and fates upon conception, and to watch the behaviour of people and report to Abasi for subsequent reward or punishment. (p.10).

On the belief in ancestors, Nando community espouses the idea that ancestors though dead, are living. Every family in Nando has a small hut in their compounds where they believe is the abode of their ancestors. The importance placed on the ancestors probably informed Anyanwu's (1999) insistence that after the Supreme Being, there is hardly any other element in Igbo religion in general that is so clear to the Igbo man's heart and receives as much regular attention as the ancestors. In Nando, the reverence and the respect of the ancestors can be better understood in the *alomuo* festival which will be described later.

The people of Nando also have deities that act as intermediaries between God and man. Ajana deity occupies a prominent place in the pantheon of deities in Nando. Its sphere of influence covers the land as well as water. According to Nwakor (personal communication, February 2, 2016), Ajana deity has a shrine where disputes are settled through swearing and oath-taking. Thus, the people of Nando say '*ka anyi je taa oji na ajana*' (meaning "let us go to Ajana and eat kolanut").

Iyi-oji is another deity in Nando, located in Ubaraisioye village. This deity is mainly appealed to for the settlement of disputes. If, for example, a person is suspected of stealing and he denies the allegation, he will swear an oath before Iyi-oji. If the accused is found guilty, the punishment is death.

Among the people of Nando, Igbonekwe is the deity that gives male children. Traditionally, any woman that gives birth to a male child must present it to Igbonekwu. Also, any woman that wants a male child must pay a visit to the deity. Other deities in Nando include *Omalaba*, *Ezeudu*, *Ofufe*, and *Anyafu-igwe*. Each deity has its own functions and is sought for when the need arises.

The cosmology of the people of Nando recognizes man as the centre of the universe. He is susceptible to the influence of the spirit beings for good or for bad. Hence, Nando people believe that man has a duty to maintain cosmic equilibrium in order to ensure his survival and the preponderance of good in the community. Maintenance of cosmic equilibrium in Nando is achieved through socio-religious instruments like *ofo*, divination, *ikpu aru*, oath-taking and *igbandu*.

In Nando, there are approved behavioural patterns expected from members of the community and any form of deviance attracts punishment commensurate with the offence committed. Again, for deviants to be accepted back to the community, different forms of appeasement are made depending on the magnitude of the offence. Madu (1997) admits that the essence of social control mechanisms is to maintain cosmic equilibrium. According to him,

To ensure that cosmic harmony is re-established, it is, therefore, necessary to evolve a kind of control mechanism that can guide the actions of men in line with the maintenance and enhancement of harmony. That is why reasonable standards of acting in human societies are formulated. (p.100).

The various socio-religious instruments for maintaining cosmic equilibrium in Nando community are briefly explained below.

### ***OFO***

*Ofo* is both a religious symbol and a symbol of authority. It is used for oath-taking and serves as a symbol of protection among Nando people. The head of each *Umunna*, who is likely to be the eldest, is in custody of the “*ofo*” which serves as a symbol of authority in each village. According to Nzomiwu (1999),

*Ofo* is a cultural symbol which is widely used among the Igbo. *Ofo* is made out of a branch of the *Detarium Senegalense* tree. One of the characteristics of this tree is that its branches are naturally divided into segments which naturally fall off when it is fully grown. Each segment is an *Ofo*. In the pre-colonial days, only chief priests could collect the *Ofo* branches and all the other people were prohibited from even approaching the tree. The tree was believed to be a meeting place of the ancestral spirits. (p.99).

### ***Igba Afa (Divination)***

*Igba afa* (divination) is one of the special art used in Nando from time immemorial to seek for solution to problems or hidden secrets. According to Obigwe (2011),

Divination is an act that involves communication between the diviner and spiritual world which an ordinary person cannot understand. Nevertheless divination goes beyond that because it gives meaning to life. Man has two worlds the physical world and the spiritual world and it is through the process of divination that the Igbo traditional religion narrows the gap between the two worlds (p.11).

The diviner will not only tell the cause or causes of a problem but will also offer solution to the problem. Arinze (1986) corroborates this idea when he submits that:

Divination in African Traditional Religion and culture is obtaining information about the future .The diviner is consulted to both discover the things that will happen in future as well as how to solve the problem of hidden knowledge of strange things that might have happened in the past. (p.11).

From the above explanation, it is clear that to maintain cosmological equilibrium, divination is one of the tools to be used. As far as Nando people are concerned, *igba afa* is integral to daily living because whatever affects one person affects all and it is taken as a burden for all before it gets out of hand. Divination, therefore, provides the key that unlocks the solution to man's problem Obigwe, (2011). It is also the avenue that gives the Igbo traditionalists access to interact with their gods and ancestors.

### ***Ikpu aru/Oath-Taking***

Being Igbo, the people of Nando recognize that there are some actions that are abomination (Aru) and some that are taboos (*Nso*). According to Eyisi (2006), abominations are acts considered as a desecration of oneself and the land or environment. It is an offence against the community and nature as well as a sin against God. They, therefore, require proper "cleansing or purification" (*Ikpu aru*) (p.3). Some examples of abominations in Nando are, murder, abortion, suicide, rape, incest, and so forth. On the other hand, Eyisi (2006) defines a taboo as:

A highly forbidden act or behaviour. In Igbo cultural context, taboos are acts, action or deeds highly regarded as offences in a particular community, such offences may not be taboos in another community. However, there are acts or actions that are generally considered as taboos among the Igbo tribe. Examples of



such taboos are stealing of yam, adultery, prostitution, to dupe, to beat a titled man, for a child to beat his parent and armed . (p.4).

Nando community shares this idea of taboo and makes provision for certain punishments regarding such offences, for example public exposure, ostracism, excommunication, denial of decent burial (for persons who die under the punishment of ostracism).

In case a person denies any offence that he committed, an oath-taking is the only option. For Ndiokwere (1994):

Oath taking is another form of solemn testimony done to confirm that one was telling the truth, It is also a public form of confession in which one denies accusation, thus reaffirming the previous stand namely, that of innocence or it can be a positive act of obliging oneself to the terms of contract-God is normally called to be sole witness. (p.121).

Oath-taking or professing that one is innocent (of the accusation made against one) is taken as an invocation of the power of the most powerful deity in a locality. Many deities are regarded as acting promptly once invoked to intervene. They either kill the guilty or handicap the defaulter for life. It is a common belief that the deity will even visit one's family with punishment if not appeased properly (Adibe, 2009).In Nando, this is done in many forms; it can be in the form of *ita oji ajana* (that is eating kola nut in the presence of *Ajana* deity) *Inu iyi na-alusi* (swearing with the idol) by taking grains of sand, lifting them up to the sun and swearing an oath. Among the people of Nando, no dispute is considered settled until the individual or the group being accused swears an oath.

### **3.4 Socio-Political Organization in Nando**

This section will examine the social and political organization that exist in Nando community.

### 3.4.1 Igwe and Ndiichie

Socio-political life in Nando community was egalitarian in nature and structure. In practice, socio-political institutions were geared towards promoting democratic principles and a sense of solidarity. At the top of the ladder is the king known as Igwe. Igwe Odibeva is the traditional ruler of Nando. The Igwe is from Agbudu village. According to Anumudu (personal communication, March 12, 2016), succession of the stool in Nando is hereditary. When an Igwe dies, the oldest man in the ruling family automatically succeeds him. A new Igwe begins to reign after the last Ofala ceremony of the deceased. Following the Igwe at the helm of leadership is an important traditional institution in Nando called *akwukwo n'ato*. It is made up of representatives of the three quarters of Nando comprising Ezi, Ikenga and Ivite. They form the Igwe's cabinet and assist him in his administration. Nevertheless, with the recent emergence of the autonomous communities, some villages have their own Eze.

In Nando, Ndiichie hold the highest authority in each village. The nature of leadership carried out by Ndiichie was explained by Nzomiwu (1999) thus:

The government of each community was in the hands of the elders (Ndiichie) whose permanent members were the family heads. But every adult male had the right to attend a meeting of council of elders. In ordinary every day affairs the council of elders rules by decrees but in matters of great moment, the whole village or community had to be consulted.(p.3).

Ndiichie is headed by a chief .

### **3.4.2 Umunna**

The village level of leadership is followed by leadership at the clan level carried out by a group of elders known as *Umunna*. Leadership by the *Umunna* encourages political dialogue, equality, communalism and egalitarianism among the lineages and families. The great respect accorded elders by virtue of their age, wisdom and experience afforded every adult an opportunity to seat at the meetings where crucial decisions concerning the community are reached (Nzomiwu, 1999). Ogbukagu (2008) notes that the *umunna* constitutes the strongest and the most effective means of managing and controlling excesses in village democracy, and also an essential vehicle for maintenance of law and order.

According to Okafor (personal communication, February 12, 2016), in Nando, *umunna* helps to settle disputes, and organize burial ceremonies and other activities that concern them and the families they represent.

### **3.4.3 Age-grade**

In Nando, the age grade known as *ogbo* or *Iru* is an institution involved in the day-to-day governing process. Members of the age grade are usually those born in a particular year although it could incorporate those born within a period. The age grades in Nando community include *Amoku, Okpoke, Mgadabuanu, Mmuta, Udoka, Iruka, Njikoka, Oganiru, Igwebuike, Ofuobi, Ubaka, Obinwanne and Ifeadiogo* age grades.

However, the most honoured age grade in Nando is the “*iru-na-ano*”, It comprises of four age grades. They advise Eze Nando and the members of the cabinet on issues that affect Nando. The functions of age grade system in Nando are very noticeable. They assist in maintaining general cleanliness, building of infrastructures like schools, hospitals, markets and post offices. According to E.E Udemezue (personal communication, January 10, 2016), there was a time Nando

and Enugu-ukwu went to Ogbaligidi court and the people of Enugu-ukwu triumphed because they had better indigenous lawyers, and while Nando had none. The humiliation prompted Amaoku and Irunano age grade into building a school and mandating every parent to send their kids to school.

Moreover, belonging to an age grade encourages the spirit of hardwork as the achievements of some members spur other to greater achievements. Hence, a Nando man could be heard saying “*Ndi ogbo m anubago nwanyi ,aluba go` ulo, ka m jee mee nke mu*”, meaning, “my age grade members are marrying, they are building houses, I have to do likewise”. In this light, Okwueze (2003) maintains that,

The age-grade does a lot to make their members responsible and moral beings. These ways are better illustrated by practical examples. If a member of an age grade becomes unbearably rude to his mother or develops a carefree attitude towards her and the age-grade learns of this, the members usually call the person to order by threatening him with a serious punishment. In other cases, where a member of an age-grade appears lazy and reluctant to do farm work, the age-grade forces the individual to do what he is supposed to do. (p.75).

#### **3.4.4 *Umuada and Ndi Nwunyedi***

The women in Nando community have their own organizations such as the *Umuada* geared towards the maintenance of peace and order in their particular families and Nando as a whole. *Umuada* serve as a disciplinary body in the event of misbehaviour, disputes and conflict among its members and in the community. They also play an active role during burial ceremonies,

marriages and festivals. *Umuada* were well respected and even feared by men in Nando community. On the membership of *Umuada*, Ogbukagu (2008) clarifies that:

The *umu-okpu* and *umuada* are groups of women born into a particular family or families (kindreds) with essentially the same outlook to life. Women who are married to other towns are all bona fide members of their respective *umu-okpu* groups. (p.92).

*Ndi-nwunye di* (women that are married within the same kindred) is another organ among the women in Nando. They are the people that sweep the market and see to the general cleanliness of stream and village square. They form a very formidable and organized body which help each other on occasions like marriages and burials by cooking, providing water and other items that will be of importance to the concerned person.

### 3.5 Festivals in Nando Traditional Lunar Calendar

Nando community has many festivals but the highest of them all are *Ifejioku*, *Alomuo*, *Onwa-nge*, and *Obododike*. These festivals are held in line with their place in the Nando native calendar.

Table 1: Nando Traditional Lunar Calendar and the Festivals Associated with it, according to Madubuonu (personal communication, March 10, 2016)

S/N	Months in Nando	Traditional Festival Associated With Each Month	English Calendar Months
1.	Onwa-Nge	Onwa-Nge festival / Iguaro	March to mid-April
2.	Onwa-Ibo	Akwali (Festival of girls)	Mid-April to May

3.	Onwa-Ito	Amanwulu (Festival for men Title taking)	Mid-May to June
4.	Onwa-Ino	Nta (Festival of married women)	Mid-June to July
5.	Onwa-Ise	Alomuo (Festival of feeding the ancestors and New-Yam festival)	Mid-July to August
6.	Onwa-Isii	IgbaMgba (wrestling contest)	Mid-August to September
7.	Onwa-Isaa	Ilo-Chi (feeding their personal gods)	Mid-September to October
8.	Onwa-Isato	Harvesting of crops	Mid-October to November
9.	Onwa-Iteghete	Harvesting of Crop Continues	Mid-November to December
10.	Onwa-Ili	<i>Ine Ezi</i> and <i>Ifejioku</i> (Festival of women feeding their personal gods)	Mid-December to January

11.	Onwa-Ili na Ofu	<i>Onwa Ntuvu</i> (No ceremony attached)	Mid-January to February
12.	Onwa-Ili na Abuo	<i>Onwa Ntuvu</i> ( No ceremony attached)	Mid-February to March

In the table above, it could be observed that every month has one festival or more. Festivals appear to be the avenue through which the people of Nando express the ontological and cosmological underpinnings of their lives and community. Some festivals in Nando are rites of passage. A good example is the Akwali festival which is the subject matter of this study. This festival receives full attention in the following chapter. An overview of Onwa nge and Alamuo festivals will suffice here.

### **3.5.1 *Onwa nge***

*Onwa nge* is a festival that is celebrated in the first month of the year according to Nando traditional calendar. It provides a good opportunity to notify the ancestors and deities that the new planting season has come and to seek their blessings for a bumper harvest. Given that Nando people are predominantly farmers, *Onwa nge* festival garners the attention and participation of both the young and old.

The announcement of the sighting of the new moon signals the commencement of preparations for the festival. This prompts people to look up in the sky and whoever sees it prays, “onwa wetalu anyi ife oma” (meaning “let the new moon bring good fortune to us”).

*Onwa nge* festival is heavily marked with the appearance of masquerades. The Isato masquerade performs all through the night. Only the male folk initiated into this cult participate at

this stage. Women and children are forbidden from coming out and setting their eyes on the masquerade and the performers. Early on Nkwo morning, the Ijele masquerade accompanied by others like Otuikpala, Izaga, Iga, Akpa-aji will parade the whole villages.

### **3.5.2 Alomuo Festival**

In Nando, *Alomuo* is an annual religious festival that involves elderly men only. The elders offer prayers of thanksgiving and petition as well as sacrifices to the ancestors. Items for the sacrifice and ritual include kola-nuts and goat or fowl. The blood of the fowl or goat will be spilt on the *ofo*, which indicates symbolically “feeding the ancestors”. Celebrated at *Onwa-ise* (which falls within mid July to August on the Gregorian calendar), *Alomuo* is a celebration of thanksgiving to God, to the deities and to the ancestors for a successful harvest. In some parts of Igbo land, it is called *Iri ji* or New Yam Festival. Commenting on the *Alomuo* festival, Oguejiofor (2010) opines that,

The ancestors are regarded as mysteriously present all around the family. They are invoked in prayers, in thanksgivings and supplications. There is a type of dependence between the ancestors and the living. It is a mutual dependence, the ancestors are now much more powerful and are expected to protect the living and prosper their undertakings. In return they are fed with sacrifices, especially at the annual *alomuo*. (p.22).

As *Onwa nge* is celebrated during the planting season, *alomuo* is celebrated during the harvesting season.

In addition, as the gods and ancestors were informed of the planting of the crops during the *Onwa nge*, and were begged to help the crops yield a bumper harvest, so during *alomuo*, the gods are thanked for answering the prayers. *Alomuo* is, indeed, the New Yam festival in Nando and is celebrated with pomp and pageantry.



During this celebration, married daughters and sons bring gifts including tubers of yam, fishes and articles of clothing to their fathers, as the festival is associated with fathers. The sons have the duty to provide bigger tubers for the *alomuo*. During the *Alomuo* festival, the eldest man in Nando leads the people to the common shrine, with the biggest tubers of yam harvested in Nando that year, for sacrifice and thanksgiving.

### **3.6 Rites of Passage in Nando Community**

#### **3.6.1 Pregnancy Rites**

In the stages of human cycle, birth is the starting point of the cycle of the rite of passage. Thus, conception and pregnancy are marked in Nando community with rituals as well as taboos. Ajana (personal communication, December 8, 2015), observes that in Nando, a pregnant woman protects herself with charms and amulets from the *Dibia-ogwu* (traditional herbalist). The amulets worn on the waist by pregnant women are usually of two colours either red or white and a knot is made in the middle. The knot contains the medicine for protection. In addition to this, the pregnant woman receives medical attention from a traditional herbalist who gives her herbs for the preparation of drinking potions or to be used as soap.

The pregnant woman is believed to be protected spiritually by her family gods; for this reason, Ajana (2015) adds, sometimes, some charms are kept in her room where she sleeps to drive off evil spirits.

The focus is not only on the pregnant woman. Visits to the *Dibia-ogwu* include sessions where medication is given to ensure that the unborn baby is strong prior to delivery. *Dibia-afa* (diviner) is also consulted in special cases to ascertain the origin and implications of occurrences during pregnancy. Ajana (2015) notes that in Nando, pregnant women are committed to a deity until they give birth to their children.

### 3.6.2 Childhood Rites.

In Nando, immediately after the birth of a baby, certain traditional ceremonies are observed as prescribed by Nando custom and tradition. The arrival of a child in a family is not only the affair of the immediate family but the affair of the whole community. A plantain stem is placed at the entrance of the compound if the child is a male child. In the case of a female, a banana stem is used. This is significant as banana signifies female while plantain signifies male in Nando worldview.

Once a child is born, care is taken to perform certain rites associated with the umbilical cord. According to Okoye (personal communication, September 20, 2015), when a child is born, the umbilical cord is cut and at the back of the enclosure for bathing by two people - a man and a woman. It is believed that if a barren woman urinates on the navel before it is buried, she would become fertile and give birth. It is also believed that when the navel is buried at home and the child grows up and travels outside, he or she would be bound to come back home. Failure to bury the navel at home, it is believed, would make him or her wayward. The umbilical cord could also be dried and kept by the mother so that it does not get lost but it is common practice to bury the navel after which trees like coco-nut and palm trees are planted at the spot where the umbilical cord was buried.

Circumcision is another stage in child rites in Nando. This involves the removal of the foreskin from male the child and the clitoris from the female child. The process of circumcision is normally conducted on the eight day following the birth of the child and usually done by a woman who is a specialist in the field. The naming ceremony is a prominent childhood rite in Nando community. It is not carelessly done in Nando because it involves visiting the *Dibia-afa* (diviner) in order to know who among their dead relatives reincarnated in the person of the new baby. Basden (1982) attests to this fact when he remarked that:

Naming a child is an important function...the Igbo believe that all children are reincarnation of beings who have already passed through a lifetime in this world; hence, a man will point to a little girl and proudly inform you that she is his mother reborn into the world (p.60).

The people of Nando, like all Igbo, think carefully before choosing names to give to their children. Parents want their children to develop good character traits, to grow and become worthy, respectable adults and responsible citizens. Therefore, The people of Nando give their children names of their ancestors who led good and exemplary lives. This ensures that their children imbibe the same character traits as those good ancestors. they also give names reflecting gratitude to God ,circumstance and experience surrounding their birth,expected virtues fortunes,graces and achievements of the child and on.

Aniagor (personal communication, October 3, 2015) stated that the naming ceremony of a child commences with the presentation of the child to the obu (family prayer house). The elders in the kindred in turn present the child to the gods and ancestors with prayers and incantations. The parents normally suggest the names to be given the child. During the naming ceremony, the most senior of the elders following say the prayer in this form:

*Ani bia taa oji*, (Mother Earth, here is your kolanut)

*Chukwu nnanna anyi ha bia nuo mmanya*,(God of our ancestors, here is your drink)

*Omalagba lee mmaya nke gi* (Omalagba, here is your drink)

*Ndi nnaanyi ha lee mmanya unu* (Our ancestors, here is your drink)

*Gini ka taa bu ma o buru ma anyi kpoo gi taa?* (What is today if we have called you today?)

*Ada gi akpo ta rala gi onye obia ka o bia nonyere anyi* (Your daughter has brought a visitor to come and stay with us)

*Mgbe anyi na akowaputara uwa maka nwa inyere anyi* (When we are introducing the child to the world)

*Anyi agaghi akpapu gi na akuku* (We cannot leave you behind)

*Anyi na akpo gi ka i bia nonyere anyi ka ihe a wee gaa nke oma* (You should come and be with us so that everything will go on smoothly)

*Bia nuo mmanya gi* (here is your drink)

*N'oge a anyi na ayoo gi ka i bia nonyere anyi ka ihe mgbu hapu idakwasi anyi* (Now, may we all be blessed and let nothing bad or any calamity befall us)

*Onye ojoo obula biaranu ihere ga-eme ya* (Any evil person who will trespass must be shamed or dealt with)

*Anyi na- ario gi ka ichekwaba ma dube nwa gi nka* (At this moment, protect the child and guard it)

*Chukwu nke ezinulo anyi na nna nna anyi, ha bikonu chekwaba nwa gi nka* (The God of our household and our ancestors, please protect the child)

*Megide ndi ojoo nile ga obuso nwa gi agha ka nwa a wee buru ezigbo nwa ga abara obodo anyi bu Nando uru.* (All bad people must be dealt with, help the child to lead a good life so that this child be beneficial the Nando)

*Anyi na enye gi nwa na aka chekwaba ya* (We have dedicated the child to you)

*Chekwaba ya bido ugbu a ruo mgbe ebiyebe* (Look after her forever and ever)

*Isee-oo* (So be it)

Usually, this naming ceremony comes up twenty eighth days following the birth of the child. For this ceremony, the meals served are pounded yam and pepper soup. The parents of the child will bring kola nut, gin and palm wine to their ancestors for the naming ceremony.

### **3.6.3 Marriage Rites**

Marriage is the legal union of man and woman as husband and wife. The people of Nando attach great importance to marriage, just like other Igbo communities. According to Basden (1982):

Marriage is a most important event in the Igbo life. From the time that boys and girls are capable of thinking for themselves, marriage is set before them as one of the objects to attain. During the earlier years, it does not assume a serious aspect, but question any boy or girl, and the answer is certain to be that, in due course, they must marry. Celibacy is an impossible prospect. Unmarried person of either sex, except in special cases, are objects of derision, and to be childless is the greatest calamity that can befall a woman. Hence a very high value is set upon marriage. (p.68).

Obi (personal communication, August 13, 2016), narrated the different stages of marriage rites in Nando. He was of the view that the man's parents or relations (sometimes without his consent) handle his betrothal to the girl he will eventually marry. He went further to say that both parents may plan and complete everything about the marriage and then the wife will be handed over to the man's parents, mostly the father. In fact, it was a matter of pride for the parents to marry for their children. This explains why early betrothal to girls from good families was common in pre-colonial Nando. The different stages of marriage rites in Nando are as follows:

*Iku aka na uzo* (Knocking on the door) is the first stage. According to Obi (2016), the first visit is to alert the parents of the girl on their wish to marry their daughter. This visit is usually done with kola nuts, palm wine and a bottle of hard drink. The girl in question will be called upon by her father to make a public declaration of her interest in the would-be husband. If she does so, then both parents will take the kola-nuts and the drinks. This rite signifies that the girl is now engaged to the man.. No other man will be allowed to marry the girl unless the girl at last finds something she does not like about the would-be- husband or vice versa. However, it is usually rare because before the proceeding at this stage, all necessary inquiries would have been done to forestall any disappointment. The areas on which inquiries are done include, according to Basden (1982), information concerning her capabilities in cooking, trading, and other useful and profitable accomplishments, inquires about her character, whether she is of good temper, quiet, industrious and so forth. All these information will help him to move forward or withdraw. The girl's parents, on the other hand, will make their own inquiries on such areas like the family background of the man, his character, his occupation and his state of health. They will also ask if he had been previously married.

The next stage, according to Obi (2016), is the payment of the bride price (*Ime-ego*). This is done in the bride's family house with the father of the bridegroom, the bride groom and five or more people from their close relatives in attendance. Essentially, this meeting involves the payment of the dowry. The father of the girl and some of his close relatives will be present to receive the visitors. After long deliberations on the amount to be paid, when they arrive on consensus, the dowry is paid. The girl's father will take only a small amount from the dowry paid and give the rest to his in-law. This acts signifies that she is not selling her daughter, and proves that the relationship formed is a permanent one which transcends material things. After this ceremony, the girl is now the man's wife that is *okudogo nwunye* (meaning that she now belong to him).

The next stage is, traditional wedding,, (*Igba nkwu*). The bride and the bridegroom will share a drink from one cup of wine, after the blessing of the elders. The bride goes with her husband that same day. As the man goes home with his age mates, he sings, “*O kee mu! O kee mu!*” (Meaning I am created great), which implies that it is at this point that God has made him great. When the bride reaches her husband’s home, her mother in-law receives her with a fowl. The fowl will be struck on the girl’s head three times as a means of cleansing her. As she does this, the mother-in-law prays for the girl and blesses her. After the cleansing ritual, the fowl will be killed and used to cook for the bride.

The parents of the bride will be invited to their son in-law’s house where they will be lavishly entertained with drinks and food. The son in-law also invites his kindred to get acquainted with his in-laws with kola-nut or in the form of money. In Nando this is called “*ime ego oji*”(giving money to replace kolanut). This stage is also called *Amalumu uno ogo* (first visit to the in-law house). It is a very important ceremony because without it, the families of the couple in-laws cannot visit each other and even if they manage to visit, they cannot eat anything together.

The next stage is *ilu-oku* (fattening of the bride).This is another marriage rite, which takes a period of four days at the husband,s homestead. During this period, the bride eats well-prepared food only with selected girls from her husband’s compound. This is another stage whereby the bride and the bridegroom visit the bride’s house. The reason behind this ceremony of *iputa olili*,(visit after traditional marrage to the inlaw) according to Obi (2006), is for the parents of the bride to examine their child ( the bride) to know how she is doing at her new home. Her parents will also use this opportunity to ask her questions about her husband and his family.

#### **3.6.4 Death/Burial Rites.**

The passing away of a person brings sorrow to the members of the family and loved ones. Mbiti (1970) says that “death is something that concerns everybody, partly because sooner or later

everyone personally faces it and partly because it brings sorrow and loss to the family and community”. The people of Nando have a strong belief in life after death. They bury their dead with many traditional burial rites. They believe that the soul of a man is immortal and so when someone dies, his soul or spirit leaves him to wander in the spirit world where it can influence the life of his living relations.

Burial ceremony in Nando takes different procedures depending on the personality of the deceased. For children and infants, the only ceremony is the physical burial. For the youth, physical burial is done after the process of “*igba-akwa*” (running round the village) with musical instruments. More often, this is done by members of the same age-grade and friends of the deceased. For the aged men or women, the funeral depends much on how influential the person or the family is, and his or her achievements as well as the kind of title the person holds. In this type of funeral, there must be *igba -akwa* by the children, the relatives and the in-laws and even age mates. Inquiry (divination) must be made to find out the circumstances surrounding his or her death even if he is very old to die. This is reflected in the observation of Nanegbe (2009):

When a grown up person dies, the diviner is first of all consulted to find out why he dies at all ,for the tradition of Igbo do not easily attribute death to a natural cause but often suspects the hand of a spirit or an evil man at work. A fortune teller and medicine man will be invited to the bereaved family. He will bury some medicine (ogwu) under the gateway and hangs a fowl on a nearby tree to tie down the evil spirits and thus, prevents them from doing harm during the funeral celebration. He may also sprinkle liquid medicine all over the house. Many people are invited, especially those of the age group of the deceased and his relatives by marriage. Later, generally, the day after the corpse is buried amidst sacrifices and singing.(p.6).



The funeral of the titled elderly men and women are very colourful. The end of Ekwe titled woman and *Amunwulu* titled man is dignified through the appropriate burial ceremony. This is to ensure that the deceased lives well and happily in the spirit world and that he reincarnates into another life without any problem Nwala (1985).

*Igbu-Ogbala* is another significant ceremony that is performed upon the death of a titled man in Nando. According to Udekwe (personal communication, March 5, 2015), *Igbu Ogbala* was done on the same day of the burial. To carry out this rite, a ram or goat is laid flat on the ground at the village square and tied with ropes. Items placed beside the ram include yam and clock. This rite is performed with the sons of the dead man present. Usually, one out of the deceased sons is chosen to perform the rite (most times it is the last son or the most loved son of the deceased that performs the *Igbu ogbala*). A fresh young palm frond is tied around the neck and two legs of the ram or goat and the designated person to kill the ram dances to the tune of iroko music with a knife. While dancing, he moves to where the ram is tied and cuts its head off with a single stroke. If he fails to cut off the animal's head with a single stroke, it is believed that the items offered were not acceptable to the departed ancestors. This leads to mourning for the entire family. The elders share the items the next morning. It is an abomination for women to partake of the items presented for *Igbu Ogbala*. The rite of *Igbu Ogbala* is performed only at the demise and burial of a man who has taken the *Amanwulu* title.

Another thing worthy of note is the traditional practice of mourning the deceased in Nando. If the deceased is married at the time of his death, the wife will start the traditional mourning period immediately after the funeral ceremonies. *Umuokpu* or *Umuada* will shave the woman's hair. If that woman did not take good care of her husband, she would be dealt with during the mourning period. She wears black attire for a period of one year, that is, thirteen months in the traditional calendar. During this period, she is not expected to shave or comb her

hair. She is only permitted to sit on a mat with a small knife in her hand. When she sleeps, she puts the knife under her mat. This ritual is to chase away evil spirits and evil people.

At the end of the mourning period, all the things she used mat, clothes and foot-wears would be burnt and her co-wife (nwunye di) that is a widow before her will shave her after which she moves to the river for a bath. Once this bath is taken, she becomes free to be reintegrated into the society which involves participating in the village activities. According to Nando tradition, the reason for allowing women to mourn their husband for a year is to determine their absolute fidelity. Any man, who has sexual intercourse with her during the period of mourning, incurs the wrath of “Ajana” (god of swearing) and the punishment is death. In contemporary Nando community, the mourning period has been reduced to six months, particular for the widows. The widowers are also included but sometimes they usually not so much observes the rule for mourning rite, for them it is for the widows. The widower did not at time equally wear their mourning dress regularly for so of them it is a woman affair to be putting on mourning dress always. The above rite does not apply to widowers, according to Izunna (personal communication, March 10, 2015). However, it is mandatory for men to abstain from shaving of hair and beards for twenty eight days

### **3.6.5 Title Taking**

Title taking is one of the most celebrated rites in Nando and Igboland in general. Ogbukagu (1997) observes that title-taking procedures are similar among the Igbo but with variations in nomenclatures and manners of approach to institutions, rituals and ceremony. It confers on the holder a prestige as well as great responsibility. Ndiokwere (1994) identifies the requirements for taking titles:

In the first place, the holder of a title must be a man of integrity and is expected to live above board; he cannot be described as a dubious character, a criminal or a

thief; he cannot be an embezzler of public fund, nor can he be encouraging such an act. He must compromise with an exemplary life of honesty and decency in dealings with others. He cannot be a debtor nor be associated with any “sharp business”. He cannot be a liar for his testimonies in any event are accepted as gospel truth. Nze anaghi ekwuhie (Nze does not lie) is an Igbo saying implying almost a status of infallibility. Nze cannot deliberately tell lies in order to deceive or hide the truth... Peace, truth, fair play and harmony are believed to be ritually symbolized and enacted in ceremonies of Nze. (p.233).

Ndife (personal communication, April 8, 2016), points out that in Nando, there are many titles which distinguished men and women can take. For the men, they include titles like *Amanwulu*, *Ichie*, *Ekwe*, *Asamuo*, *Itualor*, *Ogbuefi*, and *Ogbuinyinya*. Titles reserved for women include *Ekwe* and *Ikita*. *Amanwulu* and *Ekwe* titles are discussed below.

### ***Amanwulu***

For the Nando people the *Amanwulu* title taken is for men only. Ndife (2016) narrates that, *Amanwulu* is the first of all the titles taken by men in Nando. There is no age distinction or barrier. The ceremony is usually done in the third month, *Onwa Ito* (May). The family prepares the *Amanwulu* cap and gets a strip of cloth to be won on the waist with an *odu* (bell). *Uye* (cam wood) is prepared and used to adorn the body of the man who intends to take the title. A small basket (*ukpa* or *abo amanwulu*) is prepared for him in addition to a special seat, *akponchi*. A sum of money is also sent to the maternal grandfather of the person taking the title. On the *Eke* day, following the end of *Onwa Ito* festival, the ceremony takes off.

Throughout the period of *Amanwulu*, the man is not permitted to have any physical contact with any woman. He is not permitted to sit on the floor or elsewhere other than *akponchi*. On the next *Eke* day, his personal assistant known as *nwa omanri* carries the *akponchi* and *abo*

*amanwulu* for the celebrant to perform the *okogbe*. During the *okogbe*, the initiates run bare – bodied to the stream, take a bath and run back to their home. As they run to and from the stream, they shout “*okogbe*” (meaning they have succeeded). When they come back to their respective homes, they put on their clothes. One of the most entertaining part of the *Amanwulu* rite is tied to the “*Ji Amanulu*” (*Amawulu* yam) - an event in which the men cut tubers of yam and cook them. The appropriate word for the admission of the new members into the fold is “*ndana*”, meaning that he had “fallen”. If the celebrant was a grownup man, his age mates are invited and they get well entertained with pounded yam and soup prepared with chicken and fish.

An important benefit of taking the *Amanwulu* title is that the *Igbu Ogbala* rite is performed for a title holder at his burial as explained earlier.

## **Ekwe**

Ndife (2016) explains, Ekwe as a title for women in Nando community. The process of taking the *Ekwe* title begins with a formal notification of the head of *Ekwe* title holders of the intention to take the title. This is followed by an interview meant to ascertain the preparedness of the prospective member. The conditions for membership must be met before the celebration of the acceptance into the membership of *Ekwe* title holders. The prospective member presents to the members eight coconuts, four kola-nuts, pepper sauce and an agreed sum of money as registration fee.

On the day of the ceremony which usually starts on *Afor* day and ends on the *Nkwo* day, sitting arrangements are made for members in the celebrant’s house. The head of the *Ekwe* women must enter the place before others with her *Ekwe* stool. The initiate presents to the *Ekwe* members two kola nuts, four gallons of palm wine, *ose oji*, a bottle of gin and an agreed sum of money. Other items to be presented are melon and pepper soups with pounded yam.

The initiate is not allowed to talk throughout the day. She has to sit down at a corner as directed by the head of *Ekwe*. Her relatives are invited and entertained. On their own part, they will present the initiate with gifts of money; this is called *iza okika*, meaning their response to the jubilation of their daughter.

The initiation ceremony starts with an order to the initiate to dress up, followed by the swinging of a horsetail over her head by the head of the *Ekwe* titled women. After this, the latter places a horsetail over the former's head and on each side of her shoulder. The head of *Ekwe* title calls the initiate by the name she has chosen to adopt as her title name. Names like *Dinyelu Ugo* (husband' give eagle), *Ugo-di ya* (eagle of her husband), *Osodi eme* (partner with her husband), *Di bu ndo* (husband is a shade) and so on are taken. Towards the end of the ceremony, the head of the *Ekwe* group sings "kwo", (a patterned ecstatic applause). Other members join her in the shout of "kwo" as they sing and dance round the premises. After that, they go round the village singing, with the initiate still mute, initiate bearing horsetails on her shoulders. The head of the *Ekwe* titled women does not join in this procession as she remains on her seat at the venue of the initiation. On the next *Nkwo*, the newly titled woman goes to the market square with her *Ekwe* seat. She sits down at a vantage position to acknowledge the greetings of well-wishers and receive gifts from them. At this point, she is allowed to talk because she is deemed member of the *Ekwe* group.

Certain rules surround the taking of the *Ekwe* title in Nando. One, the initiate must be the first wife of her husband. If her husband chooses to perform the title for a second wife, the head of *Ekwe* would advise him accordingly. If he insists, the members would come, eat, drink, and call the first wife to initiate her. They can never give *nza* to the second wife, unless the first has taken the title. This is the case even if the first wife is not living with the man, but is still his wife. It is believed that the women adopted the practice to protect their members against injustice and favouritism which are common in polygamous families.

When an *Ekwe* title holder dies, it is believed that her corpse visits her place of birth. In the evening of the day of burial ceremony the relatives of deceased is accompanied with a goat or cow together with the corpse to be buried in her father's compound. This is called *igbaga icho*. In the case of a non-*Ekwe* title holder, a hen is presented. A woman who does not hold the *ekwe* title is known as an *ibide*, a derogatory term meaning (not an Ekwe holder) The death of an *ekwe* titleholder is heralded with the exclamation, '*Enyi a dala*' (an elephant has fallen). That of an *ibide* is heralded with a exclamation called "obodo". In pre-colonial Nando, every married woman aspired to take the *ekwe* title because of the dignity and benefits it affords its holders

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AKWALI RITE OF PASSAGE IN NANDO

#### ***4.1 Preparation for the Akwali Rite***

*Akwali* is a female adolescent rite of passage that provides communities with a group process for initiating girls into womanhood. It is an age-old puberty rite of passage in Nando community which prepares them for marriage. It is observed in Onwa-Ibo (second month) according to Nando traditional calendar, which coincides with the period between the second week of April and May on the Gregorian calendar. The rite is meant for girls between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. Being a puberty rite, the participants are expected to have shown physical signs of puberty such as menarche, appearance of and enlargement of breasts, and appearance of pubic hair (Igwedo, 2015).

This ceremony is open for both the engaged and those that are not engaged. Akwali rite of passage is for virgins only but non virgins may be allowed after undergoing purification rituals. However, it is a shameful thing to the parents of those candidates who are non-virgins because, it signifies failure in proper parenting which is valued not only in Nando but the entire Igboland (Onogu, 2010). Chastity before Akwali is of great value, thus, most parents especially mothers did all they could to make sure that the name of their family is not stained. It is equally a taboo for a pregnant girl to participate in the rite. It is assumed that before taking part in the rite of passage, participants have undergone female circumcision (this is usually done as part of childhood rites specifically before the naming ceremony).

Part of the preparations for the rite includes prohibition of any strenuous work like farm work, dressing up in beautiful dresses complemented with new hair-do, body decoration with *uye* and *uli*. Participants also put on beads on their waists which are prepared with protective charms

called *ogotalu-wolu*. The essence of these preparations is to attract suitors. However, all the protective charms are dropped immediately after the *Akwali* rite of passage as Nando tradition forbids married women from wearing such protective charms.

According to Etim Igwedo (personal communication, December 8, 2015), *Akwali* rite is a four-day rite of passage which traditionally starts on *Nkwo* day in *Onwa Ibo*. Atuanya (2006) states that *Akwali* festival starts on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the lunar month which is usually *Nkwo* day. In the event that the 12<sup>th</sup> day does not fall on *Nkwo*, the festival is rescheduled to commence on the following *Nkwo* day. Given that *Nkwo* is the biggest market day in Nando, the choice of *Nkwo* avails families of participants opportunity to buy food items like yams, fish and meat, cosmetics, clothes and other items that their daughters needed for the rite.

The fiance of engaged girls, in the company of relatives and friends, brought ten tubers of yam, a stick of dry fish, and the optional dry meat (grasscutter) depending on their financial capacity. These items are usually kept at the entrance of the house of the girl's mother signifying that they ought to be used for the preparation of food for the girl throughout the period of the festival. According to Atuanya (2006), the presentation of such gifts was an occasion for joy as “many people assembled to see the yams and fish. Those whose daughters had not been engaged prayed for their daughters to have husbands who could send such items.”

#### **4.2 Features of *Akwali* Festival**

A keen observation of the *Akwali* rite of passage reveals that it has the following features which almost correspond to Van Gennep's (1960) classification of the phases of the rites of passage.

1. A period of partial seclusion or separation from society during which participants receive instruction from elderly women. This corresponds to Van Gennep's (1960) separation phase.



2. *Okwolikwo* Market and moonlight entertainment, Burial Rite of Nwakiliki and Visit to Akwali Deity which corresponds to Van Gennep's (1960) transition phase.
3. A Feast involving male age mates and other members of the community which corresponds to Van Gennep's (1960) Reincorporation phase.

These features are elaborated in turn below.

### **1 . The Period of Partial Seclusion**

Ughaemu (personal communication, December 3, 2016) noted that *Akwali* rite of passage begins with a period of partial seclusion for the girls. Partial seclusion is used to describe the separation because the participants take off from their parents' house to the initiation centre every day. During this period, the mothers of the participants guide them in cooking food which they eventually take to the place designated for the celebration. The officiating specialists are elderly women well-trained in the art of training young women. The elderly women stay with participants for the four days during which they teach the latter in the mornings hours. In the afternoon, the participants rejoin their various families for entertainment and at night, they participate in the nocturnal activities of *Akwali*.

Nando traditional values and customs place premium on holistic training of an individual, hence the training given to the initiates is culturally and religiously determined. During the day, the lessons the initiates receive border on areas such as moral and social life, sex education, home management, financial management, basic medical treatment, and dancing skills. These are discussed in turn.

#### **(i)Moral and Social Life**

Respect, kindness, honesty, courage, perseverance, self-discipline, compassion, generosity, dependability are among the key moral values which the girls who participate in *Akwali* puberty rite are taught during the period of partial seclusion. The aim of teaching these values is to protect them from potentially negative societal influences. Therefore, the elderly women involved in *Akwali* rite help inculcate the traditional worldview of Nando people in the initiates.

Through well-planned conversations interspersed with stories, the elderly women influence how the initiates behave as adults. The girls are taught to imbibe honesty and compassion as important virtues that make their transformation into functional adults smooth. Emphasis is also placed on emotional and social awareness and the role they play in guiding behavior and decision-making. The girls are taught how to develop a sense of responsibility and understand their emotions. Lessons in this area are usually geared towards enabling the girls to make sound moral decisions in varying situations.

To drive home the lessons, the initiates are exposed to natural consequences of bad or improper choices. Assignments are given to them to carry out as a means of evaluating how they take responsibility, initiative and practise the culturally defined elements of a well-formed character.

## **(ii) Sexuality education**

Virginity is one of the attribute that marks *Akwali* rite of passage. The girls are look upon to be virgin. They are guided by their mother to know that virginity is the most precious thing they have to give to their spouse and that nothing in the world can bring it back if they lost it. Sexuality is one of the important topics handled during the period of partial seclusion. Sexuality education is a process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values in order

to lead fulfilling and healthy lives. Prior to participating in *Akwali* rite, the girls may not have the opportunity to get proper sex education. Hence, *Akwali* puberty rites gives room for the inculcation of correct information regarding sexual and reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image, and gender roles. The girls are also taught the significance of menstruation as a positive and life-giving spiritual rite of passage rather than an inconvenient or embarrassing weakness.

The purpose of comprehensive sexuality education is to provide the girls adequate information, skills and value to have safe, fulfilling and enjoyable relationships and to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive health and well-being.

### **(iii) Home Management**

Management of the home is essential to the wellbeing of every Nando family because it lubricates the wheel of relationships among family members, forestalls the eruption of conflict in homes and builds love and trust among couples. Through planned activities, the initiates are taught basic and advanced home management skills. Home management is a vital factor in every family because it contributes to the overall health, happiness and wellbeing of every family member. The woman is recognized as the person responsible for her family's wellness and day-to-day administration and consequently, the young girls are trained on the skills necessary to take proper charge of the home, support and encourage their husbands to make decisions that make for successful running of the family. Instructors emphasize home organization, house cleaning and laundry, and other skills essential for a truly happy home. A crucial part of home management taught during the period of partial seclusion relate to the ability to balance the interests of husbands, co-wives, children, extended family members, in-laws in order to make the home a happy place to live in.

#### **(iv) Financial management**

Financial planning is another area that receives attention during the training of the initiates. Lessons on financial management are based on cultural values regarding the management of money and other resources. The girls are educated on the influence money and material resources can have on the home. Tips on procurement, investment and administration of funds within and outside the home are given to the initiates. They are also taught of the need to be gainfully engaged in trading which was the major occupation of women in Nando.

#### **(v) Basic medical treatment**

During the period of partial seclusion, the young girls are trained to be mini-medicine women in their various homes. They are exposed to basic medical treatment aimed at preventing and curing illness in their families. This is important considering the role of women as mothers and caregivers in the home. The initiates are introduced to herbs and roots that are medicinal in nature and their uses. The basic treatments that can be handled by initiates include stopping bleeding and healing of wounds, preparation of anti-malarial medicine and baths, and other medicine targeted towards relieving stomach ache, vomiting, diarrhoea and worms. Knowledge of these treatments save initiates from the panic and stress associated with medical emergencies.

#### **(vi) Dancing skill**

Nwasolu (personal communication, December 12, 2016) asserts that *Itu-uya* is one of the most cherished dancing skills that any Nando woman can possess, and is mostly learnt by girls in the course of *Akwali* puberty rites. Proudly showcased in ceremonies, *Itu-uya* dancing skill is a mark of pride and beauty among Nando women. A woman who does not know how to dance or display this skill is derided not only publicly at occasions but in private gatherings. With this in mind, the initiates do everything within their ability to learn how to dance and give special

attention to *Itu uya*. Beyond its aesthetic value, *Itu-uya* has a religious function as it represents a form of worship, a means of honouring ancestors, a way of propitiating the gods and a method to effect magic as used by medicine men. Hence, *Itu-uya* is employed at different occasions and rites such as birth rites, initiation rites, marriage rites, succession to political office, and burial rites.

## **2. Transition phase**

### **(i) Okwokwolikwo Market**

According to Obigwe (personal communication, December 8, 2012) a major activity that takes place during *Akwali* festival (on the third day) is *Okwokwolikwo* market. This market is organized to foster social interaction. *Okwokwolikwo* market provides the platform for the initiates to interact with others, especially vibrant men in search of wives.

On the third day of *Akwali* rite of passage, the girls go to the village square called Ama for *okwokwoliko* market. They gather at the village square with items like corn, rice, groundnuts, fish, banana, plantain, oranges, pears, mangoes, and *ikpakpa* (corn meal), which they put on display. The only customers allowed in the *okwokwoliko* market are young men. The essence of this ceremony is for them to look around and select potential wives from the girls. During the market session, the men buy items through a process called *ise ugba* (which means stealing by tricks).

The art of *ise ugba* involves the buyer (usually a young man) with a long stick on which a hook is attached, pretending to strike a bargain on the items on display, at the same time trying to distract the attention of the seller (usually an initiate of the *Akwali* rite). The aim is to successfully distract the seller to the point that he uses the hook on his long stick to lift some items and run away. If successfully done, the girl pursues the man to recover the stolen item. Atuanya (2006) contends that *Ise ugba* is part of the fun of *Akwali* rite of passage which the girls look forward to (p.37).

The purpose of the *okwokwolikwo* market is for socialization and observation in the sense that it provides the avenue through which the man evaluates the character of the girl he intends to marry. The parents of the initiates are not after profit but are more concerned about the happiness and self-fulfilment of their children. For the above reason some parents go the extra mile to ensure their children enjoy the *Akwali* rite of passage.

### **(ii) Moonlight entertainment (Akwali night life)**

Akwali night life revolves around the leisurely activities carried out in the village square during the every night of the rite. The gathering at the village square affords both the elders and young people opportunity to interact with each other in a relaxed atmosphere. For this reason, everybody looks forward to Akwali night life Anumudu, (personal communication, December 3, 2016). During the night, the girls gather at the village square for moonlight activities which involves music, storytelling and dancing. Through dances, storytelling and music, the religious beliefs and traditions of Nando are internalized by the initiates of Akwali. At the core of these activities is motivation to train the future mothers socially and morally which will help them fit in properly in Nando community. Ohaekwusi (2010) hints at this element of socialization when he asserted that “culture is not inherited but instead acquired unconsciously during childhood simply by participating in human interactions with others (p.355).

From the foregoing, Akwali rite of passage in Nando is regarded as a kind of epiphany for the initiates. In other words, they should understand something more about themselves and the world they live in after the rite of passage experience.

### **(iii) Burial Rite of Nwakiliki**

On the last transition period of Akwali rite of passage, a funeral procession of Nwakiliki is performed. This funeral procession is assumed to be for the great grandmothers of the initiates. So, through this rite of passage, the girls pay tribute to their great grandmothers.

Carrying out this rite involves the building of a coffin with palm leaves. Plantain stumps (which symbolize a human being) are placed inside the coffin. Fresh palm leaves (*omu*) is alternatively used to replace the corpse of a person who died in a place where it cannot be reached. In this case, some incantations would be made after which it is assumed that the spirit of the person has entered into the *omu*. Then, the leaves are buried. This process is called “*iju akwu*” in Nando. The girls sing the following song as they carry the coffin around the village:

<b>Song</b>	<b>Chorus</b>	<b>English Translation</b>
<i>Nwakiliki, afo muru anaa</i>	<i>I kwa jo jo ooo</i>	A woman that gives birth is gone
<i>Oche m anaa</i>	<i>I kwa jo jo ooo</i>	my grandma is gone
<i>Oche anaa nkeoma</i>	<i>I kwa jo jo ooo</i>	my grandma go well
<i>Oche m anaa</i>	<i>I kwa jo jo ooo</i>	my grandma is gone
<i>Oche kwa aro ra ibia</i>	<i>I kwa jo jo ooo</i>	my grandma every year you come
<i>Oche m anaa</i>	<i>I kwa jo jo ooo</i>	my grandma is gone
<i>Oche anaa nkeoma</i>	<i>I kwa jo jo ooo</i>	my grandma go well

In addition to singing the above song, they chorus this exclamation chorus, *kwo, kwo kwo kwoooooooooo* at every *ama* they enter. This particular chorus is dedicated to their *oche* (grandmothers).

The initiates carry the coffin to the next village until they reach the boundary between one village and another village. There, the initiates from the two villages will struggle over the coffin to know the group that will carry it home. For them, it is a fun tug of war at the end of which the winners proudly show off the coffin, while the losers go home sorrowfully with the impression that they did not get enough blessings from their grandmother.

The significance of this burial ceremony is to invoke the spirit of their grandmothers to see them through in their future life as mothers, as well as for protection and guidance. This underpins the idea that *Akwali* rite of passage is a dramatization of human-divine interface in Igbo cosmic world.

#### **(iv) Visit to *Akwali* Deity**

*Akwali* deity is one of the prominent deities in Nando. Associated with procreation and protection, *Akwali* deity, according to Nwakor (personal communication, February 20, 2015), has its origin from the matriarchal era of the people and accounts for the female rites. In the words of Nwakor, *Akwali* deity appears to be the oldest of Nando local deities, because it was introduced during the matriachial era and matriarchy pre-dates patriarchy. The extended family, which was made up of descendants of one man, worshipped at a common shrine of the goddess *Akwali*. *Akwali* was the goddess that gave children to people.

On the third day of the rites, the mothers of the initiates take their children to *Akwali* deity. They present items like cocks, eggs, white chalk (*nzu*), white clothes, and kola-nuts. The kola-nuts are used for prayer, while *nzu* is rubbed on the bodies of the girls for ritual cleansing from evil ones. The clothes and cocks are used for sacrifices to *Akwali* deity.

After the presentation of these items, the chief priest of *Akwali* deity prays for the initiates for their fecundity. The prayer takes the following form:



### **Prayer by the Chief Priest**

### **Response of the audience**

*Akwali* come and take kola-nut

*isee-ee*

May God grant the young girl fruit of the womb,

*isee-ee*

She will give birth to *eke, oria, nkwo, afor*

*isee-ee*

She will give birth to one female and nine male

*isee-ee*

She will deliver all the seed in her stomach

*isee-ee*

After the prayer, the chief priest breaks the kola-nuts and does some silent incantations. This is followed by the blessing of the outstretched palm of the girl with *nzu* (white chalk). This blessing with *nzu* marks the end of the visit to *Akwali* deity.

The religious activity at *Akwali* shrine shows the religiosity of the people of Nando. For them, everything starts and ends in prayer. They equally believe that the reason for marriage is to have children, thus *Akwali* is known as a deity that gives children.

## **4. Reincorporation phase**

### **1.A Feast involving Male age mates and other members of the community and Ine-ezi ceremony**

On the fourth day of *Akwali* rites, the mothers of the initiates invite the male age mates of the initiates as well as other members of the community to a feast. The purpose of the feast is three fold:

The feast marks and announces the initiates' completion of *Akwali* rite to the community.

1. It provides the forum for the encouragement of mutual knowledge of both the male age mates and initiates; this facilitates the process of age grade formation. In Nando, the age grade association is for both the male and the female of the same age bracket. The forum will help them to know each other and organize themselves for mutual relationship and how to forge ahead for their naming ceremony of their age group.
2. The feast held at the end of the rite presents the initiates to men who will use the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the initiates, whom they now see as potential wives (having successfully undergone *Akwali* rites).

The initiate's families entertained people with foods and drinks. This celebration at this point brings people together to share, pray, sing, dance, eat, drink and rejoice together as members of one large human and spiritual family.

#### **4.3 Significance of Akwali Rite of Passage**

*Akwali* rite, which is a rite of passage, occupies an important place in the traditional ceremonies of Nando community. Every part of the rite is significant as it reflects Nando socio-cultural and religious beliefs. The benefits of *Akwali* puberty rites cannot be over-emphasized. They include its role as an informal school for girls, its preparation of girls for absorption into age grades, and its provision of avenues for relaxation and socialization. All the above points are discussed below.

##### ***Akwali* Festival serves as an informal school for girls**

As a rite of passage for girls, *Akwali* provides platforms on which they learn important lessons that aid the proper development of the girls into physically and socially mature women. As a special puberty rite of passage, initiation is performed to help them move smoothly from childhood into adulthood. The purpose of initiation is, above all, to enable the initiate internalize

the culture of the land. Through initiation, the young girls further learn about the traditions and expectations of their community after which they are equipped to contribute to the maintenance of social order in Nando.

The *Akwali* puberty rite also positions initiates to guide and guard others as future mothers. The rite prepares the young girls for marriage. In this regard, the informal education of the initiates is designed to prepare them to learn how to cook, how to eat, even how to buy and sell in the market. They are also educated on how to take proper care of themselves, their husbands and their families. Thus, they both internalize and externalize the socio-religious values and ideals of their society. It equally provide them time for reflection on their personal life and way forward.

## **2. *Akwali* aids absorption into age grade associations**

In Nando, age grades associations are crucial social institutions based on age to which every member, whether male or female must belong. Ogbukagu (2008) emphasizes this fact by asserting that,

Age grade, apart from serving as an instrument or vehicle for identifying men and women born within a specified period of time, it creates an awareness of love and good togetherness among men and women belonging to the same age span.(p.151).

Hence, on the third day of *Akwali* rite, the mothers of the initiates invite the male age mates of the latter. They are entertained with food and drinks. The reason for this invitation is to encourage mutual knowledge of both parties in readiness for age grade formation and their obligation to serve their community at large.

### **3. Akwali serves as an avenue for socialization and relaxation for both the youth and the aged**

Nzomiwu (1999) points out that for the Igbo, everybody, man or woman, needs each other to be fulfilled. Individualism is alien to Igbo traditional value system. Hence, the social life of an individual is better understood in the context of community. In relation to Akwali rite of passage, the rite showcases the girls to men who will use the opportunity to find their potential wives. The main purpose of *Akwali* rite of passage is to prepare the young girls both physically, spiritually and socially for marriage. In addition to these essential functions, the celebration of this rite brings people together for socially appropriate behaviour to rejoice together as members of one large human and spiritual family.

### **4. Akwali confers and strengthens the personal and collective identity**

The *Akwali* rite of passage provide the space for the community to transmit its core values and confer the roles and responsibilities appropriate to the initiate's stage of life, thus, ensuring cultural continuity. It also helps the initiates to emerge with a stronger sense of personal identity important for social responsibility and dignified livelihood. Through the forging of social ties and communally established roles, Akwali rites of passage give initiates a personal sense of purpose and placement in the societal structure. Corroborating this, Metuh (1987) maintains that,

Candidates [of puberty rites] are taught the implication of community life-living together, obedience to the elders, public spiritedness, endurance, and entrusted with esoteric traditions and lore of the group...they are introduced to the communion with the ancestors and other tutelary spirits of the clan. Finally, these initiation rites prepare the young people for marriage and procreation which are means of implementing the sacred duty of perpetuating and strengthening the life-force of the clan. (p.194).

Related to the benefits of *Akwali* rite of passage regarding the development of a strong identity, the rite upholds the moral sanctity of womanhood and discourages any form of compromise that threatens the virginity, and by extension, the dignity of women. In Nando, it is an abomination for a girl to lose her virginity before she is admitted to participate in *Akwali* rite of passage. If, on examination, it is found that the girl in question is not a virgin, a cleansing rite follows to appease the deities. An initiate also is expected to remain chaste till she is formally married. After *Akwali* rites of passage, the initiates come out of the experience with new and empowering stories that help them take responsibility for the decisions that set the course of their future. Lertzman (2002) points out that marking and ritualization of transitions create an experiential map of self-development. Without proper rites of passage, “people can become disoriented and lose their way on life’s journey” (p.5). The experience of the rite creates connection with nature and ancestral root help the initiates to build a solid foundation and create a story of who they are and the kind of life they want to live in further.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### AKWALI FESTIVAL AND MODERNITY

The fact that, in Igbo traditional society, the life of an individual cannot be separated from religion and culture, the cultural life and their religious life moves hand in hand. Akwali rite of passage is part and parcel of the life, culture and religious practice of young girls in Nando. It follows that the factors that have affected Igbo and by extension Nando culture has also affected the rite. The incursion of colonization as well as the advent of Christianity, western education, urbanization and globalization had great influence on the cherished values, beliefs and practices of Nando people. This chapter examines these external factors with a view to highlighting how the contemporary state of Akwali rite could be traceable to them.

#### **5.1 Factors that Influenced the Practice of Akwali Festival**

##### **5.1.1 Christianity**

The advent of Christianity in Igboland in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century brought a lot of changes in the way of life of Igbo people. These changes were double-edged as some were positive while others were negative. The abolition of the killing of twins was a welcome development while the total denigration of indigenous customs and traditions, of which festivals and rites of passage constitute a major part, was worrisome.

At the early stage, the European missionaries failed to understand Igbo cultural and religious practices. Therefore, they condemned almost every aspect of Igbo culture and religion branding them as fetish, pagan, satanic, idolatry and so forth. Festivals were seen as occasions for idol worship. Ogbukagu (1998) states that:

The Christian missionaries failed to appreciate that there was more to these traditional practices than their surface manifestations appear to indicate.

Consequent upon the barrier of language and other cultural differences, those

missionaries could not understand the full implication of what some of the traditional practices represented. They considered every aspect of our culture as fetish. Because of their biased mind, differences in culture (western and African) were singled out as heathenish. They castigated and preached against the norms of traditional religion. (p.422).

Madu (1997) affirms that

African Traditional Religion is the religion of the soil. thus, it essentially encodes the people's life style. It is therefore, not a missionary in that it does not go out to proselytize, nor does it go out to look for converts. A.T.R maintains its exclusivism but recognizes that the other religious cosmologies should exist in their own right. (p.136).

Madu also acknowledges that "A.T.R is very tolerant to other religions" (p.136). In this accommodating manner of African traditional religion embraced Christianity as brought by the missionaries. However, this acceptance opened the way for Christianity in Igboland to condemn much of Igbo culture expressed in Igbo religion as fetish, idolatrous, paganism and devilish (Obiefuna and Anigor, 2010). Concerning the impact of Christianity on Igbo culture, Anyanwu, (1999) states that,

The European missionaries to Africa and Igboland in particular came with the preconceived notion that there was either no religion at all in Africa or that it was entirely of the devil: the missionaries therefore considered it their duty not only to convert the Igbo to Christianity but also to make them give up and forget their past entirely and live up to their new dignity. The planting of Christianity in Igbo land hit at the very soul of the society and invariably caused problems of varying magnitude in Igbo life and culture. (p.152).

In Nando, the missionaries not only adopted a hostile attitude towards Nando religious and cultural practices, but went ahead to indoctrinate their converts to do the same. The missionaries and their converts confronted the observance of traditional rites of passage like *Akwali*. Some of the early Christian converts refused to be part of the community celebration of the traditional rites of passage and observance of some of the festivals as a result of their new religious faith.

Developments like this resulted in the diminishing number of participants during the rite of passage as Christian parents discouraged their daughters from observing the *Akwali* rite. Since Christianity sought to build a new community grounded in Christian principles, ethics and worldview, it created a new identity for its converts, which was at variance with the traditional worldview of Nando people. These new converts no longer saw *Akwali* as a rite of passage which ushered young girls into adulthood. Their daughters were taught that they could become women, marry and bear children without going through the rite. Belief in ancestors and spirits which underpinned the *Akwali* rite of passage was debunked by the missionaries and veneration to them was prohibited among their converts. Aspects of the *Akwali* rites of passage like the burial rites of *Nwakiliki* and the visit to *Akwali* deity were hampered.

Oguejiofor (2010) hints at the impact of this kind when he opines that:

The Igbo paradigm which was founded on basic religious conviction and the place of man in it has been heavily eroded through the result of missionary activities. It is noted that in terms of mere religious adherence, Igbo land is perhaps the most Christianized part of Africa... Thus, Igbo beliefs about the deities, the spirits and their relationship with humans, the ancestors, the land as the guardian of morality are no longer tenable in the form in which they were known. (p.22).

As Christianity grew and indigenous and Pentecostal churches came on the scene, traditional rites of passage like *Akwali* were threatened with extinction as these churches demonized them. Pentecostal churches saw *Akwali* rites of passage as part of the mechanisms by which the people



were kept in bondage and devised means of delivering people from such bondage. The religious aspect of *Akwali* rite of passage was interpreted as liaising with demonic forces and malevolent ancestral spirits who do not have anything positive to offer, but wreck havoc on the lives and destinies of people for example, the burial ceremony of *nwakiliki* and the visit to *Akwali* deity.

### **5.1.2 Colonization.**

Colonialism is the direct and overall domination of one country by another on the basis of state power being in the hands of a foreign power (for example, the direct and overall domination of Nigeria by Britain between 1900-1960 (Ocheni and Nwankwo, 2012)

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw the colonization of almost the whole African continent by European powers. This was done through the combined forces of imperialism, diplomatic pressure, military invasion and conquest (Iweriebor, 2002). Several factors have been canvassed as motivators for the incursion of colonialism such as the collapse of the profitability of the slave trade and its eventual suppression and abolition; as well as the expansion of the European capitalist industrial revolution with its attendant demand for sources of raw materials, search for guaranteed markets and profitable investment outlets (Iweriebor 2002). Igboland had its fair share of colonization. The colonization of Igboland was not smooth as the British colonial administration encountered obstacles of great magnitude when it first came to Igboland. When the Europeans came, they did not know how to penetrate them because unlike in Hausa and Yoruba where they met Emir and Oba respectively, they could not find any king in Igboland, hence they said that Igbo has no king (*Igbo enwe eze*) (Okafor 1999)

Consequently, the colonialists proceeded to dismantle the traditional egalitarian government of the Igbo in the bid to establish indirect rule as already implemented in the northern and western parts of Nigeria. In order to remedy this perceived disadvantage of the Igbo, the colonial administration hand-picked people they believed to represent the village groups in the

court area and made them Ndi- isi (Warrant Chiefs). The Warrant Chiefs were individuals appointed to leadership with no particular reference to their positions in their communities. Furthermore, the warrant chiefs were answerable to their colonial mentors, who hired and dismissed them at will. It was the warrant which these chiefs possessed that gave them the authority to collect taxes and mobilize their villages to participate in colonial court activities. The formation and operations of the indirect rule system were characterized by many ambiguities and did not last as long as the colonial administrators had wanted. While the effects of colonization on Igbo culture have been well documented by scholars like Mbiti (1969), Okafor (1999), Nwala (1985), Dirks (1992), Onwubiko (1991), Palmer (1972), Okere (2003) and others, there is a dearth of literature on the effect of colonization on *Akwali* rite of passage. With specific reference to *Akwali* rite of passage, Udemba (2015) and Okoye (2015) opined that this rite of passage was greatly affected by the establishment of colonial government in Nando. The colonial administration did not recognize the traditional authority structure of Nando and went ahead to establish a structure which was not only alien to Nando traditional culture, customs and values but elevated persons who were not recognized in Nando society as authoritative figures to official positions. Nwala (1985) noted that the priests, elders, diviners, medicine-men and the first born sons had their recognized roles which were relegated.

The patriarchal stance of the colonial administrators relegated to the background the Ekwe titled women, (who upheld the dignity of women and played an integral role in *Akwali* rites). This dealt a devastating blow on the continued practice of *Akwali* rite of passage as the *Ekwe* titled women no longer played the crucial role associated with the burial rites of Nwakiliki.

### **5.1.3 Western Education**

Since time immemorial, *Akwali* rite of passage played a crucial role in the education of young girls, thereby aiding the smooth transition from childhood to adulthood. With the introduction of western education, Igboland experienced a totally different form of education

which emphasized literacy, scientific and rational thought. Nando parents, in their quest for literacy, sent their children to school and this early exposure of their young ones led to their being influenced by western culture which in turn affected the *Akwali* rite of passage and other rites.

Anyanwu (1999) avers that:

With the introduction of western education, Igbo children were weaned from the control and influence of the families because in order to acquire the education, children stayed away from their homes for so long. Also in the schools, the children were weaned easily from their native ideas and prejudices of their unyielding parents. There in school, the children acquired a whole body of new teaching touching on all aspects of human existence and these were openly and widely advertised as antithetical to the Igbo way of life. (p.164).

Nando way of life was presented as barbaric and uncivilized in nature and consequently, the young children could not but accept anything from their Western education as superior and better compared to the education *Akwali* rite held for them.

Western education, in this vein, debased, challenged, and supplanted Nando traditional and informal education along with its cultural foundations. Anyanwu (1999) reveals that:

The missionaries through their western education taught the people that everything in Africa was bad...Puberty rites which help to introduce children into adulthood were described as pagan and traditional music and dancing were banned in schools established by the missionaries. The children who went to schools were unable to or more likely were prohibited from participating in the activities of their age sets like initiation into the masquerade societies, learning the social and cultic dancers and the various acolyte duties associated with the various celebrations marking the puberty rites.(p.165).

One major effect of Western education on *Akwali* rite was the scepticism it planted in the hearts of the younger generation. They questioned Nando traditional beliefs and practices, and sought explanations for the rationale behind the various traditional practices that underpinned *Akwali* rite of passage. Some went as far as claiming that they were no longer obliged to submit to the traditional customs and traditions of the community. This put the traditional authority structure for ensuring conformity to social norms under immense pressure.

#### **5.1.4 Urbanization**

Igbo and Anugwom (2002) maintains that urbanization refers to the movement of people from rural communities to towns and cities in search of new jobs, better wages, and new lifestyles. Migration of many village and town dwellers to urban cities to seek for urban life is called urbanization. This trend has affected, and continues to affect the Igbo society and culture including rite of passage festivals. Oguejiofor (2010) writes on the impact of migration thus:

The impact of migration takes a heavy toll on the traditional concepts of the Igbo. The Igbo, as Basden says are very adaptable, they easily acclimatize to any condition in which they find outside their homeland, they learn the language of the people, and very often they jettison, and modify their own ways, borrowing from those among whom they must live. This makes the retention of their traditional patrimony including the world-view or paradigm that accompanies it more and more difficult. That the Igbo are naturally very migrant people speaks of their desire to live better life, and their willingness to pursue it no matter where it is found. (p.23).

The fascination with which cosmopolitan areas ways of life draws young people to them. This has brought about many changes in the life of Igbo people in general and Nando in particular. Okwueze (2003) rightly captures the effect of urbanization thus,

Due to urbanization...young men [and women] have abandoned their traditional functions in the villages. Many functions performed by different age-grades, which are geared towards exercising social control, have been disrupted, since the young men [and women] now live in towns and cities. Sacred duties like masquerading, moonlight plays, making shrines and huts for traditional groups, which help to emphasize group solidarity and moral responsibility are no longer performed, while able-bodied men who were normally interested in playing masquerades migrate to town in pursuit of modern life. (p.91).

Traditional festivals and rites of passage like *Akwali* no longer command the respect and attention they had during their heydays. Many young people are no longer interested in *Akwali* rite of passage because they see it as a waste of time (and resources) and an exercise which does not have any real bearing on their lives, most importantly on their potential for marriage.

The Western worldview which pervades the urban cities hold views on adulthood which are diametrically opposed to the traditional conception of adulthood and what it takes to be an adult. Hence, young girls of Nando community who have migrated to cities in search of new jobs, better wages, and new life styles place premium on physical age, material possessions, financial independence and other forms of recognition as markers of adulthood. This total abandonment of traditional communities and acceptance of the Western value system has led to the degeneration of *Akwali* rite of passage and its place in Nando community. It is not surprising that today, a good number of young girls from Nando do not know about the festival let alone witnessing or participating in it. In fact, many parents are no longer interested in performing *Akwali* rite for their children due to lack of knowledge about its benefits.

### **5.1.5 Globalization**

Globalization refers to the new economic reality that seeks to break all known national boundaries the world over in an attempt to promote trade liberalization, economic competition or free enterprises and an emergent political structure that is people oriented. As a concept, globalization tends to wipe out national boundaries and restriction and opens every country's boundary for free trade and free flow of information, cultural ideas and trade, and diffusion of technology in the bid to make the world a global village (Ekei, 2010, Adejo, 2003). This traditional view of globalization from the economic perspective has been broadened to embrace political, cultural, religious and even military realities (Fafowora, 1998).

The effects of globalization on African cultural values and practices have been examined by scholars like Arowolo (2010), Njoku (2006) and Eboh (2004), who maintained that globalization was the vehicle through which Western culture and European mode of civilisation supplanted African and Igbo cultural heritage

With reference to Igbo culture, globalization has led to the perception of Igbo traditional way of life as primeval, out-dated and unacceptable in the global space. This led to a loss of the sense of cultural continuity. Young people have adjusted their lifestyles to suit the global culture. For example, they prefer western festivals, western songs, artists and hair styles; shoes and clothing to traditional alternatives. Tied to this global culture is a materialistic and individualistic approach to life which has eroded the communal and gregarious nature of the Igbo society. Njoku (2006) laments that the contact of Western and Igbo cultures and the ongoing processes of globalization have transformed patterns of thought, preferences in diet, dressing, housing, etiquettes, appetites and fancies. They are reengineering visions and ideals of living perceptions of self, of others, and of conflicts, which confront communal living in the present day Africa.

The communality and conviviality of *Akwali* rite of passage no longer appeals to the young people who see it as inferior, local and uncivilized, and would rather invest their time and fancy on Western events. Oguejiofor (2010) affirms:

From all parts of Africa, one can follow programmes in far-away Europe and America...In Nigeria, a young football lover follows the English league religiously. They watch the weekly fixtures and are absentee fans of the big clubs in England, displaying their logo, wearing their colours, and forecasting and betting on their success in the weekly matches. The interest of these young Nigerian football lovers in the English and European leagues, and the consequences of this interest on the local league in Nigeria are symbolic of what effects globalization is having on traditional cultures in Africa and other parts of the world. (p.17).

This state of affairs has a direct effect on *Akwali* rite of passage as it consigns the rite to antiquity, and presents as unfashionable artificial and virtual community like webspaces (which have usurped face-to-face communication), westernized concepts of personhood and adulthood, sexual independence and promiscuity (with its attendant problems like HIV and AIDS), juvenile delinquency, and so forth.

## **5.2 The Position of *Akwali* Rite of Passage in Contemporary Nando Community**

The combined forces of Christianity, colonization, urbanization and globalization exerted a lot of pressure on the *Akwali* rite to the extent that participation waned as the years went by. The prestige associated with participating in the rite also diminished with time. At some point, according to Igwedo (2015), *Akwali* rite of passage was celebrated during the Easter period with only one stage observed.

Currently, most young people in Nando do not know much about *Akwali* rite of passage. A good number of the elderly people in Nando, on the other hand, have recollections of the heydays of the rite. This is usually made possible by the occasions involving the recounting of the rites of

passage and festivals in Nando lunar calendar. Interestingly, *Akwali* deity has survived the onslaught of Christianity and is the only aspect of *Akwali* rite that is still functional in Nando. Women still patronise or pay homage to the shrine. They visit the shrine for favours relating to child bearing. Children are also named after the deity in recognition of its benevolence.

The above fate of *Akwali* rite of passage is not peculiar to it, since other rites of passage such as the Ghanaian puberty rites called *Dipo* have suffered a similar fate. Akosah (2010) corroborates this by saying that:

In today's Africa, one of the rapidly urbanizing regions in the world, traditional practices such as puberty rites are getting low: but deadly modern diseases such as HIV/AIDS are getting high...And the re-introduction of customs such as puberty rites will help check teenage pregnancy and spread of HIV/AIDS. (p.3).

Despite, the present condition of *Akwali* rite of passage, there is a yearning for the rediscovery of the rite. From the opinions of the people interviewed during the course of the research, there is an eagerness to rejuvenate this rite of passage. In December 27, 2016, Nando youths organised a cultural fiesta and one of the activities they showcased was *Akwali* rite of passage. The question remains: how can the desire to rejuvenate *Akwali* rite of passage be materialized in the face of Christianity, urbanization, Western education and globalization, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

### **5.3 Rediscover Akwali Rite of Passage in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*Akwali* rite is a ritual that empowers girls to step into motherhood. It is a rite that is passed down from generation to generation that helps to create a sense of unity and belonging among its members. The following ways can be taken to rediscover it.



## **1. Through creating awareness of the important of Akwali rite .**

Rediscovering *Akwali* rite of passage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century entails creating awareness on the importance of *Akwali* rite. Awareness should be created for Nando people to be aware that traditions are an important way to establish lasting bonds and create a sense of belonging. Hence, creating a new level of awareness for people who may not yet know about *Akwali* rite of passage is necessary and can equally lead to an understanding of the benefits of the rite.

Taking into cognizance modern realities such as the facts that more than ever before a great percentage of Nando people are now Christians and live in urban centres, and that many of them, are now more educated and have embraced modern technology. The form of *Akwali* rite should be modified and adapted in the following areas.

### **(i) Period of the Rite**

*Akwali* rite of passage is a four-day rite of passage during which young girls in Nando undergo a partial seclusion in order to participate in the activities required by the rite. Reduction of the number of days of *Akwali* festival from four days to two days will enable young girls in school to find it easy to participate in the rite. It has been observed that the young girls in Nando hold Western education in high esteem and may not be willing to participate in a rite that will keep them out of school for four days. The teachers may not be cooperative with a situation in which the girls are kept out of school due to *Akwali* rite of passage (a rite which they may regard as not being as important as formal education). Reduction of the period of the rite will also enable Nando girls in the Diaspora to take part in the rite. Alternatively, the period of the rite may be moved to coincide with the holiday period to encourage full participation.

### **(ii) Education and Training**

*Akwali* rite of passage originally involved informal education of the participants on a wide array of subjects. This education is usually carried out by elderly women. This aspect of the rite

should be retained as it provides a forum for sexual education, identity formation and socialization. However, the educative aspect of Akwali can be reinforced with the introduction of skill acquisition workshops and cultural seminar aimed at equipping the girls with skills that can position them for academic and career success as well as modern entrepreneurial skills. According to Lertzman(2002)

foundation concepts of rites of passage are described in terms of their relevance to youth, outdoor education, and the rediscovery program in particular.... In this context, the purpose of education is to cultivate self knowledge and foster core personal development: the making of whole human beings. (p.xi).

Given that part of the original aim of Akwali rite of passage is to bring young girls together for socialization and moral training, the introduction of resource persons and facilitators to give the participants talk on health issues, personal hygiene, dietary matters and healthy relationships will go a long way to making the rite attractive to modern Nando youth.

### **(iii) Okwokwolikwo Market**

While the Okwokwolikwo market stage in Akwali rites provides the leisurely forum for interaction between eligible bachelors and the participants, the setting and its import may not be fully appreciated by Nando girls today. Therefore, the researcher suggests that the market scene will remain in its form. This can also provide a platform for young people to meet and interact thereby forging relationships that may eventually blossom into marriage.

### **(iv) Burial Rite of Nwakiliki/Visit to Akwali Deity**

The burial rite accorded to Nwakiliki constituted an important part of *Akwali* rites and connects the participants to their dead ancestors. This part of the rite should be adapted to incorporate potential participants who may be Christians. In this regard, the researcher suggests

the inculturation of this rite in a way that a prayer for the dead can be substituted for the burial of *Nwakiliki*.( it can be like a memorial ceremony).

#### **(v) visit to Akwali**

Perhaps, no other aspect of *Akwali* rite of passage would elicit controversy today among Christians than the visit to *Akwali* deity. In its original form, the visit to *Akwali* deity constitutes the crux of the rite. The festival derives its name from the deity and thus finds its fullest expression in the prayers offered at the shrine of the deity for the marriage of participants, fertility and their child-bearing. Since most Christians would object to this visit to *Akwali* deity and what it entails, it may be inculturated by holding a non-denominational service for the participants. This raises the question of whether the rite of passage can still retain its name *Akwali*, and if so, how does one come to terms with the implications of the prayers offered during such a non-denominational service. It is a well known fact that in Igbo Society, names like *Akwali-Omumu* are giving to children by their parents depending on the circumstances surrounding those children. *Akwali* (omumu ) means (children).

### **5.3.2 Promoting *Akwali* Rite of Passage in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

#### **(i) Internet/Social media**

The internet is one of the most influential phenomena of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has gone further to create a unique global culture. Utoh-Ezeajughi (2010) writes:

People around the globe are more connected to each other today than ever before in the history of mankind. Information and money flow more quickly than ever. Goods and services produced in one part of the world are increasingly available in all parts of the world. International travels are more frequent, international communication is commonplace. (p.205).

The dynamism of today's culture warrants the promotion of *Akwali* rite of passage through various means in order to make it relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The role of *Akwali* rite of passage in engendering a sense of identity, dignity, unity, continuity, and security makes it imperative to use the internet and social media to revitalize the rite of passage. *Akwali* rite of passage (and other cultural festivals) should be recorded in various formats and showcased online so that information on the rite will be easily accessed. Articles, videos, podcasts and images can be made available online to educate the public on *Akwali* rite of passage. Considering that the internet has become a veritable source for information, the *Akwali* rite of passage stands to gain immensely from being projected positively online.

In addition to uploading details of *Akwali* rite of passage online, TV stations can feature public aspects of the rite. For example, N.T.A Igboezue, a subsidiary of N.T.A International specializes in airing programmes on Igbo tradition and culture. *Akwali* rite of passage can be packaged and showcased on this station to enlighten people on this rich culture of people of Nando.

### **Books**

Igbo culture and religion have suffered from misrepresentations from foreign writers whose interests were aimed at fostering the supremacy of western civilization. The task for all indigenous Igbo writers has been to rewrite the history, culture and religion of Igboland in a way that truly represents Igbo worldview. According to Chukwu (2008), affirms that such exercise helps to preserve cultures and rite of passage.

In the light of the above, rediscovering *Akwali* rite of passage entails writing books about the rite in English as well as Igbo language. This will help to preserve Nando culture and rites for the present generation and posterity. Atuanya's (2006) book "Traditional festivals in Nando" is a step in the right direction in this regard.

### **(iii) Films/Documentaries**

The film industry in Nigeria can be leveraged to promote *Akwali* rite of passage given the immense role it plays in education and providing entertainment. *Akwali* rite can be presented

through various media such as stage plays, documentaries and full length movies which can be made available to various audiences within and outside the country. Doing this will help preserve the rite and Nando culture in general. It is important to note that festivals can offer a communal shared and unique experiences, when the films, their ideas to other people.

#### **(iv) Cultural Tourism / Carnival**

Expanding on the need to promote cultural practices through carnivals, Asigbo (2012) avers that, Carnival...is a costumed 'street party' and connotes spectacle, elegance, gaiety, pageant, and dancing. While culture celebrates that which is, carnival celebrates possibilities and fantasies or where we could get to the future (p.5). *Akwali* rite of passage can be promoted by incorporating aspects of it into annual cultural carnivals which can be adopted by Anambra State and Nando people.

For the above reason Okodo (2008) submitted that:

One way of developing the culture of Nigeria that is suffering unfavourable changes is through the organisation of cultural displays of the people. This helps to bring the people together and makes the people feel at home with good sense of belonging. This will enable them to feel proud of their culture and stop shying away as a result of inferiority complex. (p.332).

Cultural carnivals serve as avenues for knowledge transfer and reference points for the promotion of the historical and cultural experience of the people.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION And RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Summary

Like all life on earth, human beings grow through stages and transitions which are traditionally marked and celebrated in cultures across the globe through ceremonies known as rites of passage. At their most essential level, rites of passage are a part of human-nature, honouring natural developmental stages, revitalizing and restoring the human experiences, and connecting the individuals to self, others, and greater ecology of which they are a part (Grimes, 2000). *Akwali* rite of passage is one of the ceremonies on the Nando traditional calendar through which young girls in Nando community transition from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, it is a rite of passage. During its heydays, the importance of this rite of passage for young girls and the entire Nando community lies in the fact that any woman who did not participate in the rite was regarded as a child, and not a woman in every sense of the word. This is because *Akwali* rite of passage prepare and ushers young girls who had reached the age of puberty into womanhood through its activities. This study examined *Akwali* rite of passage in Nando with the aim of highlighting the various aspects of the rite, its functions in Nando community and the factors that have affected its continued existence.

The study was grounded in conceptual frameworks dealing with rites of passage in general as pioneered by van Gennep, elaborated on by Turner, Grimes, Lertzmann and other scholars who have shaped discourse on the subject. Specifically, girls' puberty rites of passage were examined to arrive at certain characteristics that made them unique and important part of the lives of traditional societies. Theories such as structural-functionalism, symbolic interactionism and cultural relativism were examined as the theoretical underpinnings that guided the study. Empirical studies on girls' puberty rites highlighted fieldwork done in this area over the years. It was observed that while scholars have made efforts to evaluate female puberty rites, there is a

dearth of studies on *Akwali* rite of passage as well as the effects of external factors on female puberty rites.

This study takes up this challenge and examined the worldview of the people of Nando people order to highlight their traditional and religious life which influenced the practice of *Akwali* rite of passage. The features of *Akwali* rite of passage in pre-colonial Nando community were examined with the aid of in-depth interviews. *Akwali* rite of passage provided the means through which young girls were socialized and prepared for adulthood and marriage. This robust rite of passage was greatly hampered by external factors namely Christianity, colonization, western education, urbanization and globalization.

It is against this backdrop that the study makes the case for a rediscovery of *Akwali* festival to save it from total extinction. Given the reality that most Nando sons and daughters have become Christians more educated and live in cities, it is germane to revive the rite in ways that will make it all-embracing and appealing to the young and old, Christians and traditionalists. Recognizing the crucial roles globalization and information and communication technology (ICT) play in today's world, it is significant that efforts be made to revitalize *Akwali* rite into global media in order to present the inherent benefits of the rite for the individual and society at large.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

Rite of passage serve as a catalyst for nation building and identity formation. It is therefore necessary that all effort should be put together to rediscover our rites of passage especially *Akwali* rite. Over the years, *Akwali* rite of passage has been affected by the in-road of Christianity which gave birth to factors like colonization, and western education, as well as other factors like urbanization and globalization. These factors have not only devalued *Akwali* rites of passage, but have driven it almost to the point of extinction. Ezeanya (2010) rightly remarked that people who lose its culture and history to any other people or forces get enslaved to the new people or forces and where such cohesion is lost, extinction is imminent". The challenges facing rite of passage is

a global one in such, all hands will be joined together to fight and win some of our good cultural values and rite of passage festival back to avoid possible erosion of them all. In consideration of these identified problems facing *akwali* rites of passage, suggestions were proffered to promote and rediscovery *Akwali* festival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

In view of the study on *Akwali* rite of passage in Nando community, the following recommendations are proffered as ways of reviving the rite of passage:

#### **Incorporating *Akwali* rite of passage to Mass Returns and Carnivals**

Mass returns are annual gatherings of people from a community with the intention to foster unity, interaction and development. Igboland is known for hosting annual mass returns involving Igbo people living in various parts of the country and in the Diaspora. Incorporating *Akwali* rite of passage into the events scheduled for these mass returns will create more visibility for the rite and serve as a forum for portraying its benefits.

Carnivals can also afford the people of Nando and Anambra State in general the opportunity to showcase *Akwali* rite of passage. The ceremony marking the end of the rite could be timed to coincide with such carnivals. State and Local Governments as well as private organizations can even help to sponsor and organise carnivals. Carnivals of this nature serve as a knowledge and reference point for the promotion of the rites of passage like *Akwali* and how such experiences can foster a holistic identity.

#### ***Akwali* Alternative Rites of Passage**

The study recommends the introduction of *Akwali* Alternative Rites of Passage (AARP) which would maintain the essential components of the original rites such as partial seclusion, education, exchange of gifts etc at the same time incorporating modern phenomena to make the rite relevant. An alternative rite of passage (ARP) refers to a structured programme of activities



with community-level sensitization to first gain support and to recruit the girls who will participate, which is followed by a public ritual that includes training of the girls in family life education, and a public ceremony similar to the traditional rite of passage (Chege, et al, 2001). The aim of alternative rite of passage is to simulate the traditional rite as closely as possible. Adoption of *Akwali* alternative rites of passage will reposition the festival to appeal to a wider audience, for example Christians.

Part of modifying *Akwali* rite of passage to reflect modern realities in the form of alternative rites of passage entails placing emphasis on contemporary issues such as teenage pregnancy, personal hygiene, avoidance of promiscuity and drug abuse. This would make the participants aware of these challenges and prepare them for more productive and self-aware adulthood free from vices.

#### **6.4 Suggestion for Further Research**

In the course of this research work, the following suggestions for further research. She suggests are identical that further research. In the first place, should be done to ascertain the existence and nature of *Akwali* rite of passage in other communities in Anambra State. This will throw more light on this important festival. Again, studies can be carried out to examine how *Akwali* rite can accommodate the aspirations and lifestyles of contemporary Nando young women within the context of alternative rites of passage.

It would also be important to embark on a comparative study of *Akwali* rite of passage and Iru Mgbede rite as a way of broadening views on female rites of passage in Igboland. A comparative research on the rites of passage for young girls in Igboland is also necessary to find out those that are still in existence and those that have gone extinct in order to strengthen the former and rejuvenate the latter. In addition, studies should be done on the implications of puberty rites of passage like *Akwali* rite of passage for child development. Lastly, it is suggested that studies be carried out to evaluate how puberty rites of passage like *Akwali* rite of passage enhance women's identity, power and status in Igbo society.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Questions for Oral Interview**

The following questions were asked to the interviewee:

- 1) What is the position of akwali rite of passage today in Nando?
- 2) What are the factors affecting this rite of passage?
- 3) How was this rite performed in the olden days?
- 4) The history of Nando
- 5) How much change has been done to this rite of passage by the combined forces of globalization, urbanization, christianity and western education?
- 6) Why is it important for these problems facing Akwali to be solved and its importance rediscover?



## Appendix 2

### List of Personal Communication

<b>Date of Interview</b>	<b>Place of Interview</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Name of Respondent</b>
3/10/2016	Onitsha	Accountant	78	Christopher Madubuonu
1/10/16	Nando	Farmer	90	E.E.Udemezue
13/9/16	Nando	Trader	56	J.U.Obi
20/9/15	Nando	Farmer	60	G.A.Okoye
3/10/15	Nando	Farmer	67	U.A.Aniagor
3/12/2015	Nando	Farmer	58	O.J.Udekwe
20/2/15	Nando	Trader	69	O.B.Okafor
„	Nando	Trader	60	J.U.Obiora
„	Nando	Farmer	70	O.U.Udemba
„	Nando	Herbalist	73	A.U.Nwakor
3/12/15	Nando	Farmer	80	Etim Igwedo
„	Nando	Retired Farmer	90	Nnodu Ughaememu
„	Nando	Farmer	80	Mgbago

				Nwasolu
„	Nando	Trader	70	S.O. Anumudu
8/12/15	Nando	Herbalist	70	Adili Obigwe
„	Nando	Farmer	61	Ajana Agatha
„	Nando	Trader	70	Anakor Ijeoma
10/3/16	Nando	Farmer	71	Ekwuefi Izunna
„	Nando	Farmer	76	Obalunma Ndife
„	Nando	Farmer	60	Melikam mary
„	Nando	Farmer	67	Orji Christian
14/4/16	„	„	50	Chukwujiofor Caroline
„	Nando	Trader	„	Nnegbo Christiana
„	„	„	51	Igbokwu Virginia
„	„	„	69	Uchechukwu Mike
„	„	Trader	60	Chigbata Virginia

”	”	”	”	Aniebonam Caroline
”	”	Trader	”	Anielo Mary
”	”	Farmer	54	Mofunanya Theresa
”	”	”	53	Oguguo monica
”	”	Farmer	56	Ezinwa Cordelia
17/4/16	”	”	43	Ebogha sussana
”	”	Farmer	44	Anosike Edina
”	”	”	46	Nwangwu Caroline
”	”	”	40	Onuora Felicia
”	”	”	”	Akwuobi Veronica
”	”	”	51	Uyamadu Clement
”	”	”	54	Onuora Bridget
18/6/16	”	”	55	Obidike Roseline

”	Nando	Farmer	60	Anude Francisca
”	”	”	65	Izuchukwu Micheal
”	”	”	51	Obigwe Evelyn
”	”	”	58	Aneke Justina
”	”	”	57	Obiora Stella
”	”	”	60	Ofokansi Angela
19/7/16	Nando	Farmer	58	Onuora Agnes
”	”	”	71	Magrate Ajamm
”	”	”	65	Nnanwude Florence
”	”	”	66	Okumefuna Bridget
”	”	”	62	Nwuneli Beatrice
”	”	”	69	Ajana Anna