

identity. Furthermore, these changes in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were highly indicative of the kinds of change that Igbo made in adjusting to the highly centralized British rule of the twentieth century. It is therefore highly regrettable that the literature on Mid-West Igbo is virtually non-existent.

The Igbo, like the Hausa and Yoruba, are not a single ethnic group. Rather they are a series of sub-groups sharing certain cultural traits and in certain circumstances acting like ethnic groups in order to achieve desired ends. The cultural variations that exist among the Igbo have been noted in a number of works (UCHENDU 1965; OTTENBERG 1971; GREEN 1964). However, no one has discussed any of these variations or their reasons in any detail. As stated above, it is a major purpose of this paper to discuss one area of variation between Mid-Western Igbo and those from the Igbo homeland to present one possible explanation for that difference, the maintenance of ethnic boundaries in the articulation of interethnic relationships.

1. Title Societies

Title taking is a major trait of all Igbo communities. During the course of his lifetime each Igbo man must take some titles. While Igbo do not judge a man solely on the titles he takes, these are important variables in any judgment of an individual's worth. Furthermore, an Igbo usually must return to the South in order to take his titles and increase his prestige. It is rather significant therefore that Mid-Western Igbos can take their titles in the Mid-West and do not have to return to the South-East as do Igbo settled in the West or North. In short, Igbo have been settled in the Mid-West long enough to consider it as much their homeland as they do the South-East (LATEE FAHM: personal communication). Evidence suggests that Igbo have been in the Mid-West since at least the middle of the nineteenth century.

2. General Categories

In both the Mid-West and the South-East there are two major categories of Igbo title societies – secret and non-secret. Thus, in both areas men, and sometimes women, can join societies which have “secrets” known only to members. The membership is not secret, nor is the purpose of the society. Indeed these members have clearly-defined rights and duties in relationship to other members of their village or, in some cases, to members of a series of villages. These duties always involve some aspect of social control-discovery of witches or sorcerers, punishment of adulterers, the making of laws to apply to new circumstances, and a host of other similar functions. Thus, the members of secret societies and the work of the societies is known, but the secret that gives the societies their power is not known, for knowledge of the secret among the uninitiated would cause the society to lose its power and, in turn, injure the larger society dependent on its working. Chaos would result.