CHAPTER TWO

ETHNIC CULTURES

“[..] ethnicity is like religion, people
seem to need it”

(Quoted in Schwartz 49)

Ethnicity is an important socio-cultural aspect projected by the postcolonial writers to establish a definite cultural identity. After the exit of the British, in the colonized countries there was a turning back to tradition, creating an ethnic awareness among different cultural groups. Achebe and Wiebe narrate the pre-colonial pasts of their respective nations as they attempt to relocate the cultural identity of their respective societies at their respective centres. Their respective pre-colonial cultures changed with colonization, and ultimately moved towards homogenization of cultures. In this context, it was felt by the writers that the past of their nations has to be retold to the present generation to establish a cultural continuity. Ella Shohat emphasizes that the past should be reproduced, as fragmented sets of narrated memories and experiences, to mobilise contemporary postcolonial communities (“Notes on the Post-colonial” 330).
In the formerly colonized world, the ‘return’ to pre-colonial culture and tradition promises new ways of redefining the lost cultural identity. Even after independence, these countries looked towards Europe as their cultural centres, which eventually resulted in the disintegration of their native cultures. The contemporary culture of an erstwhile colony was influenced largely by the culture of the colonizer, so much so that it is difficult for the younger generation to identify their native culture, tradition and values. The authors of The Empire Writes Back suggest that traditional pre-colonial indigenous forms are of great importance because it is an expression of a renewed sense of identity and self-value in the independence period (182). Hence, the postcolonial writers seek to define their cultures as different and distinct from the colonial culture, by revisiting and claiming their past in terms of their ethnicity. Shohat is of the opinion that the retrieval of the past is very essential for the postcolonial societies:

For communities which have undergone brutal ruptures, now in the process of forging a collective identity, no matter how hybrid that identity has been before, during, and after colonialism, the retrieval and reinscription of a fragmented past becomes a crucial contemporary site for forging a resistant collective identity. (330)
George A. De Vos in his essay “Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation” advocates a similar view. According to him, an individual needs collective continuity and belongingness to a particular group, or in other words “a sense of common origin, of common beliefs and values, and of common feeling of survival [...]”(15). When an individual is threatened by questions of existence of his group or lineage, he seeks to reaffirm his group into existence by renewing its past cultural codes. Thomas K. Fitzgerald suggests that ethnic identity provides a “psychic shelter”(128) to such individuals.

The word “ethnic groups” has no acceptable single word in English. Yet, anthropologists suggest that the word *ethnos* is derived from the Greek word ‘ethnikos’, which means heathen or pagan. It is used in this sense in English from the mid-fourteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century; but the term gradually came to be associated with racial characteristics. Writing about ethnicity began to be widely associated with cultural anthropology. Andrew Edgar in *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* defines the study of ethnicity as a “close and prolonged observation of a particular social group”(133). In the article “Ethnicity and Nationalism” Thomas Hylland Kristen holds the view that ethnic means being culturally distinctive. To quote Kristen: “Ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as
being culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction” (par. 36). De Vos is of the view that ethnic groups are totally inclusive, and follow a common set of traditions. It is a self-perceived inclusion of those who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact (“Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation” 18). Such traditions may include folk elements, language, legends, mythologies, religious beliefs and practices, marriage celebrations, birth and death rituals, and even common ancestry or place of origin, which are symbolic reinforcement of ethnic cultural patterns.

Schwartz uses the word “tribes” interchangeably with “ethnic” groups in his critical essay, “Cultural Totemism: Ethnic Identity Primitive and Modern”. He argues that the term “tribe” has extended too far from its established traditional sense to be applicable to politically and socially unorganized groupings based on presumed common descent, blood, and culture. He concedes that under the influence of new and broad forms of political leadership within the imposed and assimilated state, some of the ethnic groups may become tribal in the more prevalent political sense (57). The scholar occasionally uses the terms tribe, clan and ethnic interchangeably without any special political connotation.
Anchoring ethnicity denotes a deliberate awareness of the past values and cultural distinctiveness on the part of the ethnic groups. Asserting the ethnic identity is a unifying effort. It brings the scattered members of the ethnic group into a single unit. Cultural identity leads to an attachment to the past; and the writer’s search for a meaningful past offers a sense of social belonging and continuity of the past in the modern alien atmosphere. Ethnic assertion not only offers identity and position, but also a strategy for survival of the past. Ethnicity in this context is oriented to past heritage.

Achebe and Wiebe position themselves to write about the ethnic cultures of their respective nations. Achebe writes about the Igbo culture of Nigeria; and Wiebe’s ethnographic impression is multiethnic that it includes the cultures of the Mennonites – a non-indigenous Canadian culture, to which he belongs, as well as that of the First Nations such as the Indians and Inuits, and the Metis, whom he knows as well as the Mennonites. In Nigeria there are more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, encompassing a larger number of language groups as well. Among these, three main alliances have emerged with a geographical as well as a linguistic dimension after the independence: the north is predominantly inhabited by the Hausa; the east by the Igbo; the west by the Yoruba. Being an Igbo himself, Achebe’s prime concern is for the
Igbo community. In Canada, apart from the Indians, Metis and Inuits, the immigrants too from a part of Canadian society but most often native Indians and Inuits are referred as the First Peoples and ancestors. Achebe recreates the Igbo Nigerian past and the white Canadian writer Wiebe locates the pre-colonial culture of the First Peoples and the migrant marginalized Mennonite culture.

Canada has been a nation of immigrant population from very early times. The earlier arrivals were the nomadic hunters living in small wandering family group. Early in one thousand A.D., the Scandinavians were the first to arrive in North America and settle in Newfoundland. In the seventeenth century, French and English settlers flowed in. It was after 1814, that European immigrants started flooding the shore threatening the First Peoples. However, these various immigrant cultural groups have not greatly influenced each other. It is the culture of the native Indians that is feared to be in jeopardy. Wiebe attempts to retrieve the indigenous cultures of Canada and represents the Mennonite immigrant community as a religio-political ethnic group.

Igbo culture is one of the oldest and richest traditions in the African Continent. It has its own rich traditions, customs, taboos, values. John Reader observes, in his book *Africa: A Biography of the Continent*, that the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria neither formed towns nor states
until the recent times. Igboland originated as a landscape of villages clustered in areas where their agricultural and economic concerns were best served, “but without the nuclei of settlement and activity from which urban centres develop”(281). Achebe’s Umuofia is a dispersed town composed of nine villages, and a commonality of ancestry links the nine villages into a clan.

The Indians as portrayed in Wiebe’s fictions are scattered into diverse groups on the Canadian prairies. The Assiniboinne, the Dene, the Sioux, the Blood, the Dogrib, the Crowfeet and the Cree are the various indigenous Indian groups referred to in Wiebe’s novels. Wiebe’s novels deal with in detail the Plains Cree people, the Dene people otherwise known as Tetsot’ine, and the Ojibwan. The Pre-colonial Cree Indians lived in the Canadian West. The Indians led a very peaceful life and divided as small groups among themselves, commonly known as Bands, with no structurally organized society. Hunting was their main occupation. The bands hunted buffaloes for their survival. They constructed small lodges to live in. There was no money economy in their clan. They traded animal skin and fur with the whites. They were a totally secluded people and were unaware of the existence of the modern world. Though Indians lived near by to each other, there was traditional hostility among the other indigenous groups. Each clan had its own Chief or Head
(not a political one as in the modern state) and he had the responsibility to provide food and shelter for the people. They stood united between the “The Only One”, a supreme power, the giver of life and the Mother Earth. Big Bear, the Cree chief, mentions the significance of “The Only One” thus:

[. . .] I say I am fed by the Mother Earth. The only water I will be touched by comes from above, the rain from The Only One who makes the grass grow and the rivers run and the buffalo feed there and drink so that I and my children live. That we have life! (Wiebe The Temptations of Big Bear 16)

The Crees believe that life is fended for from Above.

The Tetsot’ines too believe in the Supreme One like the Crees. The Tetsot’ine people lead a very simple, symbiotic life with nature. They dwell in lodges covered with spruce. Their life is marked by “ceaseless travel and thoughts, the way any Tetsot’ine must if they would live the life of this land” (Wiebe A Discovery of Strangers 24). The Tetsot’ine Indians’ life is put in a nutshell by Keskarrah as follows: “He will find the food and the friends he needs, and a needle-woman who will clothe him and heal him, and whom he will leave to travel again. That is how this land has made People” (192). They have a clear knowledge of
landscapes, with its rivers, tough snow and wild animals. They use arrows to hunt animals. Tetsot’ines follow a peculiar way of mourning death. They mourn by “destroying all their property, including their clothing” (101). They are unaware of the practical necessity of currency and hence do not understand anything of the concept of “property”.

The Ojibwa Indians as portrayed in First and Vital Candle live in groups spreading themselves all over the prairie. Their main occupation is hunting and fishing. Like the other Indian counterparts, their life is very simple and has limited needs. The Ojibwans have no strict codes of law and order and do not have a single chief for the entire community to organize them. Among the different groups there is strong hatred. As the groups are too small it is impossible to steal, and the charges of theft are minimal. Gossips and insults are social checks. There are no provable crimes as the group practiced magic and conjuring: “There’s no provable crime; no RCMP detective could ever prove a thing” (236) and the “Whiteman’s law doesn’t work here because [there is] little that’s outward, provable [. . . ]” (235). The Ojibwans fight among themselves but “direct open violence is rare among them” (235). Marriage between cousins is incest. Kekekose’s younger son Alex falls in love with his uncle’s daughter, Violet. But Kekekose and his brother do not accept Alex’s marriage to his cousin, because they have strict marriage laws.
 Indians have a natural inclination for oration. Wiebe notes that Ojibwans “loved oratory” (34).

The Cree, the Tetsot’ine, the Ojibwa Indians have the same fundamental life pattern as they share the common geographical location. All the Indian group believe in One Supreme Being and hunting is their major occupation, but their customs and rituals are distinct.

The Inuits of the Arctic region in Canada are presented as a distinct ethnic group in First and Vital Candle. The word Inuit means People. The novel deals with the Inuit culture, though not elaborately. Wiebe portrays their life that is thoroughly conditioned by the climatic conditions and physical landscape that surrounds them. The Inuits rarely have contacts with the outside world. The Inuits inhabit the ‘snowhouse’ and that provides comfortable living. Wiebe compares it with the beauty of the Grecian architecture:

*The purity of the material of which the house was framed, the doomed elegance of its construction and the translucency of its walls, which transmitted a very pleasant light, gave it an appearance far superior to a marble building and one might survey it with feelings somewhat akin to those produced by the*
contemplation of a Grecian temple reared by Phidias.

(A Discovery of Strangers 182).

They live in tents half of the year and during winter they inhabit the igloos. Snow insulates better than tents. They are excellent hunters. Animals and fishes are their food and they use sled and dogs to hunt animals. The Inuit family relies on animals for flesh and skin for their food and clothing. The world of the Inuits is immensely different and distant from the modern world.

The Inuits wear two complete suits of Caribou: “the fur on the inside turned in, the fur on the outer out, and the warmth is inside the suit not outside”. If the suit tears it becomes unbearable to survive the cold. They wear moccasin for their foot. It is a type of boot that “comes up under the coat about to the thighs” (29). It helps the feet from freezing and enables easy walking on snow. Its importance is such that even a “cut in that would freeze your feet in no time so you have to stop right there and sew it” (29). As noted by Abe Ross in First and Vital Candle, “[...] they don’t care about tomorrow much as long as right now everyone can fill his belly. That’s Eskimo: eat and be happy today” (90). Their need is limited and they lead a peaceful and contented life even in an unfriendly atmosphere.
The Metis community – a mix of Quebecois voyageurs and Cree women – though a racially mixed group of people, forms a particular religio-political ethnic culture in Canada. The word Metis is derived from the Latin participle *mixtus*, which means ‘mixed’ and in French it is ‘mêlé’ meaning half-breed. The French word Metis is adopted to denote this particular community of half-Indian and half-French.

The novel *The Scorched-Wood People* describes Metis life on the prairies of Red River. The Metis are a simple and plain dealing people, living in providential care with abundant riches. They have a native form of government. A Chief is chosen for every twelve counsellors. Soldiers form groups of ten members and every group chooses its own captain. The Metis are excellent hunters and are known for their “buffalo hunt”. They organize the Great Buffalo Hunt that highlights their hunting skill. The Metis are also called “Bois-Brûlés” meaning burnt wood that denotes their complexion. The Metis live isolated from other races. They inhabit in groups around the lakes and rivers where buffaloes come in groups. Wiebe describes their way of life thus: “their own lords, their only rulers [are] the sky and the long land and slow muddy loops of prairie rivers, and the buffalo, their true king and ruler who gave them everything for life and happiness” (11).
The Metis follow their French-Catholic ancestors and the Church plays a major role in their life. Political problems are resolved with the consent of the Priests. Riel, the Metis leader seeks the advice of Priest Andre during the Battle of Batoche. The Metis white flag holds the ‘sewn picture of Our Lady of Lourdes” (Wiebe The Scorched-Wood People 280) on one side and on the other side a poem is inscribed which speaks of the Metis as Catholic community:

Pray our divine Master
Jesus Christ to prove now that He alone
Is Lord,
Emperor, King, Monarch, President, Czar,
Prime Minister.
Pray our divine Master
That He mark us with the seal
Of His Elect,
At the foot of His Altar. (280)

The flag substantiates the Metis’ identification as a distinct religious ethnic community. Yet, in Canada Metis are “people who have almost disappeared because they no longer live to express a communal will [. . .]. The world has broken down their whole sense of community” (Twigg 212). The Metis have been subjected to discrimination and their
political non-existence is described in The Scorched-Wood People in the following words:

The new yet in their own way civilized Métis people had been formed on true concepts of public liberty and equity, they had peacefully traded with the Hudson’s Bay Company, prevented the horrible Indian wars and savagery that had been perpetrated again and again in the United States; and they had rightly resisted Canada laying hands on their country. At gun-point they demanded justice when they were about to be robbed of the future they had created for themselves but oddly, despite forcing the Manitoba Act into existence, that same act seemed to have given every advantage only to the immigrant. Métis land titles seemed never to arrive; their leaders were arrested, some brutally killed by rioting soldiers, some exiled and even thrown out of the Parliament to which they were legally elected, again and again! (335)

The Metis are a set of dispossessed community in Canada as portrayed in the novels of Wiebe.
Wiebe portrays the Mennonites as being an ethnic community within the Canadian multicultural mosaic. Canadian society is basically plural. According to J.S. Furnivall, a plural society is a medley of peoples . . . for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market-place, in buying and selling. [. . .] with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. (qtd. in Watson 19)

Canada’s colonial policies often pose a serious threat to the plural ethnic communities including the indigenous communities. While Wiebe undertakes to ensure the survival of the indigenous communities such as the Indians, the Metis and the Inuits, he positions his Mennonite community as a distinct ethnic group among the other migrants of the Canadian multicultural fold.

Canadian Mennonites are not a homogenous group though they share a common history of migration and the same pattern of geographic, cultural and linguistic displacement. However, they trace their passage to Canada with difference and they have different patterns of settlement.
once they arrived in Canada, as portrayed in Peace Shall Destroy Many and The Blue Mountains of China.

The Mennonite community is a closed one. Their life is founded on their belief in Christ. The Mennonite family is patriarchal; the sons are the heirs to their fathers. Their religious conviction makes them seek live in peace in all situations. Mennonite domestic matters, rituals of courtship, marriages, births and deaths, the building of houses, the harvesting of crops, raising of cattle and their economic position may be viewed through the character of Frieda Friesen. She narrates their life in the Manitoba prairie in The Blue Mountains of China. For instance, she narrates the building of the sod house:

We made window openings with packing cases and laid sods on peeled poplar poles from the ravine for a roof and bought a few eight-inch boards for ceiling so my five oldest brothers could sleep on top of a kind of second floor. The cellar was under the kitchen where we used the rest of the boards on the floor and when we moved in my sister and I smeared it from inside and outside all over with mud. [. . .] We filled three sacks half full and next day mixed it with water and painted the whole house outside. (54-55)
Sketches of Wapity Mennonite community delineate its ethnic characteristics. Wiebe explores the life of the community through the major character, Thom Wiens in Peace Shall Destroy Many. Church is the centre of the Wapity community and is attached to its own strict religious convictions. Its maxim is “obedience to Christ’s commandment of love, and simplicity of life” (87). Bound by their religious code, they do not participate in government activities. They involve themselves neither in business nor in amusements. Pastor Lepp in Peace Shall Destroy Many, explains the peculiarities of the community as follows: “Christ’s followers are peculiar in this world. As His disciples, our fathers believed they could not participate in worldly affairs, whether of government, business or amusement. The Christian is called to do higher things” (87). As strict followers of Christ, the Mennonites are essentially peace loving people and hence they keep themselves away from war: “The War intrigued the Mennonites, partly because they saw it as the culmination of world evil from which they had strictly, consciously, severed themselves [. . .]” (29). Thom explains the total abstention of the Mennonites from war to his brother. He says, 

Because the people that fly those planes do nothing good with them. They fly in the war and try to kill as many people
as they can. And remember what you learned in Sunday School? How the Lord Jesus said we weren’t to bother anyone, but love them all, like you love Mom? We are to do good, not hurt. (16)

Block is the head of the church and the Wapity Mennonite community, since he is the founder and pioneer of Wapity society. As the founder, he is ordained with certain powers. The community brings their disputes and family problems to him. They do not have any court of law and Block pronounces the judgment, since he is considered as an appointed messenger of God. Block’s personal authority over the community is evident in the words of Thom: “He is still the great man, getting rid of undesirables, running church, store, school, all our business with the government: he is Deacon; everyone’s quiet and peaceful when he speaks” (218). Block is obeyed and honoured by his community members.

Block, Frantz Reimer and Pastor Lepp are the main representatives of the Wapity community and Reimer is the chairman. The church has its Church Board and Youth Committee, which conduct meetings and Bible classes. The Youth Committee functions under the elected leader. The Church Board checks the organization and activities of the Youth Committee. Thom is also a member of the Youth Committee. To Thom,
the Mennonite Conference has “Omnipotent power”. It is in this conference that the Mennonites of Canada made doctrinal and general policy decisions.

The church imposes rigorous moral and ethical standards on its members. Block resolves the problems in families even if they are personal. Novy Kapadia comments on the importance of Church in the Mennonite community: “It imposes its discipline upon members of the Church, demanding when necessary that its members reveal the most intimate affairs of their lives to the congregation” (“Ethnic Identity in Rudy Wiebe’s Peace Shall Destroy Many and Bapsi Sidhwa’s The Crow Eaters” 123).

The Church Board of Wapity feels that the service at Lake-Shore which was conducted in English, is against the Mennonite Church laws. It assembles to discuss and condemn the preachers for using English in the activities of the Church. The Mennonite law recommends Church service, “whether for young or old in German” (Wiebe Peace Shall Destroy Many 55). The Church service is held only in High German, the traditional language of the Mennonites. Pastor Lepp perceives the use of German language as “a barrier between us and the worldly English surroundings we have to live in. There is merit in that, for it makes our separation easier; keeps it before us all the time” (88).
Language plays a major role in maintaining one's identity. The Mennonite community speaks Low German at home, and adopts High German while preaching. The use of their ancestral language is advantageous to them in not mixing with the other groups in Canada. Block is against adopting English in Church service, mainly for two reasons. First, some of the Mennonite Churches tried English service and as the congregation comprised the older members also it was difficult for them to understand the foreign language. Block is anxious that, “We must be concerned about our people and then we can present an unblemished front to the world” (205). The second reason is that, if the English language is adopted in church services, there will be converts from other races, and Block does not want to accept other races into their Church. The Church will not only lose its ardent members, but will be ‘tainted’ by the ‘outcastes’ such as the Metis. In another context, Joseph tells the Church members – though with regret – that their use of the German language separates them from others. He remarks:

[. . .] we have been separated from the worldly influences which bother many other Mennonite churches. We also know that much of this separation has been brought about because we have held to the German language in both church and home. (59)
Wapity Mennonites are firm in protecting the ethical codes of their community. Block’s daughter Elizabeth carries a child before marriage and she does not reveal the identity of its father. She commits the ‘deadly’ sin which a Mennonite dare not do. “Sexual immorality was for all Mennonites the nadir of sin; it was equivalent to murder” (Wiebe Peace Shall Destroy Many 180). Elizabeth’s sin puts her to “terrible shame” and that “had sealed her death” (180). Her father Block even refuses to attend her funeral service. As the head of the community, he feels the need to protect its honour.

The Mennonite social restrictions are rigid that it punishes its members who marry outside their community. In Peace Shall Destroy Many Herman, a Mennonite, falls in love with a Metis woman, Madeleine. The community refuses to accept their marriage even though she is a catholic Christian: “[A] Mennonite just did not marry such a person, even if she was a Christian” (110).

The community seldom wastes “money and health on tobacco, whisky, dancing, shows, [or] fancy clothes” (Wiebe Peace Shall Destroy Many 33). The community thrives because they lead a simple life avoiding extravagance and entertainment.

Mennonites establish their own school for the children in Wapity, which admits exclusively Mennonite children. Children attend Sunday
classes regularly. During Christmas the children enact religious plays and relate stories from the Scripture. Apart from the religious festivals they celebrate harvest festival and thanks-giving feast.

Block lays emphasis upon religious ethnicity of the Mennonites and according to him, one should not yield to external forces under any circumstance: “[. . .] the great matters of moral and spiritual discipline have been laid down once and for all in the Bible and our fathers have told us how we should act according to them. They cannot change” (emphasis added, 202). Peace Shall Destroy Many establishes that the Mennonite community, though an immigrant community, is a religious ethnic group in Canada. P.A Abraham is right in his conviction that “Wiebe is of the view that the very idea of Mennonite is so ethnic and culture-oriented”(191).

In The Blue Mountains of China the names such as Driediger, Reimer and Friesen, which recur throughout the novel, reveal the Mennonite identity of the characters. The family name is carried through every generation and “the recurrence of names may be exasperating” says Eve-Marie Kröller but “such confusions of identity are symptomatic of a culture which places little store in an individual bereft of her people and her faith”(275). Russian names are given to their new places of
settlements and some of those are Gartental, Blumenau, Rosenfeld and Friedenruh.

After a reading of the multiethnic cultures of the Canadian society as represented by Wiebe, it would be in fitness of things to read Achebe’s representation of the ethnic cultures of the Nigerian society as reflected in his novels.

Achebe’s delineation of the Igbo society is well structured with solid kinship ties. The Igbo society is egalitarian and its political circle consists of the elders and wealthy men. Their society is a well-knit unit. Kinship and familial ties are strictly maintained. Social status is as important as wealth. The Igbo community is a highly systematic one and prestige is acquired by either wealth or by personal achievement:

Prestige could be achieved by those who had acquired wealth and converted it into less tangible symbols by buying ‘positions’ in exclusive secret societies. Social position was also reflected by other objective indicators, such as the loyalty of a significant number of people: wives, children, kinsmen, friends, in-laws, and the indebted. For the many who possessed neither wealth nor the loyalty of a following, prestige could be achieved by feats involving personal risk
that were performed in the interest of the village. (Reader 281-82)

Igbo society reveres individuals who are industrious and have self-esteem. It does not foster idleness. Unoka, father of the great wrestler Okonkwo, falls into disrepute because of his laziness. In Things Fall Apart Achebe elaborates on Okonkwo’s hatred towards his father’s indolence thus:

Even as a little boy he had resented his father’s failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was agbala. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that agbala was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion – to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness. (13)

In the pre-colonial Igbo society, power does not rest with an individual as in the modern socio-political context. Everyone participates in the clan’s well being. S.A. Khayoom in his book entitled Chinua Achebe: A Study of His Novels, observes that in the Igbo community concentrated individual power has a minimal role to play:
There is no rigid hierarchy of power in the Igbo traditional society. It is a pluralistic system where power is decentralized and is vested in small groups—priests, diviners and medicine men represent religious power and lords of the village, men of title and elders constitute the temporal authority of the village. (12)

Igbo people, who are bestowed with certain powers, play different roles as the situations demand. The priest is the head of the community during festivals. Men of title play the honourable emissaries during war. Elders resolve problems between families and villages. Power is not vested in the hands of any single individual but is decentralized among various groups.

The traditional Igbo society is patriarchal. The father is the head and breadwinner of the family. The family comprises the head, his many wives and their progeny. Each wife is provided an obi wherein she lives with her children. Achebe describes Okonkwo’s patriarchal status thus: “Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children” (Achebe Things Fall Apart 13). He gathers his male children in his obi to narrate the stories of the land—masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. He is pleased to learn about his eldest son
Nwoye’s strictness with the womenfolk, which is a visible sign of leadership. Nwoye is encouraged to grow tough and capable enough to rule the household after him. This evidences that patriarchy is strictly maintained. The passage quoted below is in illustration to the above-mentioned point:

No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man. He was like the man in the song who had ten and one wives and not enough soup for his foo-foo. (Achebe Things Fall Apart 53)

Male children are a sign of wealth and prosperity in the Igbo family. A newborn male is welcomed with celebration and delight. Ezeulu, in Arrow of God, the Chief Priest of Umuaro village prays to god: “[. . .] let our wives bear male children”(6). Yam, the main food of the Igbos, is named the ‘king’ of crops and it symbolizes manliness.

The women in Igbo society play a minimal role outside the family. The eldest wife is given special recognition. The women cultivate vegetables and fruits in the backyard for their use. They also work in farm and graze the livestock. Okonkwo’s three wives are submissive to him. There is concurrence and discipline among the wives and they are less quarrelsome. They take turns to cook for the husband and each spends a
native week of four days with the husband and makes way for the next person. Women in Umuaro are treated as mere objects of possession. In Arrow of God Ezeulu declares: “My wife’s cock belongs to me because the owner of a person is also owner of whatever that person has” (172-73). Ezeulu’s father has taught him that women should be submissive: “In our custom a man is not expected to go down on his knees and knock his forehead on the ground to his wife to ask her forgiveness or beg a favour” (172). Igbo women are subjected to the male members.

In the attitude towards women, it is discernible that the Inuit and the Indian attitude, and that of the Igbos are similar. In Inuit culture man is the boss. The male member hunts for the family. He brings home meat and skin for food and clothing. Inuit women have a very limited role to play. They are submissive, and care for their husbands and children. They occupy themselves with household chores like kneading leather and sewing snowshoes. The hunter takes a woman while he goes to hunt. The woman mends clothes and scrapes the hides of the deer, which he brings from the hunt. When the man returns from hunting, his furs are frozen solid. The woman “beats out the ice and kneads them” (Wiebe First and Vital Candle 30) and keeps it ready for his next trip. Abe considers this practice to be ideal to their life situation. There is a custom of exchanging wives too. Doctor John Richardson, one of the Expedition members,
records that the Tetsot’ine men treat their women with “great kindness”. Nevertheless, women “are a kind of property that the stronger may tear from the weaker by threat or fight or killing” (Wiebe A Discovery of Strangers 98). Tetsot’ine women are just taken or “stolen” by men.

In contrast to the Indian communities, the Mennonite community protects its women and lays severe restrictions. At the age of fifteen or on passing grade eight, girls stay at home and help their mothers in the household chores. They also equip themselves in the farmyard and barn. They are allowed to visit their friends only on Sundays and their fathers or brothers accompany them. However, the community encourages them to receive their basic school education. They take jobs only as teachers. In The Blue Mountains of China, Wiebe enumerates the subscribed code of behaviour for the Mennonite women. The Mennonite society expects its women to be virtuous as per the Bible. Wiebe underscores the essential quality of a Mennonite woman thus:

Humility is required, humility in keeping with a bowed head and eyes fixed upon the dust from which all must come and to which all must again return when He comes to judge on His mighty throne. Looking everywhere with unblinking shamelessness can lead to nothing [...]. (118-19)
In the chapter titled “Drink Ye All of It” in *The Blue Mountains of China*, Greta Suderman distinguishes between the role of a man and woman in a Mennonite community. She contrasts them thus: “Men invent machines and big ideas and make plans and tear whole villages and countries out by the roots and the women keep quiet and lie down for them and bake bread and carry children [. . .]” (148). Men in Mennonite society are assigned with higher jobs, while women play a subordinate role as cooks and child bearers.

Polygamy is an essential characteristic of pre-literate communities. It is generally believed that polygamous system poses a serious threat to the value systems. Melville J. Herskovits in his book entitled, *Cultural Anthropology* presents a different view of the matter. He throws light on the essential function of the polygamous system as a survival-tactic:

One man may live with one woman, one woman may have a number of husbands, one man may have a number of wives. But if we evaluate these forms according to their function of perpetuating the group, it is clear that they perform their essential tasks. Otherwise, the societies wherein they exist would not survive. (348-49)
In the pre-colonial non-literate societies, polygamy has had a greater effect in balancing the male-female ratio. Polygamy, when examined from the point of view of those who practice it, has great significance.

In the pre-colonial Igbo community, the number of wives a man has raises the man's respectability and status. The central characters in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, Okonkwo and Ezeulu, have three and two wives respectively. Most of the “men of titles” possess more than one wife. A man’s wealth is measured by the ability to feed his womenfolk. This encourages polygamy greatly. Polygamy is prevalent in Indian culture also. An Indian can take any number of wives if he has the ability to protect and feed them. The Tetsot’ine Indians have the habit of stealing other man’s wife. A Tetsot’ine woman lives with all the men who wins her. In Inuit culture a man may have as many wives as he wishes.' If the wife falls sick or is unable to accompany him during the hunt, he, takes a substitute, and the “Eskimos’ moral code is adapted to fit the surroundings”(Wiebe First and Vital Candle 29). Women have to accompany the hunters due to the adverse climatic conditions of the Arctic region and Wiebe explains their indispensable role in the novel:

A hunter needs a woman on a trip because she keeps clothes in repair, scrapes the hides of the deer he gets and when he comes in after an all-day circle sweaty from
running behind the dogs, he takes off his clothes and sleeps naked in the sleeping bags. His furs freeze solid; then the wife beats out the ice and kneads them so when he wakes up they’re soft and he can put them on again, eat, and go hunt. It’s a matter of survival. (30)

Abe, the protagonist explains that the Inuit hunters “will exchange wives sometimes and they probably always will, because of the land they live in” (23). The hunter takes a woman on hunting – the same or different. If his wife is sick, he takes another woman. The extremity of the weather and life situation forces them to take women with them.

Religion is one of the notable factors that contribute to the ethnicity of a community. All native religions share certain features: significance of ancestral land and locally sacred places; denial of access to some knowledge; centrality of kinship obligations; and interaction of humans with supernatural powers or ancestral spirits.

The Igbo religion is pre-historic and abounds in rituals and customs. The symbiotic relationship of the Igbos with nature is reflected in their religion and in their mode of worship. They venerate the earth goddess, the rain goddess and a whole lot of deities that are believed to offer them protection and security from evil. They pray to the ancestral spirits also. Their rituals, customs and practices are based on their

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religious beliefs. Regarding this, Khayoom observes: “The Igbo religion is not a redemptive one like Christianity and Islam, nor Utilitarian. Igbos, spiritually speaking, are irreligious, they are only ritually religious”(13). Similarly, the native Canadians revere the Sun and the Earth as it the fundamental essence of their life. Big Bear reveals its significance thus: “All living has soul and the greatest of all is the Sun. It is good to pay respect when he comes back to the circle of Earth to rest” (Wiebe  The Temptations of Big Bear, 42).

An agricultural society demands seasonal festivals. Any agrarian society is punctuated by harvest festivals. The Igbos too have such festivals. In Things Fall Apart the observance of the New Yam Festival - a thanks-giving ritual, enumerates their gratitude and respect for the earth goddess, Ani:

It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth. (36)

Ani, the principal deity is the goddess of fertility and a mediator between the people and their ancestors. “New yams could not be eaten until some
had first been offered to these powers” (36). Multiple roles are assigned to this single deity. The New Yam Festival is celebrated in Umuaro but with different rituals – all the rituals centre Ulu.

A Week of Peace is designed by Umuofia forefathers to maintain peace and harmony. Igbo custom strictly prohibits any violence during this Week of Peace and it is a sacrilege to beat or hurt someone during the sacred week. The Priest of Ani speaks about its significance in Things Fall Apart:

[. . .] our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbor. We live in peace with our fellows to honor our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. (30)

In Umuaro, Pumpkin Leaves Festival, a purification ceremony, is celebrated before the New Yam Festival. Umuaro women carry a bunch of pumpkin leaves to the shrine to cast away any defilement. The Chief priest reenacts the creation of Ulu and prays thus:

Great Ulu who kills and saves I implore you to cleanse my household of all defilement. If I have spoken it with my mouth or seen it with my eyes, or if I have heard it with my ears or stepped on it with my foot or if it has come through

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my children or my friends or kinsfolk let it follow these leaves. (Achebe Arrow of God 73)

Igbo rituals are closely linked with nature. The opening line of Arrow of God brings out the significance of the circum-lunar pattern in the Igbo rituals. The Chief Priest looks for the new moon to announce the New Yam Festival of Umuaro:

This was the third nightfall since he began to look for signs of the new moon. He knew it would come today but he always began his watch three days early because he must not take a risk. In this season of the year his task was not too difficult; he did not have to peer and search the sky as he might do when the rains came. Then the new moon sometimes hid itself for days behind rain clouds so that when it finally came out it was already halfgrown. And while it played its game the Chief Priest sat up every evening waiting. (1)

In the Igbo society, the gods are divided into public and private gods. The Umuaro public deity is Ulu; Ikenga and Chi are the personal gods. The Igbo deities vary from ancestral spirits to supernatural powers. Their religious activities include prayers, magic and divination. Praying to their ancestors or personal gods is a dominant feature of Igbo worship.
In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu being the Chief Priest of Ulu, offers prayer to the guardian deity of Umuaro for the well being and prosperity of the community:

*This household may it be healthy and prosperous. As this is the moon of planting may six villages plant with profit. May we escape danger in the farm – the bite of snake or the sting of scorpion, the mighty one of the scrubland. May we not cut our shinbone with the matchet or the hoe. And let our wives bear male children. May we increase in numbers at the next counting of the villages so that we shall sacrifice to you a cow, not a chicken as we did after the last New Yam feast. May children put their fathers into the earth and not fathers their children. May good meet the face of every man and every woman. Let it come to the land of the riverain folk and to the land of the forest peoples.*

The Priest prays to Ulu for health, wealth, protection, prosperity, fertility and good luck of the people of Umuaro. This principal deity of Umuaro is installed to offer security and protection. Achebe’s description of its history may be worthwhile to quote in the context:

The six villages – Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuezani, Umuogwugwu and Umuisiuzo – lived as
different peoples, and each worshipped its own deity. Then the hired soldiers of Abam used to strike in the dead of night, set fire to the houses and carry men, women and children into slavery. Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves. They hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them. This deity which the fathers of the six villages made was called Ulu. Half of the medicine was buried at a place which became Nkwo market and the other half thrown into the stream which became Mili Ulu. The six villages then took the name of Umuaro, and the priest of Ulu became their Chief Priest. From that day they were never again beaten by an enemy. (14-15)

The six villages live as “different peoples” each following different modes of worship. However, in adverse circumstances they unite to fight their common enemy. Unlike Umuofia, which consists of nine villages sharing common ancestor and powerful common loyalties, Umuaro is the union of six “relatively antagonistic villages” (Wren, “NOT ANYBODY’S CHIEF, EXCEPT ULU: ARROW OF GOD” 81). Their difference becomes obvious in their celebrations of festivals. Umanchalu widows have their own festival named ‘Akwu Nro’ during the New Yam Festival, which is not a feature
of Umuaro. Though the festival is not held as elaborately as the other festivals, it involves the spirits of the dead ones as in others. The widows offer some special food to the souls of their dead husbands, which is accepted by them. The common belief is that the dead ones come to take the offer from Ani-Mamo. The Igbos communicate with the ancestral spirits too, especially during this festival. ‘Mgba Agbobo’ or the Wrestling of the Maidens is celebrated in Umuagu. Umunneora observes an annual feast in honour of Idemili, otherwise known as the Owner of the python. ‘Oso Nwannadi’ is a quiet retreat conducted by the union of six villages to placate the spirits of relatives who had lost their lives for the cause of Umuaro.

Idemili is a significant Igbo deity. Idemili means “Pillar of Water.” The Priest of Idemili explains the Idemili myth: “As the pillar of this house holds the roof so does Idemili hold up the Raincloud in the sky so that it does not fall down. Idemili belongs to the sky and that is why I, his priest, cannot sit on bare earth” (Achebe Arrow of God 42). The Priest of Idemili does not sit on bare earth and is not buried in the earth “because the earth and the sky are two different things”(42). When an Ezuelu dies his body and head are separated and placed in the shrine.

Ikenga the personal deity is the most important fetish in the Igbo man’s arsenal. It is believed to represent his ancestors to whom he must
give sacrifice everyday without fail. When he dies the Ikenga is split in two. One half is buried with the dead and the other half is thrown away.

Chi is another personal Igbo deity. A man’s Chi is believed to influence his actions and has a central place in Igbo mythology. S.K. Sharma in his essay “Okonkwo and His Chi” elucidates the function of Chi thus:

It stands as a counterpart to the human being; for one of the fundamental aspects of the Igbo belief is that wherever Something stands, Something Else stands behind it. Chi, as the individual manifestation of the Supreme Creator (Chukwu), is responsible for the traits, gifts and talents of the individual. Man strikes a deal with his chi in everything. If one grows too proud or too big for his shoes, he would be overthrown by his chi. And if all divinities conspire to destroy a man, they can do so only if his chi consents to it. In spite of this unprecedented veto power chi, cannot be said to posses absolute powers. (67)

Chi offers moral confidence to an individual. The concept of Chi in the Umuofia and Umuaro community is reinforced through stories and myths.
Deities bridge the gap between the human beings and the higher
gods like Idemili. The Umuaro clan destroys these deities in case they fail
to perform their ordained duties. The smaller gods, which are created by
the people themselves, face destruction when they fail to extend
protection to the believers. Achebe, in his essay “The Igbo World and Its
Arts”, explicates that in the Igbo cosmology, the gods could fall out of
use if they fail in their assigned duty:

In Igbo cosmology even gods could fall out of use; the new
forces are liable to appear without warning in the temporal
and metaphysical firmament. The practical purpose of art is
to channel a spiritual force into an aesthetically satisfying
physical form that captures the presumed attributes of that
force. It stands to reason, therefore, the new forms must
stand ready to be called into being as often as new
(threatening) forces appear on the scene. It is like ‘earthing’
an electrical charge to ensure communal safety. (43)

In some cultures a person may worship one of the gods or
goddesses in the pantheon and pay scant attention to the rest. In the Igbo
religion “such selectiveness is unthinkable. All the people must placate
all the gods all the time” (Achebe “The Igbo World and Its Arts”, 42).
Nevertheless, these deities are liable to destruction if they fail to perform their assigned duties to the clan.

Igbo festivals are celebrated elaborately to maintain kinship ties. As described in Things Fall Apart, people invite large number of guests and relations from far and wide, who form a fairly large crowd. Festivals are occasions to meet the relatives that enable social interaction. They also provide a chance to renew the family ties and maintain it. During festival seasons the Igbos exhibit their aesthetic sense by decorating themselves and their houses:

Okonkwo’s wives had scrubbed the walls and the huts with red earth until they reflected light. They had then drawn patterns on them in white, yellow and dark green. They then set about painting themselves with cam wood and drawing beautiful black patterns on their stomachs and on their backs. The children were also decorated, especially their hair, which was shaved in beautiful patterns. (Achebe Things Fall Apart 37-38)

Medicine men and diviners also play their part in the Igbo society. They are called to perform the rituals such as sacrifice. In Arrow of God Achebe describes the sacrifice ritual. When Ezeulu’s son gets married, the medicine man performs a sacrifice ritual after the marriage ceremony.
He brings the bride and the groom together to join the rites. He also pronounces the absolution:

Any evil which you might have seen with your eyes, or spoken with your mouth, or heard with your ears or trodden with your feet; whatever your father might have brought upon you or your mother brought upon you, I cover them all here. (119)

The medicine man is endowed with certain powers to drive away the evil eyes or evil castings. The medicine man and the diviners are presented with hens and cowries after the ceremony.

Supernatural elements are a characteristic of pre-literate cultures, which are believed to appear in the form of spirits, fairies and ghosts. In Igbo and Indian cultures, belief in the supernatural is obvious.

Achebe points out in Things Fall Apart that among the people of the Igbo clan, there is a belief in Oracles as in ancient Greece. The Oracle is called as Agbala, and people come from far and near to consult it. “They came when misfortune dogged their steps or when they had a dispute with their neighbors. They came to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers”(16). The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has a priestess to conduct the rituals.
Similarly, in the Ojibwa Indian culture of Canada the conjurers discharge the duties of the Umuaro Medicine men and the Oracles of the Caves and Hills. Kekekose, a conjurer, is believed to heal sickness among the group by invoking the spirits every full-moon. Every other full-moon night the drum-beat invokes the spirits and he communicates with the spirits. The rituals involve the common people too, who dance to the drum:

All the Indians of Frozen Lake had danced to Kekekose’s water-drum, men alone and women alone, the thin line of the single-file swelling against the low walls of the house. [ . . . ] young man signal[ed] to the drummer and the rhythm shift[ed] to the howe-anay or gift-giving dance. (Wiebe First and Vital Candle 138)

Like the Igbos, the Ojibwans also believe in supernatural forces. The “gift-giving” dance is a ritual invocation of the Mininak, an odd falsetto voice. The conjurer puts questions to it and the Mininak answers, though the answers are “not always intelligible, wavering sometimes like a fading radio” (152). People ask questions to Mininak and the spirit answers in Tongues, which Kekekose translates. People request favours too. The people believe that many spirits assemble before the conjurer from the stars and the moon and they are believed to be “just small and sit
on the hoops. They bring the winds shaking the lodge. When the hoops break from shaking, they go away”(153). There is hierarchy among the spirits and the Great Spirit or “kische manido” is the cardinal spirit, which communicates only with the shaman. The lesser spirits help ordinary people through the conjurers. Josh, the missionary from Frozen Lake, has a positive opinion regarding the Indian belief in spirits:

I don’t know whether the spirits Kekekose says he uses are bad or good. I know that the Indians tell me in the past they did mostly useful things – like making people well or protecting them from the windigo – and if this is mere suggestion, so what? They’re still well, aren’t they? If it helps them to live in the bush – (Wiebe First and Vital Candle 171)

The Tetsot’ine Indians too believe in supernatural beings. In A Discovery of Strangers, an ulcer in the nose affects Birdseye and Keskarrah understands it as a wrath of the Water-spirit and gives an offering ritual to appease its wrath. The offering consists of an old knife, a small piece of tobacco and some trifling articles, made up into a packet and the offering is committed to the spirits with an elaborate prayer.

In the religious rituals of the Nigerian communities mask play an important role. The use of the mask in Igbo community provides the
divine ratification for exercising the power of judgement. In Arrow of God the making of the Mask is dealt with in detail. If any of the six Umuaro villages wanted to present a new ancestral mask, its fabrication is secretly held in the seclusion of a spirit-house avoiding public gaze. Such Masks demand meticulous care and minute artistic excellence. The Masks are designed as fierce aggressive spirits with horns and teeth. The Masks of the maiden spirits are “delicately beautiful” (51). Mask, in Umuaro is the spirit believed to have returned from the depths of the earth.

Important meetings are conducted by wearing the ancestral mask to ensure the presence and the approval of the ancestors. Violent quarrels are solved efficiently using ancestral masks. Lesser masks are used to act as messengers.

The Egwugwu is a significant ancestral mask of Umuofia. Egwugwu is a masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village. Achebe describes the appearance of the Egwugwu thus:

The *Egwugwu* with the springy walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan. He looked terrible with the smoked raffia body, a huge wooden face painted white except for the round hollow eyes and the charred teeth that were as big as a man’s fingers. On his head were two powerful horns. (90)
Robert Brain explains the function of mask in ethnic communities thus:

[. . .] provides divine ratification: judgement is considered to come from the spirit world, via the Mask, not from human beings [. . .]. At important council meetings the Mask attends to ensure the presence and approval of ancestors. During violent quarrels the priest puts on the Mask and stops the litigants with his word. (513)

Egwugwu is the cardinal mask as it restores peace, administers justice in the clan and prevents communal clashes. In Things Fall Apart Achebe delineates the function of Egwugwu as an arbitrator. It settles disputes between neighbouring villages as well as family problems. In one instance a woman brought her family problem to the Egwugwu. It hears the case from both the wife’s and husband’s points of view. It pronounces a balanced judgement. As it understands that the husband is unduly suspicious of his wife, it orders the man to carry peace-talks with his wife. Egwugwu pronounces its verdict: “Go to your in-laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman” (93). The husband is reunited with his wife. The family submits to the elders’ opinion and advice.

Marriage rituals in the Igbo community differ with the lineage. Generally, the marriage ritual begins with the fixing of bride-price. The
bridegroom has to pay handsome money to marry a girl from his own tribe. The fixing of the bride-price is in itself a minor ritual. The elders of the families of the bride and the groom sit in a group. A small bundle of broomsticks is circulated among the elders assembled to negotiate the amount of the bride-price. They finally agree on a fixed amount that suits both the families. In Things Fall Apart Achebe gives a detail of fixing the bride-price, and it is quoted below for reference:

Obierika then presented to him a small bundle of short broomsticks. Ukegbu counted them.

‘They are thirty?’ he asked.

Obierika nodded in agreement.

‘We are at last getting somewhere,’ Ukegbu said, and then turning to his brother and his son he said: ‘Let us go out and whisper together.’ The three rose and went outside. When they returned Ukegbu handed the bundle of sticks back to Obierika. He counted them; instead of thirty there were now only fifteen. He passed them over to his eldest brother, Machi, who also counted them and said:

‘We had not thought to go below thirty. But as the dog said, “If I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is play”. Marriage should be a play and not a fight: so we are
falling down again.’ He then added ten sticks to the fifteen and gave the bundle to Ukegbu.

In this way Akuke’s bride-price was finally settled at twenty bags of cowries. It was already dusk when the two parties came to this agreement. (72-73)

The custom of fixing the bride-price varies from place to place. The custom narrated above, is typical of the Umuofians. In Abame and Aninta, the manner of settling the bride-price is quite different from the manner it is settled in Umuofia. In Things Fall Apart an elderly person comments upon this difference in the fixing of bride-price: “All their customs [in Abame and Aninta] are upside-down. They do not decide bride-price as we do, with sticks. They haggle and bargain as if they were buying a goat or a cow in the market” (73). The fixing of the bride-price in Umunso is entirely different from the way it is done in Umuofia or Abame: “In Umunso they do not bargain at all, not even with broomsticks. The suitor just goes on bringing bags of cowries until his in-laws tell him to stop. It is a bad custom because it always leads to a quarrel” (74). This conversation reveals that marriage customs are unique to each place. It highlights the ritual variations among the Igbo groups and lineage.
A marriage in Mbanta begins with the ritual of confession, which is a unique practice. The bride sits in the centre and questions about her virginity are put forth to her. She professes her virginity by swearing on the ancestral staff of the family. In *Things Fall Apart* a marriage ceremony is narrated and it would be pertinent to quote the relevant part of the same in the context:

‘Remember that if you do not answer truthfully you will suffer or even die at childbirth,’ she began. ‘How many men have lain with you since my brother first expressed the desire to marry you?’

‘None,’ she answered simply.

‘Answer truthfully,’ urged the other women.

‘None?’ asked Njide.

‘None,’ she answered.

‘Swear on this staff of my fathers,’ said Uchendu.

‘I swear,’ said the bride.

Uchendu takes the hen from her, slit its throat with a sharp knife and allowed some of the blood to fall on his ancestral staff.

From that day Amikwu took the young bride to his hut and she became his wife. (132)
Igbos treat marriage as sacred and the same is held as elaborate as a festival. Contrast to the same, the Tetsot’ines and the Inuits of Canada do not exhibit customary marriage rituals or elaborate ceremonies but they simply live together as man and wife.

In the Igbo community punishments are not coded. The crimes are divided as male and female. The major crimes are taken to the ancestral spirits, while the elders of the village dispose the minor crimes. Punishments are carried out impartially. When Okonkwo accidentally shoots a village boy with his gun, he is exiled from his native place for a period of seven years. Though Okonkwo is an honourable member of the clan, he is punished for his crime. This proves that punishment is carried out impartially inspite of the status of the accused. There is a constant evaluation of their rules and punishments, and changes are made in the same accordingly.

Igbos have certain day-to-day rituals which they perform with sincerity. In Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, Achebe showcases the Igbo traditional rituals that are based on goodwill and cheer. Offering kola nut and alligator pepper to the guests and visitors, speaks of the hospitality and generosity of the Igbo tribe. Kola nut in Igbo custom symbolizes wealth and goodwill: “He who brings kola brings life” (Achebe Things Fall Apart 6). It is a common practice to break the kola
and pray to their ancestors for “life and health, and for protection against their enemies” (6) and their usual prayer is this: “We shall all live. We pray for life, children, a good harvest and happiness. You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me” (19).

The Igbos have strong belief in omens. Children are not allowed to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. A snake is never called by its name at night. Instead, it is called a string. These superstitions do not carry any harm. However, there are some beliefs that harm the innocent and the sick. The newborn twins are considered as evil and are thrown alive in the Evil Forest. Each clan has an “Evil Forest”. The people who die of diseases like leprosy and small pox are buried in the Evil Forest. The Evil Forest is “alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness” (Achebe Things Fall Apart 148).

A society essentially comprises different class, caste and religious structures. These structures determine the hierarchy and status of individuals in their respective societies. The Igbo clan is not free from caste systems. The people who are commonly known as Osu are the outcastes of the Igbo clan. In Things Fall Apart Achebe portrays the predicament of the Osus:

[. . .] person dedicated to a god, a thing set apart – a taboo for ever, and his children after him. He could neither marry
nor be married by the free-born. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine. Wherever he went he carried with him the mark of his forbidden caste—long, tangled and dirty hair. (156)

He is an outcaste and an extricate:

An *osu* could not attend an assembly of the free-born, and they, in turn, could not shelter under his roof. He could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest. (*Things Fall Apart* 156)

Osus are a subjugated group and are denied any interaction with the mainstream society. When dead, they are not given a place to rest in the burial ground. The dead ones are buried in the Evil Forest, a place of abomination.

Achebe explains the origin of this evil system in *No Longer at Ease*. Originally, the Osus themselves have personally chosen to live outside the village so as to dedicate themselves totally to the service of god. As time passed, it became a blind custom to extricate these priests by force.

Killing of the python is considered inauspicious in the Igbo society, and references are made to this in *Arrow of God*. Superficially it appears
to be a blind belief, but it speaks of the common sense on the part of the
natives if analyzed carefully. The python protects their crops from frogs
and other parasites. Therefore, it becomes an essential creature. In order
to protect them from being killed, the Igbos have built the myth of
inauspiciousness around its killing. A python is not to be killed, and if at
all it is killed, a proper burial has to be given to it. Further, python is
sacred to Idemili, and anyone who killed the python will be regarded as
having killed his kinsman: “Every Umuaro child knows that if a man kills
the python inadvertently he must placate Idemili by arranging a funeral
for the snake almost as elaborate as a man’s funeral” (61).

The Igbos are usually peace loving people and therefore war is rare
among them. If there is any sign of a war or fight they get the consent of
the opposing clan. As depicted in Arrow of God, Umuaro is highly
diplomatic. They adopt a unique way of announcing war. The leaders of
Umuaro send emissaries to their opponents. The emissary carries new
palm frond and white clay “to place the choice of war or peace” (17)
before the opponent. The former represents peace and the latter war. The
opponent village has to choose between the two.

As a contrast to the Igbos, the Indians in Canada are known for
their bloody wars. Yet they have courtesies of inviting their neighbours
during feast rituals. The Cree send tobacco to the neighbouring clan as an invitation.

Igbos attach spiritual significance to their land. Land is considered as their Mother which offers them wealth, strength and solace. When Okonkwo is exiled he seeks refuge in Mbanta, his mother’s birthplace. The land is polluted when a man commits suicide. No man has the right to take his own life. If a man commits suicide, he is denied proper burial and is thrown to the animals and birds. In Things Fall Apart one of the clansmen condemns the practice of committing suicide: “It is against our custom [. . .] It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen” (207). According to the Igbos, punishment is essential for people to hold them back from ruining their own life.

The traditional food of the Igbos is pounded yam. Bitter leaf soup, chicken, and meat are served on occasions. Locusts are a rare delicacy. In marriages, food is served elaborately. In Arrow of God a Umuaro marriage feast is made complete by serving delicacies: “[. . .] pots of yam pottage, foo foo, bitter leaf soup and egusi soup, two boiled legs of goat, two large bowls of cooked asa fish” and to finish it “kegs of sweet wine tapped from the raffia palm”(117) is served. Whenever impressive items of food are served in the Umuaro clan, a thanks-giving ritual precedes it.
The Igbos have a variety of food choices, but in traditional Inuit culture, vegetation is almost non-existent due to the ice and extreme cold condition. Caribou, fish and marine mammals are the major source of food. The Indians feed on animals especially the caribou, the reindeer, the buffalo, and on dogs when other animals are scarce.

Songs and dance are a significant feature in the tribal communities. Achebe and Wiebe make use of songs and dance to recreate the Igbo and Indian and the Inuit culture. Wiebe records in his Introduction to The Story-Makers that Inuits of the Northern Arctic coast “believe that every man is a poet; shaping poems require no special gift which any one human does not have”(xxix) and the Inuits do relate beautiful stories through songs. Oolulik, an Inuit, belongs to the Itooi camp and in the past she exhibited great power. Her ancestors were great shamans and were known as Angakoks. She lost her husband and children in the storm. Belonging to a community in which “people love to sing”(80), in her misery she composes a song. Abe hears Oolulik’s song and he comments: “It is the old song of the people that I heard only once or twice during my earliest days in the north”(80). She composes a song that echoes the past life of her people and her present sorrows. Wiebe attempts to rejuvenate the age old tradition of the Inuits in Oolulik’s song:

\[ \textit{Where have gone the deer,} \]
The animals on which we live?

Who gave us meat and blood soup to drink,

Our dogs strength to run over the snow?

Once their strong sinews sewed our clothes,

And their bones gave the sweet-brown marrow;

Then our houses were warm with the fire of their fat

And our cheeks smeared with their juices.

Eyaya – eya. (80)

The song also narrates the way of life of the Itooi shaman. Oolulik’s song is a reminiscence of her ancestors:

And when they [animals] would not come,

Long ago,

The angakok would send his soul beneath the lake

Where lives the mighty spirit Pinga

And there sing a charm for her that would soothe her

And the deer would come

In great herds that covered the land

And the birds that follow them hide the autumn sun.

We would hunt them at the sacred crossings

Where little men stand guard,

And the angakoks would sing their songs,
And the people would keep strictly to the taboos
And not offend Pinga,
And in the winter the storm would wail about the house,
The dogs roll up, their snouts under their tails,
On the ledge would lie the sleeping boy
On his back, breathing through his open mouth,
His little stomach bulging round.

Eyaya – eya. (80-81)

Her song is a record of the past glory of the Inuit. Wiebe’s intention in recording the song is to reveal the Itooi belief in mythical gods like Pinga and speak about a religion centred on shamanism and the unseen world of spirits. It has traditions rooted in magic and supernatural powers. The clan holds the spirits in honour as they bring them food. They believe in the magic spell of Pinga, which is supposed to be endowed with unbelievable charm and power to drive the deer to the people. It is with the help of these spirits that the Angakoks survived.

Songs are integral part of the hunting life of the Indians, and midshipman George Back comments upon the Tetsot’ine songs: “I must say that their songs, spectral though they were in the awful silence of wilderness, did bespeak a certain courageous humanity” (Wiebe A Discovery of Strangers 51).
Metis songs are a record of their socio-political history and narrate the Metis cultural life. Pierre Falcon, the narrator in *The Scorched-Wood People*, is the oldest surviving storyteller in Riel’s camp. Wiebe explains that Falcon’s story has triple function: “how story can create the continuing consciousness of a personality, of a community, how it can hold them in a living relationship to a past and a future that helps them live in a present context of a physical and spiritual landscape: it makes people aware of their unique and changeable and yet never-changing humanity” (*More Stories from Western Canada* vii) According to him, songs are exclusively a Metis legacy. The Metis compose songs to encourage the warriors to fight. He explains the significance and value of songs. They helped them to “travel many a dusty, cart-squeaking mile when the terror of the Sioux was stronger than any blessing of buffalo” (*Wiebe The Scorched-Wood People* 38). Cathbert Grant, a soldier, praises Pierre’s songs to be immortal: “you little chip of scorched wood, they’ll sing your songs long after we’re finished by the worms”(38). The Metis legacy of tales and songs is passed on to the future generations. Pierre’s song “The Sad Ballad of King Muck” is one of ridicule on the Colonial officers that carries a tale of the Metis’ struggle for a separate providence against the Canadian Dominion:

But listen to me well

76
And the tale to you I’ll tell.

Muck-Dougall viewed our prairies;

He thought them his estate.

An Orangeman there could govern

Like an eastern Potentate.

What’s more, he actually was sent

By Macdonald and his government.

From Canada he started

His chest swollen with pride

He told his wife, when they parted,

At last, I will provide!

... 

Just as king Muck set foot

Upon his realm’s fair soil,

Some men rode up and put

A stop to his progress royal...

They said, “That’s all he owns.

Right where you stand is journey’s end.”

But is dreams his crown he wears,

King Muck knows no defeat,

Though the throne on which he sits
Has a hole fit for his seat!

Today that’s all he owns,

King Muck needs no other thrones! (39,41)

The Metis songs reflect their socio-political struggle, as a distinct ethnic group in Canada.

To draw a parallel, songs complement occasions in Igbo community. In Arrow of God a marriage feast is presided over by the song-leader, who raises the old chant of thanks:

*Kwo-kwo-kwo-kwo-kwo!*

*Kwo-o-o-oh!

We are going to eat again as we are wont to do!

*Who provides?*

Who is it?

*Who provides?*

Who is it?

*Obika Ezeulue he provides*

Ayo-o-o-o-o-oh! (117)

The host is honoured through songs during such occasions. Igbo songs fit the occasion. The people of Umuofia sing the latest songs at the feast of Uri of the daughter of Obierika. In this traditional feast, songs are sung to tease the new bride. Igbo songs are situational too. The Umuofian
youngsters, while cutting the grass compose a song of mockery attacking the cruelty of the ‘Kotmas’.

Dance is a significant cultural expression among the hunting communities of Canada and Nigeria. Certain indigenous dances were suppressed by the Canadian government in the 1800s and its retrieval has become an essential political task for the indigenous groups which are striving for ethnic status. In The Temptations of Big Bear, Wiebe intentionally revives the Thirst Dance and Peace Dance. Thirst Dance is similar to the Sun Dance of the Plains Tribes. The Plains Tribes name the worship of The Only One as Thirst Dance, the holiest of religious ceremonies. Gretel Ehrliuh explains that the Thirst Dance is not “sun worship” but “an inoculation of regenerative power that restores health, vitality and harmony to the land and all the tribes” (“To Live in Two Worlds” 531). In the novel, Bands such as Little Pine, Lucky Man, Strike Him on The Back, Red Pheasant, Young Sweetgrass and Moosomin were invited to join the dance. The dance ritual is observed for days together. Big Bear, the chief, initiates the rituals with prayers and songs on a new moon night. He appears with “grey clay stroked over his body” (154). Big Bear prays that “he have strength to complete his vow in the dance, that all the prayers of the People might be answered: especially that water be given” (154). He prays:
the sun help me to stand
the sun help me to walk
and the gathering calls out to the Thunder Spirits in all the four
directions:

Come, have a smoke
Come, and smoke

The elders of the clan place sweetgrass fires about a white buffalo skull.
They offer tobacco and pipestems to the skull with “their heads bent
steadily to the ground” (154) pleading for strength to complete the Thirst
Dance. The young warriors paint themselves and ride the horses, fully
armed. Among them, eight names are invoked to perform the ‘hunt’. Big
Bear places his head on Wandering Spirit and pleads: “Help me complete
this, this vow I have made” (155) and the eight soldiers go into the forest
to hunt. They leave their horses and vanish among the trees. Then the
“young men charge through the brush past (sic) the fallen tree, screaming
their high, thin warcries, each counting coup on the long branches, now a
slashed and ribboned enemy” (156). A tree is chopped, which
symbolically becomes their enemy. The “chosen tree” is carried back to
the camp where beautiful girls dance around the tree. The young men
“spiralled away and every warrior who had slain an enemy in battle
galloped past and fired a bullet” (157) into the tree. The warrior is full of
energy and enthusiasm and the same is expressed through dance. The tree is appeased by buffalo leather tied to a gun and Big Bear joins the other dancers. Wiebe describes his dance thus: “The drum rhythm changed, again and again, the sounds chanting high and thin changed with it, but he danced on intent” (162). The refrain that “Big Bear was dancing” occurs throughout the description of the dance ritual.

Robert Jefferson, a White Officer, in the novel The Temptations of Big Bear describes the Indians’ enthusiasm in the Thirst Dance thus:

I have never seen a camp with so much war-paint. There was no way of identifying Tongue, the braves were riding widely beyond the lodges, waving guns [. . .] but the drums and shrinking whistles and singing seemed only to increase from the Thirst Lodge. (172)

Jefferson is a white colonizer and his observation helps one to understand that the Indians are great dancers. Every important occasion is marked by a dance ritual, which is a special way of expressing their feelings. On such occasions they bubble with warmth, energy, goodwill and cheer.

Cree Indians conduct dances that compliment the occasion. Peace Dance, yet another variety of dance, is performed to symbolize peace. In My Lovely Enemy the Cree leader Maskepetoon and his soldiers conduct a Peace Dance after making peace with their traditional enemy, the
Blackfeet. Maskepetoon was a great warrior and defeated all his enemies on his march towards glory. After becoming a Christian, he declares peace with Red Sky Bird, his traditional enemy. To mark the incident, and to celebrate the happiness of the union of two enemy clans a Peace Dance is performed. The war leader, Starving Young Bull, under the guidance of The One He Dreamed Of, initiates the dancing ceremony. They repeat peace slogans: “I will live in peace” and “I hunt only buffalo” (163). The highlight of the Peace Dance is the “offering ritual”. The Cree warriors give all their precious possessions as gifts to their enemies who are now their friends. The dance ritual in its final stage is remarkable as the Blackfeet chief, Red Sky Bird, joins the Cree warrior in the Peace Dance:

He [Red Sky Bird] stood in gifts to his knees and he held the blue rifle in his hand as softly he began to sing. Our drummers passed the drums to the Blackfeet and they beat out the rhythms of our enemies, but different too for the words we knew were strong like the man standing motionless in his great song, singing of comfort and peace and trust, words that a mother or a father could have sung to a snuggling child though his hands reaching out were like a black tree with the rifle grown blue into its branches. Then
he bent at last to our chief Maskepetoon and laid the long rifle at his feet. (164)

The Peace Dance is an expression of a happy union between two rival groups. Every important occasion is marked by a dance ritual which is characteristic of the Indian community.

The Metis are great dancers like the Indians. Every occasion holds a dancing ritual. Falcon, in The Scorched-Wood People, watches Gabriel dancing: “a magnificent male dance that frothed with Métis fighting spirit, wild and living and shaped in our people by our strong horses and the wide, wide earth we rode” (42). In The Temptations of Big Bear, the white clerk, Kerr observes certain beauty in the Metis dance. He comments that, “The best dancers in the world have to be French halfbreeds. After the buffalo hunt any evening in the firelight, the dancing oh wooo –” (4).

Story-telling lies at the heart of the oral communities and a prevalent feature in ancient, traditional societies. Stories or folktales are narrated through myths and legends. They echo the creativity, values and goals of the people. They impose moral values on such communities. It helps in keeping the clan together.

The Igbo, one of the ancient communities in West Africa, has a number of stories incorporated with its oral literature, which Achebe
strategically employs in his narratives. The story of the greedy tortoise is related among the Umuofia people to illustrate a moral. The story of the tortoise and the leopard is narrated by an old man to explain the struggle of the people of Abazon against military regime. The legend of Idemili is narrated to explain the Igbo philosophy about rulers. No individual or tribal chief can go against the society and the punishment is severe for overdoings which becomes a reality in Ezeulu’s and President Sam’s case. The Umuaro story of Chi is about a great man who was undefeated in the world. He decided to wrestle with the spirits and win them as well and kept continuously challenging the spirits ignoring the call of his companion. The spirits sent their personal god to oppose him and it smashed the great wrestler to death.

Myths are a sensible recreation of particular people in order to attach themselves to a particular place of origin or group or lineage. “History often trails off into legend or mythology offering biological genetic continuity” (De Vos 18). In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe reveals the history of Umuofia, with it he constructs an origin myth about Umuofia, and the same sustains its citizens:

Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought
honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights. (3)

On witnessing Okonkwo's wrestling power, the narrator is inspired to recall the history of Umuofia.

Story-tellers play a significant role in the Igbo post-independence society. In the novel Anthills of the Savannah Achebe upholds the function of story-telling. A speaker in the novel says that stories are a medium of identity:

[. . .] why do I say that the story is chief among his fellows?
[. . .] it is only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior[sic]. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that
owns us and directs us [sic]. It is the thing that makes us
different from cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one
people apart from their neighbours. (emphasis added, 114)

Stories not only narrate the past, but also carry human experiences. “We
do not differentiate or fragment stories and experiences” (Silko 592), and
they offer substance and strength to their current enterprises. Anthills of
the Savannah stresses the importance of story-telling in the modern
political situation. Ikem Osodi, the editor of the National Gazette
Newspaper, in his speech to the public enumerates the significance of
storytellers in the post-independence society thus: “[. . .] story-tellers are
a threat. They threaten all champions of control; they frighten usurpers of
the right-to-freedom of the human spirit – in state, in church or mosque,
in party congress, in the university or wherever” (141). Stories not only
sustain the Igbos but also provide the necessary impetus for social
changes, as Ikem points out. It is relevant to see Supriya Nair’s views on
the function of a storyteller: “The traditional storyteller was a person who
was not concerned merely with the aesthetic aspects of art and
entertainment but also with values and socio-political change” (126).

Stories are important in traditional societies for they contain the essential
morals and values, and in postcolonial societies, it instigates social change as exposed in the Anthills of the Savannah. Thus, Igbo stories work at many different levels.

Wiebe retrieves the stories narrated among the Indian communities through the voice of Keskarrah. Tetsot’ine ancestors in Canada have contributed their stories as a mark of identity— their past and, therefore future too. They are either myths or songs, and these narrate either the spiritual world or the animal world. Keskarrah underscores that the stories of animals and birds are an indispensable part of the tribal life. Keskarrah describes their relationship with the animals in A Discovery of Strangers thus: “Where would we be [. . .] without the raven and the owl, the caribou and wolf who taught us how to hunt them, the mouse who gives us wit and small discretion, the beautiful animals, all gifts, gifts” (122). Stories are the spiritual and ethical guidelines to the tribes. Wiebe in his “Introduction” to the book Story-Makers speaks about the essential quality of story-telling:

At best, good story does what it does while pleasurably seducing both teller and listener out of their world into its own and, again at best, this seduction may both illuminate the world in which teller and listener actually are and often
be the more pleasurable as the seduction becomes less immediate: story worth pondering is story doubly enjoyed.

(IX)

The Tetsot’ine stories are quite complex. For instance, the creation myth varies with different Indian groups and further, as Keskarrah observes, “Stories are like ropes, they pull you to incomprehensible places” (Wiebe The Discovery of Strangers 126). The stories of their land and people are essentially related to the understanding of their past. The story passes history of the past generation to the future generation.

The origin story constructs one’s identity: “[. . .] within this story, as we know who we are [. . .] This is where we come from. We came this way. We came by this place”(Silko 592). Tetsot’ine cosmogony related in A Discovery of Strangers is unique and is exclusively narrated among the Tetsot’ine group:

The world is the way it is because it started that way [. . .]. That was when Sky came to Earth and they lay together. Their joy began then, and all day they lay together and when they separated in the evening the ground appeared, because ground is nothing more nor less than their happiness together, born between them with rocks and sand and water running. On the second day their happiness grew, and moss
and little trees appeared, and fish in the water. On the third day birds began to fly across the sky and the caribou ran along the tops of the hills, waiting for their antlers to grow so they could stare at each other, and on the fourth they were so happy that everything else burst out, even that miserable mosquito, and man too, leaping around on his two legs to get away from the woman on four legs, which is bear. (88-89)

Keskarrah has begot the origin myth from his mother and passes it on to his daughters because, “there must be a spirit guiding, a world explicating its bits of knowledge and faith and consciousness” (198).

The Tetsot’ine story of the “Ptarmigan-woman” is about the birth of humanity. Man lived an isolated life on the earth before any woman was born. One fine day a ptarmigan helped him to make snowshoes and it later turned into a woman. She continued to stay with the man cooking for him. She made clothes and sewed snowshoes from the animal skin he brought home from hunting. In due course, they became man and wife:

Women, yes, who made everything beautiful happen, fire to cook meat and tanned hides for clothing and lying together[. . .] and children for ever, because she alone could fill the frames he had dreamed and vent. [. . .] she prepared the animals he captured, and they are together, and lived. (91)
“Jumping Marten” recounts the Tetsot’ines’ first encounter with civilisation. The story tells about a particular woman who was desired by many men and was stolen by enemies from the East. However, she is too wise for anybody to win her and she manages to escape from her captors. She is an epitome of courage and she is the only woman to travel all alone through the rocks. On her return, she brings an iron axe, a needle and tea and a small kettle to the Tetsot’ines for the first time. “Stolen Woman” is the story of She One Who Delights who lived with Blackfire, a great warrior. White Horizon, greatest of Blackfire’s enemy, captures She One Who Delights. The reason behind the capture was that She One Who Delights was a powehl, a beautiful and a very wise woman. White Horizon destroys Blackfire’s camp, kills his adopted son and his people. Blackfire travels a long distance in search of his woman. The story unravels a reality: “Every man knows that, knows that if he has her and lives right with her, he may become almost as powerful and wise as she — that is why she’ll be stolen for as long as she lives” (194). The story conveys the fact that women are continuously stolen for several reasons and it is part of their culture, and women have succumbed to live under such circumstances.

The Cree “Rock story” narrates the creation of Rocks: “the rock is the grandfather of all, the first of all being as well as the last” (Wiebe The
Temptations of Big Bear 319). A certain man who on fasting decided to meet morning, and he took with him three of his friends, each seeking a gift. They travelled towards the east for many days and arrived at a beautiful lodge on the top of a hill where the sun shone from morning till night. “One who looked like themselves” gave a warm welcome to them. Each made his request and was immediately granted. The first man wanted success in love, second man wanted success in hunting and war and the third wanted wisdom in medicine. The fourth, who had fasted, wanted everlasting life. He was turned into rock. They story reveals the mystery of creation.

The authors of The Empire Writes Back propound that the sounds and the textures of the language have the “power and presence of the culture they signify” (52). Achebe’s use of proverbs, sayings and popular adages incorporates a sense of native rhythms and syntactic structures, creating a cultural distinctiveness to his fictions. The Igbo proverbs draw reference to the name of crops such as corn, yam and kola nut, which play a vital part in their agrarian society. The sayings and proverbs related to animals and insects like the cock, leopard, lizard and ant reveal the close association of the Igbos with the animal world. Their language is strewn with the knowledge of the flora and fauna that characterize Igbo life.
In his five novels, Achebe employs Igbo proverbs, adages and sayings, and metaphors that are special and specific to African Igbo identity. The proverbs in the pre-colonial Igbo societies of Umuofia and Umuaro have an organized function as they arise out of the communal experiences of the tribes. They are rich in meaning and are contextual. A few Igbo proverbs and sayings are discussed below.

In Igbo cosmology Chi, the guardian deity is essential to every individual. It helps one in making his fortune and the Igbos believe that the Chi controls their entire life. This belief is brought out in the saying: “When a man says yes his chi says yes also” (Achebe Things Fall Apart 27).

The following sayings reveal that the traditional Igbo community values achievement and success of an individual. In Things Fall Apart, Okonkwo’s success is often related thus:

If a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. (8)

You can tell a ripe corn by its look. (22)

The first saying implies that Okonkwo has worked hard in the field and so had to wash his hands before eating; and certainly the hard work he has put in would take him to heights on par with kings. In the second saying, Nwakibie equates child Okonkwo to the ripe corn because even as
a child he was industrious and Nwakibie foretells that Okonkwo would turn a successful man later.

The saying, “You have the yam and you have the knife” (96) is usually associated to a powerful deity. In Arrow of God it refers to the Chief Priest, Ezeulu. He is the Chief Priest of Umuaro and he has his responsibilities to save the clan. Yam and knife symbolize power and responsibility respectively. Yam is the main crop of the Igbo. Yam is also a metaphor for manliness: “Yam, the king of crops, was a man’s crop” (Achebe Things Fall Apart 23). Yam stands for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams, throughout the year was a very successful man.

Kola nut is a delicate and perishable crop that has a significant place in Igbo prayer. The Igbo place the nuts as an offertory to the idols and the ancestors. The saying associated with this nut is that, “He who brings kola brings life” (Achebe Things Fall Apart 6) and it signifies auspiciousness.

Proverbs and sayings contain ancient Igbo myths and stories of ethics. In Things Fall Apart Okonkwo has violated the Week of Peace by beating his wife. It is an action of contempt to violate the laws laid by the ancestors. The people of Umuofia feel that Okonkwo has become
arrogant to commit such a sin and they call him to be as proud and arrogant as the bird Nza:

[. . .] the little bird nza who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his *chi*. (31)

In the traditional Igbo culture, the story of the bird Nza relates a moral that pride goes before fall.

Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* fails to protect the clan from the white people’s political system, and his intermediary role between the clan and the British is commented upon by the people thus:

[. . .] only a foolish man can go after a leopard with his bare hands.(85)

The proverb explains that a man without proper provisions cannot oppose the white power.

Sometimes an Igbo proverb does not carry the same sense all the time. Its meaning may vary with situations. In *Arrow of God* there is a proverb that conveys different meanings in different contexts and it is quoted below:

a man who brings home ant-infested faggots should not complain if he is visited by lizards.
When Ezeulu is forced into confinement by the white man, the Umuaro people are indifferent to his suffering and it is reflected in the proverb used by Nwaka. While commenting on Ezeulu’s arrest he says:

‘What I say is this’ continued Nwaka, ‘a man who brings ant ridden faggots into the hut should expect the visit of lizards.’ (emphasis added, 144)

He goes on to add

But if Ezeulu is now telling us that he is tired of the whiteman’s friendship our advice to him should be: you tied the knot, you should know how to undo it. You passed the shit that is smelling: you should carry it away. Fortunately the evil charm brought in at the end of a pole is not too difficult to take outside again. (144)

In another context, Ezeulu uses the same proverb that it is over laden with irony. It is Ezeulu who has brought the “ant-infested faggots” by negotiating with the whites. Moreover, he has sent his son to learn the whites’ ways. But in the lines quoted below Ezeulu uses it to condemn the people for bringing the white man to Umuaro:

‘Don’t make me laugh.’ said Ezeulu again. ‘So I betrayed Umuaro to the whiteman? [...] With all their power and magic whitemen would not have overrun entire Olu and Igbo

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if we did not help them [. . . ] So let nobody come and complain that the whiteman did this and did that. The man who brings ant-infested faggots into his hut should not grumble when lizards begin to pay him a visit." (emphasis added, 131-32)

Achebe transliterates the grand culture of the ethnic tribes of Igbo. Language is employed as a means of cultural translation. It would be apt to quote Lloyd W. Brown’s comment on Achebe’s use of language as a cultural component in his works. According to Brown, Achebe’s work demonstrates his preoccupation with language, not simply as a communicative device, but as a total cultural experience. At this level, language is not merely technique. It is the embodiment of its civilization and therefore represents or dramatizes modes of perception within its cultural grouping.

(24)

Achebe lavishes his works with Igbo words and syntax which echoes the very culture it describes. Wiebe, unlike Achebe, has inadequate language provisions to rely upon. For one reason, he is outsider to the native Indian cultures he attempts to describe. Secondly, the native language in itself is on the verge of extinction and scarce in contemporary Canada. He confesses that he knows very little of the Cree
language. In Where is the Voice Coming From? Wiebe accepts that he does not understand the Cree language (330). It would be apt to quote Antwan Jefferson’s notion of the use of written language by a native writer and a non-native writer:

The use of Written language requires an understanding of its construction, the ability to apply language. Cultural context comes about as a result of writing as a member of a particular society or culture, enabling the writer with techniques, clichés, and phrases particular to the given society. It is only when a writer intends to write from a non-native perspective that the cultural context is minimized, and even then few aspects are still evident in the produced literature. (par.4)

Wiebe’s writing is not without such evidences. In The Temptations of Big Bear Big Bear tells his people:

Only a sick dog eats again what he has once spit out. (20)

The contextual explanation of the saying is that Big Bear denies any reservation or ammunition from the white man and tells his people he will not accept the same he has rejected once.

Wiebe constructs the indigenous songs, stories and myths in the form of narratives to give a native air to it. The native dialogues or speech
is rendered as a direct translation of the native language and *The Temptations of Big Bear* is a fine example. He comments upon his use of the English language thus:

> The language should warn you all times that you’re sort of off-base with it, because you are dealing with a Cree world-view and that world-view could not comprehend a lot of what was happening to it. How do you do that except by the way you handle the language? ("For Goodness Sake" 3)

In the opening of the novel an interaction is held between the First People chief, Sweetgrass and Governor Morris. Wiebe constructs a language to juxtapose their different worlds; “an insertion of ‘truth’ of cultures in to the text” (*The Empire Writes Back* 52).

Sweetgrass continued: “The Great Spirit that we shake hands once more, before all our brothers. That Spirit is above all, and under His eye every person is the same. I have pity on every one who lives by the buffalo. If I am spared until next year I want you, who has come to us from the Great White Queen, to act for our good: to protect our buffalo. We must hand in hand protect the buffalo. I am thankful. When I hold your hand I feel the First One is looking on us both as brothers. May this earth here never taste a white man’s
blood. I thank God I can lift my head, and when I take your hand and touch your heart, as I do now, let us be one. I have said it.”

Governor Morris: “We have come together and understand each other. My heart is glad that you have all seen the right way. I had written a letter to Big Bear and Bobtail and other big chiefs on the plains with the buffalo but Big Bear is here now. I am happy to tell him personally that the treaty is for them too, it was made as if they all were here.” (10-11)

Sweetgrass’ speech is structured as a literal translation of the Cree language. Governor Morris’ speech signifies the language of the metropolitan centre and Sweetgrass’ language is rendered as a variant to inscribe difference. The articulation of two opposed speech, and the political and cultural identification creates a cultural space between them, signifying their difference.

Achebe too handles English language as the way Wiebe handles, to bring out the radical difference in the cultures and characters they attempt to portray. The following paragraph may be quoted for reference:

Do you not know that in a great man’s house there must be people who follow all kinds of strange ways? There must be
good and bad people, honest and workers and thieves, peace-makers and destroyers; that is the mark of a great obi. In such a place, whatever music you beat on your drum there is somebody who can dance to it. (Arrow of God 46)

By way of summing up the discussion, it may be said that Wiebe’s writing of the Canadian indigenous cultures is in lesser depth when compared to Achebe’s Igbo cultural details. The difference arises because Achebe concentrates exclusively on the Igbos, while on the other hand, Wiebe tries to retrieve the multiple indigenous cultures of Canada and it is difficult to do justice to all the cultures within the space of a novel. Yet, A Discovery of Strangers equals with Arrow of God and Things Fall Apart in exhausting the pre-colonial Tetsot’ine culture.

Achebe and Wiebe narrate the myths, stories or folktales, and songs and dance of their respective nations as a strategy to reinforce social and moral values in the young generation. The story of the master-wrestler conveys a moral. The myth about the formation of Umuofia unravels the history and the native aesthetics values and beliefs. The Canadian Tetsot’ine ‘Origin myth’ and ‘Ptarmigan-woman’ are typical of the people of the land and thereby asserts the native Indians as the ancestors of Canada. The Cree myth ‘Rock story’ explains the mysteries in creation. Achebe uses songs and dance to strategically revive the Igbo
customs and rituals which are lost in the contemporary society. Wiebe makes a conscious attempt to revive the Indian and the Inuit songs and dance. Wiebe’s intentional use of white characters like Robert Jefferson and Josh is to appreciate the native cultural tradition and values is yet another evidence of recentring of the culture.

Achebe’s politics in writing the Igbo ethnic culture prove the “being” of a rich African cultural heritage; and that they did not “hear of culture for the first time from Europeans” (“The Role of a Writer in a New Nation”, 8). Achebe’s and Wiebe’s novels undergo a process of ethnogenesis with regards to the respective indigenous cultures of Nigeria and Canada. Wiebe’s politics is to venerate the multiethnic cultures of Canada and to decentre the dominant white cultures. Culture in Nigeria comprises multiethnic groups like the Yoruba, Hosua and Igbo, but Achebe reinscribes only the pre-colonial Igbo culture. The indigenous Cree, Tetsot’ine and Ojibwan Indians, the Inuits, the Metis, and the migrant Mennonites of Canada have their distinct cultural richness and Wiebe establishes these Canadian cultures as “being” ethnic. It is true that Wiebe’s portrayal of the “Indians, Metis and Eskimos illustrate a tribal life which defines, sustains and strengthens its citizens” (Kertzer par.6). Achebe remains monoculture, while Wiebe’s stance is multicultural.
The next chapter deals with the Nigerian and Canadian societies that are hybridized during the colonial advent at the expense of their respective ethnic cultures.