

SUBJECTIVITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE DIALECTICAL COSMOLOGY OF THE TRADITIONAL IGBO SOCIETY

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Abstract

The traditional African is said to be incurably religious. The spirit shares the world with mortals. Some of those spirits have shrines but some do not. Reality is double pronged: death and life, spirit and matter. No dichotomies are found, matter and spirit proceed from the same source but the spirit seems to be given a place of prominence as a reality overlaying the material. The spirit assumes the subject-end while matter remains the object.

Introduction

So God created human beings in his own image.
In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27)

It follows that God has male and female attributes and characteristics in Him, which he imaged in Adam and all creation. The difference is that creatures are polarized. No particular creature has it all: it is either positive or negative, subject or object, plus or minus, male or female. Creation comes in pairs, which means that the meaning of life lies in relationship, in give-and-take, *do ut des* principle of living. Thus, there is equally a relationship in God, which is absolutely and infinitely resolved into a unity. The *Nag Hammadi* documents revealed a gnostic tenet that envisions the salvation of man as a product of striking a unity between contradictions. Betz (1979) records a passage in the gnostic gospel of St. Thomas:

When you make the two one and make the inside like the outside and the outside as the inside and the upperside like the underside and when you make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female [not] be female, ... then you shall enter [the kingdom]. (P.196)

Among the Gnostics, the myth was seen as part of the founding elements, where redemption and salvation were taken in terms of restoring the original androgynous unity since they believed that the human person was made sexless at the beginning and the division of the sexes was taken to be the fundamental symbol of the human plight. However, this does not talk of resolution of the pair into a unity but a dissolution or sublimation of one into the other.

This may not represent the mind of the Christian Creator, who polarized them and still declared them good. It is rather through correspondences of the polarization that the spectra of enhancements, meanings and consequently the histories of human activities in the universe are engendered. A doctor

becomes one who knows the elements that co-responds to another in a way as to assuage a specific problem. In this same thread, Arazu (2003) maintains that the spirit is one but that the material reality diversifies into the many. Kim (2013) expresses the twofold pattern of creation with the terms subject-object, give-take, male-female, and positive-negative. He believes that everything co-responds to each other in the subject and object, positive and negative pattern. The body co-responds to the spirit as its subject or positive just as the electrons of an atom, which are negatively charged hover over the positively charged nucleus in co-response to its being.

This is applicable to the traditional Igbo world into which this paper investigates. Egbujie (1976) believes that:

For the Africans the world is *dual in nature*. Beyond and over above the visible, tactile, physical world, there is a non-visible, nontactile world which envelopes the former. It permeates the former through and through; it is simultaneously within and outside of the earth and the seas. (p.107)

Edeh (1985) also avers that the Igbo have a view of a dual world “*Uwa n’ani muo*” (p.73) depicting the spiritual and physical worlds. This paper therefore intends to portray how the Spirit becomes the nucleus of life in the Igbo socio-religious life, which is part and parcel of Africa. The Igbo world stands as a microcosm to Africa, the macrocosm. Studying an independent unit of a system often facilitates greater understanding and depth.

The Igbo People

Contemporary views about Igbo people punctuated by genetic, archeological, linguistic, scriptures exegetical and ethnological findings dismiss completely the hypothesis of hamitic (Jewish or Egyptian) origin and tend to situate the cradle of the modern man, *homo sapiens*, in the Igbo people. When taken as a whole, these contemporary scholarships open up new vistas of study and research into the interior of human origin on this planet. Scholars are of the opinion that what is hitherto unknown is much greater than what is known and opening up the unknown can proffer solutions to some problems we experience now in the world.

Acholonu (2009) said that the Igbo story is not the story of a localized community but one of the black people all over the continent of Africa. *Ndi-Igbo* therefore is said to mean “the Ancients, the First People, the Aborigines (*Ndi Gbo*)” (p.2). She maintained that their origin came from the Grimaldi/Bushmen, who were direct descendants of the *homo erectus* (Early man) (p.114). They traversed and migrated out of Africa as hunter gatherers. They were called Igbo by the earliest migrants, probably the Nri (as asserted by Jeffrey (1951) and other researchers) who met them *in situ* on arrival in

the Niger-Benue Confluence area. They went by the name *San* or *Shan* (South Africa), *Bushmen*, *Twa* and *Pygmies* in other parts of Africa. In China, they were known as *Shan* (the creators of the *Shan* Dynasty of God-men) and in Igboland as *Eshi/Nshi* or *Nwa-nshi*. Afigbo (1981) maintains that the Igbo have lost all memory of their migration into the area they now occupy if it ever happened. He avers rather that the Igbo emigrated from an original location at the plateau region (Northern Igbo stretching from Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta and Awka – Orlu uplands) to the southern areas of Uratta, Ikwerre, Etche, Asa, and Ndoki as well as the west and east.

Invariably, Uchendu (1965) outlines three senses in which the word is used:

1. To refer to domestic speakers of the language
2. To refer to the language spoken by the people
3. To refer to Igbo territory (p.1)

Geographical territory:

Uchendu (1965) states that the Igbo People are located between latitudes 5° and 7° north of the equator and longitude 6° and 8° east of the Greenwich Meridian. They occupy an area of about 25,280km² (15,800square miles) (p.1). Igbo-speaking peoples can be divided into five geographically based subcultures: northern Igbo, southern Igbo, western Igbo, eastern Igbo, and northeastern Igbo.

The Igbo People are densely populated, which suggests a long occupation of the land. Amadiume (1996) writes that in 1963 the Igbo numbers about 8.5 million and by 1993 has grown to more than 15 million. The Igbo People have one of the highest population densities in West Africa, ranging from 120 to more than 400 persons per square kilometer. Nzomiwu (1999) quoting Ifeemesia stated that the population of the Igbo People that year was about 15 million (p.5). Encarta Encyclopaedia (2006) has it that the population was something over 17 million in 2006. Smock (1972) maintained that “the Igboland had the densest countryside population in any part of Africa” (p.21).

Igbo Socio-Religious Worldview

The Igbo world was a complex and dynamic whole. It was a society open to influences from the world outside of them. Complexities therefore abound from layers of historical deposits that defy a linear conceptualization of their worldview. However, Onwuejeogwu’s (1975) categorization may be of some help. The Cosmos is divided into four complex constituents:

- *Okike* (Creation)
- *Alusi* (Supernatural Forces or Deities)
- *Mmuo* (Spirit)

- **Uwa** (World)

Okike

Chineke manifests to our world as:

- **Anyanwu** (the Sun)—*Chineke* is the mastermind behind the source of light, love and knowledge and, implicitly, earthly existence or life itself;
- **Chi** (the godly guardian), the personal providence is a divine agent assigned to each human from cradle to the coffin;
- **Kpakpando** (the stars) which manifest as the celestial beauty;
- **Enuigwe** (the heavens), the home of all supernatural forces including the stars.

Chineke created everything visible and invisible. It has been overtly demonstrated by many scholars that the Igbo People believe in a unified world created by a Supreme Being, *Chukwu Okike*. It appears in many myths of origin. Talbot (1926) maintained that “the word *Chineke* appears to have come into use lately, and in many parts, only after the introduction of the Christian religion. The old form seems to have been *chi*, sometime called *Chi-Ukwu*, the great *Chi*.” (p. 41). If the original sense of *Okike* meant *sharing* or *distribution*, it could follow that the Igbo do not believe in creation from nothing as Ekwuru (2009) said, in line with Arazu (1982) and Nwoga (1984), that “It is semantically plausible that the original Igbo religious thought lacked the Christian concept of “creation” as production of something out of nothing.” (p.40). However, if *Okike* originally meant great power, *Oke ike*, then it may suggest creation from nothing since the Supreme Being must have called up all existents into being and assigned certain amounts of power to each of them. It might have been the fact too that the Igbo ancestors were not interested with the knowledge of *creation ab initio* but were simply interested in stating the cause or bearings of certain cultures or *omenala*. Likewise, they do not speak of creation as originating from the decision of the Supreme God but rather as a response to human needs. This highlights the utilitarian end of Igbo life and religion.

However, the Igbo People believe that every existent: animals, plants, inanimate, humans and spirits exercise some variable amounts of power from the Creator. These can be seen as spirit of the Creator (*chi*) in all things and for one to control and rule or even manipulate all things, one must know their dos and don'ts. The Igbo People say: *onye sọkarĩa, ọ rụkarĩa* (one who

applies the dos and don'ts of life more will wield more powers). The powerful person is therefore the more reserved person – *onye nso*. *Agwu-ishi*, *Chukwu's* spirit, life-force or spirit-energy, which is said to have been imparted into every existent, also stands for spirit of divination and knowledge. Thus one needs *agwu-ishi* in order to know the force in all things. Achebe in demonstrating *ike di n'awaja n'awaja* (power runs in channels) says in Cole (1984), that the “term *Ike* is the essence of all things human, spiritual, animate and inanimate. Everything has its own unique energy which must be acknowledged and given its due” (p. ix). This is in line with what Placid (1969), said that “The Africans speak, act and live, as if for them beings were forces ... Force for them is the nature of being, force is being and being is force” (pp. 51-52). This force is thus the indemonstrable principle of all demonstrations and since it is present in all creation: spirits, animates and inanimate, it is the string linking all creation to *Chukwu*. Therefore, the Supreme Being, the parenting spirit(s) in Igbo is a unity of all existents. Ekwuru (2009) avered that

to talk of God in the traditional Igbo meant symbolically, to talk about the totality of “being.” The Igbo say that *ihe nile bi nime Chukwu* (everything live in God), and nothing is conceived as existent if not in this sense. From this notion of *Chukwu*, He is said to be *mgbara-muhie* or *Mgburu-mgburu*, (“round” or “circular”, to mean “totality”) in form. (p. 101)

Abanuka (2012) sees Reality as a principle running in all other realities and as such makes all a unified whole, where evil is not repugnant to good but complements it. The only repugnancy is nothingness (absence of all realities), which is simply not possible. In outlining reality, he posits “ultimacy, ancestry, humankind, reity and nothing” (p.23) and calls them principle of reality being expressed in differing levels of which the Ultimacy is the origin and support of all. Arazu (2003) sees this principle as Consciousness and Consciousness as God. He is the One that becomes many but gets wrapped up in ‘sheaths’ (p. 89). Moon (1996) calls it the Divine Principle of whose characteristics of duality is manifested in all its creatures. In effect, the ultimate reality has male and female, subject and object, positive and negative in its being. The Igbo myth mentioned above incarnates this metaphysical reality in *Amadioha* and *Ala* and understands them as the idealized relationship of men and women in Igbo marital life.

Chi: Agbasiere (2000) says that *chi* has been interpreted with Judeo-Christian slant to stand for “‘a kind of tutelary spirit’, ‘personal genius’, ‘guardian angel’, ‘a spiritual double’” (p.54). She rather associates *chi* with the

movement of the sun, which is a sign of *Amadioha/Chukwu* and the receptivity of the earth, which is a sign of the goddess of *Ala*. This is seen in the greeting: *I bọla chi?* - Have you succeeded in breaking through darkness to light? *Ala* is the force behind the Igbo communal religion and *chi* is the mark of uniqueness for the individual, which can be associated with personal fortune or misfortune. Agbasiere thus concludes that *chi* is “a subtle incarnation of both *Chukwu* and *Ala*” (p. 55). This is as good as saying that *chi* is the human individual vital force. Ezekwugo (1987) demonstrates an independent existence of *chi* as a guide and also as a destiny of one. It is said that *onye kwe chi ya ekwe* – one’s *chi* consents when one is determined to act. Yet, if *akara aka (chi) onye na-edu ya*, (the destiny of a man, the *chi*, guides him), it is the power in the *chi* that makes one determined to act before the consent of the same *chi*. *Chi* is at once part and parcel of a person and yet is distinct from the visible person. The Igbo often say: *Ekene m ya na ife na-emelu ya ife* (I greet him and what makes things happen for him) and Edeh (1999) maintains that this “invisible element is distinct from and yet part of the visible, and in fact it is “that by which the visible is”” (p79).

Men and women possess *chi* but unlike a man’s *chi*, a woman’s *chi* is revered by her children and all who descended from her. Ekwuru (2009) mentions a ceremony called *Alum chi*, which was dedicated to the mothers’ *chi*. This has been replaced nowadays by the mothering Sunday. A woman’s *chi* is often enshrined in an *Oha* or *ogirisi* tree, which she carries to her husband’s house when married.

AlUsI

Alusi is a supernatural force. Although the forces are neither human beings (*mmadu*) nor spirits (*mmuo*), they sometimes assume the attributes of human beings. Prof. Onwuejeogwu called them “**being forces.**” Every Igbo town has a shrine dedicated to its communal *alusi*; every other community respects the deity. A priestly clan usually ministers to the revered communal deity on behalf of the community.

MmUQ (Spirit-being)

Mmuo is the spirit of ancestors called *Ndi ichie*. They are the dead ancestors of the Igbo people, who have lived honest moral lives and have been rewarded with an imperishable life. Abanuka (1994) says that “Ancestors share the imperishability of the ultimate reality, at the same time, they are closely connected with individuals on the level of humankind with whom they were of one skin.” (p.39). *Ndi ichie* are now in the womb or labyrinth of *Ala*, the goddess and at the same time influence the lives of the people, to whom they serve as matrons and patrons. One who reaches the ancestral place has stepped into a condition for the survival of the family. It is said that *ngwuru onye ozo*

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adiḡhi echi echi – the lineage of the titled or good man does not get extinct. In Enugwu-Ukwu, the first ritual of welcome to a baby is *igba agụ*. This entails consulting the native priest to know and recognize the ancestor that reincarnated into the said person. A boy whose re-incarnate is not known cannot step into manhood or begin the processes of *ozo* title-taking. At times when this is not done, the person grows up with certain disabilities of life but when the ancestor is recognized, the destiny of the person is somewhat insured and protected by that ancestor. The ancestors intercede with *Ala* for the living and actually reincarnate in the newly born members of the family (not just once), while maintaining their position in the ancestral realm. This realm highlights physical and moral prowess of individuals, to which men and women may belong.

Some *mmuo* are so restless that they come back to be born-again (*ogbanje*), not to make amends but to torment a mother, her family, and the community.

Uwa

Uwa is our world. It is founded on four fundamental materials called *Urstoff*. They are: **Air, fire, earth and water**. It is interesting to note that the first two *urstoffs* are intangible materials that come and go and are referred to as male, while the more tangible ones: water and earth are characterized female. What it all means is that male deities are ascribed to air and fire, while female deities are ascribed to water and land/earth.

Air: Air keeps the world in shape and maintains its balance just as it drives away odour and maintains freshness. It is said: *Ka ahuru adina, ikuku gae-kusasi ya* – No matter the intensity of the stench from a fart, air will return freshness.

Fire: Fire moulds, purifies and burns material objects in order to keep the world in equilibrium. What air does to the space, fire does to physical objects. Fire and air have no residential address, yet they are regarded with some awe.

Earth: *Earth* (*Ala*) is the physical manifestation of Earth Deity, *Ala*. It harbors four components:

Mmadu Human beings, ***Anumanu*** (animal), ***Ofia*** (forests) Vegetation sustains both *mmadu* and *anumanu* and ***Mmiri*** (water).

Ala is believed to be the Supreme Mother of all things. Acholonu (1995) submits that the socio-religious life of the ancient Igbo must have been imbued with a mother-centric focus. This is supported by some myths even among the Kikuyus, which highlight the change of authority from women to men. An interesting discovery at Ugwuele made by Catherine Acholonu

(2009) and her group was the shrine, *Isi-ume* ("First Breath"), where "Nnem Chukwu" (My Mother, the Supreme Being) as the natives know it, was worshipped in the pre-historic times. This tallies with the God of the *Nag Hammadi*, *Nneka*, the Supreme (Mother) Goddess of the forest dwarfs, the direct descendants of the *homo erectus* encountered in the Benin myth of origin.

Ala is also believed in Ekwuru (2009) to be the wife of the Supreme Being, who in some places is called *Amadioha*. *Amadioha* inhabits the sky and was separated from the Earth Goddess because of a woman who disobeyed a tradition by committing *aru*. Another myth portrayed *Ala* and *Amadioha* as being in the water, which covered the whole earth but seeing that humans and animals would have nowhere to bury their dead and rest, *Ala* decided to spread the body out and make a home for humans. This has made *Ala* the most important and indispensable deity in Igbo religion.

Mmadu (human being) — Humans are rather little gods that descended from *Chukwu/Amadioha*. They are the mortal eyes of *Chukwu* on the earth with the ability to manipulate creatures and even the gods, deities or lesser spirits. This is seen in some myths of creation, which purport that humans lived with God before they were settled on earth and God receded far away from them. As Ekwuru (2009) maintains

Man is called *Madu*, that is, the "beauty of creation." In this sense, he is further regarded analogically as the *Ife-nta*, meaning, the "junior light (sun)" that illumines the whole creation. Man for the Igbo therefore stands next to *Chukwu*, and this gives him the privileged position of *deseverence*, that is, the position of assigning roles and functions, and conferment of meanings to the rest of created things. (p.102)

The Igbo enter into pacts with these forces to take into their benevolence. The process is called "***igommuo***"(to placate/negotiate, not worship, spirits). Even *Agwu* ("the divination force" or the trickster *alusi*, which causes confusion in the life of human beings) can be manipulated in *afa* (divination) to yield good effects. It is said that *dibia gbasia afa mmadu agbaa uche* – It is for the diviner to divinize but the person uses his prudence to know what is to be applied and how. *Ndiichie* are not worshipped; they do not demand to be worshipped. In fact, the term "worship" does not readily occur in Igbo theosophy. "*Ifé alusi*" ("to worship deities") is a colonial concept introduced by Euro-Christianity. The Igbo considered it more appropriate to negotiate and navigate natural forces around them; the will of God cannot be manipulated or changed.

Some Igbo Proverbs that Portray Some Relationships with the Spirits

Igbo idea of reality as duality finds expression in some Igbo proverbs. *Ife niile di abuo abuo* – All things come in pairs; *Ife kwuru, ife akwudebe ya* - Something stands by another. According to Aniakor (1973):

When Duru Agwu/Duru Aku, the Chief Diviner at Amauzari in Mbano Division, through whose divination man comes to understand the complicated web of cosmic relationships between him and the gods, looked at the five divination pebbles on his palm, he picked out one, threw it on the ground, picked it up again, examined it and stared into the vacancy in communion with the gods. He said:

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| <i>ihe di abuo abuo</i> | - | Reality comes in twos |
| <i>Nwoke na nwanyị</i> | - | Male and Female |
| <i>Ihe oma na ihe ojoo</i> | - | Good and Evil |
| <i>Ugbua na Mgbe-Ochie</i> | - | Present and Past |
| <i>Mmadu na Mmuo</i> | - | People and Spirits |
| <i>Igwe na Ala</i> | - | Firmament and Earth |
| <i>Onwu na Ndu</i> | - | Life and Death |

In saying this, he penetrated the heart of Igbo ontology (p.6)

The following proverbs show the primacy of the spirit world over the physical world:

Ọ bu n'ọnu nwa dibia ka okwu na-ebi, ọ dighị ebi n'ọnu ofeke – It is the diviner that normally has the final say and not the simpleton. The diviner is only a voice to the words of the spirits. It can also be said that the decision of the spirits is final of whom the ultimate is the supreme deity. Lesser spirits can be manipulated but not *Chukwu*.

Onye na-eje be dibia kwa daa anaghị anwụ ka urịom ọkụkọ – A constant visitor of diviners does not die like a chick. This shows that the ultimate matters of life are decided by the spirits. Thus to know what they have in store for one and act accordingly saves one from untimely death.

N'ime afọ ọnwụ ga-egbu nwa dibia, anya ya adighịzi ahụ mmụọ – In the year the diviner is destined to die, he loses sight of the spirits. The spirits do not have absolute decision but God himself. Once it is *Ogechukwu* (God's time), nothing can be done.

Ọ bu e lee ka chi nwata ha anya, e wee kenye ya ọrụ – the god of a child is firstly considered before assigning a job to him/her. Anything from the Supreme Being stands unalterable. *A ga-eje ọgụ be Chukwu?* (Nobody can fight or ask God questions). A folk story of *Ojadili*, who fought all spirits and succeeded but could not fight his *Chi* buttresses the point. It also shows that

our *chi* is derived from *Chi-ukwu*. Little wonder He has few or no shrines. Humans are rather His shrines (*Oke mmadu bu oke arusi* – A great man is a great deity) and that is why they have the manipulative powers over the spirits. What takes place has been deciphering what has been fixed and acting to maximize opportunities within the horizon.

A muo ofeke o buru umu mana a muo Omalu, oburu ndi ichie bira ije – When a simpleton is born, he/she is accepted as a child but when a great person is born, it means that the ancestors have come to assist. Ayika (2012) holds that human dignity for the Igbo means *ndu na afa* –life and life actualizing deeds. In this line therefore, greatness is born and greatness is nurtured. *Nwata ga-abu oke na-esite n'uju* – The greatness of a child is known from the primary stages of his life. He comes with a strong *chi* who will guide him to success but he must also acknowledge the channel through which his *chi* comes to life, the ancestor. When a TV program is watched in a channel that is not well tuned, the pictures may be blurred and interferences may occur in the voice productions.

Onye chi ya na-adighi n'alo onwu anaghi egbu ya – One whose *chi* does not partake of a plot cannot fall into the trap of death. Ezekwugo (1987) rightly maintained that *Chi* is the God of Igbo religion. The Igbo believe that if the gods gather to inflict death on one and one's *chi* is absent from the gathering, one may suffer grievously but would not die. His *chi* will mediate and find a way out of the sickness or problem, no matter what time it takes. Hence Igbo bear the name: *Chimagoorom (Chiagooro)* - *my god vindicates me; chimasaaramokwu (Chinasa)* –*My god speaks for me; Chimamanda* – *My god will never fail me.*

Onye na-ama mburu na-ebuzo egosigodu enuigwe – Anyone who wants to throw a stick at something must firstly show the stick to the sky (spirit). This shows the primacy of the spiritual world over the physical. The Igbo go to their *Ikenga* for protection when making a trip; they go to the ancestors to know the re-incarnated spirit in a child before he begins the journey to manhood; they ask the help of the gods when they want to begin the farm work in a year and they pass through rites of passage when the time comes for change of levels. In a gathering or meeting, they welcome the spirits who would control the occasion over breaking of kola nuts. This is why they say: *A naghị ekwukpo oji okwu* – The matters for the day cannot precede the breaking of kola nut.

Primacy of the Spirit in the Life of Igbo Traditional Society

The backdrop from above is that the Igbo man has the spirit of *Chi-Ukwu* in the midst of spirits in order to achieve a kind of maturity. The Igbo say: *Uwa bu ahia* – the world is a market, where people come, buy and sell and go back.

This is done with purity, truth and fairness and such people are *ndị aka ha kwụ ọtọ*. Nzomiwu (1999) pointed out, according to the *omenala* that “In Igbo land a just man is one who speaks the truth, without any fear or favour. He is a man of the community. He is kind, merciful, sociable and upright.” (p.31). This is also captured in folk stories like the story of a flutist who was sent to the land of the spirits on an errand. He used his flute to entice the spirits and his good manners to secure their empathy. He came back successful, and still more, with the gift of wealth that changed the life of his family forever. Another child who was pushed by greed sojourned and came back with all evil that plagued the existence of his family. The astute and hardworking person is always a blessing to the family and when he joins *Ndịchie*, immortalizes his family. He is called *onye nsọ* or *onye nze* - one who abstains. This is used as a translation of a holy person but it does not really mean the English ‘sacred’ as to dedicated to God but one who bridles his/her actions or tailors it to what is acceptable to the spirits and the community.

Like all traditional societies, the Igbo traditional society has social institutions that hinge on the spiritual. Institutions are complex sets of normative rules geared towards preserving certain basic or primary needs of the society. These needs include: determining Kinship; providing for the legitimate use of power; regulating the distribution of goods and services; transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next; and regulating our relation to the supernatural. It is often hard to separate other institutions of society from the religious institution. Rather the religious institution authenticate and even regulate the other four institutions and were often indistinguishable from the religious. "Africans are notoriously religious" (p.1) has been a comment from Mbiti (1969) in order to capture their circumstance and differentiate them from the western civilization.

The Igbo of pre-colonial times had a well-developed leadership system that left them a peaceful people, ebullient in trade and strong in religion. According to Amadiume (1987) “The pre-colonial period, pre-1900, is considered by present-day Igbo as the ‘olden days’, when traditional customs were ‘pure and unspoilt’”. (p.21) The Igbo had no king, yet they were very hardworking and peaceful. It was an egalitarian society, where morality depended on the Goddess of *Ala*. *Nze na Ozo* (a group of titled men) stood as messengers of *Ala*, who could not pervert justice or come against the ordinance of the land for fear of death from *Ala*. This period inflamed the admiration of Vancouver Candice Goucher of Washington State University in an online comment to an article, “Connecting African history to the major themes of world’s history”. He maintained that the Igbo existed before the Islamic conquest, around 1000BCE and was connected with the trade of the civilized world then, yet they did not become a great political centre like the

Benin Empire and the rest. No one man had it all and everyone was free to attain the level of titled men even though reaching this stage bespeaks a successful man. There were no dictators, rather there were directors in the person of priests, priestesses and *dibia*. All were rather governed by the morality norms of the earth goddess. When the titled man, Okonkwo flouted the rules, Achebe (1995) recounts through the mouth of Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess.

“...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 fellow neighbour” ... “We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow.” “The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish.”

Okonkwo later committed a female crime against the land, which was an accidental shot that killed a man and the punishment was seven years banishment. This was interpreted to be an overflow from neglecting the goddess' week of peace. Okonkwo later ended his life by hanging himself which also was an abomination to the land, the most demeaning of oneself. Achebe (1995) says: "it is against our custom...it is an abomination ...and an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansman. His body is evil and only strangers may touch it... We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land" (p 207-208). The dignity of the Igbo person was not just wealth or success but a cultured heart that had respect for the gods and spirits of the land. Okonkwo was successful but did not join *Ndịichie*, the spirit-beings of the land, who controlled the morality and life of the people. They were the enforcers of the law and needed no help from the living in order to mete out justice.

However, *Ndịichie* partner with the living in some levels of enforcements through the masquerades. The masquerades were a sign of this partnership between the living, the initiates, and the *Ndịichie* in order to preserve social order, enhance the well-being of individuals and communities, and preserve the highest values. Though this was an occult group, yet anybody can become a candidate except one who is edged out by age or another communal task which has a priority over giving meaning to life. Here, I mean the women, whom Ayika (2014) displays their 'ontic-ontological' representation of *Ala*, the goddess. (p 79). The spiritual power of a woman was her identification with *Ala* in order to bring life into the community. Nothing came in between the menstrual blood of a woman and *Ala*, otherwise it became a taboo. Agbasiere (2000) says that meeting a woman at such times would infect a man with *orịa nwanị*, (woman-sickness) named so probably because it was a

breach of communion between a woman and the woman-essence. Egwuatu (2008) calls it a cleansing and purifying exercise that signified peace with the 'gods' and this was why she sat on an earth hole during this time which was called *iba na nsọ* - going into being holy. Women were thus excluded from some communal places and actions like the streams and the *mmanwu* cult during this time or period of their life.

Rites of passage (puberty rite, Marriage rite, widowhood rite and rite of membership in secret and open societies) existed to exclude candidates from the normal life and identify them with the spirits that govern their new world or group. They live between and betwixt this world and the spiritual world, at the end of which they were impacted with the spirits and norms of the new life, which could not be forgotten or revealed to non-initiates.

Conclusion

Ife kwuru, ife akwudebe ya - Something stands by another. From the on-going, one can actually see that what stands by another is the physical world and that other is the spiritual world. It is like the shrine of an arusi, which has a physical site of a deity. The site may be a tree or some totem animals but the main power that these physical signs point at remains hidden. It is wrong to bring down the tree while the spirit is still present. In some places like in Osumenyi, if the tree is simply brought down, it stands up again. The spirit is *ife na-emelu ya ife* – that by which the physical stands. Edeh (1999) maintains above that this “invisible element is distinct from and yet part of the visible, and in fact it is “that by which the visible is”” (p79). The spirit remains the subject to the visible entities in a *subject-object* relationship. It is that which defines the quintessence of the material reality and to deal with the spirit is to dwell with the kernel of life of anything. A proverb above points at this succinctly: *Ọ bụ e lee ka chi nwata ha anya, e wee kenye ya ọrụ*. Arazu (2003) defines *Dibia oje na mmụọ* as one who is “the initiate in the mysteries of nature” (p 12). It meant that he dealt with the essence, the spirit-content of any visible reality and this was why they were rated high in the traditional Igbo life.

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