

## **African Belief Systems and the Place of the Almighty God**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the topic “African Belief systems and the place of the Almighty God”. Africa is a massive continent with 54 independent countries and over 3000 different ethnic groups; with such diversity it is impossible to have a single African belief system or worldview. This study considers the uniqueness of the African Igbo religious belief system and engages it to stem the forces eroding the Igbo historical consciousness. According to Chinweizu, the weak historical consciousness among Ndigbo is due to a general ignorance of the things that connect us to our remote ancestral past...the Igbo national temperament, through the loss of the holistic cosmology and ideology that fostered it, has become dysfunctional. It has become hyper – individualistic, hyper competitive, hyper – materialistic, and hyper-xenophile... The overall result is that Igbo society is on the brink of implosion. After all, what other prospect is there for a conquered people whose language is dying, whose historical consciousness is shallow and whose national temperament has become dysfunctional (2015; 43, 44). It is on this note that the paper proposes the revival of African (Igbo) belief system through what Fafunwa suggests as “Education in traditional African Society” (1974: 15-16).

### **Introduction**

Africa is a massive continent with diverse religious traditions. According to Janet T. Fargion, “Africa is the second largest and most populated continent in the world, covering around 6% of the earth’ s surface with 54 independent countries and about 1.3 billion people. There are over 3000 different ethnic groups or cultures across Africa, each with its own mythic history, language and beliefs. With such a diversity, it is impossible to have a single ‘African belief System’.

Indeed, Africa is a home to a wide variety of religious beliefs and practices. (African Belief System by Dr. Janet Topp Fargion). J.S. Mbiti (African Traditional Religions & Philosophy, 1969).

Arising from this view Fargion further observes that indigenous African belief Systems have the oldest roots of any of the continent's religions. Just as there is great cultural diversity so there is diversity in belief systems.

John S. Mbiti, totally confirms the views of Janet T. Fargion, that there are a thousand and one African peoples, each with its religion, language and culture. It is therefore more accurate to speak of African Traditional Religions, in the plural. Mbiti further states that every ethnic group on the continent has its own traditional belief system. No two are identical. In spite of the diversities, Gary Maxey has observed that there are occasion when ATR is best referred to in the plural and other instances when it is considered in the singular (Juju vs Christianity. p.30)

According to Gary Maxey, ATR is not a religion in the sense that is normally understood in western secular societies. It is not something that can be separated from the rest of life. On the contrary, it is the total traditional way of understanding the world; religion pervades the African life in all its ramifications – social, economic, political – this gives credence to Mbiti's statement that African people are "notoriously religious". Consequently Africa has evolved and sustained religiously conscious communities where their religion helps them to celebrate life: "they dance life, sing life, ritualize life, drum life, shout life, ceremonise life, festivize life, for individual and for the community.

### **The place of the Supreme God in African Belief Systems**

Any talk of African Belief systems and the place of the Almighty God has to begin with the African understanding or the knowledge of God and the worship of God. These according to John S. Mbiti has been staples of African life from earliest. It shows that the sense of the divine was native, not something introduced to Africans by missionaries or by anyone else; on the contrary the

knowledge of God in African religion was not much different from the idea of God that Christian missionaries preached in Africa. The belief in God engendered a moral response that directed moral life and interaction on the continent and among its people. As Gary Maxey would say “There is no continent in the world, where belief in a powerful creator God is more firmly held than Africa”. Atheism is virtually unheard of in Africa”. (Gary Maxey, 2019.7).

### **The Moral Attributes of God**

According to Mbiti Africans come to believe in God by reflecting on their experience and through observation of the created universe, they came to the conclusion that God must exist; they posited the existence of God to explain the existence and sustenance of the universe. Rooted in their belief in God as the creator, Africans believe in various moral dimensions of the created universe. Africans view the universe religiously. Since God is seen as the creator, various aspects of the universe are permeated by the sense of the sacred, this religious mentality affects the way people see the universe. They see the universe as having dimensions of order and power, that is, there is order in the laws of nature. This order established by God guides the functioning of the universe, preventing it from falling into chaos.

The laws that maintain order in the universe are controlled by God directly or indirectly through God’s intermediaries. Mbiti also posits that Africans believe that God has ordained a moral order for humans through which they come to understand what is good and what is evil. As such he said that no society can exist without the moral imperative, it is from religion that people are told what is good or evil, right or wrong, just or unjust, virtue or vice.

### **Our Great God**

By reason of the moral order in nature it follows that the creator of the universe has moral attributes which are a kin to the moral attributes of the Christian God, to wit:

1. **God is Omnipotent** - that is He possesses all power and ultimate authority over all thing and all creatures. It is believed that it is through the power of God that the universe continues in its God's appointed course whereby as long as the earth exists, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease; and it has been so.
2. **God is Omnipresent** – (Present everywhere) at one and the same time and He observes all that goes on in the world of men and nature.
3. **God is Omniscient-** He knows everything, He has all knowledge, and nothing is hidden from Him.
4. **God is transcendent** –means above, beyond, or surpassing. He is greater than all things, He is beyond them and above them, yet He also sustains them by his own power.
5. **God is also immanent** – that is He permeates the world by his creative power.
6. **God is omnificent and Omnibenevolent** – Omnificent means that God has the ability to create anything he wants; omnibenevolent means that He is eternally and infinitely good.
7. **God is Just** – He upholds the moral order of the universe. He is not partial in judgment; He is no respecter of persons, He does not punish the righteous nor spare the guilty (Gary Maxey 2019: 53-58).

By virtue of these attributes, these unique characteristics of God, we can understand why Africans worship God with deep respect.

### **Igbo Traditional Religion, World-View and Social Structure**

The Igbo occupy the southeastern part of Nigeria along with other ethnic groups, with a projected population of over 50 million people, excluding the Igbo in diaspora. Geopolitically, there are five Igbo states in the Nigerian federation – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. While they are not a nomadic

people, history shows that they are the most widely spread and travelled ethnic group in the continent of Africa.

A sizeable population of the Igbo lives in Rivers, Delta and parts of Akwa Ibom states of Nigeria as their original home from prehistoric times. In Rivers State, they occupy the mainland areas of Ikwere, Oyigbo, Etche, Ahoada, Omoku and Andoni. In Delta State they occupy the Asaba, Kwale (Ukwani), Agbor, Iselle-Ukwu, obiaruka, Ibuza, Utagba-Uno areas (Onunwa 2005:21).

### **The Igbo World-View**

Igbo traditional religion encapsulates the world-view or “weltanschauung”, customs and tradition of the people. Uzodinma Nwala defines the people's world-view, weltanschauung as,

... the complex of beliefs, habits, laws, customs and tradition of a people. It includes the overall picture they have about reality, the universe, life and existence; their attitude to life and to things in general; what they do and think of what life is, what things are worth striving to attain; what man's place is in the scheme of things: whether or not man has an immortal soul; whether or not life has a meaning and purpose (1985:26).

EmefieIkengaMetuh describes a world-view of a people as "... the complex of their beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, nature, structure of the universe and the interaction of its beings with particular reference to man... a people's traditional world-view draws heavily on their surroundings and their cultural past... people's world-view is a significant part of their system of religious beliefs" (1981:48).

Metuh further describes the nature and dynamism of Igbo traditional world-view as follows:

The world of human experience is seen as one fluid, coherent unit, in which spirits, men, animals, plants and the elements are engaged in continuous interaction. The invisible world shade into and mutually influence each other. Man is at the centre of this universe of dynamic beings and forces, and seeks through rituals to maintain equilibrium and a harmonious relationship

with all beings and forces that impinge on his life and being (1981:3-4).

Metuh's description of the Igbo world-view is in consonance with Ogbu Kalu's views on the precarious vision which depicts spiritual vulnerability of the African in a dangerous world.

The African world-view is predominantly religious; both human Life and nature are held sacred, intricately intertwined and under the governance of the Supreme Being and his multifarious divinities. The predominant attitude is that human existence is precarious because of the machination of evil spirits. In traditional African communities all forms of misfortune - illness, death." failure - are explained by the activities of ubiquitous evil spirits, angry gods, revengeful ancestors and destiny-evil forces operating through man and nature. Thus, lightning, falling trees, animals and rivers could harm or kill the star-struck human. Witches are, in fact, unsuspecting and involuntary agents but sorcerers are more deliberate, voluntary, and ill-disposed (1991:16).

The Igbo world-view is anthropocentric with human beings at the centre of the universe, and may end up as victims in the cosmic struggle. Every human being must be conscious of the confusion and crises that is inherent in human and social existence. "For to realize his destiny (chi) he must, through divination and rituals, harness the powers and favors of the benevolent forces and spiritual beings, and ward off the attacks and snares of malevolent spirit - forces" (Metuh 1981:4). The Igbo like any other African, struggles through rituals to maintain a balance between the spiritual and physical universe. The Igbo knows that there are powerful spiritual forces that are malevolent, capricious and whimsical, capable of doing good and evil.

### **The Igbo concept of Almighty God and his relationship to the lesser divinities: Chukwu, Chineke, Osebuluwa**

There are three personal names for God in Igbo traditional religion - Chukwu -- the Great chi, Chineke-chi-the creator, Osebuluwa, or Olisa-carrier of the world (Metu 1981:20). G. T. Basden commented on the variations in the use of the three names:

Several names are appropriate to the Supreme Being which, more or less, assimilated the underlying ideas of some, particular attributes in the southern parts of the country, God is known as **Chineke** (God, the creator). In the northern parts, the term **Chukwu** (the Great God) is the more common title. In some districts God is spoken of as Olisa-bulu-uwa or in one word, Olisa. This conveys the meaning of 'god who fashions world' (1966:37)

Anyaso, adds *chukwu-nna* or *chineke-nna* – God the father or father God, He is the father of the universe and at the same time its controller and governor. He created everything that exists in the universe including the divinities, human beings, the flora and fauna (Man, animals, land and plants). This great God is described with superlative qualities of goodness, kindness, love, justice, mercy, strength, intelligence and presence. The belief in these attributes of God, is reflected in all names the Igbo people give their children. Such names begin with “chi” which is then joined with the verb describing the attribute of God which the giver of the name wants people to know. For example: *Chidimma* – God is good, *Chukwu emeka* – God has done great things, *Chukwuebuka* – God is great, other names start with a sentence which at the end points to the greatness of God – for example- *Ifeanyi chukwu* – nothing is greater than God, *Uchechi-ga-eme* – God’s will shall come to pass. Other names point to the omnipotence of God – for the igbos, *chukwu* is everything. Their plans and proposals point to their utter dependence on God. They say “ma-chi-kwe”, if God allows; then the Igboland do not have a particular shrine for “*chukwu*”. They believe that He is immanent, therefore to limit him to a particular shrine undermines his attribute of omnipresence. According to Iwe, Igboman’s attachment to God is almost instinctive and emotional. Appeal to God – *chukwu* colour and characterize personal names, parables and proverbs. Names such as “chukwudi” – “There is God”, “Chukwuma” – “God knows”, “Iwuchukwu” – “God’s law”, “Ikechukwu” – “God’s Power”. These names reflect the people’s evidence of their constant devotion to God. *Chukwu* then is the Creator and sustainer of the universe. He

created “Anyanwu” (Sun), “Igwe” (Sky) “Amadioha” (thunder), operating as his messengers. As the sustainer of the universe Chukwu is called "Osebuluwa- The Lord carrier of the world. The moment Chukwu creates human spirit, he gives him a 'chi'. "**Chi** determines and dispenses a person's destiny, and protects and guards him much like a guardian angel. 'Okike', on the other hand, gives a person his form, character and qualities" (Metuh 1981:40). There is a symbiotic relationship and a bond between Chukwu and deities. The deities are either sons of Chukwu, or his messengers, or manifestations. Sacrifices offered to the Deities are indirectly being offered to Chukwu. A. J. Shelton writes:

Worship of the lesser deities is an act of worshipping the high god, who is considered to be immanent in subordinate beings or is symbolized by the images of lesser deities... whatever powers the inferior deities possess, these powers are ultimately derived from God, the source (1964:53)

The unity in Igbo world-view shows that the world is one. The supreme God, the deities and the spirits do not have a separate world that is far removed from human experience. God-**chukwu** lives, in a distant outer space. The ancestors (**Ndi chie**) live in the land of the spirits (**Ani mmuo**), which is believed to be beneath in the ground where the ancestors were interred. **Anyanwu** (Sun) is sometimes called “son of Chineke”, or His emanation. Sacrifices offered to Chukwu are often passed through Anyanwu (Metuh 1981:17; Meek 1937:22; Shelton 1965:17). The relationship between “Igwe” or “Amadioha” (Sky) is cordial and intimate. “Igwe” is also recognized as the “son of Chineke”. He is also known as the husband of “Ala” -Earth goddess. “Igwe” fertilizes his wife Ala through the rain. Igwe manifests his cosmic power and resentment through thunderbolts and lightnings. “Igwe” is Chineke's commissioner for crime detection (Uchendu 1965:97; Metuh 1981:41). On the relationship between Chukwu and Ala. The earth goddess is regarded as the sole daughter of Chineke, and wife of Anyanwu (Sun).

## **IGBO SOCIAL-CULTURAL AND MORAL VALUES**

### **Children in Igbo Land**

In Igbo land, wealth and children were considered in one way related. Children were more valued than money. This is expressed in the Igbo name as “Nwakaego” – meaning “Children are more precious than money”.

In the area of values, Igbo men and women are expected to have children, particularly male children. A barren woman is pitied and regarded as a failure. As Igbo kinship is patrilineal, relatives of the husband of a barren wife or a woman who has only daughters or whose children have died, encourage and expect the man to marry an additional wife, to ensure that his lineage continues. His wife would normally encourage him, because she too wants his line to continue. A childless woman is not directly ostracized. However, she is not appreciated as much as a mother is, since children, are a person's life insurance and the focus of one's life. Although loved and desired, children cannot trap a mother in a terribly unhappy marriage.

Despite, or because of, a mother's love, a difficult marriage can create an ambiguous attitude towards one's children, and by extension towards the goddess who grants children.

When there is a divorce, Children belong to the man in Igbo Land. Young adults stay with their fathers, while the bride price is returned to the man. In this way, the financial burden persuades the woman's family to discourage their daughter/sister from doing anything that would incur divorce. In general, among the Igbo, a woman with a large number of children is unlikely to follow the option of divorce when things go bad in the marriage. Childrearing among the Igbo is the primary concern of the woman and her mother. By puberty, sex typing with tasks, boundaries of behavior, and sex-role preferences emerge. The image of females as a nurturing agent is entrenched in the minds of the people (Kalu, 1992a)

### **Naming of the Newborn**

A major social practice among the Igbo is the ritual naming of the newborn. For an Igbo child, the ceremony of being named is the beginning point of being socialized into the membership of the community. Some of the names given to the child during such a ritual, such as Onwubiko (death, we implore you) bear testimony to the suffering and desperation experienced by the parents preceding the child's birth. Such names often help to make the child to resolve to acquire good decorum to avoid aggravating the pains already suffered by the parents before he or she was born. Furthermore, influenced by Igbo world-view, Igbo birth rites initiate sex-role orientation at an early age. The child is expected to model after the re-incarnated ancestor or deity represented by the godfather or godmother (the Onye-Uwa). People point to gestures, character traits, looks, and other signs to confirm that the child really is a reincarnation of a loved one or a deity. Thus, a middle-aged man may call a baby "grandfather" because he perceives the baby as a reincarnated grandfather. From birth, rites of passage are designed to celebrate and initiate the child into the family and community. The adage, there is no place like home, is very true of the Igbo. Deeply associated with strong kinship attachment are respect for human life and love of children. A few personal names here will clearly illustrate the Igbo attitude to the sanctity of human life and children.

- Onyegbule - Let no One commit murder
- Onyegbule onweya - Let no one commit suicide
- Ndubuisi - Life and health are a priority
- Ndukaku - Life is worth more than wealth
- Nwakaego - Children are worth more than money
- Nwabueze - Children are a royal gift money
- Ifeyinwa - Children are gifts without parallelor comparison
- Nwadinobi- Children are the longing of the heart.

All the above sayings and names are clear indications of deep respect for human life and of strong love of children. Among the Igbos the dignity of labor is positively appreciated as the key to self-liberation and realization. The Igbo are as industrious as the Germans. They know no midday sleep or siesta, except in hospitals, as often humorously remarked. The belief is very strong and abiding in Igbo culture that the true road to Success in life is through resourcefulness and diligent industry.

### **The Sense of Self-reliance and Self-achievement**

According to Iwe, the Igbo man craves for the liberty to achieve their chosen goals and thereby become self-reliant and self-dependent. After the attainment of maturity, one in Igbo community is expected to be enterprising, resourceful, full of initiatives, daring and adventuring. Any childish dependence on the family or parasitizing existence is frowned upon as unbecoming. This enterprising spirit of adventure for self-realization has taken the Igbo people to all corners of the World (Isichei 1976:200-225) (Iwe 2016: 240-241).

It is this spirit of self-reliance and self-achievement that has frequently driven the Igbo people to embark on a life of legitimate sojourn and adventure in quest of the Golden Fleece or self-realization. This explains the presence of the Igbo not only in all parts of Nigeria but also in all corners of the globe. (Iwe 2016: 240-241).

### **The Moral Heroes of the Ndi-igbo**

According to Mbefo (2001), four classes of people are recognized in Igbo world-view. These include **the Ekwueme**. These are those calibers of humans who accompany action with their words. They are reliable, trustworthy, and have won the respect of the community. A sub-group of the Ekwueme category of human beings belongs to those that can be referred to as the **Ome-Mgbe-Oji**. This refers to the careful and the humble that nevertheless act when they can make it. They are those who know their limit and act within their possibilities. The other group is the **Oji Onu Group**. This refers to the group of rhetoricians and boasters,

people who know how to manipulate and manufacture words to confuse their audiences. Their weakness is their inability to match words with action. They are therefore referred to contemptuously as the Oji Onu Egbu Oji or “those who fell the Iroko tree or build houses by the mouth alone”. They live extravagant lives and the life of pretensions. The fourth is the Akarogoli. These are the lazy and the immature adults. They say 'Yes' and 'No' to life at the same time and lose their bearing in the end, often ending up dying unsuccessful; and, at times, through careless living die bad deaths.

### **Gender In Igbo World-View**

Due to the predominant place occupied by male deities and male occupations in Igbo culture, the Igbo are a patriarchal people. In this way, women do not inherit land among the Igbo. A woman's male children in such cases inherit the land. In general, masculinity dominates the gender ideology among the Igbo. Males currently dogmatically pursue opportunities in the business world that do not require much academic training. Women cultivate cocoyam, cassava, vegetables and cereals. Although these products yield some monetary returns, they are less in value compared to yams, the principal crop cultivated by the males. In this way, at the social level, sex differentiation is enshrined by emphasis on deference to males. For this reason, among the Igbo, a woman cannot call her husband by his name: she addresses him by his social title or praise name. The Igbo are by character strong, tolerant, competitive and ultra-democratic, highly individualistic with an excessive penchant for achievement and egalitarianism (Ekwunife 1990). Among them enormous emphasis is placed on solid personal achievement that promotes the life of independence as one matures with age. Some prayers offered at most Igbo religious rituals are entered into to ensure that one progresses from the life of dependency of childhood to the independence and solvency of adulthood. Chieftaincy titles among the Igbo constitute a form of reward or social control model designed to support acceptable norms and values by rewarding those who have upheld them. Such titles or rewards make the

recipients advisers to the political leadership of the village. Among the Igbo, titles bring prestige. They also grant the title holder specific roles of legal and religious authority.

The position of women among the Igbo is moderated by two considerations. The first is age. After attaining the age of a grandmother, the female enjoys some of the exclusively male rights. In that way, when operating as a great grandmother, she can even upbraid a male of younger age in public without shocking the community. The second factor marriage. Being married is highly valued among the Igbo. Married women play a role in their patrilineages as lineage daughters (Okonjo, 1976; Allen, 1976; Mba, 1982).

### **Care for the Elderly**

Care for the aged is not institutionalized. Children are taken as the greatest insurance for old age. In this perspective, where the children succeed they are expected to look after their aged parents. In this process, the first sons and all daughters have a priority to take in, and look after their aged and ailing parents regardless of their family size. In traditional Igbo religious worship where their umbilical cords were buried. For this reason, Igbo civil servants who have attained the age of 70 and above prefer to go back to the village and await the journey into the ancestral world. In this way, Igbo cultural norms bind the society, and the village norm still dominates the attitudes of the people including the elites and the Christians among them. Those located in the sophisticated environments still cling to traditional customs and go home to their villages regularly for important functions, such as for naming, marriage, or burial ceremonies.

### **Death, Burial and Ancestors**

In Igbo world-view nobody of worth is to be buried like a dog without fanfare except for children without a name or those who committed abomination against the society before their death. In line with this ethos, the dead are usually accompanied by music and dance, and other rituals and transported to the

ancestors with canon shots and alarms to humans the otherworld (Mbefo, 2001). The understanding among the Igbo is that the noise of merry-making alerts the forebears of the coming of the dead person to meet and join them. It is believed that where this ceremony is omitted the dead man or woman goes half-way and would have to come back in visions as ghosts to disturb the living until such a time as they complete the send-off ceremony, namely, burial rites. Among the Igbo, aged parents often give the living instructions of how their burial should go while they are still alive.

Family and lineage elders among the Igbo are particularly concerned with maintaining the most cordial relationship with ancestral spirits through routine prayers and ritual offerings. In this context, the understanding is that a man's moral life is paramount in keeping the cosmic equilibrium. All norms of conduct, including taboos, even those that might be mechanical, are expected to be strictly complied with. In case of doubt about any infringement, the services of diviners are employed so that things could promptly be set aright. In this way, the prospects of death as involving opportunity for reunion with their friends and relatives tend to raise for the traditional aged Igbo, a feeling of enthusiasm and optimism, rather than fear and trembling.

### **Ancestors**

Ancestors according to Ezuji are classified as one of the most benign spiritual beings of the Igbo traditional Cosmology. They are the spirits of the forebears of particular kindred who though have departed this terrestrial life but having lived well, among the kinsmen, died at an old age, and given full burial rites are believed to be living in Underworld. They are often called the living dead and believed to form on community with their living members on earth. Thus, they are members of supersensible world and members of the physical world. They maintain life continuity in their families through cycles of reincarnation. They play mediatory roles for their living members. They are guardians of morality (Ezuji 1986: 140).

As Isichei explains:

The ancestors – those who live well-spent lives die in socially approved ways, and are given correct burial rites – live in one of those world of the dead, which mirror the world of the living. The living honors them with sacrifices. The ancestors watch over the living, and are periodically reincarnated among them...The unhappy spirits who die bad deaths, and lack burial rites, cannot return to the world of the living, or enter that of the dead. They wander homeless and dispossessed (1977:25).

The given citation points to the fact that life for the Igbo moves in a complimentary fashion. From conception, through birth, puberty and adulthood, to ripe old age, the Igbo are preoccupied with the optimal enhancement of their lives. In that way, a successful life here on earth is understood by them as a sure passport to gain one a good place among the ancestors – and important place of habitation in after life. The Igbo burial/funeral ceremonies are designed to accomplish the conferment to the dead the much needed passport for joining the company of the ancestors. The Igbo belief in the ancestors is a direct source of knowledge in their understanding of afterlife. It forms the fulcrum through which their eschatology could be derived. Life to them is a continuum.

### **Summary of Igbo belief Systems**

In Sum, from the review of the literature on African belief system and the place of the Almighty, it ought to be noted that the African traditional Religion (ATR) has no sacred scriptures, it has no founder and it is not missionary. But serious studies in the religion have recently developed and we can now boast of having a host of books on the subject of ATR. Even then, the studies have been largely carried out by sociologists, anthropologists and theologians who are “outsiders” to the Religion as either “non Africans” or Africans who are Christians and most times have very limited knowledge of the experiences of actual devotees of the religion. Consequently, the “authentic” source of information about the Religion is still embedded in oral tradition found in myths, rituals, folktales, proverbs et

cetera, and non-oral sources such as archaeological findings, African arts of painting, sculptures, music and dance (I.S. Aderibigbe).

In spite of the great achievements that have been attributed to the pervasive impact of Western Christianity, science and technology, together with Islam, yet belief in the supernatural power is still deeply rooted in African culture and many Africans of Igbo extraction, still retain beliefs and rituals that are characteristic of traditional African religions. For example the discovery of the **Okija shrine** in Anambra state, south east Nigeria, which was patronized by prominent politicians, Christians, and other groups seeking supernatural intervention in various endeavours, exemplifies the continued existence of beliefs in the efficacy of African religious practices among social groups (Ellis, 2008). Also, the popularity of Bakasi boys, a vigilante group noted for using charms to fish out criminals, and the rise of folk justice, may have evolved with the slow pace of the western judicial system and the belief that supernatural interventions can be used to arrest criminals believed to have evaded justice using spiritual powers (Smith, 2004; McCall, 2004).

#### **DIAGNOSIS AND THERAPY FOR CRISIS IN IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CULTURE (Etim E. Okon (2016) XXV-XXXV)**

In view of apparent decline in Igbo traditional Religion and Culture, the clamor for Igbo rebirth cannot be interpreted as agitation for the restoration of negative and atavistic values. Positively, it is a call for the restoration of authentic Igbo traditional religion, philosophy, culture, history, government, law, literature, music, drama, theatre et cetera. Culture viewed as the totality of the best that every society has produced, and the portrait of the human spirit in quest of progress and development, these must be protected from extinction.

Chinweizu an unrepentant apostle of Igbo Irredentism has diagnosed the crisis rocking the Igbo nation. He Said:

During the 20th century, the Igbo world was shaken to its foundations by a series of political and cultural earthquakes,

including being conquered militarily twice in seventy years. First, Ndigbo, unlike most of their neighbors in Nigeria, were conquered in detail, practically village by village, by repeated British military expeditions and patrols. Second, their spiritual order was attacked, root and branch, by Christian missionaries who conquered Igbo polytheism ... there came another military defeat, in the Nigerian civil war, which added a host of political, economic, cultural and social dislocation to those already inflicted by the British (2015:42-43).

Chinweizu noted that the three primary factors of cultural identity and social cohesion, that is, language, historical consciousness and national temperament have been severely damaged for Ndigbo to the extent that the loss of language, the decline in the quality of spoken Igbo, and poor literacy in Igbo does not disturb the Igbo elites and political class (Chinweizu 2015:43). Chinweizu summarized the state of Igbo nation as follow:

The weak historical consciousness among Ndigbo is due to a general ignorance of the things that connect us to our remote ancestral past... The Igbo national temperament, through the loss of the holistic cosmology and ideology that fostered it, has become dysfunctional. It has become hyper-individualistic, hyper-competitive, hyper-materialistic, and hyper-xenophile... The overall result is that Igbo society is on the brink of implosion. After all, what other prospect is there for a conquered people whose language is dying, whose historical consciousness is shallow, and whose national temperament has become dysfunctional (2015:43, 44).

Chinweizu proffered solution to heal the split, and fill the vacuum in Igbo soul:

The cultural sources of this self-defeating Igbo self-centeredness are probably linked to Ikengaism... Ikenga, I must emphasize, is by its nature a totally self-centered and individualistic spirit. It has become dominant and therefore anti-social in the 20th century Igbo society. As a result, it has become dangerous for Ndigbo: it dissolves the bonds within the Igbo community (2015:46).

Chinweizu has stated the problem, and offered a viable solution toward the healing of Igbo crisis. He has identified ignorance of Igbo traditional and cultural

history as the most negative phenomenon in contemporary Igbo society. It is near fatal for any people to forget their history. The principle of historicism shows that we need the knowledge of the past to guide us into the future. History is therefore both a road map, and a compass into the future. The mistakes and failures of the past must be investigated with historical rigor to avert a repetition. George Santayana informs us that “Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it” (qtd. in Rivera 2008:248). Arnold Toynbee tells us that we have a choice;

But we are not doomed to make history repeat itself; it is open to us, through our own efforts, to give history, in our case, some new and unprecedented turn. As human beings, we are endowed with this freedom of choice, and we cannot shuffle off our responsibility upon the shoulders of God or nature. We must shoulder it ourselves. It is up to us (Toynbee 1955:45).

Here we recall the counsel of Engels:

All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different formations of society must be examined in detail before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-law, aesthetic, philosophic, religious and others views corresponding to them (1982:393).

The present generation of Ndigbo must be inspired by the history, and labor of their past heroes and heroine. The ancient injunction “Man, know thyself” must be taken serious by Ndigbo. Igbo self-understanding is a *conditio-sine-qua-non* for survival in the Nigerian nation.

### **OMENALA AND DEVELOPMENT**

Omenala is Igbo word for tradition or compliance with the tradition and custom of the people. Igbo traditional principles and values can be applied to achieve development. Traditional religion can be a veritable platform for development. For the economist, development is synonymous with economic growth measured in aggregate terms. A comprehensive definition of development was given by Walter Rodney:

Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being.... The achievement of any of those aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole (Rodney 1972:9).

Luis Ramiro Beltran avers that:

National development is a directed and widely participatory process of deep and accelerated socio-political change geared towards producing substantial changes in the economy, the technology, the ecology and the overall culture of a country, so that the moral and material advancement of the majority of its population can be obtained within conditions of generalized equality, dignity, justice and liberty (Beltran 1974:11-27)

Development is not just a technical, non-social thing as scientism would have us believe. It is the sum total of all improvement within the socio-political and economic systems.

Development cannot thrive where there is social injustice. No matter the level of economic growth, society cannot achieve development except there is corporate peace and communal co-existence. The Igbo have been relegated to the background in terms of development. This is partly attributed to the negative impact of modernism which includes the rejection of traditional religion and values. Ogbu Kalu asserts, "There is a persistence of the traditional core amid change, however revolutionary the change may be. Elements of continuity exist amid discontinuities created by external change-agents" (1975:53-54). The sociologist, E. Shils has said that traditional values are not anti-development, and that in many places, traditions have become vehicles of modernization:

Traditions often possess sufficient ambiguity and hence flexibility to allow innovations to enter without severely disruptive consequences... patterns of traditional beliefs do not form such a rigorously unitary whole; some parts are more affirmative towards modernity, or at least less resistant towards innovation. Many traditional beliefs are not so much objects of

zealous devotion to symbols of the past as they are the resultants of a situation without alternatives (1970:404-405).

Ogbu Kalu has stressed the importance of traditional religion in national development:

The importance of African traditional religion in the modernization process is that it once propped up certain ethical values which could stabilize the gyrating moral system of our days. It is argued here that rapid process of modernization has thrown the value system into a spin (1980:316).

Fulton Sheen observes that:

Man, by attempting to exist apart from God or defiant of God has made the world as delirious as his own mind is neurotic. The crisis today is so deep in its causes that all social and political attempts to deal with it are bound to be as ineffective as talcum powder in curing jaundice. It is man who has to be remade first; then society will be remade by the restored new man... The constant refusal of man to allow a suprahistoric Divine Power to break into his closed mind is the pride which prepares catastrophe (Sheen 1954:244).

## **THE JAPANESE MODEL**

Godfrey Uzoigwe has recommended the Japanese model of development through the concept of Yamato damashii and karajie, which was Japanese reaction against the fascination of their society with Chinese values and civilization. Japan, *we know was a Chinese colony for centuries. 'Yamato damashii' connotes Japanese sense, while 'karajie' represents Chinese knowledge.* The triumph and ascendancy of Yamato damashii over karajie resulted in Japanese national consciousness which was later popularized not only to become kokutai (national entity) but was associated with kokugaku (national learning or movement). Kokugaku was a national self-understanding which culminated in the Shinto revivalism during the Tokugawa dynasty (1600-1868). Japanese religion Shintoism is life and earth affirming, with little interest in the

after-life. The essence of Shintoism is to sacralize the social and political system. The emergence of Japan as a leading world power with a buoyant economy can be attributed to a merger of tradition with 'techne' in the second half of the 20th century, precisely from 1868. Japan therefore, is a pre-modern society. *Uzoigwe asserts that "At no time did the Japanese sacrifice the humanities and the social sciences at the altar of science, technology and the professions"* (Uzoigwe 1989:20-21)

### **WHAT IS TO BE DONE**

Chinweizu rightly recommended the setting up of a special study of Igbo cultural heritage as a springboard for Igbo self-knowledge (2015:47, 48). There is urgent need for an interdisciplinary study of Igbo humanities and culture in all the universities in Igboland. Igbo studies should be anchored from a multidisciplinary perspective. Curriculum integration is necessary because of the growth of knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Jacobs 1989:3). It is strongly recommended that all governments in Igbo states should invest massively in cultural education as a strategy to achieve Igbo self-understanding in patriotism and national consciousness.

The obvious and historic symbiosis between education and culture led Babs Fafunwa to observe that "Education, whether modern or ancient, aims at perpetuating the culture of the society" (1982:48). B.O. Ukeje noted that "All through the ages, education has always been a process of passing on the group culture from one generation to the next (1979:371). P. O. Okunrotifa avers that 'things comprising the curriculum are always in every society, derived from culture; the traditional function of a school and therefore a curriculum has been the transmission of culture' (1983:163). Education is a platform for socialization and training for the: "conferment of moral, intellectual and manual skills on individuals as well as the transmission of same from generation to generation. "The function of education, therefore, whether formal or informal, is the transmission of culture" (Bello 1992:124).

Culture provides the content of the school curriculum. L. E. Amadi noted that "culture is an essential element in any school curriculum. The relationship between curriculum and the culture of the society that operates the school system determines the rate of development in any given direction" (1990:370). Amadi argues that the link between culture and curriculum can be seen in the cultural implications of educational aims and objectives. "The process of cultural transmission is a function of the curriculum of a school system. As much as curriculum remains, in part, a plan for action, it should necessarily include the cultural values of the society" (Amadi 1990:370).

Edet Okon and Alvin Anderson pointed to the fact that we the "primary relationships of schools and society is the function of the school as the primary agent for the transmission of the culture, folklore, knowledge, skills, attitude and appreciations deemed important by that society (1982:8). Ngwobia Uka is of the view that "the concept of culture focuses attention not only on the behavior of parents in training their children, but also on the cognitive map that influences the content of what is transmitted, the techniques employed in the transmission process, and the behavior of parents as role models" (1966:1).

The time has come for Ndigbo to look inward. There is urgent need to integrate Igbo traditional system of education with the Western model. Though informal without physical structures and written curricula, Igbo indigenous educational system was pivoted through the family, age grades, trade guilds and secret societies. It was largely participatory and knowledge was acquired through a learning-by-doing method which included ceremonies, rituals, initiation, recitation and demonstration" (Bello 1992:125). Fafunwa expatiates on the purpose of education in traditional African society:

Education was generally for an immediate induction into society and a preparation for adulthood. African education emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, political participation and spiritual and moral values. It combined physical training with

character-building and manual activity with intellectual training (1974:15, 16).

## **CONCLUSION**

The ongoing efforts towards the realization of Igbo renaissance should lead scholars to resonate on the value of culture, education and the curriculum as the springboard for socialization. It is culture that helps an individual to identify with the society. Despite the overwhelming negative impact of westernization and modernization in Igboland, the traditional society has survived the onslaught and that is the more reason why urgent decision must be taken to integrate the good elements in the old with all the positive dimensions of the new.

The making of patriotic citizens and the promotion of Igbo national consciousness cannot succeed without appropriate civic and moral education. When the religio-moral dimension of nation building is neglected, society will have no basis for social integration and solidarity.

Furley and Watson sums it up "The task of the educator in modern Africa is to blend, by careful selection, the old and the new, to the betterment of the rising generations and the betterment of their world" (1978:27). The eminent scholar, Ali Mazrui in his *Cultural Engineering and Nation Building in East Africa* has aptly described the challenge before the African scholar as fourfold: how to indigenize what was foreign; how to idealize what was indigenous; how to nationalize what was sectional or ethnic and how to emphasize what was African (1972:88). Implicit in Mazrui's analysis is the goal to "ancientize and modernize".

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