

## **The African Factor in the Anthology of Priesthood in Igbo Tradition**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper explains factors that determine the character of Africa from Igbo traditional perspectives using research works and Oral interviews of priests from various local shrines as its anthropological study. The paper also portrays mechanism through which African judicial, legislative, political and metaphysical ways of life are practiced (as reverence is showed towards the “sacred” in connection with priestly involvement in African system of life). It also shows methods that characterize the practices as African. Through the theory of *Tradition Ability* the paper defines challenges facing African tradition in our present contemporary society and develops diplomatic mechanism through which it can survive and be restructured to maintain its original identity in our modern pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Priest, African Priest, Traditional Priesthood, African Religion, Indigenous Priest

### **Introduction**

There is global perspective of Africa as a vast continent encompassing tremendous cultural diversity, and as a depressed society with archaic concept of mixed economic system, radical practice of apolitical tradition for governance, and synthesized cultural system of life due to African unbiased reception to the ideology of the colonial forces. Some Western critics understand African societies as a “dark continent” with a third world democratic system of government facing competitive challenges of surviving with its mixed economic system pronounced with corruption in the administrative system, and the presence of endemic cultural barriers.

Originally, the practice of African tradition is a reflection of African ethno-philosophical worldviews were cultural practices remain applicable with the ethnic group and it concerns itself with the way in which the Africans of the past and presence make sense of their destiny and of the world in which they live (K.C. Anyanwu 1981). By this analysis, African philosophy is reflected on its political system and the leadership in the administration of their duties towards their citizens for their moral blameworthiness or praiseworthiness. As evolved culture diffused from diverse traditional practices, it also reflects African perception of personhood, and human capital development from

spirituality dimension and metaphysical reality of life, judicial and legislative roles. They also use methods that distinctively characterize them as African.

The method through which Igbos of west Africa express their concept of life is *Odinani*; a traditional system where a priest plays integral role that reflect the facet of African life as opposed to both democratic system of Government as a political ideology of the west and global culture that defines human social-economic and socio-cultural system of life. *Odinani* is a long cultural practice that has forged some fundamental commonalities among traditions within Aro, Eri, Nri and some present clans of Igbo communities thereby allowing some generalization to be made about the distinguishing features of Igbo tradition. From African perspective, *Odinani* is fixed and unchanging like traditional discrimination of Osu caste system despite the cultural diffusion of global culture and western tradition. It exhibits both continuity with the past and innovation and can be modernized to reflect the trends of modernity

The possibility of an indigenous tradition and religion to exist without priestly services in African culture is not clearly certain. In African tradition; priests of different shrines dedicated to various deities are the most important religious specialists in Igbo traditional society (Turner 1968) because of their multiple roles in different cultural context. They play roles as diviners, medicine men, and sometimes “as eye of the gods”, mediators between man and spirits of the ethereal world through various oracles in Igbo mythology, and their functions and works defers according to the particular deity they serve. Vocation to the Igbo traditional priesthood is thus a special and unique process (Okechukwu 2016) for its work requires the knowledge of spiritual, intellectual, cultural and social foundation on which the Igbo society was built and knowledge in the spiritual and temporal realms was almost exclusively confined to this sacred institution.

Shrines mean sites where oracles are located and may be accessed and house deities. In these shrines, deities are consulted through forms of ritual with appropriate rites of passage to each. Mainly at shrines, devotion is paid to a deity, or saint. Saint is used here to show that to graduate to the level of deity, the extra-human force or spirit must prove itself in terms of genuine functions and service to the community. But in the faith and hierarchy of the orthodox Christian church like the Catholic church, saints are Christian lived-faith figures revered but before a dead person becomes a saint, prove is gradually assessed and authenticated. Likewise, the traditional manner of consultation and petition in worship and healing is correlated to this mechanism of power and belief, or do we say has been copied or acculturated by Christianity?

Deities are extra-human or supernatural forces without human bodies. Images are used to represent such deital forces. Such images or symbols may be dead or alive objects of power. Trees, rivers, mountains, hills, valleys, stones, and so on, in most part consist in these. Writing on shrines and oracles, Iroegbu (2002) explained that they are places of consultation with esteemed extra-human forces to answer un-answerable questions in order to allay fear and provide a way out to resolve problems, be they economic, political, religious, kinship, theft, killing, accusations, power seeking, and all that require supernatural insight and competencies. Shrines are cogent communal and awesome traditional institutionalized spaces and sites of consultation and rituals. Shrines are rational healing sites and as well bring people and feared reliable cultural forces into contact to solve difficult problems in culturally patterned ritual ways. It works for those

whose belief in them and therefore flourishes in the practices of the daily life and communal fundamentals.

With the involvement of the priests in African tradition, two factors enhanced their state and role among the Igbos. In the first place, it was a traditional belief that the Igbo society is not centrally organized. The largest political group is the village group made up of a group of segmentary lineages and kindred. There can be maintenance of cohesion by interest in a common land area, common strives, a central market, and belief that they descended from a common ancestors (Forde and Jones 1950). On the other hand, with the roles of the priest in initiation of members into Okonko society, Elizabeth Isichei (1977) maintained that the Okonko society contained a number of important executives and judicial functions and remained widespread among the southern Igbo. Here, the traditional secret society tried to maintain a central government because the society consisted of a number of hierarchical grades which gave political power and social distinction to the prosperous, like the title system elsewhere in Igbo land as means of influencing control throughout Igbo Land (Isichei 1977 p. 91). Secondly, Igbo world-view is characterized by a multiplicity of divine beings who underpin every aspect of life. In the absence of a strong political authority, the statutes and roles of religious specialist are not limited to the religious sphere, but also include important social and political functions and influences. The objectives of this article is to show factors that make African unique characterized by the diverse roles of priests in Igbo society using anthological studies of Igbo oriented priesthood from different sources. Using the theory of tradition ability, It shows mechanism through which African tradition survives, and also pinpoints hindering factors that could affect its growth and development in our globalized society.

### **Priest and Their Roles; Anthological Approach**

The anthological approach employed for this academic research work requires collection of works from different sources. The first source details priestly roles from documented researched works which characterizes the objective view of the researchers as “outsider”, and the second speak much of the “insider’s” perspective as the works were collected from oral interview of two priests who served in different culturally oriented clans in Igbo Society. The anthological studies create disparity between the insiders vs. Outsider’s approach for contextual balance of judgment in drawing conclusion in the scientific study of African tradition from phenomenological approach. African tradition has been studied through various dimensions which in one hand create principles that cause controversy in categorizing priestly roles from different clans of Igbo race as one. On the other hand, it subject priesthood to further inquiry as a new venture of social sciences and Humanities. The employment of “Neutrality” and “Objectivity” determine the paradigm context for developing the principles for better explanation of phenomena involve in African tradition, and barricade philosophical, metaphysical and mythical barriers which can bias deductive conclusion in the study of tradition with complex syncretic ideas. From the above analysis, the first priest is the *Family Priest* i.e. the “Okpara” (first son) who is the eldest male of the senior lineage in the smallest social group in the Igbo social structure. His duties include a religious role of regular pouring of libation and prayers to the ancestors on behalf of the *Umunna* every morning at the shrines. Sacrifices are made to them every four days of the Igbo week and sometimes at the annual festival of the

ancestors- Alommmuo. With the ancestral cult staff he participates in settling disputes among the members of the group and assumes several custodian roles with its like oath swearing, blessing, and placing curse. He can control land and has right to play from it as the Okpara of the *Umunna* represents the group socially and politically in their dealings with outside.

The second priestly service entails the service of the *priest of spirit* cult known as *Isi mmuo*. The priest plays roles in spirits cult (not deity) that are set up by the ancestor and men at different times (Onwuejeogwu 1987), and according to Arinze, they go by different names (Arinze 1970). As attached with deities his name will also be identified with the deity worshipped or whose shrine he is in charge of. For instance, there are *isi Edo* (priest of Edo), priest of *Amadioha* and above all the *Isi mmuo* who take charge of the village spirit shrines, and the priest of earth-Mother known as “*Ezeala*” I.e. The priests of *Ala* who enjoys status higher than that of priest of other cult because the *Ala* is the custodian of tradition and custom which regulate the cult of the other deities and spirit. So his priest exercises the role with the regard to their cult. In the whole of *Igbo* land the *EzeNri* was the foremost priest of the *al* cult and possibly exercises the priestly role for a large section of *Igbo* communities. The *isimmuo* was regarded as the heads of spirit-cult who take charge of the village spirit shrines. The third type of priest in *Igbo* Tradition is the *Eze-ala*. Here, his role becomes significant in *Igbo* society where there is chiefless clan and as such the priest’s role have the effective equivalent of a political leader. The candidate for the office is selected from the senior lineage among the first settlers of the land through the spiritual manifestation he will encounter as the earth-mother’s call from special signs which can be confirmed by divination,. By virtues of supremacy, the earth-mother is the spirit next in rank to the supreme being and as the queen of the underworld, she is the source and custodian of tradition (*omenala*) where laws and oaths are made and sworn by her name (meek 1939) as she manifest in several ways to her priest. For instance, the priest of *Awka* Oracle explained that he got his call in a dream in which the earth –mother came to him and said “I am hungry; I have come to you to provide for me. If you fail, I will punish you (Thomas 1914). The initiation rites of *Ezeala* always involves elaborated rituals that may cost up to twenty cows in some instances which last several months. One can be sacrificed at the shrine of each of the important deities and spirits in the town and other sacrifices will be made to ancestors who were *Eze*. At the end of the ceremonial rituals, the presiding *Nri* priest tied ankle cord on his ankles and the initiate assumes his role

The Fourth is the *Eze-Nri*. Here the *Nri* people refer the priest as a god discovered by *Chukwu* (the biggest god) under the direction of the spirit of *Eri* (the mythical ancestor). In support of this, Thomas (1914) stated;

*“ he is the spiritual potentate over a large extent of the Ibo country, and so great is the awe which he inspire that recently, when, probably for the first time in history an Ezenri enter the native court of Awka, while a sitting was going on, the whole assembly rose and prepared to flee.”*(p.48).

*Eze-Nri*’s genuine calls for priest service are confirmed by divination and since he is regarded as a god, his initiation ceremonies are more elaborate than those of the *Eze-Ala* (Jeffery 1935), and does not administer and any territory and not perform sacrifices as described further by Thomas (1914)’

*“an important function that he fulfilled was to vary or abolish the NsoAni by Means of sacrifices. The sacrifice was not performed by the Ezenri himself but in Agukwu by the Ezeana in the Presence of the Ezenri. In other places by an Nri man or by the Ezeana in the presence of Nri Man.”* (p. 52)

Nri priest also promote the growth of preparing medicine for yams and securing an abundance of Palm wine, especially on special ceremonies. As a god he confers ofor and ankle cord to candidate of the Ezeala and the Ozo(chieftaincy titles) for Nri priesthood who sometimes can travel through different Igbo communities to provide these services and to perform sacrifices to establish, abrogate, sacred prohibitions to clean pollution arising from their branch. Thus Leonard (1906) stated;

*“Just as the first born, by virtue of his birth becomes the priest, so the Nri family, for the same sacred reason, are not only the progenitors but the priest of the whole Ibo race, and as such, high priest, taking precedence of all other fraternities- priestly, social, and political.”* (p. 35)

The Nri priests were at it's the Levite of the people who dwell in these part, in fact , their influence extends to Igara and all the kings and chiefs of this way are crowned or consecrated by them (Perry 1880).

The second study involves a face to face interview with two different priests who served in different capacities in two different communities within the same Igbo tradition. Here, the first is the interview with the Uwaga-Okeanya of Ogbodummu Umuopkara (isichie 1977). Priest of Okonko society took major role in the initiation of a new member into the full membership of Okonko society. In 1972 an aged (90 years) Uwaga Okeanya of OgbodummuUmuopkara (Isichie 1977) served as priest of the traditional system of government. According to him, the rites are performed at midnight when it is believed that the atmosphere has been charged. During the initiation the initiate will be surrounded by the old members, and a palm frond will be placed between his lips top enforce silence. He will be taunted and molested by the initiators. The priest's role will be to reveal seven secrets to him to be kept silent. He will be paraded round the village after which he will come back to the Okonko base to stream through the “Ida Iyi” ceremony. He will remain two weeks in hiding before he comes out. The initiation must have been done after he must have offer a he goat, seven eggs, white cock, ten larger yams and one alligator pepper. With this sacrificial and food items the chief priest prepare yam in ahot pepper soup to be partaken by every member of the Okonko society. The full initiation requires becoming an ezumezu (Isichei 1977) i.e. been fully initiated into the three stages namely Akans, Mboko and Ekpe of Okonko society.

The second is the interview with the Priest of Araba Shrine according to Boi Adagbon from Ikeze, Mbiri, by S. Ukala of Mbiri (A research assistant in the project financed by the south Eastern Nigerian history scheme, 1975). The Araba shrine functions as law court where cases are brought for judgment before Araba. According to Adagbon, the priestly service is chosen by Araba (the deity herself) through certain violent changes that would occur and require the “answer” to the spirit's voice. The spirit's voice could occur in the dream or in any form like a block of stone. From Adagbon's spiritual experience, the stone, when taken to Udegbe's home and to his people declared that it was Araba the goddess. Since her declaration, the entire community started worshiping her. Araba has been served by the successive chief priest prior to Adagbon namely Udegbe, Imuze, Ogboin, Efagwu, and Adagbon before Bio Adagbon. As stone the Araba is worshipped

and through it sacrifices are made for consultation. And in her physical manifestations, several people mostly women have claimed they have seen her in different manifestations, especially in a form of a beautiful woman with a white hand-woven cloth around her waist. In a year, the Arab is worshiped time without number in the shrine by the priest. Once a year, the chief priest visit the shrine after harvest during which sacrifices are made by the priest for five days. On the thirteenth day, the chief priest visit "ugboko" Araba with a large devotees and admirers who accompany him with loud singing and heavy drumming. He will be carried shoulder high or heavily flanked by strong priests and doctors to the water where they make sacrifices and throw certain sacrificial items into the water. Then the chief priest enters inside the water and "vanish out of sight" to bring home messages such as directives to the town on what to do to avert certain calamities. On the fourth and fifth day, there will be a lot of dancing and feasting.

### **Ordination or Recruitment?**

In Igbo tradition there is no official training institution for recruited priest. The prospective candidate learns by observation which correlates with the pattern of succession. As the priest ages, he chooses as an assistant a son or perhaps a close relative who has interest and had been initiated into the cult and by virtue of Igbo theology, the chosen "will be called by the deity for the priestly service." As a son is chosen by his father or drawn by a member of a particular lineage, the priesthood can be said to be hereditary. But most a times the succession passes to the next or most senior male member of the deceased priest's lineage. In Igbo mythology the deity, for example in Ezeala and the Ezenri (priests of mother earth and King respectively), chose her priest through indications given in dream, apparitions, mysterious events, divinations, and sometimes a combination of those supernatural events. For example, in Nsukka clan, the Attamapriest of Ngwumadashe spirit explained how he was recruited as priest of the Ngwumadashe spirit shrine (Shelton, 1971);

*"When I was born after the death of my grandfather, who was the last Attama, they (member of his kindred) said that I must be the attama, and I made the sacrifice"* (p. 133)

Sometime succession is made from grandfather to grandson and by members of the kindred. For instance, in the case of Araba priest in the ika area of the western Igbo, the succession pattern is different from that of the case of Attama. In the case of Nsukka Attama, the kinsmen mandated who will be the servant but in the case of Araba cult, the deity chooses for herself who will be her chief priests through various supernatural occurrences, according to culture, that will manifest in certain violent changes in the life of the selected. Again the chosen will hear spirit's voices and sometime receives his own call through a series of dream (Isichie 1978). In the strict sense, an Igbo deity does not have more than one priest at a time but a single priest through succession or replacement as explained above. But after the death of an incumbent an interregnum ensue which may last from a few months to a year, before a successor will be chosen and installed through initiation rites that usually take place at the shrine. During the initiation rite there will be the performance of libation and sacrifices, handing over of the cult object, after which will end with a feast to entertain the priests and his relative (Arinze 1970)

## African Factors

Expressions of culture are abundant within Africa, with large amounts of cultural diversity being found not only across different countries but also within ethnic tribes of a single country. With the roles of traditional Priests, African culture is expressed in its religion, politics, and socio-cultural ways of life (Tajudeen Abdul Raheem 1996). When closely studied, African tradition seems to have many similarities despite the differences that occur within the ethnic groups. For example, the morals they uphold through cultural norms, their love and respect for their culture as well as the strong respect they hold for the aged and the important i.e. Kings and Chiefs are similar in Nri Kingdom, Aro Clan and other clan of Igbo society. The survival of African tradition can be portrayed in Its *ability* to adapt to the ever-changing modern world rather than staying rooted to their static culture. The Westernized few, persuaded by European culture and Christianity, first denied African traditional culture most especially through the destruction of traditional shrines which decline priestly vocational profession, but with the increase of African nationalism, a cultural recovery has occurred through the involvement of African governments with various programs developed to facilitate cultural practices and preservation for cultural heritage; the Government encourages national dance and music groups, establishment of museums, public Lectures like Ahia-Ajoku Lectures of Imo State Government in Nigeria, and to a lower degree encourage African oriented Artistic works with artists and writers. With the diverse roles of the priest in African tradition, African factor is identified with the following:

### 1. Judicial System

African tradition exists with sense of justice which is a cardinal pillar of Igbo judicial and legal system. It guides Igbo man to the state of oughthness. And be founded on restitution. Justice is retributive in *Ofo and Ogu* form which indicates an innocent who is wrongly accused and is practiced with the use of professing innocence when coupled with libation. The judicial system is operated via the traditional courts of elders [Egwugwu] who with the assistance of the priest can consult with the gods for establishment of punishment once a guilty verdict had been reached depending on the spirit used and the deity consulted. With the administration of “*audi alteram partem*” principle, trials will be conducted in open place with both parties undertaking oath before the deities especially in the court of Amadioha oracle.

Sometimes a complex justice system can be used with the same role of Egwugwu with but comprises of prominent citizens of the village. The masks are worn as a representation of the gods of the ancestors of the community who will pass judgment upon the accused. Judgment is obtained in private and public after the private decision of the judges and consultations. Based on the degree of the offence, there will be compensation or a melted punishment which in serious offence results to execution, banishment, or permanent exile. By restitution compensation is required either in some cases perpetrator’s land or property or “*a life for a life*” justice system as in the case of the Jewish “*eye for eye and tooth for tooth*” traditional practice. Laws are prescribed by the elders or from the gods to give a sense of sanity and reverence to certain things in the community and to abhor forbidden things that defile sacred nature or protect the indigenes from the wrath of the gods or elders. In more complex situation, a visit to oracle is needed which requires

divinatory inquiry via the assistance of a priest like the priest of Kamalu Ozuzu oracle, Nneche Oracle or Aniagu-Ububa Shrine [Ezedike 2011]

## 2. Politics (Government of Okonkon Society)

With the roles of traditional Priests, African political system contrasts the Western Political ideology of Governance and Public administration. With the proverb “*Eze no nanchi*” some clans in Igbo society had kings called Obi, and places like the Nri Kingdom and Arochukwu, which had priest kings. In Eri and ancient Nri kingdom, each king traces his origin back to the founding ancestor, Eri and serves as is a ritual reproduction of Eri. The initiation rite of a new king shows that the ritual process of becoming Ezenri (Nri priest-king) follows closely the path traced by the hero in establishing the Nri kingdom. (Elochukwu Uzukwu,1997). But with the slogan “*Igboenweghi-Eze*”, Igbo political organization was based on a quasi-democratic system of government with republicans. In tight knit communities, this system guaranteed its citizens equality, as opposed to a feudalist system with a king ruling over subjects (Furniss, Gunners 1995). This government system was witnessed by the Portuguese who first arrived and met with the Igbo people in the 15th century (Chigere and Nkem 2001). Generally, Igbo communities and area governments were overwhelmingly ruled solely by a republican consultative assembly of the common people, and these communities were usually governed and administered by a council of elders along with Priests like that of the Okonko society (Gordon 2003). The Igbo’s are staunch advocates of the government operating without a Monarch or dictatorship thus republicans because absolute rulership is not found in Igbo’s political ideology and by political structure, Igbo government is a quasi-participatory democratic system that operates a decentralized political system which entails consensual nature of decision making in the area of resource allocation and law-making thus an inter-play of *politics and law* operating with different political institution that composes of the Offor title holder (council or Elders), the Ozo title holders (the politicians), and the Age grade (Abiola 1984). Age-grade is structurally made up of elders, youth and children, and exist based on philosophy of linkages and relationships of past, present and future. The elders represent the past, the youth present and the children born and unborn, the future. Elders die to become ancestors to whom sacrifices are made. Youths become elders and children become youth. By this dynamism the future is transformed culturally into the present and the present into the past and the Past into the future and thus the movement continuous as a structural mechanism which barricades generation gap and replication of metamorphosed culture but enhance the consolidation of practical approached developed for cultural heritage.

The Igbo democracy reflects the deference paid to age and experience, and the respect paid to wealth, which could be institutionalized in different ways; like the purchase of titles. The political institutions, in its different forms, give form of political weight to different sections of the community. In ancient Naze village democracy, elders play the dominant role along with the wealthy who sustain the community’s financial responsibility like war, patronage and protection to travelling traders. As Europe interprets every extension of democracy as a form of progress, the weight of wealth and experiences of Igbo government gave its citizen more participation in the process of making decision than is possible in any western-style democracy.



With the establishment of Okonko secret society, executive and judicial function becomes important. The system of governance became wide spread among the southern Igbo's and operated with the extinction of other secret societies, secret organization and secret information. It consisted of a number of hierarchal grades; access that can be obtained by an ascending scale of payment. The higher grades gain political power and social destruction to the prosperous, like the title system in other class.

### 3. African Religion

As part of tradition life of indigenous Africans, Religion is fixed as in "odinani" of Igbo tradition and remains unchanged with pantentheistic belief system. It exhibits continuity, spirituality, metaphysical understanding of the world around us and the mythical realities which enhances its metaphorical and metamorphic innovation. With its philosophy of "wholeness", African traditional religion is concerned with supporting fecundity and sustaining the community. It emphasizes maintaining a harmonious relationship with the divine powers with the cosmos, and its ritual harness cosmic powers and channel them for the good because ritual practices serves as a channel for negotiating a responsible relationship within the community and within the community and with the ancestors, the spiritual forces within nation, and the gods being panentheistic i.e. immanent and transcendent. The Igbo's concept of chi (gods) is a single God existing with a pantheon of spirits which been lesser expressly serve as elements of the God (Chukwu). These spirits exist by representation of natural forces or "agbara" as divine force with manifestation of "Alusi" (in Igbo pantheon) that are mediated by priest or "Dibia" through divination or "afa" and in return to the community which they represents communicate the laws and demands of the *Alusi*. Significant in African religion is the beliefs in mystic power, because man is sensibly conscious of the activities of powers around him and has also refused to be persuaded that they are imaginary. According to Westerman (1937);

*"The enemies of African's life are many; he is surrounded by a host of malevolent beings and is almost consistently engaged in warding off the dangers from threatening them..... in his view of the world, there is little room for national happenings or inevitable laws, ever event in which he is affected and which disturbs his life is caused by an agent, which may be stronger than himself, but is a personal being like himself, a personal enemy full or spite and renegefulness and it is a natural that he should try to protect himself against him it is a fight not against something but against somebody, nothing the first instance against illness but against him who caused the illness."* [pp. 76A]

Paramount to African religious belief is system the belief of reincarnation. The Igbo knows that life is not inevitable and a death does not write finis to life. Man is composed of body which is physical and tangible as well as soul which is intangible and indestructible thus *immortal*. The belief is demonstrated in the way Igbo people treats corpses and the funeral ceremonies accorded the deceased; they are washed, dressed in beautiful and clean clothes and be buried in graves within the family compound with the view that the departed is still part of the living members of the extended family, and then spirits can be evoked at will. As a living dead, they serve ancestors who commune and communicate through the priest to the living messages on the affairs of the communities and its members, thus constitute a factor of cohesion. Till date, belief in deities and spirits

is still strong among Igbo ethnic group in West African and a number of festival in memory of the deities and the ancestors have not reduced with time.

The practice of divinations is also persistent which involve consulting oracles to ascertain the future with regard to “*man*” and to those close to them there is also continuity of magic and medicine which involve the use of incantations and magical words with the look of things, there are rewarding exercise African characteristic which attract indigenous worshippers to foreign religion; persistent apocalyptic view of life ,death, creation, natural phenomenon as great human concerns and provide emotion and psychological easement via redeeming features or future event, sincerity of worship, devotion of worshippers, the offerings of extensors prayer which speak to the situation, the drumming, the song with enchantment clapping of hands and dancing on festival occasion which brings life and joy to worshippers, the system of seeking practical solution to immediate problem and feast during religious celebration.

These are the factors of religious positivity which can be singled out and nurtured as a restructured tradition of African (Idowu, 1962).

#### 4. Vocational Profession

Craftsmanship is significant with pre-colonial African society prior to the advent of western scientific method. Generally, the available source materials suggest that in Western Igbo land, Land was more abundant than in the East, and that hence communities depend more on farming and less on trade and other forms of production. Textile manufacturer has high degree of excellence and other skills such as metal working, and calabash carving is also found along with cloth that was made of tree bark through local hand woven techniques. The weavers weaved the cloths from cotton plants of *nkpulu Olulu* harvested during dry season and spun into thread, the later woven into cloths. *Ufa plant* was also used. It barks contained fabric like materials out of which thread for weaving cloth could be made. When collected, they will be split, soaked to remove the waste, boiled and finally dried in the sun. The weavers produced from the materials long white threads in arranged bundles that will be weaved into white cloths or died with red or black ink through spinning. Sometimes the end product of young leaves of plant, *Ububa Ukpukpa*, could be used to produce red liquid which were used to make red design on the cloth. Sometimes the *akonogbe* tree will be used. The bark will be cut and soaked in water which turned red for dyeing of the thread for making black design on cloth.

Blacksmith from the beginning was African system of producing metal and iron object for war, agricultural use, house hold chores and other social activities like gong for masquerade dance with the use of *ona*[iron bars] in Igbo tradition. Axes, iron pots, knives, cutlasses, keys etc. are manufactured. As a profession embraced by the Igbos, it became a significant practice of the Awka people as attested and recorded by North Cole Thomas, and G.T. Basben, missionary who wrote account in connection with Agbala Oracle and the title structure, but gave very little information about the blacksmithing industry. Jaffie in his unpublished article – Intelligent Report- presented in 1932 gave versions of Awka tradition in connection with the Iron ore manufacturing process. He found several versions of tradition concerning the origin of black smiting but in relation to shrine worship which involved priestly roles.

Practically, blacksmith is done with raw iron ore which is mined locally from a site [Amaji]. The iron is melted locally in a locally made smelting furnace –ikishi- a tall oven reading up to a height of 6ft and tapping at its top, with a lease that has a wide circumference. The furnace is built of mud and at the lease was an outlet through which the smelted iron ore flowed out. There are two pairs of bellows attached to the furnace at opposite ends near the base. Usually the iron ore is dropped into the furnace together with a large quantity of charcoal as the bellows are blown for a period of up to two hours or more the intense heat generated would melt the iron ore, leaving the pure iron to flow out from the furnace via the outlet provided. It is usually red hot initially and after many hours it cools and solidifies into ordinary iron assuming a black color. The iron obtained via the smelting process was then taken to a smaller ikishi in the blacksmith's workshop where it was utilized in fashioning any item the smith desired. This lucrative profession was guarded jealously and toured extensively across the boundaries of Igbo society reaching even Cameroon.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the system of blacksmith practice with its organization was breaking down. Its craft knowledge spread from Awka to neighboring villages of Amikwo. With their passionate interest on past, blacksmith profession provided in the heart of African man a lively intelligence, a welcoming charm, an impassioned local patriotism and split of vocational skills to an eager interest in local training.

### **Challenges Facing African Tradition in Competitive Society**

The search for survival of African tradition in this present contemporary society is quite essential, and should be the responsibility of the Governments of African countries, growing elites who have cultural orientation of African indigeneity, adherents of the principal traditions in different ethnic tribes of African to adopt a diplomatic and schematized approach, underlined by understanding sympathy and tolerance, which could ensure the possibility of sliding and practicing African ethno-traditions in the nucleus of a modernization process which will not only launch most traditions like New Yam Festival and Masquerade dance into a more dynamic and prestigious future (Garba Ashiwaju 1989), but ensure retaining the identity of the indigenous tradition and show its ability to adapt, develop, grow, and be restructured to ensure cultural heritage.

Currently, African tradition is on the verge of structural and functional degeneration due to the effect of cultured orientation from the colonialist, inability to repulse the diffused global culture through communist mechanism, and facing the competition of foreign religion both within the African continent and trans-continental environment. For instance, prior to 1972 the tradition of Okonko society in South Eastern Nigeria was maligned by Christianity, jettisoned to demote it to uncivilized level; the Ojam Traditional practices which comprises of *Njoku Offor* and *Iyi Afoor* were destroyed. In fact, when the members of the Faith Tabernacle Church reached their peak of Fanaticism in 1950, they gathered women and initiates and revealed the secret practices of Okonko society to them, which the uninitiated male sons and women are unaware of, because no matter how wealthy and influential the uninitiated is the secret of Okonko society are denied the person. (Samuel Onyeokon 1973). With the destruction of Okonko Tradition in Igbo land, the loss of African Quasi system of Governance with priestly supervision

became evident, thus allowing the Western public administrative system of Democracy to dominate with the influx of western political ideology.

The survival of Igbo tradition hinges on its “*natural ability*” and the ability of African tradition to survive in this post-colonial era is based on the theory of *Tradition Ability* which is the *structural and functional mechanism through which tradition grows, develops and adapts to survive in competitive pluralistic societies to prevent diffusion of global culture and the competitive force of humanistic ideologies that conflict the tenets of culturally oriented tradition*. By this analysis, tradition survives through three phases namely; Growth Ability, Adaption Ability and Stability Ability. **Growth Ability** entails the “psychic unity of the Mankind”. Here, tradition grows through evolution from simpler towards complex and different types. According to Morgan (1993) human society evolved from lower into higher types through three developmental stages namely the older period characterized by presence of primitivity and barbarism, the Middle period marked by domestication of animals and civilization of plants by irrigation, and the Later period which starts with the process of smelting iron ore and tools and identified with the invention of alphabet and writing. By this process, Igbo tradition evolved through the three stages of cultural evolution ( from the age of primitivity and Barbarism when the concept of Igbo society was filled with the mythical ideologies coupled with the aggression of human slave trade to a period when Agriculture was a fundamental source of economic development) but colonialism bridged the evolution development of the later stage of Igbo civilization with the loss of original alphabetical symbols, modified thought patterns and writing. **Adaptation Ability** is another challenge facing African Tradition in modern pluralistic society. According to Franz Boas (2006), cultural system can to a certain extent fit the living conditions of their transmitters, and should have at its disposal the potential necessary for the achievement of its adaptive effects in new conditions. Going by this analysis, Igbo tradition was characterized with the specific capacity to overcome changes of their natural and social environment by modifications to the African tradition. Initially, the tradition fits the living condition of pre-colonial era but to some extent conflicts various established global traditions in post-Colonial African society like the issues of Gender Equality and Female Genital mutilation. The scale of change of Igbo tradition depends on the extent of the ancestral changes across the colonial eras. It also varies from slight modification in livelihood system to principal transformation of the whole tradition system like social activity, ethics, psychological and ideological spheres. By this analysis, post-colonial influence drives many forces that make the environment inadaptable for Igbo tradition by enhancing the influx of global culture, foreign Religion and western tradition etc into African societies. It caused loss of potentialities of Igbo tradition due to the fanatical suppression , forced acculturation of western tradition and re-orientation of Igbo man by the westerners against his tradition In **Stability Ability**, tradition can be inherently stable, and when built upon thoughts and assumptions it can be taken for granted. Stability Ability is the ability of a tradition to remain unchanged over time under stated reasonably expected conditions of storage and use. It also entails mechanism through which the identity of tradition is maintained and its practices are performed without relapse to environmental constraints with the ability of resisting change penetrating from multiple positions. Igbo tradition was stabled prior to colonial Era due to the static nature of its traditional practices caused by the belief attitude of dogmatism and orientation of the ancient ancestors of Igbo Civilization and the strict

maintenance of law and Order. For instance, the concept- “*odinani is odinani*”- still plays integral role in influencing modern Igbo man to be committed to Igbo tradition in raw form but the belief in global culture has indoctrinated Igbo man into a complex system of life that has been hybridized from colonial to post-colonial era. Generally, African tradition cannot cut across the colonial era without getting diluted en route partly by getting associated and mixed up with foreign features (Clark Wissler). In each of the tradition of the local Igbo clan, there is certain set of culture complexes a central point of dispersal could be local and boundaries fixed when the culture complexes involved becomes most diluted and the influence of a vague but distinctly alien culture is felt. With the constant dilution of foreign culture in African society, Igbo tradition is still facing the challenges of ability to stabilize, ability to growth and the ability to adapt to the environment that has be diffused with alien cultures.

### **Conclusion**

Involvement of traditional Priest in the public administration of Igbo society encourages diligence, hard work and fears of punishment which strengthen obedience to Law and Order for the maintenance of public interests. With their roles, African tradition is paramount with the technical invention of mechanical weaving and dyeing skills, manual methods of blacksmithing, Quasi participatory democratic system of government that operate with its republican’s quota, a cooperate judicial system that operates with the principles of retribution and restitution, pantentheistic form of religion that reflect distinct principles of life and a socio-cultural activity that is governed by oneness of mind for consolidation of its ethnic unity. Tradition is the key driving force of African civilization, and as Anthropologist and historians suggested, Man’s feeling becomes mystified by the forces of nature, threatened by beast, perplexed by death and the hereafter, and wondered on the need for co-habitation coupled with the fear of the unknown, tradition and Religion came to be born with various tradition oriented practices. In the “Outling of history, H.G. Wells stressed on the centrality of Tradition and Religion towards civilization. Thus he stated;

*“wherever primitive civilization set its foot in Africa, Europe or western Asia, A temple arose, and where the civilization is not ancient, in Egypt and in sumer , the (traditional ) Temple is most evidence.....the beginnings of civilization and the appearance of Temple is simultaneous in history. The two things belong together.”*

As the influence of native tradition of Igbo civilization increased in pre-colonial Africa society, it dominated the roots of the culture areas of South Eastern Nigeria and serves as a fundamental mechanism of African communism which governs both the mythical, historical and political times. In fact, all the activities and instruments of governance and survival were clothed in Religions ritual, Language and Symbol with priestly roles (Ogbu Kalu, 1975). Post-colonial era hybridized the Igbo tradition to complex phenomenon, caused social and cultural change and created opportunity for African Scholars to utilize their oral traditions to capture the dynamism and complexity of the hybridized African societies. There is also presence of grafted policy of the state politics which influenced the economy and the governance systems that have not been adapted to suit local conditions, and governance and political challenges have further shortchanged African societies (Linda Semu 2013). The challenges facing Igbo tradition question if Igbo Tradition can still survive in this competitive post-colonial era. Different scholars and

political stakeholders have developed few scholarly and diplomatic mechanisms like Igbo reformism, Igbo fundamentalism, Igbo communism, Igbo political restructuring and restructuralism etc to preserve the Igbo tradition but on several occasions their ideologies contrast the objectives of preserving the originality of the African tradition in pluralistic society. Igbo Restructuralism entails structural mechanism designed by concerned political stakeholders to bring about change but from a political perspective to enhance the interest and conspiracy of interest of diplomats which can change the factors of Igbo identity and perhaps enhance the objectives of the self centered interest of the political initiators. An accepted mechanism is through ***Igbo Fundamental Liberalism***. By this approach, this article means a dynamic blending of Igbo tradition to comply with the current trends of modernity and still retaining its identity. It is a way of life that is tradition based but requires transforming African tradition to comply with the current trends of modernity with the objectives of amending Igbo ideologies and maintain Igbo identity in every facet. This theory is based on the Karl Marx theory of Class struggle. According to Karl Marx (1998), a Man's position within a class hierarchy is determined by his role in the production process, and the political and ideological consciousness is determined by class position (Parkin 1979); a class is those who share common economic interests, are conscious of those interests, and engage in collective action which advances those interests. Within Marxian class theory, the structure of the production process forms the basis of class construction. By Marx ideology, Igbo tradition is in a competitive struggle with foreign forces (See the below diagram. Fig. 1.). Igbo Tradition has diffused into the pluralistic society and hybridized most of the cultural practices to develop complex phenomena that convey a wrong definition of modern African culture from a foreign perspective.

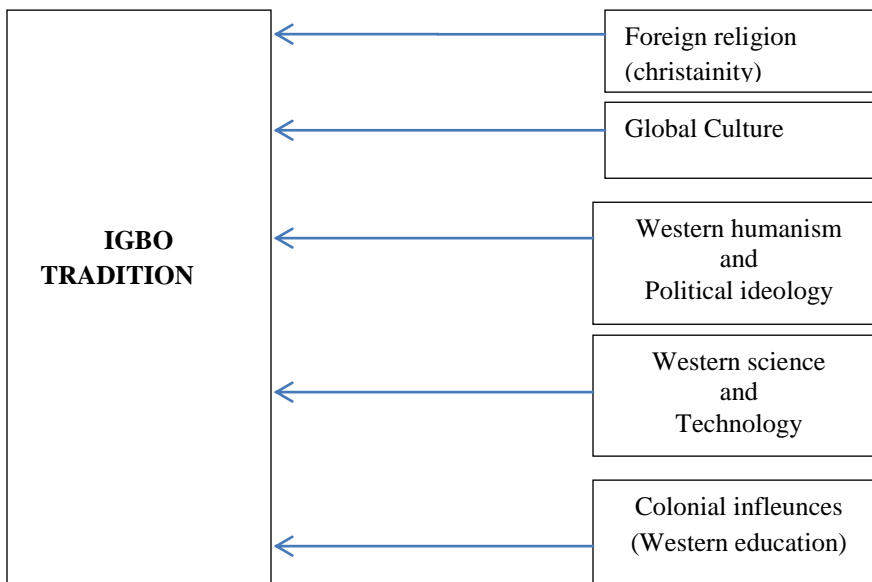


Fig. 1: Diagram showing different forces in a competition with Igbo tradition in African society

With the practice of Igbo fundamental Liberalism, the future of Africa can only be forged from accepting and mending the socio-cultural present. Igbo Tradition provides an ethos the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria must honor in both thought and practice in African society, which begins with re-orientation. By ethos, this article means a people's self-understanding as well as its self-presentation in the world through its thought and practice in the other six areas of culture. It is above all a cultural challenge. By this analysis, tradition is here defined as the totality of thought and practice by which African people creates themselves, celebrate, sustain and develop themselves and introduce themselves to history and humanity ( Maulana Karenga, 2010). The re-orientation involved in the Igbo Fundamental Liberalism entails:

1. Formation of a political Party that will reflect pure Igbo fundamentalism and fosters the objectives and initiatives of Igbo tradition.
2. Inclusion of Igbo traditional studies in the Curriculum of Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Post secondary education to improve cultural literacy in South Eastern Nigeria.
3. Involvement of foreign Religions in the modification of their religious doctrine to reflect Igbo Identity for preservation of Igbo cultural heritage in the foreign religions.
4. Establishment and Development of academic and Vocational training centers, and Non- Vocational infrastructure like Library and Museum in every autonomous community in south Eastern states for preservation of Igbo archives, enhance academic support services and improve extra-curricular activities.
5. Substitution of English Language with Igbo Language in O'Level and Jamb examinations as Option for South Eastern Candidates.
6. Use of Igbo Language in teaching both public and private schools in South Eastern States.
7. Reforming the South Eastern state's Carnivals to ensure compliance with Igbo tradition
8. Inclusion of Igbo tradition priest in the public administration of South Eastern state to ensure strict policy for maintenance of Law and Order
9. Development of Igbo Technologies for science and research to improve the vocabulary of Igbo word
10. With the rise of the New economy of Nigeria and the development of nationally minded elites, there should be establishment of independent school, college and post secondary school for the academic study of Igbo and African tradition

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