

**EZI GBARA ỊNỌ/ANỌ: THE CROSS-ROAD IN IGBO RELIGIOUS CULTURE,
THE CROSS IN CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS – A
STUDY IN COMPARATIVE RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM**

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Abstract

Ezi gbara ịnọ/anọ is crossroad. This work found that Ezi gbara ịnọ/anọ is not just human access road; it is the meeting point of all manner of spirits in Igbo religious culture (Agama et al., 2024, p. 148). The work is an investigation in religious symbolism, especially in Igbo religious culture. Symbol is at the very heart of religion; revealing what the senses are not perceiving and taking the practitioner into the mystical realm. Symbols offer hidden meaning of life and things in the world; many times, taking the practitioner away from material experiences. Ezi gbara ịnọ/anọ was found to be more than a space or location; it is a symbol whose deep mystical sense is not easily made known to the users. The orientation, reverence and ritual uses of Ezi gbara ịnọ/anọ proved to be something more than a spot. The work also did a comparative study of Ezi gbara ịnọ/anọ and other related symbols in other religions. The comparison was done in the regions of physical character, symbolization, significance and religious uses. The work found that Ezi gbara ịnọ/anọ is the oldest version of its equivalents and the most natural of all. The work is a multidimensional approach to the study of symbols in religion.

Keywords: Crossroads, religious symbolism, Igbo religion, religious symbols, witches pentagram, Star of David, Sacred space, Swastika, Astaroth's Seal

Introduction

*Ezi gbara ịnọ/anọ is literally a road of four converging lanes, the point of interjection of two lanes or a junction where two roads cut across each other commonly referred to as crossroad. In some other Igbo dialects, they are also called *Iro n'anọ* or *Ezi n'anọ*. It is actually a cross-shaped spot on a road. In modern road constructions, they are used for connections, better road networking and access. Crossroads are not just architectural concepts; they have sociological connotations. In older cultures, crossroads have socio-religious significance; Agama et al. (2024) categorized it as natural symbol in religion. This categorization agrees with the position of Onwubiko (1991), who insisted that "Our cultural values are documented in our myths, songs, symbols and signs, proverbs and riddles, and*

in the work of art.” (p. xi). In other words, the African environment is replete with documented knowledge of Africa without alphabetical language or being written in books.

For Betsky (2020), crossroads have deeper social implications: “It is a space and a metaphor deeply rooted in most cultures around the world. It is where you meet, where you mingle, and where you make choices.” In Igbo religious culture, it has all those uses, but is also a choice spot for sacrifices and a metaphor for experiences in life. As a spot for sacrifices, the Igbo traditionally believe in the mystical and magical effects of sacrifice at *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ*, but as metaphor, many Igbo do not know the hidden meaning of *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* especially as a location for sacrifice. In former times, as today (although the prevalence is quite reduced due to Christian influence), objects sacrificed to different spirits litter *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* in all Igbo communities, especially major ones (*Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ*).

Sacrifices can be homage, redemption of pledges, paying the demands made by deities or objects of worship. They can also be appeasement or care shown to spirits, including ancestral spirits. Nwagbara (2007) includes that sacrifices also aim at confusing the spirits or diverting their attention. The Igbo believe that spirits wander through the land, and a good number of them are angry, sad, tricky, greedy etc while very many others are ambivalent, sometimes constituting problems for human beings. These kinds of spirits may also constitute nuisance or danger to unsuspecting persons. Such spirits on rampage can be enticed, trapped and kept busy with sacrificial items, so as to ward them off, at least temporarily. There are also other spirits without designated shrines or a dedicated location; *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* is, generally, used to deposit sacrifices for such spirits. Agama et al. (2024) suggests that *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* is a spiritual path and all manner of spirits traverse it.

From a multidimensional approach, this study re-examined *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* as a symbol in Igbo religious culture, it explored the significance of the symbol, both for the Dibia and the un-informed practitioner. It went further to do a comparative study of other religious symbols which were found related to *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* by physical character, symbolization, significance and religious uses. The symbols that were found and compared were the Witches’ Pentagram, the Star of David, Astaroth’s Seal, Swastika and the Christian Cross. The researcher found that the four, five or six points orientation of all these symbols were deeply connected with the four poles of the earth, basic elements or human-divine realms and signified the energy source of effective mystical powers in all circumstances, whereas *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* is the oldest, most comprehensive and natural of them all. The writer deliberately highlighted the Christian Cross in the title because the Igbo of today is dominantly Christian and there is need to situate this research of an ancient practice within

the new religious context without prejudice to the latter. A lot of studies had been done on crossroads in African culture and other cultures. This work was a furtherance of those research works, highlighting the symbolism of *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano* scarcely known to the non-informed practitioner.

Literature Review

In his study of religious symbolism, Barrett (2023) basically used the works of Robert Gellah and Clifford Geertz as classical examples of predicating religious symbols on the prejudice of life as problematic and understanding religious symbols as product of that conditioning. He understood this as the major flaw of the Source Model. He rather averred that religious symbolism enhances meaning which ordinarily were vague and in so doing enhance also experience and enriching meaning which is an important source of affective power in religion. The present researcher agrees with this position of Barrett, but also found that among the Igbo the idea that life is problematic is at the background of their religious practice. The most debilitating problem of life was the unperceived and unknown activities of spirits. They struggle to be favoured by these spirits, evolving religious symbols to make life more meaningful. It was this idea which informed the position of Jordan (1949) that the Igbo penchant for sacrifice was based on this consciousness.

Onwuatuegwu (2023) understood sacrifices at crossroads in Igbo religious culture and compared its significance with the Christian idea of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. He fell short of equating the two, but seemed to agree with the Source Model that religious symbolism evolves from the experience of life as problematic. Drawing similarities in the philosophical undertone of both Igbo crossroad sacrifices and Christianity's sacrifice on the cross, this author was more inclined to the preservation of the former as a prelude to Christianity. The present work went further to assert that the crossroad – *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano* - was the natural prototype of the cross upon which Christ was crucified and that the symbolic significance of *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano* can also be drawn from the cross of Christ without diminishing or contradicting the Christian wealth of meaning for the cross of Christ.

Arts and artefacts are part of religious symbols in Africa which Omatseye & Emeriewen (2010) captured as having metaphysical and religious significance. These works of arts derive from ancestral and spiritual worship and evoke effective spiritual powers and energy especially when they are ritually charged. This work's sense of symbolism falls in line with oriental and western iconography and to a large extent captures the African religious symbolic sense. Yet the dimension of religious symbolism explored by the present researcher was more fundamental than the artist's impressions of the sacred. This work draws the symbolism of *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano* from the Igbo functional environment and traced

its orientation from the Polar Regions of the universe and being part of man's concrete experience.

Agama et al. (2024) subscribed to the idea of Barrett (2023) about the enhancement of meaning. The work also agreed with Omatseye & Emeriewen (2010) on the idea that symbolism is a source of affective power in African religious practice. The work captured five categories of symbols in African religious practice, natural, communicative, cultural, artistic/ritualistic and Artificial. It also tinkered around crossroad, nasty bush and evil forest as instances of natural symbols. The work made a very incisive input when it identified the crossroad as the area of interaction of the spirits which Nwagbara (2007) also agrees with. The present researcher also agrees with Agama et al. but most importantly explored the often-neglected angle by which *Ezi gbara ino/ano* bears the ethical implication, mystical significance and powers of four in Igbo numerology.

Religious symbolism is at the same time a derivative of human concrete experiences, especially environmental challenges, a means of adding and enhancing meaning, embellishment/concealing of the real meaning of religious signs and a source of affective power in African religious culture. Religious symbolism in Africa is much more than iconography and includes symbolization with the physical features of the environment. *Ezi gbara ino/ano* is one of the natural symbols of the Igbo religious culture whose proper understanding relates with symbols in other religions.

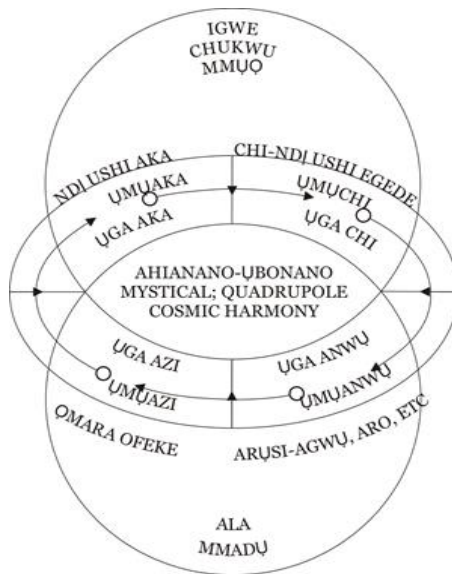
Igbo Worldview

The study of worldview has proved to be vital in understanding the socio-cultural milieu of a people and certain of their behavioural patterns. Ivey and Simek-Downing (1980) likened worldview to lens. It is the lenses that we wear which provide us with the mental constructs we employ in interpreting the world. Achebe (1986) avers that "... world-view ... gives a unified picture of the cosmos explained by a system of concepts which order the natural or social rhythm and the place of individuals and communities in them" (p. 10). Ekwunife (2011) is of the opinion that world view "... is an invaluable guide for assessing, predicting and controlling people's behaviours expectations and visions. It is the fundamental key to people's values" (p. 24).

The present researcher is looking at the Igbo worldview through the prisms of *Afa* and its concomitant mystical expositions. At the same time, he incorporates the basic idea of Igbo worldview as exposed by earlier writers. For instance, in describing the African world Iroegbu (1994) propounded the theory of *Uwa* Ontology. In it he understood the Igbo world as *Uwa* of which he wrote:

Uwa is all-inclusive. It mirrors being, existence, entity, all reality. It englobes all that is: animate and inanimate, visible and invisible. It is comprehensive, universal and global. It has transcendent and immanent scope as well as explicative and prospective elasticity. Further it has moral, psychological and eschatological dimensions. (p.144)

Iroegbu went on to posit *Uwaoma* and *Uwaojiro* as the dual dimensions of the universe. It is true that these terms present themselves as moral they also have ontological dimensions. *Uwa* contains the totality of the Igbo reality and dimensions in life. Any study in Igbo Traditional Religious culture amounts to a study of *Uwa*. (Madu, 2008, p.155).



This diagram is the invention of this writer, first published in his doctoral thesis, to explain the life experiences of the Igbo who must interact with varieties of spirits and spiritual forces in the course of life. It is this world-pattern that makes spiritual dynamics possible and every Igbo both open and susceptible to them. This was an attempt of that work to diagrammatize the Igbo world in a very unique manner. Here is presented a central oval-circle with two other inter-locking circles overlaying it. While the central oval circle represents the real-concrete world, the interlocking circles represent the ideal-virtual world which at the same time could be experienced in a mystical dimension. They are the separated but united world of *Mmadu* and *Mmuo* both realities of which the Igbo live every day. All other intermediary spirits and forces are located in the region surrounding the mystical centre and operating the cyclic time of *Ahịa na anọ-Ubọ na anọ*. *Afọ*, *Nkwọ*, *Eke* and *Orie* are not just market days or days of the Igbo week but a mystical time which must be invoked at any encounter of the two inter-locking worlds. *Mmadu* (the human being) is

constantly on his way traversing the quad-dimensional world-path in a journey referred to as *Ijeṛwa*. Care must be taken to understand the insinuations of this part of the work in conformity to the ideas of Madu (2008) and Ekwunife (2011) that any study in Igbo tradition and culture is a study of various aspects of Igbo world view.

The diagram represents the very centre of *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano* as the place of cosmic harmony. It also shows the four segments of the Igbo life path. This life path shows both the trajectory of coming into the world from a place of pre-existence and the model of passage in every life situation. The segments are transitional by their very nature. Umeh (1999) elaborated on Uga as a concept of transitional time:

Briefly, there are four *Uga* namely: *Uga Aka*, *Uga Chi*, *UgaAnwu* and *Uga Azi*. Each of these is associated with major waves of incarnate spirits of *Ikuku Chukwu* (winds of God). Each is made up of several Uke and each Uke is made up of several Ogbo (age mates (p. 24)

Igbo world view is based on the multiples and derivatives of four. *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano* is a localized pointer to the four cardinal points of the earth; it does not exclude any conceivable point from which the spirit may be operating. It is not surprising that most *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano* in Igbo land may be natural compasses to locate the four cardinal points of the earth.

Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano: Its Mystique and Meaning

Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano literally means roads converging into one centre from four directions. Each of the roads is conceived as originating from the different regions of *Ala Mmadụ* (the Earth or human abode), its *terminus a quo*. *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano* as a location, symbolizes the *terminus ad quem* of all entities originating from various regions of *Ala Mmadụ*. That centre is a symbol of *Ala Mmụọ* (the abode of spirits) and the geometric centre of the earth. It recalls the four dimensions of the base of the great pyramid of Giza. From any point on the stretch, every entity, humans and spirits make their way to the centre. At this point, let us do an exercise which is a matter of utmost importance in Igbo mysticism, which is numbers; in this instance, the number four and one; one centre, four Polar Regions.

One is *Otu/Ofu/Nnaa/Nge/Ori*. It is the converging centre or location of everything. According to Umeh (1997):

One (1) is sacred to Chukwu in his capacity as the Aka Ofu Ora Naabo. He is the source and sustainer of all and sundry in the seen and unseen universe, and the link with Him is the representative Chi” (p. 25).

The one centre of *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano* is the symbol of the mystical location of *Chukwu* or *Ezumezu Chukwu*. Spirits return from the four corners of the earth to *Ezumezu Chukwu* from

time to time. Ritually, the objects of sacrifice are not placed at the centre of the crossroad, but at the peripheries, the centre being *Ofu* and *Chukwu*'s exclusive spot. In other words, the practitioner in the religious culture strategically places the objects of sacrifice on a sure zone, anywhere at the precincts of that centre, in hope that any spirit-beneficiary will identify it and yield to the practitioner's intentions.

Four is *Ano* or *Ịnọ* as is seen in *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano*. Four in Igbo numerology is completeness, readiness to live, fullness of life, assured beginning. It is an essential mystical number accessible to everyone. Other important numbers are three and seven; while three is accessible, it is transitional (ready to explore), seven is rarely accessible, not given to everyone. It is a combination of four and three. Four is more universal, reaching the farthest extension of time and every dimension of space.

In Igbo cosmology, time and space are four-dimensional; four is at the core of materiality. The four-dimensional time is expressed as *Ahịa n'ano ụbọ n'ano*, while four-dimensional space is expressed variously as *Ihum na Azụ m, Aka nnim na Aka ekpe m* (my front and my back; my right hand and my left hand) or *Ọwụwa Anyanwụ na Ọdịda Anyanwụ, Ugwu na Ndịda* (the rising of the sun and the setting of the sun; the mountains and the valleys) and so on. *Ahịa n'ano ụbọ n'ano* is not just four market days as many translate it. It is the expression of mystical time which is at the present moment, yet reaches back into the past and forward into the future. The nature of that time is cyclic and endless. In *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano*, the mystical time of *Ahịa n'ano ụbọ n'ano* is operative.

Four is also the basic number of *Ugiri/Ukpukpara* type of *Afa*. *Afa* is the ancient Igbo cipher of coded formula used in the socio-religious culture to traverse knowledge, past, present and future. No knowledge is closed to *Afa*. *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano* is a perfect location for *Afa Ugiri/Ukpukpara*. When the location is not readily available, every informed *Dibia* marks it with his kaolin, superimposes it with another five strokes to get four spaces, before he exposes his beads. Drawing from Igbo cosmology and numerology, *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano* is the symbol of a guaranteed sacrificial space. It is the area for the resolution of all problems humans contend with; the melting pot of the known and unknown.

Other Religious Symbols Associable with *Ezi gbara ịnọ/ano*

It is interesting to view and compare the similarities among these five symbols – The Witches Pentagram (Source: *La Clef de la Magie Noire* (1897) by the Rosicrucian Stanislas de Guiata), Astaroth's seal (Source: Mathers, Samuel MacGregor Liddel: "The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King"; 1904), The Star of David (Source: The oldest surviving complete copy of the Masoretic text, the Leningrad Codex; 1008), The Christian Cross

(Cimabue's Crucifix, 1287-1288, Basilica di Santa Croce, Florence) and Swastika (Source : Rosenberg; 2012).

The Witches' Pentagram

The pentagram is an ancient symbol of witchcraft; it is the commonest symbol of witchcraft and used for sorcery and magic. It symbolized a wide range of things for witches. According to D'Avalon (2020):

This symbol is fascinating because it is a symbol that is emotionally charged with historic, religious, political and pop-culture content, some of which is highly contradictory. The pentagram is a metaphoric, metonymic, multifocal, polysemic symbol. It simultaneously has meanings of evil, satanism, magic and witchcraft, protection, humanity, unity, balance, and perfection. It is both a natural and arbitrary symbol. How the pentagram operates on multiple levels can be analyzed by looking at its history, the modern religious uses of the symbol, and the modern pop culture reactions toward the symbol.

However, it is found among modern neo-pagans, especially Wiccans. It is a five-pointed



star enclosed in a circle known as the pentacle. The five points are mystical connections to the five basic elements – water, fire, earth, air and spirit. Most Wiccans believe that it symbolizes power and protection. According to Eldridge (2023):

For Wiccans the pentagram may also symbolize masculine and feminine, or the Triple Goddess (three points) and the Horned God (two points). Many Neo-Pagans consider the pentagram a symbol of protection

and may use it to invoke or banish spirits.

Knowles (2006) drew the comparison between the witches' pentagram and other religious symbols:

The Pentagram and Pentacle are commonly the most famous symbols of Witchcraft, and are symbolic of the power of Spirit as the overriding power controlling elements. As the cross is to Christianity and the six-pointed star to Judaism, so the pentagram is a symbol of the magickal craft of Witchcraft. (p. 1).

Although the present writer considers this position of Knowles especially as regards the comparison of the witches' pentagram and the Christian cross, clearly, the extensive symbolism of the pentagram is gradually diminishing in pop culture. This work preferred D'Avalon's description of pentagram which it understood as more extensive and inclusive; giving the veritable grounds for comparison with other religious symbols. Conor (2008)

holds the opinion that Satanists began to use the inverted pentagram not less than hundred years ago whereas the Wiccans use it in the manner of the old traditional paganism. At the same time, he impresses: “In the past, the pentagram has belonged to many other religions. Some of these include Judaism, Paganism, and even early Christianity”.

The Astaroth's Seal

In demonology, Astaroth is identified as the Duke of Hell. It is depicted as female or male depending on culture and period. It is also identified in different names Astarte or Astoreth



in Canaanite and Phoenician culture, Ishtar in ancient Egypt, Innana in Babylonian mythology, Aphrodite in Greece and Venus in Rome. Mathers (1904) had warned against the menace of Astaroth simply because of its affinity to divination. Yet divination is found in all cultures. However, witches are also devoted to Astaroth as were the Phoenicians of the second Millenia CE. At the same time Mathers (1904) was simply giving account of spirits worshipped by Satanists and it is the same Astaroth

that he listed as the 29th spirit whereas Timmons (1991) categorized it in the third degree of the emanation of the Devil. Incidentally Astaroth's Seal looks similar to the witches' pentagram.

The Star of David

The Star of David also known as Magen David (Shield of David) is geometrically two equilateral triangles superimposed on each other (one pointing up, the other pointing down)



to form a hexagon. Today it is seen as the symbol of Judaism and Jewishness. Its popularity may not predate medieval times. The Zohar teaches that there are three knots connecting three entities – God, the Torah and Israel. According to Silberberg (no date): “The Jewish soul connects to its Creator through the study and observance of Torah. The triangle represents the connection between these three entities.” Frankel and Teutsch (1992) related the Star of David to magic. Although, it is now the most common and universally recognized sign of Judaism and Jewish identity, both

within and outside of the Jewish community, it has only achieved this status in the last two hundred years. Before that it was chiefly associated with magic or with the insignia of individual families or communities.

Frankel and Teutsch (1992) had suggested that because of its geometric symmetry, the Star of David, also known as the hexagram, has been a popular symbol in many cultures from earliest times. Anthropologists claim that the triangle pointing downward represents female sexuality, and the triangle pointing upward, male sexuality; thus, their combination symbolizes unity and harmony; obviously this interpretation is Wiccan and depicts the core of witchcraft rituals. In alchemy, the two triangles symbolize "fire" and "water"; together, they represent the reconciliation of opposites. Some medieval alchemists even borrowed the talmudic punish mayim, fiery water, and shamayim, heaven - to demonstrate the interpenetration of the two realms.

The Christian Cross

The Cross or Crucifix is the indisputable symbol of Christianity. Yet it is not as if the cross entirely originated with Christianity. It was the Romans who chose this manner of killing for Jesus of Nazareth; a form of execution which pre-dated Christianity and a symbol which had been used by various religions. Christians hold on to this narrative as a historical event



which took place in Jerusalem between 1 and 6AD. The cross has become the universal symbol of Christianity and has variously been interpreted. Coleman (2024) had made sense of the cross, understanding it as a great contradiction:

The Cross is a great contradiction. A simple upright post with a transverse bar used for crucifixion. It's a symbol of death, but so much more. Death and life, hate and love, violence and peace, accusation and forgiveness, sin and purity, brokenness and wholeness, all is lost yet everything is gained, destruction and restoration, defeat and victory. Once the cruelest form of execution, yet now it is a symbol of abundant life.

The cross is often depicted as two bars. The longer bar stands vertically while the shorter bar crosses on it, leaving a lengthier part of the longer bar on the lower part of the crossing. Apart from the cross itself, the image of the crucified Christ is placed with its head resting on the vertical bar right above the horizontal bar. Its hands are spread on the right and left sides of the horizontal bar, while its trunk and feet rest on the lower part of the vertical bar. The cross which bears this image of Christ on it is traditionally called the Crucifix. The crucifix is the ideal for Catholics, while Protestants, reasoning that Christ is no longer on the cross, do not go with the image of Christ on their own cross.

In Christianity, Christ is the victim of one single sacrifice which sufficed for all other sacrifices past, present and future (Hebrews 10:11-18). The hands of Jesus spread on the cross is the symbol of gathering all humans to himself, emphasizing the universality of this singular sacrifice (Jn. 12:32). The horizontal bar is the earth dimension of the cross; reaching out to the ends of the earth. The vertical bar soars from earth to heaven. The cross made it possible for humanity, the best of its specie crucified on the cross, to access the divine realm through Christ who opened that access on the cross. Christians believe that no other sacrifice is necessary for humanity to live with and triumph through the problems of life.

The Swastika

The Swastika is depicted like a cross, all the arms are equal in length and perpendicular to the adjacent arms, these arms are bent to right angles, all aligning towards a clockwise direction. It is found in various Eurasian, American and African cultures. For these cultures, it is a symbol of prosperity and good fortune. In Indian religions, the Swastika symbolizes spirituality and divinity. It is still found among the Hindu, Buddhists, etc. Again, it was a symbol which signalled triumph over the problems of life or which signalled the capacity of human beings to actually triumph through those problems.



Freed & Freed (1980) was of the opinion that the Swastika originated from India and by the Bronze age had been used in various regions of the world with different names to it - garnmadion, hakenkreuz, fowerfot, wan, manji, tau cross, Thor's hammer and flyfot. Nevertheless, in the 1930's, Swastika was adopted by the Nazi party in Germany. The association of the Swastika with the Nazi Party stigmatized it as a symbol of anti-Semitism and racism. It was Hitler's World War II stint which finally popularized the Swastika and it could easily be identified with the Nazi today. Yet the History of the Swastika goes far into ancient times and symbolizes more than the emblem of Nazi revolt. According to Rosenberg (2021):

The swastika is an ancient symbol that has been used for over 3,000 years. (That even predates the ancient Egyptian symbol, the Ankh!) Artifacts such as pottery and coins from ancient Troy show that the swastika was a commonly used symbol as far back as 1000 BCE. During the following thousand years, the image of the swastika was used by many cultures around the world, including in China, Japan, India, and southern Europe. By the Middle Ages, the swastika was a well-known, if not commonly used, symbol but was called by many different names.

Whether it was the witches' pentagram, the Astaroth's Seal, the Star of David, the Cross of Christianity or the Swastika, each of these symbols served to liberate man from the problems associated with living.

Comparative Analysis

Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ is a four-arm symbol. Ordinarily, it is major feature of a typical Igbo landscape meant to serve the Igbo mobility needs. At the same time, it serves a very important religious need. The Igbo environment expresses their religious sense. It was not an incapacitation that the Igbo did not abstract *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* to make it into a carved, drawn or moulded image; it is rather to emphasize the sacredness of the Igbo environment; that sacredness which nothing else can adequately replace and the absence of boundaries between the sacred and the profane. In Igbo religious culture, nature and natural objects speak to experts and those who treat nature with commensurate benignity. So *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* speaks to experts of the culture and those who understand and live in the Igbo world as a moral universe. The expert knows that in recommending sacrifice at *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* to the practitioner, he is metaphorically impressing on him all the significance of *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ*. For instance, he may be implying: "Take your matter to a place of meeting and have it thrashed by all the parties involved" or "life is all set for you but you are not seeing it yet" and so on. This work also found that the four arms of *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* endears to the Christian cross which has also four arms. It was as if the Igbo religious culture anticipated Christianity in its understanding of *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ*, whereas the Christian cross becomes the transcendental *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ*.

In Igbo cosmological thought sacrifices are not kept at the centre of *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* because there is the symbolic position of Chukwu who reserves all the authority to summon all creatures from all ends of the universe to *Ezumezu Chukwu* (God's summons). On the very centre of the Christian Cross is the body of Christ who fames among Christians as the son of God. Being rightly so, he takes the symbolic position of God, now as a victim of sacrifice, still summoning all creatures to a banquet (*Ezumezu Chukwu*). *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* draws energy from the four polar regions of the earth, the cross has vertical and horizontal dimensions; reaching the ends of the earth and soaring to the high heavens from earth. Another way of saying that the Christian Cross lifts *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* and all it could convoke, humans and spirits alike, from this earthly terrain into the heavenly abode of Chukwu through the mediation of Christ who had taken the central position at *Ezi gbara ñnọ/anọ* formerly reserved for Chukwu.

The witches' pentagram and Astaroth's Seal both have five points or arms; relating more to elemental energies (air, earth, water, fire and spirit) and drawing power from them. The mystical value of the witches' pentagram and Astaroth's Seal is appropriation of power by practitioners and the diffusion of same power from practitioners to affect things in nature. These symbols were studied alongside each other and it is clear that the witches' pentagram and Astaroth's Seal are of entirely different mystical significance. At the same time, the earlier claims of Conor (2008) as to the use of pentagram in Christianity could be evidential. Colles (1971) claims that in ancient times, the pentagram was used to symbolize the five senses. Analyzing a 14th century English poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Morgan (1979) averred that the unknown author of the poem impressed that the pentagram symbolized five senses, five fingers, Five Wounds of Christ, five joys that Mary had of Jesus, and five virtues of the knighthood. Nevertheless, the present work is only interested in the symbolism of the pentagram from its ancient origins.

The Star of David has six points or arms. It relates more to the Sefirot. With its ten points, nay eleven, the Sefirot symbolizes divine creative force or consciousness. It is the central symbol of Jewish Kabbalah. The six points of the Star of David corresponds to the six male Sefirot and the centre corresponds to the female Sefirah (Silberberg, n.d.). The Star of David evokes the special place of Jews in the universe of God and the presence of that God among them. One can sense the heinous excavation of the Swastika by the Nazi's as inventing a rival symbol to denigrate and make nonsense of the Star of David through cowering the Jewish spirit with intimidation.

Conclusion

Ezi gbara ñọ/ano is a natural symbol of the cross common in Igbo landscape, not just for socio-mobility purposes, but for deeper religious significance. It is the symbolic location of *Ezumezu Chukwu* where the known and unknown spirits converge from time to time to honour the summons of Chukwu which happens from time to time. Objects of sacrifice are often laid at the corners of *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano* and never at the centre, in the belief that every spirit makes its way to *Ezumezu Chukwu* sometime, therefore giving the assurance that the sacrifice must be accessed.

The Igbo world is populated with different kinds of spirits, most of which are ambivalent. However, some are benevolent while others are malevolent. A host of these spirits are not identifiable, yet one way or another, they affect the lives of the Igbo. On their part, the Igbo are only worried about their negative influences. When plagued with challenges of life and tough times, the Igbo are most likely to seek causes and even when none is found, they still do sacrifice to a possible angry spirit. When such spirit is neither known or has a dedicated

shrine or spot among them, they place the recommended sacrifice on *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano*, rest assured that such spirit must sometime attend to *Ezumezu Chukwu* and at least bump into the sacrifice.

This work also studied other religious symbols each of which like *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano* have arms as their physical feature. They are the Swastika, Witches' Pentagram, Astaroth's Seal, the Star of David and the Christian Cross. Among all, it was found that the Christian Cross is the closest in its religious symbolic significance to *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano*. In terms of arms, it is only the Swastika which has four arms too like *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano* and the Christian Cross; while the Witches' Pentagram and the Astaroth's Seal had five each, the Star of David had six. In ancient religious cultures, the Swastika was a symbol of prosperity and good fortune and in more recent times for the Hindu and other related religions, it symbolizes spirituality and divinity. In as much as the Swastika evokes the interaction of the human and the divine which is the crux of religion, it is the Christian Cross which as symbol corresponded most to *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano*.

This work concluded that *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano* is one the evidences that the Igbo religious culture was a prelude to Christianity. Before Christ was crucified on the cross the Igbo were already displaying victims of sacrifice on the cross of *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano*. They also knew that the centre of *Ezi gbara ñọ/ano* was exactly the location of *Ezumezu Chukwu* and Chukwu's reserve. The Christian Cross depicts the Son of God or God the Son occupying that very centre as a victim of sacrifice. There will really be no need for further sacrifices because God himself has been sacrificed at the location of *Ezumezu Chukwu* and there is nothing more to appease any rampaging spirit that could compare with the body of the son of God. So, even when the spirits still convoke at Chukwu's behest, the sacrifice of Christ overwhelms and occupies their adoration so much so that humans are free from their menace and torment.

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