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THE SPIRIT IN THE DIALECTICAL COSMOLOGY OF THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY (IGBO)

Emenike Philip Ayika, Ph.D

Introduction

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

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

When you make the two one and make the inside like the outside and the outside as the inside and the upperside like the underside and when you make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male

¹ Gen 1:27

and the female [not] be female, ... then you shall enter [the kingdom].²

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

This may not represent the mind of the Christian Creator, who polarized them and still declared them good. It is rather through correspondences of the polarization that the spectra of enhancements, meanings and consequently the histories of human activities in the universe are engendered. A doctor becomes one who knows the elements that co-responds to another in a way as to assuage a specific problem. In this same thread, Arazu³ maintains that the spirit is one but that the material reality diversifies into the many. Moon⁴ expresses the twofold pattern of creation with the terms subject-object, give-take, male-female, and positive-negative. He believes that everything co-responds to each other in the subject and object, positive and negative patterns. The body co-responds to the spirit as its subject or positive just as the electrons

² Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia, Philadelphia Fortress, 1979, 196, no. 120

³ Arazu, R. (2003). *Man know thyself: Discovering the master plan by knowing which everything else is known*. SNAAP Press Ltd, Enugu.

⁴ Moon, Myung (1996). *Divine Principles*, Transl by The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, New York

of an atom, which are negatively charged hover over the positively charged nucleus in co-response to its being.

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

For the Africans the world is *dual in nature*. Beyond and over above the visible, tactile, physical world, there is a non-visible, nontactile world which envelopes the former. It permeates the former through and through; it is simultaneously within and outside of the earth and the seas⁵.

Edeh also avers that the Igbo have a view of a dual world "*Uwa n'ani muo*"⁶ depicting the spiritual and physical worlds. This paper therefore intends to portray how the Spirit becomes the nucleus of life in the Igbo socio-religious life, which is part and parcel of Africa. The Igbo world stands as a microcosm to Africa, the macrocosm. Studying an independent unit of a system often facilitates greater understanding and depth.

The Igbo people

Contemporary views about Igbo people punctuated by genetic, archeological, linguistic, scriptural/ exegetical and ethnological findings dismiss completely the hypothesis of hamitic (Jewish or Egyptian) origin and tend to situate the cradle of the modern man, *homo sapiens*, in the Igbo people. When taken as a whole, these contemporary scholarships open up new vistas of study and

⁵ Egbujie, I. (1976). "The hermeneutics of the African culture". Ph.D dissertation, Boston College, p. 107

⁶ Edeh, E. (1985). *Towards an Igbo metaphysics*. Chicago: Loyola University, p.73

research into the interior of human origin on this planet. Scholars are of the opinion that what is hitherto unknown is much greater than what is known and opening up the unknown can proffer solutions to some problems we experience now in the world.

Acholonu said that the Igbo story is not the story of a localized community, but one of the black people all over the continent of Africa. *Ndi-Igbo* therefore is said to mean “the Ancients, the First People, the Aborigines (*Ndi Gbo*)”⁷. She maintained that their origin came from the Grimaldi/Bushmen, who were direct descendants of the *homo erectus* (Early man)⁸. They traversed and migrated out of Africa as hunters and gatherers. They were called Igbo by the earliest migrants, probably the Nri (as asserted by Jeffrey⁹ and other researchers) who met them *in situ* on arrival in the Niger-Benue Confluence area. They went by the name *San* or *Shan* (South Africa), *Bushmen*, *Twa* and *Pygmies* in other parts of Africa. In China, they were known as *Shan* (the creators of the *Shan* Dynasty of God-men) and in Igboland as *Eshi/Nshi* or *Nwanshi*. Afigbo¹⁰ maintains that the Igbo have lost all memory of their migration into the area they now occupy, if it ever happened. He avers rather that the Igbo emigrated from an original location at the plateau region (Northern Igbo stretching from Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta and Awka – Orlu uplands) to the southern areas of Uratta, Ikwerre, Etche, Asa, and Ndoki as well as the west and east.

⁷ Acholonu, C. (2009). *They lived before Adam: Prehistoric origins of the Igbo – The never been ruled, ndi-Igbo since 1.6 million BC*. Abuja: CARC, p.2

⁸ Ibid, p.114

⁹ Jeffreys, M. (1951). “Africa”. *Journal of the international African institute*, Vol. XXI, Nr.2

¹⁰ Afigbo, A. (1981). *Ropes of sand: Studies in Igbo history and culture*. Nsukka: University Press

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

- I To refer to domestic speakers of the language
- II To refer to the language spoken by the people
- III To refer to Igbo territory¹¹

Geographical territory

Uchendu states that the Igbo People are located between latitudes 5° and 7° north of the equator and longitude 6° and 8° east of the Greenwich Meridian. They occupy an area of about 25,280km² (15,800square miles)¹². Igbo-speaking people can be divided into five geographically based subcultures: northern Igbo, southern Igbo, western Igbo, eastern Igbo, and northeastern Igbo.

The Igbo People are densely populated, which suggests a long occupation of the land. Amadiume¹³ writes that, in 1963, the Igbo number about 8.5 million and by 1993 has grown to more than 15 million. The Igbo People have one of the highest population densities in West Africa, ranging from 120 to more than 400 persons per square kilometer. Nzomiwu quoting Ifeemesia stated that the population of the Igbo People that year was about 15 million¹⁴. *Encarta Encyclopaedia*¹⁵ has it that the population was over 17 million in 2006. Smock (1972) maintained that “the

¹¹ Uchendu, V. (1965). *The Igbo of southeast Nigeria*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, p. 1

¹² Ibid

¹³ Amadiume, I. (1996). *Encyclopedia of world cultures*. Retrieved 20th October, 2010 from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Igbo.aspx>

¹⁴ Nzomiwu, J. (1990). *The concept of justice among the traditional Igbo: An ethical inquiry*. Enugu: SNAAP, p.5

¹⁵ *Microsoft Encarta*. (2006). Washington: Microsoft Corporation.

Igboland had the densest countryside population in any part of Africa”¹⁶.

Igbo socio-religious worldview

The Igbo world was a complex and dynamic whole. It was a society open to influences from the world outside of it. Complexities, therefore, abound from layers of historical deposits that defy a linear conceptualization of their worldview. However, Onwuejeogwu’s categorization¹⁷ may be of some help. The Cosmos is divided into four complex constituents:

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

OKIKE

Chineke (divine creator) manifests to our world as:

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

¹⁶ Smock, D. & Smock A. (1972). *Cultural and political aspects of rural transformation: A case study of eastern Nigeria*. New York: Praeger, p.21

¹⁷ Onwuejeogwu, 1975: *The Igbo Culture Area* in "Igbo Language and Culture," F. Chidozie Ogbalu & E Nolue Emenanjo -ed.

- *Enuigwe* (the heavens), the home of all supernatural forces including the stars.

Chineke created everything visible and invisible. It has been overtly demonstrated by many scholars that the Igbo People believe in a unified world created by a Supreme Being, *Chukwu Okike*. It appears in many myths of origin. Talbot (1926) maintained that "the word *Chineke* appears to have come into use lately, and in many parts, only after the introduction of the Christian religion. The old form seems to have been *chi*, sometime called *Chi-Ukwu*, the great *Chi*."¹⁸ If the original sense of *Okike* meant *sharing* or *distribution*, it could follow that the Igbo do not believe in creation from nothing as Ekwuru maintained, in line with Arazu¹⁹ and Nwoga²⁰ that "It is semantically plausible that the original Igbo religious thought lacked the Christian concept of "creation" as production of something out of nothing."²¹ However, if *Okike* originally meant great power, *Oke ike*, it may suggest creation from nothing since the Supreme Being must have called up all existents into being and assigned certain **amounts of power** to each of them. It might have been the fact too that the Igbo ancestors were not interested in the knowledge of *creatio ab initio* (Creation from the beginning), but were simply interested in stating the cause or bearings of certain cultures or *omenala*.

¹⁸ Talbot. (1926). *The peoples of southern Nigeria: a sketch of their history, ethnology and languages, Vols I & II*. London: Oxford University Press, p.41

¹⁹ Arazu, R. (1982), "The supreme God in Igbo traditional religion". *Nsukka, institute of African Studies*. June, 1982

²⁰ Nwoga, D. (1984). *The supreme God as a stranger in Igbo religious thought*. Mbaise: Hawk.

²¹ Ekwuru, G. (2009). *Igbo cosmology: The ontogeny and hermeneutics of Igbo sculpture, studies in African ethnoaesthetics*. Owerri: Living Flames Resources, p.40

Likewise, they do not speak of creation as originating from the decision of the Supreme God, rather as a response to human needs. This highlights the utilitarian end of Igbo life and religion.

However, the Igbo People believe that every existent: animals, plants, inanimate, humans and spirits exercise some **variable amounts of power** from the Creator. These can be seen as the **spirit of the Creator (*chi*)** in all things; and, for one to control and rule or even manipulate all things, one must know their dos and don'ts. The Igbo People say: *onye sọkarịa, ọ rụkarịa* (one who applies the dos and don'ts of life more will wield more powers). The powerful person is therefore the more reserved person – *onye nsọ*. *Agwụ-ishi*, *Chukwu's spirit, life-force or spirit-energy*, which is said to have been imparted into every existent, also stands for spirit of divination and knowledge. Thus one needs *agwụ-ishi* in order to know the force in all things. Achebe in demonstrating *ike dī n'awaja n'awaja* (power runs in channels) says in Cole and Aniakor, that the “term *Ike* is the essence of all things human, spiritual, animate and inanimate. Everything has its own unique energy which must be acknowledged and given its due”²². This is in line with what Placid said that “The Africans speak, act and live, as if for them beings were forces ... Force for them is the nature of being, force is being and being is force”²³. This force is thus the indemonstrable principle of all demonstrations and since it is present in all creation: spirits, animates and inanimate, it is the string linking all creation to *Chukwu*. Therefore, the Supreme Being, **the parenting spirit(s)** in Igbo is a unity of all existents. Ekwuru said that

²² Cole & Aniakor, (Eds). (1984). *Igbo arts: Community and cosmos*. Los Angeles: University of California, p.ix

²³ Placid, T. (1969). *Bantu philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine, pp. 51-52

to talk of God in the traditional Igbo meant symbolically, to talk about the totality of "being." The Igbo say that *ihe nile bi nime Chukwu* (everything live in God), and nothing is conceived as existent if not in this sense. From this notion of *Chukwu*, He is said to be *mgbara-muhie* or *Mgburu-mgburu*, ("round" or "circular", to mean "totality") in form.²⁴

Abanuka²⁵ sees reality as a principle running in all other realities and as such makes all a unified whole, where evil is **not** repugnant to good, but complements it. The only repugnancy is nothingness (absence of all realities), which is simply not possible. In outlining reality, he posits "ultimacy, ancestry, humankind, reity and nothing"²⁶ and calls them **principle of reality** being expressed in differing levels of which the Ultimacy is the origin and support of all. Arazu sees this principle as consciousness and consciousness as God. He is the One that becomes many but gets wrapped up in 'sheaths'²⁷. Moon²⁸ calls it the Divine Principle whose characteristics of duality is manifested in all its creatures. In effect, the ultimate reality has male and female, subject and object, positive and negative in its being. The Igbo myth mentioned above incarnates this metaphysical reality in *Amadioha* and *Ala* and understands them as the idealized relationship of men and women in Igbo marital life.

²⁴ Ekwuru, G. (2009). Op cit p. 101

²⁵ Abanuka, B. (2012), *A new essay on African philosophy*, R.ed, SNAAP press, Nigeria

²⁶ Ibid p.23

²⁷ Arazu, R. (2003). *Man know thyself: Discovering the master plan by knowing which everything else is known*. SNAAP Press Ltd, Enugu, p.89

²⁸ Moon, Myung (1996). *Op.cit*

Chi: Agbasiere says that *chi* has been interpreted with Judeo-Christian slant to stand for “‘a kind of tutelary spirit’, ‘personal genius’, ‘guardian angel’, ‘a spiritual double’”²⁹. She rather associates *chi* with the movement of the sun, which is a sign of *Amadipha/Chukwu* and the receptivity of the earth, which is a sign of the goddess of *Ala*. This is seen in the greeting: *I bōla chi?* - Have you succeeded in breaking through darkness to light? *Ala* is the force behind the Igbo communal religion and *chi* is the mark of uniqueness for the individual, which can be associated with personal fortune or misfortune. Agbasiere thus concludes that *chi* is “a subtle incarnation of both *Chukwu* and *Ala*”³⁰. This is as good as saying that *chi* is the human individual vital force. Ezekwugo³¹ demonstrates an independent existence of *chi* as a guide and also as a destiny of a person. It is said that *onye kwe chi ya ekwe* – one’s *chi* consents when one is determined to act. Yet, if *akara aka (chi) onye na-edu ya*, (the destiny of a man, the *chi*, guides him), it is the power in the *chi* that makes one determined to act before the consent of the same *chi*. *Chi* is at once part and parcel of a person and yet is distinct from the visible person. The Igbo often say, *Ekene m ya na ife na-emelu ya ife* (I greet him and what makes things happen for him); and Edeh maintains that this “invisible element is distinct from and yet part of the visible, and in fact it is “that by which the visible is””³².

²⁹ Agbasiere, J. (2000). *Women in Igbo life and thought*. New York: Routledge, p.54

³⁰ Ibid, p.55

³¹ Ezekwugo, C. (1987), *Chi, the true god in Igbo religion*. India: Mar Mathew Press, (p.120)

³² Edeh, E. (1985). Op. cit, p.79

Men and women possess *chi*, but unlike a man's *chi*, a woman's *chi* is revered by her children and all who descended from her. Ekwuru³³ mentions a ceremony called *Alum chi*, which was dedicated to mothers' *chi*. This has been replaced nowadays by the mothering Sunday. A woman's *chi* is often enshrined in an *Qha* or *ogirisi* tree, which she carries to her husband's house when married.

Alusi

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

Mmuo (Spirit-being).

Mmuo is the spirit of ancestors called *Ndi ichie*. They are the dead ancestors of the Igbo people, who have lived honest moral lives and have been rewarded with an imperishable life. Abanuka (1994) says that "Ancestors share the imperishability of the ultimate reality, at the same time, they are closely connected with individuals on the level of humankind with whom they were of one skin".³⁴ *Ndi ichie* are now in the womb or labyrinth of *Ala*, the goddess and at the same time they influence the lives of the people to whom they serve as matrons and patrons. One who reaches the

³³ Ekwuru, Op. Cit

³⁴ Abanuka, B. (1994). *A New essay on African philosophy*. Nsukka: Spiritan Publications, p.39

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

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

Ụwa

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

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

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

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

Mmadu (Human beings), *Anumanu* (animal), *Ofi* (forests/vegetations) sustains both *mmadu* and *anumanu* and *Mmiri* (water).

Ala is believed to be the Supreme Mother of all things. Acholonu³⁵ submits that the socio-religious life of the ancient Igbo must have been imbued with a mother-centric focus. This is supported by some myths even among the Kikuyus of Kenya, which highlight the change of authority from women to men. An interesting discovery at Ugwuele made by Catherine Acholonu³⁶ and her group was the shrine, *Isi-ume* (“First Breath”), where “Nnem Chukwu” (My Mother, the Supreme Being) as the natives know it, was worshipped in the pre-historic times. This tallies with the God of the *Nag Hammadi*, *Nneka*, the Supreme (Mother) Goddess of

³⁵ Acholonu, C. (1995). *Motherism: Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*. Owerri: Afa publications,

³⁶ Acholonu, C. (2009). *They lived before Adam: Prehistoric origins of the Igbo – The never been ruled, ndi-Igbo since 1.6 million BC*. Abuja: CARC

the forest dwarfs, the direct descendants of the *homo erectus* encountered in the Benin myth of origin.

Ala is also believed in Ekwuru³⁷ to be the wife of the Supreme Being, who, in some places, is called *Amadiqha*. *Amadiqha* inhabits the sky and was separated from the Earth Goddess because of a woman who disobeyed a tradition by committing *aru* (a taboo). Another myth portrayed *Ala* and *Amadiqha* as being in the water, which covered the whole earth but seeing that humans and animals would have nowhere to bury their dead and rest, *Ala* decided to spread her body out and make a home for humans. This has made *Ala* the most important and indispensable deity in Igbo religion.

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

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

³⁷ Ekwuru, *Op. Cit*

functions, and conferment of meanings to the rest of created things.³⁸

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

Some Igbo proverbs that portray some relationships with the spirits

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

When Duru Agwu/Duru Aku, the Chief Diviner at Amauzari in Mbano Division, through whose divination man comes to understand the complicated web of cosmic relationships between him and the gods, looked at the

³⁸ Ibid, p.102

five divination pebbles on his palm, he picked out one, threw it on the ground, picked it up again, examined it and stared into the vacancy in communion with the gods.

He said:

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

In saying this, he penetrated the heart of Igbo ontology³⁹

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

Ọ bụ n'ọnu nwa dibia ka okwu na-ebi, ọ dighị ebi n'ọnu ofeke –

It is the diviner that normally has the final say and not the simpleton. The diviner is only a voice to the words of the spirits. It can also be said that the decision of the spirits is final of whom the ultimate is the supreme deity. Lesser spirits can be manipulated but not *Chukwu*.

Onye na-eje be dibia kwa daa anaghị anwu ka urịom okukọ – A

constant visitor of diviners does not die like a chick. This shows that the ultimate matters of life are decided by the spirits. Thus to know what they have in store for one and act accordingly saves one from untimely death.

³⁹ Aniakor, C. (1973) "Structuralism in Ikenga: An ethnoaesthetic approach". *Ikenga*, Vol 2, No 1, p.6

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

Q bu e lee ka chi nwata ha anya, e wee kenye ya oru – the god of a child is firstly considered before assigning a job to him/her. Anything from the Supreme Being stands unalterable. *A ga-eje ogu be Chukwu?* (Nobody can fight or ask God questions). A folk story of *Ojadili*, who fought all spirits and succeeded but could not fight his *Chi* buttressed the point. It also shows that our *chi* is derived from *Chi-u! u*. Little wonder He has few or no shrines. Humans are rather His shrines (*Oke mmadu bu oke arusi* – A great man is a great deity) and that is why they have the manipulative powers over the spirits. What is at stake is to decipher what has been fixed and acting to maximize opportunities within that horizon.

A muo ofeke o buru umu mana a muo Omalu, oburu ndi ichie biara ije – When a simpleton is born, he/she is accepted as a child, but when a great person is born, it means that the ancestors have come to assist. Ayika⁴⁰ holds that human dignity for the Igbo means *ndu na afa* – life and life actualizing deeds. In this line, therefore, greatness is born and greatness is nurtured. *Nwata ga-abu oke na-esite n'uju* – The greatness of a child is known from the primary stages of his life. He comes with a strong *chi* who will guide him to success, but he must also acknowledge the channel through which his *chi* comes to life, the ancestor. When a TV program is watched in a channel that is not well tuned, the pictures

⁴⁰ Ayika, P. (2012). *Dignity of women in Igbo traditional society: A socio-religious appraisal*, Awka: Nnamdi Azikiwe University

may be blurred and interferences may occur in the voice productions.

Onye chi ya na-adighi n'alo, onwu anaghi egbu ya – One whose *chi* does not partake of a plot cannot fall into the trap of death. Ezekwugo⁴¹ rightly maintained that *Chi* is the God of Igbo religion. The Igbo believe that if the gods gather to inflict death on one and one's *chi* is absent from the gathering, one may suffer grievously, but would not die. His *chi* will mediate and find a way out of the sickness or problem, no matter what time it takes. Hence Igbo bear the name: *Chimagoorom (Chiagooro)* - *my god vindicates me; chimasaaramokwu (Chinasa)* - *My god speaks for me; Chimamanda* – *My god will never fail me.*

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

Evaluation

The preceding exposition proves that the Igbo man has the spirit of *Chi-Ukwu* as he exists in the midst of spirits. This is geared

⁴¹ Ezekwugo *Op. Cit*

towards achieving success or maturity in life. Through divinations, the Igbo man discerns the *agwu nshi* or the spirit present in every object of experience for the reason of their manipulation in order to harmonize their world. This manipulation is not negative but rather a way of engaging the divine roles assigned to beings according to the mind of the Creator. This is the heart of the ecological harmony of the traditional Igbo. The spirit in nature sets the pace and limit for every give-and-take or correspondent actions. Hunting, farming, fighting, masquerading, menstruating, selling and buying, etc have limits set by the spirits that govern them, otherwise abomination sets in. *Uwa bu ahia* – the world is a market, where people come, buy, sell and go back bespeaks manipulation. It is in this sense that the Igbo is said to bear the business-like attitudes with their gods. The god or goddess that does not supply a determined role is removed and a more succinct one replaced. Removal of gods/goddesses has its own ritual in order to appease the spirit-beings that control the actions and/or objects, otherwise a disequilibrium results. Far from looking irresponsible, it is rather an ecological way of managing the creation handed over to man by *Chi-Ukwu*. This is rather done with purity, truth and fairness and such people are regarded as *ndi aka ha kwu otu*. Nzomiwu pointed out that “In Igbo land a just man is one who speaks the truth, without any fear or favour. He is a man of the community. He is kind, merciful, sociable and upright”⁴². Moving in the writhing coils of a snake in the face of the stakeholders of human existence, the spirits, otherwise referred to as manipulation, is rather wisdom for humans, whose target is to succeed in life and join their ancestors.

⁴² Nzomiwu, J. (1990). *The concept of justice among the traditional Igbo: An ethical inquiry*. Enugu: SNAAP, p.31

This is also captured in folk stories like the story of a flutist who was sent to the land of the spirits on an errand. He used his flute to entice the spirits and his good manners to secure their empathy. He came back successful, and still more, with the gift of wealth that changed the life of his family forever. Another child who was pushed by greed sojourned and came back with evil that plagued the existence of his family. This means that the astute and hardworking person is always a blessing to the family and, when he joins *Ndịichie* (ancestors), immortalizes his family. He is called *onye nsọ* or *onye nze* - one who abstains. This is used as a translation of a holy person, but it does not really mean the English 'sacred' as to dedicated to God; instead it stand for one who bridles his/her actions or tailors them to what is acceptable to the spirits and the community.

The Igbo of pre-colonial times had a well-developed leadership system that left them a peaceful people, ebullient in trade and strong in religion. According to Amadiume: "The pre-colonial period, pre-1900, is considered by present-day Igbo as the 'olden days', when traditional customs were 'pure and unspoilt'"⁴³. The Igbo had no king, yet they were very hardworking and peaceful. It was an egalitarian society, where morality depended on the goddess, *Ala*. *Nze na Ozo* (a group of titled men) stood as messengers of *Ala*, who could not pervert justice or come against the ordinance of the land for fear of death from *Ala*. This period inflamed the admiration of Vancouver Candice Goucher of Washington State University in an online comment to an article, "Connecting African history to the major themes of world's history". He maintained that the Igbo existed before the Islamic

⁴³ Amadiume, I. (1987). *African matriarchal foundations*. Uk: Karnak House, p.21

conquest, around 1000BCE and was connected with the trade of the civilized world then, yet they did not become a great political centre like the Benin Empire and the rest. No one man had it all and everyone was free to attain the level of titled men even though reaching this stage bespeaks a successful man. There were no dictators, rather there were directors in the person of priests, priestesses and *dibia*. All were rather governed by the morality norms of the earth goddess, who was well feared by the entire Igbo community. When the titled man, Okonkwo, flouted the rules, Achebe (1995) recounts through the mouth of Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess:

“...our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his fellow neighbour” ... “We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow.” “The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish.”⁴⁴

Okonkwo later committed a female crime against the land, which was an accidental gun-shot that killed a man and the punishment was seven years banishment. This was interpreted to be an overflow from neglecting the goddess’ week-of-peace. Okonkwo later ended his life by hanging himself, which also was an abomination to the land, the most demeaning of oneself. Achebe

⁴⁴ Achebe, C. (1986). *Things Fall Apart*. England: Multivista Global

says: "it is against our custom ... it is an abomination ... and an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansman. His body is evil and only strangers may touch it ... We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land"⁴⁵. The dignity of the Igbo person was not just wealth or success, but a cultured heart that had respect for the gods and spirits of the land. Okonkwo was successful, but did not join *Ndịichie*, the spirit-beings of the land, who controlled the morality and life of the people. They were the enforcers of the law and needed no help from the living in order to mete out justice.

However, *Ndịichie* partner with the living in some levels of enforcements through the masquerades. The masquerades were a sign of this partnership between the living, the initiates, and the *Ndịichie* in order to preserve social order, enhance the well-being of individuals and communities, and preserve the highest values in the community. Though this was an occult group, yet anybody can become a candidate except one who is edged out by age or another communal task which has a priority over giving meaning to life. Here, I mean the women, whom Ayika displays their 'ontic-ontological' representation of *Ala*, the goddess⁴⁶. The spiritual power of a woman was her identification with *Ala* in order to bring life into the community. Nothing came in between the menstrual blood of a woman and *Ala*, otherwise it became a taboo. Agbasiere⁴⁷ says that meeting a woman at such times would infect a man with *orja nwanyị*, (woman-sickness) named so probably

⁴⁵ Ibid, Pp. 207-208

⁴⁶ Ayika, P. (2014). "The heritage of Igbo religion: challenges to the hotchpotch of values of women". *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, Vol 1 No 6. Awka: Global Select, P. 79

⁴⁷ Agbasiere, J. (2000). *Women in Igbo life and thought*. New York: Routledge

because it was a breach of communion between a woman and the woman-essence, the Goddess of Igbo religion. Egwuatu⁴⁸ calls it a cleansing and purifying exercise that signified peace with the 'gods' and, this was why the woman sat on an earth-hole during this time which was called *iba na nsọ* - going into being holy. Women were thus excluded from some communal places and actions like the streams and the *mmanwụ* cult during this time or period of their life. All these are pointing out that the division in gender roles were not borne out of oppression but out of the masterplan of ritualizing the relationships with the divine roles assigned to the spirits and of aligning with the fact of duality of reality.

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

Conclusion

Ife kwurū, ife akwudebe ya - Something stands by another. From the on-going, one can actually see that what stands by another is the physical world and the other is the spiritual world. It is like the shrine of an *arusi*, which has a physical site of a deity. The site may be a tree or some totem animals but the main power that these

⁴⁸ Egwuatu, U. (2008). "Menstruation in Rural Igbo Women of South East Nigeria: Attitudes, Beliefs and Practices." *African Journal of Reproductive Health Vol. 12 No.1 April, 2008*. Retrieved 8th July, 2012 from <http://www.bioline.org.br/pdf?rh08016>

physical signs point to remains hidden. It is wrong to bring down the tree while the spirit is still present. In places like Osumenyi, if the tree is simply brought down, it stands up again. The spirit is *ife na-emelu ya ife* – that by which the physical stands. Edeh maintains above that this “invisible element is distinct from and yet part of the visible, and in fact it is “that by which the visible is””⁴⁹. The spirit remains subject to the visible entities in a *subject-object* relationship. It is that which defines the quintessence of the material reality; and to deal with the spirit is to deal with the kernel of life of anything. A proverb above points at this succinctly: *O bu e lee ka chi nwata ha anya, e wee kenye ya oru*. Arazu defines *Dibia oje na mmuo* as one who is “the initiate in the mysteries of nature”⁵⁰. It meant that he dealt with the essence, the spirit-content of any visible reality and this was why they were rated high in the traditional Igbo life.

⁴⁹ Edeh, *Op.cit*, p.79

⁵⁰ Arazu, R. (2003). *Man know thyself: Discovering the master plan by knowing which everything else is known*. SNAAP Press Ltd, Enugu. p.12