

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

Kraft asserts, “knowing a people involves contact with their (world view) i.e their mental picture of reality which is the central control box designing and governing their relationship.”<sup>1</sup> This however, refers to a people’s perception beliefs and interpretations of the problems of reality and human existence. The Igbo cosmological view reflects the solutions the Igbo give to the varieties of problems erupting from their experiences of the marvels of the world, life and the circumstances surrounding them. Cosmological existence is like a two faced coin. Life and death are two opposites that complement each other. None can be discussed without relating to the other. The problem of death like other fundamental problems of philosophy is as old as mankind and philosophy. The question of death is universal; it cannot be restricted to a particular culture. Life and death are so complicated and enigmatic that man can neither grasp their clear picture nor give vivid explanation of them. Man passes through stages of life; he is thrown into life through birth, grows and face extinction; the principle underlying these is beyond his imagination and cognition. The process of metamorphosis of human life so much perplexed man that he began to interrogate the nature of his being, as well as the origin, meanings and purpose of life and death.

The theme of this research points to the Igbo concept of death and its implication for man as a social being. It also emphasizes on how the Igbo as a cultural entity perceive and interpret the problem of death and other issues revolving around it in relation to human existence. The questions asked are: what is death? How do the Igbo perceive it? The concept of death cannot be discussed profoundly without involving the concept of life because the two contradict and complement each other. In as much as they are different, yet they are intermingling. Without life, there would be no death and vice versa. The Igbo conceptualized life and death with mixed feelings and beliefs. To them, Life is so precious and worth preserving. It is a continuous process and yet meaningless.

Life is meaningless in the sense that, change is constant. Reality is in motion. Whatever that exists today may definitely not exist tomorrow. Man exists today and vanishes tomorrow. Life is full of ups and downs. Igbo people used to say, "*Ihe ọbụla Chukwu kere, nwere ihu na azụ* (every reality has opposite)."<sup>2</sup> We are in the world of conflicts and opposites. Emphasizing on this, Heraclitus writes:

Although the universe is a universe of conflict, strife and clash of opposites, it is nevertheless not a chaotic one, for an imminent law, a universal law, a universal principle of reasons and order (logos) governs it. The logos is the cosmic principle of intelligibility, the principle of order and harmony and the universal law. It is the logos which brings order and harmony out of the conflict of opposites.<sup>3</sup>

The Igbo believe that the polarity between life and death is made by God. As there is harmonious polarization between day and night, young and old, wise and foolish, male and female, so it exists between life and death. The world is characterized by conflicts and flux. Everything functions based on the arrangement by the principle of order and harmony. Without life, there would be no death. One Igbo adage says, "*n'etiti ndụ, anyi nọ n' ọnwụ* ( *in the midst of life, there is chances of death*)."<sup>4</sup> Death is always very close to every man and, it is ready to strike at the appointed time. This in effect implies that, in as much as man lives, he will definitely leave this world one day.

According to the Igbo people, death means, "the separation of the *mmụọ* (spirit) from the *ahụ* (body)."<sup>5</sup> It is also described as, "man's transformation and transition to the glorious ancestral existence."<sup>6</sup> In the traditional Igbo culture, death is perceived as one reality that has left mankind confused and humbled. It is one thing that visits man when least expected and often, leaves unbearable scars on his relations. For them, death is the most certain, yet the most uncertain phenomenon in man's earthly existence. As it is, it is the most certain because, it is a call everybody must answer irrespective of the age and status etc. Characteristically, death is universal, inescapable, imminent,

inexorable and horrendous. In the philosophy of death, no one is an unbeliever. Death is unfriendly; it fears and respects no body. It is a phenomenon everybody must encounter. It befalls young and old, infant and adult etc. In as much as death in Igbo cosmological conception is necessary, yet, it is taken to be a bad omen because it marks the demise of their loved ones or someone very close to the family. Death is bad omen when one dies under unbecoming circumstance. This prompted their views of bad deaths, premature and mature deaths. But, what is bad death? Could man be said to die prematurely? What is mature death? And, when do we say that man has died prematurely or maturely? Etc.

In Igbo culture and tradition, there is a strong belief in the philosophy of mature death. Mature death means death at ripe old age. It is the death of an aged man who must have fulfilled all the socially stipulated criteria for achieving the goal of human life. In Igbo custom and tradition, deaths at old age coupled with the set criteria of moral uprightness, marriage, procreation and receiving of proper burial rite from one's children or relations are the conditions for the attainment of the prerequisite goals of the blissful but gloomy ancestral life. But, is ancestral life real? Shall we stick solemnly to the principles of mature death? Is it not possible that once a man is born into life as an infant, he or she becomes old enough to die? In as much as the Igbo custom stipulates the criteria to be reached in order to attain the glorious world of ancestors, what of those that neither married nor procreated, especially those that are celibates? Where do they go after death? Does it mean that their portion is lost in the ancestral communion? What of those that did not marry nor procreated yet, they received funeral rites from their kinsmen or the organization to which they belong? What should be their stand? What of those that died at infant or youth age? What about those that married and procreated children but as a result of one problem or the other especially financial problem, their children did not perform their burial ceremonies? In fact, the Igbo conception of death poses and attracts a lot of arguments and criticism. Man by nature is afraid of death. His urge is to live permanently on earth but death is his stumbling block. Yet the urge was indirectly granted to him through procreation and

reincarnation. The Igbo people's conception, feelings and interpretations of death are expressed through the names they give to their children e.g.

- Ọnwụdịnjọ* - Death is bad and cruel
- Ọnwụamaeze* - Death knows no king or wealth
- Ọnwụatuegwu* - Death doesn't fear
- Onyekaọnwụ* - Who is above death?
- Ọnwụka* - Death is the worst

As cited above, man naturally desires to live perpetually on earth. But, given that death is inevitable and that man cannot manipulate it, he then resorts to pleading with it. Thus, the Igbo express this in the names they give to their children:

- Ọnwụbiko* - Death I implore you
- Ọnwụachusim* - Please death stop pursuing me
- Ọnwụchekwa* - May death wait
- Ọnwụegbulam* - May death not kill me
- Ọnwụra* - If death allows or leaves me

Answering these names implies that the Igbo believe that once there is life, man will accomplish the purpose for which he was created. So in a situation where man dies prematurely without reaching these standards of life, his purpose of coming into life will remain unachieved and such a person will have the problem of joining the ancestors of which every traditional Igbo man strives for.

The general or common conception is that death is universal. Its visit is not negotiable. The philosophy of death does not entertain bribery, appointment or selection. Death cannot be shown who to kill. It befalls whoever it feels. This, however is expressed in Igbo names like

- Ọnwụzuruigbo* - death is universal
- Anaeziọnwụ* - nobody dictates for death who to kill
- Ọnwuringo* - Death does not accept bribes
- Ọnwụanụizu* - death hears no discussion
- Ọnwumere* - it is death that caused it

In the traditional Igbo life, death is perceived as the most uncertain phenomenon because, nobody knows when, where and how he is going to die. To the Igbo, life is a continuous process, and death actually is not the end of human life but a transition to ancestral life which is the authentic existence. It is also assumed in Igbo philosophy that man does not die completely but rather transcends the material life to join the ancestors only to return again to earthly existence through reincarnation. The question of the certitude of reincarnation has raised dust all over the world. The belief in this concept thrived mainly in the traditional African universe. Little mention of it however was made by Pythagoras in the ancient period of the Western philosophy. In his metempsychotic view, Pythagoras as a passerby saw and hushed a man that was flogging a dog believing that the spirit of his dead friend reincarnated the dog. Aside this, there was no proof of reincarnation in the critical western philosophy.

The ontological study of man in Igbo universe claims that it is the spirit that reincarnates into new being after death. And that, amongst all the living beings, it is only man that witnessed the authentic death that is felt and noticed. However man derives from the being of God and that makes him superior to other creatures. In the hierarchical structure of being, man is below God, gods or deities and ancestors. Man fears and reveres the spirits, he is the superior and master to all earthly beings, hence he exercises control and directs them towards their normal purposes of life using the force of *Nommo* (the power of spoken word) ike *dị n' okwu ọnyụ*. Man generally is believed to be the centre of universe. He exists and communicates between the invisible world of spirits and the visible world of men. He possesses the life force *ike ndụ* with which he transcends the visible world to penetrate the spirit realm to interact with them. Human being according to this group of people, shares in two realms, in materiality, he dines with the creatures while in spirituality he transcends nature to share with the spiritual existence. Commenting on this, Copleston writes...,"for he possesses a spiritual mind which transcends the material worlds and the determining laws of efficient causality which governs the world."<sup>7</sup>

Man possesses a special life force. He is a free, religious, social political as well as moral and aesthetic being. He is capable of distinguishing between good and evil, right and wrong beauty and ugly etc. Man possesses an intelligence and consciousness which he uses to free the frozen forces in things, and channels them towards fulfilling the purpose for which they were created. With this therefore, man is the master of things. Emphasizing on this, Copleston once more writes:

Man is not deceived when he regarded himself as superior to bodily things (subject matter of science)... when he recognized in himself a spiritual and material soul, he is not being led astray by false imaginings that are due to merely physical and social causes. On the contrary, he grasps what is profoundly true in this matter.<sup>8</sup>

The traditional Igbo believe that the spirit of human being which is his real self reincarnates after death, and that it also has the capacity to reincarnate as many times as it could so far as the descendants still exist in the visible world. They also believe that, reincarnation ceases only when such dead has no descendants any more on earth. So at this point, such dead person will be said to have died completely. It is also the belief of the Igbo that there are some people who once they died their souls and spirits die too. Such are the people that deviated from abiding by the moral rules of "do good and avoid evil". Examples of such people include the sorcerers, witches and wizards, those that committed suicide etc. The traditional Igbo people's philosophy of death and continuity of human life after death is discriminating and contained errors.

The Igbo like other Africans actually believe that the dead are not alive but they do exist. According to them, the spirits of the dead exist as ancestors in the spiritual world, and also transcend themselves into physical objects. Attaching more importance to this, as cited in Muntu Birago Diop "a Senegambian Poet" writes in the following verses:

Hear more of thing than beings,  
The voice of the fire listening,

Hear the voice of the water,  
Hear in the wind,  
The bushes sobbing,  
It is the sign of our forebears.

Those who are dead are never gone;  
They are there in the thickening shadow  
The dead are not under the earth,  
They are in the tree that rustles,  
They are in the wood that groans  
They are in the water that runs  
They are in the water that sleeps  
They are in the cut, they are in the  
Crowd, the dead are not dead

Those who are dead are never gone,  
They are in the breast of the woman,  
They are in the child who are wailing,  
And in the fire brand that flames  
They are not under the earth,  
They are in the fire that is dying  
They are in the grasses that weep,  
They are in the whispering rocks  
They are in forest, they are in house  
The dead are not dead.<sup>9</sup>

The spirits of the dead in the Igbo cosmological view are not static but dynamic. They exist everywhere as spiritual force in the world beneath, in the physical objects and in the air. Those who are dead are never gone. They still exist in the invisible realm and then interact with the living. Emphasizing further on this, Alegxis Kagame a *Ruandise* aptly avers, “Strictly therefore, it is false to say that the dead live. They do not live but

exist as spiritual forces. As spiritual forces, the dead man, the ancestor, is in communication with his descendants.”<sup>10</sup>

Reflecting deeply on these beliefs, we then ask: How can the spirit of a dead person be said to exercise double existence? Who has physically seen them existing in the physical objects and in the air? If at all one has claimed to have encountered them, does such claim have epistemological strength? Is the claim true? How can he prove it? Again, how can we believe that a person who has been confirmed dead and buried is said to still exist and interact with the living? Is this not a fallacy? Who has ever seen spirit and keeps living in his full consciousness? Despite the fact that world view generally is all about beliefs and assumptions, we shall still delve deeply into these in the subsequent chapters to know how assertive the Igbo are about them. Because, the Igbo people used to say, *“nkụ dị na mba, n’eghere mba nri* (people live and sustain themselves based on what they have).”<sup>11</sup> Again, *“ihe mmadụ kpọrọ nkịta ya, ka ọna aza* (anything man called his dog, that he bears).”<sup>12</sup> *“Chi onye kwenyere n’ya, ka ọna efe* (whatever god one believe in, that he serves).”<sup>13</sup>

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Problems abound, man’s wonder about his experiences and encounters with the phenomenon of the world and that of human existence prompted him to question, reflect, search and offer solutions and explanations to them. Nevertheless, the research standard, both in philosophy and other disciplines focuses on collection of data and solving of problems encircling the theme of the research in question. Thus, this work tends towards elucidating the puzzling issues revolving around the Igbo conception of death such as: the question of What is death? What is the origin of death? What are the characteristics of death? What factors could prompt the occurrence of death? What are the signs of death? Or when do we confirm that a man is dead? Must all men experience death? Etc. The problem of personal identity which poses such questions as: what is man? What is the constituent nature of his being? Is man essentially body or spirit? The problem of immortality which bears the questions: Is death the end of



human existence? Or could there be another life after death? Where does man go after his departure or transition from the earthly existence? Since the Igbo believed that the spirit of man goes to the ancestral world after death, does it mean that they are apportioned with an abode there? Who can prove it?

In as much as we have mentioned varieties of issues begging for solutions in this research, there are still many more that queue on the same line and also pleading for answers. These however include: The problem of disembodied existence which asks: Are the dead really dead? Could they interact with the living? Could the spirit of the dead exist in the spirit world as ancestors and, at same time in the physical object? Could there be death in the spirit world? If yes, what factor could prompt that? However, the last but not the least problem to be solved in this research is the problem of reincarnation. This poses questions: Could the dead come back to earthly life after death? That is, is reincarnation true? Is the new born baby truly the person that is said to have reincarnated him? If in the affirmative, what epistemological backing has such an answer? Hence, the Igbo people's solution and explanations to these and the subsequence issues that may erupt as we proceed in this work is our main concern.

### **1.3 Purpose of Study**

This work aims at examining and interpreting the nature and meaning of death and its implications for man as a being in the Igbo/African society. There are however, core problems encircling the topic of our research that need philosophical attention. Such include the essential nature of man, life after death, the problem of disembodied existence and the rest. The Igbo seem to have stipulated the criteria which man needs to fulfill in order to join his ancestors blissfully. Hence, it is the objective of this research to understand and expose the Igbo people's explanations and beliefs to these problems and their implications for man and society at large.

#### **1.4 Scope of Study**

No research work could be said to be all encompassing rather, each is narrowed down to a particular sphere of operation. Hence, this research will go the same way. It would be vast in this sphere with regards to the hermeneutical exposition of the concept of death in the Igbo cosmological perception and its effects on man as a social being and the society itself.

#### **1.5 Significance of Study**

This work will be an important source of knowledge to any rational person that comes across it, especially to the students of philosophy who major specifically on African philosophy (metaphysics) as their area of study. It will help all the Igbo/African scholars in the field of science who despite the fact that they engaged in scientific disciplines, to be proud and defend their culture against the varieties of jests and ridicules they have encountered from their Euro-Western mates who accused their society of lacking intelligence and civilization. It will serve as an eye opener to the people that are ignorant of African way of life in general and the Igbo people's culture in particular. Thus, this research will help to promote the position of the Igbo philosophy as part of the complex body of African philosophy in the realm of intellectual development and civilization. Since there is a denial and repudiation of the existence of philosophy in traditional Africa, the outcome of this research will be an instrument to, contradict the Western philosopher's, especially Hegel's, Sartres, Kant's and Levy Bruhl's arrogant, ferocious and nasty denial of philosophy and civilisation in traditional African societies. No world is uncivilized and primitive. No world, no society or people can be said to lack philosophy. Because, rationality is the causal chain that ties people together all over the world. There is no part of the world where men are not struct with the marvels of reality and life. Hence, men throughout the globe do question, reflect and offer solutions and explanations to the issues of human existence, and the environment around. Philosophy per se is worldwide. Since this is so, this work however, will aid to make known to people especially the western philosophers that, the Igbo like other peoples of the world have their own beliefs, assumptions and solutions to the

cosmological, ontological and eschatological problems of reality and human life. The knowledge of the Igbo people's perceptions and explanations to the problem of death and other issues erupting from it which is encapsulated in their culture and religious beliefs as well as their social/political practices, will help to open the eyes and minds of the (Afro-European philosophers) professional African philosophers who due to the influence of the Western culture on them, refuted and denied the existence of philosophy in the traditional Africa. This more so, will help to make them realize and acknowledge the need to be proud of their original identity. Thus, Agrey says, "he who is not proud of his colour is not worthy to be the son of the soil". Such person he further argues "has lost his identity and is not worth living." Thus, the significance of this study is much more than expected. It will help those that are afraid of death to know actually that it is not as they view and think of it. But rather, they should conceive it as a change of world for the new world or, a transition to the ancestral bliss from which man reincarnates to new man in the earthly existence. It will also enable people to understand that death is very necessary and that through rebirth system, it helps to maintain permanency in the continuity and progress of human society. So, to enjoy the glorious ancestral life, every man should endeavour to conduct himself and behave towards achieving and fulfilling at least the stipulated conditions of moral uprightness.

## **1.6 Methodology**

For any research work to yield as expected, whether in the natural science, philosophy, social or management science, it is very necessary that the researcher must make use of one method or another. So, to reach the set objective of this paper, we will aptly delve deeply into Igbo people's world view using the hermeneutical method of philosophical investigation. This is because the theme of this research focuses on the culture, belief and practices of a particular society (Igbo) whose indices of language varies from those of the other societies of the world.

### **Hermeneutics**

The concept of hermeneutics was inspired by "Hermes" the Greek termed messenger of the gods. Its literal meaning is drawn from the Greek word "*hermeneutike*" Hermes; the

source of this word was the mythological Greek deity whose role is that of the messenger of the Gods. He mediates between gods themselves and between the gods and humanity. Hermes was believed by the Greeks to be the deity that leads the souls to the underworld upon death. Apart from his intermediary role, he is also considered, “the inventor of language and speech, an interpreter, a liar, a thief and trickster. These multiple functions make him an ideal representative figure for hermeneutics. As Socrates noted, “words have the power to reveal and conceal, thus promoting the message in an ambiguous way.” The Greek believe that language, which is consistently sign of interpretation and that which could lead to truth or falsehood is the very essence of Hermes, who is said to relish the uneasiness of the thoughts of the recipients.

Hermeneutics is one of the numerous methods of philosophical investigation. It is broadly, “an art and science of text interpretation.”<sup>14</sup> It is used interchangeably with exegesis. It is a more widely defined discipline of interpretation theory, because it includes the entire framework of the interpretative process, encompassing written, verbal and non verbal communication. Exegesis in the other way round focuses primarily on written text. There are two types of hermeneutics viz, the “Traditional” and “modern” hermeneutics. The traditional type is, “the study of the interpretation of written texts, especially on the area of literature, religion and law.”<sup>15</sup> Examples of this is the biblical hermeneutics in religious studies and social philosophy. Hermeneutics is, “the study of theory and practice of interpretation.”<sup>16</sup> Modern hermeneutics on the other hand encompasses everything in the interpretative process including verbal and non verbal forms of communication as well as prior aspects that communicate, like presuppositions, pre-understandings, the meaning and philosophy of language and semiotics.

After the post modern hermeneutics approach, there emerged the objective hermeneutics which focuses on the use of hermeneutic (interpretative) procedure as the basic method for gaining precise and valid knowledge in the social sciences etc. The concept of hermeneutics however, is applied in all discipline e.g. it is used in

archeology, architecture, international relation, law, political philosophy, psychology, religion and theology, safety science, sociology etc. Hermeneutics as a method of philosophy passes through the four periods of the western philosophy. It started in the ancient period and run down through the medieval or scholastic period, modern and contemporary periods, each containing its characteristic features and contents as well as scholars and their views and practices. The ancient period of hermeneutics started precisely with Aristotle. Aristotle introduced the concept of hermeneutics, particularly the traditional type which is said to derive its etymological root from the Greek word "*hermeno*" – meaning "translate" or "interpret". Hermeneutics in Latin language means "*De interpretatione*."<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the African version of the meaning and origin of the term hermeneutics is not far different from that of the Euro-Westerners. Many African scholars have in diverse ways given their ideas about the meaning of this term. Some scholars like R.O. Madu and Sylvernus Nnoruka suggest a sacred origin to the word hermeneutics when they explain that it rooted from the ancient Greek term "*hermenia*". This they said is associated with the name of the ancient Greek god "Hermes" ( a deity in the Greek mythology) that acts as a go between the gods and mankind, whose function is to understand, translate and interpret the intentions of the gods to mortals.

The Igbo scholars like their western counter parts believed that Hermeneutics as the science of interpretation is applied in all disciplines ranging from philosophy, history, theology, psychology, jurisprudence, literary and textual criticisms in the entire humanities. Though, it means different things depending on the field of study under consideration, it can mean sort of rendering of one's language intelligible to another (i.e. the work of the interpreter). As such, it is not essentially different from exegesis. Thus J. Obi Oguejiofor comments that:

Though many thinkers add different slants to the meaning of the term, in general hermeneutics involves the bringing out of the inner meaning to the open. It

entails making explicit what is implicit. It is thus a quest for meaning, one's own meaning in one's life, society, milieu, in short the totality of one's universe which could be said to be constituted by one's cultural symbols.<sup>18</sup>

Emphasizing more, he says, "Hermeneutics involves deeper traditional overtones of bringing out a hidden meaning to light, a kind of revelation and disclosure. It is not merely what the author intended to do. So, it would be to fall short at the very point when true interpretation must begin. Rather it goes beyond the text to ask what the author did not and could not say yet which in the text comes to light as its inner most dynamic."<sup>19</sup>

According to R.O. Madu, "hermeneutics traditionally has its utmost expression in the study of scriptures, but also connotes a methodological concern that is shared by among all fields of knowledge, which most often makes it to assume ambiguous connotations – when applied as a method of interpreting literary text. For others, it designates a movement in the twentieth century philosophy and theology. For yet another group, the term designates a movement in the disciplines in the human and social sciences which make use of the methods of understanding and interpretation."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the concept of hermeneutics and its meaning attracted the ideas and explanations of many western and African scholars like; Paul Ricoeur, J. Habermas, Gadamer, R.E. Palmer, Theophilus Okere, J. Obi Oguejiofor etc. These scholars and others have in one way or the other perceived the symbolic nature of words and expressions which are communicated and made comprehensible through the use of hermeneutics as a science of interpretation. In all therefore, hermeneutics as a method of philosophical inquiry is, "an act of interpretation, expression and the breaking down of complex concepts into an understandable order."<sup>21</sup>

Having known the method applied in this research, the whole work will be divided into seven chapters. Chapter one contains all the rudimentary aspects of the research.

Chapter two shall centre on the literature review. In chapter three, we shall emphasize and trace the historical origin of the Igbo people as well as other matters encircling it. Chapter four shall focus on the Igbo concept of death. Here, we shall discuss types of death, characteristic of death, causes of death, signs of death terms related to death etc. Chapter five shall emphasize the question of death and other related issues, such as, the problem of personal identity, the problem of immortality, the problem of reincarnation and the goals of human life as criteria for ancestral bliss. Then chapter six shall expose how the Igbo concept of death affects man and the society at large. Finally in chapter seven we shall evaluate, criticise and conclude.

### **1.7 Definition of Terms**

A comprehensive understanding of any research work, whether scientific or philosophical, calls for the definitions and interpretations of the key words that constitute the theme of such work. So, here in “the Hermeneutics of death in Igbo world view and its social-anthropological implications”, we shall define world view, Igbo world view, anthropology, social anthropology and death.

#### **Igbo World View**

Understanding the meaning of Igbo world view entails giving a conceptual analysis of the phrase “world view”. As there are diverse cultures and people, so there are different world views. World view like other concepts has no definite meaning. There are individual world view, people’s world view etc. to capture a wide world picture of it, it is very necessary to channel towards its etymological, lexical and some individual explanations.

World view as a concept derives its root meaning from the German words; *Welt* – meaning “world” and *Anschanuung* – meaning “view” or “out-look”. World view is fundamental to German philosophy and epistemology and, refers to as a wide world perception. It refers to as the framework of ideas and beliefs through which any individual, group or culture interprets and interacts with the environment.”<sup>22</sup>

Comprehensively, world-view can be described as, “the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society’s encompassing the entirety of individual or society’s knowledge and point of view including natural philosophy”. Fundamental, existential and normative postulations or themes, values, emotions and ethics, a worldview is, “a network of presupposition which is not verified by the procedures of natural science, but in terms of which every aspect of knowledge and experience is interpreted and interact.”<sup>23</sup> A people’s worldview connotes their cosmological, metaphysical and eschatological perceptions of all reality. Worldview according to *Longman Dictionary of the Contemporary English* means, “someone’s opinion and attitude to the world and things in general”<sup>24</sup>. Relating to the 1989 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary of Philosophy*, worldview is simply “a contemplation of the world, a view of life; it is also described as, “a particular philosophy of life, a concept of the world held by an individual or group.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the *New Webster Dictionary* of the English language defines worldview as, “a philosophy of life or a conception of the world from a specific view point, *Weltanschauung*.”<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the search for the meaning of world view does not stop with the etymological and lexical definitions. There are yet individuals and groups perspectives. Kenfunk in his book *What is Weltanschauung*, says, “world view seems self evident an intellectual perspective on the world or universe”. According to Enyeribe Onuoha, world view means:

A conceptualization of the universe providing a structured and unified picture of the cosmos and defining man’s place and role in it. It comprises a set of values, concepts, attitudes and images which guided man’s perception and interpretation of facts and events. It is a mental map of the universe.<sup>27</sup>

Kraft defines worldview as the “central control box which governs the applications of the people’s conceptualizations of their relationships to reality.”<sup>28</sup> Ikenga Metu in his



work gives a vivid and very interesting definition of world view. He however described it as a complex of the people's beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, the nature, structure, organizations and interaction of beings in their universe with particular reference to man."<sup>29</sup> According to the scholars mentioned above and others, worldview has many functions. The functions are focused towards man. It enables man to function effectively in his environment and provides man with a set of intervention techniques by which he can act on his environment particularly in times of distress. It serves as an important key to the knowledge of a people's culture. It evaluates culture, it gives psychological reinforcement to the various cultural groups. World view helps people to integrate their own perceptions and also guides culture to adapt to various changes. According to I.E. Metu, "it helps to know how a people view the world around them or how they seek to answer the fundamental questions about the place and relationship of man with the universe etc. In all, worldview comprises of the cosmological, metaphysical and eschatological perceptions of a people about reality."<sup>30</sup> etc.

Igbo world view is something peculiar to Igbo culture. It comprises their beliefs attitudes in regards to the origin, nature, structures and organizations of all reality as well as their interactions in the world. This include the traditional Igbo people's cosmological, metaphysical and eschatological conceptions of the world. It is both natural and coeval with the Igbo man as a "being-in-the-Igbo-world" its essential horizon is limited to the experiences of the Igbo. It can be briefly defined as the collective uncritical views of the Igbo, their "outlook" in life. This type of outlook however is as old as the Igbo themselves and is transmitted to generations yet unborn.

Like other traditional world views, the Igbo people's world view is characteristically featured with traditionalism. This is because it is essentially and primarily limited strictly to their reasons or nature. It is co-natural and according to C.B. Okolo, "it is not something revealed or extraneous to Igbo people unlike that of Islam or Christianity."<sup>31</sup> Such world view he concludes is handed from generation to generation. It is a heritage from the past which links the past with the future. Igbo world view encapsulates in their

oral tradition and has no written literature. It is largely and easily seen in their myths, proverbs, riddles, ballads in their songs and liturgies etc. Igbo world view as it is emanated as a result of the experiences, reflections, questions and answers given by our forebears with regard to the marvel of reality.

Igbo world view is communal. It is a world view traceable to the forebears. It is the sum total of the whole belief systems of the Igbo which is the product of communal thinking, communal living and above all, collective insight through an appeal, for instance, to collective authority that is a collective consensus of the elders or tradition. Igbo world view is based on "faith". It is based on unproven assumptions. It thrives well in assumptions which fall short of unscientific methods of inquiry and, the creed of such a world view is to be accepted as an article of faith. Typical example of this is the right and truth of the Igbo concept of reincarnation. Igbo world view is taken out of their context, it is therefore uncritical and largely dogmatic. It accepts anything about the past without raising questions. It accepts that the world and its contents (reality) are given. It is regarded as sacred and no traditional Igbo calls it to question or doubts its validity etc.

Igbo world-view is mythical by nature. It is preserved in myths and other cultural expressions. Consequently, the Igbo have varieties of myths like that of the origin of the world, origin of death, the origin of fire, that of how God was very nearer to people etc. Commenting on the mythical nature of Igbo world view, Celestine Mbaegbu says:

Igbo world view tends to be and often is mythical as opposed to scientific and critical. Myth as an unscientific mode of explaining or understanding reality indeed pervades the traditional world of the African as other people's world, too. Myths as a whole do not explain everything in the sense of rational, critical explanation or even explication of things.<sup>32</sup>

The fact of being mythical does not mean that Igbo world view is primitive and illogical as argued by some philosophers. This is true because people in all cultures and races differ only in degree, not in kind, they make use of the faculty of reason which is unique to man etc.

Igbo people's world view is anthropocentric by nature. It is so in the sense that it is centered on man. Man is important and indeed central in Igbo world view but is by no means the measure of all things. There are superior beings and laws higher than him which he must obey or else face drastic consequences. Man is the centre of creation. He is amidst the spiritual and that of physical reality. He is the master of things, he has the authority to control and direct both the animates inanimates and infra-beings towards their normal purposes of creation. Emphasizing on this, J. Obi Oguejiofor correctly observes that "the Igbo, like many other communities in Africa, place man *mmadu* at the centre of their universe. Nature, society itself, and a host of innumerable spiritual beings are relevant in so far as they affect man (positively or negatively)." <sup>23</sup>

Another important feature of Igbo world-view is "wisdom" Igbo world view as said before is mythical. Myth contains wisdom, it is a reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring out not only the truth it proclaims but must proclaim and elaborate a poetic form of truth. This implies that myths are not just empty stories; they contain hidden lessons in them etc. Igbo world view as it is, is a sum of total assumptions entertained by the pre-modern Igbo. This as said within the text contains the cosmological, metaphysical and eschatological views of all there is. These however are summarized by Celestine .C. Mbaegbu in his book *Hermeneutics of God in Igbo ontology* as follows:

### **The Cosmological Beliefs of Igbo People**

Belief in the existence of a material world the opposite of the spirit world, this is in consequence of the Igbo belief that everything in the world has its opposite, inner-side or a double.

Belief in the ontological goodness of the world, it is a perfect world in structure and beautiful world in design. The world when created by God *Chineke* was good and innocent but the emergence of man in it that is, man's quest to satisfy his appetitive part and manoeuvre nature brought about its pollution and corruption which is evil in the society. The presence of evil and imperfection existing in the world today are extrinsic. They are the consequences of the actions of men and the gods. Belief that the world is the world of *Chi-ukwu* greatest spirit and the God of creation, He is also believed to be the creative principle of other beings outside Him.

Belief that the Supreme Being *Chi-ukwu* provides, sustains and governs the world to its end. These operative attributes of God as well as His immanent nature in Igbo world view expressed in one of the principal names of God, namely, *Oseburuwa* God, carrier of the world, By this immanent attribute of God. He is also the principle of continued existence and dependence of all created beings including the immortal gods.

Man is believed to control the created 'things in the universe because of his super-intelligence. There is the belief in the influence of the gods on the mortality of the Igbo man. *Chi-ukwu* the Supreme Being is not regarded as the arbiter in moral issues *Ani* the earth goddess and the ancestors are believed to punish any breach of morality especially the very grave ones. But God remains the ultimate source of power and authority believed of moral issues.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Metaphysical Belief of the Igbo People**

Belief in the existence of the spiritual world *ala mụọ* the abode of *Chi-ukwu* Big God and other spirits both the benevolent and malevolent ones. Belief in the existence of gods who are subordinates to Big God. Examples of such major gods are; *Ala* earth goddess, *Igwe* sky god, *Anyanwụ* sun god, *Egbe Igwe* thunder god, *Ahịajioku* god of agriculture etc. Belief in other minor gods, they believed in ancestors or "the living dead" or human spirits. And believe in *Ogwụ* mystical and magical powers.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Eschatological Beliefs the Igbo People**

The Igbo have firm belief in death, in after life and in the doctrine of reincarnation. For them, death is a universal and inevitable tragedy, it is a gate way for joining the ancestors in next world (spirit world). The manner of passage into the 'after life' matters a lot for the Igbo, the goal of life of every traditional Igbo is to join the ancestors at death. These cannot be achieved without commitment. To reach the goal, man must fulfill the standards of moral upright life, marriage, reproduction, old age and receiving funeral rite from either the children or relations at death. Accomplishing these values means that the person had lived good life. This however leads to good death which grants him ancestral communion and reincarnation as rewards. Man's inability to accomplish these standards results to and/unnatural death. This adversely affects the victims in the sense that they are denied the above mentioned reward etc.<sup>36</sup>

### **Anthropology**

The term anthropology is derived from the Greek words *anthropos* – meaning “man”. This also means *persona* in the Latin language. And *logos* means “discourse” or “Study” therefore, “it means the study of man.”<sup>37</sup> Anthropology is, “the science of humanity.”<sup>38</sup> It has origins in the “humanities”, the “natural sciences, and the “social sciences.” Anthropology is the study of humans, past and present.”<sup>39</sup> to understand the full sweep and complexity of cultures across all of human history, anthropology draws and builds upon knowledge from the social and biological sciences as well as the humanities and physical sciences. The concern of the study of these concepts or those that studied it (anthropologists) is the application of knowledge to the solution of human problems.

### **Social Anthropology**

To talk of social anthropology is to talk of the study of man as a social being, that is the study of man in relation to the society. Social anthropology means the same as socio cultural anthropology or ethnology. It is all about studying the social patterns and practices across cultures, with a special interest in how people live in particular places and how they organize, govern and create meanings. The hallmark of this is its concern

with similarities and differences, both within and among societies, and its attention to race, sexuality, class, gender and nationality etc. In the context of the theme of this research, “hermeneutics of death in Igbo world view and its socio-anthropological implications”, the paper focuses and stresses on the implications or effects of the Igbo people’s view of death to man as a being living in a society. That is how their conception of death touches man and humanity at large.

### **Death**

The solution to the question will be narrowed down towards the context of its etymological meaning, its associated terms, dictionary, scholarly and Igbo definitions. Death is used to describe when biological functions that sustain a living organism cease. Organism in this sense includes man and other animate beings. Amongst the beings that have life, the Igbo like other people’s of the world biologically believe that man is the only being whose death is felt and noticed due to his nature and status in the realm of beings of the physical existence, e.g. animals and trees die and nobody notice it, they experience death but do not feel nor predict it. There are different phenomena which commonly bring about death, such includes; old age, predation, malnutrition, disease and accident or trauma. Apart from this general perception, there are in Igbo context other causes of death. They believe that man can die as a result of invoking of evil forces either from sorcerer, witchcrafts, and infliction of unpleasant suffering or poisoning one in different ways by evil men. The traditional Igbo believe strictly that man cannot die without any cause. The death of Igbo man, no matter the age must have occurred as a result of certain causes. One Igbo idiom says, “*Onye Igbo adighi onwu gbara aka* Igbo man cannot die without cause.”<sup>40</sup>

Generally, every living organism is believed to be dual by nature that is, they are the composites of the body and spirit. The body is material and exists in space and time, while the spirit is immaterial and is immortal. So, at death, the material body dies and decomposes shortly after death, while the spirit keeps living immortal either in the world of form as Plato depicted, heaven and hell or in the ancestral realm based on the

people's culture and religious beliefs. In human societies, the nature of death has for millennium been the concern of the world religious traditions and philosophical inquiry. This may includes a belief in some kind of after life, reincarnation or that consciousness ceases to exist with an eternal oblivion. After man's death, what follow is the commemoration ceremonies which is mourning or funeral practices. Death is inevitable for all known living organisms. The commemoration ceremonies accompany the interment of the body which after death has quickly changed to corpse. There are diverse methods of mortuary disposal e.g. grave method,, sky burial (as in *Tibet*) and the mummification or embalmment method which is prevalent in many cultures today etc.

The word death etymologiccally comes from Old English *deao* which in turn comes from Proto Germanic *daupas*. When reconstructed by etymological analysis, "it comes from the *Proto-Indo-European* stem, *dheu* – meaning, "the process, act, condition of dying."<sup>41</sup>

The concept and symptoms of death, at varying degrees of are used in discuss in public forums as socially acceptable terms or euphemisms for death. When a person dies, it is also said he has "passed away", "passed on" or "expired", among numerous other socially accepted religious – specific slang, and current terms. Bereft of life, the dead person is then a corpse, cadaver, a body, a set of remains and finally a skeleton. The terms clarion and carcass can also be used, though, these more often condole the remains of non-human animals. As polite reference to a dead person, it has become common practice to use the participle form of "decease" as in the deceased, the noun form of a dead body. The ashes left after a cremation are referred to by the neologism as a portmanteau of "cremation" and remains."

There are however, many types of death: "brain death" otherwise known as biological death or "clinical death." This means, "The cessation of the electrical activity in the brain of the human being."<sup>42</sup> In the case of brain death, both the heart and lungs are functionable, even, the blood vessels and streams will be conducting and flowing

normal only that the blood flow to the brain will cease thereby effect the brain function badly and renders it unconscious.

Other type of death include, "Legal death, suicide death and the rest. Legal death means, "Death by law." <sup>43</sup> when a person is confirmed to be dead by law, certificate approved by a licensed medical practitioner will be issued for such case. This type of death goes with consequences like, the removal from the person of what in legal terminology is called "personhood" this implies that the possession of brain activities or capabilities to presume brain activity is a necessary condition to legal personhood. In this type of condition therefore no criminal or civil liability will result from disconnecting the life-support devices. This type of death and other issue following it are seen in America (U.S.A) etc. Legal aspects of death are not only part of the U.S.A culture but also part of the other cultures of the world, particularly the settlement of the deceased estate and the issue of inheritance and in some countries, inheritance taxation etc.

Suicide as one of the sources of death simply means "a deliberate termination of one's life by oneself." <sup>44</sup> That is, a system or process by which one deliberately puts an end to his/her life by him/her. This type of death is welcomed by some individual or cultures while some frown at it and view it not only as sin but a taboo. For instance, in Japan, end of life with honour by *Seppuku* was considered a desirable death. In the traditional Christian, Islamic and African socio-religious cultures, as well as the Igbo in particular, suicide is seen as sin and taboo *njọ na arụ*. And, no burial rite is given to such victims. According to the Igbo, a person that committed suicide of any sort did not died only on the body but also in spirit and such dead can neither enter the world of ancestors nor reincarnate.

According to *Longman Dictionary of the contemporary English*, death means "the end of the life of a person or animal". it also means "the permanent end of something." <sup>45</sup>

According to *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, death means, "The cessation of life." <sup>46</sup>



Death for the *Webster's Dictionary of the English language* is also defined as, "a dying, the end of life."<sup>47</sup>

Similar to Plato's idea of death as the cessation or separation of soul from the body, the concept "death" in Igbo understanding means, "the separation of the spirit *mmuo* from the body *ahu*."<sup>48</sup> It is the dissolution of man's flesh and loss of his physical presence."<sup>49</sup> Death specifically, is described or taken by the Igbo as, "a transformation and transition from the material life to the yonder world with the possibility of reincarnation."<sup>50</sup> It is perceived more so as a road to new life. This is because, man's departure in the form of spirit (breath or air) from the earthly life, finds his destination in the ancestral realm from where he reincarnates to new human being on earth. And this process continues ad infinitum for the sake of continuity and perpetual earthly existence.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Every society has its own philosophy that is her own perception, belief and explanation about the issues of the world, life and beyond. In as much as there are diverse philosophies among the societies of the world, there are yet some who share similar beliefs with others. In this particular chapter, we shall delve deeply into Igbo people's philosophy and culture to unveil and expose their ideas of death, what they think about life, the relationship of the two concepts as well as their contentions and positions concerning the circumstances encircling the phenomenon of death. More so, in this context, we shall search to ascertain the Igbo and African as well as alien individual philosophers whose ideas and beliefs about death are synonymous with those of the said culture .

The Igbo people's idea of death lays emphasis on the solution to the universal and philosophical questions of the world, life, the stuff of the being of man, the meaning of death, life after death and reincarnation. Man generally is seen to have contributed nothing to his existence. His coming and departing the earthly existence is like a drama. He saw himself thrown into life through birth, grows, dies and decomposed; the force or principle underlying this is beyond his imagination. However, this drama of human life prompted the question of the meaning of life and death as well as the nature of the being of man and his fate after life.

In regard to the question of the meanings of life and death, the Igbo offer solution; "Life is the integration of spirit *mmuo* and body *ahụ* – the self and its physical vehicle – into a single entity."<sup>1</sup> This is equivalent to Aristotle's hylemorphic and J.I. Omoregbe's integrated theories of the mind (soul) and body or, matter and form as the unified nature of man. The Igbo people's concept of life goes beyond the material world. It includes life with God which they believe is the source of life and all there is. This also involves life with the community of men in the maternal world, with the ancestors,

divinities and environment. Highlighting the Igbo/African concept of life, Njoku summarized as follows:

First, “God is the originator of life, the creator of man, the universe and the sustainer of creation.”<sup>2</sup>

Second, “the ancestors play an important role in the communal life. They are not cut off from the living, for they may still reveal themselves in dreams or appear to the living relatives to guide or correct them.”<sup>3</sup>

Third, “life is a communal affair. It involves relationship and communion between man, God, divinities, ancestors, other men and the land. This relationship must be based on certain rules and regulations for it to succeed.”<sup>4</sup>

In consonance with the Igbo concept of life, Opuku, Awolalu and Dopamu support Njoku by saying that “in addition to creating men and the world, God also owns the world, man, and the society, and also sustains them.”<sup>5</sup>

The Igbo as a cultural entity sees life as an act of existing in time and space. For them, life is, “a rhythm or cycle which includes birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, entry into the community of the departed and the company of the spirits.”<sup>6</sup> In conformity with this, Mbiti says, “this implies that God created man with the potentialities of passing through these stages of life. Every human being must go through them, although they vary according to culture and time.”<sup>7</sup> Life and death according to the Igbo are two opposites that complement each other. As life is the beginning of man’s preparation for the encounter with death and the journey of after life, death is in turn, the road to new life. Death according to the Igbo means, “The dissolution of the body *ahụ* and spirit *mmụọ* into two separate entities – a separation of the spiritual self from that which was once a vehicle or house to that self.”<sup>8</sup>

Death, although, a dreaded event is perceived by the Igbo/Africans as, “the beginning of a person’s deeper relationship with all of creation, it is the complement of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and invisible worlds.”<sup>9</sup> The Igbo believed, “death is not a complete annihilation of a person’s authentic self, but can be seen as a departure from one state of life to the other or a portal from one state of life to a wider world beyond.”<sup>10</sup> The Igbo concept of death includes therefore, the relationship of the living, the dead and those yet unborn. The dead members according to this group of people are said to be more interested in the affairs of the people as it is through the living members that they could seek re-entry into the world of space and time.

The Igbo conceived life *ndu* as true human existence. This for them has a number of connotations and modes. This simply implies an existence in which a being still functions in his natural mode, that is to say that, the principle or whatever is the animating force of his activity is still active. In that case, when the Igbo say, that an object is effective, it means being alive *idi ndu*. To say to a man— you are dead *inwuola*, means that such a man is inactive or incapacitated in respect of a certain functions expected of him as a human being. To say to a man *idi ndu* means that some particular role or function is being actively executed. Life in Igbo conception and belief involves physical and mental as well as social/biological capability. Thus, to be alive in Igbo culture also involves one being capable of fulfilling the roles expected of him or her by virtue of the communal values and ideas. But if one physically exists and is ineffective then he will be described as *odi ndu onwu ka mma* Alive but dead. Life *ndu* for the Igbo people is thus, “the activating principle sustaining all existences and also regulating all actions.”<sup>11</sup> Life is a continuous process, it never ends. Although, there is a belief that, thoroughly wicked people may die complete death in the spirit world which means a final end to their lives *ndu*. But, if such deads still have descendants in the visible world, the Igbo believe that the living are capable of bringing about good fates on the dead by prayer and invocation of the gods and ancestors. The Igbo believe that man goes to the



spirit world after death. But the questions are: Does he go there as a full human being? If no, which part of him experiences that?

In the solution to the problem of the nature of man, the Igbo believe that man *mmadu* is both spirit and non-spirit. He possesses two main parts –spirit *mmuo* and body *ahu*. The spirit part *mmuo* incorporates the elements of immateriality, intelligence, feeling, emotion and conscience. It is also associated with the *Mkpuru obi* soul which is located in the heart. In Igbo culture, the spirit and soul are used interchangeably. But the spirit which has no particular shape or form, but only compared with breath or air, abodes itself in the soul which is material by nature. According to the Igbo, the spirit *mmuo* is what survives death and reincarnates after death. For them, man does not die completely; there is yet another life after death. The Igbo believed in the existence of ancestors and that the goal of every man is to commune with them after death. For them, “death is not the end of life but a transition to the world of the ancestors and spirit.”<sup>12</sup> At death, the spirit departs the body and transforms itself into the gloomy but blissful spirit realm. Thus, death is, described as, “a transformation from the bodily existence to the spiritual existence.”<sup>13</sup>

Man, for the Igbo and other societies of the world is said to resemble God. He occupies the fourth position in the hierarchical structure of being. He is in the centre of the universe and communicates the interactions between the beings of the spirit world (i.e. God, deities, and ancestors) and that of the space and time. The Igbo believe that, the ancestral existence is the most authentic existence while the earthly life is the prototype of the spiritual existence. More so, they believed that the spirit *mmuo* of man, at death, exists both in the spirit land *ala mmuo* as ancestors and also interact with the living relatives in the visible world. Human spirit has the potentiality to exist everywhere (omnipresence) and to have the knowledge of all earthly reality (Omniscience) features. However, they (spirits) exist in the land of the dead and also shuttle between there and the material world of space and time either to protect, advice or message their relatives.

In the Igbo concept of death, life and after life, much emphasis is placed on ancestor hood to the extent that the goal of every Igbo is to join their cult. But, who are these ancestors? What functions and position do they occupy and perform in the eyes and minds of the living that every one strives to join them? The ancestors according to the Igbo are, “the departed heroes and heroines of the various tribes.”<sup>14</sup> Specifically in Igbo tribe, ancestors include, “the spirit of the departed forefathers, parents and relatives, they include also the spirits of the departed heads of the kindred’s and communities.”<sup>15</sup> Belief in the ancestors is based on the general notion that life continues after death and that communion and communication are possible between those who are alive here on earth and the deceased. The ancestors are believed to have power to influence the affairs of the living for better or for worse.

In Igbo culture, every dead person does not necessarily become an ancestor for the simple reason that certain conditions must be fulfilled to qualify one to reach such height apart from the fact of death. The first criterion is adulthood, which is determined by marriage status. Such adult must have died a natural death, for unnatural deaths of all sorts are believed by them (Igbo) to have been caused by the person’s hidden crimes. In the Igbo concept of death, life after death and ancestral communion, there seems to be discrimination. The ancestral bliss is for those that lived good life on earth, while some people are seen as not qualified to attain it. However, those that are disqualified include the people that died through unclean diseases such as; leprosy, epilepsy, sleeping sickness, madness, small pox, swollen stomach and so forth. These set of people in Igbo custom are believed to be wrong doers who were inflicted with unclean diseases as punishment for their crimes. The natural inference is that only good people become ancestors. Such high moral and ethical standards required for ancestor hood together with the meaningful contribution to the total welfare of the community, places the Igbo ancestors in the category of the holy people as it is in other religions.

In Igbo culture and African as a whole, ancestors are believed not to be separated from their earthly families by death. But rather, they are still considered a part of them. Indeed, in this cultural context as cited in the beginning of this chapter, the family is

constituted of the dead, the living and the generations yet unborn. The people thus have personal memories of the ancestors, who are believed to return to their human families from time to time, and share meal with them symbolically.

The belief of the Igbo is that, the affairs of the family are the concern of the ancestors. They know and have been interested in what is going on in their families. When they appear in dreams generally to the eldest members of the family, they enquire about family affairs and may even warn of impending disaster and rebuke those who have failed to follow their special instructions.

The role of the ancestors in the life of the Igbo families and communities at large cannot be underestimated. They are the guardians of the family affairs, property, traditions, ethics and activities. They punish those that have offended in one way or the other. Offence in this matter is against the forebears, the divinities and ultimately God, the source and upholder of the social and moral orders. In this regard, the ancestors act as an invisible police force of the families and communities. They are the unseen presidents at family gatherings. In other words, the ancestors are the spiritual superintendents of earthly families of which they remain members and not mortals any more.

Igbo people perceive the ancestors as the nearest and closest link between the people and the spirit world. They believe them to be bilingual. They speak and understand the language of men with whom they lived until recently and also that of the spirit and God. The Igbo understand the reality of the spirit world through the ancestors. They see ancestors as best intermediaries between the divinities and God, and men on the other hand because they have full access to the channels of communicating directly with the divine beings. As intermediaries from above, they have delegated authority from God. They have the mandate to reward right conduct and to punish the whole tribe, clan, kindred or kinsmen, family or individual for crimes against the society.

With their delegated power and authority, the ancestors naturally command awe, fear and respect from the people. As a result, great care is taken to ensure that the ancestors get befitting burial/funeral rites. Thus, all rituals done during burial ceremonies of the ancestors in Igbo land are carried out meticulously to avoid displeasing them. This is because any negligence attracts their wraths with misfortune. This also prompts the living to follow as instructed by the ancestors prior to their death on how to carry out their funeral rituals. The ancestors in Igbo tradition are fed by the living through citation and food (i.e. by placing it on the tables overnight or sometimes, food is left in the pot in the kitchen because, they are believed to eat the food when they visit the house at night) as well as offerings as the case may be. While doing these, the Igbo also make request of prayers to them such as, granting of fertility (children), food, life, prosperity, peace and so on and so forth. This sense of dependence on the ancestors by the Igbo prompted their counterpart religion (Christianity) to view them to be worshipping the ancestors. In contradistinction to this criticism, it must be noted that in the Igbo cosmology, the ancestors dispense their roles and kindness on behalf of God *Chukwu*. Thus, the ancestors *ndị ichie na nna nna anyị ha* are the immediate representatives and intermediaries of God and the living. So, they are to us some sort of big brothers and ambassadors.

Ancestors in Igbo culture and tradition are accorded much value. They are given significant place in ritual at the national level in connection with ancestral cults. Every town in Igbo land does celebrate one festival or the other through which they perform rituals for their ancestors. In such activities, kings *Ndị Eze, na Ndị Ama ala ma ọbụ ndị Aka ji ọfọr* and village heads (his cabinets) from different kindred, are the people that perform the rituals and, they are the links between the living and the dead. Typical examples of this are; the new yam festival rituals that are performed by every town or community in Igbo land as well as the celebration of cola acuminata *Emume ọjị Igbo* by Ezinifite Mbaise of Imo State. Others include; Imo festival of Awka *Emume Imo Awka* and *Nwafor* festival *emume nwafor* of all the communities in Idemili North L.G.A of Anambra State etc. The Igbo perceived ancestors as divine, therefore, the kings *Ndị Eze,*

*Aka ji Ofo na Ndi ichie* and the heads of various villages that constitute all towns or clans in Igbo land are seen to occupy divine position because they perform rituals and offer sacrifices to appease the gods and ancestors respectively.

The aforementioned attention paid by the Igbo to ancestors seems to be sort of worshipping. But, is this actually worship? Truly, the Igbo and Africans generally do not worship their ancestors. Rather, what they do is veneration. They venerate them in the sense that, ancestors are perceived as the channels through which the people reach God and gods or divinities. In Igbo culture, it is not only the kings and heads of the communities and kindred's are conceived as the representatives of the ancestors. However the eldest sons and fathers of every family are included in this category. These distinguished set of men regard the ancestors as the heads and superintendents of every family despite the fact that they are dead, while they that are living are their representatives here on earth. Moreso, the ancestors are perceived as those that lived good life when they were living an earth. The ancestors also perform functions like; "distribution of favours, exercise of disciplines or enforcement of penalties, guarding the families both ethically and otherwise as well as preventing anything that may cause disruption."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the ancestors are factors of cohesion in the Igbo land. This is illustrated in the *ofor* symbol in Igbo land (which is the supreme symbol of the ancestral genius of the tribe or nation) *Ofor* symbol is thus, "that which gives the nation a sense of cohesion."<sup>17</sup> Since the ancestors were no longer in the world of ordinaries, the way they are approached must necessarily be different from the approach given to them during their earthly lives. They are the spirits and, are approached as spirits, even though they are spirits with difference as a result of their family ties with their earthly folks."<sup>18</sup>

Africans and the Igbo in particular, do not place the ancestors on the same footing with God or the divinities. They do not worship the ancestors, but merely venerate them. In practice however, there is every danger of veneration slipping unawares into worshipping, especially as the veneration becomes so intense. But this is virtually the flaw in all religions. In Christianity the reverence or veneration paid to the saints can

easily be said to become worship. Similarly the veneration accorded to Muhammad in Islamic religion during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca is applied to all religions and not just Igbo/African traditional Religion alone. It must be noted that some elements of worship in the ancestral cults like libation have become in contemporary societies an action performed to project Igbo and African personality as an aspect of nationalism. Thus, the issue of ancestor worship is neither here nor there.

In Igbo land, ancestors are remembered and revered in every day activities especially when kola nut (kola acuminate) is been presented to people. The eldest man among them will pick up the kola *oji* and call upon God and ancestors

Saying:

*Nara ekele chukwu maka ndu inyere anyi  
nara ekele ndi nna nna anyi maka nchekwa  
na nduzi unu n'ebe anyi no. Onye wetara  
oji, wetara ndu na ihe dim ma. Anyi na-  
ari o unu ndi mmuo nwe ala n'anyị, ka unu  
gozie oji nkea, wepu ihe ojọ di n'ime ya  
gozienu onye wetara oji a, taanu n'ogbe  
ka anyi taa n;ibe. Isee...<sup>19</sup>*

Translation

Thank you God for giving us life, thank  
You our ancestors (forebearers) for guarding and  
guiding us well, Thank you for this kola nut. He  
who brings kola brings life. We pray you divine  
spirit and owners of land and us to bless this kola,  
remove all the ill things in it. Bless he that  
brought this kola, eat in whole so that we will eat  
in parts, Amen...<sup>20</sup>

Libation *igọ ọfọr* does not stop here, it is also applicable to every activity in Igbo land such as new yam festival *Emume Iri Ji ọhuu*, masquerade ceremony *igba Nmanwu*,

marriage ceremony *ihu Nwanyi* , age grade initiation *Emume iba n'otu ogbọ*, etc. The position of ancestors in Igbo culture cannot be over emphasized because it is the goal which every man is striving to attain at death.

The Igbo believe in the existence of two types of death viz; natural death *onwu chi* and unnatural death *ajọ onwu*. Natural death means, " death at a very ripe old age."<sup>21</sup> It is the death of those who lived transparent, honest and moral life and died good death and as well received appropriate funeral rites from their children."<sup>22</sup> One is said to have died good death when he/she must have grown morally well, become initiated into the age grade cult, marry, procreate, died, buried by receiving a well planned burial ceremony from his children or kinsmen. Any Igbo man that died and passed through all these stages has reached the conditions or standards for the attainment of the blissful spirit world *ala mmụọ* where he will continue to live with the ancestors *Ndi ichie* and eventually return to join his kith and kin here in the human world through the process of reincarnation *ilọ ụwa, inọ ụwa* On the other hand, unnatural death involves all manner of bad deaths. These include premature death *onwu erughi eru* like deaths of youths and infants. Others are; suicide and homicide, deaths by accident, leprosy, swollen tummy, drowning etc. In some communities in Igbo land, those that died prematurely are not given funeral rites. Those that died as a result of swollen stomach, leprosy, suicide etc are thrown into evil forest *ajọ ofia*. This is because such people are believed to have committed one taboo or another, hence, they died mysteriously. However, one thing that is certain in the traditional Igbo culture is that, this caliber of people, do not reincarnate to new earthly life after death.

Nevertheless, the Igbo are fond of natural death and, if they were to choose, they (every Igbo man) would prefer natural death to unnatural or bad death. This is because, natural or clean slate death is an avenue to the community of the ancestors which is the goal of every Igbo man. One Igbo adage says "*ihe oma iga emere onye nwuru anwu bu igwu ala lie yaone* good thing to do for a dead is to dig a grave and bury him."<sup>23</sup> Unlike the Hindu and its extreme Hindu religion and philosophy which is Buddhism", the Igbo adopt grave method of burial. Burial ceremony as it is, is one of the conditions for

attainment of ancestral land. There are two types of burial rites; the burial of titled men and (that of the ordinary or non-titled men) as well as the burial of the married women. Burial ceremony in Igbo land undergoes two stages. The first stage is called *Igbasu Ozu* which lasts for 14-15 days and the second stage is also called *ikwa ozu* or *ili ozu*. This particular stage lasts for few days in the contemporary era. It attracts the presence of *Umụada* daughters of the community or *Umụokpụ* as they are called in some part of the Igbo society. *Umụokpụ* as their name imply are, “distinguished set of women born in every family in Igbo land.”<sup>24</sup> They are the typical daughters of the soil or land. Their presences are highly needed in every funeral ceremony in Igbo land. No man or married woman in their families, kindred’s or communities have ever offended them and go scot free. Any person that offends them is said to have offended the ancestors. This is because *Umụokpụ* are assumed to command recognition and respect from the ancestors. They are the peace makers in the various communities where they were born. They would neither allow their brothers to maltreat their wives for no cause nor their wives to disobey them for no reason. They make justice prevail when there is problem in the families or communities where they were born. They scold any of their brothers or relatives who go contrary to the rules and regulations guiding their families, communities or clans irrespective of the person’s status or position etc. *Umụada* or *Umụokpụ* are the custodians of moral and ethical principle of do good and avoid evil in Igbo land. The Igbo believed that the presence of *Umụokpụ* in any funeral ceremony in Igbo land is the confirmation that such dead is welcomed by the ancestors. Every *Nwaokpụ* in Igbo land is treated and handled with care otherwise, if they find one guilty, the person will face their wrath. No police, no court can find them guilty. Any woman married in their father’s house must accord them respect and treat them like their husbands. Sometimes, the married women fear them more than their husbands etc.

In the traditional Igbo era, widows were customarily ill-treated in the community. They were meant to mourn their deceased husbands for the period of two years without taking bath, they eat without washing their hands, their freedom of speech and



movement were also restricted and, they were also customarily forced to marry their deceased husband's brother even against their wish *Nkuchi ekpe*. Though, in this contemporary era, specifically with the advent of Christianity and consequently upon increasing cost of living, the mourning *iru ụju ma obụ ekpe* custom has reduced drastically even amongst the traditionalists. In the present day Igbo society, burial ceremonies are performed for the same purpose with that of traditional Igbo era which is to enable the dead to get his or her share in the spirit world. Burial ceremony in this contemporary time is more expensive but, the mourners invariably realized what they spent at the end of the ceremony through the condolence visits paid to them from people. Moreso, those obnoxious mourning customs have been changed definitely by the present day Igbo. Mourning period is no more 2 years but 6 months or a year as the case may be. Widows are granted their natural right of freedom as human beings. They have the right to decide what to do and also argue on those customs they feel does not suit them well. No one dictates to the deceased children what to use to celebrate their father's or mother's burial. The issue of the inheritance of the deceased man's wife and property by his brothers or relatives has ended. In fact, all those obnoxious customs have been abolished in this present time. In the present Igbo society, funeral ceremony attracts also the presence of friends and well wishers from all nooks and crannies of the world including the relatives and kinsmen *Ụmụnna* of the deceased person. Hence the Igbo parlance; "The day of one's death is better than his day of birth "*Ụbọchi ọnwụ mmadụ ka Ụbọchị amụrụ ya mma.*"<sup>25</sup> During the Burial of a dead man, every person that visited the arena shows grief. The grief is because of the loss of the physical presence of the person in question. But, in the other way round, they console themselves bearing in mind that the person did not die completely and that, he is always close to them spiritually. Based on this belief, the Igbo conceived death as, "a change of life for better life beyond."<sup>26</sup>

The Igbo believe so much in reincarnation. But what is this reincarnation? How does the Igbo perceive it? The solution to these questions has evoked many opinions and beliefs from people. Generally, reincarnation is "a process or a belief which upholds that the

spirit of the dead person returns to inhabit a new earthly body after death.”<sup>27</sup> According to Igbo people’s belief, reincarnation *ilọ ụwa* means, “an act where the spirit *mmụọ* of the dead returns to earthly existence via birth by his children or relatives.”<sup>28</sup> They also described it as, “gesture or gratitude manifested by the dead to the living, it is an act through which the dead pay back to their sons, daughters and relations for the good things done to them when they were alive.”<sup>29</sup> Reincarnation can be used as a means of modifying or completing all the deeds which the dead did not amend or finished when he was alive. They believe that where a person did not finish bearing the consequences of his past evil deeds, the person will try to modify them when he or she reincarnates back to time and space. Some Igbo people see reincarnations as a means to denouncing what they did not like when they were alive *ike ekpe*. For example, some Igbo used to say; “I will not suffer the way I do now when I reincarnate in my next life”, “I will become a man in my next life” etc. This shows that for the Igbo, reincarnation is true and should be believed etc. This is because without it, human world would have ended. Reincarnation and birth maintain the permanency of earthly existence.

In Igbo culture and tradition, there is a belief that man cannot die without cause. They uphold the philosophy of cause and effect. Thus, they believe that majority of the people’s death are not natural. Natural death according to them occurs on rare occasions. Hence the Igbo parlance, “*Onye Igbo adighi anwu onwu gbara aka* Igbo African man does not die without cause.”<sup>30</sup> The Igbo believe that man can die either natural or unnatural death. But their belief in unnatural death overrides that of natural death. Igbo man however, can die as a result of strong sickness, accidents, sorcery, witchcraft, suicide, homicide etc. In all, the Igbo people’s beliefs in death and the circumstances encircling it imply that:

Death is not the end of human existence but, there is another existence beyond the earth. Man by nature is composed of flesh *ahụ* and spirit *mmụọ* at death *onwu*, the flesh *ahụ* decays while the spirit *mmụọ* transits to spirit world to exist as ancestors and then keeps on interacting with the living relatives.

The spirit of the dead is always near to the living and they also observe all their activities; it has the capacity to transcend the visible world to enter the world of ancestors from where it shuttles from there to the material world, to exist closer to its descendants to protect, message, warn, advice and even punish them when they deviate from the instruction given to them. The spirit of the dead sees and knows all the activities of the living even though we don't see them.

The spirits of the dead exist in the mind of their relatives. They are remembered by their descendants even to the fourth and fifth generations. There are kinds of spirit viz, the spirits of the living dead (those that are still remembered by the relatives just as mentioned above), the ghost spirits (i.e., those that are not remembered again because the people that know them do not exist any longer). These spirits exist in the trees, waters, mountains and other objects etc. They are believed by the Igbo to be the type of spirits that frighten people when they encounter them. The diviners, witchcrafts and sorcerers even use them to do evil and strange things. These spirits are still perceived as human spirits but when they possess people, they often torment them but, people can in turn use the power of spoken word to exorcise and expel them etc. However, these calibers of evil spirits as classified by Prof. Obi J. Ogburnji for involve; *ekwensu* devil *ogbanje* repeaters *akologoli* "spirits of those that did not received burial rites from their descendants, *Ogbomike* spirit of those that died by accident or at young age.

The goal of every Igbo is to join the ancestral bliss. And that, for one to achieve this, he or she must fulfill the standards of moral and ethical principle of do good and avoid evil, marriage, procreation and receiving appropriate burial rite from his children etc. Life is permanent; it does not end; man's earthly life is believed to be brief; hence, the authentic life is the spiritual life with the ancestors. The Christian doctrine of heaven and hell is not for the traditional Igbo. Hence the question of judgment and its explanation is not clear for their thinking. Hence they believe that the spirit of the sorcerers, witchcrafts, suiciders and killers of all sorts including those that died at young

and infant age are not welcomed in the ancestral community and they do not reincarnate.

In fact, the Igbo idea and belief of death implies that, man must contribute to the stability and continuity of the human life here and hereafter by living a good life, marrying, procreating and receiving proper and befitting burial rite from his children. Man must live for the common good of the community of the space and time and beyond etc. The Igbo used to say, “*ka esi eme ya n’mmụọ bụ ka esi eme ya n’mmadụ* as it is done in the spirit, so it is done in the physical”. This also means that, as there is community of men. *Ụmụnna* in the material life, so there is in the realm of ancestors. So man must be morally good for him to attain such level.

Children outlived their parents and through them, parents and forebears become immortalized on earth.

Every people, society or individual has her own perception and belief of death. As we have looked into the various reflections, thoughts, explanations and beliefs of different societies, peoples and religions about death, we shall then turn to individual or scholarly views.

According to T. Uzodimma Nwala in his book *Igbo Philosophy*, death means, “dissolution of the flesh.”<sup>31</sup> He is of the view that the grief felt at the death of man is usually because of the sense of loss of his physical presence. Specifically, death is taken as a transformation from this life to the yonder world with the possibility of reincarnation

G.T. Basden, an early writer of literature on Igbo people’s culture and life discussed death and burial in his book *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*. Describing death and funeral rites, he said, “for the Igbo, death is like having gone home or simply having gone to the spirit realm and the mourning of the survivors is that of those who have said farewell for the time being only.”<sup>32</sup> In consonance to Basden’s view, J.P. Jordan who had spent

several years of missionary work in Igbo land, said in his book *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*: “death for the Igbo people is a necessary end and a going home to occupy one’s original place permanently in the spirit world”.

According to O.U. Kalu, “death for the Igbo is not terminus; the spirit keeps existing in the spirit realm until it reincarnates or acquires new body again.”<sup>33</sup>

S.A. Okafor speaking about death, burial, funeral and widowhood in the Catholic Diocese of Awka, describes the Igbo idea of death as the conclusion and the way out of earthly life, an inevitable consequence of life on this earth and the necessary means of reunion with the ancestors in the spirit world. Going further, he said; the earthly life is a pilgrimage which ends with death – a trip to market for business at the end of which one returns home. Igbo people buttress this with the following maxims; *obiara ije nwe ula/una* a visitor will surely leave for where he comes from. *Uwa bu ahia, onye zuru olaba* The world is a market place which one returns home after accomplishing transaction. This implies that the human world is not permanent but temporal. Therefore, death is simply a gateway that switches life from the temporal world to eternal realm.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, in this passage, Okafor’s view seems to have laid emphasis on the elements of the Igbo which run counter to certain fundamental elements of Igbo cosmology; the integrated world of the Igbo where the three worlds of ancestors, the terrestrial and the yet unborn-merge and exist in the here and now, the cyclic concept of life and time, and the consequent belief in reincarnation. Okafor further differentiated three types and causes of death viz: *onwuchi*. Natural death, *ajo onwu*” bad/shameful death, and *onwu akamelu*” death brought about by human agents. He also described the various burial and funeral rites and made a serious distinction between them. Thus he said:

In the traditional Igbo society, burial rite is distinct from funeral rite. While the former is the interment of the body of a deceased, funeral rite follows as rituals designed to ensure his or her safe arrival in the spirit land. Both rites

however constitute the rite of passage and take place concurrently.<sup>35</sup>

Funeral rites he said enables the spirit of the dead to reach the spirit land. Without rites, the dead keep wandering about on earth and then causing havocs on human beings. Okafor truly recognized the difference between the two concepts of burial and funeral rites, but did explain it when he said that both take place concurrently. Burial as it is, can take place without funeral rite depending on the circumstances that arise from the side ones relation. Well, one may not be surprised about Okafor's interpretation because the Igbo Christian practices frown at funeral rite long after burial. They termed it *ikwa ozu nkwa abua* second funeral ceremony. Okafor also made it known that:

There are gradations in both the burial and funeral ceremonies of the traditional Igbo. For those who suffered bad death *ajọ ọnwụ*, burial is very simple and quiet...with lots of rites to purify the land....For people who died well, they are laid to rest in bosom of the earth amid pomp and pegeantry...After their interment, an elaborate..."*ikwa ozu*" commences, and this, it is believed, is necessary to usher the deceased into the abode of the ancestors. It complements the good moral life already presumed of a good death.<sup>36</sup>

Edmund Ilogu in his *Christianity and Igbo Culture* introduces the element of the Igbo tenacious holding unto life. Here he remarks:

I have not come across any death that any Igbo accepts as natural and biological end...After many inquiries, I realize that to the Ibo, life is eternal and man, because of his share in the Supreme God *Chineke* through the chi particles in him, is meant to be immortal.<sup>37</sup>

In another version of his thought he said:

The philosophy behind the people's concern about life and death is that all the visible world around us and the invisible world beyond. The divine and human, the past and the present, the living and the dead all form a harmonious entity. Death is one of the disturbances of life disturbing this entity, but because the dead themselves belong to this harmonious entity all that is necessary as to ensure that this balance in life's harmony is not upset when one member of the group is transformed through death to another level of existence; viz the spirits of the dead who make up the unseen part of the community.<sup>38</sup>

Emphasizing more, Ilogu said that "the burial rites and ceremonies therefore are the means by which this transition is effected to ensure that the dead received secure place in the spirit realm which will help the established order of life to go on uninterrupted". He added that "the spirit of the dead members of the community cannot rest or find secure place among the dead unless proper burial rite and ceremonies have been performed."<sup>39</sup>

B. Abanuka in his book *A New Essay in African Philosophy* while discussing the reality of the ancestors observes that the dead are not far from the living and those who are still living are conscious of their journey to join those that have gone before them to the land of the dead. He further states that "in certain sense, death is located at the boundary between the living and the dead/ancestors. Death is significant not just because it is the end of earthly striving and achievement, but because it marks the entry into the abode of the ancestor."<sup>40</sup> Thus, the above scholars commonly agreed that death in Igbo belief is a transition from the physico – spiritual force to pure spiritual form. Thus, Francis Arinze in his book *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion* confirms the above view by stating that:

The Igbo have a firm belief in a life after death. When a person dies, his spirit *mmuo* wanders till it is received into the blessed company of his forebears on condition that the relations on earth celebrate the funeral ceremonies. In some places, this belief requires also that the person must have been a good man on earth or at least that a cleansing rite be performed over the corpse before burial. The main passport however is the performance of the funeral celebrations, without these ceremonies the restless ghost of the deceased would return to haunt and harass his merciless relatives.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of the above conceptions of death however, the Igbo have a lot of negative attitude to death. Thus J. Obi Oguejiofor in his article “Eschatology, Immortality and Philosophy of Life” remarks:

The positive Igbo attitude to life is accompanied by a negative attitude towards death. Death is also personified and there are proper names that express the deep Igbo desire to keep it at bay. *Egwu onwu* fear of death, *onwuzuruike* let death rest *onwughalu* let death allow etc.<sup>42</sup>

Going further, Oguejiofor observes that despite these countless wishes expressed in countless names, the Igbo are as well aware of the fatality of death, hence he avers, “*ogbenye onwu, Ogalanya onwu*” the poor as well as the rich are destined to die

In the same view, L. Mbaefo observed the negative attitude of the Igbo towards death when he said that:



In the Igbo traditional self understanding, death is the ultimate tragedy, the unmitigated calamity. It signals the end of ambition, the wiping away of grandiose plan for self advancement. Every sort of means is employed to stave it off or at least delay it. Its folklore contains the saga of a delegation to God, the story of dog and the toad intended to lobby for physical immortality. In Igbo mythic consciousness, nobody dies except through the mechanization of an enemy....People's names and Igbo treasure of wisdom stored in its proverbs warned people of the ultimate enemy death is lurking at every stage of human life.<sup>43</sup>

From this scholarly view point, it becomes obvious that the traditional Igbo conceived death as the worst evil that can befall a man yet he does not see it as the ultimate and which is capable of annihilating the human person, because the human being has been endowed with spirit capable of reincarnating after death from the ancestral realm. Hence life in the Igbo is conceived primarily as a process of birth, living, death and reincarnation.

John. A. Noon in his article "A Preliminary Examination of Death Concept of the Ibo" supports the above idea by saying:

Individual existence becomes a continuum of alternating periods of life in this world and in the spirit land *anị mmụọ*, and death is the portal to one phase of existence as birth is to another. Both phases are extricably intertwined. Indeed, death is the cause of birth or living and vice versa. It is a continuum, one face of the roller and life the other – aspect in a continuous action.<sup>44</sup>

This implies that, for the traditional Igbo, death is fatal, but its fatality does not signify finality of life. Hence C.B. Nze in his book *Aspect of African Communalism* described the traditional Igbo conception of death as, “a withdrawal, a submergence of life into death and death into life”. From this, Nze contends that if death is a loss, it is “only a physical loss because the constant communion or communication between the dead and the living brings them into daily contact so that death continues to be a positive phenomenon wearing a negative appearance.”<sup>45</sup> Death for the Igbo is the end of life as well as the beginning of new life because life comes out of death only to return to it. It is a return that is never final and definitive, but a process of departing and returning etc.

For J.S. Mbiti, “death is a process which removes a person gradually from the *Sasa* period to the *Zamani*. The *Sasa* period means the time of physical existence on earth and the period after death within which the departed is remembered by relatives and friends who knew him, when that last of the survivors die off, the departed now enters the *Zamani* “which is complete death.”<sup>46</sup>

Throwing light on the meaning of death, K.A Opoku States; “death is not the end of life, but a transition from this world to the land of the spirit. He also explains that death does not sever family connections, but the dead become ancestors.”<sup>47</sup>

According to Rosalind Hackett in her Book *Religion in Calabar*, “death is a journey to the underworld with the hope of reincarnation for the maintenance of permanence in earthly life.”<sup>48</sup>

According to Kalish R.A in his book, *Death and Dying in a Social Context*, “death is a process of transition that starts with dying and ends with being dead.”<sup>49</sup>

Emphasizing on the concepts of death and dying, Atchly says, “a dying person is one identified as having a condition from which no recovery can be expected. Dying process is a period characterized by the loss of organism’s viability (decline in functioning).

Furthermore, he defines death as the point at which a person becomes physically dead. He believed that when one is said to have died, the inference is made to its final production.”<sup>50</sup>

Kastembaum explained the meaning of death at social aspect of life. For him, man can be said to be dead socially. This is when we no longer treat him as a human but as an unthinking and unfeeling object. This view re-echoed in the famous dictum of a renowned French philosopher, Rene Descartes who asserted existence base on thinking “*Cogito ergo Sum* - I think therefore I am. According to him, social death occurs when people talk about a dying person rather than to the dying person even when the dying person is capable of hearing and understanding what is being said. For him, social death occurs before physical death.<sup>51</sup>

Speaking on the concepts of death, Booth, in his work, *African Religion; A Symposium*, describes death as the failure of the positive force and disintegration of man into his constituent parts etc. <sup>52</sup>

To Veatch, death is “a complete change in the status of a living entity characterized by the invisible loss of those characteristics that are essentially significant to it.”<sup>53</sup> Anchoring on Robert Veatch definition of death, there are essential elements observable (inherent) in the idea of death. Such include; universality: all living things eventually die. Death is all inclusive, inevitable (unavoidable) and unpredictable with respect to its exact timing. Irreversibility: Organism that dies cannot be made alive again.

Epicurus, the Greek philosopher once reminded us that wornout tissue cannot forever renew themselves. Non functionality: death involves the cessation of all physiological functioning, or signs of life and occurrence of death etc.

Death in Igbo world view and its social-anthropological implications is a unique topic that needs to be researched on. This is so in the sense that no thorough study has been done on this particular area. Literature on death in Igbo world view is very scanty. The

existing ones are either drawn from the socio-anthropological background or from the religious point of view, even at that, death as a concept is discussed as sub topic emphasizing mainly on burial and funeral rites and ceremonies. It is on the back drop of this, that the researcher sees it necessary to delve deeply into Igbo people's world view to do complete search on their conception and interpretation of death as well its effect on man as a being in the Igbo world.

In sum, a critical review of the available literature reveals that death in traditional Igbo thought is conceived as negative phenomenon which often prompts the people to deify and personify it. However, the traditional Igbo never understood death as a total annihilation of life rather as a transition of life to the ancestral world which is accomplished through good life and subsequent good death. It also reveals that, that which is called death, for the Igbo is not death as such. It simply means a change of life for a new life via reincarnation. This research however gives in details everything about death and all the circumstances surrounding it. All the reviewed scholarly perspectives of death are not out of context with the traditional Igbo belief and explanation. The traditional Igbo people's interpretation of death has both positive and negative implications on human being. These however, encapsulated in their concepts of natural and unnatural death which impose on man either positive or negative reward. These must be accompanied by appropriate burial and funeral rites worthy of the victim's social and moral status in the community. However, the deficiency observed in these reviewed literatures is not only their understanding and discussion of Igbo notion of death, but that all discussed death either as an aspect of general interrogation of Igbo culture or as a religious rite in which they mostly concentrated on discussing death and burial/funeral arrangement as part of the rite of transition. None has actually taken up death as it relates to Igbo world, its interpretation and its implications on man as a being in the Igbo tribal universe. Therefore, the mission of the researcher is to do thorough hermeneutical investigation of death in Igbo world view to fill this lacuna.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### The Igbo

The question of who the Igbo are has for ages attracted different interpretations and descriptions. The term 'Igbo' according to M.M. Green has been interpreted as, "a population of people inhabiting a particular geographical territory, sharing common culture and belief."<sup>1</sup> In other cases, the term has been described as a "person" or "language". The solution to the question of who the Igbo are will lay emphasis on the exposition of their historical origin, geographical location, language and the meaning of the word 'Igbo', their ideological identity and other unifying features.

#### 3.1 Historical Origin of the Igbo

The origin of the Igbo is a subject of much speculation. Thus ethnologists are divided on the question of the precise origin of the Igbo. Who are the Igbo? Where did they come from? Tracing the origin of the Igbo people has been a difficult task. The search for this as said above has caused controversy among ethnologists. Some were of the view that the Igbo themselves have gotten no general or elaborate tradition or migration. Scholars like Ford and Floyd Barry expressed the difficulty in tracing the origin of the Ibo or the origin of their nomenclature. The inability of the existing oral tradition of the Igbo to give clue to their origin has added to this complication. Euro-Western authors for instance (colonial masters) have treated Igbo people as the "people without history". Contradicting them, Igbo scholars like V.C. Uchendu argued that, "a people with a culture are a people with some form of history. The Igbo have culture therefore they have also a history – an unwritten history which it is the task of culture historians to piece together."<sup>2</sup> Giving the fact that the Igbo have culture and history, the problem therefore is whether or not the Igbo are aborigines of their land. This has given rise to two hypotheses viz; outside – origin – hypothesis and ancient – origin – hypothesis.

##### 3.1.1 Outside-Origin-Hypothesis

The outside-origin-hypothesis is of the view that the traditional Igbo migrated from outside to the present Igbo land. The majority of the exponents of this view often point

to the East as the place of Igbo origin. Some authors argued that the Igbo migrated from the Israel. They base this on the fact that the Igbo share common features with Jews. Some scholars moreso said that the Igbo travelled far away from Egypt to settle in their present abode. Even Igbo scholars like Nnamdi Azikiwe present his own case that the Onitsha Igbo originated from Bini Kingdom. In his book *My Odyssey*, Zik narrated an interview he had with his grandmother which throws more light on the Benin origin of the Onitsha – Igbo people. Here he writes.

I continued to belabor my grandmother to tell me more of the history and origin of the Onitsha people. She narrated that many years ago; there lived at Idu (Benin) a great Oba who had many children. Due to a power struggle regarding the right of precedence among the princes of the blood and other altercations, there was a civil war in Benin. One day, the supporters of Queen Asije, the mother of the *Oba* of Benin, were accused of trespassing on their farm land. Enraged at this evidence of indiscipline and lawlessness, the Oba ordered his war chiefs and brother Gbuawala Asije to apprehend and punish the insurgents. In the attempt to penalize them, Chima, the ultimate founder of Onitsha city state, a prince of the blood in his own right, left the recalcitrant against his uncle, Gbunwala. This intensified the civil war which rent the kingdom of Benin in two and led to the founding of Onitsha Ado N'idu.<sup>3</sup>

Some scholars were of the view also that some Igbo people migrated from both the North and East Africa. For instance, the people of Umuahia, Bende, Abam and Aro-Chukwu migrated from Egypt and Congo to settle in their present abodes. The overall contentions of the exponents of the outside – origin-hypothesis is that the Igbo people migrated into their present abodes from outside.

### 3.1.2 Ancient-Origin-Hypothesis

The second position, “ancient-origin-hypothesis” maintains that the Igbo did not migrate from outside but rather, they developed independently like other indigenous African peoples. There is a stronger probability for this view. This ancient original and independent development of the Igbo has its strong backing in the recent archeological findings of Thursten Shaw of the institute of African studies, university of Nigeria Nsukka and the ethnologists, anthropologists and historians. F. Chidozie Ogbalu for example holds that Chineke created and planted them (Igbo) where they are now.”<sup>4</sup> And, “Hartles” own archeological collections made at *Bende Afikpo, Okigwe, Awka and Nsukka*, have shown that the Igbo had settled in those areas as far back as 205 Ad. According to Chinua Achebe, the Igbo had toiled for about 3,000 years and had developed an ancient civilization a thousand years ago which is about half a millennium before the emergence of the kingdom of Benin. To cut it short, the onus of this hypothesis is that the core Igbo traditionally had existed on their own. The core Igbo is what Uchendu termed “the nuclear Igbo”. Using the term “nuclear” means that they have no tradition of coming from any other place. Solidifying this he says.

The analysis of demographic patterns, trait lists, and other cultural features combined with available local tradition would throw more light on the two interrelated hypotheses of Igbo origin; that there exist a core area which may be called “nuclear” Igboland; and that waves of immigrant communities from the North and West planted themselves on the border of the nuclear Igboland as early as the fourteenth or the fifteenth century.<sup>5</sup>etc.

### 3.2 Geographical Location

Igbo is one of the three major tribes in Nigeria along side Hausa and Yoruba. It is also one of the 250 or more ethnic groups in Nigeria of West Africa. Put in terms of geographical and territorial integrity, Igboland is roughly circumscribed between 6<sup>0</sup> and

8 ½<sup>0</sup> East longitude and 4 ½<sup>0</sup> and 7 ½<sup>0</sup> North latitude. It cuts across the equatorial forest in the South and Savanna in the North. Igbo territory covers six out of the thirty five (35) states of Nigeria with the inclusion of the Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T) Abuja. The Igbo states are; Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia, Ebony and major parts of River and Delta states. Laying emphasis on the structure of the Igbo of today, H. Chukwuma writes:

The Igbo have their homes in the six of the thirty six states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu and Ebony are entirely Igbo, but in the states of Delta and Rivers, the Igbo form only part of the indigenous population. In Delta State, the Igbo are found in the Western part of the River Niger and they are referred to as, *Enu-ani*, *Ukwu-ani* and *Ndi-Oshimili*. *Ndi Oshimili* is completely river bounded and this reflected in their name (river people). Part of the *Ukwuani* and *Enu-ani* bode, the River Niger or its tributaries. These great area paradoxically form a political and administrative demarcation as well as an integrating force for the Igbo.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from the River Niger, which is the largest river that passes through most of the Igbo land, there are considerably other water ways surrounding this area, such are: *Omambara*, *Imo*, *Urashi*, *Njaba*, *Ebonyi*, *Abia*, *Oji*, *Adofi* rivers etc, *Adofi* and *Njaba* are low lying except for *Owgu*, Enugu and Nsukka. Thus, the vegetation survey of the Igbo land shows that, it is surrounded by major belts;

- i. Mangrove forest at the Delta toughening the Southern part of Igbo land
- ii. Fresh water Swamp forest, covering Ahoda, Port-Harcourt and Opobo areas.
- iii. Rainforest region, thus ruggedly channels itself from Agbor and Ogwasiukwu via Orlu, Owerri down to Elele and up through Aba and Umuahia.
- iv. Dried Savanna, covering most of the rest of the land, running from vegetation belt include, Onitsha, Nsukka via Enugu, down to Okigwe, Bende, Afikpo and to

Nkalagu and Abakaliki. According to H. Chukwuma this rainforest fauna is always relocated in the corpus and literature of the Igbo people, in proverbs, folk tales, songs and plays. Explaining further he says:

The animal that features most in these areas are tortoise, the elephant, and leopard. The tortoise is the traditional Igbo and Nigeria animal trickster. The mention of these animal characters in tales affords clues to the nature of the habitats of corners of these tables. The choice of animals depends on what is known to the narrator and his audience. Why one animal is used in one situation and not in another start from the significance the animal has to the cultural and symbolic context of its use.<sup>7</sup>

In the issue of territorial demarcation, the Igbo are bounded by the Igala and Idoma of Kogi and, the Tivs, Mbembe and Yako of the Benue states of the Northern part of Nigeria. Others include; the Ekoi, Ibibio, Anang and Efiki in the East, the Ijaw, Ogoni, Kalabari and Okirika in the south and, the Benin, Warri and Isoko in the West etc.

### **3.3 Language and Meaning of the Word Igbo**

In terms of race and language, Uchendu said, “the Igbo like their neighbours, belong to the negro race in Africa and speak a language belonging to the *kwa* group of languages found in Africa.” Igbo language is one of the varieties of language found in Nigeria, a country located at the South of the Sahara desert. Explaining more, F Arinze said: “The Igbo belongs to the Sudanic linguistic groups of Kwa division. The main characteristics, its tonality the monosyllabic root – words and an absence of inflexional endings”.<sup>8</sup>

The origin of the word Igbo itself is not very clear. As early as 1789, an Igbo ex-slave Equiano had spoken of the Eboe (i.e. Igbo). While W.B. Baike had described the villages

East and West of the Niger between Aboh and Anam as Igbo country occupied by people who spoke same language. Because of the pejorative use of the word Igbo to refer to slaves from the interior by early Europeans and slave dealers, some sections of the Igbo speak of the rest as “Ndi Igbo (Igbo people)”. Thus the West Niger Igbo refer to all East Niger Igbo as Igbo; the Onitsha people refer to all living east of them as Igbo. The Nri refer to others including Onitsha as Igbo while the Aro refer to others including Nri and Onitsha as Igbo.<sup>9</sup>

Despite all these, the name Igbo has become a symbol of unity among the Igbo. The organization of an Igbo state union, though politically motivated, played some major role in bringing about a type of consciousness of ethnic unity. Prof. Onwuejeogwu has said that the word Igbo means, “The community of people.”<sup>10</sup> And he evoked several linguistic uses of the word to support his views.

The diversity and variation found in Igbo culture have been attributed to the diverse ecological situations in which the Igbo people are found and partly to factors such as the influences which other cultures have had on their own in the course of contact. Thus; The peripheral or intrusive communities such as Onitsha and Aboh, Oguta, Arochukwu or places bordering on other tribes will tend to show cultural features differing from those of the other interior or central Ibo, particularly those of Owerri division.<sup>11</sup>

The Igbo community, as may be pointed out again stretches from the Northern Savanna to the very thick forest of the Southern region, occupying the southern palm belt northern grass and scarp land region, the Niger and Cross River basin. Incidentally, the area that may be designated as one of the core neighbours of Igbo people. The Owerri-Orlu area- is also the most densely populated part of West Africa with a population density of over 1000 per square mile. According to M.A. Onwuejeogwu:

The present Owerri – Orlu area may be regarded as one of the primary cores of Igbo culture area. Linguistically, heavy nasalization and aspiration occur in Igbo dialects of this

area. There is linguistic evidence to indicate their early Igbo population dispersed from this core to other secondary cores, for as one moves out of this area in any direction both nasalization and aspiration occurring together seem to be archaic traits of Igbo language.<sup>12</sup>

Despite all these cultural and ecological differences, one central issue remaining to be settled, is how far can the Igbo be regarded as an ideological entity? Ideological entity in this sense refers to a group sharing some common basic beliefs and attitude to life, society, existence and the universe in general.

### **3.4 Ideological Identity/ other Unifying Features**

The Igbo as a cultural entity share one idea and belief about the world, life and reality. They have common perception, reflection, question and offer common solution to the issues of the wonders of reality and human existence. They have a unique idea about the cosmological, ontological and eschatological problems of all there is. They have one perception about God, life, death, man and other things of the world. God according to them is the source of all there is. Life and death are two necessities, two opposites that complement each other. Life is a continuous process and death is not actually a bad thing but, sort of avenue for one to transform oneself for new earthly being. The Igbo share common mental and cultural traits by believing man to be the centre of creation connecting the interactions of the material world of man and that of the immaterial realm of spirits. According to them, man is made in the semblance of God. Hence all human beings are same irrespective of the face and color.

The dignity of human being is worth valuing and respecting. Life is precious and worth preserving. That is why the Igbo custom and tradition forbid killing of man of all sorts. They believe human body needs taking proper care of. Because despite the fact that the body decays at death man (the dead) still takes up another body that is similar to the one that has been transformed and keeps on existing with ancestors. Several

encounters on the occasion of dream tell that, there is no difference between the dead seen in dream and the one seen when the person was alive. Thus, the Igbo believe that the person seen in the dream is the real person, while the physical person is ephemeral. That is why, whenever a dead or living disabled is seen in the dream, he or she exists with complete body. This implies that death is only a change from the physical existence to the ancestral life. And that the physical existence is a picture of the spiritual existence etc.

There are other features that characterize the Igbo as a cultural unit. Apart from language which has been discussed within this text, the Igbo are known for their communal existence. There are apparently hundreds of small, more or less independent social units, the largest being in many cases, what is known as village group. This according to Dame Green, "is a collection of villages bounded together by certain ties, but each one at any rate largely manage its own affairs."<sup>13</sup> The village group or community in Igbo society is the umbrella that covers individual persons inhabiting the community. For the Igbo, individual existence is meaningful only in the community. The community protects individual and individual works towards the common good to ensure the stability and continuity of the community. Hence in the Igbo parlance, "*Umunna bu ike* one's kinsmen or community is his strength."<sup>14</sup> Igbo people as a cultural entity are known for their kingship structure, cult symbols (e.g. *ofo* and ancestral cults) etc. Highlighting further, Green says:

They occupy a common territory; speak a common language though with many dialectical variations, despite countless variations in custom, there are a number of cultural factors which are common to all Igbo areas, such as, kingship structure, cult-symbols (like *ofo* and ancestral cults) which are widely spread.<sup>15</sup>

They are also known for commercial activity, handcrafting, pottery and subsistence type of agriculture. Like other ethnic groups and communities in Nigeria and Africa at large the Igbo are famously known for the practice of extended family system and closeness



to natural environment. They are known for intermarriage relationship and the same pattern of burial rite practices. For example, in Igbo society, much recognition is given to the position of the first son and daughter or every family. High regard is also paid and given to the position of *Umụada* in the family and at burial ceremonies etc. The Igbo are also well known for their affectionate relationship. They are their brother's keepers. The Igbo exogamy make it possible for everyman to have relations with the birth place of his mother *Ikwu nne ya*, his wife and with the various places into which his sisters (and from which his brothers) have married. They are well acknowledged for their generosity and hospitality. They are more so, the people with peculiar decent system as to compare that of the other nation elities. For example, the Igbo have double decent which are both patrilineal and matrilineal. Thus, the patrilineal stresses the matrilineal. But, for their neighbours (Hausa, Yoruba), their decent systems were only patrilineal. Emphasizing on this, Ikenna Nzirimo says:

Igbo decent systems are peculiar when compared with the decent of other nationalities like, the Yoruba, Hausa and the Ashanti, in that these have one decent system (only patrilineal) while the Igbo have patrilineal double decent and stressed matrilineal group.<sup>16</sup>

The Igbo constitute a nationality, an ethnic group with a common language, with a variety of dialects, a common culture, geographical location etc. as a unified community, they have common perception, reflection and explanation to both the cosmological, ontological and eschatological problems of reality. Clarifying further, Nzirimo deftly concludes "The Igbo constitute a nationality, an ethnic group whose indices of identity are characterized by a common language, with a variety of dialects, a common culture, and geographical continuity and have developed feelings of National awareness".<sup>17</sup>

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Igbo Concept of Death

#### 4.1 Life and Death in Igbo World View.

Death: a phenomenon that troubles and perplexes mankind, what is it? Where did it originate? This concept in the language of the Igbo people is called *onwu*. How do the Igbo conceive it? What interpretations and descriptions do they give to it? In this chapter, the Igbo conceptualization of death will centre on the following order: types of death in the world, the characteristic features of death, causes of death, act of dying – terms related to death and funerals rites in Igbo culture. Like other people's of the world, the Igbo conceive death as a universal phenomenon. This is expressed in their traditional name like *onwuzuruigbo*. Death to the Igbo is a common price every living being must pay. But, the pre-eminent position of man in the category of all the beings that have life made him to sense and feel the authenticity of death. However, the Igbo people's perceptions of the marvels of the human gradual processes from birth to growth, death and decomposition perplexed them that they interrogate the nature of his being.

To offer solution to the question of the meaning and origin of death, the Igbo says, death cannot be discussed without relating to life because the two exist parallel to each other. The concepts were arranged to conflict each other hence, no life, no death. The Igbo used to say, "*azota ndu edebere onwu* we save life to keep for death."<sup>1</sup> But, what is life? How do the Igbo perceive it? To be alive biologically is reference only to living things like man, animals and trees. Humans and animals live actively in Igbo world while that of trees are passive though they can be active under human control. When we talked of being alive *idi ndu*, we refer to the capacity to respire, locomote, feed, feel, reproduce and die. These however are the properties that man share with other animate beings. The concept of life in Igbo society has a lot of philosophical implications.. To say that man is alive *idi ndu* in this culture implies his conscious participation with himself and other beings of the universe. The conscious participation of man with other beings extends beyond the grave. Man is said to be alive since he

partakes not only in his personal affairs but with that of the community. Individual life is meaningful only in the community in which he lives. This is what Aristotle meant when he defined man as, “a social and political being *ens socialis et ens politicus*.”<sup>2</sup> This in the other way round reflects Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jasper’s explanations of human existence as a process of, “I and thou” communication or “togetherness”. This implies that man exists because others exist. Man is not meant to live in isolation. So, In Igbo land, when man is being ex communicated or isolated, such person is said or understood to have died. Thus, the Igbo equate the earthly life with that of the spiritual life with ancestors. As man participates and functions as a full fledged member of the community here on earth, so he is expected to function and partake fully in the spirit world if he has fulfilled the set conditions for this here on earth.

The Igbo value life greatly. F. A. Arinze emphasized this point when he states that:

Life is the greatest of all that an Igbo wants, after all, does he not sometimes name his son *Ndubisi* (life first). If an Igbo is asked what he considered the good..his answer will be; life. This is true to the letter. The Ibo do not even want to speak of death. *Ọnwụ dj iwe* death is wicked, they say.<sup>3</sup>

The traditional Igbo also believe and know that life comes from *Chukwu* God and regard and esteem this life as the utmost and primary value of human existence. This more than any other phenomenon is in fact the main key to the understanding of the Igbo cosmological perception and thought. Thus, some Igbo names like *Ndubueze*, one with life is a king, *Ndukaku* life is more important than wealth depict the high premium which man places on life. Theophilus Okere succinctly summarized the Igbo people’s understanding of life in his *Odenigbo* lecture when he states:

*Otu ihe Igbo kpọrọ ihe karia ihe nile bụ ndụ. Ma na, ihe a bụ ndụ, so kwa n’ihe gbara Igbo gharị ighọtanụ. Ọbughị ihe nile dj n’ụwa nwere ndụ, ma ndụ bụ ihe*

*na-enye ha nile aha na nkowa, ewee mara isi na uruije ha nile. Ndu bu iku ume etu nkume na anaghj eku ume; imeghari. Ndu bu ike, udi ike ahụ gwurula ozu nwuruanwu”*

### **Translation**

There is something that the Igbo value above all things, it is life. But it's exact meaning also puzzles them. Although not all creatures in the universe live, they derive their meaning and worth from life..life is the jewel with which God adorned all creatures. To live is to breathe that which a stone is incapable of, it is the ability to move, that which a log of wood is incapable of, life is strength/power/dynamism that type which a corpse lacks.<sup>4</sup>

The Igbo respect and value for life inspires them to always protect and preserve it in all ramifications. Hence to kill no matter the circumstance is abhorred and a grievous offence against the earth goddess, *Ala* punishable by “ostracisation or tit for that.” As a result, the Igbo culture forbids murder, abortion, euthanasia and crimes that involves human life and the dignity of the human person. This value and respect for life *Ndu* can be deduced from the various names the Igbo give their children like *Ndubisi* life is supreme, *Ndubuaku* life is wealth, *Ndukaku* Life is greater than wealth, *Ndukwe* if life permits, *Chinwendu* God owns life etc.

Similarly, the importance placed on life, its perseverance and strengthening among the Igbo people *Ndi Igbo* can also be deciphered from the diviner's invocation during consultation as well as during the routine mourning prayer of the family head. Edmund Ilogu describes the above two scenarios thus “...When a man goes to a diviner with a wrenched tendril of the palm tree to inquire about anything, the diviner *Nwadibia* lifts up his *ofo* stick and says to the client, *jurū ndu* touch the *ofo* for life.”<sup>5</sup> Again early in the morning when a titled man offers the kolanut prayers to his

ancestors, he starts by saying, *Nna anyị ha tanụ ọjị, ihe anyi na achọ bu ndụ*(our ancestors eat kola, what we are asking for is good life.”<sup>6</sup> Life *ndụ* for the Igbo is not just to exist. Life *ndụ* can be likened to what Tempels called “vital force.”<sup>7</sup> Hence to be alive according to the Igbo is to live strongly in an activity in which all the good thing of life will come or are already present, like wealth, health, children and ability to function effectively and actively in the community. Hence, a life blessed with these for the Igbo is life in its fullness. Again, this life or vital force for the Igbo is eternal, because, man shares in the life of the creator – God *Chineke*, through the spirit in him which makes it immortal. Hence, there is a strong belief among Igbo people that life is endless even after it has been terminated biologically. Life does not cease at death but continues in another realm. This idea of eternity of life is the background to the Igbo cult of the ancestors “through which the dead shares in the life of the living and the living can hope on the protection of the living dead.”<sup>8</sup> This however buttresses the Igbo escathological belief, that there is life after death and reincarnation as we shall discuss in the subsequent chapter. The Igbo therefore strives always to uphold this life till its natural end through death, even when it is threatened by ill health, the Igbo runs to God the author of life to seek restoration of life through prayers, sacrifices, rituals gestures and proper conduct as the case may be.

Another point worthy of note is the social emphasis which the Igbo place on life. I.e Metu refers to this when he say that:

For the Igbo, life is a communion, communion is not limited to the relationship with the created order the universe, the spirit, ancestors, his family and community, but also relationship with the creator himself, *Chukwu*. Man is indeed bound to God by ties of creation and by his divine providence over the world which man is a part.<sup>9</sup>

Life for the Igbo therefore is a relational affair, the history of Igbo man is simply dotted with the story of his relationship with fellow men, to other creatures in his environment, to the ancestors, the deities in general and ultimately to the supreme being, who himself is the beginning and end of all these relationship. This is well explained in the Igbo expressive vision of the world as a “market place” *uwa bu ahia* where one necessarily need the other since no one could both sell and buy all alone. The interesting point in this market bargaining activity is that, “it is all inclusive, with a vertical as well as a horizontal connection.”<sup>10</sup> That is from man to God, the deities both major and minor as well as man to man and other creatures dimensions. The underlying principle of it all is the ensuring of security through a search for equilibrium in creation by the maintenance of friendly relationship within and between the two dimensions namely; the invisible and the visible. The point of it all is focused on life and the search for its enhancement.

There is also ethical connection in the above issues because for the Igbo, every human action and value attached to it is measured on the backdrop of life. They are good when they are life promoting and life preserving. They are inversely evil, when they are in any way anti life. This can be indirectly likened to what L. Magesa while writing from East African background said about the ethical dimension of African religion when he states that:

The foundation and purpose of the ethical perspective in African religion is life, life in its fullness... This most basic understanding of morality in African religion is incorporated systematically in the people’s way of life.. It constitutes what Africans perceive as the mystique of life.<sup>11</sup>

In fact this set up results in traditional community organization in which ethics, religion and law dovetail into one another, where even ecological crimes are classified as sins, and principles of good manners acquire moral and sometimes legal status.

In summary, the concept and understanding of life in Igbo thought embraces all aspects of cosmic order both visible and invisible. By this we mean that all created beings that participate in the network of interaction of being has life force either in act or potency. There is no inactive being. "Everything that exists ontologically has life force." They influence man and are in turn influenced by man. Man is capable of understanding and manipulating all these other forces for his own interest through divination ritual rites and sacrifices.

Life for the traditional Igbo goes beyond maintenance of individual life. It includes maintaining the entire cosmic order for his benefit and that of the entire community. However, human life occupies central position and sacredness, it is distinguished from other lives and other lives are at its disposal. Man maintains cosmic equilibrium with other life forces of nature for the sole and of sustaining his own. Hence, life for him is communion in which man strives to maintain vital relationship with the Supreme Being *Chukwu*, the deities, the ancestors, the family, the community and the whole of nature. Human life is structured to strive toward being in harmony with God, the deities, his fellow human being, both living, dead and those yet unborn. Equilibrium with the above mentioned realities forms the basis of understanding life and ontological relationships embedded in it. Hence human well being consists in maintaining harmony with the entire totality of cosmic reality. When events go well with him, it shows that he is at peace with life forces of reality. But if things go wrong then somewhere along the line it means then that he has fallen out of steps.

Thus, Ikenga E. Metu states, "for the Igbo, the first evil is disintegration for this would spell disaster both for himself and his intermediate world."<sup>12</sup>, while Udobata Onuwa concurs that, "among the Igbo, the only unfriendly agent that threatens life here on earth is illness, the other enemy which Igbo hates is death itself."<sup>13</sup>

However, remedies exists in the use of "divination to help him discover the point which the harmony has been broken, as well as provide solution towards ameliorating and re-establishing the harmony."<sup>14</sup> But where the individual fails to do this, it may result in



state of chaotic life leading to sickness and eventual death. Thus even at death, this harmony must be re-established before the final burial rites otherwise the individual may not be admitted in the ancestral world.

The Igbo proverbially says, "*Igwe nile gaje n'ụzụ* every iron is moving towards a smith."<sup>15</sup> This implies that every human being irrespective of age or status must experience death. Death is a pre-requisite for new life. No life, no death and vice versa. The Igbo believed good life leads to good death and good death brings about the visa of reincarnation *ilọ ụwa*. One Igbo parlance says, "*Chukwu kere ụtara, kere mmiri ofe* created all opposites."<sup>16</sup> This means that the God that created life also created death. All realities as stated above emanated from God. There however exist the invisible and visible realms. And, God with the gods (who are his subordinates) as well as the ancestors and other spirits abode the invisible realm. While the visible realm accommodates human beings and things *Mmady na ihe nkịti*. To the Igbo, the visible realm and its contents are the manifestations of the whole being of God and that of the spirits beings. As it is believed in this culture. He is perceived and explained as the greatest, most supreme and intelligent being. Hence the Igbo call him different names expressing His apex rank in the realm of all beings. God in the language of the Igbo is called *Chi-ukwu*. This is because, they believed in the varieties of Chi hence amongst them exists the highest and author of all. Other names of God in Igbo land are; *Chineke* God the creator, *Ezechitoke* God that created and apportioned every existence as they suppose to be, *Igwe ka ala* sky greater than earth, *Osebuluwa* God that created all realities and still takes care of them, *Eze Igwe* king of sky etc. According to the Igbo, life and death *ndụ na ọnwụ* originated from God *Chukwu*. He created life, sustains and takes it at the appointed time. Hence, death to the Igbo can be described as, "God's act of taking away life from man."<sup>17</sup> However, the Igbo people's assumptions and explanations to the puzzling issues of the meaning and origin of death are narrated in their different myths. As it is in this context, we shall focus on the interview carried out with Dr C.C Mbaegbu concerning the myths of the origin of death and why God withdrew from the world of man as narrated by C.O. Obiego and Mazi Julius Ojukwu respectively.

## The Igbo Myth of the Origin of Death

The famous cosmogonic myth of the Igbo people of Nigeria under circulations in various forms and which tells how death came into the world was narrated by Obiego.

At the beginning of things when there was nothing, neither man nor animals nor plant nor heaven nor earth, nothing was, only very powerful person was and his name was *chukwu*. Then, He came and created both the water below, animals and everything as we see it today. After words, *chineke* created man, man was the head of all the things of the earth but, *Chineke* and *Ala* own man. After a long time, death entered the world and began to kill men. Men became worried and gathered together and sent a messenger to *Chineke* asking Him whether the dead could be restored to life and sent back to their homes. They chose a dog as their messenger. Mr dog however zoomed out to deliver the message to Him. But, Mr toad over heard the content of the message which dog was to deliver and decided to punish mankind by going to deliver the contrary message. On their way, dog diverted and dallied on the way. While toad overtook him and reached *Chineke* first. He told *Chineke* that men sent him to inform Him that, after their community meeting, they agreed that when man dies, he will not come back to the world again. Giving that *Chineke* had already declared to act on men's wish, he then stamped the message. Later, the dog arrived to *Chineke* with the original message from men, but *Chineke* refused to alter his decision. Thus, human

being be born again, he cannot return with the same body and the same personality.”<sup>18</sup>

### **The Igbo Myth of Why God Withdrew from the world of Man.**

Many Igbo localities link the Supreme Being with the sky. The names of God in some areas of the Igbo society reflect their perceptions and beliefs about God and sky. Such names are: *Eze Igwe* king of the sky, *Eze bi n’elu* the king that inhabits the sky, *Igwe ka ala* sky greater than earth or land etc. Some myths link the separation of God or Igwe from man or earth with the advent of evil. Thus, in response to the request made to narrate a myth or story that will show the Igbo peoples belief in the existence of God prior to Christianity, Celestine. C. Mbaegbu in his book *Hermeneutics of God in Igbo Ontology* said: An old man from one of the numerous communities of the Igbo society (precisely from Nnokwa in Idemili South L.G.A), named Julius Ojukwu tells how *Chukwu* God and man *mmadu* or earth *uwa* were near to each other. Thus he observes that:

The sky then, lay just above the earth. Man could reach *Chineke* God the creator via a rope which hung down from the sky. There was no death at that time God created the world and man. Man never lacked anything, God was interested in their affairs, associating and providing for them in all their needs. God was very near to man. The spirits and man were one. One day, it happened that a woman spit out into the eyes of God. He felt offended and withdrew with the sky to its present position and punished men by causing them to die. Since then, things became difficult for men on earth. Evil, sin and suffering however spread all over the earth.”<sup>19</sup>

These myths however explained God’s love and care for human beings. God originally loves man and wanted them to live forever on earth. His intention was not that men

would die. But, because of their arrogance, stupid and ill behaviours, God withdrew from them and in turn, inflicted death on them as a way of punishment. Thus, the Igbo believe life and death originate from God. When the spirit of God is in man, there exists life but, when the same spirit moves out death occurs. Therefore, the Igbo describe life and death as the presence and departure of the spirit of God in man. The Igbo people's conceptions and explanations of the phenomenon of death are of mixed feelings. In as much as they perceived death as an enemy or something bad, they still uphold its necessity. At the mention of death, all humans shiver. It instills fear and anxiety in man generally. Like other people of the world, the traditional Igbo believe that death is a necessary end that must surely occur. As it is, they believed that human beings are sojourners on earth. Earthly existence is similar to market arena where men go to sell and purchase and depart on individual bases *ụwa bu ahịa onye zụcha ọlaa*. One Igbo proverb said, "*Ọnwụ bu oke, onye ọbụla ga achịrị nke ya, anaghị achị tara ya mmadu*" death is a share to be taken individually, no representation of any sort."<sup>20</sup> Truly, one cannot represent another person at the call of death. Everybody must submit to its occurrence on the appointed time no matter what. As said above, the Igbo people's description of death as an enemy and evil is not because it puts an end to life but because, it marks the demise and the physical end of the relationship with a dear one or someone very close to the family.

According to the Igbo, death *ọnwụ* is not the end of life. There is yet another life beyond the earth and grave. Hence T.U. Nwala defined death as "one's transition from the physical to life beyond."<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the Igbo (ndị Igbo) believed in the existence of the two worlds: spirit and human worlds *ụwa mmụọ na ụwa mmadu*. Thus God and the gods as well as the forebears and minor spirits abode in the spirit world *ụwa mmụọ*. As there is the community of men in this material realm so it is in the spiritual realm. According to the Igbo, the conditions that make man a complete social being here on earth are also applicable and authenticate the existence of the dead in the spirit world. Here in Igbo land and Africa as a whole, human being passes through four stages of birth, growth, death and decay. But, at the stage of growth, of course the middle stage,

he is expected to function on to fulfill the stipulated condition of marriage, procreation and moral upright life which aid to prepare him for reaching the last stage which is receiving of proper rite of passage. Thus, man's accomplishment of these criteria will lead him to the communal existence with the ancestors. One of the uncountable sayings of the Igbo people is, "*ka esi eme ya n'mmadu bu ka esi eme ya na mmuo*" as it is done in the physical world, so it is done in the spiritual world."<sup>22</sup>

This in effect shows that there exists different families, kindreds, villages, clans, tribes or ethnic groups in the spiritual realm of ancestors. Hence, every people share their thoughts and ideas separately, just as it is done here on *uwa mmadu* earth. No wonder Plato explained the earthly existence as the replica/prototype of the world of form and ideas. As it is however, the Igbo people's conceptions and explanations of the relationship between the visible and invisible realms are in line with Hegel's explanation of the visible realm as the projection and manifestation of the absolute. The dead in the Igbo philosophy are believed to know and commune with themselves and invariably visit their relatives on earth on frequent basis.

According to Igbo people's belief, human beings including other living beings do not die completely, what they do is sort of transformation. They transit into the yonder realm through death to take up another new body and return to earthly existence through birth. In fact, to this group of people, it is assumed that human being does not die. Instead, what he does is just a change of situation for a new situation or to start afresh. They believe thus that life starts at conception. That is why they customarily and morally frown at the termination of life of any sort including abortion *ite ime*. The Igbo frowns at this because they believed that at conception, it is the spirit of an ancestor that is about to come back to earthly existence, so, abortion is an act of molesting and pushing the spirit back to where it is coming from.

Human being *mmadu* generally is dual by nature. But, every society classified him into parts based on their psychological perception of his (human) destiny. The Igbo categorized human being into tripartite constituent parts. These involved, the body

*ahụ*, the spirit *mmụọ*, and the soul *mkpụrụ obi*. They believe that the body and soul are materialistic by nature. The soul however, is the seed of the heart *obi* and, it is the abode of the spirit. So, at death, the soul perishes with the body while the spirit departs to the spiritual world where it continues to exist as an ancestor and in turn keeps on visiting his relatives as well as reincarnating to life through the relatives or children. For the Igbo, what experienced death is the body. The spirit does not encounter death rather what it does at death is decamping the body to transit to the communion of the ancestors. Hence, death for the Igbo can be described as, “a system whereby man transits to join the blissful ancestral communion and in turn reincarnates to maternal/earthly communion via birth.”<sup>23</sup>

One Igbo parlance says, “*Onye Igbo adighi anwụ ọnwụ gbara aka* Igbo man cannot die without cause.”<sup>24</sup> Whenever an Igbo man dies, the occurrence must be attributed to certain factor etc. Man according to the Igbo has two main moments that is, the moments of life and death. At the moment of life, man prepared himself for death. Death is inevitable *onye ọbụla dị ndụ ga anwụrịrị* etc. The Igbo believed that man faces two options of natural and unnatural death and each of them has its effects on man and the society.

In the traditional Igbo land, much value is attached to ancestor hood and that is the goal which everyone of them strives for. The wish of every traditional Igbo is to attain ancestral status. But, this cannot be achieved without commitment. Hence there are standards meant for it. The standards however have been enlisted somewhere within the text. Contrary to these makes man a loser of the set goal.

Thus, the doctrines of resurrection, heaven and hell as well as the end of the world have gained momentum in the contemporary Igbo era. But, these are not the true Igbo belief. They are imported in Igbo land and Africa generally. The true traditional Igbo belief is the ancestral existence. For them, neither heaven and hell nor resurrection exist. They do not anticipate the end of the world or the coming of the last day. The spiritual and physical life exist endless. Thus death is the gate way to their endlessness.

The two realms for the Igbo influence each other. What man does is just ever shuttling them. They believe that *Chukwu* God mysteriously threw human beings into earthly life via birth; they grow, die and go back to their place of origin. This therefore implies that death means, “man’s act of going back to his place of origin etc.

In the philosophy of death and the circumstances surrounding it, the Igbo believed that human being exists immortal both spiritually and materially. Human spirit as nature destined it exists immortal as ancestors in the spirit realm while in materiality, the truth is that the dead passes to the realm of ancestors *uwa nna nna anyi ha* yet he remains ever green in the memory of his children. In fact, the Igbo believe that one’s descendants immortalize him on earth. Despite the fact that man dies, he still exist immortal through his descendants. He is always remembered in everyday family activity. Such person is remembered often and on in every morning Prayer and in pouring libation. In this culture, it is assumed that human death does not mark his total annihilation. He lives permanently in the spirit world. He cannot be said to die or face another death unless when such dead lost all his descendants on earth. The bare bone of the Igbo conception of death is their common belief in the existence of hereafter. Human death as it is, is empirical but, metaphysically he exists. Despite all odds and biases, the Igbo assumed man does not die. What he does is just wearing out the weak and enfeebled body to keep on existing spiritually. They metaphorically equate or interchangeably used the concepts like going back to the place of origin. *i laghachi azu ebe osiri bja*, transformation *mgbanwe* etc. to compare with human death. According to the Igbo, man does not die what he does at death is going back from where he came from. They however put this or sing it as song at a funeral arena like:

*Nwanne m la n’udo*

*Nwanne m la n’udo*

*Olala ebe osiri bja n’uwa*

*Onwu, onwu, onwu*

*Olala ebe osiri bja n’uwa*

*Chukwu na nara ya*

my brother go in peace  
My brother go in peace  
He has gone to where he came from  
Death, death, death,  
He gone to where he came from  
God accept his spirit.<sup>25</sup>

Concerning the question of where the spirit of the dead goes after death, the Igbo answered that it goes back to its place of origin hence the Igbo sing again during funeral ceremony asking themselves of where their relative goes thus:

*Ebe ka nwanne anyi gara nuo?*  
*Ọla la*  
*Ebe ka nwanne anyi gara nuo?*  
*Ọla la*  
*Ewoo, gwam ihe nga eme, gwam ihe nga eme*  
*Ọsị na nwanne anyi gara ebe?*  
*Ọla la.*<sup>26</sup>

Here, the people were asking and also responding that their relative has just gone home, definitely to his place of origin. In the traditional Igbo, even in the present day Igbo, there is what is called, *inọdebe onye n'anwụ ọnwụ* i.e staying close to a dying person. The physicians (medical doctors/scientists) call this "coma" while the Igbo call it *ikwo ọnwụ*. At such time, the relatives of the dying person especially the aged one's will rally round to support and console the victim. This is exactly where the Igbo exhibits one of the numerous qualities that according to F. Arinze, are shared with the Jews. They will be telling the dying person words of encouragement. But, immediately he gives up to ghost, the people will start singing to him a lot of praises like; yes hero or heroin *dike*, you did well *imere nke ọma*, go well *laa nke ọma* we know you will always be around us *anyị mara n'igana anọnyere anyị mgbe nile*, greet our people there *kele ndi be anyị nọ ebe ahụ*, we anticipate your coming back *anyị n'atụ anya na ịga lọrọ anyị ụwa* etc. Thus, all these happen when an aged person is dying. When man is in the dying process, it is only aged people that will understand that the person in question



will give up to ghost in no distance hour. The young ones whose intelligence has not grown fully will see such person as being severely sick. They will be incessantly asking to know how the person is recovering. But once he gives up to ghost, the aged will inform them that he has passed away *ogafego* or he has gone *olaala*. This therefore implies that all human beings are visitors on earth and that all will definitely go back to where they came from. So man's act of going back to his place of origin means death.

#### 4.2 Types of Death

There are two main types of death in Igbo cosmological understanding. These are; natural and unnatural deaths. Natural death (dying well) in the language of the Igbo is called *onwu chi* while unnatural death is called *ajọ onwu* evil/ bad death. This includes all manner of bad deaths like, premature death *onwuike ma obu onwu mgbabi*. The above classifications have sub-categories with moral, ontological, religious, social and political dimensions etc. similarly, the cause and manner of death is very important and must be ascertained through the diviner as it determined the nature of the burial and funeral rites to be given to a dead person. It is therefore on account of the above classification that the Igbo people ascertain whether or not to accord the deceased full burial rites. However, a dead person, no matter his or her social status has rights, such person is entitled to fairly appropriate or well organized burial rights that fits his or her life, character and achievement when alive. The dead expect and often demand or force the fulfillment of this obligation, failure on the part of the living brings about harassment of the living by the spirit of the dead in Igbo world.

##### Natural Death *Onwu Chi*

This means dying well. It is called *ezigbo onwu* or *onwu ruru eru* in the language of the Igbo people. This in a general sense is regarded amongst the traditional Igbo as "death at a ripe old age." It could be described as *onwu akara aka* (death as destined to have occurred as decreed by one's personal god *chi*, J.C. Aguwa described this as, "a natural end which does not mean an isolated biological disintegration of man; it may at the same time be understood to have occurred when and how one's chi has decreed; it is a good fortune being the determination of a chi that is favourably disposed."<sup>27</sup> Such

death as is explicitly believed by the Igbo is just a departure, not an annihilation of the deceased person. Simply put, natural death is one's act of changing to join the company of the departed; the major change in this situation is the decomposition of the empirical body while the spirit moves on to another portal of existence. The dead in the words of J.S. Mbiti is said to have joined the ancestors. This however is the desire of every traditional Igbo because it is conceived as a reunion, a home journey that is more of a celebration than mourning. This presupposes that the deceased has lived a good moral life as well as achieved his desired goal in life as destined by his *chi* personal god. C.O. Obiego states that:

When an old man dies, it is a moment of joy of sorrow for the older a man is, the more descendants he has, the higher his rank and prestige, the more acceptable does his death become, the peaceful demise of an old chief with numerous progeny is as much as occasion for rejoicing in his life's achievement as for sorrow.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, when a man lives to a ripe old age, he has taken a good step towards being an ancestor, provided he lived a good life and died a good death. Good life as it is brings about good death which is the visa for ancestral communion and reincarnation. The question however is, "how do we count that man lived good life? or How do we describe one who died good death? In the traditional Igbo society, we count man's good life based on his ability to fulfill the social obligations of marriage, procreation and living moral upright life. More so, man is said to have died good death when he has grown old enough and meet the prerequisite conditions of life as stated above and then given a comprehensive burial/funeral rites by his children. In this culture, it is one thing to be born in this world, it is another to live well and die well. C.B. Nze reported that, "to live and die well has its significance and even recompense among the Igbo. Death is a loss and it is an inevitable loss but for the Igbo what mitigates this loss is good life concluded by good death."<sup>29</sup> Explaining more on the concept of good death and what it

takes to die good death *ezigbo ɔnwu*, D.U. Oputa in his book, *Essays on Igbo World View* describes a man who is said to have died good death as:

One who first and foremost reached old age before dying, secondly, the person must have had children and grand children who are well to do. Thirdly, the person must have died the sort of death in which all the needed burial/funeral rites must be performed. Fourthly and perhaps not very important is that the person should have died at an opportune time, a time when there is plenty to eat and drink, a time where there are no ongoing traditional festivals during which mourning is interdicted in the person's community, and a time when clan members and extended family members are all in peace such that there would be no wrangling about unsettled grievances such that could prevent the participation of all in the burial/funeral ceremonies. Finally, a person who is deemed free from all associations with the factors we shall later on enumerate as constituting evil/ bad death.<sup>30</sup>

Good death is more of a definitive living well and quitting this world peacefully and with a deep sense of satisfaction not only for what one achieved, but also for the type of life one had lived. Hence, D.U. Oputa added that the Igbo rate a man that is said to have died well as:

One that has reached old age, left children, grand and great grand children, and relations behind, is assured of being treated well at death and burial; has plenty of maternal prosperity with which to support existence and with which the person's death would be celebrated.<sup>31</sup>

However, emphasizing on the import of good death involves relating to the concept of good life. Good life in Igbo society and culture does not mean an exclusively life of spontaneousness, it is life full of the care of one's neighbour, life of communal mindedness, above all, it is life of moral rectitude free from any attempt to sabotage the wealth of one's community or that of one's individual brothers, sister and friends. It eschews self centeredness, solitude or kittles life. Good life is the one that found solace through the discovery of human essence and realization in belonging and sharing with the community as a whole. As John A. Noon avers, "it is the wish of every Igbo man to die well; ironically, to die well is to reduce the painful sting of death; it is to survive, to exist, dying well does proud to one's self, family and one's relations dead and alive, it is full of hope, hope of reunion, resurrection and reincarnation."<sup>32</sup> Though he added that one will achieve all these only if he or she lived a good life.

A fulfilled or good life in Igbo context is one that has reached old age, left children, grand children, (great grandchildren) and relations behind, such person is assured of being treated well at death, burial and funeral, has plenty of material property with which to support existence, and with which the person's death will be celebrated. Following this, C.B. Nze informs that:

In Awka, Ugwuoba, Enugu- ukwu, Ogidi, Oraifite etc it is believed that good life, well led life, draw to itself some definite attractions, namely definitive and worthy burial. Good life leads to and proceeds good death, imports unity in oneself, unity in the family and unity in the community, fortune, good fortune directs good life and one is led die in the presence and hands of one's relations. At death, good death, the way is paved, there are noticeable signs of cheerfulness as ceremonial rites to send off the dead to the land of the spirits are about to take place.<sup>33</sup>

In the traditional Igbo land as said somewhere in this text, the desire of every human being is to attain the ancestral bliss. But for one to achieve this, he/she must undergo and accomplished or lived through what Mike Ejeagha (a renowned Igbo folk musician/philosopher) called *uwa Mgbede*. This as he explained means when one *mmadu* has grown to a full fledged person, partakes fully in the community affairs and activities, fulfill his individual or personal functions of marriage, procreation, living moral upright life and then, given appropriate burial/funeral rites by his children. When one accomplished and worked towards these conditions, he/she would be perceived and judged to have died a good death when he passed out of this life. Then, having died good death means that he has automatically gotten a ticket for the spiritual life with ancestors. Hence such person will reincarnate back to keep existing with his relations here on earth. Though this does not terminate one's spiritual existence. The dead exist permanently in the world of the dead and as well reincarnate to earthly life via their children etc. Thus, the summary of the Igbo conceptual analysis of natural death involves self or individual realization by marriage, procreation, moral upright life and social/communal participation. These in effect lead to good death which authenticates ancestral communion and the repertoire of reincarnation.

### **Unnatural Death *Ajọ Ọnwu***

In the traditional Igbo cosmological understanding, human existence is classified into two phases. The first phase is called *uwa Mgbede* evening world while the second aspect is known *uwa ututu* morning world. *Uwa mgbede* relates to the concept of natural death which was just discussed and explained before. This (evening world), when applied in interpreting the experience of life implies a life that attained a ripe old age represented by morning, afternoon and evening stages of life. This is also used when man must have completed his functions as an individual in the community, and is marked to have lived a good life. That is to say, when he/her must has grown fully as a real man (adult), participate and contributes to the progress and stability of the community through marriage, production of his replicas (children) enjoying the fruit of his or her labour living as morally and socially expected and then, transits to join his

ancestors. At this stage, the deceased enjoys befitting burial and funeral rites from his children and relatives. The death of such man does proud both to himself, the entire community and relations both dead and alive etc.

On the contrary, (the concept of *uwa ututu*), the second phase literally translated as morning world has a close affinity and interpretation with bad death in traditional Igbo cosmological conception. It is usually used to describe those who died in the early or middle stages of their lives that is to say in the morning or afternoon of their lives time. Death of this sort is categorized as bad death *ajọ ọnwụ*. This in the traditional Igbo includes premature or untimely death *ọnwụ mgbabi*, *ọnwụ ike/ọnwụ erughi eru* based on different dialects or tongues; *ọnwụ amusu* death by witch-craft, *ọnwụ ọgbanje* repeaters. These types of death are termed so because they connote some ontological and religious implications in the traditional Igbo society. Other types of bad death as believed by the Igbo are death by suicide *ọnwụ ikwụ ụdọ* this means “deliberate termination of one’s life”, accidental deaths e.g. dying by fire or by drowning in the river or sea; deaths caused by chronic and incurable sicknesses and diseases like leprosy, small pox *akpasị*, elephantiasis *njagidi*, swollen stomach *ito afọ* etc. In this culture, if a woman dies during child labour or before the funeral or during mourning of her deceased husband, it is also perceived as bad death. Again, if one dies in the process of committing abominable crime or at the time of taking oath *ịdụ isi*, such person is said to have died bad death and, the person in question will be concluded definitely to have done as alleged etc. Explaining more on this, C.B. Nze said other types of bad death include:

To die with a protruding or swollen belly, swollen feet and hands, it is equally bad for a married woman to die without being known to have ever been pregnant; a vertical mark is left on her belly before burial. To die, lying flat on one’s belly is a calamity that can only befall an isolated, rejected solitary who has by his bad life, angled himself into

a cocooned life. He did not die well and he is not buried within the compound.<sup>34</sup>

Morally in the traditional Igbo community, a man is deemed to have died a bad death if the person at the point of death is under any type of interdiction which prevents him from receiving full burial and funeral rites. Such a situation is ascertained through divination as soon as the person dies, because the community as it were does not have right to declare someone fit or not to be accorded full burial rites even when such knowledge is obvious to all. Even when the diviner declares otherwise as against the already known experience, the family would look for another diviner or set who would ascertain and confirm that the victim died a bad death and prescribe the nature of the burial/funeral rites to be given to such a person.

Amongst all manner of deaths that are termed bad and frowned at by the Igbo, death by suicide is the worst that needs to be discussed in details. Suicide in the language of the Igbo people is called *madu igbu onwe ya*. This may be by hanging, drowning, falling, self poisoning etc. These types of death is believed to distort the ontological order because a human being within the traditional Igbo is believed to have no right to take his own life, because it is a gift from God to the individual and community at large. Hence nobody is authorized to take away his or her life deliberately without incurring the wrath of both God and the community. Ordinarily, it is something bad to hear that a man deliberately kills his or her fellow human being (except in a war situation or self defence situation). Of course, such person should be killed because it is naturally an abomination or taboo *aru kwọ nwa* to terminate human life, so it is not quite understandable why a person should willfully think of taking his or her life. Thus, C.B. Nze reports that, “[...] in Igbo culture, “suicide” or “self destruction” as a willful and permanent denial through death to others of one’s companionship is a violent death, it is abominable and abhorrent. So there is no known mitigating influence or circumstance which can play down the gravity and consequence of suicides.”<sup>35</sup> In some suicide cases, especially by hanging *ikwu udo*, it is not only that the victim is denied of funeral rites because he or she has condemned himself permanently by severing links with his

relations both living and dead, even his personal property and belongings within the vicinity of abomination are cast away in the bad bush or allowed to be taken by foreigners. The victim declares himself an untouchable to members of the community and they must not come in contact with his corpse instead hirelings are employed from outside the community to bury him in the bad bush *ajọ ọhia*.

As no formal funeral rites which honour the dead, secure their memory and prepare them for their future in other world are carried out for the person to aggregate him or her to the ancestral family, a special ritual is performed. This is using to sever whatever relationship that existed between the victim of bad death and his relations. Thus, it is the ritual which leaves him an outcast and turns the dead into malevolent spirit with no proper abode. Chinua Achebe narrated pathetic story of Igbo attitude to suicide committers in his book *Things Fall Apart* thus:

Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead. Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him. Said Obierika. We have sent for strangers from another village to do it for us, but they may be a long time coming. The District Commissioner changed instantaneously. This resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs, why can't you take him down yourself? He asked. It is against our custom, said one of the men. It is an abomination *arụ* for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, only strangers may touch it. That is why we asked your people to bring him down, because you are strangers. Will you bury him like any other man? Asked the commissioner. We cannot bury him. Only strangers can



do that. We shall pay your men to do it. When he has been buried we then do our duty to him. We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land. Obierika, who has been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, said ferociously: that man was one of the greatest men in ụmụofịa. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog...<sup>36</sup>

In some communities in Igbo land, C.B. Nze further narrates,, “[...] an egg is left on his grave approximately on his chest area where the heart is supposed to be to soothe his anger, at other times axe or stone is placed on his grave to hold him back from harassing his relations.”<sup>37</sup>

Finally, another death classified by traditional Igbo as bad death is *ọnwụ ọgbanje* sylph caused by *ọgbanje* spirit. Chinwe Achebe explains it as “[...] part human and part spirit beings whose lives are confounded by the added loyalty which they owe to the spirit deities. A normal individual is born owing his or her *chi* but an *ọgbanje's* life is complicated by being mixed up with the demands of paranormal deities. The most notable of these is that the *ogbanje* will not be allowed to enjoy a full life cycle.”<sup>38</sup> The concept sylph as used by Mathew Orji in his work *The History and culture of the Igbo people* simply means, “an imaginary female creature who lived in the air according to ancient stories.”<sup>39</sup> Death by *ogbanje* Child repeater contradicts the Igbo expectation of meaningful existence. Moreover, the phenomenon of *ogbanje* as a repeater child coming and dying prematurely usually before puberty makes it not only a torment to the parents but also detestable in the eyes of the community. Thus Ikenga Metu remarks that, “a women infested by *ogbanje* spirit may give birth up to nine times but may not have any survive as they would each die before adulthood.”<sup>40</sup>

The demands of the *ogbanje* spirit are most times heartless and wicked in the sense that they do not consider the feelings of their parents or relations. All these are in compliance with *ịyị ụwa* oath which the people have contracted with his or her spiritual

counterpart *ndị uke* and the sylph deity. The terms of the contract may range from a collective decision not to live to adulthood, not to marry, if married, he or she will not reproduce children, not to tolerate any type of chastisement only to be pampered and when coerced or persuaded, to go contrary to *iyị uwa* to die immediately. Sylph victims according to Mathew Orji are generally great dreamers, who hear and communicate with unseen beings and often threaten to die even if minor request are not granted. Ordinarily as Chinue Achebe said;

*Ọgbanje* are beautiful and often greatly talented, and some of them are courageous and hardworking. But their normal life span and virtues are short lived. Typical of some *ọgbanje* acts, all members of the *ogbanje* group of children of different parents may decided to die at same period and in similar circumstance often tragically.<sup>41</sup>

In Igbo land, *ogbanje* is a curse, the belief is that such bad death should not be honoured, but driven away by ritual rites of sacrifice *ichụ aja* which may involve corpse mutilation as usually prescribed and directed by a diviner. This is especially so if the relations want to quit the phenomenon of sylph *ogbanje* in their family. Their belief is that if so treated, the spirit will abhor coming back to the same family. This phenomenon therefore may be classified as bad death. Though it may not all that be termed reincarnation but if at all it is to be termed, it will be described as a negative reincarnation.

In all, we can say that bad life results to bad death and, this leads to loss of family by the victims, because such person severes all kinds both physical and spiritual with the human as well as the ancestral family and there by depletes the membership of the family in question. In this type of case, the person is permanently dead with no proper communal burial/funeral rites given to him, the person's spirit however, has no permanent abode, no peace and finally no hope of proper/positive reincarnation, which every traditional Igbo person longs for as well as desired in other to preserve self and

the lineage. Such dead they believe may wish to reincarnate but the problem is whether the wish is welcomed and approved by one's kith and kin with whom the person has lived. Hence, the Igbo expression *onye dika gị abịaralam ịwa* may a person of your kind not reincarnate to me. This is a disapproval of all that one stands for as well as a curse that one is not desired to reincarnate in the family lineage. Consequently, such death is not natural, where it occurs, a repeat of it is undesirable and no Igbo family will welcome a reincarnate whose profile or curriculum vitae in the words of C.B. Nze is "[...] said to be with violent death."<sup>42</sup> So, all who died bad/violent death as described above are permanently banned from both human and ancestral realms, they become spiritual parialis and malevolent spirits *akalaogeli* that hover around to haunt the living but usually are warded off through sacrifice *ichu aja* at cross roads.

In summary, in the Igbo philosophy of death, there are two main categories of death viz:natural and unnatural death. These have their own implications each on man and the society. Natural death *ezigbo onwu or onwu chi* which rooted from good life which man lived paves way and grant him membership ticket for ancestral communion and potentiality for reincarnation and prolongation of life on earth. Contrarily, the concept of unnatural death heaped a lot of negative implications on man and, this has adverse effects to the society. In Igbo land, culture and tradition made it that any man that died unnaturally will definitely forfeit proper and befitting rite of passage. In fact, such person will be buried but no funeral rite will be accorded to him. Sometimes in some communities, the people that died unnaturally are buried outside their homes, in the evil forests to be precise. The Igbo believed that the spirits of such dead will not be welcomed by the ancestors. And that, they will be wanderers hovering around without a place of rest. Such deads do not reincarnate. They lose contact of relationship with their descendants here on earth as they do in the spirit world. This type of sanction the researcher argued, is so ferocious and, it effects the prolongation of life and deteriorates the stability and progress of the society. The traditional Igbo maliciously generalized and imposed the same level of punishment to people that died unnaturally. They do not consider the type of death one died, what caused it or how it comes. One would wonder why they place the same level of punishment on the people that died by suicide, witchcraft, sorcerer and murder with those that died by accident, chronic and

incurable diseases. They even stipulate that those who died at infant and youth age will suffer the same fate with the above mentioned set of people, what of those that neither marry nor procreate? Will they suffer the similar fate at death?. This is erroneous, it contradicts the principle of fatalism which states that all events are fated to happen no matter what the person involved might have done to avoid it. Because, no man will choose to die by accident or by chronic and incurable sickness. It should be obviously understood that, if people were to choose, all will choose to die good death and at a very ripe old age. No man or woman apart from those that are celibate will not like to marry and procreate. Any person outside those mentioned above may have one problem or the other. In that case, the researcher however contend that nature must be allowed to take its course. So, the concept of natural and unnatural death should be trashed and done away with. Specifically, all the socially stipulated conditions that robbed man the ancestral bliss should also be abolished to adopt the moral principle of do good and avoid evil as a criterion for ancestral existence etc.

### **4.3 Characteristics of Death**

Death is a dramatic event which each and everyone of us must encounter on the appointed time and hour. For this event, there are no attorneys, no delegates, and no representatives. Not to be moribund, but the king, the subjects and lawyers can all be substituted for. This possibility of substitution is completely doomed to failure when there is brought into play that the possibility of being which is constituted by the reacting of the end on the part of the man and that, as such, to confer upon him his totality. "No one can take on the death of another. Yes, anyone can die for another. But, this dying for never implies that another person's death is taken away completely. Every man must always assume his own death himself."<sup>43</sup>

The tragic event of death is singularly dramatic because it is characteristically featured by; universality, inescapability, imminence, inexorability and fearfulness. Giving that we have enlisted the qualities that featured death, it is very necessary that we examine and explain briefly each and every one of them in relation to Igbo conception and belief.

## Universality

Death as it is," is a universal phenomenon. All men fail to the scythe of death: youths and the aged, the rich and wretched, the black and white, men and women, the healthy and the ill. Death looks no one in the face before striking its murderous blow. It does not take into account position, the race or wealth or age. It is not stopped when confronted with the innocent smile of the child nor with the seductive beauty of a young woman nor with the robust strength of an athlete or warrior."<sup>44</sup> This however implies that all human beings irrespective of age and status must experience death. Explaining on the universality of death, the Igbo give their children names like *onwuzuruigbo* death is universal. As it strikes the young so it does to the old. Emphasizing on this, J. Obi Oguejiofor in his article "Eschatology, Immortality and Igbo Philosophy of life" says, "the fatality of death befalls everybody; both the poor and the rich, *ogbenye or ogalanya*, all are destined to die."<sup>45</sup> Similar to the Igbo perception of the universality of death, Martin Heidegger in his book *Being and Time* remarks:

[...] all men fail to the scythe of death youths and the aged. Scholars and illiterates, atheists and believers, the rich and the poor, the black and white, men and women, the healthy and the ill. Death looks no one in face before striking its murderous blow, and does not take account of the position or race, wealth or age, sex or religion. It is not stopped when confronted with the innocent smile of the child, nor with the robust seductive beauty of the young woman, nor with the wisdom of the scholar, nor with the piety of the monk, it has already fixed the hour of its arrival for everyone.<sup>46</sup>

## Inescapability

The Igbo proverbially say, "*ogba osọ adighi agbanari ike ya n'osọ* a runner cannot zoom out without his buttocks following him."<sup>47</sup> Death as it is, is inevitable, man cannot avoid

it. There is nothing to do against death; any battle begun against death is doomed to failure. Neither gold nor sword, nor astuteness, nor prayer succeeds in getting the better of this adversary. Against death, sooner or later, even the bravest player must surrender. Even if one obtains some small, brief success, it serves only to delay for sometime the decisive blow. Death is a drama, Bergman masterfully demonstrated this in the.. "The seventh seal" with an animated game of chess between the knight and death, with some able moves, the knight defends himself from the assaults of death, but the final victory goes to death. The Igbo make it known that, "man *mmadu* has two main inevitable days in the world: the day of his birth and the day of death *abalị abụọ ka mmadu nwere n'ụwa, ụbọchị ọmụmụ ya na ụbọchị ọnwụ ya.*"<sup>48</sup> When man is born on earth, he or she will be welcomed. Man is said to be innocent when he was a foetus in the womb. He knows no sin, in fact, he was not corrupt. But having been born immediately, he starts lamenting because he has been infected by the evils and anomalies of the world.

The relationship between life and death is a process that never ends. This resembles a flowing river that comes and passes away while new ones keep running in the same manner. Thus, the journey between the material life and that of the dead in Igbo world is perceived as sort of infinite regress. Man comes in to the visible world and passes out of it through death and in turn returns to earth again via rebirth system. Hence this movement exists *ad-infinitum* without end; no matter how diabolic and powerful man is in the world that can effect, change or stop his death. Whether he likes it not, he or she must definitely die one day at the appointed time. One Igbo adage says, "*Ọnwụ bụ ụgwọ onye ọbụla ji ala* death is a debt every person owes land or earth."<sup>49</sup> Every human being must surely die whether he likes it or not.

### **Imminence**

Men cling to life as if death does not exist or as if it is very far away, or as if it does not regard the man personally. Meanwhile, they dissipate their time in infinity of distractions that are stupid and damming themselves and for others. Death is not

entirely something distant, fixed in an undermined future, which does not touch us at the present moment. Instead, it is an always present potency, incessantly inter-weaving itself with life and threatening it. As said somewhere in the text, life and death are in conflict. The Igbo believed that, *ihe nile di n'uwa nwere ihu na azu* every thing that exist in the world has front and back, for example, man or woman, *o bughị nwoke, o buru nwanyị*, sky or earth *elu ma obu ala*, spiritual world or physical world *ala mmuo ma obu ala mmadu nke ana ahụ anya* etc Death is a phenomenon that threatens life. Once there is life, there must definitely be death. Death *onwu* is a danger that keeps every human being restless. No one wants to die, people live and behave as if death is not possible. But, whether man want to die or not, whether people live as if death did exists or not, death is imminent, it must surely come as it is destined, Igbo people used to say "*n'etiti ndu, anyị nọ n'onwu, onye obula di ndu ma na ya ga ezute onwu ya otu ubochi* in the midst of life, there are chances of death, every human being knows quite well that he or she will surely encounter death one day."<sup>50</sup> Death as it is, is not far from man, it is very close to his feet. One thing that reminds man of who and what he is according to the Igbo belief is death. Actually, man knows very well that he will depart this material world one day but, how and when it will occur is beyond his knowledge. Despite the fact that man perceived death as danger and enemy, yet no man would like to live like the Metusalar of the Christian religion. One funny thing about human being is that, once he or she approaches eighty (80), ninety (90) or more than hundred (100) years, his body will start to shrink and diminish. Thus, old age affects his reasoning ability. This act complements what the wise King Solomon said in the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 12.

At this time and age, the sweetness of life has declined and, human being become exhausted with life. What he will be anxious of is to have rest. A person at this time said King Solomon understands more of the language and interactions of the dead than that of men. People at this age in traditional Igbo world, possess a strong life force that is why the younger ones avoid provoking them, to avoid being cursed. Death not only to the Igbo people, but generally is perceived and believed to threaten human life. As as it

is, human being is always consigned to the possibility of death. Emphasizing on the imminent quality of death, Martin Heidegger ( a German philosopher) as cited in his book *Being and Time* writes:

The menace of nearby death is a mode of being for the man. For his existence – it is an existential. Man is always consigned to this possibility. Death is not completely a simple presence not yet actuated, nor is it an extreme lack reduced and minimum, but it is first of all an imminence that threatens. The being-for-the-end is revealed as a phenomenon as the being which is the most characteristic and specific possibility of the *Dasein* that is man. As the most proper, unconditioned and insuperable possibility, the *Dasein* does not create it additionally and occasionally in the course of its being. But, if the *Dasein* exists, it is also already projected into the world; the *Dasein* has no explicit or theoretical knowledge of. The being projected into death is revealed to the *Dasein*, is revealed originally and acutely in the affective situation of anguish.. This must not be confused with the dread of death. It is not entirely an effective tonality of arbitrary, causal ‘depression’ proper to an individual, but instead, as a fundamental affective situation of the *Dasein*, represents the aperture of the *Dasein* to its existence as a being-projected to its own end. With this, is rendered clear the existential concept of death as being projected into being able to be more proper unconditioned, and insuperable, and the differences in relation to this aspect are clarified, made clearer as



much respecting a pure disappearing as respecting a simple cessation of life, and finally respecting a lived experience of death.<sup>51</sup>

### **Inexorability**

Death for the Igbo is a necessary end that must occur. Before it, every prayer, supplication, and invocation is in vain. Igbo people name their children "*Ikeriṅwu*." This implies that no matter how brave and powerful man is, he cannot subdue death, the power of death surpasses that of man and man must submit to it.. The Igbo bear names like *Ṗnwukamike* death is powerful than me, *Ebere..ṅwu*, death shows no mercy, *Anaebereṅwu* can one cry or plea death? etc. For the fact that death does not compromise and no amount of lobbying can change its occurrence and, since it does not look at face or show remorse, man then resorts to beg its mercy. This manifest too in the type of names they bear like, *ṅwubiko* death we implore you, *ṅwuchekwa* Death wait etc. No matter the amount prayers and pleads people do, yet death is of necessity. It cannot be avoided, whenever it comes and knocks at the door of man, he or she will surely succumb leaving all the acquired material wealth like, house, money, employment, education, landed property and projects, parents and friends etc. One Igbo adage says, "*aka ka mmadu gbara bia n'ụwa, aka ka ọga agba laa* man came into the world empty handedly and, so shall he go back to his place of origin empty handedly."<sup>52</sup> Death cannot be stopped and scared. Men have in one way or the other tried to stop and scar death yet, all were in vain. For example, people like Alphonse Daudet, recounting the death of Delphino of France, presents him in a crisis of dread, while he calls for soldiers and cannons to put off the death that is imminent. But death did not respect soldiers or cannons. Its specter advances inexorably towards all men, including kings and emperors etc.

### **Fearfulness**

Because of the proceeding characteristics, death appears frightfully. It gives rise to horror, aversion and anguish in man. This aspect of death has been illustrated most effectively by scholars like Jean Paul Sartre in his book *The Wall* and Albert Camus in his

book titled *The Stranger* while Heidegger performed a very penetrating analysis on it in *Being and Time*. Anyhow, we are speaking about a universally admitted fact, men detest death and do not wish to hear it being spoken of. "Precisely this event, the only one predictable in the future of everyone, is the one most tenaciously ignored by this society of futurologists, planners, programmers, and organizers of future."<sup>53</sup> As said in chapter one, the traditional Igbo exercise mixed feelings about death. No one likes to hear the mention of death. They perceived it as an enemy yet it is necessary and must take place. Unlike the Christians who conceived death as negative and the total annihilation of human life, the Igbo contrarily understands the necessity of death. For them, death is both negative and positive. They hate death because it debars their inclination to live immortal on earth. And inversely, they show positive attitude towards death because it is inevitable. The Igbo and other African societies, believe death to be a gate way to new world and life. However, the joy of every traditional Igbo is to die good death and join their ancestors and from there, they developed the potentiality for reincarnation.

Edmund Hursel in his *Phenomenological Epoche* says, "reaching the essence of a thing involves setting aside all presuppositions, prejudices and biases to study it phenomenological as it appears."<sup>54</sup> So, from this small sketch of phenomenology of death we can come to conclusion, which will open the way for us to a deepening of this phenomenon.

First – Death, as the failing of being, is a possibility of the being of every limited creature that is, the being which participates in the being of ultimate reality. The being of the limited creature is distinct from the being of the absolute which is itself, the essence of all reality. The creature is always exposed to death but not to total annihilation. In the strict sense of the word, the Igbo believe it is only the physical (body) aspect of living creatures that experience total annihilation. Now, man is not being, but a particular being, he is a participation in being, and not being itself by essence. For this ontological reason, he is exposed to frailty, to death. Death touches him because he is creature and not God. In death, the essence of man is revealed as the

essence of a creature. Death is the sign of this creaturehood of man. But for spiritual creatures such as the gods, death is just a possibility; death for man, as we have seen, is inescapable, necessary, and the direct consequence of his composite structure by psychophysical constitution. Made essentially also a matter since this is intrinsically corruptible, man, in as much as he is composed of spirit and body, is destined to dissolve himself, he is doomed to death. Death is for man a biological necessity.

Second – The death of man as generally perceived is different from the death of the other beings inferior to him, for which death is simply an automatic, mechanical and biological event. Animals die: they do not predict it, study it, or prepare for it. Man, instead, has consciousness of death; he can make it a subject of meditation during his whole life, and he can pledge his life for death: he can make death the most important act of his existence, as heroes do “to have knowledge seems to belong properly to man as it belongs to him to know of thought [...] Death is for man, such a difficult issue that he cannot renounce it, it is also a phenomenon without which one cannot live. This manifestly means that differently from the other living being, we possess this distinct sign that death is something for us.”<sup>55</sup>

#### **4.4 Causes of Death**

Man in the traditional Igbo society could be said to die either naturally or unnaturally. Here, much value is attached to the concept of natural or good death because; it is what every man longs for. No Igbo man wants to die unnaturally. This is because such imposes lots of implications on man and as well effects the growth and common good of the society. One Igbo adage says, “*Onye Igbo adighi anwu onwu n’nkiti*” an Igbo man cannot die without a cause.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, the principle of cause and effect is much more effective in the Igbo philosophy. Perceptually in Igbo and Africa generally, reality is not static but dynamic. The polarity between the corporeal world of men and the incorporeal world of the spirit is not rigid but continuously and causally intermingling. The two realms influence one another. However, the inhabitants of the two realms are one. They are one in the sense that the incorporeals manifest and project themselves in the

corporeal (material) world. In Igbo society both the contemporary and traditional, every death is believed to be the effect of a particular cause. Sometimes they attribute it to be the result of an evil force. Whenever man died in Igbo land, especially in the present day Igbo, what follows is, “*egbuola ha* they have killed” This syndrome has overtaken event in the society. In a situation of this nature, the relations or children of the deceased will search deeply to ascertain the cause or what killed him. They will go miles away to consult a diviner *dibia afa* to tell them the person or force responsible for that. One Igbo proverb says, “*onwenughị onye gara be dibia gbara aka afa laa* nobody has gone to a diviner and go back home without a piece of information.”<sup>57</sup> This process in the language of the Igbo people is called *nchọpụta*. The *egbuola ha* and *nchọpụta* syndromes have caused a lot of havoc in the society today. In the traditional era of the Igbo society, the allegation is heaped only on old people. But today, it has taken a new dimension. Both the aged and youths are believed to be involved in the malevolent act of killing. This act is sometimes attributed to witchcraft, sorcerers, and other evil forces. Even where a man dies on his sick bed, by accident of many kind, even if a woman died in pregnancy labour or where man died while sleeping, the Igbo believe such is caused by evil men who use their occultic and witchcraft powers to invoke death on the person in question etc.

Actually, human being cannot die without a cause, many factors contribute to death phenomenon *Ọnwụ mmadụ* the factors include metaphysical and physical factors. As it is, man dies as a result of metaphysical forces inflicted and evoked on him. Strictly speaking, the issue of witchcraft, sorcery and other mystical forces cannot be ruled out. Human beings sometimes die based on the sickness evoked on him or her by fellow man. Evil people may use evil forces of witchcraft and sorcery or even *juju* masquerade to kill their fellow human being etc. The physical causes of death include; accident, sickness, predation, cardiac arrest, suicide, homicide etc. Accident could be by auto mobiles, air crash, drowning, by fire, falling of all sorts etc. Speaking on the Igbo conception of the cause of death, G. Ikeobi states that:

The world of the Igbo [...] is full of activity... it is not an indifferent universe [...] Nothing happens in this universe by chance or in isolation. Thus, every type of sickness from severe headache to stomach upset is caused by forces, evil spirits, witchcraft, angry divinities and machination of enemies in the form of sorcery *ogwu na nsj*. Although, the medicine expert is consulted in these cases, yet the priest has to offer sacrifices to appease the power concerned.<sup>58</sup>

In Summarily, death in Igbo culture is believed to be caused by “evil forces or spirits, witchcraft, sorcery, poison *nsj na aja*, sickness *oria*, accident *ihe mberede dika oku ogbugba*, *mmiri iri mmadu*, *ugbo ala ikugbu mmadu*, *ida elu ma obu ada ala* etc. More so, man can die by committing suicide *mmadu igbu onwe ya*, by homicide, abductionism *itorj mmadu* murder. Other causes of human death are; cardiac arrest *obi mmapu* prediation *mmadu ma obu anu iri mmadu* High blood pressure *obara mgbali elu* etc.

#### **4.5 Signs of Death**

How do we know that a person has died. How do we certify death of a human person? There are many criteria for knowing that death has actually occur, however is not only for the Igbo but mankind generally. Death is literarily defined as, “the cessation of breath.”<sup>59</sup> According to Igbo people, the human being is a composite of body and spirit. The body works with blood while the spirit works with breath. Then, at death, the body dies and the blood immediately turns to water while the spirit decamps and breath ceases at once. Other signs of death are; cessation or loss of consciousness. Non-functioning of other sense organs, stiffness of the body tissues, if such dead is not taken where to buried or embalmed it, it will start decomposing and smelling etc.

#### 4.6 Burial/Funeral Practices in Igbo Land

The discuss of burial and funeral practices in Igbo land involves the search for the meanings of the two concepts. What is burial? And what is funeral? These concepts though are used interchangeably yet they differ a little in their meanings. The term 'burial' according to *Longman Dictionary of the Contemporary English* means, "to put someone who has died in a grave."<sup>60</sup> As John .S. Mbiti explained, "burial connotes the process of disposing a dead body as well as the ceremony that follows immediately after burial."<sup>61</sup> The concept of funeral *akwam ozu* as called by the Igbo literarily means, "a religious ceremony for burying or cremating someone who has died."<sup>62</sup> Funeral practices in Igbo land calls for the presence of some social groups. The groups in question are highly needed that their absent renders the ceremony incomplete. Custom and tradition had made it that in any burial/funeral ceremony in Igbo land where *Umunna* kinsmen and *Umuada* daughters of the community are not present, the ceremony is incomplete and it affects the dead person badly. It will disturb his communion with the ancestors. From this, questions may ask: why is it that such social groups must be present in these practices? What roles do they play? etc. In response to these questions, the Igbo believe that the presence of these group of people matters a lot that, they bear witness and authenticate the persons participation as a full fledge citizen of the community. And this will also guarantee the person a happy journey to the blissful existence with the ancestors.

The presence of *Umunna* and *Umuada* male relatives and the female relatives who married in and outside the community are so indispensable in every celebration of life in Igbo land. The kinsmen carry out the functions of meeting in the house of the deceased often and on to help the children to articulate and prepare for the burial and funeral ceremony. They are the people that dig the grave of the corpse. They help to contribute money and palm wine for the ceremony. They are the people that will bury the corpse and also celebrate his departure even when friends and well wishers depart. The Igbo proverbially say, " *ozu sibe isi, enyi ka nwanne ala* when a corpse starts smelling, a friend that exceeds relations will run away."<sup>63</sup> No Igbo man plays with his or

her relatives because, his or her individual existence is meaningful within the community of such people. The Igbo says, “*otu onye siere ọra, ọra erisịa mana ọra siere otu onye, ọgaghị erichanwu ya.*”<sup>64</sup> Actually in Igbo society, the power of the community overrides that of individual. Hence, when the community *obodo* says ‘no’ to an individual, such person is in trouble. That is why in Igbo land, when a person that was interdicted or excommunicated dies, his children and relatives will do everything within their reach to reconcile him with the community by paying all the fines that were imposed on him when living. But where they are not able to do all that are required, the community or the kinsmen will not be present and this will stop the welcoming of such dead in the ancestral community. The Igbo as it is, believe that the visible and invisible realms are peopled and that, it is only those that meet the requirements will enjoy the relationships with those over there at death.

Another social group in Igbo land whose presence is needed to grace burial/funeral ceremony are that of the female folks. These include the *Ụmụada* and the *alutara di* the former are the women who were born and married in and outside the community while the later involve the women that were married from outside by the brothers of *Ụmụada*. The married women like their husbands also contribute both money, cassava and fufu to help their fellow wife and her children in the burial/funeral ceremony.

Amongst all the people that were mentioned above, the group whose presence are so much needed include the *Ụmụnna* kinsmen and *Ụmụada* or *Ụmụọkpụ*. Apart from the kinsmen whose roles were listed above, the *Ụmụọkpụ*'s position is indispensable. The appearance of these set of women looks as if the ancestors are present in the occasion. Based on the interview conducted by the writer from the traditional ruler of her community His Royal Majesty, Eze Sir Stephen Ekemezie *Alagba, Duruegbe* II of *Ụmụduru* Onuimo L.G.A, Imo State, to ascertain why *Ụmụọkpụ* must appear in every burial/funeral ceremony in Igbo land. The *Eze* king says:

*Ụmụọkpụ* are like the ancestors they share equal rights with their brothers in the presence of their forebears. It is through them that the

descent/lineages of the various families, kindred and communities in Igbo land are maintained. Every *Nwa okpu* that married maintains the relationship of the two families of her's and that of the husband. As she gives birth, it is much likely that her ancestors will reincarnate to maintain the co-existence with their inlaws.<sup>65</sup>

As it is, the *Eze* king added that, the presence of *Umụokpu* in every burial/funeral ceremony in Igbo world cannot be over emphasized. This is because where they are not present, such burial and funeral ceremony is incomplete hence, it also effect the dead person in the spirit world. In his further explanations of the position of these women in the physical and spiritual realms, he says:

*Umụokpu* share double existence for they exist as daughters in their father's homes and also as wives in their husband's families. When *Nwaokpu* dies, her spirit leaves immediately for her father's family while the corpse lies in her husband's house waiting to be put in the mortuary or to be buried. As it is, her spirit shuttles both her fathers and husbands homes as well as the spirit world. Unlike the spirits of their dead brothers, those of the *Umụada* are bound to reincarnate in their father's homes and that of their husband's families. There is no place in Igbo land where the spirit of a dead man has ever reincarnated to where he married when living.<sup>66</sup>

Burial/funeral practice in Igbo land depends on the type of death one died and the status and age of the person. The burial/funeral ceremony of a man who has accomplished the conditions stipulated for good death and the attainment of ancestral existence differs from that of youths and infants who are seen to have died



prematurely. There is also a distinction between the burial/funeral of a man that died by suicide and the person who died from chronic and incurable sicknesses like, small pox, lunacy, epilepsy, swollen stomach etc. In some communities in Igbo land, those that died by suicide or prematurely are treated alike. They are not given any funeral rite rather they are buried with incantations in the evil forest *ajọ ọhịa*. Inversely in some communities, those that died prematurely and those who died out of the chronic and incurable sicknesses are given half hazard funeral rites.

In this culture, authentic and full funeral rites are meant only for those who died good death. That is, those who died at a ripe old age, the time when he or she must have accomplished the requirements for ancestorhood. For example, when an old man died in Igboland, his relations kinsmen and children will rally round to put him in the mortuary or bury him before preparing for his funeral ceremony. They will hold series of meetings with his children to see that things are put in order. On the funeral day, the invitees from all walks of life will come to condole the bereaved. After this, the *Ụmụnna* kinsmen sit back to complete the remaining ceremony based on their custom and tradition.

In this situation, once the corpse is buried, the wife of the dead man will shave her hair. Though this is done by her fellow widows within the community, it is perceived as a taboo in Igbo land if a woman whose husband died did not shave her hair. To shave hair by a widow signifies that; the woman is innocent of his husband's death; she is grieved about her husband's death; the shade that protect her no longer exist and that she is now incomplete. For a widow to shave her hair when her husband died is also a way to separate herself from the companion of the dead husband etc. In the traditional Igbo era, widows suffer so much especially from the treatment of the *Ụmụokpu*. They used to mourn their dead husbands for about a year or more. But today, it is no more like that. Presently with the emergence of Christianity, those obnoxious customs and traditions no longer exist. Widows mourn their husbands for the maximum of 6 months. At this particular period, they wear white or black clothes as the case may be. When the mourning period ended, the cloths and ornaments of mourning worn by the widow will

be burnt a day prior to her outing service etc. Another thing that is forbidden in Igbo land before and presently is that a widow under mourning will not sleep outside her husband's house whether in the village or township except in the occasion of sickness where she is admitted in the hospital etc.

However, the funeral ceremony of married women in Igbo land differs also from that of men. Generally, every woman in Igbo land is known as *Nwaokpu* or *nwa ada* this is because they are born in the families, kindred and communities that constitute Igbo as a society. And also married in or outside their communities and beyond etc. When *Nwaokpu* dies, her husband and children as well as her fellow married women will inform her people of her death. In some communities, her corpse is buried in her father's home while in some, the corpse will be taken to her father's home after which they convey her back to her husband's house where she will be buried. In some places in Igbo land, the custom and tradition made it that her departure will be celebrated both in her fathers and husband's homes while in some, the funeral is done only in her husband's home with her relatives being there to witness the proceedings. Then after that, they will go back to their homes etc. Proper burial/funeral ceremonies in Igbo society guarantee a blissful existence with the ancestors.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE QUESTION OF DEATH AND OTHER RELATED ISSUES.

With regards to the theme of the chapter, *ndị Igbo* take stand that death *onwu* is meant for every being that breaths ihe *ọbụla n'eku ume*. All that breath has life and they must encounter death one day. There is a difference between human death and that of other animate beings like animals atnd trees. Like other African and Euro-Western societies, the Igbo believe human beings possess the features that distinguish him from animate and inanimate beings. Generally, the human being is believed to be the image of God. He has reason, freedom, moral and ethical, social/political and relational qualities. In fact, human being *mmadu* is the chief and master of all animate and inanimate beings. Hence he controls, directs, frees the frozen forces in them and channels them towards their purposes of creation. In spite of all these powerful qualities of human being yet he succumbs to the dreadful power of death. This however puzzles and perplexes the Igbo that they interrogate the constituent nature of his being. The Igbo people's approach to the question of death involves the search for the identity of human being whose experience of death is highly noticed. This however relates to other circumstances of death like, the issue of hereafter, companionship with the ancestors as the goal desire of every Igbo man and the conditions necessary for achieving the desire, other issues include the problems of immortality as well as the issue of disembodied existence under which we shall enlist the varieties of spirit. The last of these to be discussed is the question of reincarnation or rebirth.

#### 5.1 The Problem of Personal Identity

The problem of personal identity has for ages been a general concern of people. This however arises as a result of the perception about the changes (metamorphosis) of human being from the stage of birth to growth and death. Thus, the Igbo regard human being as unique, although he is composed of various elements, they are; *mmuo* spirit, *mkpuruobi* soul and *ahu* body. The heart *Obi* as distinct from *mkpuruobi* soul, is like other organs of body, it is included under the visible components of *ahu* body. It is true that in ordinary language, the heart *obi* is sometimes regarded as the affective domain

of the body where mercy, kindness, conscience, sympathy and what signals certain psychological states such as joy and fear emanate. This clarifies many Igbo assertions; *Onye obi ebere* a generous or kind person; *enwerem obi anurj* I am happy, joyful; *obi n' ekupum* I am frightened, anxious – literally, my heart is stopping to beat; *Obi ipja italj*, pain of conscience; *obi tara ya mmiri* he is so much wicked or cruel etc.

In the strict sense of the word, the Igbo believed that man is both spirit and non-spirit. He possesses two main parts – spirit *mmuo* and body *ahu*. But in analysis, he is perceived to be composed of three elements as listed above. In this categorization, *mmuo* spirit as the Igbo believed, is the most essential element because it is the engine that activates and vivify other elements. Absence of the spiritual element in man renders other elements inactive and dormant. Having portrayed the Igbo analytical conception of man *mmadu*, let us then discuss them one after another.

### **Spirit *Mmuo***

This according to the Igbo is the spiritual part of man. It associates itself with the heart *obi* and soul *mkpuruobi*. Sometimes, the elements of heart and soul are perceived and used as that which sustains life *ndu*. But, the spirit which is immaterial by nature use them as its abode. Hence, the presence of the spirit makes heart to be the affective domain of man and, it is featured with the enlisted qualities of intelligence, feeling, emotion and others. Biologically, the Igbo believe that the heart *Obi* is covered by the chest while the soul which they called “nut of heart” *mkpuruobi* though materials, is the dwelling place of the spirit *mmuo*. However, the Igbo *Ndi Igbo* believed that, both the heart and its nut or seed (soul) are linked with the material body and, they die with it at death while the spirit *mmuo* goes back to its original abode. Hence from there, it reincarnates back to a new person on earth (*uwa*) and also lives there permanently as an ancestor.

### **Soul *Mkpuru obi***

This has a definite material shape and location in the heart. As its name implies, it is the nut/seed *mkpuru* of the heart *obi*. Unlike the Christian's ideas, the Igbo idea of the soul



is definitely materialistic. It is the location of the spirit which is the life giving force *ihe n'enyē ndụ*. Occasionally, the Igbo speak of soul as if it is the same thing with spirit – such as when it is used to “indicate the virtue we have in mind when we speak of a man possessing a strong spirit, one which inculcate courage, endurance etc.<sup>1</sup>” The Igbo people’s differentiation of soul *mkpụrụ obi* and spirit *mmụọ* of a man is very clear. They bear in mind that one is essentially materialistic while the other is spiritual. The soul as it is; is the part of the body which is the residence of the spirit. It perishes at death with the body of man, while the spirit departs into separate existence in the spiritual realm and at the same time may come back to earthly life through rebirth system.

### **Body *Ahụ***

This is the visible part of the human being which perishes and becomes earth at death. Human body biologically involves his outer and inner parts. It exists inactive to become active only when the vivifying spirit enters it. Hence the Igbo assume that spirit is the human share from the complex being of God. The Igbo believe that the body of a dead person needs to be taken proper care of. This however is because; the body that dies physically is the replica of the spiritual body. This thus implies that the body that dies physically is what the Igbo called “*anụ ahụ*” flesh. This human flesh *anụ ahụ mmadụ* is the body *ahụ* we have been discussing from the beginning of this paper. The *anụ ahụ*, as said above involves the external and internal biological parts of human being. Invariably, the spiritual body is shadow like. It is intangible. It is this same body that is seen moving around carrying out one activity or the other when alive that also appear to people’s dreams when dead. Even when the dead are being consulted in an oracle, it is still the same body that suddenly appears etc. the physical body of man dies while the spiritual body exists immortal in the spirit realm. The spiritual body of man when dead, appears in the same form and shape as it were when living. This however complements what V.C. Uchendu meant when he states that:

The Igbo world is a world peopled by the invisible and visible forces, by the living, the dead and those unborn. It is a world in which all these forces

interact, affecting and modifying behaviour, a world that is delicately balanced between opposing forces, a world whose survival demands some form of cooperation amongst its members, although that cooperation may be minimal and hostile in character. It is a world in which others can be manipulated for the sake of the individual's status advancement for the goal of Igbo life.<sup>2</sup>

As said above, the spiritual body in the realm of the dead does not experience death. If all it will experience death, it will only be when the descendants of such spirit no longer exist in the world. Apart from this, there exist in the Igbo belief what is called temporary and permanent transmigration. The former, is practiced by mystics, medicine men and magicians. This caliber of people can temporarily transform themselves into animal of all class. They however can transform and transmigrate into the spiritual realm for certain purpose and thus return quickly to their normal physical existence. Inversely, the permanent transformation and transmigration exist when the human being changes the physical body and passes through death to exist in the realm of the dead as an ancestor and then keeps shuttling the world of man on frequent basis via rebirth system. Though, sometimes, the spiritual transmigration may take place via birth when the spirits of dead men come back into the visible realm with deformities as a way of retribution for the wrongs done in the world before their death. The deformities may be in form of animals, trees, or even becoming a dwarf, blind, cripple or a man with hunch back etc.

In summary, the Igbo believe that the human being is dual by nature. He is a composite of the two main elements that are essential for his existence. The existence however, involves that of the visible and invisible realms. Thus, *anu ahụ na mmụọ* body and spirit as the two vital parts of human being complement each other in such a way that the spiritual part cannot project itself to the material realm without becoming a physical

body. And, the physical body cannot even penetrate the spiritual realm without transforming itself to a spiritual body or form. However, a thorough reflection on this belief brings about the question: does man have two bodies? If yes, what explanation do the Igbo give to it? In regards to these, the Igbo used to say that, "*mmadu chukwu kere di udi abuo* man as created by God is dual by nature." This as it is, has raised much dust amongst people, even amongst the Western philosophers. Thus, John Locke, the founder of the British Empiricist tradition, was the initiator of this argument where he adopted the body as the essential part of man. Contradicting Locke's view, Rene Descartes influenced by Plato, introduced and argued that human being is dual by nature. Though, this caused controversy and unresolved problem amongst people. Distinct from this, the Igbo used analysis that is similar to Aristotle's hylemorphic theory of matter and form or potency and act to explain the identity of man. They believed that both elements are essential to each other though more priority is given to the spiritual body. Hence, the visible body died at death while the spiritual body goes back to the realm of the dead to reincarnate back to earth etc.

## **5.2 The Issue of Hereafter**

This goes with the questions: is there anything like life after death? Or is death the total annihilation of man? If not, where is man going to when he leaves this world? This like other problems of death also troubles people all over the world. The problem reaches to the extent that people developed different camps and views about it. This is, between those that uphold the authenticity of the physical beings and their repertoire to end here on earth and, those that believed in the existence of the abstract world and its contents. For the physicalists, the western philosophers to be precise, there is nothing like life after death. They believe that all existence end here on earth. Hence death is the total annihilation of human life. In contradistinction to this, the metaphysical camp upholds the existence of hereafter. The typical examples of this camp are the Igbo and African societies generally. Unlike the Permanides who held the static nature of all reality, the Igbo uphold the moveable and dynamic nature of all there is. They also maintained that, all existences causally interact with each other.

Thus, the visible and invisible realms are contiguous with one another. Hence existence continues ad-infinitum. For the Igbo, the two worlds are populated by people. Thus, the invisible world is the abode of all the spiritual beings including the ancestors. It manifests and projects itself in the visible world. Ikenga Metu however confirms this in somewhat more vivid picture:

The abode of the good spirits of the dead *ala mmuo*, is a carbon copy of the abode of the living. The two differ only in that one is visible and the other invisible. A geographical map of the land of the living would represent the spirit land in every particular; every town, village and homestead would be situated exactly where it is in the land of the living.

Elsewhere, Ikenga Metu seems to have found a plausible explanation for such an attitude when he expatiates that: “the pattern of organization of the spirit world varies with each cultural group, just as their ecology and social organization is known to many. In fact, the organization of the spirit world of most groups often reflects their ecology and social organization simply because it is designed to explain them.”<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, the point of distinction between the two worlds is that of visibility. So it is a question of two worlds in one: the visible and invisible.

Actually for the Igbo people, the visible and invisible realms exist. Apart from the distinction of the visibility and invisibility between them, they are yet seen to be one, they are one in the sense that they are contiguous. They interrelate with one another. Emphasizing on this, J.O. Ohajuobodo observes that, “there is no vivid demarcation since both of them constitute a cosmic unity and are thought of not as two independent and opposing worlds but as two dimensions of one and the same reality.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, their relationship is characterized by interdependent. Nothing happens in the visible spheres that do not have its root in the spiritual world, because, it is the ontological foundation of the sensuous world. Confirming this, C. Obiego says, “The invisible realm is the

counterpart of the visible. It is symbolized or manifested by the visible and the concrete phenomena and objects of nature. It presses hard upon the visible. One speaks of the other; and the Igbo 'see' that invisible universe when they look at or feel the visible and tangible work."<sup>6</sup> In consonance with this, Francis Arinze confirms that the Igbo person "does not think of life as possible without due attention being paid to the invisible high powers."<sup>7</sup> Moving a little further, he aptly says, "the spirit world *ụwa mmụọ*" is as real to him as the dry December ground or the July soil on which he walks. The Igbo is no maternalist."<sup>8</sup> They know quite well that man after leaving here (the visible world of man) is going straight to the next world to start living original life. Hence the saying, "*ụwa abụghị ebe obibi* the visible world is not a dwelling place," *anyị b́jara ab́ja, anyi ga alaghachi ebe anyi siri b́ja* we are visitors on earth and will definitely go back to where we came from."<sup>9</sup> The abstract and perceptible realms in the thought of this group of people are taken to be distinct from each other but in the real sense they are one. However, the important point here is that, the Igbo understands only very well, how this same world could be both immanent and transcendent at the same time. For them, there are two existing worlds, which are really not divided from one another. They are really the replica of one another. They are so contiguous and contemporaneous to each other that they literally co-penetrate themselves.

When man dies according to the Igbo, his spirit decamps and journey straight to the spirit world to continue his existence with his ancestors. This however involves existence with the family, kindred, village, clan and others. Every traditional Igbo aspires to penetrate the spirit world to gain adequate knowledge of the ancestral world, hence they believed the inhabitants of the spirit world are more powerful than those of the visible world and, depending on their disposition towards human being, they can equally bring good or evil on man either to foster his life or hinder it, give success or distance between the two worlds. J.C.U. Aguwa cautiously explains, "the Igbo people entertain certain ambivalence as regards the distance between these worlds. Igbo folklore depicts a large volume of space between the two with the legendary number seven. It is said that the Igbo travel from one world to the other, crosses "seven

deserts and seven seas *ikpa/Agụ asaa na iyii asaa*. It is the idea of an immense span of space.”<sup>10</sup> He goes further to add that, “the vision of a dichotomized and well distance cosmos however, is blurred by other human experiences. There is the immediacy and force that characterize man’s experiences of the other world... The interactions between the two worlds are so enormous that the boundaries could be said to overlap.”<sup>11</sup>

In summary on this, the Igbo believe that there is life after death. They believed that human beings do have a double status which is unique among all creatures of the world. Human beings on the one hand, are under the class of animal, they fall within the category of high class animals. Hence they are formed out of long slow evolutionary process. They are also among the beings that constitute part of the continuous realm of nature. Death for the Igbo is not the end of human life. There is yet life beyond the earthly life. They believe that when man dies, his spirit departs to the spirit world to join the ancestors. Thus, Jacobs explained this when he said that, “the belief that those who depart from this earth continue in existence elsewhere and are actively in touch with those who are still here on earth is seen in certain cult.”<sup>12</sup> Just like animals, men are mortal, they are made up of the dust of the earth and are destined to return to that dust. Men have a normal life span today, in our seventies or in our eighties or at most our nineties, we shall die, and this living body, then lifeless and cold, will begin to disintegrate and return to the dust of the earth. Supporting the truth about this, *Anedo* says: “For the Igbo people, what survives after death, is the spirit. They regard this as the real person himself, or a mirror of shadow “*onyinyo*” and this “*onyinyo*” is liable to God alone.”<sup>13</sup>

Explaining more, he said we (the Igbo) are part of nature, in a quite precise sense we transcended nature. For we, are possessed of reason which is the power to contemplate and understand including our own nature, from an intellectual vantage point outside it. The journey to the spirit world in some cases, is believed to be so long. “The disseminated spirit looks like the shadow cast by the person on a sunny day during his time.”<sup>14</sup> On leaving the body, the spirit hangs around the home stead for a few days,

visiting for the last time, the places he used to be frequenting when he was alive. Soon after burial, he sets out for the ancestral spirit land where he will live permanently as ancestors and then, keeps on reincarnating to earth as a new born baby etc.

### **5.3 Ancestor Hood as the Goal of Human Life**

The goal of every Igbo is to attain ancestral enlightenment after death. Thus, the Igbo believe that death is not the end of human life. There is life after death and this involves the life with the ancestors. However, a deep reflection on this call for questions like: Who are the ancestors? What relationships have they with the living? What qualities and functions do they have and carry out that attract the interest and desire of the living? In which rank do the present day Igbo places their ancestors? Etc Here; we shall lay emphasis on the following: the belief in ancestors among the Igbo; qualities and the roles of ancestors in the Igbo world; the feast of ancestors.; the fate of ancestors in the eyes of the contemporary Igbo. Finally, we shall discuss the importance of recognizing and respecting our Igbo ancestors rather than neglecting them etc.

In every human society, there are heroes of different values, these are people who have made impact or contributed in one way or the other to the growth of their society. They are people who brought smiles into the faces of people and are so honoured and emulated by their people. Among the Igbo of old, people loved to live life of emulation, life of righteousness, life that attracted love and respect to the beholder even after life on earth. Such people when they died and befitting burial accorded them are remembered as ancestors. Ancestors are the custodians of Igbo culture. They are respected and honoured because of the worthy lives they lived. In doing that, feasts are celebrated in their honours, prayers and sacrifices accorded them. All these however are to show that they really believed that the ancestors were still with them and then hoped to receive their blessings etc.

#### **The Belief in Ancestors Among the Igbo**

This among the Igbo is as old as how death came into the world. Among the Igbo people of Nigeria, the belief that life extends beyond death is a serious issue. The Igbo believe

that when one dies, the spirit separates itself from the physical body, leaving it to rot and as such go and settle in a place prepared for it depending on the status of the spirit. So, it happens that when the spirit and physical self cease to relate, one is said to have died. And so Craig says:

In as much as it has certain relation to the body, the spirit is a form to that body that is the perfection of that body. It is a form because a natural body is composed of matter and form.<sup>15</sup>

The belief that, the spirit lives beyond this present life after separation from the matter is unquestionable among the Igbo. The Igbo therefore do honour some of those spirits who were believed to have lived exemplary life while on earth. Explaining this point, Anịzọba says, “to live a good life means that one must not be a murderer, a sorcerer and a liar. One must abstain from any unclean thing and uphold all the social norms and taboos of one’s community.”<sup>16</sup>

These spirits are called ancestors and they, in the language of the Igbo people are called *Ndị ichịe*. In the Igbo world, reality is perceived as unified; consequently, the dead are not considered as very far removed from the living, that, in their turn, are very conscious of their journey to join those who have gone before them to the land of the dead. Ancestors mean more than just being dead. They are those who have achieved to a remarkable degree the aspirations and values of their communities. The respect and reverence they receive depend on their accomplishments. Those, whose accomplishments affect the entire community, receive reverence from the whole community. If the achievement is limited to a part or section of the community, for example, to a kindred or family, the respect is limited accordingly. In this culture, living moral upright life is also considered already as achievement. This is why ancestors are considered along with all those who have not committed any abomination against the land, and refrained from committing offences against the community which cry out to gods and ancestors for redress.



However, there are three classes of *ndj ichie* ancestors in Igbo belief system. These include; the living ancestors *ndj ichie dj ndu*. They are the oldest set of people in the community. Ajama grouped them at the bracket of 71 and above. Explaining them, he says, “they are the apex of the hierarchy of the age grades. They hold in trust the tradition and culture of the people and ensure their sanctity always. The oldest among them is the head or obi of the village.”<sup>17</sup>

The living ancestors are believed to be closer to the dead ancestors and therefore serve as intermediaries between the younger one and the dead ancestors. They understand and speak the language of the dead. As a result of their position in the families and the communities, they are respected. It is the belief of the Igbo people that whoever they curse or bless is ratified by the living dead. Therefore, no one loves to disobey or challenge their words. An example was what happened in the Holy Bible, Genesis, 27:33 where Isaac asked, “Who was it then that killed an animal and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came. I gave him my final blessing and so it is forever.”<sup>18</sup> Apart from this, respect for elders has been with the Igbo from time of creation and that is why the elders snub the younger ones whenever they pass them without showing respect. The second class of ancestors is the ancestral cult symbols *ndj ichie nọ n’obi*. According to Anedo, “it was found that as in every other cultures and religions of the world, symbols and symbolism were prominent in Igbo culture.”<sup>19</sup> One cannot talk of religious aspect of Igbo culture without mention of ancestral worship. And so, since ancestral worship is part of Igbo Traditional Religion and philosophy, symbols play important role in the veneration of ancestors. Ancestral cult symbols *ndj ichie nọ n’obi* are the consecrated carved representations of the dead ancestors through which the living ancestors commune with the dead ancestors.

These symbols are always positioned inside the ancestral house *obi* where both the living and the dead members of the family converge for deliberations on matters concerning them. The symbols in Igbo are referred to as “*Okposi*”. Telling more about this, Jacobs says, “There are also family stools called *Okposi*. Some other parts of Igbo

land also represent these with *Mpekele eju* broken clay pots neck' usually for women and rock *okwute*."<sup>20</sup>

The third class of ancestors is the one in vogue. They are the ones being represented with the ancestral cult symbols. They lived fulfilled life here on earth before their exit into eternal bliss from where they oversee the overall administration of their various families on earth. However, the Igbo custom and tradition forbid the entrance of those who died at youth age to the ancestral communion. In Igbo society, all those who died young but had carried out an extraordinary assignments, for example a stunning victory in war, a great exploit that increased the community's self esteem and were given befitting funeral rites etc, will also join the ancestors. These calibre of ancestors, that is the spirit of our dead forbears, whether make or not make any distinguishing mark on the community, since they did not cause any great harm either, they are always remembered and respected by the living in every morning prayers of breaking of kola nut and pouring of libation etc.

### **Qualities of Ancestors**

Life is full of struggles. People therefore strive in one way or the other to make ends meet. In pursuit of that, some people are very careful not to injure others while others do not care to know whoever they step on their toes as far as success is their answer. The Igbo believed that the status of a spirit or dead is pre-determined by the person's performance before death. It is the outcome of one's observance of the taboos of the land. This was why Anedo says that, "What occupied the mind of every African of pre-Christian time, was how to keep the taboos of his community or how to appease the land in case of violation and by so doing, helped entire community to enjoy a peaceful environment."<sup>21</sup>

To achieve this, the Igbo man had to know the taboos, mend his life, and ensure that he did not violate any of the community's taboos. In keeping of these taboos one must not have destroyed life in any way. This is on the belief that life belongs to *Chukwu* God and Him alone has right to take it. Of course, one might argue that in the past, the Igbo

sacrificed human beings to their deities. That, to their understanding was to appease those deities as it was believed to be the highest sacrifice due to a deity.

Other qualities of ancestors are that one should not die prematurely. It is the belief of the Igbo that death is not for the young ones (youths/infants). Therefore, one has to reach ripe old age. One must not die bad death and in fact, one must die with someone standing beside one. Having one beside a dying person helps the Igbo to know full well who the person actually is for sometimes, a dying person before his or her final breath confess of his or her wrong doings. Wealth is also necessary here to show that such person is not an idle one. He therefore must be titled.

Marriage is also one of the qualities which ancestors possess that attract the desires of the living. In Igbo land, marriage is a mark of responsibility, in fact, one must live a good life. To live good life means that one must not be a murderer, scoerer, a thief and a liar. One must abstain from unclean things and life, and also uphold all the social norms and values of one's community.

### **Relationship between the Ancestors and their Descendants**

Among the Igbo, the belief that the living and the dead commune is real, hence all the rites are performed by the living for the dead, some of these start immediately breath stops. They believe that life goes on even after here on earth. When one dies especially the elderly one, his/her corpse will be washed, beautified with cloth and make ups and then, buried in the grave by his relatives. In the traditional Igbo era, corpse i.e. dead bodies are buried with some of their properties. If a titled man or king *Eze* dies, either one of his slaves or wives will be used to bury him. In a situation where such titled man lacks such people, some able bodied men from the community will be sent to haunt for human head outside their community, the head/s if caught will be used to bury the dead person in question. All these however are in preparation of his or her journey into eternity. On the other hand, if any of these rites due for the dead lacks, the livings will face the wrath. It is because of this that G.T Basden says, "Igbo man is deeply conscious of relationship to the unseen world, every precaution must be observed in order to

keep the spirit of the dead in a state of peaceful contentment, in fact, the symbiotic relationship that exists between the living and the dead is inevitable for peaceful progressive society.”<sup>22</sup>

### **The Roles of Ancestors**

The role of ancestors made the Igbo feel their absence in the governance of the families and clans. Anizoba said, “the ancestors constitute a very important instrument of faith and belief in the Igbo and African traditional philosophy and religion because of their roles in the lives of the living.”<sup>23</sup> He further added that among the Igbo, “the economic and social well-being of the living members of the Igbo families is very real, clear and beyond doubt.”<sup>24</sup> Among the numerous beings worshipped by the Igbo, ancestors are the closest to mankind and most loved. Reason is that they were once with the living and know their problems. In fact, they care for the living more than any other worshipped being in the spirit world. Their spirits are always near to solve the problems of the living. The Igbo people know that ancestors do not fail in their ability to care for the living. They serve as eye of the living in the spirit world. They therefore do not sit down and watch evil spirits torment the members of their families on earth. Even when the members of their families erred the spirit beings, the ancestors act as solicitors of the living. Emphasizing on the reason why the ancestors solicit for the living before the spirits, Anizoba says, “They do this because they are capable of understanding both human and spirit language.”<sup>25</sup>

Ensuring that the livings also observe all the moral standards of the communities is the work of the ancestors. Violation of any of these is disobedience to the ancestors therefore; one has to appease them as well as the land *kuo ala, kuo ndi ichie*. Failure to do this amounts to catastrophe in the life of the violator. Supporting this Parriender says, “Under the presidency of ‘Ala’ – the earth goddess, the ancestors are the guardians of morality.”<sup>26</sup> However, observance of these laws gives one a long life as the ancestors have it as a duty to protect the person spiritually and otherwise. Sometimes, when one seems to be dying, or on the way to the spirit land, the ancestor on seeing the person, sends the person’s spirit back to earth.

## Feast of Ancestors

In Igbo society and Africa (especially West Africa) as a whole, there are beliefs in ancestors and they have feast and periods of feasts for the ancestors. So, ancestral worship is not peculiar to the Igbo alone. Speaking on the different nations of Africa that celebrate the feast of their ancestors, Jacob tells “The Mende people of Sierra Leon worship two different groups of ancestor spirits namely; *Kekeri and Ndibia*. The former are the ancestors whose names are known while *Ndibia* are the ancestors who died in the distant past.”<sup>27</sup> The later according to Jacobs are prayed to by the former. The ‘kono’ of Sierra Leone refer to the invisible abode of the dead as *faa* and the residents of *faa* are spoken of as *famu-fathers*”, or *Mbinbanu* the great ancestral forefathers.

Among the fan of Dahomey, the cult of the ancestors is established by special priests and initiators. The ceremonies last for days and consist of sacrifices, prayers and dances by cult groups. Jacobs made us known that in some areas in West Africa, important rites are held at the beginning of the yam harvest season. No one must eat until the ancestors have taken their share of the new harvest. And after rites, no old yam shall be eaten again. The Fan sacrifice goats and fowls at the shrine and slice of the new yams are placed there. And, the flesh of the animals is eaten after a portion has been put on the irons of the ancestors etc.

Among the Igbo, there is also annual feast in honour of the ancestors. This feast is referred to as *alom mmuo* according to *Arinze*, “although the ancestors are daily invoked and worshipped, there, there is a special yearly feast about August in honour of all the ancestors. This feast is variously called *alom mmuo* or *otute*, or by other names.”<sup>28</sup> The feast of ancestors in Igbo land starts precisely from the months of July to August and above depending the time communities fixed it. This is the time when new yams are harvested. During this period, series of meetings are conducted by the female and male adults of various clans and communities. At this, the kings and various village heads of every community will gather at their usual gathering point to perform the feast in the presence of their people. Yams will be roasted; wines, animals etc will be brought, killed and cooked for people to eat. They break *kola nuts*, pour libation and

then, call on the ancestors to come and take their own shares via the blood of those killed animals that was poured on the front of *ofọ* shrine. In any occasion in Igbo land, ancestors must be called upon to gratify the occasion, they will eat first before any other person.

However, in Igbo society, there are some communities who use one ceremony or the other apart from new yam festival to celebrate the feast of ancestors. This is the case of Ezinihite Mbasie and Arondizogu. The Ezinihite Mbase do conduct the feast of their ancestors with the celebration of kola-acuminata *oji Igbo* while the Arondizogu celebrate theirs with *Ikeji* festival. These communities have their different times of performing theirs for example; the *Arondizogu* use the months of March and April to celebrate their ancestors. As it is, *Ikeji* means, “When the people of Arondizogu used to tie the harvested yams on barns *oba*. It is called *Ike ji n’oba* tying yams in the barn.”<sup>29</sup> During this festival, they used to perform a lot of rituals and sacrifices calling on their ancestors to come and enjoy with them. Different types of masquerade will fill the community at this feast. They thus symbolize the spirits of their ancestors etc.

During the feast of ancestors in Igbo land, elaborate preparations are made; village paths are cleaned by children, sons and daughters abroad return. To the Igbo, this is the time for thanksgiving to the ancestors for their protection, economic boost in the families, insurance of peace and all other favours. This time also is when members of different families that did not get on well economically, socially, politically and otherwise, use to pledge the ancestral assistance in future endeavours. So, it is a conference time for both the living and the dead members of various families and clans of Igbo nation. At this time, libations and sacrifices are made to the ancestors. As the Igbo people observe the feast of ancestors, “The ancestral spirits also believed to be incarnate in man links him with his family, clan and other human societies.”<sup>30</sup>

There are also other communities in Igbo land that remember their ancestors through the celebration of cocoyam *emume ede*. Example of such community includes “the *Umuna* people of Onuimo L.G.A. of Imo State. They carry out the same activity with

those of the above-mentioned communities and also share the same purpose with them. Thus, question may ask, why do the Igbo people choose to conduct the feast of ancestors via the celebration of crops? It is because they believe that ancestors play a lot of significant roles to see that crops that are buried in the soil (earth) died, germinate and replicate themselves. This complements what the Holy Bible says in the book of New Testament that, "if a maize seed does not fall in the soil die and decay, it will not reproduce its like."<sup>31</sup> However, the Igbo peoples conceptions of death and the circumstances surrounding it testify that, actually, the visible realm is the manifestation and projection of the unseen realm etc.

### **The Fate of Ancestors in the Contemporary Igbo Society**

Ancestors in the nations of West Africa are always remembered and accorded respect and honour because of the worthy lives they lived when alive. In doing that, feasts were celebrated in their honours, prayers and sacrifices accorded them. All these are to show that they really believed that the ancestors are still with them and then hoped to receive their blessings. The Igbo of old actually honoured their ancestors as enumerated above. And the ancestors on their own reciprocate by fulfilling their obligations to the living. But, how does the present day Igbo perceive the ancestors?. Unfortunately, the contemporary Igbo, because of the influence of Christianity and urbanization turned their back on their ancestors and in place, run after the Christian ancestors, renamed 'saints'. With the emergence of this particular culture and religion, today's Igbo feel a sign of relief. They do not want to go back to the practice of old. The young ones find it difficult to adopt such belief and also respect *Ndị ichie dī ndụ* the living ancestors.

All the rites accorded the ancestors by the living in the traditional era no longer exist. For instance, the contemporary Igbo perceived the belief in existence of ancestors as awkward and primitive hence they turn their backs easily on the them. In the past, before an Igbo would eat his food, he will first of all throw a lump of food outside for the ancestors, but no one does it now. The present day Igbo sees all these as superstitious belief. They fearlessly sweep their houses at night without drawing their brooms backwards after. Infact, they act as it fits the modern world.

Presently in Igbo land, the feast meant for the ancestors has taken a different shape and the original name changed. For instance, *Alom mmuo* with which this feast was known is now changed to *emume iwa ji ohuru* new yam festival. Even children, youths and some old people of today do not know actually why the feast is being celebrated and how it should be celebrated.

Nevertheless, the feast of ancestors which is done through the celebration of *alo m mmuo I wa ji ohuru*, *emume ede* and *emunu oji* as the case may be, “means a time when ancestors come from the spirit land *ala mmuo* to join their families on earth to exchange gifts. This calls for mass returning back home of the families, kindred’s and clan’s members living abroad.”<sup>32</sup> At this time, the living particularly males pour libations to the ancestors while ancestors in turn give blessing to the livings. All the things therein are today ignored and turned to Christian culture. As a result of that, a Christian priest can now pray the Christian prayer with the people at a village square with the acclamation, *amen!* not even *ise!*. Every people or society is known through their cultures. This *ise!* and *amen!* are the same. None is greater than the other. The Igbo people’s acclamation of prayer signifies the five basic needs of the Igbo. Thus Idigo observes, “When the Igbo prays, he has five things in mind which he asks from God. This is why when he solicits any of these demands at the end people will answer *ise!*. After that, some roasted yams are cut into pieces, shared out to people, they eat and disperse. Supporting this, Ajama said, “that is not only what the celebration of *alom mmuo* meant for the ancestors. The *ise!* include, *ogologo ndu* long life, *ihe ndu ji atọ utọ* wealth, *azu* offspring, *udo* peace and *mee mmadu ka ichoro ka omee gi* golden rule.”<sup>33</sup>

In summary, ancestral worship is not peculiar to Igbo people alone. Almost every people, every society has their own ancestors who they respect to in one way or the other. They make every effort to please them for their reciprocal blessings. The Igbo believed that their ancestors still remain so loving to them as they were before their death. They feel and care as well as protect their descendants here on earth. The Igbo believed our ancestors always communicate so closely with God *Chukwu*, hence they do not sit down at the corridor of the power of God and watch their children on earth



suffer. But because of the neglect of ancestors and subsequent violation of moral codes of the land by the living, the traditional Igbo believe that the ancestors allow certain unpleasant events to affect human beings. They do not do this out of hatred rather it is for the living to retrace their steps and change their ways. By so doing, the already battered situations of the Igbo will definitely come to normalcy.

#### **5.4 The Problem of Immortality**

This like other circumstances encircling the philosophical problems of death has been a global concern. Different societies and religious people have their various ideas and approach in regards to death and immortality. Immortality generally means “perenity of life”, or speaking in the etymological sense of the term, “in (non) – mortality”, it means “lack of death” *caentia interitus*.<sup>34</sup> St Thomas Aquinas gives a very beautiful definition of this as that which signifies a certain power to live and not to die *immortalitas dicit potentiam quandam ad semper vivendum et non moriendum*.<sup>35</sup>

Concretely, immortality means, the continued and perennial existence of spiritual dimension of man. The Christian argument is that, the concept of immortality has nothing to do with either apparent death or even with survival of someone in the memory of a family, friends, or descendants. Immortality according to them is rather synonymous with the ontological survival in the identity of the proper unique and unrepeatable being after the death of the body. Then, how do the traditional Igbo perceive this? What effect has this to the identity of man as a being in the Igbo world? Properly speaking, immortality is commonly perceived as an attribute which only man can adorn himself with. To talk of immortality concerning God and the gods does not make sense, because they are beings that by their nature are removed from the contagion of death. God is a self-existent being. He required no other being for Him to exist. According to Thomas Aquinas, “God is his own essence and his own existence. His essence is to exist.”<sup>36</sup> This technically implies that God is *ipsum Esse sub-sistens* (self-subsisting Essence). So the concept of immortality is not meant or refers to Him because he has neither beginning nor end.

In response to the questions asked above, The Igbo people's belief in immortality differ from the Euro-Western perspectives. The Igbo know the problem of immortality and tried to solve it on time. Actually, the Igbo believe that man in his more macroscopic, more obvious, more tangible dimension – that is the corporeal dimension – succumbs inexorably to death. It is with regard to this being that death wrecks havoc, and it is with regard to this being that the question of immortality is legitimately raised. With death, questions are asked; does the end of the spirit also come and with it the destruction of a man's project that is clearly unfulfilled? Or instead, does the soul have such a nature that the biting razor of death does not arrive to enter into the realm in which he will finally reach his perfect fulfillment? However, this is the pressing anguishing interrogation for which we search to find conclusive response by meditating on death *mysterium mortis*. As said above, the Igbo and Africans as a whole understand the puzzling nature of immortality and have tackled it once and for all before now. Unlike their western counterparts, the Igbo believe that one's children immortalize him or her. Descendants are the sources of remembering the dead. A man with children remains evergreen in the memory of his children at death. Though he is dead and inhabits the spirit world yet, he still lives through his descendants in the material world. For the Igbo, death is never the end of life, there is hereafter. What man does at death is just a change. He wears out the physical body and transits to the ancestral realm to enjoy the blissful ancestral life. And yet remain immortalized through his family here on earth. Contrary to Christian religious belief, the Igbo and Africans generally perceived the doctrines of resurrection, end of the world and immortalization outside the memory of one's children as fallacious. The Igbo and Africans holistically conceived human spirit to be featured with omnipresence quality. The concept of "force" in the African world is ever dynamic and motional not static as depicted by Permanides of the Western philosophy. Immortality explicitly means a process whereby the spirits of dead people exist as ancestors in the spirit world and also exist and are remembered in the visible world through their descendants . However, the disembodied spirit of human being exists immortal both in the realms of the immaterial and material at death through the descendants. As far as one's descendants or family exists on earth, the

person remains especially when counting on the genealogical root etc. From this therefore, the indispensability of procreation in the Igbo cosmological belief becomes very obvious. The worst evil that can befall a married person is lack of child or children. The Igbo believe that the primary reason for marriage is procreation. Once a person without a child dies, all about him will end and he or she will be forgotten completely. But where such person is not given funeral rite at death by the relatives, the Igbo believed that he or she will have stagnant existence in the ancestral world. Otherwise, the person is doomed to exist amidst *ama nri mmuo na mmadu* ( he will be wandering around causing problem to the living. Though tide has changed with the contemporary Igbo, they often indulge themselves in child adoption as an alternative. Immortality in the Igbo universe guarantees reincarnation. The spirits of the dead exist permanently in the spirit world and through procreation by one's descendants on earth, one reincarnates back to earthly life. That is why in Igbo land, when a new born baby is given birth to in a family, you see either the husband or wife having consulted a diviner *dibia afa* through divination *igba agụ* process to ascertain the person that reincarnates the baby, calling the baby either *Nnem ma ọbụ Nnam* my mother or my father *nne nnem ma obu nna nnam* my mother's mother or my father's father; *ọgọm nwoke ma ọbụ ọgọm nwanyị* my father in-law or my mother in-law depending on the sex gender etc.

#### **5.4.1 The Problem of Disembodied Existence**

This is one out of the numerous fundamental questions of philosophy. It is so puzzling that it goes with the questions: Is there the possibility of the existence of the soul or spirit after its departure from the body? What is the nature of this type of existence? If actually there is spiritual existence, which caliber of beings inhabit it? Thus the solutions to these issues have raised dust in so many ways. The Igbo and Africa generally believed firmly in the spiritual existence. This involved what they termed disembodied and embodied existences. "Disembodied existence (immortality of the soul or spirit) involves the existence of the spirit beings such as; God *chukwu*, deities/gods *chi dị iche iche* ancestral spirits *mmụọ ndị nna anyi ha nwụrụ anwụ* and the phenomena spirits."<sup>37</sup>

Contrary to the Western conception of being, that of the traditional Africa is quite distinct. Reality in the African universe is force and the force is not static but dynamic. Just as in the traditional African universe, force in the Igbo worldview according to Abanuka is distinguished into five levels; ultimacy, ancestry, humankind, reity and nothing. Amongst these the ultimacy comprises of the class of disembodied and embodied spirits just as have enumerated above. In responds to the interpretation and import of disembodied existence, it is, “a misnomer because the deities and gods are conceived in one corporeal image or the other and they share in corporeal attributes in general.”<sup>38</sup> Disembodied existence or spirits as they are believed by the Igbo are spirits in the proper sense because, they have no bodily form permanently associated with them. However, they are supposed to have a shadowy bodily nature, animal, plants forms or inanimate objects. For the Igbo, amongst the level of disembodied existences, the ultimacy is the source and supporter of other realities. The ancestry or ancestors are distinct from the ultimacy but also derived from atemporal and imperishable characteristic of the ultimacy. Just as the ancestors share from the feature of the source of existence, so they share from that of humankind because they once upon a time lived in flesh. The spirits according to the Igbo and the mother African society are holistically believed to possess omnipresence quality. Their existence does not count on time. They exist everywhere. Narrating the Igbo conception and belief of the nature of the disembodied spirits, T.U. Nwala writes:

Among the Igbo too, people report that they see the spirits in pounds, caves, grooves mountains or outside their villages, dancing, singing, herding cattle, working in their fields or nursing their children. Some spirits appear in people’s dreams, especially to diviners, priests, medicine-men and rain-makers to impart some injunction. These personages may also consult the spirits as part of their normal training and practice. In many societies, it is said and believed that spirits call people by name but on turning round to see who called, them there would be nobody. In folk stories, it is told that spirits sleep in the day time and remain awake at night.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, we see that the spirits have superhuman qualities i.e. they share human attribute but possess them in superlative degree. They are prone to the same passions, emotions and predilections as human beings, but there is much too canny, weird and mysterious about them. Some spirits are said to have many heads. This is depicted in some masks with several heads. The spirits are said to be invisible to the ordinary human eyes although, certain people including the priests and diviner's, medicine men and mystics claim to be in touch with them. Ordinary human beings may come across them accidentally. But if that happens it become dangerous for them. It is believed that people fall sick when they do so and it is then said that such person have encountered *mba-mmụọ* stroke in the English and physio-scientific terminology. This came in the form of shock and, unless medicine men intervene, the victim may die or suffer a very bad deformity.

The Igbo believed that the unusual heat, scent or cloudy atmosphere met along the road indicate that a spirit is around or has just passed. In such a case, people spray their sputum and recite some incantations which are believed to ward off the influence of the spirit. A part from *chukwu* God who is not associated with any evil, other spirits are capable of both good and evil just like human beings. But the classes of spirit that are thoroughly evil are the devil *Ekwensu* though this will be discussed in details when discussing types of spirit in the Igbo universe.

### **Embodied Existence**

These are forces or spirits inhabiting mankind and inanimate beings. By this, we mean, "the principles underling empirical objects or things. They constitute the so-called essence of those beings."<sup>40</sup> The spirits that live in human beings differ from those in other things like animals and plants. The spiritual contents of, say, animals and plants are associated with their powers as medical or sacrificial objects. They are the active elements in them as well as what sustain their lives and existences. What sustains a man's overall activity is his spirit *mmụọ* and it is that which is believed to survive in the spirit world after his death.

Except in exceptional circumstances, spirit does not die. It is believed that it is the spirit of man which wanders in dreams *nrọ* while he is asleep. Similarly, the other beings maintain spiritual counterpart in the spirit world. This spiritual counterpart is not necessarily their individual counterparts but is rather their species because the spirits world of which we may catch a glimpse in dreams is merely peopled and populated like the visible world. This active element that vivifies the corporeal existences according to the Igbo is known as *ndụ* life.

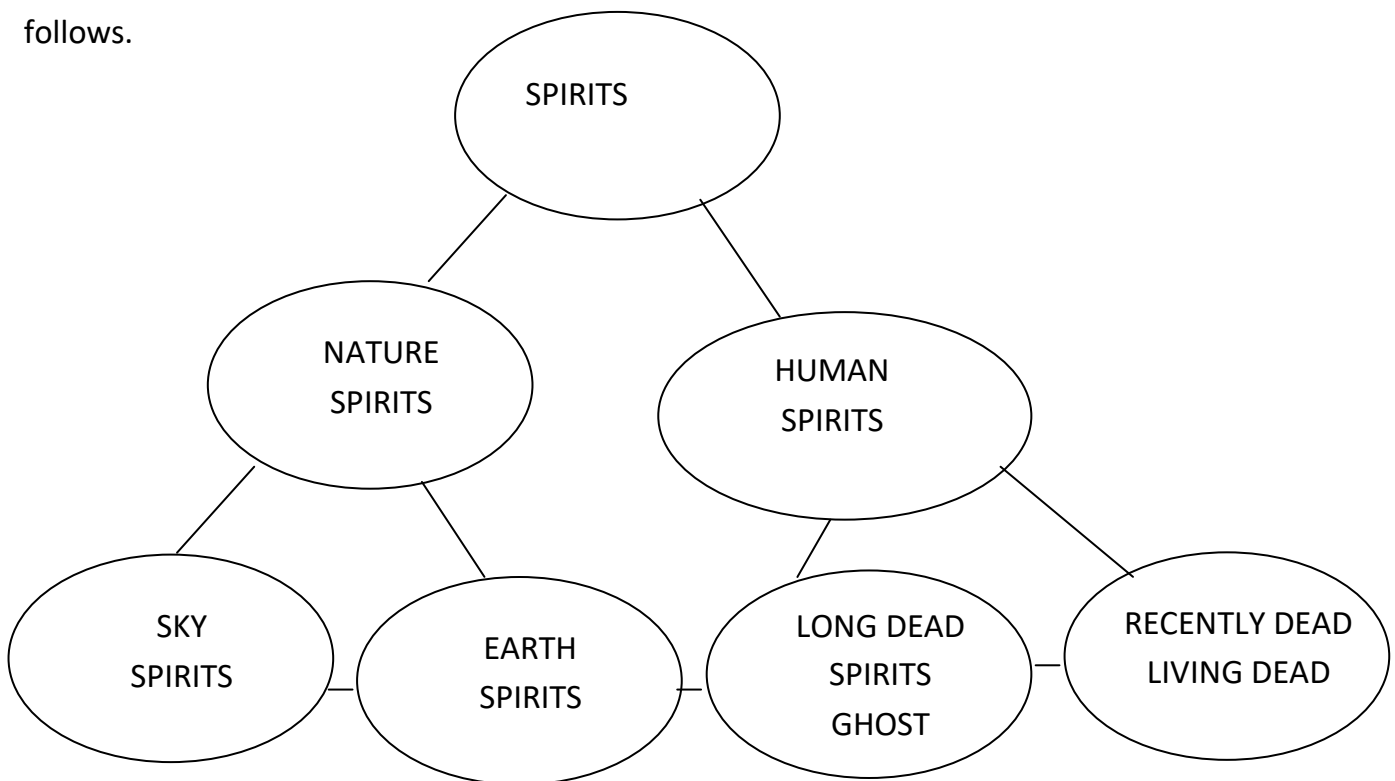
The active element in objects is what makes them efficacious – i.e. what makes the river flow, over flood, dry up or shrink. It makes a root or leaf or herb medically effective, it gives the wind its power to blow, it makes darkness *uchichi* dark and mysterious, it is what makes day light to shine etc. however, this force or active element *ike ndụ*, according to Paul Nwakeze Oguguzi, is conceived in personalistic term (i.e. at times addressed by the Igbo as a living being or spirit) and it is under the control and manipulation of the gods and men. They are however the media through which gods reach men and other beings. For with *ogwu* medicine made by manipulating the content of plants and animals, the power of deities can be influenced, and some disease and sicknesses are cured.

According to the Igbo and Africa generally, spirits or gods dwell in the woods, bushes, rivers, trees, mountains etc. They use certain animals, birds, and objects as agents e.g. owls, millipedes, wild cats, bush rats, bees, soldier ants, frogs etc. The sudden appearance of any of these in any family or compound indicates a message from any of the gods and so diviners must be consulted to know what is wrong. Of course, their presence evokes instant incantations and pouring of libations and prayers to the god or spirit who has sent them to hold on until his will has been divined and appeased. Certain deities are associated with certain animals, birds and objects and consequently those things are tabooed and held as sacred example of the rivers that are associated with gods are: *Imo*, *Idemili*, *Urasi*, *Omaballa*, streams like *Haba* stream in *Agulu* etc. The python is associated with the *Imo* god in *Itu mbaise*. Other sacred animals and trees are: *anụnyụ ebe*, *iroko*, *ngwu* etc. However, the Igbo and Africans belief that spirits or

gods exist everywhere and embodied animate and inanimate beings. This is expressed by *Birago Diop*, a Senegambian poet just as have written in the first chapter of this paper. From this therefore, we conclude that the Igbo and Africa at large do believe and affirm the possibility of disembodied existence.

### Types of Spirit

Here, we shall use diagrammatical sketch to illustrate and make clear and understandable the categorization of spirits in the Igbo universe. We have seen that, according to Igbo people, the universe is composed of visible and invisible parts. It is also believed by them that between God and human beings, there are many other beings that populate the universe. These are the spirits. There are varieties of spirits and God is their creator, just as he is the creator of other existences. The spirits have a status between God and man, and are not same with either. But people often speak about them in human terms or even treat them as though they had human features such as, thinking, speaking, intelligent and possession of power which they can use as they will. Because the spirits are created by God, they may be used by God to do certain things. Thus, the Igbo belief about the existence of varieties of spirits are illustrated as follows.



This sketch illustrates the varieties of spirits that exist in the Igbo and African universe. Though they are distinct from each other yet, they possess certain characteristics in common, just as peoples of different nationalities or races have common characteristics as well as differences. Drawling from the sketch include nature spirits and human spirits. Within these two main types of spirits, there are other spirits that are sub-categorized under them. The nature and human spirits share certain features in common in the sense that they derive from the most intelligence and indestructible spirit which is termed the ultimacy God. Spirits in the true sense of the word are immaterial and intangible by nature. They are like air or shadow and cannot be grasped. Within the nature spirit, there existed the sky and earth spirits. And, within the class of human spirits, there are the spirits of those that died recently and those that died long ago. In as much as the types of spirits in this culture have been enumerated, let us portray them as have explained and interpreted by this group of people.

### **Nature Spirits**

Nature spirits are those which people associate specifically with natural objects and forces. Some are thought to have been created by God *Chukwu* initially as spirits; others are said to have been human beings of distant past. The spirits propagate among themselves and their population is on the increase. Nature spirits; the Igbo and Africa holistically said are largely the personifications of natural objects and forces. This means that people give personal characteristics to the objects and forces of the universe, regarding them as if they were living intelligent beings of the invisible world.

### **Sky Spirits**

This falls within the main class of the nature spirits. Some of them are associated with objects and forces in the sky. These include; the sun *anyanwu*, the moon *onwa*, stars and falling stars *kpakpando*, rainbow *egwurugwu*, rain *mmiri ozizo*, wind *ikuku*, storms *Ebili mmiri*, thunder and lightning *egbe igwe na amuma mmiri*. The Igbo believe that these objects are possessed and controlled by special spirit and, that each and every one of them has a particular function to carry out. In Igbo land, the spirits in charge of



the enumerated objects are termed and described as divinities or deities. They may be featured as ruling over, or being associated with weather, storm, sun, and so on. There are legends and myths about such divinities, their origin, their activities and their relationship with human beings.

Divinities are important features of all the traditional philosophy and religion practiced in the West African countries and all the tribes and ethnic groups that constituted it. The deities and other sky spirit are mainly concerned with matter affecting large communities rather than single individuals. Thus, the Igbo just like other West African people make offerings and sacrifices to the divinities, asking them to help or relay their request to God. As they solicit for their helps so they may sometimes ignore them and approach God *Chukwu* directly etc.

### **Spirits of the Earth**

Just as there are spirits associated with the things and forces of the sky, so there are those associated with the things and forces of the earth, these are the forces and things closest to human life. Therefore according to the beliefs of the Igbo people, there are many such spirits. They are connected with the earth *ɔwá*, hills or mountains *ugwu*, rocks and boulders *Okwute*, trees and forests *Osisi na ọhịa*, metals *igwe*, waters *mmiri* in various forms such as lakes, ponds, rivers, waterfalls and rapid lagoons and river banks, different animals and Insects, certain disease and so on, as with the sky, these many things of the earth are thought to be occupied or moved by intelligent and living beings which are normally invisible to people. They are spoken of in human terms as if they can be pleased, offended, informed, interested and so on. Some of the native spirits of the earth are of a high status than other, and may be regarded as divinities. They may include for example, the spirits of the sea, the lake and forest, Disease such as small pox and death itself, may be regarded as major spirits. This belief is commonly found in the same areas where objects and phenomena of sky are and regarded as divinities. However, other types of nature spirits involved that of earth quake *ala o ma jijiji*, god of agriculture *ahiajoku* etc.

## **Human Spirits**

Where as in Igbo society, nature spirits have no direct physical kinship with people human spirits are those that once were ordinary men, women and children. Belief in the existence of these spirits is under spread throughout Igbo land and Africa as a whole. It is the natural consequence of the strong belief in the Igbo cosmological thought that human life does not terminate at death of the individual, but continues beyond death. It follows, therefore, that there are myriads upon myriads of human spirits in the Igbo world. Many of them appear in legends, myths and folktales, and others are spoken about in normal conversations among people and some possess people or appear to people in visions and dreams, or even in the open. Human spirits the Igbo believed are of two different kinds namely the spirit of those who died long time ago and the spirits of the people who died recently.

### **Spirit of those Who Died Long Time Ago**

These are called ghosts. There are countless number of them. Most of them are no longer remembered in their human form by anybody. People still believe that such spirits must exist in the invisible world. Some of them may be recollected through myth and legends as tribal, national or clan founders, and reciting or counting ones genealogies. As have been written somewhere in this text, majority of them are the spirits of forgotten people who are no longer within the personal memory of the living. They are however the spirits of those who died in the distant past; the people that knew them when they were alive do not exist any longer; it is thought that some of them have become nature spirits. Others as it is, may still be in the world of the departed (which is on this earth or underground and is very close to that of the living but invisible).

The spirits of the distant past,when mentioned or featured in folk stories, are sometimes presented in exaggerated human forms. In some stories they appear to be like animal or plants or inanimate things. They may be shown as doing both human and extra-human things or they appear stupid and naïve. These spirits of folk tales are

literary devices by means of which people caricature human life, satirize one another, make comments on society, and give an outlet to their feelings of fear, hatred or frustration without the danger of offending anybody. We therefore see that the Igbo idea of the spirit serves an important social and psychological purpose through the literary form. The idea of nature spirits helps the Igbo to explain the mysteries of nature. For example, the Igbo believe that agriculture of all sorts are controlled and take charged by *ahiajioku* spirit. This spirit or force has dos and don'ts. Any person who goes contrary to the said taboo will suffer the adverse effect. In this culture, the spirits of people who were once leaders, heroes, warriors, clan founders and other outstanding men and women are sometimes continue to be respected, honoured and brought into the life of the community or nation. This however is down through legends about them and through ceremonies in which they feature. In some communities in Igbo land, a few of the most outstanding spirits of the dead are elevated in mythology and ritual to the status of divinities, and may be pictured as being close to God. The people ask for their aid via prayer and ceremony, or mention them when making their requests to God *Chukwu*.

On the whole, the Igbo people fear and dislike the spirits of those who died long time ago or of unknown persons. Apart from those of the outstanding spirits mentioned in the previous paragraph. Another word for such spirits is ghost. People fear them mainly because they are spirits of the unknown people and they are strangers to the living. People are not sure what might be done to them by such spirits. The Igbo believe that some of them may possess human beings, either voluntarily or without the wish of the people possessed. Some diseases such as meningitis, lunacy and the condition of being deaf and dumb are associated with the spirit of this kind in Igbo land. On the other hand, diviners and medicine men even the mystics or prophets *ndi amuma* are said by the Igbo to obtain some of their knowledge, insights and powers from these spirits. Thus, these spirits are not completely bad as people may fear or think. Sometimes, they act in unpleasant ways towards people and sometimes in beneficial way etc.

### **Spirit of People Who Died Recently**

These are known as the living dead. They are remembered by their families, relatives and friends for up to four or five generations. The name, the living dead for whom they are known for distinguished them from the ghost types which had already been discussed above. The belief in the existence of the living dead is wide spread throughout the Igbo land and Africa generally. Unlike other societies in Africa, this is held more strongly in Igbo land. Although, we have discussed about the hereafter and types of ancestor in Igbo Society, yet we will explain more about them when discussing the concept of reincarnation in the next chapter.

The living dead are the spirits that normally matter most on the family level. They are considered to be part of their families. They are believed to live close to their families where they lived when they were human beings. They show interest in their surviving families, and in return, their families remember them by pouring out parts of their drinks and leaving bits of food for them from time to time. The living dead may also visit their surviving relatives in dreams, or visions, or even openly, and make their wishes known. When people face sickness and miss fortune in the family, the cause will be attributed to the living dead if not, such will be seen as the work of the magicians, sorcerers and witchcraft. In this case, these spirits serve as an explanation of what has caused things to go wrong. In order to put them right, the spirits have to be satisfied by the performance of rituals, by following their request or by correcting any breaches of the improper conduct towards them. Generally, the diviner *dibja* or medicine man will be consulted in order to find out exactly what the alleged spirits may wish. But on the whole, the spirits of those who died recently are benevolent towards their families as long as they are remembered and properly treated. In Igbo land, therefore, the people feel more at home with the spirits of the recent dead than with any of the other spirits. This is because; they are still very close to their surviving relatives in both memory and emotion.

In conclusion, in Igbo land just as applicable to other African societies, the belief is that spirit exists and that the spirit by nature is intangible and shadow like. They possess the characteristics of existing everywhere, every time. Hence they shuttle the visible and invisible realms at a time. Spirits as they are, are classified into two main categories; nature and human spirits. And each of the two main is further sub divided into classes and are deified by the Igbo. For examples the forces of the earth *ala* and the sun *anyanwu* are different Deities that perform different functions in Igbo understanding. Another class of spirit which is the human spirit is also sub categorized into the spirits of the people that died in the distant past (i.e. the ghost) and that of the recent dead. It is also the belief of the Igbo people that the human spirits may be malevolent or benevolent depending on the person's encounter with them. Though, the Igbo believed that not all spirits are malevolent. There are the particular spirits that are evil by nature. These according to Obi Oguejiofor include "the devil *Ekwensu*, the spirits of the dead youths *ogbunike*, the spirits of those that were not given rite of passage *akalogoli* and the sylph or repeaters *ogbanje*."<sup>41</sup>

Spirits according to the Igbo have a lot to do they can be good or bad, some can protect people while some can possess and torment them in different ways. Spirits have different taboos that are peculiar to each and every one of them. So each punishes the offender based on its strength and the gravity of the offence committed.

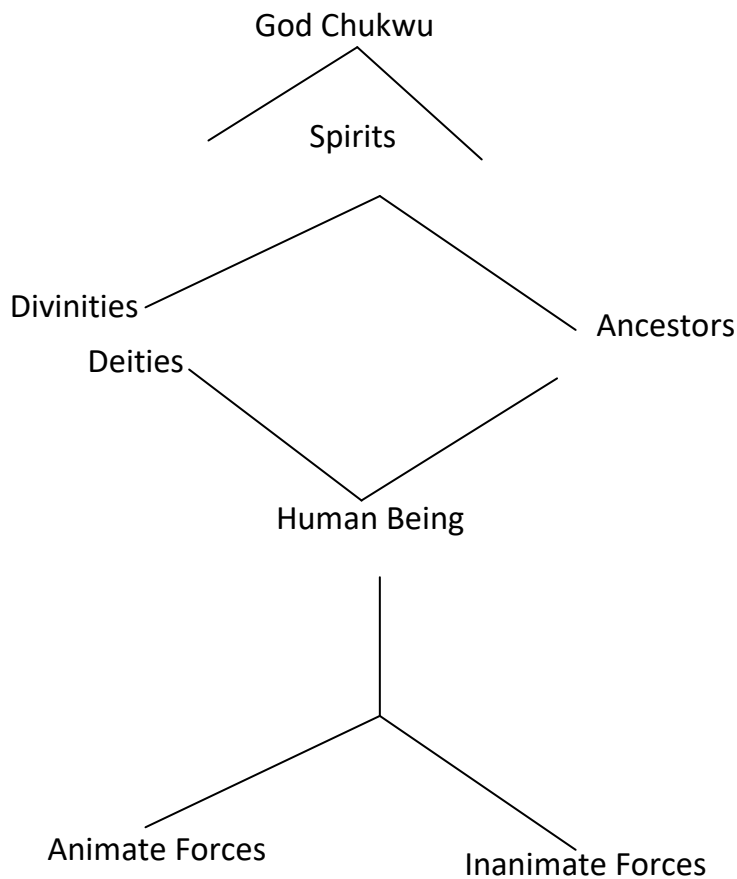
However, Emeka J. Madu in his *Fundamentals of Religious Studies* exposed and enlisted the spirits or deities that are revered and feared by the Igbo apart from the supreme God *chukwu, chineke*. They involved "the nature spirit such as the earth deity or goddess *aja ala*, the sun deity *anyanwu*, the rain deity or thunder and lightning *egbe igwe na amuma mmiri*, the god of divination and healing *Agwu nsi*. The lesser spirits or forces *alusi*, the ancestors *ndi ichie*."<sup>42</sup> In the true sense of the word, the Igbo and African people revere gods and in turn penetrate them. This implies that man manipulate them to do either good or evil things. This conjures the interconnectivity and interactivity between spirits and human beings etc.

Deities and spirits in Igbo understanding are similar and are used interchangeably. They are numerous and uncountable *agụkata agba awa* or *agụta agụta*. These spirits occupies the six worlds as classified by Pantheleon Iroegbu in his "*ụwa ontology*. The worlds includes: the cosmos, Divine world, Godian–world, good spirit world, bad-spirit world, and the ancestral world."<sup>43</sup> However, the five worlds are under the control of the Godian world and were also created by Him. According to Igbo people, the divine world is the realm of the divinities or spirits who were created by God to subordinate him. They are the messengers of the Supreme Being. They help in supervising, coordinating and taking charges of the forces or beings of the cosmos. The being of the cosmos involved the forces of nature and that of human beings. However, the good spirit world for the Igbo people is the world of the ancestors which they believed that only those that meet the required and stipulated conditions that were enlisted somewhere in the text will inherit. Unlike the ontological and religious beliefs of the other people's of the world for examples, Christianity and Islamic religions, the Igbo belief that the Godian – world is the abode of ancestors, because God *chukwu* lived with ancestors in the spirit world. According to them Igbo, earthly existence is temporal; hence man transits into the spirit world to commune with ancestor and God if the person performed well when alive. From there in the Godian-realm, the spirit of the ancestor will appear before God through *chi* particle (guardian force or genus) to obtain destiny after which it reincarnates to new life on earth through the descendants. For the evil spirit world, it contains all in the category of evil spirit which according to Obi Oguejiofor were enlisted somewhere in this chapter. These for the Igbo involve the spirits of human beings that did not reached the criteria for achieving the goal of human life. Other evil spirits apart from the humans are those of the nature which the Igbo believed torment people due to their short fallings. Examples are; earth quake, storms, flood, hurricanes, droughts, illnesses and diseases such as lunacy, epilepsy, dropsy and other incurable disease as well as death during pregnancy and mourning period etc.

Although, sometimes, some of these aforementioned illnesses and diseases are caused and afflicted on man by his fellow man who are sorcerers and witchcrafts. But, all these

sorcerers and witches as well as murderers, when they died, their spirits are sanctioned and not welcomed by the ancestors. The Igbo people believe that they face instant judgment by God, and therefore are pushed to the world of evil spirits. As it is, the divinities are spirits in the Igbo people's understandings. They differ in some aspects from the ancestral spirits. They are seen as the messengers of God and also deified by human beings. They carry out difference functions like, taking charge of the cosmos forces, protections as well as punishing the people that deviate from keeping to their taboos and laws. People make images that represent and symbolize them. They are also feared and respected by the human beings. They are believed and taken by people to mediate between man and God. The Igbo and Africans generally are said to worship the gods. The concept worship means not necessarily that which it is taken to be. In regards to the Igbo practices, worship depends on the meaning attributed to it in the language of the person that used it. The term worship may refer to 'service of men,' hence it is used for instance in the law court to address the judge as 'your worship.' Worship may include the phrases as, 'to pray,' 'to sacrifice' and to make offerings.'

Briefly put, worship means, "an expression of man's attitude towards God and other spirit beings, it is an act of communication and communion between man and the superasensible world, a means of retaining God-man relationship, and the channel through which an upset of the balance of such relationship is rectified and restored."<sup>44</sup> Worship therefore, is described as" the inward expression of spiritual realities by means of the physical, the medium of channel by which diviner power or powers are presented to man."<sup>45</sup> In the strict sense of the word *Instrictu sensu*, what the Igbo/Africans do is not necessarily worshipping the gods or deities rather, they take them as media through which they worship the Supreme Being. However, Arinze R.N. diagrammatical represented this belief as follows.



#### 5.4.2 The Igbo Concept of Reincarnation

Here, emphasis shall be on the lexical, general and scholarly definitions of reincarnation. However, much emphasis shall be laid on the Igbo people's ideas of the term *ilọ ụwa*, the bases, evidences or facts forwarded by them to justify this belief. These shall be mentioned and explained and efforts shall be made thereafter to take these bases to philosophical reasoning in order to know whether they are good enough to hold on to the belief in reincarnation or not.

There is no doubt that there is a very strong and widespread belief in reincarnation among most African ethnic groups. Several scholars in Africa and Igbo particularly have written on this concept, although, they usually either only mentioned it as parts of religious doctrines found in African Traditional Religion (ATR) or they try to show the unreasonableness of the belief by raising a few philosophical problems associated with such a belief. According to *Long man Dictionary of the Contemporary English*, reincarnation means "the belief that people are born again in another body after they



have died.”<sup>46</sup> A part from this lexical definition, Sylvernus Nnoruka says that “the belief in reincarnation *!lọ ụwà* is deeply held that it is common to hear people discuss who and how they will be in next life on earth when they reincarnate. For instance, a woman dissatisfied with her present marriage on account of ill treatment received from her husband could say “in my next life, I will not marry a man of this kind.”<sup>47</sup> Nnoruka goes on to say that “reincarnation is further a gesture of gratitude manifested by the dead to the living. It is an act through which the dead pays back to his sons and daughters, and relations for the good things that were done to them when they were alive.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, having completed the funeral rites of their dead which is normally demanding and expensive, the living expect the dead to reciprocate this gesture by coming back to them. If after some years, he does not reincarnate, his relatives will conclude that all is not well with him in the land of the ancestors. Thus, it is symbolic that at the burial of the dead, an elder in a mourning oration beg the deceased to come back to them as early as possible.

Reincarnation is one of the numerous related issues surrounding death. It is one of the earliest beliefs and has been one of the great questions of all times. Following the question of the meaning of this term, Peter Geach defined reincarnation as “the successive animation of different human bodies by one human mind.”<sup>49</sup>

Reincarnation could be also mean that at death, a person passes into another living creatures, man animal or plant, usually reincarnation can only take place within a people of the same clan. The belief in reincarnation has exercised a tremendous, extensive and permanent influences upon the Igbo people in particular and Africans in general. That is why upon the birth of a child, “the Igbo like the Essen people normally call in a diviner *dibia afa* or fortune teller to ascertain the spirit that has returned to the world.”<sup>50</sup>

Again, according to A.F Udigwomen “the belief in reincarnation upholds that the spirit of the dead person returns to inhabits on new body. So, reincarnation means the process whereby the spirit of the deceased person takes a new body to start existing

again on earth.”<sup>51</sup> Emphasizing on this, C.S. Momoh says, “When a person dies, his spirit is believed to return to take a new body. In other words, the dead person is reborn”.<sup>52</sup> Invariably, the Igbo and other societies who hold such similar view with them maintained that man’s life here on earth is so brief for him to have accomplished his divine assignments. So, rebirth is considered as an opportunity of the deceased to come back as it were on a second mission to make amendments for his past evil deeds. As it is, the Igbo people believed so much in the “law of nemesis and repercussion” thus they proverbially say, “*Onye zakọ, ya kpoo, o kpobe ekpochaghị, ya gbaba ya ụlụ* every man is responsible for his or her evil deeds, where the person could not finish it prior to his death, he or she must keep recycling it until he finished it.”<sup>53</sup> More so, the Igbo believe in the doctrine of man reaping from whatever he sowed *mkpuru onye kuru ka o ga aghoro*. If one does well, he will definitely reap from good, but where he does evil, he will reap evil hence the saying, *Ometera buru*.<sup>54</sup> According to Sola Adebajo, “reincarnation is a conception of the separable spirit capable to passing out of the body and taking up its abode in some other human with animal or inanimate object.”<sup>55</sup> Synonymously with Sola, Idowu rightly described reincarnation as, “the passage of the human spirit in each being determined by its behaviour in a former life.”<sup>56</sup> In line with Idowu’s view, the Igbo believe that whatever one prepare for himself, that he will enjoy at last. For them, this type of reincarnation accounts for the type of life that the dead will live in their successive life. Thus, the belief in reincarnation is not for the Igbo and Africans alone. This issue is so biased and controversial that various camps erupt both here in Africa and other parts of the world. However, reincarnation is a religious concept that erupted from the metaphysical questions of eschatology, that is the discussions of afterlife or man’s final end, judgment and the fate of man towards the consequences of the judgment.

The belief in reincarnation existed prior to the golden age of philosophy, precisely with Pythagorean doctrine of soul (orphism). This emphasized the possibility of human soul or spirit reincarnating either as animal or plant. Pythagoras as a passerby, hushed a man that was ill treating a dog, claiming to know him through the voice to be that of his

friend that departed some time ago.”<sup>57</sup> In the Christian scripture, *The Holy Bible* the Hebrew people (the Jews) believed John the Baptist is Elijah incarnate, hence they said, “Elijah has come again.” In line with this, the disciples asked Jesus, “Why do the teachers of law say Elijah has come first? “Responding to this question, Jesus said:

Elijah is indeed coming first, and He will get everything ready. But I tell you that Elijah has already come and people did not recognize Him, but treated him just as they pleased. In the same way they will also ill-treat the son of man.<sup>58</sup>

After all the sayings of Christ, the disciples concluded that Christ was talking to them about John the Baptist. By implication, Christ himself confirmed the belief. Inversely, the Jews perceived Christ to be Elijah or one of the prophets of old. Even king Herod believed same when he heard of the numerous deeds of Jesus Christ. Thus he said, “He is John the Baptist! I had his head cut off, but he has come back to life!”<sup>59</sup> Prior to Christian era, Socrates agreed in after life as well as the spirit of the dead coming back to life again. As it were at that time, Socrates said:

I am confident that there is such a thing as living again, that the living spirit from the dead, and that the souls of the dead are in Existence .<sup>60</sup>

Speaking more on this, Ralph Waldo Emerson says, “The soul comes from without into the human body as into a temporary abode and it goes out of it a new.....it passes into other habitations, for the soul is immortal.”<sup>61</sup>

Life for the Igbo is a continuous process that goes beyond existence. This in effect implies that man is a being even at death. Death is not strictly the end of life, there is life or existence after death. Nevertheless, when man dies as the Igbo people depict, he goes back to his original abode from where he reincarnates back to earthly existence. Thus, human life is like a circle, it is just an infinite regress. Life and death of man is like

a circle that starts from a particular point and returns back to the usual point. Therefore, the process of coming back to physical existence after death is termed reincarnation. Rebirth for the Igbo is meant strictly for those that lived good life here when alive. The Igbo-African concept of reincarnation is real in the sense that only a part of human being that is, the spirit part that reincarnates, while the body *ahụ* rots away. Rebirth system in Igbo universe is dicey that some people are denied such privilege especially those that did not accomplished the conditions of reaching the goal of human life, for example, those that died at youth age, those that died by certain chronic and incurable diseases, the people that were sanctioned and excommunicated from the community as well as those that were not given proper funeral rite by their relatives.

### **Bases for Reincarnation**

However, there are some facts and bases upon which the Igbo and African people rely to justify their belief in reincarnation. These will now be mentioned and explained and efforts shall be made therefore to take these bases to philosophical evaluation to ascertain the truth and reality of this belief. However, the bases centered on the following;

Divination report

Family resemblance

Memory

Sylph syndrome *ogbanje*

Rite of passage

### **Divination Report**

Whenever a child is giving birth to in the traditional Igbo land, the family or parents of that child will go to diviner to ascertain the spiritual person that came to them. In some communities in Igbo land; it is only the elders *ndị okenye* are permitted to inquire for that. On reaching the diviners *dibịa afa* house and shrine, the diviner will ask the person his intension of coming to him. After replying, the diviner will bring out his divination bag *akpa afa* in which he brings out *mkpuru afa* pebbles or divination seeds and starts

to make incantation to penetrate the spirit world to ascertain the dead whose spirit incarnated the new born baby. On getting the spirit *mmuo* responsible for the child, he then tells his client the person in question. However, divination act is not confined only to men rather it includes that of women. In regards to the result of divination in traditional Igbo society, once the person in charge of the new born baby is mentioned to the relatives, they will rejoice and begin to call the child the name of the person that reincarnated him or her. Sometimes in some Igbo families, the name of person that reincarnated the child may over ride the actual name given to the child by the parents. That is why when one visits some families in Igbo land, he or she will hear the father calling his male son *nnam* my father or *nnem* my mother, *na na* my father's father or *nne nne* my mother's mother. Most times, one may hear the mother calling her male and female children, *na dim* or *nne dim*, my father – in-law or my mother – in-law etc.

### **Family Resemblance**

We should note from the outset that not only do children resemble their dead ancestors, “they very often carry both the physical and mental features of their living parents”. Many Igbo proverbs testify to those purely biological traits in man and animals, for instance “*nwa mbe enweghị ike ịgba aji ebe nne na nna ya bu okpokoro* tortoise child cannot have hairs when it's parents has shell.”<sup>62</sup> Another proverb says “*ihe si na agburu eme, nwa eyighi nne, ya eyie nna* normally it occurs through hereditary that children normally resemble their progenitors.”<sup>63</sup> Thus the first precondition for reincarnation according to Igbo people is the death of a reincarnated person. The new baby very often bears striking traits or marks of the dead ancestors. Such children have been seen to carry scars which occurred just before the death of the ancestor or even a relation.

### **Memory Transfer**

The Igbo believed that memory of a dead relative would be transferred to another person in reincarnation. Several stories in this society have been told of young children who could recount the life history of an ancestor, who died long before they were born. For instance, a child of about five years went to farm with his parents for the first time,

and to their utter surprise, this child expressed anger claiming that his children allowed his cutlasses and hoes rot away while they knew where he used to keep them. When the boy went near a dead wood, he stretches his hands underneath and brought out cutlasses and hoes whose handle had been eaten away by rodents. Coincidentally that was the piece of land his grandfather farmed just before his death and the child's father recognized the tools as those used by his own father etc.

### **Sylph *Ọgbanje* Syndrome**

There is another phenomenon which gives glaring evidence of the Igbo people's belief that the dead come back to earthly life. This is in form of what the Igbo called *ọgbanje* born to die children and the Yoruba call it "*abiku*" repeaters As Parrinder E.G would say, "These are children whose spirits were believed to enter woman's womb to be born and come back to the spirit world. They are believed to have held their meetings prior to entering the womb and to have taken decision on when and how they would die."<sup>64</sup> Instances have been reported by parents who gave birth to such children. In order to ascertain the truth or falsity of such a belief, they are said to have lacerated such children, giving them marks on a specific part of the body. On return to the world, these children are said to have returned with such marks. Their joy is to migrate from womb to womb and die either as babies or children or on important occasions in their lives such as marriage, birthday and child birth etc. In desperate human efforts to put to end the sorrow which an *ọgbanje* repeatedly creates, conspicuous marks are often made on the corpse in the belief that the deformity will make it unwanted by other occult members *ndị uke* who now allows the reincarnated self to stay alive. Hence, the ears, fingers, legs upper tips among other may be erupted.

### **Rite of Passage Syndrome**

There is the belief in Igbo land that funeral rite values much and guarantees man the repertoire to reincarnate after many years of his or her death. In this culture, funeral rites of the deceased are carefully carried out to grant the spirit *mmuo* of the deceased perfects rest in the spirit world. The reason is that, if a man is not given proper funeral

rite, he would remain a ghost, wandering about and could often return to harass the surviving members of his family. But when the man's children fulfill the obligations by giving their father a befitting burial, they will be rest assured that their father has gone safely to join his ancestors. Thus, they will long for his protection and guidance at all times now that he is closer to God *Chukwu*. The prayers at the graveside of a dead person show that they want him or her to rest in peace and at the same time implore his quick return to the family, that is to be reborn in the family for the prolongation of his name and that of the family.

In summary, from the evidences above, it is pertinent to note that these evidences are used by the Igbo people to support the concept of reincarnation, the doctrine that when people die, their existence does not end with the death of their physical bodies. Instead, something in them (the spirit) lives on in form of disembodied existence, and sooner or later comes back to life on this earth in another form. Evidence for belief in reincarnation could be seen in consulting diviner to find out which particular ancestor that has come back to life, it could also be justified through resemblance, *ogbanje* syndrome and memory transfer etc.

There is also a reason for reincarnation as believed by the Igbo people. They are; to complete an uncompleted destiny, to make correction of the previous bad deeds; to learn lessons and understand certain experiences; to complete life on earth through partial reincarnation or transmigration of the soul.

### **Philosophical Problems Inherent in Reincarnation**

Having stated the various evidences, bases and justifications for reincarnation, efforts will now be made to point out the philosophical flaws in some of these bases for reincarnation which of course will render the belief in reincarnation somehow impossible. The belief in reincarnation according to Igbo people, upholds that the spirit of the dead person returns to inhabit a new body. In such cases, it is sometime claimed that the bodies of such incarnate person bear some marks of scars on the exact spot where the incarnate person had such scars on his body, in his or her previous existence.

While in other cases, the verbal confession of the incarnate person or revelation from people are accepted as testimonies that attest to the truth of the belief from the forgoing, let us consider the criteria for bodily identity. Identity of the type as it would not hold in the case of reincarnation. The reasons for this claim are obvious. The relation as implies or requires is that things be identical with themselves. So, applying this criterion in identifying the incarnate person would require that the physical characteristics of the living person would undergo decomposition and disintegration. This is why it even becomes mysterious to say that we can identify incarnate persons by the marks or scars on their present body, which reflects the scar they had in the previous existence. We could further contest the validity of such a claim with a logical scheme. Let us posit that a term "s" is predicable of thing, "X" if and only if, the result of affirming of s of x is true. And suppose we apply George Englebret's opinion that a person is nothing more than a material object that is, he is not a material object plus a soul, mind and so forth. By this view persons are identifiable with their bodies.

Now, if this argument is tenable, it becomes difficult to rely on bodily identity to judge that the person now living is the same person who had died some years back. To apply our logical schemata, let us assume that 'S' represents scar on the right leg of a person 'x' who died long ago. Now, for the fact that scar is part of the material body which has decomposed, it aims if we affirm 's' of 'x' on a new body which the supposed reincarnate person has acquired in his present existence. However, supposed we grant on the other hand, that bodily identity holds. How do we establish the truth of the other claim that the spirit in person, a new living is the spirit of ancestors? Can the same spirit dwell in more than one body at the same or different times? And how would it be decided which goes with which body? These are fundamental questions about reincarnation *ilq uwa* that beg for solution. For, if we cannot account for the relationship of spirit with their incarnate bodies or persons, it would even become more difficult to account for what makes the continuity or sameness of persons from one cycle of reincarnation to another, we can equally ask these questions: what criteria we



use in the re-identification of the human person? What set of body has he? What set of memory has he? Which one is primary or more fundamental?

If the identity of the reincarnate person is not bodily, is there an essential core a true self, or inner you, a sort of identity of the person which would be the same as “you” where your bodies to have been completely annihilated by any means in your previous existence? To identify such an inner you with the spirit leads us to the problems highlighted above. So, how do we go about it? It seems then that the talk about reincarnation is spurious if we have to make bodily identity of reincarnate persons.

As a follow up to the above questions, let us also consider memory as a possible criterion for the identity of incarnate person. The thesis here is that, in reincarnation *ilọ uwa*, a person may remember events in his past life. Such claim is problematic. First, it is difficult to establish the truth value of such a claim we can neither confirm nor disprove it. Apart from that, Ruben Abel says, “memory may not be a reliable criterion to identify incarnate person for many other reasons for contemporary scientific era, a person’s memory can be edited, elided and replaced with others.”<sup>65</sup> Now, if two people are brain washed and their memories switched off, do they exchange their identify? And should these persons reincarnate with both of them, will they revert to their previous memories that is before they were switched? Or, will they reincarnate with their acquired memories? If they reincarnate with the acquired memories there will be difficulty in identifying them with their past life. Again, the *ogbanje* born to die syndrome, on the other hand, is fast becoming a myth among the Igbo. The point is not that children are not born to die. Infant mortality rates make the talk of *ogbanje* almost a piece of nonsense. This is because improved medical facilities, better health alignment programmes have helped many Igbo and Africans to realize that no specific group of children are born primarily to die young. The belief of born to die existed as a result of the ignorance by parents and couples. Prior to this new age, intending couples neither check their genotypes nor their blood groups before they got married. They only get married based on family background, what they do as at that era is just to

inquire whether the son in-law to be or daughter in-law to be is suffering from one chronic and incurable disease like epilepsy *akwukwu*, sleeping sickness *oro ura*, lunacy *ara*; whether the lineage die young etc. Another important point here, however, remains un-clarified. How would one explain the transfer of body deformities inflicted on a corpse to the body of a new baby?

From the forgoing analysis, it can be concluded based on empiricist's point of view that there are no rational justifications for reincarnation *ilo uwa*. This is because most of these beliefs are not only tenable but are freight with problems and flaws. How can the same people who argue that human being is essentially the spirit and that at death, the body expires and rot away, use family resemblance, memory transfer, sylph syndrome and the rest as the precondition for reincarnation. There is the tendency that a new born babies may resemble either their father's or mother's parents, relations or even their immediate parents. Developmental Psychology test proves that heredity goes through blood. For instance, a family where there is genetic Diabetes, there is a possibility that they will produce carrier children etc.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### Socio-Anthropological implications of Death in Igbo World view.

This thematically portrays the Igbo people's belief and interpretation of death and its implications on man as a being in Igbo society. To understand the topic clearly, it is necessary that we do an etymological exegesis of the Igbo word for man as a generic term. By the concept man, we mean human being of all sorts irrespective of gender. Human being in the language of the Igbo is called '*mmadu*'. This etymologically connotes two Igbo words; '*mma*' and '*ndu*' though with different dialectical options. Commenting on this, C.O. Ukeh in his book *Spirit-between Man and God: an Igbo Africa Christian Appreciate*, states that

In the Igbo world '*mmadu*', the prefix '*mma*' is a pan word with same meaning everywhere in Igbo land; the surfix has rather many dialectic options '*dụ*', '*dị*' '*de*' all which have the same imperative and affirmative meanings respectively. Thus one has such dialectical versions '*mmade*' and '*mmadu*.'<sup>1</sup>

He further avers that:

The concept *mmadu* in orlu dialect which goes with suffix '*dụ*' is often interchanged with '*nụ*' thus '*mmanụ*' Note worthy, is that '*nu*' is the orlu dialectical rendition of the central Igbo world '*no*' which is in the sense of physical being there i.e. '*de*', '*dị*', '*dụ*'.<sup>2</sup>

As C. Eze said, "the inhabitants of the northern Igbo area of Enugu, Nsukka etc, prefer to use the word *Madu* to denote man or human being, while the Southern Igbo of Onitsha are fond of use *mmadu*."<sup>3</sup> Hence one can rightly infer that the term *mmadu* is an Igbo word that distinguishes human beings from other beings like plants, animals, inanimates and spirits etc.



We shall briefly discuss the ethnological interpretation of the above two different spelling Mmadụ and madụ with the aim of ascertaining whether they have any meaning to offer us in our inquiry about the Igbo concept of man and their interpretation of death. Conceptually, the Igbo equivalent meaning of human being according to J.C. Ekei is “mmadụ.” Some other scholars like E.M.P. Edeh, M.I. Mozie, C. Eze, P. Iroegbu, R. Arazu etc believe that the conceptual meaning of the Igbo term “mmadụ” is contained in the wording. E.M.P Edeh particularly in his etymological analysis of the term avers that:

Madụ is a short of mmadụ (mma-dị) the good that is, mma is the Igbo word for ‘good’ a good or the good. Di is from ịdị which is the Igbo word ‘to be,’ mmadị mean the same thing, there is beauty or goodness, it is an assertion implying the absolute certainty in the existence of beauty and goodness in man that lives in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Another school of thought analyzes the term mmadụ as mma-ndụ the goodness of life. Mozie is of the opinion that, “mma-ndụ is a synthesis of all that is good in creation. It could also mean that “goodness of life.”<sup>6</sup> J.C. Ekei summarizes the above two position when he states that, “both share the core ethical concept of good as a quality that associated with. He is considered “the highest good” the beauty of creation.”<sup>7</sup> He further observes that, “the above concept has a profound ethical implication for the Igbo. If man is at the centre of Igbo ethics, its life (ndụ) is an issue for him (man), Igbo ethics therefore emerged as a provision of rational exposure to foster and to protect human life (mmadụ) through concentered actions of rational beings.”<sup>8</sup>

Another school of thought represented by C. Eze argues that, “*mmadị* especially from northern dialect seems to suggest a different meaning from the one considered above. *Ma* is the Nsukka word for *mụo* meaning spirit.”<sup>9</sup> Thus *mmadụ (dị)* could as well mean *mụo dị* the spirit that is. The verb to be in Nsukka Igbo sub cultural dialect is *du* not *dị* such that when we say *maadị* meaning man or human being it could equally mean that

there is spirit, human being is its greatest proof. *Chukwu bu maa* meaning God is spirit, so that when we call human being *maadu*, we could mean that there is spirit in man *mmadi* which is the ultimate manifestation of the spirit of God. R. Arazu probably refers to this when he states that, "man in his concrete existence is the nearest resemblance to divinity. The resemblance is neither moral nor physical. These concepts are not adequate in this matter. Man's resemblance to God is religious."<sup>10</sup>

O.M. Anizoba similarly remarks that, "it is this divine spark, which *forces* the Igbo to give man the name *mmadu* beauty of life, because... the Igbo people ascribe man's uniqueness to the fact that the life force which God puts in man is God's special gift to all his living creatures."<sup>11</sup>

Njaka equally argues that "[...] other created beings have godhood also but in a lesser degree than man hence he assigns himself a position nearer to *Chukwu* than any held *Chineke's* other creatures."<sup>12</sup>

We may sum up the above schools of thought by saying that etymologically. *mmadu* is possibly traceable to two Igbo words *mma* and *ndu*. D. Agbo analyses this combination thus:

the composite parts of the term *mmadu* are *Mma*: meaning goodness, order, beauty, peace, love depending on the context in which one uses it: *du* or *de* or *di* could be read with imperative or affirmative mood or notion.' In the imperative mood, it means 'let there be.' In the indicative or affirmative, it rather means 'there is.' *Mmadu* would then mean let there be Beauty or Goodness/order Or that there is Goodness or Beauty/order."<sup>13</sup>

Another etymological suggestion could be that the word *mmadu* comes from the two words *Mma*-Beauty/Goodness/order etc, and *Ndu*-life. Thus the combination would then mean the "beauty or goodness in life." In order words man is the "beauty of life."

The implication of the above passage in Igbo thought is that the original intention of creating man by the Supreme Being (*Chiokikel Chineke*) is to be the harbinger of beauty, order and goodness in the universe of his creation.

P. E Aligwekwe rightly observes that:

Man, thought the ancients, could change the world (Cosmic and spiritual forces included) by his own capacity, the Creator having put at his disposal the means to control these forces. A mal adjustment or a faulty balancing of things in the world was only the consequences of the laziness or the transgression of man.<sup>14</sup>

P. Iroegbu summarizes the essential element of man in Igbo cosmology when he states that:

*Mmadu* expresses the corporal aspect of the human being while *Mu* remains the standard and original word for that aspect of the human person that is spiritual, the invisible and the determinant of the ontologico-transcendental being and function of *mmadu*. *Mu* is thus the indestructible immortal element. It survives death.<sup>15</sup>

This *mu* is often referred to by some scholars as the life principle in human being. It is the highest value in the people's perception of reality. Man's struggle in the world is all geared towards the enhancement and maintenance of this life principle and keeping it in equilibrium. Ndi Igbo therefore believe that human beings were created and imbued with life by the Supreme Being in direct association with the deities, ancestral spirit and other cosmic forces. O.U. Kalu maintains that:

Every individual is endowed with spiritual as well as material aspects. The chi is a direct gift of God to each person at creation meant to lead the person through life. *Eke* links

every individual to the ancestral kins. *Mụo-madu* is the principle responsible for the life in the person. The spiritual elements, which joins up with the material parts at the inception of the earthly existence of a person are thought to pre exist in the spirit world before the co-joining.<sup>16</sup>

Other scholars like M. Ugwu while interpreting Igbo conception of man remarks that there are three aspects of the man. He states that:

(The Igbo) speak of the body (*ahụ*), spirit\shadow, *mmụo onyinyo*, Heart *obi/Nkpuru obi*, so for the Igbo, there are three aspects of the same man. These aspects are different instances of the person or the levels which permits the whole person to be seen from different view points.<sup>17</sup>

Integrally he further states, "man is composed of a material element "ahụ" body and an immaterial element "obi" soul or spirit and the *Nkpuru obi*. The body *ahụ* is:

The appearance or epiphany of the person during his earthly life. It is the seat of person hood; the center for manifestation of a person in gestures. A Human being experiences the world through his body, while the spirit *mụo* represents the spiritual aspect of human being that is immaterial and passes away from the body at the moment of death. The third aspect is the heart breath *obi/Nkpuru Obi*, *Obi* is human beings animating principle and the seat of affection and volition. For instance a kindly man is described as *onye obi oma*, good heart and a wicked man is *onye obi tara mmiri* one whose heart is dry and hard or *onye obi ojoo* hard hearted person. Breath resides in the biological heart also called *Obi - heart*.<sup>18</sup>

Obi he reiterates:

Is the life force that links man with other cosmic forces. It may be attacked through witchcraft or sorcery and may be weakened or die. This obi-heart /breath' leaves the body at death but does not continue to exist after death this differentiates it from *mụọ* spirit that continues to exist after death in the spirit worlds.<sup>19</sup>

T. Nwala is of the same view when he states that, "*mụọ* is the part of the person which reincarnates after death and also lives in the spirit world at death."<sup>20</sup>

In the course of the earthly existence, man's life may be enhanced, increased or diminished, because human life is intricately bound with the activities of the other cosmic spiritual forces. Hence the traditional Igbo indulges himself every now and then in extensive religious and ritual acts to harness all available forces to enhance his life, while exploiting, the material earth resources with his natural skills. He equally prays, divines, sacrifices, expiates and celebrates at the shrines of the deities in a persistent effort to ensure that he lives out full span of his life in a way that will guarantee successful life, a good death which attracts a befitting burial and bliss: continuation of the same in the next life as glorified ancestor capable of reincarnating in his lineage.

In sum, for one to answer the question, what is the Igbo cosmological concept of man? One will say that the logical thought behind their concept of man comes from their belief that the world and all its contents including man came to be through the creative act of God. Man therefore came into existence through creation by Supreme Being called *Chiukwu*, or *Chiokike* as a composite of material and immaterial being (*aru na mụọ*). They regard the *mụọ* as the most essential part of man and this makes him superior as well as differentiates him from other creatures because this quality immortalises him beyond the present existence. C.O. Obiego is of the above view when he asserts that "*Chukwu* made everything including man. Men are people because they possess Chi, which is given them by *Chukwu*."<sup>21</sup> The origin of man is thus very clear to

the traditional Igbo; however the detail of how he actually originated from *Chukwu* is not given, except in some Nri myth of origin which tells more of how *Chukwu* sent first man and his wife from the sky down the earth which was still created new, young and delicate. This is understandable on the ground that one is actually not expected to have a firsthand knowledge of what happened before he comes into existence. But, what aptly sums up our interest here is the following ontological elaboration by C.O. Obiego who states

The Igbo, like other Africans, in some ways consider man as in between, the centre of the universe, the common denominator and this geocentrism makes them interpret the universe, that is all things that exist, both anthropocentrically and anthropomorphically. It is hardly surprising then if their ontology is also anthropocentric.<sup>22</sup>

Hence, this is the recurring theme in Igbo ontology and anthropology. A good explanation of this is found in the following words of G. Ikeobi "our ancestors, unlike us, were real people (people with "un-shod" feet solidly on the ground). They realized that man's spirit is restless-inhabiting both the world of sense and a world of dreams mystery and wonder."<sup>23</sup>

E. E. Uzukwu also addresses the same point though from another dimension when he states that "African anthropology (doctrine of man) understands the self as a unit-corporeal but also invisible. The dualism body-soul, matter spirit does not exist for the African."<sup>24</sup> In fact, man for the African is an enfleshed spirit. N.I Ndiokwere also alludes to this when he states that "the... typical Africa phenomenon, arising from Africa situation, in which the spirit and the flesh of a person, his soul and body are considered forming one whole, and so must be treated together as an interest phenomenon."<sup>25</sup> This for the Igbo is the broad outline of man's make up. Man is surely something more than what meets the eyes. On this hang much as regards the meaning and essence of the universe for him.

C.O Ukeh rightly remark that at, "the centre of this universe as a unified diversity in the Igbo cosmological thinking, as well as typifying it practical terms is man himself. The Igbo world as indeed the world of man, is a world that is being co-created by man."<sup>26</sup> G. Ikeobi further observes that in man the material and the spiritual worlds become incarnate. Every reality of the material world becomes symbolic an expression of some deeper reality which transcends the limitations of time and space open to laws other than those of material causality.<sup>27</sup>

Man in the estimation of the Igbo is in fact a microcosm of the entire reality and even in a figurative sense of God too. Hence P.E. Aligwekwe further avers that:

With regard to man in himself, in his essence, to have been superior to all natural elements of creation and by his ability to hold dialogue with the supernatural forces and maintain the equilibrium between him and them, he has already fixed his status among them and has proved his superiority over the rest of creation in the natural world. His duty was to work incessantly to the up keep of that superiority.<sup>28</sup>

C.O Ukeh however remarks that:

The spirits and deities, which generously populate the Igbo world remain veritable gadflies checkmating any possible flagrant abuses of such privileges bestowed on man because of this unavoidable intermediary position between *mmadu* and *chukwu*, man must simply check his own excesses, or be dealt with by them. However, he is still simultaneously the lord and the servant of the other creatures.<sup>29</sup>

L. Magesa while writing from East African background similarly avers that

One can only become truly human in community, in the context of other human beings in the world, and in some sort of relationship to the dead. And kinship is what in large measure constitutes life itself and its mystique, and kinship is the most intensely and most meaningfully realized and expressed in and by the ancestor relationship.<sup>30</sup>

P. Iroegbu similarly observes this of the traditional Igbo when he states that " the person is the self-transcending communal self in mutual relationship with other selves, and in search of full union with the divine who is his ultimate source. In a word, the person is self-with-others, community and God."<sup>31</sup>

Thus, existence can only be meaningful for an Igbo when he lives and communes with others in his community. Hence community identity is an issue for him because; outside the community human life is precarious. Community for him comprises both the visible and the invisible, believed to interact and interpenetrate each other. He who rejects his community will in turn be rejected by the ancestral community, which is the core origin of the community. J. S. Mbiti's quotation passage that "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am,"<sup>32</sup> is equally applied to the Igbo. In fact isolated from the community the individual in Igbo world becomes faceless both here and hereafter, because the community of both the visible and invisible identify and provide him the wherewithal for meaningful existence that guarantee him a place in the community of ancestors capable of attaining reincarnation within his linkage. Man's preoccupation in Igbo world is how to enhance his life and make it meaningful within his community. These two realms of existence are intimately connected and copenetrate each other to the extent that whatever happens in one affects the other. In fact among all the created beings of the world, man is the most important, centrally located to mediate and manipulate the two realms of existence. Then, how does man mediate and manipulate the two realms? He does this in the sense that he is born into earthly existence and



transits back to the spiritual realm only to come back to live a new life on earth through reincarnation. Death for the Igbo is not death as such. It connotes the concepts of natural and unnatural types of death. And each has its own effect on human being. The natural type has positive effect on man in the sense that he or she has to live good life, and die good death coupled with fulfilling other conditions of marriage, procreation, moral upright life and receiving appropriate rite of passage from the children in order to attain ancestral status. Invariably, the concept of unnatural death has negative effect on human being. When any human being is unable to reach the above mentioned conditions, even if the person lived good life and died good death, but could not fulfill one out of the other conditions, such person automatically becomes a victim of unnatural death and he/she also has lost the joy of ancestral status. Thus, the Igbo people's concept of unnatural death and the stipulated conditions that could lead to it as well as the punishments attached to its victims; contain a lot of error and wicked elements. Why should the so called victims suffer such punishments? Were they the cause of their problems? Who on earth would like to die prematurely? Who would like to undergo series of pains and die out of chronic and incurable sickness and disease? Who is that man that would prefer dying without receiving rite of passage from his children? Who apart from the people that are celibate would not like to marry or even choose not to procreate when he is biologically sound? Who is that woman who would like to die during pregnancy? Who is that man who will chose to die during mourning period.

Certainly, no human being would not like to die good death reach old age; Old age is what every human being apart from the suicide bombers glamour for. The desire of every Igbo, both traditional and contemporary, is to attain ancestral status. So custom and tradition should not deprive any person such desire once the person is morally upright in life. Human being in the words of Pantheleon Iroegbu is, "both body and spirit, he expresses the bodily aspect of his being, while *mụọ* remains the standard and original word for that aspect of human person that is spiritual."<sup>33</sup> We participate and share from the incorporeal nature of the ultimate (God). Hence all human beings should

be treated alike. The Igbo should adhere to the principles of fatalism and determinism and then allow nature to take its course. Even in a situation where one died as a result of his or her mistake, it should be understood that such occurred as has pre-determined by the higher force.

In as much as, we have searched and dug out the effects which the Igbo people's concept of death imposed on human being, we then argue that; death is death whether natural or unnatural. So, these types of death and the stipulated conditions of marriage, procreation, rite of passage as well as the negative punishments meant for the victims of unnatural death should be abolished. But if it is a must that punishment of this sort must be imposed, they should be meant only for the people that deliberately gone contrary to the natural law of terminating human life e.g., suiciders, sorcerers, witches etc. In all we argue moral upright life should be used as a criterion for evaluating the qualification for dying good and attainment of ancestral status.

## ENDNOTES

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EVALUATION/CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 EVALUATION

No world, no people or society can be said to lack philosophy since intelligence is the core and universal feature that characterizes the being of man generally. Every society has her own culture, “the totalization of all, a people’s belief, morals, arts, history, customs, traditions etc which is learned, shared and equally handed over to future generations. Culture as it is, embodies the manipulation of forces in the environment for the better. Culture differs yet its beliefs are really right not only to its members. Beyond the culture of a people is their cosmological experience or in a more precise manner, alongside culture is the cosmological view of a people. In consonance with this, Pantheon Iroegbu states:

There is a background to every experience. All experiences, including religious ones, have a foundation and springboard, which we may call the mother that gives birth to the experiences. Equally experience itself is also a father of basic tenets, including the metaphysical convictions and religious credo of persons and peoples... that the human being is fundamentally a communal being. This is a metaphysical conviction that arises from the experience, that, outside some form of community no one has ever survived.<sup>1</sup>

It stands then to reason that every society has a data base that is the fundamental picture of reality or the central control box designing and governing the people’s relationships in the word of Kraft. “A people’s world-view (Welterchaung) contains their ontological and eschatological conceptions of reality”. Thus, for F.U Okafor, world view contains the concepts of the world physical and metaphysical held by a people. They are the basic notions underlying their cultural, religious and social activities.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this, T.U. Nwala says “this refers to the complex of being, habits, laws, customs and traditions of a people. It includes the overall picture they have about reality, the universe, life and existence”.<sup>3</sup>

A people’s cosmological perceptions include their interrogations to decipher whether life is worth living or not. It also involves their questions, reflections, beliefs and explanations about the wonders of life, death and hereafter. World-view in the strict sense of the word is traditional. It is a philosophy of its kind or a philosophy in a debased sense. It is not only traditional, but co-eval and raw. It encapsulates in myths, folklores, religion, social-moral, aesthetical, political thoughts and activities as well as customs and morals. World view however is unscientific and uncritical. It is an incorruptible mind of the people in regards to the marvels of life. Lallerand Suzanne described it as:

The totality or ensemblage of belief and practical knowledge, a complete knowledge that explains the natural and human universe, while its cognate word cosmology centers on the creation of the world which explains the origin of the universal process of the society.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of cosmology in the thought of O.U.Kalu is synonymous with world-view, in this sense that, “the former...is an impressive term for world view which he described as theories or doctrines of contemporary science, which may be unscientific because it may be based on superstitions, emotions and speculations.”<sup>5</sup> Conclusively. Kalu avers, “world view almost is unscientific, similarly, all traditional world views lack the objectivity of scientific world view.”<sup>6</sup>

Similar to other traditional societies of the world, the Igbo cosmological perception centers on their whole of experiences, reflections, interrogations and explanations as well as beliefs in all there is. All there is in this context involves the universe, stuff of reality, human existence, death and hereafter.

The theme of this research is anthropocentric. It thematically portrays the lots of implications which the Igbo people's concept of death has on man as being in the world. Man in the word of Aristotle is a social-political being whose value of individuality depends on his relational existence within the community in which he lives. As it is, man's rational, religious, ethical-moral and aesthetical value is meaningful only when he interacts and counter interacts with his fellow man. Every human being naturally has the freedom to function and act as he wish. So, in as much as freedom permits man to behave as he likes, in the same vein the plethora of his freedom is curtailed and controlled by the social-moral principles guiding that community in its entirety. Therefore, man generally bears the responsibility of whatever negative and positive actions he exhibits.

A thorough reflection on the whole of the text made it clearly comprehensible the negative and positive implications which the Igbo people's concept of death have on man as a social being. "Flux is the stuff of all there is says *Herachitus*."<sup>7</sup> We are in the world of conflict; every reality has its opposite. Hence there exists; day and night, sky and earth, male and female, visible and invisible realms, life and death. Igbo people, like other societies of the world, believe in the existence of the material world of space and time and the invisible abstract world. The realm of space and time contains man, animate, inanimate and infra beings. Inversely, the invisible realm i.e. the Godian world according to Pantheleon Iroegbu is inhabited by God, gods or spirits and ancestors. These realms however are perceptively separate, but the Igbo rationally believe they are intermingling and dynamic. Hence, they influence one another. The beings or forces of these two realms, the Igbo believed, causally interact. Question may ask, how can the visible interact with invisible? Yes, the possibility of this interaction is based on temporality and atemporality (permanency). There is a universal belief in after life. But, the questions again are; how?, to whom?, and where? For the Igbo people, man's existence on earth is too brief. Man is born into life, grows, dies and goes back to his place of origin. The *ala mmuo* invisible realm is the permanent abode of man via death. According to Heidegger, "man Dasein is a being unto death."<sup>8</sup> This implies that the

Social-relational quality of man extends beyond the visible community. When man is alive, he exists because of others. So, it is the same even when he dies. When man is alive, he has lots of obligations and duties to carry out as a communal being. Thus, he is obliged to marry, procreate, be morally up right and function according to the social norms guiding human conduct from the family, kindred, *Umunna*, village *Ogbe*, clan *obodo* and the entire society. For the Igbo, the criteria or conditions that make man a full fledged citizen of the earthly community, also help to fetch him existence in the ancestral community when he dies. This means that death is vital to man and it confers on his existence the uniqueness of life and always define him with reference to itself as the end of that which lives. Unlike the physicalists notion of death as total annihilation of man, the Igbo and Africans generally contend that man actually does not die completely; instead something very indispensable still lives on. According to them, what perishes at death is the body *anu ahụ*, but the spirit *mmuo* keeps on existing with the ancestors in the spirit world. As was written above, the necessary conditions that fetch every man ancestral communion may adversely affect them especially when they fail to accomplish the said criteria. The spirit of such caliber of people is called by the Igbo *Akaliogoli* when they die. They are said to exist between *amanri mmuo na mmadu* because they are neither welcomed by the ancestors nor can they go back to exist with their people on earth. Hence they are termed, *elu eru aka, ala eru aka*. Sometimes, most of them become evil and start to haunt their relations on earth. In this culture, the belief is that once a person qualifies for admittance into the land of the ancestors through moral, material and spiritual maturity, then, that person is sure to make the desired return to the land of living *uwa or ala mmadu*. However, the ultimate points in the Igbo people's idea of death centres on human existence on earth and after life (i.e. cosmological and eschatological existence). Those who do not qualify as candidates for ancestral realm will by that be denied the hope of reunion. There is therefore, a cyclic motion round the two orders of existence from the (material land of man and immaterial land of spirits) back and forth. As it were, those who lived and died well, merit to come back to relive their cycle. It is really a dear hope of the Igbo traditional religionist and thinkers. While the greatest evil that could befall man is to be thrown



out of the life cycle through denial of reincarnation. Explaining more on this, J.O. Oguejiofor says:

The world represents for the Igbo, a certain *summum bonum*. An eternity where there is unbounded joy for Igbo. The glory of a good life is entrance into the company of the ancestors and reincarnation into the world in which one had formerly striven so hard to be morally upright and materially successful.<sup>9</sup>

From the above discourse, the Igbo people's idea of death meets and radically breaks with the creation of cosmology. While both presume some kind of beginning to human life by the efficient causality of the divinity, they hold parallel positions with regards to subsequent replenishment of human life on earth. Thus, the Christian variant of creation cosmology emphasized special divine creation of future human person. Igbo world view *uwa* cosmology on the other hand, holds that human life on earth is replenished from the spirit world via reincarnation.

Actually, the Igbo people's conception of death is of mixed feelings. In the first instance, it is perceived as an enemy and something bad. But in the other way round, it is taken to be something necessary and positive. Their perception of death as an enemy, however, is based on the obstruction it puts to human inclination to live immortal on earth, death marks the demise of a dearly one or a member of the family, it in effect quits the physical interactions of people with the dead person in question. As it is, no man on earth apart from the suicide bombers would deliberately take his life. Life generally is so precious and worth preserving. Human desire is to enjoy physical immortalization. But, many myths, especially the Igbo people's myth where Toad and Dog were sent on an errand to God, but as Mr Dog dallied on the way, Mr Toad first reached God; hence he packaged back to man the signed pact from God *Chukwu* that man must die before being reborn again to earthly existence. Characteristically posits Mondin, "Death is universal, inescapable, imminent, inexorable and fearful. It is a

phenomenon that pushes man to the wall. Death reminds man of his worthiness especially at the sight of dead person. The sight of a corpse lying in state tells man who he is, whenever death is mentioned, man will begin to shiver, panic and become terrified. No one wants to die. Although, man not withstanding is defined by economists as, “insatiable being.”<sup>10</sup> He is a being that prefers to exist immortal on earth, but as his aging approaches its peak, he will in turn plead for death. Imagine what life will be for a man of one hundred years and above. This stage of life complements what King Solomon wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 12:1-8.

So remember your creator while you are still young, before those dismal days and years come when you will say, “I don’t enjoy life”. That is when the light of the sun, the moon and stars will grow dim far away. Then your arms that have protected you will grow weak. Your teeth will be few to chew your food, your eyes too dim to see clearly. Your ears will be deaf to the noise in the streets. You will barely be able to hear the mill as it grinds or music as it plays, but even the song of a bird will wake you up from sleep. You will be afraid of high places, and walking will be dangerous. Your hair will turn white, you will hardly be able to drag yourself along and all desires would have gone.<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion King Solomon avers:

We are going to our final resting place and then there will be mourning in the streets. The silver chain will snap, and the golden lamp will fall and break; the rope in the well will break, and the water jar be shattered. Our bodies will return to the dust of the earth, and the breath of life will go back to God who gave it to us. Useless, useless says the philosopher: it is all useless.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, an Igbo man at this stage of life does not cherish life anymore. Such person in this culture is termed *ođj ndụ, oñwụ ka mma*. At this time of life however, things are no longer at ease with man. Hence he cannot eat, walk and function as normal. According to developmental psychologists, man at this age no doubt will lost his sight and develop mental retardation as a result of the decay of brain substance. There is the saying by the Igbo people that *mmadu anaghi epu ero n'ụwa* man will never remain forever on earth. Imagine the contradiction; at a stage in life, the same person that desires to live endlessly on earth will in trun pray to God to take him for the fact of being exhausted of this life. It is at this point however that the Igbo people came to realize the importance of death. To them, death is very necessary. In fact, death *oñwụ* to the Igbo people is not all that bad. It is just a change. Similar to the moderate dualists who see man as a composite of matter and spirit, the Igbo explained death as, “the separation of the life principle from the body, in which case, it becomes a substantial and total change where all self-propelled activities cease. It is about the secesion from the organizational activities of living beings. “Death never means an end of a being, but a change in functioning.”<sup>13</sup> Death for the Igbo people is simply a change of life for another new earthly life via reincarnation. According to this culture, life is burdensome, but it is death that releases man from such burden. A good man enjoys blissfully with the ancestors at death only if he accomplished the set criteria for the realization of the set objectives of life. But where the reverse is the case, the person becomes excluded and excommunicated spiritually. Death releases man from the sufferings of life, that is why one hears the Igbo saying to a dead person, *laa ga zuru ike go* and have rest. Death authenticates man’s freedom from the shackles of life and grants him rest spiritually. Hence death is conceived and described simply as a way of going back to place of rest.

Similar to the Euro-Western Christianity, the Igbo acknowledges the glory of ancestry. Man’s inability to realize and accomplish the natural desire for perennial existence on earth is consoled with ancestral bliss, if such person did not reconcile to his community before his her death. But such ancestral communion contradicts the Christian perspectives of existence with the forbears either in heaven or hell. The Igbo ancestral

existence is a one way traffic. In Igbo land, one's social/moral incapability affects him badly at death. Once a person is interdicted here on earth, he or she will automatically be denied the ancestral bliss. According to Metu. I. E, "the indispensability of descendants cannot be over emphasized. As such, the dead escapes the dilemma of existing between *ama nri mmuḡ na mmadu* since there is the possibility of setting him free through ritualistic sacrifices by his descendants on earth: That is why it is very hard to see any evil man that has never reincarnate."<sup>14</sup>

Death conflicts life and vice versa. As life is very important to mankind, so is death. Death to the Igbo people is so indispensable for the fact that it reminds man of his nature; man Dasein as Heidegger defined is, "a being towards death."<sup>15</sup> His nature admits death and he cannot avoid it. Death is for every creature that has life. Biologically, both man, animals and plants die. But as Batista Mondin posits, "man's death is quite distinct from that of the other living creatures for the fact that he predicts, thinks prepares, and awaits for it."<sup>16</sup> Expressing more, he said, "Death is a sign of creatureliness, a consequence of a composite nature. Above all matter, which as a principle in the composition of man is intrinsically corruptible, making it (Death) for man a biological necessity with an ontological significance."<sup>17</sup>

Death grants man the ticket for ancestral journey and communion. It is man's visa for reincarnation. Thus, the idea of reincarnation is to complement the Igbo principle of *onye amuru, ḡmḡta ibe ya* man's replication or reproduction of his likeness. This principle however blesses the continuity of mankind. Where death is said to not exist, the universe as it is wouldn't have contained man and other living beings. So, death is described as, "a means or sort of clearing space existence for another new space existence."<sup>18</sup> Thus, the conception and differentiation of the positive and negative consequences of natural and unnatural deaths explains to man the need for being morally upright as well as living in accordance to the principles/norms of the community in which he lives. Compliance to the order guiding the physical community invariably grants man the existence in the spiritual community of ancestors. Igbo people

*ndị Igbo* uphold the glory of ancestorhood. Contrary to the controversy in the Christendom where some sect acknowledge a brief stoppage and suffering in purgatory before going to heaven, some believe that when one dies, he remains in the grave until the last day when he will resurrect to meet the Messiah via the blow of trumpet, and others believe that once a man dies, he goes straight to God to face the judgment which the verdict will either cause him to go to heaven or to hell fire where he will gnash his teeth forever. This however is quite distinct from that of the Igbo and African people in general. To these group of people immediately man dies, the spirit goes quickly to join the ancestor if he lived well otherwise, the spirit of such person will face the dilemma of *elu erughị aka, ala erughị aka*. Therefore such spirit becomes evil spirit that haunts the living.

Two worlds exist for Igbo people; the material world of man and things and the immaterial world of God, gods and ancestors. These realms share identical structure. Hence the indices of birth, death and re-birth define the necessary connection between them. Articulating on this idea, Achebe said:

The topography of the spirit world is exactly the same as that of the world of the living. Life mirrors each other in both worlds. Both worlds are contiguous with each other. Considerable and continuous contacts exist between them, for many journeys from the spirit land to the land of the living and back in an endless cycle of birth, death and reincarnation.<sup>19</sup>

In as much as the two realms exist, there is in addition to this triad of cosmological frameworks of the Igbo society, what is called *ama nri mmụọ na mmadụ*. This exists amidst the boundary of the dead and the living. It is the abode of all the restless and nefarious spirits. It is however from this particular spot that such spirits launch frequent attacks on the inhabitants of *ala mmadụ* earth. The Igbo people's concept of death explains and reveals the truth of everything about death. Death is universal, inevitable, imminence, inexorable and dreadful: its fatality perturbs everybody, hence Oguejiofor avers, "*Onwenughi onye onwu rara; ogbenye onwu, ogaranya onwu, agbohobia*

*onwu*.<sup>20</sup> The Igbo people's idea of death states that it is obvious that man does not die completely rather, what he does is just transition. That which we called death actually is "man's act of wearing out the wrinkled and worn out tissues of the body to penetrate into an ideal world, from where he reincarnates into new earthly existence". This however is to maintain and promote the continuity and stability of mankind. Death is not the total annihilation of the being of man. The Igbo believe that death is only the death of the body *anụ ahụ*. Thus, the principle that makes man what he is does not die rather; it is man's share of the ultimate principle underlying every reality. The departure of the particle of the ultimate reality in man amounts to death. Hence it goes back to its original abode which is the ideal world of form in the word of Plato. The belief of the Igbo people is that; if it happened that death is the end of everything about man, life would have stopped at the death of the first man that were first created by *Chineke*. But, if it in the contrary happens that man does not die at all, would the world contain everybody? It is not possible because if it is in the mind that death will be the total annihilation of man on earth, it then means that God *Chukwu* would not have instituted marriage. Therefore, the Igbo believe and maintain that God does not want the world to come to an end that is why he initiated marriage so that man will be a help to Him in the prolongation of mankind.

The Igbo people's philosophy of death and its implications on man which we have been discussing for long, does not make reference to the contemporary Igbo rather to the traditional Igbo. By traditional Igbo, we mean those that were not influenced by the Euro-Christian culture and belief. These people practiced double religion. This has gone to the extent of denying their traditional Igbo religion and cultural identity. Hence, the language they speak is that of the West, and their thought pattern is also that of the West. For this reason, it is very hard to see any present day Igbo man, even the very old ones in the rural areas speaking their mother tongue expressly without mixing it the colonial masters (English) language. Sequence to this omen, most of the contemporary Igbo share similar ideas about death and other realities with their European counterparts. They for instance, long for the coming of the last day. Some believe that

the dead remain wholly in the grave with the hope of resurrecting to meet Christ at the blow of trumpet; they also believed there will be a change or transformation by the living. So at this time, only the righteous will join Christ to keep on existing immortal on earth where Christ will rule the whole world forever. Contrary to the righteous inheritance of the earth with Christ, the sinners will be thrown into hell fire to exist everlasting. However, the influence of the colonial masters and their religion has caused many Igbo to become Christian religious lunatics. Hence there are many and numerous sects in one Christendom. However, many of these sects especially the self acclaimed “born again people” have developed deaf ear towards the Igbo culture, custom and tradition. To them, ancestry has become a taboo of which whoever that talked of it finds his or her fate in hell fire.

One Igbo proverb says, “*onye amaghj ebe mmiri bidoro maba ya, agaghj ama ebe mmiri ga akwusj ima ya* one who do not know where rain started beating him, will not know where it will stop beating him.”<sup>21</sup>

Sincerely speaking, we the contemporary Igbo suffer out of pretence. We know our problems and our problems know us. *Ihe n’esi nwa nkpi isi dij ya na ahụ*. The Scripture says, we should know the truth and only the truth shall save us. So, let us release ourselves from ignorance and pretence. We do not want to accept our faults. Socrates said, “Unexamined life is not worth living.”<sup>22</sup> Most of the problems that haunt the present day Igbo people are as a result of the neglect of our culture, custom and tradition. Most families in Igbo land today undergo and encounter one crisis or the other due to the neglect and denial of their ancestors. The people languished and perished in one problem or the other. Yet they could not reflect and meditate to trace and ascertain the cause. In some cases, they know the havocs they are passing through, but for the sake of answering Christians, they pretend and choose to die with the problem believing to enjoy with the Christian ancestors (Saints) in heaven. Thus, one Igbo proverb says, “*ogba osọ anaghj agbalahụ ike ya n’oso* One cannot over take his buttocks while running.”<sup>23</sup> Every society has their own culture, custom, and tradition.

No world-view is superior to the other. Hence no people should relegate their ancestry to mud. People should regard and revere their ancestors no matter what.

There are for instance some families in Igbo land whose parents died and no one gave them funeral rites because of either financial incapability or that the children were at very tender age. Often times, when the children grow up, they knowingly or unknowingly refuse to offer them funeral rites. Hence the spirits of those dead parents keep on existing amidst the boundary of *ama nri mmuṅ na mmadu* the dead and living. So, when they see that their children do not care to know about their fate, they will begin to torment and harm them. These dead may decide to cause obstruction to their ways thereby making them become so wretched. They may decide to interrupt their business progress thereby causing them to face unbearable set backs and difficulties. In some situation, they may inflict chronic and incurable diseases and sicknesses on their children. Experience they said “is the best teacher.”<sup>24</sup> The researcher is the typical witness of the wrath of the dead parents that were not given the rite of passage. The story is too long to tell. But the truth however is that ancestors exist and burial and funeral rites play a very significant role in ones life. In Igbo land, every dead person is supposed to be given burial and funeral rites no matter how meager, or the people concerned should be ready to face the consequences. In this culture, when one member of the family dies and no funeral rite was given to him, if it happens that when another member dies, he or she will be treated alike otherwise the whole family will be wiped out by the wrath of the ancestor. If such person will be given funeral rite at all, the family will start from the first person that died. People are supposed to dig deeper to find out the root cause of the problems they pass through or else they will keep on suffering until the entire family becomes extinct.

No people’s thought pattern should be termed superior to other. As cited in the rudimentary phase of this paper, Igbo proverb says “*nkụ dj na mba, n’eghere mba nri* people sustain themselves with what they have.”<sup>25</sup> A people’s solution to the problems of reality deepens into their culture. Thus culture embodies a people’s way of life such as their history, arts, attitudes and values. Hence a people’s belief interprets them.



Traditional thoughts of all sorts are featured with assumptions and presumptions; they are prejudiced and biased; they are raw, co-eval, and have not been scientifically proved; therefore, they cannot escape flaws.

## 7.2 CONCLUSION

Philosophical thought in the word of John Dewey simply means, "The criticism of criticism."<sup>26</sup> This however is one out of the many characteristics and methods of philosophy. Therefore, the criticism leveled against the Igbo conceptions of death is applicable to those of the other peoples of the world.

Thus, an extract from the whole of this text shows that the criticisms leveled against the Igbo people's solution to the problem of death centered mainly on the distinction between natural and unnatural death; the criteria for attainment of ancestral bliss as well as the idea of reincarnation. Death in the Igbo peoples view is of two types: *onwu chi*: good death and *Ajo onwu* bad death. The later includes; premature deaths of infants, youths, and middle aged men and women; this may come either by accident, chronic and incurable diseases and sicknesses, suicide and mysterious death during pregnancy or mourning period. However, the circumstances of social/moral upright life, marriage, procreation, old age and receiving proper burial/funeral rites from one's children characterizes one's good death and a visa for ancestral communion and reincarnation. In a situation where one could not accomplish all these, such person has automatically become a victim to *ajọ onwu* bad death and the person will not join the ancestors. The people that died naturally in Igbo society are equivalent to the Euro-Christians righteous people. Like their Christian counterparts, the Igbo believe that, as the funeral ceremony of a good man is being celebrated here on earth, so the ancestors celebrate the arrival of the dead person in question in their midst. The issue of hell and heaven is not entertained by the traditional Igbo people. Just like the Roman Catholic Church's belief in the existence of purgatory in the Christendom, the Igbo people's belief in punishing the victims of unnatural death by denying them of the ancestral inheritance and reincarnation is apologetic. The force of the punishment is not strict

and firm. It could only be effective when the descendants of such dead people no longer exist on earth. In as much as their descendants still exist, there is the possibility of pleading the course of those victims to set them free via incantations and sacrifices thereby enabling them to obtain their share in the ancestry and reincarnation.

This however uplifts to climax the indispensability of marriage and procreation in Igbo land. Child bearing is so much cherished in this culture to the extent that they do not care to know whether the children born in their families are legitimate or not. The hunger for children especially the male folks caused the involvement of most of our forebearers into polygamy. In some situations, when a man could not get his heart's desire from his monogamous practice, he will resort to marrying more than one wife. But if it happens that upon marrying the multiple wives, he did not get what he want, may be because of infertility problem, such man will do nothing than dancing to the tune of Igbo maxim of *Omebere ma chi ekweghi* accepting life as it effects one "Man by nature is so jealous that he will be the last to subject his wife to his fellow man. It is also so humiliating for a man to be declared impotent. But for the fact of fulfilling the taste for children and to maintain the prolongation of his lineage, he may secretly consult and beg his intimate friend to bear children for him. Contrary to the traditional conviction that "*anaghi azuta nwa n'ahja* children are not commodities that are bought from the market", the contemporary Igbo do buy and sell children in the market. That is why child adoption is too rampant in today's society. The present day Igbo couples however, do not care to know the character of the person that gave birth to the children they adopt. Many medical practitioners have turned their hospitals and maternities to child selling markets. Of course this is one out of the numerous influence of the Western culture on us. Though, this is hardly seen in the pre-colonial era. The present day child adoption syndrome has polluted many responsible and reputable Igbo families with nuisance. Some adopted children have become nightmare to various couples. In the traditional Igbo society, no man would like to tarnish the image of his family. In fact, they do not accept anyhow child. If it is in the case of impotence, the man concern will under strict arrangement plead his good friend or brother to help him out. Descendants are held in high esteem in Igbo culture. And male children are so much valued. In some

cases where couples give birth only to female children, the equation there is not balanced and the foundation of such descendants will be shaky. So, to make it firm and stable, some will resort as written above while some will indulge themselves in what the Igbo called *Nnọchi*. This is a way by which some of our forebearers stop their families from crumbling and to maintain the continuity of their descendants. Here, a father may decide to leave one of his daughters to remain unmarried and stay at home so as to conceive and bear children from men outside. In this case, the father will perform all the necessary *omenala* customs and traditions to his kinsmen confirming the authentic involvement and membership of such daughter in the association of the married women of the community. Such daughter however will legitimately inherit his father's property. And, her children will definitely become the legitimate sons and daughters of the family, kindred and the clan. The researcher's home town is a typical example of the part of the Igbo land where culture permits this. There, such women are called *nwunye nna ha* (their father's wives) or *nnochi*.

Thus, the standards set by the Igbo people that grant man good death, ancestral enjoyment and the repertoire for reincarnation are so much pleasing and welcomed. The Igbo concept of good man states it clearly that man must exist because of others. That is to say he must be a communal being; his individuality is meaningful only in the community of people *Ụmụnna bu ike*. Emphasizing on the importance of human relationship, the Igbo say, "*Onye sị ka nanị ya biri; ọnwụ bịa, nanị ya nwụọ; ọnwụ cha o lie onwe ya* one who chooses to live alone should be ready to die alone and as well bury himself."<sup>27</sup> A good man must be morally upright; he must contribute to the well being, stability and continuity of the community through marriage and procreation as well as fulfilling other duties and obligations of the community. Accomplishing all these necessary conditions as well as dying at old age and receiving burial/funeral rites from one's children will fetch the person ancestral communion. Contrary to these, amounts to becoming a victim of unnatural or bad death. This however is very unpleasant and wicked. Who on earth apart from the suicide bombers will choose to die at infant, youth or middle age? Even sometimes, death by suicide is caused by sorcerers or evil

men. Grey hair is what every man longs for. No man would marry and bear children and choose to die without bringing them up. The Igbo believe that *Chukwu kere mmadu* God created man and that everything happens as occasioned by God. Then the question is; why should such obnoxious punishment be placed on people that died out of chronic and incurable sicknesses and diseases like dropsy, epilepsy, madness etc? Were such people the cause of their problems? If they were asked to choose from the options of good and ill health, it is quite obvious that none of them will choose ill-health not to talk of such chronic ones. One could mirror the type of suffering women encounter during pregnancy and child labour. Then, who amongst mothers would choose to die out of pregnancy and child labour? Who is that woman that would not like to enjoy staying with her new born baby or even being alive to bring the baby up? Death during mourning is a taboo in Igbo land. But who is that person who prefers dying when mourning?

In fact, no one has seen anywhere in the world where one enjoy dying during pregnancy or mourning period. If such occur, there must be some mysterious circumstances surrounding it. Death during pregnancy may be as a result of ill-health, biological anomalies or act of evil forces. Accident occurs by sudden, and no one would prefer accidental death. The Igbo strongly adhere to the concept of *uto ntochi* "Successorship". That is why it is a taboo for them to hear the death of a youth. If death at a young age should be considered good, it means that old age which everybody glamour for will be useless, and mankind would have ceased to exist long ago. This is quite understandable but, where the attack lies is on the punishment of denying the victims the ancestral bliss and reincarnation. The Igbo should understand and realize that death is not predictable and that no one knows when to die and how it will happen. It is definitely beyond man's knowledge to know the type of death he or she is going to meet. Death is like a thief that visits one by sudden, it doesn't give notice rather it steals man at any age and at its convenient time. So, if it will be possible for the Igbo people, let it be a welcome idea to put off the sanctions imposed on the victims of death at this particular stage of life. Reason is because, they neither created themselves nor contributed to such ugly incident, rather that is how they encountered their own death. The necessity of death at any stage in life is much more compatible with the concept of "fatalism" which states that "all events are fated to occur; they would

happen no matter what the person involved might have done to avoid it."<sup>28</sup> In a situation where it is a must that such sanctions are to be imposed, we argue let them be only on those that died out of immoral acts especially those died in the process of weapon robbery, murdering of their fellow human being, and committing suicide. There is however no way a man or woman will choose to die without accomplishing the objectives for which he or she came into earthly existence.

The Igbo people's stipulation of marriage and procreation as the criteria for attainment of ancestral existence and the repertoire for reincarnation is questionable. If these standards should be strictly relied on, what then should be the fate of those that practice celibacy; especially those in the Roman Catholic sect of the Christendom? Does it mean that their fate of the ancestral bliss is lost? If no, where were the spirits of all the priests of this sect who died long ago, starting from the emergence of the colonial Christianity in Igbo society and African as a whole? Being that priests in "Igbo Traditional Religion" and those of some present day sects in African Christendom do marry and reproduce children. This logically means that they according to traditional Igbo join the ancestors when they die. Then, what of the aforementioned sect where priests neither marry nor procreate? These clergy for sure live morally upright lives; they contribute to the well being of mankind and receive befitting rite of passage from the church and relations. Being that they skipped the criteria of marriage and procreation, does it mean that they are isolated in the spirit realm of the Igbo? Or are they given a separate abode there? Empiricist contention is that, "experience is the foundation of rational knowledge."<sup>29</sup> *"Esse-est-percipi et-est percipiere* to be is to be perceived in the mind of the perceiver."<sup>30</sup> Human perceptions of the marvels of the environment, impresses on the mind the existence of that beyond. This typically explains Kant's interpretation of the causal relationship of the concepts of "Phenomena and noumena worlds. Igbo people believe in the existence of the two distinct but interactive realms of spirit and physical. And that the spiritual mirror itself with the physical. Then, since they practiced mixed religion here on earth, does it mean that their ancestors practice mixed religion there? Does Igbo Christianity continue over there? Let us put it this way: is there any separate abode for the Igbo Christians in the

spirit realm? If no, where then do they belong since they are influenced by the Euro-Christian culture? Do they stay with the Euro-ancestors, since they revere them and make them their guardian saints? I do not think that any Igbo man will like to lose his wholesome identity to a foreign body. Igbo man remains an Igbo man whether dead or life. No man is an island. The Garden of Eden's fallibility concept, defines man as a, "fallible being."<sup>31</sup> Hence no man is all round good. The argument here is that since social/moral upright life seems to be a universal principle that grants people, whether the Igbo, Africans, Euro-Westerners or others a blissful ancestral existence and the ability for reincarnation, it will be a better idea that the Igbo use it as a yardstick for measuring ones repertoire for ancestral inheritance and reincarnation. One may argue whether the clergy in the above mentioned religious sect or world reincarnate? Or, do Christians believe in reincarnation? The solution to this is that there is the tendency that they reincarnate only that no one has cared to inquire about that in this contemporary time.

However, the issue of using rite of passage as one of the core conditions for achieving ancestral objectives should be removed if possible, because a lot of people may struggle to reach other set conditions, but financial incapability and other shackles of life may debar them from getting rite of passage from their children. In many cases, those that lived immoral life, e.g. sorcerers, witches, murderers, blood suckers, adulterers, armed robbers, etc become opportuned to get rite of passage from their children and relatives because of financial strength. Is it not a pity for a wretched to die when his or her children are still under age? One who died at this particular stage of life will obviously not taste anything called funeral rites and this will make such person to experience the dilemma of existence amidst the boundary of *ama nri mmuṅ na mmadu* neither being ancestor nor the living. Would it not be socially good for the Igbo to inflict this punishment of *elu erughị aka, ala erughị aka* (dilemma) only on those that lived immoral life on earth?. If it will be possible, let the sanctions of denying one ancestral inheritance and reincarnation be placed only on evil people.

In regards to the Igbo belief in reincarnation and the evidences outlined to justify its possibility, there seems to be some certainty underlying them. Cultural relativism as it is, “goes beyond merely stating the fact that different cultures have different belief; it asserts that for each society, its beliefs are really right (not just believed to be right by its members).”<sup>32</sup> “*Nkụ dī na mba n’eghere mba nri* (people prepare their food with the firewood in their environs).”<sup>33</sup> Reincarnation truly exist and it is possible. Thus, the possibility and certitude of the idea of reincarnation is esoteric in nature. This is because it is meant only for the people with special knowledge and interest. Some contemporary Igbo argue that reincarnation is an act of familiar spirits. If the import of the term familiarity is critically reflected on, one will understand it simply to be “act of coming in contact and in nice knowledge of either somebody or something.”<sup>34</sup> This also means an act of having good rapport with people both internally and externally. So, one who is well familiar with his or her children, relations, kinsmen and clan when alive, will definitely maintain same with them when he transits into the spiritual realm. For the Igbo people and Africa as a whole, the causal intermingling of the realms of space and time and that beyond exists *ad-infinitum*. Yes, it flows without ceasing. So, any ancestor that rapported well with his descendants when alive will not be blind to locate them on earth even when he is dead. Descendant syndrome is so much valued in Igbo land. Hence no man plays with its permanency and continuity. The spirits of the dead people do reincarnate. They locate easily their children and relatives wherever they are. They are neither deaf nor blind. They are not far from us, hence they see and hear us and are always near to us; only that the barrier is there for us not to see them physically. Such spiritual barrier is so powerful that it blocks our physical contact with them. Though, they on rare occasions pierce and penetrate the barrier to appear physically to the living particularly on important matters. Arguing on the possibility of reincarnation, question may ask; do the spirits of the dead Igbo Christians particularly those that are celibate reincarnate? There is however the tendency that they do, only that nobody has found time to inquire on that.

The evidences of sylph *ogbanje*, *uke* or *abiku*, physical marks on the body, memory of the past life, child’s revelation of the spirit that incarnates him etc which the Igbo give to justify reincarnation are real. The researcher however, has in three cases

experienced the truth of this belief. Though, telling the stories will consume a lot of time. The overall findings and summary of this research are that: the Igbo concept of death has both positive and negative implications on man not only as a being in the Igbo world but in Africa generally: as long as man lives, he or she should function towards achieving good objectives of life, because they will fetch him glorious existence over there in the abstract realm. Anything contrary to this will bring him perpetual gnashing of teeth which may adversely affect his descendants here on earth. The obvious truth behind the life of every Igbo man is that, most of the problems facing them are as a consequence of the neglect of their ancestors. No time is late; the Igbo people name their children *Tabugbo* it is still early. Whatever wrong one does, he or she still has the chances of amending it so far the person knows and admits it. So, the earlier the Igbos realize their shortcomings, the better for them.

Embracing foreign culture is good but that will not make us (the Igbo) to relegate our custom and tradition *Omenala* to mud. Instead, we should hold them in high esteem. Igbo people should stick to their values especially to the good ones, and then do away with the obnoxious ones. Mr Agrey's Maxism that, "one who is not proud of his colour is not worthy to be the son of the soil."<sup>35</sup> Should ever remain fresh and new in the mind of every Igbo. So, the Igbo should always be proud of their culture and also respect it. Let it also be always imprinted on our memory, the inscription on the Egyptian Temple gate ("unexamined life is not worth living") which was stolen by Socrates of Athens. Therefore, the Igbo should not forget to question always our past deeds and compare them with the present. Again, we should endeavour to dig out the root cause of our problems and then solve them for our own good and that of the society here on earth and for the happy and peaceful enrollment of our dead relations in the glorious ancestral existence etc.



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