

OMENALA AND OR EKPEMEKPE IN IGBO WELTANSCHAUUNG

Towards a Differential Understanding of the Religio-cultural Implications and Values.

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Abstract

Values are the hallmark of human life within the human society amidst its religio-political cum socio-economic interactions. *Omenala* is the peoples' way of life as *animal culturalis* depicted in their humane culture and often, lively borrowed traditions. *Ekpemekpe* remains peoples' religious idiosyncrasies pictured as *homo religiousus*. In our contemporary world there is misleading understanding and applicable melange of these concepts: *omenala* and *ekpemekpe*, leading to a kind of perplexed appreciation and nebulous application. The confusion in these concepts has led to some guileful contradictions, contradictory concepts and antonymous words. Using the method of critical analysis the researcher tries to expose the contronymous nature of these two concepts which have chanced many forms of abracadabra amongst uniformed adherents who confuse themselves with *ekpemekpe* as *omenala* and *vice versa*. However, human being fundamentally remains a *homo religiousus* as well as *traditional hominibus* or *homo culturae*

Keywords: Weltanschauung, *omenala*, *ekpemekpe*, Igbo , religio-ethical orientation

Introduction

Man, as a human being, is religiously bound and trado-culturally oriented. The concepts of man as a *homo religiousus* and *animal culturalis* are very unique and definitive of man. Humans, by nature, possess an inherent tendency to seek meaning, purpose, and connection to something beyond themselves. This is human nature that defines man as a composite of body and soul. This idea reflects the universal presence of religion or spiritual practices in virtually every human culture throughout history. It implies that religiosity is a fundamental aspect of human existence, rooted in our capacity for self-reflection, imagination and a desire to understand our place in the universe. Philosophers, anthropologists and theologians have subscribed to this view and offered various interpretations of this idea. Hence, in relation to human beings, we can think of the biological nature of man (body), the spiritual aspect of man (soul) and psychological aspect of man (mind). These concepts are often used to explore deeper what differentiates humans from other species, emphasizing the depth of our religious capabilities.

Man as a cultural animal highlights the unique pattern of human ability to create, transmit and live within the tapestry systems of shared meanings, values, practices and institutions. Humans depend on a particular way of life as culture for survival and flourishing. The dynamics of culture are shown in the acts of learned and adaptive systems that have helped human beings to survive within an environment. This idea of culture defining man makes human beings. This idea underscores several key aspects of human nature providing human beings with a sense of identity, rooted in shared language, traditions, and beliefs, fostering community and social cohesion through all forms of adaptability, creativity and social structures .

The phrases, man as a religious being and a cultural animal, emphasize profoundly that humans are deeply shaped by, and dependent on culture and religion, which distinguishes them from

other animals and enables their extraordinary creativities, metaphysical appreciations and religio-cultural diversities. In the preceding sections, the researcher will delve into the complex nature of human beings in their relationship with *ekpekekpe* and or *omenala* as against *omenachukwu* which is closely related with all forms of *ekpekekpe* in Igbo cosmogony. Igbo cosmogony therefore encompasses Igbo people's worldview as encumbered in their systems of cosmic-existential dynamisms. This essential relationship is epitomized within the bounds of humans, animals, divine and nature interactions.

Igbo People

Igbo people or Ibo people are often referred to Ndigbo. Nigeria is a country of nations birthed in the 1914 amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates by Lord Laggard and infamously named as such as Nigeria by his mistress. into major ethnic groups as: *Hausa*, *Yoruba*, *Igbo* and other minor nations. Existing as a country of nations with much lauded unity in diversity would have been the best thing to have happened to her in the comity of other nations with vast human and natural resources amidst cultural diversities. The word nation is appreciated etymologically as a Latin word from *natus* meaning the root, made, produced by nature. In our context and usage, it has to do with people from the same root having same language, habit of culture and tradition in their dressing, type of food and so on. Our interest borders on *Igbo Nation as Ndigbo* (Onebunne, J. & Ezeaka, S. 2024)

The Igbo nation or tribe is very indigenous to the South-eastern part of Nigeria. The Igbo nation remains an ethnic group well-known for their enterprising spirit, independent disposition and adventurous nature. The Igbo people are natively referred to as Ndigbo. This nation of Igbo people has great value system embedded in their cherished culture and adorable tradition and popularized more in their variety of food, dance, music, musical instruments and diverse symbolic festivals. Ndigbo have this admirable resilience typified much in the reflection of their unique symbolism, Ikenga. However, the Igbo people are natively found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Delta and Rivers State. The Igbo language spoken in many dialects though with what is regarded as central Igbo language, is predominant throughout these areas, although Nigerian English (the national language) is spoken as well, (Onebunne, J. & Ezeaka, S. 2024).

Igbo Nation is equally known as ubiquitous nation. A popular saying has it that any place you travel to and couldn't find *onye igbo*, just know that that place is never habitable. And recently, people have added that such a place remains an economic dead zone. If such a place is viable economically, you ought to see an Igbo man. This is Igbo spirit that has to do with the attitude of adapting easily wherever *onye igbo* finds himself or herself. Beyond the shores of South-east Nigeria there exists a fraction of Igbo people amongst other nations of the globe. Most of the descendants of these Igbo people were and or transferred from Arochukwu to the new world *via* slavery which lost its glory in 1883. However, Igbo nation is just a dot in a circle was meant to be an insulting statement that turned to be a blessing. Nwachukwu, J. O. states that, Buhari had during an interview with Arise TV on Thursday, June 10, 2012¹ made reference implying that Igbo nation is merely a dot when he said that the, "IPOB is just like a dot in a circle. On another note, the dot-in-a-circle seems to give Ndigbo their ubiquitous nature knowing that a dot shows all round of a thing. Hence, the angle at a dot is 360 degrees. A dot, therefore, shows completeness of a sort.

Appreciation of Igbo Weltanschauung

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.) defines Weltanschauung as "a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint: world-view". The German word Weltanschauung literally means "world view"; it combines *Welt*, meaning "world,"

with *Anschauung*, meaning "view." When English speakers first adopted *Weltanschauung* in the mid-19th century, it referred to a philosophical view or apprehension of the universe, and this sense is still the most widely used. It can also describe a more general ideology or philosophy of life. *Weltanschauung* is an Anglicized German word which is translated and or is synonymous with the English word: world-view. It has assumed a form of peculiar and popular philosophy. It equally borders on particular and specific views of life. *Weltanschauung* is the world-view of an individual or group. Hence, we talk of Igbo world-view.

The word Igbo is ever seen as a language and a people in the context of Nwoye, C. M. A. (2011) presentations thus, "the term Igbo is used as a double signifier. On the one hand, it refers to one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. On the other hand, it is used to designate the language of this group, the Igbo people of Nigeria"...Igbo language is characterized by its tonality, the monosyllabic root-words and an absence of inflexional endings". Continuing, Nwoye (2011) defines Igbo world-view as "how people perceive and explain their world, or the ways things are or change in their environment. In other words, a world-view reflects people's basic assumptions about reality and perceptions of the universe, which give orientation and value to their lives. A people's world-view stands for their source of explanations for the ways things are in the world, including their theories of illness, death and misfortunes, and how human afflictions and problems can be resolved...Igbo traditional world-view is seen as heavily anthropocentric".

Igbo world-view is, in a very simple terms, all about how Igbo people see the world presented to them by *nature as well as by nurture* and how the world sees them too. It is a two-way complimentary views. World-views or *Weltanschauungs* (*Weltanschauungen*) are very important as they become sources of information in both ways. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.) defines World-view as "a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint". It is also called *Weltanschauung*. Igbo world-view as Igbo *Weltanschauung* is summarized in the life of Igbo people expressed in their culture and tradition especially in Igbo culture and Igbo tradition as *Omenala* Igbo.

Appreciation of Culture

The word culture is derived from the Latin verb *colere* meaning to cultivate. Culture as a man-made concept in its holistic significance is constituted by visible and invisible features, tangible and intangible realities, material and non-material characteristics in their forms and modes. Ekwuru (2010) in a complimentary remarks asserts that culture is also the spiritual form of a society. Mondin (2011) maintains that "certainly, man has always produced culture, because he's essentially a cultural, and not a natural, being", (p.145). Man by this definition remains *animal culturalis*, cultural animal, a cultural being. Culture, therefore, defines human beings as products of a nation. Nation depicts a people of same root or culture. Culture opens the nature of humanity as rational animals that interacts authoritatively with other realities in nature. Amidst many differential senses of popular appreciation of culture, Mondin (2011) asserts that "it is the mode of living proper to a society...culture is a dimension, a property of man as such", (p.146). In this understanding Mondin opined that culture is the soul of the human society and this amalgam between history and nature is culture, (Mondin, 2011). Onebunne, J. & Ezeaka, C. (2024) maintain that "culture is people's way of life and living. Culture is a human identity, hence, it is one of the indispensable aspects of human existence. The culture of a people, as it is usually understood, entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other peoples or societies", (p.45). This is why people all over the world of the same country, tribe, clan, region or

geographical location have a history. This history is distinct in their cultural heritages and practices that clearly defines and differentiates them from other people. The culture of a people is what marks them out distinctively from other human societies in the family of humanity (Onebunne & Ezeaka, 2024).

Man, essentially a product of culture, hence, a cultural being having been born into a particular way of life as culture. Scholars have accepted that culture defines a man and that is why a man's culture is his personality and identity deeply structured into his character as a man. Mondin (2011) gave this concept of culture different senses as egalitarian, pedagogical and anthropological through which man comprehends his environment. This is why Umeh (2017) maintains that culture regulates the circumstances of human development both corporeally and spiritually. One must note that various elements of culture as in mother-tongue, language, religion, food, dressing, language, marriage, music, norms and values form the lifestyle, identity or personality of a man. This culture, however, encounters other cultures and peoples thereby giving room for other types or nuances of cultural integration and reintegration as inculturation, enculturation and acculturation. Ndigbo in this respect are well cultured, deeply oriented, highly versed and cultured enterprise streaming alongside the nature of humanity as man or woman. Ndigbo are known and properly defined by their cultural outlook and heritages which they treasure much. And their culture, embedded in their lifestyle and personality is well established in great principles of egalitarian, togetherness and communalistic maxims expressed in many concepts like *igwebuikwe*, *onyeaghananwanneya*, *ibuanyidanda*, *onyebiriibeyabiri*, *ohanekwu*, *egbebereugobere*, *et cetera*. Most of their festivals, dances and songs as well as proverbs, idioms and every human institutions express their cultural traits. However, idea of cultures beyond concepts of inculturation, enculturation and acculturation leads to multiculturalism.

Perspectives on Multiculturalism

The concept, multiculturalism, is a product of two words *multi* and *culturalism*. Etymologically, *multi* is from Latin word *multus* much, many, more. *Multi* speaks of many, numerous, umpteen. Often it's a prefix giving us words like multiple, multifaceted, multitude, multimillionaire with meanings showing large indefinite quantity or numbers as in battalion. Culturalism is a concept that is culture related and the suffix *ism* simply relates to theories. Culturalism by an applied implication is a theory of culture. It is a theory on peoples' way of life as enshrined in their nature overtime as people from the same root within an environment. Multiculturalism as a bi-lexical word means theory of many cultures. The idea of multiculturalism expresses a kind of mixed ethnic community or a defined area where multiple cultural traditions exist. It's like a single country with many nationals. Collins & Forsyth (2014) define multiculturalism as a situation in which all the different cultural or racial groups in a society have equal rights and opportunities, and none is ignored or regarded as unimportant. Merriam-Websters (n.d.) complemented this definition by insisting that multiculturalism is a "cultural pluralism or diversity (as within a society, an organization, or an educational institution)". The dictionary maintains that it is "a multicultural social state or a doctrine or policy that promotes or advocates such a state". Multiculturalism, therefore, is a term that has come to serve as shorthand for a host of different and not necessarily related cultural and educational issues. Arguments relating to gender studies, ethnic and racial studies, affirmative action, freedom of speech on campus, compromise and corruption among educational administrators have all been aired under the title, multiculturalism, (Barnes, n.d.). This is why Ravitch (n.d.) is of the opinion that "successful multiculturalism builds the bonds of community that lead to interracial, inter-ethnic friendships".

Culture is the most and fundamental basic people's way of life. Migration has made it possible for people of different cultures and nations to meet. Moreover, migration is all about movement of peoples with all that define them as persons in a community, sharing communal dispensations within the ambient of communalism. Hence, as a people, they move with their cultures which embodies everything about their personality and being as cultural patterns and identities: language, food, religion, traditions, social patterns, leisure activities, and family structures. However, Stolnitz (1967) notes that "immigration involves not only the movement of peoples, but also the movement of cultures". Migration made it possible for multicultural interactions in our time. This is the fundamental appreciation of multiculturalism as coexistence of different culture and cultural dispensations. Rodrigues (n. d.) succinctly observes that "cultural diversity has been present in our societies for a very long time. In the 21st century, societies remain culturally diverse, with most countries having a mixture of individuals from different races, linguistic backgrounds, religious affiliations, *et ceteram*. Contemporary political theorists have labeled this phenomenon of the coexistence of different cultures in the same geographical space multiculturalism.

The phenomenon multiculturalism becomes a socio-political policy or socio-political theory that is meant to protect the cultural diversities inherent in people's *modus vivendum* and *modus operandum* in a well defined environment. However, the concept of multiculturalism is understood from two perspectives as descriptive perspectives (describing a society where a variety of different cultures coexist within the limits of religious and linguistic diversities) and cultural perspective as regards policy responding to cultural diversity (The second set of groups that are understood as a form of linguistic diversity are national minorities, referring to groups that have settled in the country for a long time, but do not share the same language with the majority), (Rodrigues, n. d.). Multiculturalism is equally witnessed in the existing global divides of global north and global south as well as the contemporary digital divides. In spite of the these divides there is still mutual interaction and complementary *connectedness* among the divided continents-countries on a socio-political cum economic gains. Rodrigues (n. d.) maintains that other third kind of group diversity can result from *distinct territory location* with regard to their specific geographical area in which they are located. And the fourth kind of group diversity is race. Racism has been an entrenched generational evil of humanity as it justified slavery and colonialism and all other forms of man's inhumanity to mankind even in this 21st Century. Doherty (1949) emphatically defines racism as, "a way of thinking that has dogmatized that notion that one ethnic group is condemned by the laws of nature to hereditary inferiority and another group is marked off as hereditary superior". The inhuman nature of racism attracted a maxim that there is only one race and it is the human race! Any other race is inhuman, unnatural and *undivine*. Nkrumah (1964) terms racism as *foul intellectual rubbish* while he reminded us that *we neither face east or west, we face forward*. And there is only one race, the human race. Nevertheless, Stolnitz (1967) insists that multiculturalism is the acceptance of a number of cultures within a multi-ethnic society. Multiculturalism as officially adopted public policy is very controversial. Those who favour a policy of multiculturalism assert that it promotes respect for individual differences, fosters diversity and promotes beneficial cultural evolution. Multiculturalism can be referred to as a cultural phenomenon divorced from politics and socio-economic dealings.

Appreciation of Tradition

Etymologically, tradition is from Middle English *tradicioun*, from Middle French & Latin; Middle French *tradicion*, from Latin *tradition-*, *traditio* action of handing over.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.) defines tradition as “an inherited, established or customary pattern of thought, action, or behaviour (such as a religious practice or a social custom)”. As a characteristic manner, method or style, tradition is a cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs and institutions. Tradition often has stories relating to the past that are commonly accepted as unique history. The complexness of tradition unfurls in a various forms from cultural customs and social norms to historical legacies and familial practices. Tradition as custom and all forms of customary innuendoes the seek to uncover the overarching trend influencing human society as the evolution of tradition reflects the dynamism inherent in nature of cultural practices over time. Traditions nevertheless evolved in response to the changing societal norms and scientific *cum* technological advancements, (Onebunne, J. & Ezeaka, S., 2024). Hence, a renowned philosopher, T.S. Eliot, once remarked that "a tradition without intelligence is not worth having." Globalization and consequent modernization has continued to influence our contemporary society. However, tradition is not static entities but it remains something that is constantly shaped by the ever-changing social conditions. This act of change gives room to evolution of traditional practices and resilience in cultural identity with nuances of adaptability that ensures relevance and continuity of traditions in a changing world. In this form of appreciation, tradition serves as means through which individuals and communities express their cultural indistinguishability, providing a sense of belongingness and traits of continuity as they link past, present, and future generations.

However, Onebunne & Ezeaka (2024) maintains that “tradition is very essential for maintaining and promoting cultural continuity and identity as well as contemporary realities and traditional customs inherent in communal celebrations, such as festivals and religious rituals, actively involving community members, reinforcing a shared identity and sense of togetherness”. This is the thrust of traditional values and traditional norms providing a framework for social interaction, ensuring a common understanding and cooperation among individuals within the society. Tradition is an *interconnectedness* of human life within the fabrics of human society with a significant and enduring impact on the inter-generational transmission of knowledge, customs and beliefs that cannot be overstated. Tradition passes down customs from elders to younger generations in a responsible and response-able sense of continuity and *connectedness* while maintaining a kind of coherence of cultural reorientation and cultural revival with great emphasis on an enduring value of cultural heritage and identity. In this understanding tradition explores and encounters modernity given rise to new traditional forms of societal structures, cultural norms and individual perspectives. This is why tradition holds an enduring significance in shaping and reshaping societies and individual identities. Equally, it plays a pivotal role in the evolution of cultural identity, social cohesion and inter-generational transmission of values. Traditions nevertheless survives and grows in contact with modernity as via culture as it super driving agent, hence, one speaks of cultural traditions or traditional cultures, (Onebunne & Ezeaka, 2024).

Omenala

Onebunne (2019) defines *Omenala Ndigbo* as “the customs, practices and traditions of the Igbo people. It comprises archaic practices as well as new concepts added into the Igbo culture either by cultural evolution or by outside influence”. Taking cognizance of tradition as something transferred from one generation unto another and culture as peoples way of life, *omenala* or *omenani* or *odibendi* translating and describing culture is the tradition and or culture of the people. A new version and appreciation of *omenala* is understood as *omenamadu*. The concept of *ala* in Igbo cosmogony is related to *mmadu* because in Igbo adage, *ala nwee mmadu nile* (the land owns every human being). The whole idea of *ala* is intrinsically related to *mmadu*.

Scripturally, *mmadu* came from *ala* (cf. Gen.2:7). Traditionally, in terms of evolution, Igbo people appreciates deeply that humans evolved from *ala* and its constitutional elements.

Again, in a large sense, *omenala* is *omenammadu*. Being the people's way of life, it is the people's thing, *ome (ndi) mmadu* (people's behaviour, people's way). *Omenala* is *omenammadu* as well as *ome (ndi) mmadu*. However, *omenala* is against *omenelu* and as well it is in contradistinction with *omenelu*. Hence, *omenala* is terrestrial and earth-bound. *Omenelu* is celestial and heavenly-bound. Hence, *omenelu* is related to *omenachukwu* as *Chukwu* is believed to have his abode up-there, that is, heavenly or celestially. Onebunne, J. (2019) reiterates that "*omenachukwu* is a new Igbo philosophical concept adapted to Christianize basic Igbo cultural practices, shaving it from idolatry and the worship of the earth-god, *ala*, because the earth was made for man's use and not to be worshiped by man. *Omenachukwu* therefore involves the application of some level of liberality in all our cultural practices such that everyone will be well incorporated and well stand the test of time. It involves the practice of *omenala* such that it will reflect what is acceptable in the contemporary society. It may also involve the creation of options where necessary and the idea of redressing it when it is necessary to stand the test of the moment". *Omenachukwu* involves the application of some level of liberality in all our cultural practices, such that everyone will be well incorporated, (Onebunne, 2019). Culture as *omenala* is an experiential derivatives, created out of peoples desire to be known, often unintentionally, with this way or that way of life, hence, culture is more or less organized, learned or created. This is why culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another (Hofstede, 1994). It is the set of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next' (Matsumoto, 1996).

Edeh (1985), defined tradition to mean "an inherited pattern of thought or action, such as a religious practice or a social custom. It also means cultural continuity in social attitudes and institutions. The Igbo concept of tradition includes all these and more", (p.78). Furthermore, he maintains that the Igbo word for tradition is *omenani*. It is also translated as *odibendi* that is, "according to what is accepted in one's community." *Omenani* comes from two roots, *ome* and *ani*. *Ome* denotes action, dynamic activity. It has the same root as *omume*, which means action, act, conduct, doing. This in turn has the same root as *omimi* which means mystery, depth, (Edeh, 1985). *Ani* means land, ground, soil. It is also the name used for the earth-god, the highest and most universal god in 19boland. She is regarded as the *foster mother* of all men. On her lap man is born and there he spends his whole life. *Ani* is the terrestrial expression of Chineke, the all-embracing supra-sensory being. To get a comprehensive idea of the Igbo concept of *omenani* we have to join to the usual dictionary meaning of tradition the notions of *ome*, *omume*, *omimi* on the one hand, and the notion of *ani* on the other. Drawing upon my discussions with Igbo elders, I would think of *omenani* as an inherited pattern of thought and action customarily and mysteriously in harmony with the dynamic creativity of being within the totality of all that is essential requirement of *omenani* (tradition) on the part of the individual is the identification of the individual with the totality of being, (Edeh, 1985). Most Igbo peoples' ways of life and interaction life bear the stamp of custom established in years of their cultural and traditional interactions as *omenala* and are sanctioned by the imprint and authority of the ancestors.

Omenala is a word from the Igbo language and culture. It refers to the tapestry of customs, traditions, beliefs and cultural practices of the Igbo people. *Omenala* encompasses and influences various aspects of Igbo life, including religious beliefs, social organization, rituals, ceremonies, art, language, literature, idioms, proverbs and orature. *Omenala* plays an enduring

and a significant role in shaping the identity and worldview of the Igbo people. As such *omenala* is passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition and lived experiences. In this core understanding, *omenala* is deeply rooted in the Igbo sense of community, spirituality and history. *Omenala* is *nwa tokwute otokwuru*. However, it shapes how Igbo people interact with one another, perceive the world and understand their place within it. Thus, *omenala* is an integral component of Igbo culture, contributing to its richness and diversity. *Omenala* is therefore rich in cultural diversities and traditional variedness. Often taken as culture, tradition refers to the transmission of customs, beliefs and practices from one generation to another. *Omenala* embodies the traditional heritage of the Igbo people, serving as a repository of their collective wisdom, experiences and history. It is passed down orally through storytelling, rituals, ceremonies, and everyday interactions within Igbo communities. *Omenala* provides continuity and a sense of identity across generations, anchoring Igbo society in its cultural root. In summary, *omenala*, *in stricto sensu* as culture and *omenana in lato sensu* as tradition are interconnected and have interconnecting elements that shape the identity, values, and practices of Igbo society. *Omenala* serves as the cultural and traditional framework through which the Igbo people understand themselves, their historical past as people, invigorates their present condition and delves into their place in the world. This is why *omenala* both *in stricto* and *in lato sensu*, grows and accommodates other people's way of life. There are many cultural and traditional practices of the Igbo people. That is to say that Igbo people have a rich cultural heritage that is shown through various traditional practices as:

- *Iri/Iwa Ji (New Yam Festival)*: is an annual celebration held by Igbo communities to mark the beginning of the yam harvest season. It is a time of thanksgiving to the deities and ancestors for a bountiful harvest and an opportunity to showcase cultural dances, music, and traditional cuisine. However, during planting season some celebratively prepare for its beginning as they tag it *erichaa apuo ubi!* Most recently the Catholic Bishop of Ekwulobia Diocese, His Eminence, Peter Cardinal Okpaleke called the attention of everyone to begin to celebrate beginning of planting season so as to be ready to celebrate harvesting season culminated in New yam festivities.

Cardinal Okpaleke, on Wednesday March, 13th, 2024 called on the people of the diocese to gird their loins and conscientiously prepare for the commencement of farming season for the year in his speech titled, *Call People Back To Farm*. Cardinal Okpaleke issues directives on farming season 2024." The Prince of the Mother Church, while lamenting the critical situation of hunger in the country, fearing its consequences, directs that all hands should be on deck in leading the people back to farming. Going further and in line with the ideals of inculturation, he harps on the need for the church becoming agents of cultural reproduction to ensure food security for all. He directs that every community, either with one or many parishes, agree on the date to ritualize the beginning of the farming season with the celebration of the Eucharist, praying God to bless the work of our hands. He requests that in doing this, young ones should be involved so as to help in nurturing them on the gains of good labour and consequent harvest of same. Cardinal Okpaleke further approves that 'parishes in communities where people have limited access to arable land are to introduce the idea of cultivating in cement bags with manured soil. Again, Cardinal Okpaleke made another complementary remark on Wednesday March 27th 2024 at St Joseph's Cathedral, Ekwulobia during the homily he delivered to mark Ekwulobia Region Chrism Mass and Cathedraticum for the year 2024 titled, *Solution To Hunger In The Land Lies In Our Hands*, lamented thus, "many of our people have for long forgotten that farming is a critical measure by which we can sustain food adequacy for all and by so doing fight hunger and all the diseases that comes with it. He noted with regret that many towns in the state celebrate New Yam festival with yams bought from the northern part of the

country and queries why that should be so among a people known in the past for their mastery in farming. He called on parents, community and Church leaders as well as all men and women of goodwill to lead frontally in taking all back to farming, back to cultivating the land and growing various types of food items, vegetables and fruits. He urged them to see to it that all virgin and arable lands are cultivated”.

- *Mmanwu (Masqarade)*: masked performers who embody ancestral spirits during cultural festivals and ceremonies. They dance through the streets accompanied by music and drumming, entertaining the community, act as policing agent and security devices for many towns and conveying messages from the spirit world.

- *Igba Nkwu (Traditional Marriage)*: *Igba Nkwu* is the traditional marriage ceremony of the Igbo people, characterized by elaborate rituals and customs that symbolize the union of two families. It involves negotiations between the families of the bride and groom, traditional blessings, exchange of gifts, and communal feasting. IT often brings religious acts in consonance with traditional performances.

- *Ichi Ozo (Title Taking Ceremony)*: In this ceremony the individuals are conferred with traditional titles in recognition of their contributions to the community or achievements in various fields. One may equally chose to take any title as long as he’s found worthy. It involves rituals, blessings from elders, and the presentation of symbolic items

Omenala is a basic concept in Igbo cosmology rich in rituals and ceremonies that mark various vestiges of human life: From Marriage and conception expanding through death and after life as seen in Ancestors. Therefore, *omenala* encompasses a pantheon of lesser deities and spirits, each with its own domain of influence. These include *Ala*, the earth goddess; *Amadioha*, the god of thunder and lightning; and *Ikenga*, the god of success and personal achievement. *Omenala* is rooted in a deep reverence for nature, ancestors and the supreme deity, *omenala* encompasses a tapestry of realities that define human society in its social life and entertainment. Explicit healthy acts of *omenala* which has human face as *actus humanus*, human acts, are reflected in all forms of *omenachukwu*.

Omenachukwu

Omenana in contradistinction with *omenachukwu* is the peoples trado-cultural way of living and interacting within the human society while *omenachukwu* is people’s way of living an enlightened life by God’s word and often through the dictates of one’s conscience, whereupon such conscience is defined as the voice of God. Onebunne, J. (2019) maintains that “*Omenala* and *Omenachukwu* are wings of basic and fundamental human trado-religious activities and interactions in Igbo society. *Omenala* as basic *human culture* can be defined as shared pattern of behaviour and interactions, cognitive constructions and affective understanding that are learned through a process of inter and intra socialization”. *Omenachukwu* translates essentially as *Divine Culture* and in a large sense, Christianity and by extension, inculturation. *Omenala* and *Omenachukwu* are basic human activities within human society in relation to a patterned way of life as well as to a *being* of a sort...in Igbo Society, between *omenala* and *omenachukwu* is a vital activity seen in ‘*ome*’ and the conjunction ‘*na*’ relates the activity either to culture as expressed in the concept of *ala* and *Chukwu* as to a supreme being (Onebunne, 2019). One of the Christian culture or *omenachukwu* is *ekpere*.

Ekpemekpe

Traditionally, Igbo people as “African peoples do not know how to exist without religion”. And if there is no religion, a typical Igbo man, that is, an African man, would have created one. The sole reason is that a typical Igbo man (African man) must worship something as *homo religiosus*. Hence, *omenala* and *ekpemekpe* interwoves. Yet *omenala* exists as well as *Ekpemekpe*. *Ekpemekpe* as religious practices and or worship in Igbo worldview are deeply rooted in their traditional belief systems, socio-economic practises cum political dispensations. This is why worship in Igbo worldview revolves around a complex system of beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies that honour the spiritual forces, ancestors and deities that govern the universe. Central to this form of Igbo religious beliefs is the concept of a supreme deity, often known as *Chukwu* or *Chineke*, who is believed to be the creator of all things and the ultimate source of life and power. This supreme deity in Igbo religious belief system encompasses a tapestry of a pantheon of lesser deities and spirits, each with their own spheres of influence over different aspects of nature, human affairs and the spiritual realm. These deities may include among others: Ala, the earth goddess; Amadioha, the god of thunder and lightning; and Ikenga, the god of success and personal achievement. Equally, these religious practices and or worship in Igbo worldview known as African Traditional Religion (ATR) with all the forms of Ancestor worship, idol worship and bizarre references involve a variety of rituals and ceremonies conducted to honour and appease the deities and spirits; seek their guidance and blessings and maintain harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds. These rituals may include offerings of sacrifices, prayers, libations and divination ceremonies performed by designated priests, *dibias* or diviners. However, one must note that religion fully expressed in religious beliefs, in religious practices and or worship have their effects on the Igbo community and nevertheless are keys to a good understanding and appreciation of the Igbo ideological worldview (Onwubiko, 1991). One, therefore, notes some forms of *ekpemekpe* in Igbo worldview. *Ekpemekpe* in Igbo worldview is rooted in many forms classes of worship, from monotheism to polytheism, pantheism to deism, atheism and dualism (Okafor & Onebunne, 2019). However, there is this form of polytheism or dualism that can be reduced into monotheism by a dint of fine scholarship that defines the traditional Igbo religion thereby giving accounts for many of the cultures and customs of the Igbo people. And this old singular but mere identification has chanced the contemporary melange and mixing of *omenala* with *ekpemekpe*.

Omenala As Tradition in Dialogue with Culture

This idea will lead us to what Onebunne (2019) refers to as *Philosophy of Inculturation: From Omenala to Omenachukwu*. Hence, in reference to above citation Onebunne, J. maintains that if there is one thing which is not detachable from society, that would be people’s culture. Culture is considered as one of the most important entities that a society possesses, because it shapes the future and contains the society’s pasts and future in their present. Culture plays a crucial role in terms of building communal peace and keeping individuals away from disrespectful behaviours. The Igbo land is beset with myriads of culture assimilation and crises. This is evident in the ubiquitous presence of syncretisms as well as all forms of abracadabra in our society today in the name of castigating Christianity and return once existed culture. However, some of them do return to religious disposition, that is a return to outdated paganism! Culture grows! No one can return to an already grown culture. Ignorantly and very painfully, many uniformed person have taken to social media to condemn Western education. Rightly put, they try to blame the West for bringing Christianity but they culpably accepts Commerce and Colonization of western civilization as typified in the language they speak (English), social media they use (western technology), other western amenities they enjoy especially their

dressing and the houses they live in, *et cetera*. Christianity is now poses a problem to our contemporary society. It's most unfortunate that such persons use social media and enjoy all the benefits of western civilization save Christianity. This is civic arrogance and contemporary prodigious ignorance. Today than ever, the yawning gap between the Church as an institution and culture widens with much crises of identity as well as social conflicts that prevail in many parts of Igbo land. It is through being part of our cultural practices and welcoming others into it that we show that we truly belong to a community. In promoting our culture or tradition, we try to make it blend with Christian worship. We can do this by aligning some elements of Christianity to our culture especially the good ones, *vice versa*. Equally, it can happen when Christian light shines forth on our culture thereby enlightening it. This is our responsibility. Being involved in our cultural-traditional enlightenment for the progress and socio-political development of our society as necessary activity is not against the word of God. (Onebunne, 2019)

Tradition refers to the transmission of customs, beliefs and practices from one generation to another. *Omenala* embodies all the traditional heritages of the Igbo people, serving as a repository of their collective wisdom, experiences and history. It is passed down orally through storytelling, rituals, ceremonies and everyday interactions within Igbo communities. *Omenala* provides continuity and a sense of identity across generations, anchoring Igbo society in its cultural roots. While culture encompasses a broader range of elements, including language, art, social organization, and spirituality, *omenala* specifically pertains to the conventional aspects of Igbo culture, making it more closely aligned with the concept of tradition.

Contemporary Abracadabra in the Appreciation of *Omenala* and *Ekpemekpe*

In what one may call neopaganism or properly undue revival of Godism or paganism all in the name of ATR as culture is worrisome. There is this contemporary youth return to idol worship or paganism. There is a melange of traditional religious practices with culture, all being blended as one. This depicts sheer crass ignorance. Cajolingly, my father, Nze Simeon U. Onebunne, *Abiakódudu*, used to refer to them as *educated pagans*, (Onebunne, 2019a). That is, seeing our youths who are no more rural or rustic (as such as in defining pagan) behaving like an uncivilised people. These educated youths and supposedly, the informed youths have relapsed into idol worshipping in the name of *ime omenala*. It is presumed that many of them, as educated they seem to show, have failed in a simple appreciation of education as *leading out of ignorance and leading into knowledge*. There is, therefore, a return to some shameful pagan practices that are archaic and out-moded. Many towns celebrate their markets *aji arusi hibe*. There is a return to a religion they don't even know of. Today many more trees in our towns and villages are tied with red and white cloths in the name doing what their forefathers did as *omenala*. This is mere transvaluation of values.

However, some of their father actually brought, instituted and worshiped such idols and later abandoned them for a superior religion in Christianity. Some of such idols were revered in total and crass ignorance. Today the so called *ndi dibia* are every where and subscribe to what they invent and try to reconstruct from the ruins of the yore years of their fathers ignorance. The social media has neither helped as some of these *dibias* and modern *ezenwayi* are every where showcasing their religious business. Shamelessly many things they do are done in the name of culture as religion. Describing the scenario well, in an exclusive Interview with *Savio-Spring Magazine* on the *Resurgence of Traditional Igbo Religious Beliefs and Practices Among Young People: Challenges and Prospects*, Peter Cardinal Okpaleke reiterates thus, "What is different today is the main-streaming of modified versions of Igbo traditional religious ideas and practices and the appeal of this to young people. These use modern means of communication to propagate these beliefs. One sees many more trees, in towns and villages, with white or red

clothes tied around them. *Ndi dibia* advertise their services on social media. Some young and baptized Christians publicly renounce their Christian faith, which wonders how much of it know and have experienced. They subscribe to what they invent as the traditional religion. Paradoxically, want to bring back the beliefs and practices which our forefathers renounced when they got converted to Christianity. Having lost this religious tradition in its purity and integrity, they invent beliefs and practices to address the present circumstances. For example, in response to capitalism and the new economy it brought about, the idea of *okite* or *ogwu ego* emerged.” Its unfortunate that we are in the age of crisis and confusion as Albert Camus once stated. Most parents of these young people involved in these atrocious religious reinvention were Christians. Now the question is from where did their children learned.

Conclusion

In sum, the idea that man is a culturally religious animal integrates two aspects of human nature: the cultural aspects and the religious aspects. Man is a culturally religious animal suggests that humans, as cultural beings, use culture to shape, express, and systematize their religious experiences, practices, and beliefs. Religionism or rightly put, religiosity is a by-product of human evolution, as it fosters group cohesion and survival, (Wilson, 1998). Religion as the *ultimate concern* of humanity, where cultural expressions such as art, music, and architecture are used to express the transcendent. (Tillich, 1957). In these contexts, religion is beyond the worship of something higher than man is often described as a universal attribute in human cultures. Anthropologists like Clifford Geertz argue that religion provides a "system of symbols" that gives meaning to human existence and aligns personal experiences with broader cultural frameworks. In his unique definition, Geertz (1973) maintains that religion is "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations". Through religion, therefore, human beings as cultural beings, organize their spiritual inclinations into rituals, stories and institutions that are culturally specific. Equally, Émile Durkheim, a sociologist, highlights that religion is a social phenomenon, rooted in collective cultural practices. For him, religious practices are embedded in cultural traditions. In this context one appreciates the fact that religion unites communities through shared rituals and beliefs, making it a cultural product of human society. We must note that, the interplay between religion and culture is evident in how religious systems adapt to local traditions. The Church often refers to that as inculturation. There are other ideological concepts like acculturation and enculturation. However, scholars like Smart, N. (1998) emphasizes that religious systems are shaped by their cultural environments, creating diverse religious expressions worldwide. Echoing Paul Tillich further, human beings are known to demonstrate their cultural creativity in religious contexts. Notably, therefore, man as a culturally religious being collectively demonstrate that humans are "culturally religious animals," as their religiosity is not isolated but deeply intertwined with any existing cultural systems.

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