

AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF FORCES IN IGBO ONTOLOGY

Dr. Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo (Ph.D)

Department of Philosophy

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State.

Email: ratzingerjunior2020@gmail.com

Abstract

The question of the reality and the nature of being have preoccupied debates not only in western philosophy but also among African philosophy especially in the bid to rationally prove the existence of traditional African philosophy. Efforts have been made to critically expose the theory of forces or being among African groups. This involves a holistic approach towards understanding the realities in the African universe. Among the Igbo-African group, there are a plethora of forces inhabiting both the visible and invisible worlds. These forces operate at different levels or hierarchical order while intercommunicating in ways that the action of one affects the other. In this essay our attention shall be focused on the kinds of realities and the influences they have among themselves in Igbo ontology. We shall be considering the categories of forces, their hierarchy and nature and the role they play in the order of existence. Attention will equally be given to the unique place of man in the order of beings. Using the method of hermeneutics, this essay elucidates the two worlds in Igbo universe - the visible world and the invisible world. These worlds are inhabited by visible beings and invisible beings respectively. A cordial relationship among these forces ensures cosmic balance whereas the reverse brings about chaos and disaster.

INTRODUCTION

There has been admittedly a corpus of literature devoted to the hermeneutics of being in African ontology. African philosophers in response to the question of the existence of African Philosophy have dissipated large amount of energy trying to prove that there is no pre-logical age in Africa; that Africa has a well thought-out philosophy as considerably contained in their myths, folklores, and world-views. Efforts is been made to critically expose the theory of forces among African groups. This involves their holistic understanding and approach towards every reality in their universe.

For the African, there is a hierarchy in being or forces in their universe. These forces are never equal in power or degree of influence over other beings. The common denominator among African groups and subgroups is that these forces live in two separate interrelated worlds - the visible and the invisible worlds for the visible and invisible forces, physical and spiritual forces respectively. It is equally a common belief

that man assumes a central position in the created order. Whatever exists enjoys its being insofar as it affects man whether positively or negatively.

Nevertheless, our intention here is not to dwell on theory of forces in Africa at large nor to entertain the details of different opinions expressed by several scholars on the ontological structure of Igbo world-view,¹ but to specifically attempt an epistemic perusal of the existence and arrangement of the forces inhabiting the universe in the interpretation of the Igbo people. Forces in Igbo world-view are, alongside their African counterparts, graded in different kinds or ranking according to their level of importance, with respect to their qualities and powers considering their respective roles in the ontological order in nature. They can be arranged in hierarchy either in ascending or descending order, provided they are accorded their rightful positions. Also, they are fundamentally classified into visible and invisible forces in relation to the existence of two worlds in Igbo world-view. In what will soon follow, I shall give a detailed analysis of forces in Igbo ontology.

THE IGBO THEORY OF FORCES

The forces in the Igbo world-view are graded in different kinds or ranking according to their level of importance with respect to their qualities and powers considering their respective roles in their ontological order in nature. They can, therefore, be arranged in hierarchy either in ascending or descending order, provided they are properly accorded their rightful positions. Fundamentally, they are classified into visible and invisible forces in relation to the existence of two worlds. While the visible forces occupy the physical world, the invisible forces dwell in the spirit world. In the articulation of Tempels, he states the ontological hierarchy of forces from God to the least elements thus:

Above all force is God, spirit and creator...it is he who has force, power in himself. He gives existence, power and survival and increase to other forces... After him came the first father's of men, founders of different clans... They constitute the most important chain binding men to God... After these first parents came the dead of the tribe following their order of primogeniture. They form a chain through the links of which the forces of elders exercise their vitalizing influence on the living generation... After the category of human forces come the other forces, animal, vegetable and mineral.²

However, for clarity and systematic order of arrangement, we shall borrow from the two eminent scholars - Nwala and Mbaegbu, whom in their different elucidations have contributed extensively to the growth of Igbo philosophy.

Following their model, all the forces in Igbo ontology are further classified into three main broad categories which are: spirits and forces (*mmuṅ*), human beings (*mmadu*) and things (*ihe*). It is believed that "all things, all essence, in whatever form it is conceived can be subsumed under one of the categories. Nothing in Igbo ontology can

be conceived outside of them."³ Each of these main categories has other subcategories to accommodate the whole of reality in the Igbo universe. Consequently, in ascending order, the hierarchy of forces in Igbo ontology can be represented as follows:

At the base or bottom of this hierarchy are the *Ihe* (Things) namely, minerals, plants and animals. After things, come *Madu* (Human Beings), (their rationality differentiates them from things); *Ndi-Muo* (Human Spirits); *Muo* (Non-Human - Spirits), the immortality of the human and Non-Human spirits differentiates them from other classes of beings and at the apex is *CHI-UKWU* (The Greatest *Chi*), in the order. His creative power differentiates Him from all other created beings. Thus, he is the author and creator of all things in the universe both spiritual and temporal.⁴

But for the purpose of this work we shall discuss in details all the forces in these categories and their sub-categories in a descending order beginning with the highest being to the least in the hierarchy. It is important to mention that irrespective of the magnitude number of forces inhabiting the Igbo universe, the Igbo conceive the cosmos in terms of unity without any form of dichotomy. All the forces interact with each other and this can be seen as unity in diversity a fluid coherent unit in which spirits, men, animals, plants and the elements are engaged in continuous interaction. Both the physical and spiritual are united; these words form a perfect union as they intermingle and randomly shade into each other without restriction. Describing the interaction between these worlds Uchendu, observes it as not isolated phenomena but all so interwoven and interdependent that they mutually co-habit and harmoniously relate to one another in a world where the creator and the creatures are mutually engaged, like players and spectators, or like a conductor and musicians in an orchestra."⁵ The interaction of beings in Igbo world-view can be likened to that of the Bantu as demonstrated by Tempels. The concept of being in Bantu thought is rendered by the term 'vital force' because being is dynamic and is thought to be alive. Essentially every being is thought to be active. It is all the time acting and acted upon by all other beings. No being is completely static not even a stone or a piece of metal. A being that does not act is a non-being. It does not exist. Hence, being is alive, it is seen as a 'he' rather than an 'it'. Being is capable of being strengthened or weakened through interaction with other beings. Beings maintain an intimate ontological relationship and constantly interact with one another transcending mechanical, chemical and psychological interactions. Though such interactions, forces either strengthen or weaken one another. Beings in the world are therefore, linked by a network of relationships. No being is an island, or ever being a juxtaposition of independent forces each operating on its own. All creatures are found in relationship according to the laws of the hierarchy. This he notes when he wrote that: "Nothing moves in the universe of forces without influencing others by its movement. The world of forces in like spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network."⁶ The result of

interaction of forces in Igbo ontology is the maintenance of integration and balance of the forces in it, in which man is the focal point. And the objective of existence is to live a life of harmony with humanity and with nature. Man is always conscious that the essence of his existence is in connection with other force both spiritual and material that determines a greater part of his goodness or wellbeing and once in opposition with them can bring a serious calamity. Oguejiofor puts it that:

Man is a noble and valuable being. Nevertheless, his nobility and his value in general are very much linked with other factors that may otherwise be considered extrinsic by an outside observer. The Igbo however consider these factors as intrinsically bound up with the goodness of man. For him, abnormal conditions affecting man adversely are not merely accidental. They believe that somehow major diseases and misfortunes must be connected with the transgression of the moral order, and in a major way detract from the nobility of man... However, the anthropocentricity of Igbo world view does not make man the beginning and the end of existence. For the Igbo, existence is meaningful in so far as it affects the life of man. But they are religious through and through, and their religiosity is best understood in reference to their belief in uncountable spiritual forces. Thus, there are beings that impinge very much on the life of man and, to a great extent, determine his lot in it.⁷

The unity and interaction of forces in Igbo ontology lies on the effort of man as a higher force endowed with intelligence and rationality to maintain harmony with all other forces both higher and below him in the hierarchy. In these interactions, forces are strengthened or diminished but there is always a balance because both the higher and the lower forces have their respective roles in which they manifest their significance. All the forces inter-relate through one means or the other and effort must be made to remain at peace with the connectivity of every essence. According to Ikenga-Metuh, he remarks that:

Man strives to be in harmony with God, the deities, and his fellow men both living and dead. He feels himself in intimate rapport and tries to maintain harmonious relationship with the animal, vegetable, and other elements and phenomena in the universe. For him, the first evil is disintegration for this would spell disaster both for himself and his immediate world. The ideal thing is integration, communion and harmony. Man must constantly consult oracles and divination to assure him that he is on the right relationship with all the forces in the world. He must frequently engage in ritual to reinforce his communion with the forces or repair any interruption that may have occurred... man tries to maintain harmony with his family and the human society through ancestor cult and rites of passage. While through divination, and magic he relates with the lower forces and protects himself against forces of disintegration like witches, sorcerers and evil spirits.⁸

Notwithstanding the dynamics of interrelationship among the forces in existence, the Igbo world is essentially one, both the visible and the invisible, the spiritual and material, the profane and the sacred are united in one encompassing universe contrary to the two worlds found in European philosophy and theology.⁹

Nevertheless, having seen the hierarchical arrangement, the unity and interaction of the forces in Igbo ontology, we shall now turn our lens to the different categories of forces to ascertain their nature, their level of existence and how they interact with other forces or possibly influence them and other occurrences in the universe. *MMUỌ (SPIRIT CATEGORY AND SUB-CATEGORY)*

The Igbo conceive the universe to be full of spirits. The Igbo world is not limited to the material world of visible forces, but includes the realm of invisible forces. The spirits are called *mmuọ* and the invisible sphere is the spirit world of the spirit forces (*Ala, Ani, Ana Mmuọ*). The spirit world is populated by various spiritual forces of different qualities and roles. There are three main types of spirits - *Chukwu* (The Supreme Being), *Mmuọ* (Non-human, disembodied or pure spirits), *Ndi-Mmuo* (Human or embodied spirits). These spirits are also arranged in hierarchical order and the order of our discussion will follow thus: *Chukwu* (The Supreme Being), *Agbara* (Deities), *Ndichie* (Ancestral spirits or the living dead), *Uluchi* (spirits of the dead), spirit forces, *Ogwu* (Mystical/Magical Powers), and Evil Spirits.

CHUKWU (THE SUPREME BEING)

Let us begin the examination of God - *Chukwu* (The Greatest Being) with some extract from the elucidation of Nnabuchi in what he called "The Riddle of God," in one of his publications, *In Defence of Igbo Belief System*. He painted the picture of the Supreme Being in the following lines:

God has never been part of us, yet in every face of life or creation, It dwells in the highest, yet could be found in worlds and forms; it is alive yet 'dead' millions of years ago; it is formless yet exists as forms including man, plants, fishes, etc.; it is both the creator and the created, Nature exists without God yet creation cannot come into being without the supreme one. God is not the first and last impulse of creation, yet the beginning and the end. God is neither good, bad nor even neuter, yet good, bad or neuter is embodied into its beingness and creation; it is the power house and nerve centre of all teachings, religions, philosophies, mystery schools, occult groups, faith and belief systems, yet a stranger in their midst and onlooker in their actions, words and deeds; of itself, God is a single indivisible constituency, yet seen and exists as uncountable number of constituencies. In short all the characteristics and qualities of God's creation are expressed and embodied in the creator, the Supreme Being itself.¹⁰

Like other Africans, the Igbo traditionally conceive and recognize the existence of a Supreme Being whom they address as God - *Chukwu*, as the first and greatest in the hierarchy of forces. *Chukwu* is a pure spirit and always seen as the creator of the universe and every existence. In Igbo world-view there are three different names for the creator: "*Chukwu* - the great providence; *Chineke* - creator providence, and *Osebuluwa* - Lord carrier of the world. Although all the names are now used in all parts of Igbo land, each name stems from a different area."¹¹ The Igbo understands the Supreme God - *Chukwu* using the expression of Tempels (1959) as "He who has force, power in himself. He gives existence, power of survival and increase, to other forces."¹² However, as the greatest Being, the Igbo recognize some relationship between *Chukwu* and Deities. The Deities who are next in the ontological hierarchy are sometimes referred to as the sons of *Chukwu*, or his messengers, and sometimes as his manifestations "...the creator (*Okike*) of everything, transcends the world, and at the same time is imminent through the deities who are His messengers and representatives in nature; and especially through *Chi* the spirit guardians regarded as manifestations of Himself which reside in every creature."¹³ The Igbo believe that the sacrifices they offer to the Deities are ultimately received by *Chukwu*, hence the Deities are messengers and mediators who are at His service as ministering spirits whose function primarily is to fulfill the desires and commands of the Supreme Being. Shelton in his remark writes that:

Worship of the lesser deities is an act of worshipping the high god, who is considered to be imminent, is subordinate beings or is symbolized by the images of lesser deities. In any case, whatever powers the inferior deities possess, these powers are ultimately derived from God, the source. Thus, among the Igbo in Eastern Nigeria, deity shrines (among which are those of *Ani*) are common, but it is also understood that the deities are descendent powers, especially considered of *Chukwu* (*Chi*, *Okike*, *Chineke*).¹⁴

There has been contention about the Igbo traditional belief in the existence of a Supreme Being at the apex of the ontological order with a lot of varying opinions among scholars. As some challenge the originality of *Chukwu* as a name for the Supreme God, others express their skepticism "on the exclusive supremacy of *Chukwu*, even when accepting the presence of a certain notion of supremacy."¹⁵ A whole lot of others make known their total rejection of the idea of a Supreme Being in Igbo traditional belief system. To this controversy, Oguejiofor expresses concern on the negative impact of early missionaries in their condemnation of traditional religion as this poses much difficulty in getting at the original Igbo traditional belief. Be that as it

may, he remarks that whatever the Igbo conception of *Chukwu*, it can never stand for the Christian God.

AGBARA (Divinities/Gods/Deities)

Next to *Chukwu* is *Agbara* often believed to be created by God in the ontological category of forces. In the instance of most African scholars, they believe they are associated with God, and often stand for His activities or manifestations either as personifications or as spiritual forces in charge of these major objects or phenomena of nature.

Nwala is of the opinion that *Agbara* oversees some areas of human affairs such as fertility, protection, and also exercises control over certain phenomena.¹⁶ We are using *Agbara* to refer to the whole lots of what many scholars have classified as Divinities, gods or Deities. Divinities or Deities, in Mbiti's assertion refer to the "personifications of God's activities and manifestations of natural phenomena and objects, the so-called 'nature spirits', deified heroes and mythological figures."¹⁷ The whole of Igboland is populated with Divinities or Deities as every town or community is peculiar with one kind of divinity or the other. While they sometimes act in their own, these divinities are believed to be, most times, doing the biddings of *Chineke*.¹⁸ There are six popular divinities among the Igbo - *Anyanwu* (Sun god), *Igwe* (Sky god), *Ala* (Earth god), *Ifejioku*, *Agwu* and *Amadioha*. Each and everyone of them is famous with respect to the functions assigned to them by the supreme God or by the particular aspect of human endeavour they are meant to take charge. *Anyanwu*, for instance, is an important and a beneficent major non-personal and non-human deity, the male principle, lord of light and life, controlling the sun and causing the growth of vegetations. *Anyanwu* is mostly worshipped in Nsukka division of the Northern Igbo sub-cultural area. *Amadioha* is lightning as well as the god of thunder. He is known for executing God's punishment by striking a person or his house with fire. His anger can be felt by his capability to uproot a big iroko or palm tree from the taproot. In recent times, he has become the patron of all who use anything made of iron - from hoes to bicycles, motor-cars and sowing machines.¹⁹ But the most revered is *Ala*, the earth deity.

Ala is said to be the great mother spirit, the queen of the underworld, the owner of men, and the custodian of public morality in conjunction with the ancestors. The *Ifejioku* in collaboration with *Ala* protects the main food of the Igbo - yam. *Ifejioku* is widespread throughout Igboland. Sacrifices are made to *Ifejioku* before the planting season and soon after the harvesting of new yams. Annually, the Igbo celebrate the new yam festivals through which they honour the deity responsible for protecting yam and for good harvest. Describing these deities and their principal functions in relation to the creator, and in their ontological order, Ikenga-Metuh remarks that:

...the Igbo deities form the great circle of non-human spirits, who come next to God in the ontological hierarchy and are believed to be his great agents, helping Him to shepherd different sections of this creation. Some have their abode in the sky and are believed to be very near *Chukwu*; others live below and come under *Ala*, the earth mother. However, the deities are more often conceived with reference to the services they render to man; *Chukwu* who created them, assigned them specific functions. *Anyanwu*, the sun brings good fortune; *Ala* herself is the custodian of law and morality and guarantor of political stability. *Chi* assures fertility and provides guidance and protection; *Agwu* is the deity of medicine and is also responsible for spirit possession, prophecy and divination.²⁰

Ala is greatly revered that no one could afford to offend or discard. Echeruo believes that *Ala* would be the supreme deity if there was a supreme God among the Igbo.²¹ While some scholars like Meek that *Ala* is the most important deity among the Igbo, and by extension the supreme god in Igbo ontology,²² some contend that logically in all ramifications both ontologically and otherwise, she cannot be supreme. Besides, irrespective of the much reverence to *Ala*, she is not a single universal deity among the Igbo.²³ Oguejiofor in his well elaborate and coherent argument contends that:

Offences that are regarded as defilement of *Ala* are binding only on those who live within a particular community, or within a community in which one has blood relations. When these offences have their direct adverse effect on a human being, it will be a serious abomination against *Ala* if a member of a community or a permanent resident is affected. In many Igbo communities for instance, stealing of yams from a farm is abominable. There even communities which do not being anybody who has stolen yams from a farm. But such a stringent measure seems to apply only when such a defilement of *Ala* is committed within the community in question or against a member of the community. In cases where the community becomes aware that their land has been defiled by a stranger, they can either offer expiatory sacrifice or seek redress. But it is not known that the *Ala* of a foreign community holds in ransom an offender who is neither a member of the community nor a resident. Such examples can be multiplied.²⁴

Though we are not interested in all the deities in the Igbo spirit world but there is need to mention that there are minor deities who equally participate in the affairs of men. In most cases they are not regarded as part of the power that rules the world but they immensely benefit man in many respects. Among which are *Ikenga*, the symbol of strength of a man's right hand, the harbinger of good luck and success; *Ofo*, the symbol of justice, etc.²⁵ They range from clan deity to personal deity. We wish to end this section with Ilogu's assertion that:

Then there are innumerable minor deities, personifications of facts and features of daily life... these minor gods and godlings could be very

meddlesome in the affairs of daily life; hence the innumerable sacrifices offered to keep them happy and beneficial to man's enterprises, such as agriculture, hunting, marriage and warfare. The minor gods, however, are not very important in the people's conception of power that rules this world and of man's share in that power or life-force or energy. They are sometimes controlled by man's magic or by sheer will-power. Sometimes they are concerned to the advantage of the community by the activities (sacrificial, benevolent or otherwise) of a chief or one dedicated to the gods, such as *dibia* (medicineman).²⁶

NDICHIE (Ancestral Spirits)

These are non-human spirits and human spirits in Igbo ontology, among the human spirits, the ancestors are the greatest in hierarchy. The non-human spirits refers to pure spirits like the Supreme Being and the Deities, but the human spirits consist of spirits of one time human beings which are therefore disembodied or disincarnated. In this group of spirits are souls, ghosts, witches and ancestors. Ancestorship is the dearest expressions of the traditional Igbo believe in life after death. Hence, the nature, the living dead' as suggested by Mbiti and collaborated by scholars like C. B. Okolo who said that they are so-called because, though dead yet they are alive with their particular families, are certainly part and parcel of their own physically living families and are often invited to family meals. However, some scholars have argued that the 'living dead' could be a useful term to designate all the departed, but should not be a replacement for ancestors. This is because, ancestors constitute a special category among the spirits of the departed and equally have a special recognition in the Igbo tradition and culture which must not be confused with other spirits of the dead who are not ancestors. Indeed death alone is not a guarantee for becoming an ancestor; for there are many implications. To this, Ikenga-Metuh declares that:

The deceased have the requisite qualifications; and some processes must be followed before he attains the status of ancestor. These qualifications and processes may vary from Society to society. But most African groups make a clear distinction between the departed who are ancestors and those who are not, and have terms and different cults for the two groups. The Igbo, for example, call the ancestors '*Ndichie*' and call the departed who have not attained ancestorhood; *Ogeli* (wanderers). The former are venerated, as good spirits while the latter are generally regarded as malignant spirits are driven away by rites of exorcism.²⁷

Ancestors are believed to be those who have realized, to a remarkable degree, the values and aspirations of their communities. They are "men or women of proved upright character whose dealings with their fellow men reflected the acceptable traditional standard of conduct. They have been exposed to critical test and certified good."²⁸ According to Mbaegbu's observation, ancestors in Igbo world-view go by various Igbo

names such as '*Ndi-ichie, Nna-nna-anyi-ha* (our forefathers), *Ndi Mbu na ndi egede* (the first of a long ago). These he stated include family heads, village heads and clan heads or founders. They are therefore, human spirits of former members of the society who have lived well, died well, been buried well and have reached the spirit world. Ancestors for the Igbo are more than just being dead. They are those who have "lived this tradition to the full and who expect their descendants to follow along in the footsteps to ensure that things are as they have always been."²⁹ The Igbo eschatological belief abhors the idea of total annihilation of human person; rather it is a philosophy of some kind of personal immortality. Life for the Igbo is a continuum; death is only a reality that brings one to adore abundant living. This Igbo Belief in a continued existence is well demonstrated in these well articulated lines of the African poet, Birago Diop, when he writes:

Hear more often things than beings,
The voice of the fire listening,
Hear the voice of the water.
Hear in the wind,
The bushes sobbing,
it is the sigh 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 hut, 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 is wailing
and in the fire brand that flames.
The dead are not under the earth:
they are in the fire that is dying,
they are in the grass that weep,
they are in the whimpering rocks,
they are in the forest, they are in the house,
the dead are not dead.³⁰

Countless of Igbo traditional practices are clear indices that the dead are never gone; they are not alive but surely does exist. The ancestors are given much attention in Igbo daily affairs and are believed to always participate in every family activity. This is why ancestors are considered along with all those who have not committed any abomination against the clam and refrained from committing offences against the community which cry out to the gods and ancestors for redress. The closeness and interactions that exist between the living and ancestors are very clear in these expressions of Metuh that:

...the Igbo are very close to their ancestors. They receive more attention in daily and annual acts of worship than the Supreme Being or the deities. As members of the family they are invited to be present and participate in most family activities; they are invoked to share in the kola communion whether it is blessed in public gatherings or split at home to entertain a guest. They are invoked to participate at naming ceremonies, marriages and funeral rites of other members of their family. The Igbo morning offering, Igo Ofo 'praying with the 'Ofo' is addressed to God, the deities and ancestors, but it is made before the ancestral shrine *Okpesi*. Kola, palm wine and phallic chalk, *nzu*, are offered to them. Occasionally, especially during their annual festivals or when directed by a diviner, offerings arcade exclusively to the ancestors...³¹

As earlier stated, death alone does not make an ancestor; there are specific conditions and processes that are very necessary for such promotion. These requirements are never compromised though they vary among African societies but surely their conscious observance is a continuous reminder on the need for a healthy and responsible living which in turn promotes the wellbeing of the entire community. On the Igbo tradition and culture, such qualifications basically have ethical implications. Indeed, it is a life process which challenges individuals not just to be honest but to place a just value on life. These conditions Oguejiofor succinctly puts:

Admittance into the land of the spirits or the company of the ancestors is based on certain conditions. The individual must live a morally upright life. He must also be successful, and his success shown in his possession of a wife (or wives) and children, especially sons, and enough material possession. He must also have lived a considerable long life and died a good death. A good death implies that the deceased did not die of mysterious illness or by accident (*onwu ekwensu*). These conditions must be accompanied by a befitting burial. There is always an initial ceremony of burying the dead, and later a much more elaborate second burial'. It is with this 'second burial' that the dead man is received in the land of the spirits by his ancestors.³² (1996:80).

It is important to note at this point that ancestors are very significant in the Igbo conception of reality such that it is appropriate when scholars remark that it is one of the basic principles without which a proper account of the who reality cannot be given. The ancestors nevertheless, have a dual characteristics; that which they share with the

Supreme Being and equally what they share with the lower beings especially, human beings. They share in the immortality of the Supreme Being while with man they are no strangers in the exigencies of life. With respect to the above, Abanuka submits that:

... It will be clear that ancestry shares characteristics both with ultimacy and the levels of the real below it. With ultimacy, ancestry shares temporality or imperishability. For alrhya, ancestor may have come to be in time, in its present state of being, it endures in an unending manner; its existence is not characterized by time... the main characteristics which ancestors share with individuals on the level of humankind is that they (ancestors) were in flesh. Having been in flesh, ancestors have passed through the vicissitudes of time; in other words, they are no strangers to the problem of time and change. In brief, the chief distinguishing mark of ancestors is that they claim something in common both with ultimacy and the humankind; they share the imperishability of the ultimate reality, at the same time, they are closely connected with individuals on the level of humankind with whom they were in flesh.³³

At death, the ancestors are believed to have entered the spirit world, and as spirits, they also share in the ordering of the community. They are happy to plead with the gods for the wellbeing of their families. Any contravention of the laws and customs of the community which the ancestors had either established or upheld in their life time grieves and displeases them. When this is discovered, propitiation must be made at once, or evil would befall the family or village concerned. By implication, they have attained the fullness of life through their celebrated accomplishments and contributions to their families and communities which signifies extreme courage, great determinations and has inspired public interest to embrace ingenuity and responsible behaviours. Significantly, ancestors among the Igbo are essentially what Abanuka describes as the final causes and channels of God's power and goodness. Categorically, he enunciates that:

The significance of ancestors can be viewed from two separate but intimately connected perspectives; namely, ancestors are final causes and channels of God's power and goodness. First, ancestors can be considered to be final causes (*causatio a fronte*) in so far as they are concrete imperishable models. They are concrete imperishable models because their great achievements bear witness to their self-actualization (*ujuchi*) and immortality (*anwu-anwu*). As concrete imperishable models, they are permanent examples for people involved in mundane affairs to follow. In other words, from their position close to the ultimate reality, they attract people not only to goodoral behaviour, but also to great achievements. Considered as concrete and imperishable examples of human conduct, ancestors are penultimate causes. Secondly, ancestors are channels of God's power and goodness. It is also their self-actualization (*ujuchi*) that constitutes them into channels of God's power and goodness. Because of their self-actualization, they are close to the ultimate reality as

penultimate beings, who not only command universal appeal, but whose influence is also universal. Their universal appeal flows from their extraordinary deeds through which they attained self-actualization and immortality (*anwu-anwu*). Their influence is universal because, in accomplishing their great deeds they overcome the vicissitudes of time and change.³⁴

Nevertheless, the roles of ancestors in most cases are drawn from their significance. As we have noted, they are imperishable models of the society with great influence as universal beings. When Parrinder wrote that ancestors are not just dead heroes but are existentially active, he was referring to their functions and relevance in the society. Indeed they "are felt to be still present watching over the household directly involved in all the affairs of the family and property, giving abundant harvest and fertility."³⁵ However, they are always believed to be the custodians and protectors of morality in union with *Ala* (the Earth goddess) and equally punishes offender when necessary with different measures as it pleases the gods and ancestors. "To avoid any danger to the community, ancestry is held in view as providing the model of proper human behavior, and this is the only type of conduct which brings fulfillment of all human aspirations. Through a good moral behavior which concretely means sustaining observance of the customs and laws of the community, the individuals come to see the meaning in their lives."³⁶ Most importantly, the ancestors increase the life-force of the members of their individual families by constantly keeping alive their memories through prayers and sacrifices. In collaboration with Mbiti's view of the ancestral roles, Ikenga-Metuh objectively summarizes in the following words their principal functions to the traditional Igbo society thus:

The funeral rites of their descendants have helped them reach the spiritual home of the clan which is intimate communion with the living members. As spirits, the ancestors have enhanced powers and influence. They are believed to be closer to the Supreme Being and the deities and act as intermediaries between these divine beings and members of their families. With their better knowledge of the affairs of the spirit world, they constantly warn their descendants and kinsmen of an impending disaster and counsel them on what to do to attract the most favourable fortunes. As members of the clan into which they hope one day to reincarnate, they are very concerned with the continued existence and strengthening of the clan. They are therefore believed to be custodians of traditional laws and customs on which the survival of the clan depends and would punish with sickness or misfortune anybody who flouted them.³⁷

The above seems to justify why the ihjo conceive the ancestors as the greatest in the category of human spirits as they are the symbols of peace, unity and progress in

opposition to other human spirits that are always regarded as wandering spirits constituting enough evil.

AKALOGHELI AND OGBANJE [SPIRITS OF THE DEAD (BAD DEATH)]

These are another class of human spirits called Ghost-Spirits and Repeaters respectively. Generally, the Igbo refer to them as *Uluchi* (bad death); while *Akalogheli* are the spirits of those who died a bad death (*ajo onwu*). *Ogbanje* are the spirits of dead children who find their way into their mother's womb to be born only to die again and again. The existence of wandering spirits as they are often qualified is a strong believe in Igbo world-view. It is believed that those who died a bad death in the instance of suicide or accident; as a result was not given proper burial and funeral rites, turn out to become wanderers. The Igbo put it that they have not reached to the spirit world due to their inability to provide the essential requirements for entrance. As a matter of facts, they will never become ancestors nor reincarnate but the ceaseless tormenting of their kits and kin and immediate neighbours are the least of their evils. Oguejiofor in his explanation of Akalogheli and Ogbonuke as evil spirits says that:

Another group of evil spirits is the Akalogheli. These are spirits of people who die without fulfilling their reason for existence. In such people, the conditions of admittance into the world of the ancestors are lacking. Departing this physical existence, they have no other place to rest. Disgruntled, they have among the living, causing all sorts of harm. *Ogbonuke* is another group similar to *Akalogheli*. *Ogbonuke* is the spirit of a member of an age grade (*Ogbo*) who did not attain the goal of life before death. Such spirit goes about creating misfortune among the living age mates who are striving to advance their worldly fortune. When a person dies young, i.e without being initiated into any age grade, he is known as *Idebole* and has the same diabolic inclinations as the other groups of evil spirits.³⁸

Among the Igbo, a good number of things can constitute what is *Onwu ojo* which can make one a wandering spirit keeping him in a perpetual state of unrest. Instances abound of people dying in a strange manner mostly accident only to be reports existing in another city far from where they are known, engaging in some kind of endeavour or the other, some even married with children to disappear or vanish at the slightest contact with somebody who knows them previously or is aware of their death. Umeasiegbu, in his book *Ghost Stories*, gave a particular example of such a wandering spirit, thus he records that:

There was an Idemili vulcanizer at Eke Amichi, the old Eke, *Eke-Ochie*. He always had plenty of work. One day a luxury bus stopped near the vulcanizer's place of work. As source goods were being off-loaded for a passenger, another passenger came down to look around and make sure his goods were not brought down in error. This second passenger spotted the vulcanizer, who had died in his town in Idemili some years ago. He asked rather naively and

rhetorically, if that was not the vulcanizer he used to know many years ago. Almost immediately the vulcanizer and his articles of trade disappeared.³⁹

In the case of *Ogbanje*, some have argued that the phenomenon is a mere fiction especially those with Western orientation but for the traditional Igbo, it is a reality that is always imbued with negation, a misfortune unto anyone. Describing *ogbanje*, Arazu remarks that: "*Ogbanje* is the soul that comes to birth, dies prematurely and comes back again to die prematurely again. It is this idea of coming to birth and dying as a kind of mischief that gives rise to the terminology '*Ogbanje*' which literally means coming and going. To the adherents of traditional religion *Ogbanje* is not a fiction..."⁴⁰

Explaining further, Ikenga-Metuh (1992) maintains that:

The aim of *Ogbanje* is to torment parents with the pangs of constant births and death of their children, and to leave them childless and frustrated at the end of their child bearing age. It is believed that these evil spirits are arranged in age-groups. Some are infants of five years and below, others are young people of more than thirty years. Each group binds its members by oath not to live longer than their age limit. Since those who die childless cannot reach ancestral home and are therefore lost and damned, the '*Ogbanje*' are regarded as one of the most devilish agents of misfortunes.⁴¹

Both ghost spirits and repeaters are realities in Igbo world-view and would be difficult to comprehend with the scientific mind. Another human wandering spirit to be given attention here is the *Amosu* (witches) but this is the spirit of the living believed to have the ability of leaving their body temporarily "to enter into mysteries, to go to the land of the dead of the spirit world, to perform several occult and magical activities,"⁴² only to return to the same body later. The Igbo like other African cultures entertain a strong belief in the existence and operations of such a dreaded human spirit believed to be capable of perpetrating evil machinations. Thorough analyses have been given to this phenomenon and possibility of its reality and challenges in another essay elsewhere.

OGWU (MYSTICAL OR MAGICAL POWERS)

This is the spirit associated with certain preparations. The Igbo believe that there are frozen forces in things that are in animals, plants and minerals which man harness in order to control and manipulate the supernatural resources of the universe for his own benefits. *Ogwu* is the ability of man to activate these forces which are immanent in natural objects and which can be tapped and harnessed into an active magical or mystical power. Certain occurrences, the Igbo without doubt, attributes to the working of *Ogwu*; it is a strong spirit when invoked that can-do things that are beyond ordinary human understanding but always sole for those who are familiar with the doings of magical powers.

EVIL SPIRITS

Generally, the spirits described as evil spirits are those dangerous and fearful spirits whom their principal function is only to bring destruction. The Igbo have identified among them *Ekwensu* (Devil) who is capable of only evil. It is believed that evil occurrence come from *Ekwensu*, other spirits or humans considered being his agents. Though specialists in Igbo language have argued that the spirit described as *Ekwensu* is not equivalent to the Christian Devil. This is because in many parts of Igboland, deities are worshipped as *Ekwensu*, like in Asaba and Ukpokwu which are true Igbo communities; however, due to the problem of language, the Christian Devil have come to be popularly known and referred to as *Ekwensu*. Metuh in affirmation declares that: "*Ekwensu* is not the devil it is an *Arusi*, its role differs among different Igbo groups. However, it is generally regarded as a spirit of violence by most Igbo as it incites people to violence. This can be very useful during war and *Ekwensu* is therefore invoked by warriors and head-hunters. But *Ekwensu* may also incite people to violence during peace time and the result may be disastrous."⁴³ In collaboration with Metuh, Ezekwugo states, though with more addition that:

Ekwensu has nothing to do with devil or fallen angels in the biblical sense, but rather designates the most prominent personage among the condemned human beings, who stand in opposition to the good dead. *Ekwensu* is collectively all the wicked disembodied spirits who by some reasons are refused entry into the land of the dead. In a sense they did not reach the land of the dead. In Igbo belief-system they never conclusively got united with their creative 'Chi'. Even good people could be added to this class of wicked spirits when they did not receive ritual burial after death. They join the roaming wicked spirits. Included in this grade of roaming wicked spirits are people in their life time were murderers, witches, robbers, law breakers and whoever in any form hated a fellow human being (*ndi ajo mmadu bu ndi ajo mmufo* - the bad people are the bad spirits).⁴⁴

Nevertheless, irrespective of the language debate concerning the spirit entity 'Ekwensu', it is in fact a categorical representation of a force of only evil in all ramifications.

MMADU (HUMAN BEING CATEGORY AND SUB-CATEGORIES)

The category of human being is one of the three major categories of Igbo ontology. Human beings and other created order are the inhabitants of the visible sphere - *Uwa* (the universe). Like their Africans, man occupied a very vital position in the ontology of the Igbo. Man is not only regarded as the most important aspect of creation but equally the most superior natural intelligence only but God - *Chukwu*. They have been described as "the main actors in the drama of existence and life. Their actions invoke reactions from the gods and have deep implications for the lower beings and forces,

which may have to be manipulated to satisfy the needs of human beings.”⁴⁵ We agree with Mbaegbu when he says that:

It is correct to hold that in the traditional ontology of the Igbo, man sees himself as the centre of the universe. The position of *mmadu* (human beings) and his role as the ‘centre of the created order’, master of things (*ihe*) ‘the focal point of universe’, etc., conferred unparalleled dignity, respect and worth to individuals in Igbo world viewed and in real life. This also is the metaphysical basis for the anthropocentric ontology characteristics of the life, thought and practices of the Igbo.⁴⁶

Every culture has a unique way of knowing man, understanding and interpreting other realities. The traditional Igbo conceive man as an embodiment of dual nature, spirit and non-spirit, body and soul. This accordingly implies man’s ability to participate or engage in higher metaphysical operations. He is endowed with rationality and understanding, characteristics which he does not share with the lower beings. While *Muo* is the spiritual part of man and has as its components the element of the spirit, intelligence feeling, emotion and conscience. *Aru* (the body) is the physical part of human being which becomes frozen and lifeless at death; neither the body nor the soul is independent as they are complimentary to each other. It is believed that the soul is the animating principle in man the very thing which reincarnate after death and also lives in the spirit world at death. Explaining this union mbaegbu observes that:

Body and Spirit meet in the human self or person and in concrete human life. Neither the body nor the spirit can be presence alone. The essence of living self or person is that he is made up of body and spirit. Only in this way, he is a living human person, who belongs to the category *Mmadu* (human beings). Thus in Igbo conception, *mmadu* (self or man) without a body is inconceivable. Such a being is simply by Igbo conception a spirit. In like manner *mmadu* (self or man) who has body but lacks the spiritual principle is also absurd. Such a being would be monstrosity. Such a being has fallen outside the category of *mmadu* (human being). It is at best simply called a ‘thing.’ In short, in Igbo ontology, the two principles which make up every human being, namely, matter and spirit must be conceived neither in isolation, nor independent of each other but must always be seen as complementary. Once these two components are united, man is equipped to function as a complex and paradoxical being.⁴⁷

There are sub-categories of human beings within the human category arranged in their hierarchical order. It is important to note that this distinction and arrangement are made not ontological basis but with respect to qualitative characteristics. By this we meant the possession of certain qualities and powers by which some people to qualitative characteristics. But this will meant the possession of certain qualities and powers by which some people are accorded greater respect, honour, and even dignity than others.

This is because ontologically, all men are equal by virtue of rationality. But a close examination regarding peoples' characters, talents, functions, roles, power, statues, primogeniture and usefulness to the community shows significantly certain levels of inequality among men. Accordingly, we present all categories of human beings in their different personalities and capabilities, following this order. The greatest among men is *Ndi-Eze Mmuo* (chief priests); followed by *Ndi Dibia Afa* (Diviners); then comes *Ndi dibia Ogwu* (Elders); *Ndi Nze na Ozo* (Titled men); *Ndi Nkiti* (common people); *Umunwanyi* (Women); *Umuaka* (children). The hierarchy of human beings moves in that order and for want of space and time we wish not to continue in any further examination of these sub-categories. We limit our study to what man is and his place among other forces in Igbo world view.

IHE (CATEGORY OF THING AND SUB-CATEGORY)

Ihe: thing in this context refers to all the beings below the category of spirits and man; though in the general Igbo expression of *Ihe*, it embraces all that is. But here we recognize the category of *Ihe* as implying to what Kagame in his exposition of the four categories of Bantu (African) philosophy describes as '*Bintu*' (things) –Animals, Plants, Inanimate objects and elements. Every being in this category lacks both will and intellect; they can only get at the command of man who has the necessary qualities and power for activity. According to Kagame who explains that:

Kintu embraces that forces which are cannot act for them and which can become active only at the command of a *Muntu*, whether living an, dead man, *Orisha*, or *Bon Dieu* in the category of *Kintu* belong plants, animals, minerals, tools, objects of customary usage, and so on.they are all *Bintu* as the plural of *Kintu* is expressed. None of this *bintu* has any will of their own, unless, like animals, they are given a drive by the command of *Bon Dieu*. The *Bintu* are 'frozen' forces, which await the command of *Muntu* they stand at the disposal of *Muntu*, or at 'at hand' for him.⁴⁸

Explain further the nature of beings in the category of *Mabaegbu* agrees with Kagame as he described their actions as a product of vital influence which is responsible for a lot mystical occurrences in Igbo world view thus he claims that:

No being in this *ihe* category the Igbo say or believe has any will of its own. They all lack reason or intellect which is needed for activity. Consequently, *ihe* has no activity and can only be activated by either the spirits or man. When they are influenced, they in their turn influence other things. This is the theory of 'vital influence and interaction of forces in Bantu ontology' the phenomenon of *ogwu* (medicine and magical forces) in Igbo world view rests on this law of vital influence or casualty, namely, that the vital human force can directly influence interior force beings (animals, vegetables or minerals) in their being itself through the intermediary of which it influences the rational being.⁴⁹

In most cases even when the beings in this category does not share in the rationality of man, they are in different circumstances regarded as sacred, often deified and their spirits worshipped as gods for different reasons. The Igbo till date believe that certain ‘things’ – animals plants and minerals possesses qualities that are not ordinary which are highly beneficial to man in many respects. And more we shall see as we examine the *Ihe* sub-categories respectively.

ANIMALS

Animals as a sub-category of ‘things’ in Igbo ontology are known to be an important aspect of Igbo traditional practice; they are considered not just important but indispensable in various aspect of the Igbo life. The Igbo has special appeal for animals especially those that are used for peculiar purposes other than consumable meats. Because of the numerous qualities that are found in animals as each symbolizes an aspect of reality and is endowed with a special kind of power and ability, they are in most occasions used with respect to these powers they posses. Commenting about the magic and essential roles animals play in the web of life, Green observes and correctly too when he says that:

What incredible powers sagacity and immense knowledge all these creatures posses. What immense knowledge they must have accrued. Animals have always devised ways to exist even within the most harsh or unforgiving of environments. Some animals like Squid, live on the oceans floor where the water pressure will crush us. Cold blooded frog produces anti- freeze glycerol so that she may pass winters of twenty- two degrees Fahrenheit (-6° C) in comfortable torpor. Cheetah sprints at 70 miles per hour (110km/u), the speed limit of British freeways. Bush baby can detect the first light of dawn well before the most sophisticated light meter. Dry can smell the bio-chemical charged of Cancer – not test devised by man is yet capable of this. And how varied is their social structure; Hgena society is a matriarchy, Meerkat is a model for the communist Ideal, why self-sufficient pandy lives above in her dense tamboo.⁵⁰

Bringing to a higher level of consciousness her exposition of the abilities of animals she further remarks that:

Every creative has its own special wisdom and magic and none is better than another-they are simply different. Each one is absolutely essential to the web of life on earth and greater cosmology of non-ordinary reality...this animal can reveal the secrets human kind so long for because they are the earthly manifestations of divine beings. Learning their language allows communication with alternative reality, which is the source of all things that happen here. Like journeying, it is another way to communicate with the beyond.⁵¹

However, scholars have effectively painted the relevance of animals in every culture especially in cultic rituals like in the Igbo traditional practice; animals are always the victims, the pawns in traditional rituals and practices. They are in addition to the above rules as agents in cultic practices and equally as agents of the spirit and the gods. In that regards they are guardians, helpers and messengers. In the wider sense, they are sources of information and inspiration.

Nwala among other articulated differently but important ways in which animals are respected, honoured and even feared among the Igbo. Accordingly he asserts that:

But with regard to certain things, animals are accorded a special respect, for it is believed that they may know things that human beings do not know and they see things that are not seen with ordinary human eyes. The Igbo believe that animals can see spirits. When, for example a dog barks without any visible cause, or when fowls begin to quack uneasily without birds or any other visible object inducing them to do so, then the Igbo suspect that spirits may be around or that something mysterious is about to happen. There is the belief too, that animals can detect poison. When they suspected that the food or fruit has been poisoned, they throw it out to animals to taste. If they do so, then there is no poison in the good or fruit. So it is believed that when a dead body (human corpse) is visited by ants, it is taken as a Proof that the dead man was a witch or had committed an abomination. Animals, it has been emphasized, act as agents of the spirits and gods. Their role in the preparation of medicine (*ogwu*), in sacrifices, and religions and social festivities is very central indeed. In that case they act as the foci of ambition and attitude and sources of inspiration.⁵²

All these does not presuppose that they are of equality with man but it shows essentially, that they determine a whole lot of things in maintaining the cosmic balance and in providing explanations in certain occurrences regarded to be paranormal.

PLANTS

As animals are important so are plants. Trees have myriad qualities to give to man. They have medicinal properties to heal him, and give fruits for his enjoyment and nourishment. They heal him psychically as well as physically, by their very presence, for they emit soothing energies. This soothing force can even help a woman in childbirth, if she is brave enough to go out and give birth amongst them. The ancients knew and understand these facts very well, for they use certain barks from trees to be worn during pregnancy to help with an easy delivery. If a woman gave birth under a tree, during the last stages of labour she embraced the bark, whilst simultaneously transmitting her pains to the tree. However, trees purify the air we breathe, and also influence the atmosphere by their shapes. "Circular-branched trees represent the oneness of all life in the universe, those with triangular shapes are living manifestation

of the great trinity, and the sharp, pointed trees depict the vital masculine principle, and man's inspirational nature. The relaxed open trees radiate feminine receptivity and gentleness."⁵³ Trees also give rubber, oil, paper, coal and of course, wood. They serve various purposes especially in the preparation of different kinds of *ogwu*. The Igbo traditional medicine practitioners argue that every plant in the bush irrespective of how small is created for a purpose specifically for the cure of a particular ailment. When plants bear seed and fruits they did not only provide food for man, equally they possess healing powers and other potentials necessarily for various functions. They are the antidotes and forms part of the essential ingredients in any preparation both in concoctions of traditional curative medicine for saving lives and bad *ogwu* for destruction. Plants are powerful and have the ability to do some unimaginable things as a result of their natural endowments.

Nwabuchi is of the contention that *ogwu* is from nature and to it shall it return. There are plants that have inherent powers without any invocation from the *Dibia* and those that gain their potency from the words of the *Dibia*. Hence every *ogwu* is a product of some plants and other ingredients charged with spiritual power by the use of rites, spells and invocation. Writing about the capabilities of plants he states that:

There are very many plants or rather herbs which when planted in a compound perform one or more functions some herbs repel snakes and other dangerous animals. Certain plants prevent lightning and thunder while others draw it to the vicinity wherein they grow. Others could neutralize all forms of power or nullify the effects of power of enemies and beings: lower levels of witches are repelled by certain herbs while others act as tools of membership into the cult. Thieves are prevented from stealing in ones compound by the use of certain herbs. Rainfalls and winds are created by the action of herbs. Any required environmental condition could be achieved by the application of herbs. There are herbs for raising the dead. In the same manner there are very many herbs for killing. The power to achieve complete elimination of hantiness is contained in certain herbs. Finally certain herbs have been used for creating state of madness in people while others are used to effect cure.⁵⁴

Apart from the abundant endowments of trees, they are nature's exorcists and takes spirits into their branches and bodies; some of which are very dangerous and could even kill human beings. Like in the other African cultures, the Igbo regard certain trees and groves as sacred; they are taken to be the living places of spirits and deities. To this Mbaegbu demonstrates that:

In Igbo world-view, there are reports of instances of various mythologies speaking about certain trees like the Iroko tree, *Akpu*, *Ogbu*, *Ofo* tree (*Detarium Senegalensis*), etc.; which are the repository of the gods especially the ancestral spirits and any other spirits whether benevolent or malevolent. There is therefore a strong believe among the pre modern Igbo that when a

sacrifice is made to such trees or even the wood from them, it is never the plant or the object for whom the sacrifice is meant but the ancestors or the gods that are journeying or reposing in them. Such trees and the wood from them have special quality. The ancestors and gods reposing in them in one way or the other have given them their special concentration. Other trees or forest are full of awe, dreaded and in effect are generally avoided especially at particular hours of the day or night respectively.⁵⁵

Plants no doubt are very vital among the Igbo, the question is, how many of its functions do you know since even the most common weed at the roadside has a vital function? A specific herb may be used by a specialist to make a particular preparation, that same herb another uses for a different function. It is equally important to mention that different cultures attach various meanings and significance to plants according to how best it serves their purpose; no wonder while some plants are significant in some places, in another locality they are very much utilized and revered. The detailed documentation of Strachan, of some special tree powers is most helpful in this regard, especially in revealing many secrets and significance of most known herbs. Thus he extensively explains:

The Almond tree is a very sweet natured being, and symbolizes fruitfulness and self-protection. It also symbolizes virginity and is identified with the use of phallicism. The Ash was highly venerated because of its magnificent clusters of red berries, and was also considered to be the father of trees. Special guardian spirits reside in the Ash, so it would be ideal for absorbing sickness. The Apple tree is said to help fertility, and one old English custom is to drink to the health of the apple tree with a glass of cider, to encourage the tree to give a good crop for the next harvest. Banana trees are regarded as male, because of the shape of the fruit. When these trees grow their fruit the tree is said to murmur, and if someone hears this sound, they will die. The Banyan tree is reputed to imbibe eternal life, productivity, knowledge and happiness. It is also strongly favoured for its fertility powers. The Coconut tree is very feminine and fertile, the shell represents the womb, and the milk, fertility. It is also regarded as an effective charm against the evil eye. The Fig tree is regarded as androgynous, or bi-sexual. The fruit represents the feminine attributes, and the tri-lobed leaves suggest the masculine force.⁵⁶

In a further explanation he notes that:

Ivy was sacred to the Bacchus, the god of wine and revelry; however it has diverse powers which could be unreliable if they are not handled with great care and knowledge. Ground ivy used in conjunction with juice and herbs induces a deep, trance-like sleep, and of course one must also know the antidote to this. Mistletoe was considered to be the great 'all healer'. The Druids believe it to have fallen from heaven. In Scandinavian core, it has negative as well as positive attributes, although now it is generally regarded as a symbol

of love and purity, hence the custom of kissing beneath a sprig. The Oak was the sacred tree of the Druids, whose name means 'Oak men'. They believe that their god lived in this massive tree, which was always associated with the most powerful gods such as Zeus, Thor and Jupiter. The Palm tree is regarded as particularly powerful, because it is self-renewing, and never changes its leaves. Because of its incredible durability, it is often been used as a symbol for martyrdom. It also aids in rejuvenation, symbolizes the very matrix of life itself. The Peach tree is an emblem of marriage, and symbolizes abundance. It is particularly favoured by the Chinese. The Pine is the eternal symbol of life and immortality. It is regarded as a very soothing tree to be near. It was also worshipped by the ancients as a symbol of fire, because of its resemblance to a spiral of flame. The Willow and the Yew trees are both associated with dead and sorrow, and also black magic rituals.⁵⁷ (loc. cit.).

MINERALS

Among the Igbo, certain natural elements like stone, river, cave, mountain, etc., are equally hold at a very high esteem. This is because of their believe that different spirits and forces abound in the universe and they permeate every being. Certain individuals have the knowledge and power to manipulate these forces in various ways to attain their desired ends. By manipulation we meant activating the forces of those elements and inanimate objects. Also, they serve as places of worship, sacred objects and ingredients in cultic rituals. Nwala was right when he posits that:

Most mountains and hills, caves and valleys, rivers and streams, are the abode of deities and spirits. They are usually the scenes of sacrifices, locations of shrines and supernatural events. Some are deified, for example, the earth, the sun, the sky, lightning, etc. some objects are saved and medicinal. If a man drinks poison, he can escape death if he drinks water from a certain shrine or river. Sand, alcohol, water, oil, salt, chalk, *edo*, etc. are essential ingredients both for sacrifices and for medicine and magic among the traditional Igbo.⁵⁸

The knowledge about the principles guiding these forces is key to manipulating the activities of nature and the affairs of men. It is the secret behind certain occurrences which have poses a great challenge to man and are beyond mere human understanding such that "their activities, their 'coming into being' and 'passing away' bear some stamp of mystery and so are thought to posses some mysterious or occult attributes."⁵⁹ Hence, the dynamics of their interactions is a sure index in maintaining the cosmic balance; though their actions and inactions remains the prerogative of man through the power of words. An attribute and ability that is exclusive to man.

CONCLUSION

In this essay we have extensively been able to the best of our ability via the categories of being (in African philosophy referred to as the theory of forces) demonstrate

effectively in Igbo ontology the realities or being there are. The ideas examined in this essay are the traditional beliefs of the Igbo people though there are a little variations with respect to different communities but "the general picture remains valid for all the Igbo people,"⁶⁰ as described in this context. The reality of various degrees, kinds and categories of forces cannot be separated from Igbo world-view. The knowledge of forces, the interplay among them and how they influence person's, things and events through the instrumentality of 'word' which is at the command of man are all aspects of Igbo metaphysical beliefs and practices. All forces are all, in principle, in existence for the purpose of satisfying man's needs, inclinations and certain desired ends. Hence, all the beings and essences are at the service of man, this is the anthropocentric characteristics of Igbo world-view.

References

- a) Several Authors have expressed different opinions on the structure of African world view and particularly that of the Igbo. While some classify the beings inhabiting in the Igbo worlds as of five categories, others says, they are four, three or even two, just visible and invisible beings. However, in all these division there is a consensus that the beings influence each other and the spheres forms an essential unity as they continuously intermingle, and shade into each other. For the ontological structure of African Igbo World view See: G.E Parrinder, *West African Religion*, (London, 1969), p. 7; E.W. Smith, *African Ideas of God*, (No reference), p. 23; V.C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southern Nigeria*, (New York: Reinhart and Wiston 1965), p. 11; J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Lid, 1969). pp. 75-92; B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Problem of Definition*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1973), pp. 137-202; Nwala, pp. 36-53; O.P. Ejiofor, *A Quest for a Moral Conscience in Igbo Culture*, (Enugu: Kingsely's, 2006), pp. 19-20; Ikenga-Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981), pp. 54-59. Mbaegbu, *The Ultimate Being in Igbo Ontology*, (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1997), pp. 156-192; E. Ilogu, *Igbo Life and Thought*, (Onitsha: The Versity Limited Press), 1985), pp. 7-8.
- b) P. Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, (Paris: Presence Africaie, 1959), pp. 61-62.
- c) Mbaegbu, *The Ultimate Being in Igbo Ontology*, (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1997), p. 158.
- d) Mbaegbu, p. 159.
- e) V. Uchendu, as cited by C.M Ezekwugo, *Philosophical Concepts*, (Enugu: Agatha Series Publishers Limited, 1992), p. 246.
- f) Tempels, p. 60.
- g) Oguejiofor, *The Influence of Igbo Traditional Religion on the Socio-Political Character of the Igbo*, pp. 71-72.
- h) Ikenga-Metu, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religion*, pp. 71-72.

- i) For further clarification on the unity of Igbo worlds and the interaction of being See: Ikenga-Metuh, pp. 52-53; Mbiti, p. 75.
- j) Nnabuchi, *In Defence of Igbo Belief System: A Dialectical Approach*, pp. 108-109.
- k) Basden, *Niger Ibos*, (London, Frank Cass, 1977), p.37; Oguejiofor, pp. 51-52.
- l) Tempels, p. 61.
- m) Ikenga-Metuh, *God, and Man in African Religion*, p. 54.
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- p) Nwala, p. 36.
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- oo) Ikenga-Metuh, pp. 156-157.
- pp) Nwala, p. 37.
- qq) Metuh, p. 77.
- rr) Ezekwugo, pp. 167-169.
- ss) Nwala, p. 41.
- tt) Mbegbu, p. 161.
- uu) *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- vv) *Muntu*, simply means 'Human beings' including both the living and dead. Human beings are endowed with the gift of intelligence and reason. With the power of word he brings other beings under his control. *Muntu* says Kagame, is an entity which is a force which has control over *Nommo*. *Nommo* is 'word', the vital force that carries the word which issues from the month in water vapour which is both water and word in one. It is the life force, the fluid as such, a unity of spiritual-physical fluidity, giving life to everything. causing everything. It is only man that has the power of *Nommo* and with this he activates the forces frozen in things. J. Jalm, *MUNTU: An Outline of the New African Culture*, (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1961). p. 102.
- ww) Mbaegbu, p. 121.
- xx) S. Green, *Animal Wisdom: Harness the Power of Animals to Liberate your Spirit*, (London: 2005), p. 7.
- yy) *Ibid.*, pp. 23-33.
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- aaa) F. Strachan, *Natural Magic*, (New York: Black Watch, 1974), pp. 46-48.
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