

## **HUMAN DESTINY AS AKALA AKA IN IGBOLAND: A HERMENEUTIC ENGAGEMENT**

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### **Abstract**

From the existential and metaphysical standpoint, the Igbo-African world presents a duality of the physical and the metaphysical worlds. In praxis, the metaphysical world is seen to be higher in the scheme of things because, it is from it that the impersonal beings/forces operate and superintend on the physical world of man. It is based on this that 'the concept of human destiny' is topical and recurrent in Igbo-African metaphysics. The problem is, however, to account for the place of freedom, choice and responsibility within the framework of human destiny. If we admit that one's destiny is chosen and affixed by his Chi (the guardian spirit), the question arises, as to the appropriateness of praise or blame. Yet, the traditional Igbo do not shy away from praising and/ or blaming people for their actions. In this seemingly Igbo standard, this paper took a reconciliatory approach. It employs the method of hermeneutics in its task. Through this method of interpretation, the true Igbo conception of human destiny is sifted out. The finding, in one hand, is that destiny is 'the already given', a package sealed and given to man before birth. On the other hand, destiny is a resource to be exploited, a potential to be harnessed through hard work and resolute resourcefulness. On the basis of this, the paper concludes that man, in collaboration with his Chi works for the realization of his destiny. This is to say that, in Igbo concept of human destiny, the Igbo internal destiny (Akala Chi) and the Igbo external destiny (Akala Agu) co-exist and are mutually co-related. Therefore, destiny (Akala Aka) is a function both of freedom and determinism.

**Keywords:** *Destiny, Akala Aka, Destiny, Igboland*

### **1. Introduction**

Deep reflection on the existence of man raises the very question of his destiny. It is a question that is relevant and appropriate for philosophical investigation since it touches on the very being of man. If we agree that wherever there is human existence, there is thinking and reflection, on fundamental issues, that wherever there is such reflection there is the highest possibility of raising the question of ultimate meaning of human existence; then it follows that all human cultures and thought system must have consciously or unconsciously given thought to the question of human destiny. It is generally believed and accepted that all things derive their existence from God, and so by an original plan proceed from Him and also strive back towards Him. The Igbo equally harbours the belief that Chukwu (God) not only creates and orders the

functionality of things in the world; He as well endows man, fixes man's longevity on earth and sets how, where and when man's destiny manifests itself. This underscores the Igbo view about *uche Chi na oge Chi* (the will of God and God's time). Hence, the Igbo strongly believe that *uche Chi ga-eme n'oge Chi* – 'the will of God happens at the time of God'.

Another Igbo saying has it that *ukwa ruo oge ya o daa* (*ukwa* is a breadfruit that drops to the ground when it ripens). Armed with this obscured knowledge of God, man in his survival attempts is poised to wait for *uche Chi na oge Chi* (the will of God and God's time) and the final analysis as to what happens to him is *o bu ka Chi si choo ya* – 'that is how God wanted it', irrespective of whether what happened was good or bad.

Man, for the Igbo, is a composed being of body and soul, physical and spiritual, determinism and freewill, such that his life and existence rest upon two fundamental principles that gave vent to his composition. On the one hand, the Igbo believe that *Chukwu* (God) creates, gives and owns life – *Chi-na-eke*, *Chi-na- enye-ndu*, and *Chi-nwe-ndu*. Man is however, linked to his creator (*Chineke*) through the *Chi* – “the person's personal guardian spirit, or the invisible pilot of day to day activities of human beings” (Opata, 1998, p.151). Consequently, man only receives his destiny (*Akala Aka*) from *Chi* which admits no addition or subtraction and of no modification whatsoever. On this count, the Igbo would say *ihe Chi dere, o dego ya* – what *Chi* has written is written. On the other hand, the Igbo hold tenaciously to yet another principle that says *onye kwe, Chi ya ekwe* – if a man says yes, his *Chi* also says yes. It connotes choice and responsibility and involves man in his quest for a meaning-filled life and happy existence as underscored by Igbo wisdom saying that *aka aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu, aruo n'anwu erie na ndo, ike keta o rie* – 'all implying that resourcefulness is a condition for a better life and enjoyment'.

It is evident from the foregoing that the Igbo concept of human destiny is replete with confusion, inconsistencies and controversies. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to clarify and present a comprehensive concept of human destiny among the traditional Igbo-Africa. It would investigate its application to human realization through a complimentary understanding of freedom and determinism within the Igbo thought system. To this end tackles the question of the alterability or inalterability of destiny.

## **2. Definition of Terms**

For a better understanding of this article there is need for analysis and systematic evaluation of data or information by breaking the basic concepts employed to uncover their interrelations. Here, the terms to be conceptualized include:

### **2.1. Destiny**

Derived from the Latin word, *destinare*, destiny means 'that which has been firmly established'. "It is the power believed to control events that happens to somebody; an idea that somebody has been determined in advance by a superior power, either by God, fate or a person; a predetermined course of events often held to be an irresistible power or agency" (Opata, 1998, p.146). Kwame Gyekye reveals that destiny in Akan conception is the message borne by a person's soul which determines the general outline of a person's life in the world. It determines both the uniqueness and individuality of a person. Thus, "it is your destiny...that makes you, you and my destiny that makes me, me" (Gyekye, 1995). While the above definitions may seem to refer to the idea of predetermination, destiny is something we can actively shape and alter. It is therefore, a given as well as a task of the future for an individual to work out.

### **2.2. Akala Aka (Human Destiny)**

Akala aka simply means lines on one's palms. However, when an Igbo speaks of akala aka m, he or she is not referring literally to the lines on his or her palm, rather, to his life pattern so far. The Igbo believe that what one will be in life is all inscribed in the lines found on one's palm. Hence, Umeogu (2004, p.3) writes: "akala aka is the personalization of the past, the present and the future conditions of an individual's possibility and reality of life and being...kpakpa ndu (star), that is, life propeller, life predictor, life shelterer, life controller, life manager, life administrator". Akala aka is God's given talent to man which leads man to all goodness, Abanuka asserts. Similarly, Iroegbu (as cited in Ukwamedua, 2016, p.275) writes: "palmistry, also called fate in your hand (akala chi) is a common practice. Each person's palm (obo aka) is marked differently and it has something to say about the current and future events in the life of the person whose palms are being examined". Based on its etymology, Akala aka connotes both 'the already given' (akala) and 'the fruit of hard work' (aka). It is a potential handed over to the individual to develop.

### **2.3. Igboland**

Igboland is the homeland of Ndigbo (Igbo people). The word Ndigbo comes from two ancient words in Igbo cultural lexicon: Ndi meaning 'people collectively belonging to', and Igbo - 'the original ancient stock'. Hence, Ndigbo etymologically, means 'the people collectively belonging to an original ancient stock'. This ancient stock occupies a specific area in the southern Nigeria. The area has been identified by anthropologists as the people that share common religious beliefs and have common economic, political, philosophical and ideological ways of life. They have several dialects of one common language called 'Igbo'. Variations in the Igbo cultural areas are geographical. Igbo dialects, developed in various geographical groupings are mutually intelligible. Hence, Onwuejeogwu (2004, p.51) observes that "the speaker of Igbo dialect does not

have to learn a new grammar and lexicon to understand what the other speaker says". On the same note, Emenanjo (1968, p.210) maintains that "mutual intelligibility is achieved by a psychological adjustment yet to be understood by linguists". At present, the Igbo culture area encompasses wholly or partially seven political states of Nigeria, namely: Abia (whole), Anambra (whole), Delta (partial), Ebonyi (whole), Enugu (whole), Imo (whole), and Rivers state (partial). The Igbo are single people in the sense that they speak a number of related dialects, occupy a continuous track of territory and have many features of social structures and culture in common, but they were not formerly politically unified. Ford and Jones (as cited in Mbaegbu, 2012, p.89) remarked that the Igbo are "...generally held to be tolerant, ultra democratic because they dislike any form of external government and authority and they have a practical unromantic approach to life". The Igbo of Nigeria are really a hard-working, enterprising and progressive race.

### **3. The Igbo Concept of Chi**

The concept of human destiny (Akala Aka) cannot be easily understood without first understanding the Igbo concept of Chi. "Chi cult plays an important role in Igbo traditional religion that mystical practices of all kinds within Igbo world view cannot be understood without a discussion on the principles of operation of Chi mmadu or Chi onye (the guardian spirit of individual)" (Adibe, 2008, p.155). The Igbo regard Chi and Akala Aka as personal orienting forces which facilitate the personal fulfilment of individuals. They are believed to "have direct link with Chukwu and seem to be personification of Chukwu's attribution of gifts to man" (Dine, 1983, p.41). Man enjoys a close relationship with God than any other being. This follows from the Igbo understanding of man as a being that possesses the spark of God, Chi. Little wonder they (Igbo) refer to man as mmadu which is a contraction of a sentence that reads; mmuo di ndu (the spirit that is alive). Man is a composite of ahu (body) and mmuo (spirit). His dual nature makes possible the vertical and horizontal relationship. This is to say that man's spiritual nature enables him relate with his God (Chukwu) while his material nature makes his existence in the material world and his interactions with beings therein possible.

In Igbo ontology, Chi simply means 'spirit'. In its ordinary everyday usage, Chi connotes day light as in chi ofufo. "However when used in a religious context, Chi evolves three related concepts, namely; the creator, the guardian spirit given by the creator to each individual and the destiny given to each person also by the creator" (Metuh, 1985, p.24). To avoid ambiguity, the Igbo most often employ the qualifying suffix 'Ukwu' (the greatest, the supreme, the highest) and 'na-eke' (that creates) to distinguish the use of Chi as God from other understanding of Chi in Igbo ontology. Hence, Chi- ukwu stands for 'the Greatest, the Supreme or the Highest God', and Chi-

na-eke means 'the God who creates' or 'God the creator'. However, in certain cases the suffix is not used. By way of general guide, the exact meaning of Chi is inferred from the given context. For instance, in the Igbo proverb; *Chi onye adighi n'izu ma onwu egbuna ya* - when a person's Chi does not take part in the plot to kill, death will not kill him; Chi stands for the Supreme Being. In another proverb: *Onye kwe Chi ya ekwe* - if a person says yes, his Chi also says yes; Chi denotes the personal god. And in the proverb: *agbatagi ajo Chi n uzo olu* - you cannot escape bad fortune by resourcefulness, Chi means destiny package.

Chi is believed to be the emanation of the creator, a spark of God in man. On the basis of this, the Igbo believe that it is the spark of God in man, the Chi that survives death and goes back to Chukwu (God) after ones sojourn on earth. Death in Igbo world view is not a cessation of life, rather a movement from the material world to the world of the spirits. It is the spiritual part of man, the Chi, mmuo that lives hereafter while the material part, ahu dies and decays. Ogbukagu (as cited in Adibe, 2008, p.156) writing on the idea of Chi as a spark of God in every individual avers:

The Igbo speaking people believe that every individual (male or female) has a personality abiding god that is closely connected with God or Chukwu, and who controls the individual day-to-day functions and behaviours. The Chi or spiritual god was assigned to everyone from before cradle to death by the Supreme deity to act as the person's guardian angel. The successes and the failures people encounter in life are ascribed to the competence of their individual Chi.

Everyone has his or her Chi. No two individuals, not even identical twins have the same Chi. Therefore, the Igbo say: *ofu nne na amu ma ofu Chi adighi eke* meaning the same mother, yes but not the same Chi. Some Igbo personal names speak volume of the role of personal god; such names include: *Chizoba* (let my Chi guide me), *Chinagorom* (may my Chi speak for me), *Chinenyem* (my Chi provides for me). Mbaegbu (2012, p.171) outlines the active roles of the personal god to include;

...interceding with God on behalf of the parents and in conjunction with him, fixes the Chi (destiny package) of the child, its total achievements and what the child will be, thus: its' sex (whether male or female), its term of life (whether long or short), its social and economic standing (whether noble or base, rich or poor) its occupation and trade (whether a farmer, a diviner, a herbalist or an artist, etc).

The above suggests that Chi besides being the personal god is also the destiny package. In the light of this Ikenga Metuh (1985, p.27) observes that "the Igbo belief, have it

that Chukwu gives each person a Chi - a personal god as well as destiny also called Chi. The (assigned) Chi goes before God and chooses the Chi, the destiny of the child to be born". Elsewhere, he added; "Chi is God's own representative in man. It protects and guides man through dangers and snares of the world. It is worried when man is in danger of any sort. It chooses a man's destiny and thereafter disperses the fortune or misfortune therein as he thinks fit" (Metuh, 1985, p.28). It follows therefore that Chi is to be held responsible for whatever comes one's way in life, success or failure. The deduction therefore is that Chi can either be good (Chi oma) or bad (Chi ojoo or Ajo Chi). In the light of this Ezekwugo (as cited in Adibe, 2009, p.72) writes:

The Igbos believe that before a child is born his life course has been charted and fixed by Chi.... so whatever happens to a man, whether he meets with success or failure in his undertakings, it is all attributed to his predetermined fate. People say; O bu Chi - it is fate /divine will; or O bu Onatala Chi; it is consequential on providential decree. In this mode of expression Chi becomes synonymous with destiny, providence, fate. A lucky person is – Onye Chioma (a person of good luck or fortune] and unlucky person is Onye Chi ojoo (a person of bad luck or misfortune). The Igbos say in proverb: onye ajo Chi kpatala nku ewu taa ya = a person of bad fortune fetched firewood and a goat ate it, onye ajoo Chi gburu oji okolu na ata = a person of evil fortune cuts down iroko tree but while falling it remained suspended in a needle grass....

The above submission of Ezekwugo cannot be taken to be a true representation of the Igbo concept of Chi. First; it presents Igbo idea of Chi as providential, fate, and destiny which an Igbo got from birth. This understanding proposes that the Igbo believe in predetermined life from God, represented by Chi before, during birth and after birth. The implication is that man has no freedom of action, it thus follows that man cannot be held responsible for his actions since such actions are predetermined. Equally, an acceptance of such predetermined course of life would invalidate the idea of moral judgement and punishment for offences. A perpetrator of crimes becomes exonerated because he or she is charting a life path fixed for him or her ab initio by the creator. However, the Igbo do not subscribe to such deterministic life; they believe and hold tenaciously that the onye metalu obulu meaning that one is liable for his or her actions. This implies that there is freedom of action upon which responsibility for action would be justifiable.

Another point of misnomer deducible from Ezekwugo's contention is the idea that some persons come into the world of existence with Ajo Chi (evil destiny). Chi in Igbo world view is a benevolent spirit that falls within the sub-category of non- human spirits. Being benevolent, Chi is by its very nature good. The absence of good is bad. So Chi

cannot be good and bad at the same time. Secondly, following the Igbo belief that Chukwu (God) is All-good, and that Chi is its spark in man; it follows therefore that God's spark cannot but be good. However, we cannot deny the fact that people experience misfortunes in life. What or who is responsible for such mishaps or misfortunes? Dine (1983, p.41) says that “misfortunes is not created by Chukwu, but exist in person as a result of neglect and lack of initiative on the part of the person”. For Abanuka (as cited in Adibe, 2009, p.71), “the failure of man is because of none proper use of God-given theoretical and practical intelligence (harmonization of *ako na uche*) which is inherent in Chi reality”. Onwuejeogwu presented *agwu* as the cause of the individual's mishaps or misfortunes in life. He came to his conclusion following his conversation with Nri religious thinkers. He reveals that:

...every living being is constantly under the influence of *agwu* (the double character, ambivalent and unpredictable being), which can take possession of a person temporarily. When this happens, the person's personality changes and he becomes unpredictable. His actions alternate between frenzy and calmness, disorderliness and creativeness, insanity and sanity, violence and peacefulness, ignorance and wisdom. Such temporary changes in personality traits are generally described in two ways either by using the popular concept of describing chi as bad chi or using the specific concept of saying that *agwu* has taken possession of the person, *agwu atu ya* (as cited in Adibe, 2009, p.75).

Adibe contested Onwuejeogwu's view above. He argues that *agwu* spirit in Igbo world view is a supernatural call to specific religious functions. That such call to service must not be resisted otherwise the individual suffers. But “once the *agwu* service call is accepted and the necessary religious sacrifices and initiation to the Igbo religious profession is done, the troubled individual ceases to be hysterical, disorderly, insane, violent and ignorant” (Adibe, 2009, p.75). He concludes that *agwu* far from being a destiny destroyer enhances the destiny of an individual to a maximal manifestation. Adibe is right that *agwu* is not to be blamed for individual's misfortunes. *Agwu* only disturbs when its call to service is rejected, but once accepted and appeased and it is propitiated, it becomes loving spirit force that provides success to professionals.

Our discussion so far shows that neither Chi nor *agwu* is to be blamed for one's mishaps or failures in life. The evil forces of witches, the bad spirits and the individuals himself are culpable for such misfortunes. The evil spirits (forces) only take hold of the individual when he breaks his communion with his Chi because the Igbo believe that *onye ya na chi ya kwu, onweghi ihe na eme ya* meaning that one with his chi is safe. One must maintain good relationship with his Chi, offering prayers and sacrifices to his Chi for protection and success. Also, the individual must not fail to work assiduously because hard work leads to success. It is through hard work and the

guidance and support of the Chi that one actualizes his destiny. We shall now be faced with the task of exposing what destiny means for the Igbo.

#### 4. Akala Aka: Ihe Si Na Chi (Destiny: A Package from the Personal God)

The Igbo believe that man is created by Chi-ne-ke, the creator God, who also is the Great God, Chi-ukwu. At the time of birth, the great God (Chukwu) gives to man a spark of himself called Chi, the personal god. He puts one's destiny package into parcels and one's lot depends upon what parcel, the personal god chooses. The choices made by man's personal god (Chi) are inscribed by Chukwu (God) on both palms of the child at birth. These lines on individuals palm, the Owerri-Igbo calls Akala Chi while Onitsha-Igbo term it Akala Aka. "The word 'Aka' in Akala Aka does not mean hand but it is the Onitsha variation of Chi so that Akala Aka are marks imprinted or inscribed on one's palms in accordance with the choices made by the individual or personal deity Chi, hence, Akala Chi or Akala Aka depending on the locality or local dialect" (Mbaegbu, 2012, p.172). And since one's lots in life are chosen by his personal god, Chi the Igbo refers to Akala Aka as 'ihe si na chi', literally means 'what comes from the personal god'. This implies that the things which happen to one are determined beforehand by the disposition of the person's guardian spirit. Metuh (1985, p.28) reveals that "every event in a man's life, whether it be success or failure is Onatara Chi - a gift from Chi". Hence, "the goal of every man is to achieve his Akala Chi - destiny imprinted on his palms". He also noted that Chi derives from Chukwu, God and thus a representative of God in man. He listed some of the functions of the Chi as thus; "it protects and guides man through the dangers and snares of the world.... It chooses a man's destiny and thereafter dispenses the fortune or misfortune therein as he thinks fit".

The above suggests that Chi is responsible for individual's fortunes or misfortunes in life. This presupposes the existence of a good personal god (Chi oma) who dispenses fortune as well as bad personal god (Ajo chi) who dishes out misfortune. However, the idea of ajo chi as earlier argued is inconsistent with Igbo thought and belief system. The Igbo believe and hold tenaciously that Chi is good because it is the image of God in man who is all good. Chi is a benevolent personal god entrusted with the well-being of the individual. It is therefore absurd to think of ajo chi whose task is to dish out misfortune. Opata (1998, p.161) well captured the position of the Igbo on ajo chi theory, when he writes:

The issue of ajo chi is particularly problematic because among the traditional Igbo, Chi is generally worshipped and there is no known instance in which a particular Chi is denied sacrifice on the supposition that it is perceived as ajo chi. Of course, it is widely known and held that Igbo are highly achievement, oriented people. One can then end up having a Chi that prevents one everywhere from actualizing what one desires in life.

The observation of Opatá has a great to say about the Igbo conception of Chi. Chi by its very nature is good. It follows therefore, that Akala Aka which is *ihe si na chi* must as well be good. One is therefore poised to ask the source or the origin of misfortunes. Why do people fail in life? Who or what is culpable whence neither Chi nor the destiny package (*akala Chi*) is bad? We shall seek to address these questions in our subsequent section. However, it is worthy to note that the Igbo not only hold that the individual's lot in life is apportioned by the Chi, they also maintain that the decision of the Chi (as regards the individual's destiny) is unchangeable. Hence, the Igbo say; *ihe Chi dere odego ya* meaning that 'what the Chi has written is unchangeable'. The Igbo so much believe that what is written has a lasting sense of permanence as against what is spoken which can pass away easily or could be denied. Where could we find that which the Chi is written? The Igbo would say; what the Chi is written is to be found in the lines of one's palm. It is Akala Chi, Akala Aka. Akala Aka – 'the lines of the palm' is therefore "a physical manifestation of inward significance of life in every person" (Dine, 1983, p.42). "It is the personalization of the past, the present and the future conditions of an individual's possibility; reality of life and being" (Umeogu, 2004, p.3). Akala Aka is the principle of individuation, that is, that which makes a person different from another. No two individuals, not even identical twins have the same Akala Aka. A child does not have the same Akala Aka with his parents; neither do siblings have the same Akala Aka. The deduction therefore is that Akala Aka is distinct and unique. It is such a personal thing because it derives from the personal god, Chi. It defies genetic influence because it differs even among persons with blood ties.

Akala aka, from the foregoing, is portrayed as the 'already-given', that is, what one comes to life with (*ovuru puta uwa*) fixed and unalterable. This very description, no doubt, purports that the Igbo conception of human destiny is fatalism - the doctrine that every event is pre-determined and inevitable. If so, the individual is said to be left at the mercy of destiny. His life path was chosen for him without his consent and yet he cannot alter such decision. This therefore puts to question the idea of human freedom and by extension, the notion of responsibility for action. Could an individual be held responsible for what he actually becomes in life whence his life path was predestined? As the Igbo hold that '*Akala Aka: Ihe si na Chi*' is unalterable, they at the same time maintain that an individual is responsible for what he or she does. This finds its expression in Igbo saying; *ihe onye metalu oburu* meaning what one has caused for him or herself, let him or her bear the responsibility, the consequence. What could inform such Igbo belief? We therefore turn our attention to the Igbo conception of Akala Aka as *Ihe onye metalu* for elucidation.

5. Akala Aka: Ihe Onye Metalu (Destiny: The Effect of One's Action)

Ihe onye metalu (what a person has caused or done for oneself) could be read both in the positive and negative sense as the cause of one's fortunes and misfortunes respectively. It appears to have some karmic implications in the direction of one having to suffer for what one has done. This comes out well when the statement is read in full: 'ihe onye metalu, o bulu' meaning 'what one has caused for oneself, let him or her bear the responsibility, the consequence'. This implies the notion of individual's responsibility for action; suggesting an underlying notion of the concept of freewill among the Igbo, for if one is to bear one's action, it presupposes that one is free to choose what to or what not to do. The principle of responsibility for one's actions is so strong in Igbo belief system that they are quick to affirm: ihe onye ozo metalu egbunam (let what another person has done lead not to my death).

It is therefore absurd to suggest that an individual is responsible for what his or her life turns out to be, oblivious of the fact that Akala Aka (destiny) is Onatalu Chi (a gift of the Chi) and that what is predestined remains unalterable. Where then lies freedom of action upon which responsibility for action becomes justifiable? However, when we refer to the Igbo idea of predestination, the rationale behind the Igbo insistence for responsibility for action becomes explicit. Ikenga Metuh made us understand that in the Igbo world view, predestination and human responsibility are conflicting terms yet mutually inclusive. What is predestined for the individuals remains latent and it is thus the responsibility of the individual to harness such hidden potentials. Where the individual fails to properly harness such hidden potentials, he or she is culpable for the failure. In the words of Metuh (1985, p.101):

In Igbo thought, predestination and human responsibility are conflicting but they are not diametrically opposed concepts. It is true that what one may hope to get out of life is only what has been predestined by God. But what one actually gets is his own responsibility. He only gets what he has worked for. In other words, where a person is not resourceful, a particular fortune in his destiny package may be lost. Since no one knows the contents of his destiny, he must keep trying as if what he wants is there.

It is evident from the above that ihe onye metalu is sustainable within the purview of human freedom. An individual is at liberty to choose or not to choose to realize his destiny package. Any choice made comes with a responsibility. More so, an individual person is by nature endowed with the faculty, call it 'conscience' which enables him to make appropriate distinction between good and evil. Often, when an individual does something wrong, you would hear such a person say; obi m na ama m ikpe, my conscience judges me. In an event where someone is being accused of something he did not do, such a person would say; obi m di ocha, I have a clear conscience. In an event where someone is asked to do something wrong, such person would say; obi m

anabataghi ya, my conscience does not accept it. All these point to the fact that “the human person is existentially equipped to make appropriate distinction between good and the evil. The election then to perform an evil act is a question of personal choice, an exercise of the will and a manifestation of the freedom to choose” (Opata, 1998, p.169). Therefore, Akala Aka as ihe onye metalu is true because an individual exercises freedom of choice upon which responsibility for action is justifiable.

## 6. Can Akala Aka (Destiny) Be Changed? Addressing the Question of Freedom and Determinism

In our exposition of the Igbo conception of human destiny, we adduced that destiny (Akala Aka) implies on one hand, what one comes to life with (ovuru puta uwa). By this we mean that destiny is the 'already-given', a gift of the Chi (Onatala Chi) which admits no change. On the other hand, we resolved that destiny is what one makes out of life, as we carefully captioned it; 'Akala Aka: Ihe onye metalu'. What is meant here is that an individual person plays a vital role in the shaping of his destiny. He is responsible for what his life turns out to be, a success or a failure. It is obvious, based on these two understanding of destiny that destiny in Igbo world view connotes both freedom and determinism. It is therefore, our task in this section to elucidate these two opposing concepts: freedom and determinism. Consequent upon this, we shall be well equipped to address the issue of the alterability or otherwise of human destiny.

### 6.1 Destiny and Determinism

Determinism appears to be the foundation of destiny. This is because “when something is determined, the thing is said to be destined towards its determined end” (Ukwamedua, 2016, p.275). Determinism is “the belief that every event has a cause; that things are dependent upon and necessitated by causes” (Ukwamedua, 2016, p.275). It has as its core the idea that everything that happens is fully determined by what has gone before it; hence, every event has antecedent cause, which was sufficient to ensure its occurrence. The philosophical discussion on determinism has its basis the question whether human freedom of action is possible if the universe behaves as a deterministic system. Philosophers are divided in their views. Those who agree that there can be no free action in a deterministic world are called 'incompatibilists'. Such philosophers who posit the existence of free action and infer that the actual world is deterministic are known as 'Libertarians'. Those who consent to determinism, maintaining that human freedom is illusory are 'hard determinists'. Opposed to hard determinism is soft determinism - the view that freedom is possible under determinism. There are plethoras of determinism but metaphysical determinism is quite suitable in this context.

To be destined therefore means that one is metaphysically determined by a supernatural power. On this note Iroegbu (1995, p.346) opines : “the baby, still asleep in its cradle

has its being, performance and destiny already partly enshrined and construed in the Igbo world of common origin, world view, language, historical experience, destiny, shared culture, race, colour and habit". We can therefore talk of the relatedness between the philosophical concept of determinism and destiny. Destiny includes everything about determinism, but not every determinism is destiny since the latter portends power-controlling events. A person can be politically, religiously or even socially determined but destiny is a force or power controlling events, which are thought of as determined in advance by God(god) or fate. Ukwamedua (2016, p.278) enumerated three basic factors which determine the success or failure of an individual person in Igbo worldview thus: "the benevolence of one's Chi; one's own effort symbolized by the Ikenga; and one's conscious effort to maintain the law and customs of the community". In addition "that constant libation has to be made to the ancestors for intervention". Onwuejiogwu (as cited in Ukwamedua: 2016, p.278) made us understand that "if one's Chi is active one's energy and actions are well directed and so one's Ikenga becomes effective; when one's Ikenga is effective, through hard work, one makes social and economic progress, as can be seen in the acquisition of knowledge and wealth".

Destiny viewed from the standpoint of metaphysical determinism is destiny in a strict sense. In this conception, an individual's destiny can be determined to be good or evil even before the individual's birth. In the light of this the Igbo would say: *onye uwa oma jiri nkata kuru mmiri* (a man of good destiny fetches water with a basket). Conversely, *onye uwa ojoo gara nku na uguru mmiri amaa ya* (a man of bad destiny goes in the dry season to fetch firewood and gets drenched by the rain). However, destiny in the traditional Igbo thought fits well into the framework of soft determinism. The Igbo believe that though an individual is determined; he still plays a vital role in realizing the contents of his destiny package. This is to say that freedom is possible within the Igbo analysis of destiny.

## **6.2. Destiny and Freedom**

The notion of freedom in one's destiny remains a controversial issue in the philosophical parlance. Freedom though commonly used by man, is subject to widely different interpretations. Hence, to speculate on how free a destined person is (if he is free at all) we must to some extent know what freedom is and what freedom is not. Freedom according to Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary (1989, p.565) is "the state of being at liberty rather than in confinement or under physical restraint; exemption from external control, interference and regulation; power of determining one's own choice; power to make one's own choices or decisions without constraint from within or without". It is "the power of an intelligent being to act or not act, to act this way or another way, without compulsion from within or coercion from without" (Ibekwe,

2003, p.81). In his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1981, Pope John Paul II states that to be free is to be able to choose and to want to choose, it is the ability to live according to one's conscience. Similarly, Osuagwu (1999, p.211) defining freedom from an ontological African perspective avers: "man is born or created free. To be naturally or divinely created means to be basically liberated or made free. To be means to be free; to possess rights and responsibilities".

As a philosophical concept, the real meaning of freedom is so porous; there is no unanimity regarding it. However, two principal ideas of freedom prevail in its history. The first is the liberal view. This is a negative conception of freedom which presents freedom as the absence of constraints to the attainment of our desires. The second is the positive view of freedom which makes constrains a condition for the realization of our freedom. It is the view of philosophical metaphysicians who see freedom as a means of self-actualization. Sigmund Freud could be identified as a Liberalist because he adopted the negative conception of freedom. His basic contention is that culture restricts freedom through ethical code. He maintains that the only measure of the freedom is pleasure and happiness, which aims at maximization of our instincts. On the other side of the divide is Malinowski who subscribes to the idea that culture is a condition for man's freedom. This is a positive conception of freedom, which is a utilitarian view of freedom that subjects the idea of individual freedom to the collective aspirations of the community. The concept of choice, voluntariness, knowledge, freedom and responsibility are the major challenges for the ontological status of destiny in Igbo metaphysics. Has a destined person choice to make since a being or force has ab initio determined all his action? How will the person know what particular life pattern he is destined for? Will he be held responsible for a success or a failure that has been determined for him? These and many other questions arise in the analysis of freedom vis-à-vis human destiny.

Man is condemned to be free, says, Sartre. Man's desire to be free makes him to choose one thing and leave the other. Man lives and decides what to do out of many alternatives. If man makes choice and takes decisions about his life (as he always does) what then is the place of destiny in choice? Is man's choice and decision taken under the same propelling force of destiny or in absence of it? If the force of destiny guides his choices and decisions, then he has not made any choice or taken any decision in the first place; although within him, he believes a choice and a decision has been taken by him. Paradoxically, such a man is not free. His freedom is deceptive because he thinks himself free but his freedom is limited and determined. The assertion therefore, is that the concept of freedom in destiny is a coin of double faces. There is nothing like total freedom, because the same individual who is physically free is metaphysical unfree and ontologically subservient.

Based on the foregoing discussion on the concepts of freedom and determinism within the preview of human destiny, it is apt to assert that destiny (as conceived by the Igbo) is the function of freedom and determinism. Man has a determined beginning but a free living, this means that an individual person is bestowed with the gift of nature (Onatala Chi) at birth but by plenary exercise of his freedom he works out his mission on earth by realizing the content of his destiny. In the light of this, M. Obiajulu (2019, pp.79-80) opines; “Onatala Chi - the gift of destiny does not mean that man receives it in spite of his effort. Man is not a passive receiver but an active one who can only realize this destiny package through hard work in view of self-realization”. In the like manner, Metuh (1985, p.101) insists that the individual has the responsibility of bringing to fruition the content of the destiny. He says: “what one may hope to get out of life is only what has been predestined by God. But what one actually gets is his own responsibility. He only gets what he has worked for”.

The bottom line therefore is that the two opposing terms; freedom and determinism are reconcilable within the Igbo conception of human destiny: “the predetermined end (determinism) and the freely chosen of man (freedom) are intrinsically united in a mutual relationship” (Rahner, as cited in Obiajulu, 2019, p.86). Man is, by this understanding subject both to the power of (pre)determinism and that of freedom. The very conclusion therefore, is that human destiny in Igbo thought is both unalterable and alterable. It is unalterable when conceived as the already given, a package sealed and given to an individual at birth. However, it is alterable since it is a resource to be exploited through human effort. Destiny though predetermined, is achievable. With this reconciliation (of freedom and determinism), we shall now embark on exposing the personality elements that mutually function towards the realization of human destiny.

### **7. Akala Aka (Destiny): Akala Chi (Internal Destiny) And Akala Agu (External Destiny) - Towards the Igbo Personality Potentialities**

Determinism and freedom (as discussed in the preceding section) are indispensable arms of destiny. None does exist without the other. Our starting point is a function of determinism while the rest of the journey rests completely on freedom. Umeogu (2004, p.5) affirms that “in Igbo thought and culture, Akala Aka is a function both of freedom and determinism, for in Akala Aka, Akala Chi and Akala Agu may agree or disagree in the dialectics of an individual's life of lived experience”. What then is Akala Chi? What is Akala Agu? He (2004, p.4) answers: “Akala Aka as Akala Agu represents the outer or external or physical or material realization of the inner or internal or spiritual reality of Akala Aka as Akala Chi”. Akala Chi and Akala Agu are so regarded as the Igbo personality potentialities because they function towards the realization of individuals' destiny.

Akala Chi occupies the infinite level of reality in Igbo theory of personality. Chi falls within the Akala Chi category. Chi is personal oriented force which facilitates the personal fulfilment of individuals. It performs dual functions as personal god and personal destiny. As personal god, Chi serves as the mediator between God and the individual assigned to it. It remains with the individual, from cradle to the grave, protecting and guarding the individual through the dangers and snares of the world. As personal destiny however, Chi undertakes the responsibility of fixing the destiny package of the individual and thereafter sticks with the individual to realizing the contents of his destiny. Consequently, Mbaegbu (2012, p.171) writes: “To his personal god, the Igbo man prays as he does to other gods. In most of these prayers and cults, he asks for long life, for material blessings, for offering and above all, for success in life. Individual god is the final determinant of man's failure or success”.

Accepted that Chi is the final determinant of one's destiny, however, other elements contribute towards the realization of the individuals' essence. Here, we classify them as Akala Agu. They are the physical or visible elements of human personality potentialities. The first to be examined here is Ikenga. Ikenga symbolizes the 'right hand' with which man works out his living. It is symbolically represented by “a carved wooden figure of a man sitting on a stool. It holds in its left hand the head of a man. Most characteristic of Ikenga, however, is that it has two horns; vertical and carved” (Ezekwugo, as cited in Mbaegbu, 2012, p.166). Ezekwugo (as cited in Mbaegbu, 2012, pp.166-167) writing on the essential features of Ikenga and their symbolism has this to say:

The peculiar features of Ikenga are not without their symbolism. The horns indicate power to attack and defence, likewise, the matchet and the head of a conquered enemy; hence both the matchet and the head show victory over enemies and obstacles. The sitting position signifies sovereignty and rule.... There is also the idea of stability and eternity both that is represented by the kind of wood from which an Ikenga is made; Ogilisi, Ukpaka, Akpa and Inyi very hard wood which termites cannot easily eat away.

We agree with Ezekwugo that the whole figure of Ikenga is illustrative of man's authority, power and strength of achievement. However, we disagree with him that the idea of eternity is symbolized by the kind of wood from which Ikenga is carved. Eternity portrays the idea of existence without end, infinite time. But Ikenga cannot fit into such description; it is a personal spirit that ceases to exist with the death of the individual possessing it. What we mean here, is that Ikenga has an end. It does not exist without an end. Rather than using the term 'eternity' to describe the essential feature of Ikenga which is represented by the kind of wood from which it is made, 'durability' would be much apt and reasonable. The words used by Ezekwugo to describe such

wood, namely; very hard wood which termites cannot easily eat away, do not in any way suggest that it is eternal, however, it shows that it lasts long, hence durable. Ikenga strictly speaking is the exclusive possession of grown up men who own families. Women and children are not permitted to possess it. However, a male child may possess Okpesi (a short wood made from Ogilisi tree) loosely referred to as his Ikenga or a kind of imitation, on the ground that he would someday be a grown man and hence, own family. Ikenga is a personal benevolent god concerned with the welfare of individuals. If the possessor is successful in his business, he proudly displays his Ikenga in the shrine of his Ndiichie for people to see and he offers to it a cock or a he-goat proportionate to the magnitude of his success. However, “when one has done everything and fails, he could take his Ikenga and split it into two arguing that it is bent, and carve a straight Ikenga thus starting a new life again” (Onwuejeogwu, 2004, p.45). The indication therefore, is that one must always shun despair despite the worst situations in life. He must keepworking hard hopeful that tomorrow comes with a better package (echi ga aka mma).

The next element is ukwu na ije, the feet. It is symbolized by a 'carved wooden icon of a foot'. It represents the foot of adventure into foreign land. “The spirit of adventure is associated with work and migration” (Onwuejeogwu, 2004, p.46). It is this spirit that accounts why the Igbo inhabit every nooks and crannies of the world in search of living. It is said that there is hardly any town in the world where an Igbo does not live. The Igbo are industrious set of people, they are never afraid to take risk to make ends meet. Every grown up Igbo child is expected to leave his home town, probably for city, in search of his destiny. The Igbo would say; o bu ngaghari ngaghari ka e ji ere nwa mkpi (it is by moving around with the he-goat that it would eventually be sold). This implies that it is by moving from place to place trying different businesses that one gets to identify what he is best suited for.

Another element is iru or ihu, the face. It is symbolized by a 'carved wooden-like chalice'. It represents the face that charms whoever that gazes on it. Naturally, smiles attract. Any business man or woman who always puts up a smiling face would, no doubt, have many customers. This is not only restricted to business, it applies to everything one does. The facial appearance matters in all one does; it has a lot to say about an individual.

Closely related to ihu is uho, the tongue. It is symbolized by a wooden object, tongue-like in shape. The tongue is a very important element because it makes speech possible. It is through the power of the tongue that an individual would be able to express himself as well as persuade others. It would be hard for one to market his products if not for

the tongue. The tongue is an essential element for communication, learning, trading, eating and many other human activities.

The last element to be discussed here is *omuoku*, 'the intellect, the head or seat of wisdom'. It is symbolized by a wooden saucer with a flat handle; an object used for collecting and keeping kola nut and white chalk. *Omuoku* represents "the intellect, the ability to conserve and manage accumulated wealth (*aku*), and knowledge called *ako na uche*" (Onwuejeogwu, 2004, p.45). Without *ako na uche* (the intellect) no individual will make headway in life. The other four personality elements would remain ineffective without *omuoku* since it is the intellect that initiates, controls and harmonizes every activity of man. In the light of this, Onwuejeogwu (2004, pp.49-50) avers:

One personality element can be very active without the others. But the greatest effect emerges when all four are. *Omuoku* must always be effective at all times, because its dominance connotes dispersal of one's wealth and knowledge. Wealth and knowledge accumulated through active element of *Ikenga* or *ukwu na ije* or *uhu* or *iru* singularly or collectively can only be conserved by frugal usage and good management under the active direction of *omuoku*.

The foregoing exposes the elements that occupy the personality potentialities; *Akala Chi* and *Akala Agu*. At the invisible level is the *Chi*, the personal god whereas *Ikenga*, *ihu*, *uho* and *omuoku* occupy the visible level of personality reality. The interplay of these elements brings to fruition an individual's destiny. Umeogu (2004, p.50) explains this interrelationship among personality elements thus:

*Igbo* destiny, to be sure is a tree. *Chi* is the unseen root of *Igbo* tree of destiny. It is the spiritual root animating and carrying the stem, branches, leaves and fruits of the same tree. *Agu* is the seen stem supporting, garnering and carrying the branches, leaves and fruits of the same tree. *Ikenga*, *omuoku*, *ukwunaije*, *uho*, etc. comprises the branches, leaves and fruits of *Igbo* tree of destiny.

## **8. Culminating Reflections**

The *Igbo* concept of human destiny if critically evaluated would reveal that the concept creates more than it can solve. First is the problem of choice. As indicated in the concept, it is obvious that there is no notion of choice. Choice presupposes the existence of options and one is conscious of all facts relating to each so as to facilitate preference. Given the fact that human beings are rational and that they do not make choice outside a preferential system, one wonders how one could properly be said to have made a choice when the available *Chi* (personal god) does that on behalf of the individual person. The *Igbo* belief has it that "at the moment of his (individual's) conception, God

assigns to each person a Chi, an emanation of himself...The Chi goes before God, and chooses the Chi, the Destiny of the child to be born” (Metuh, 1985, p.24). It is therefore point clear that the individual person is passive in the whole process of choosing his destiny.

The second problem draws exclusively from the first. It follows that if one is not free to chart his life's lot, it would be unjustified to hold such a person responsible for his actions since the causes of his actions are external to him and beyond his control. With this fatalistic interpretation of the Igbo concept of human destiny, the practice of performance of character formation becomes otiose, since it is not a product of man's making. Besides, this nullifies the efficacy of reason, stifles creativity and spirit of hard work.

Judging from the foregoing, one would conclude that the Igbo are incurable fatalists and hard determinists. Although in theory, the destiny of a person is said to be unalterable because it became doubly sealed after its choice, but in actual sense, it does not seem to be so. Upon a deeper reflection and practical experience, several factors have occasioned an alteration in destiny either for good or bad. An individual's destiny may be changed for good or for bad. Instances of this abound within the Igbo cultural milieu. The Igbo believe in the consultation of the god of divination, that is, 'igba afa' to know the kind of destiny chosen for the individual and to perhaps alter an unfavourable package through the help of some spiritual forces and by the application of the right type of sacrifices. The Igbo also believe that evil forces such as witchcraft (amosu) and other demonic forces form agents of possible change in the fulfilment of individual's destiny. One's character, no doubt, contributes in the alteration in the status of destiny. One's act of rashness or impulse behaviour can affect one's destiny for the worse. An impatient runs at a faster pace than his Chi (personal god) thereby losing its support and stumbles in life. The Igbo saying has it: *onye buru chi ya uzo, ogbagbuo onwe ya na oso*. The implication is that when one disconnects with his personal god, who is meant to direct him along his destiny paths, failure is inevitable. In the like manner, the Igbo believe that a lazy fellow realizes not his life's lots. The aforementioned instances lay credence to the Igbo belief that destiny can be altered.

The possibility of altering one's destiny presents some forms of antinomies in Igbo thought. At one point, it is said that one's destiny is unalterable. At another, it is held that it is alterable through some factors. What do we make of this seeming contradiction? What is suggested is that there seems inconsistency in the whole idea of destiny in Igbo thought and belief system. If we assume a changeable destiny, then we may draw analogy between destiny and soft determinism. The Igbo trace the cause of some events to the individual person who performs the action and not any supernatural

force outside of man. It is for this reason that people are punished for wrong doing because they are believed to be responsible for their actions. This therefore suggests that the Igbo concept of human destiny falls within the gamut of 'soft determinism'. Soft determinism here refers to a situation where a person is held responsible for actions deliberately performed by him while attributing to his Chi (personal god) those whose causes transcend him. In the face of misfortune and distress, the Igbo would exclaim: Chim egbuo m (my Chi has killed me). It is a cry of one deserted by his personal god who ought to guard him, and guides him along his destined path.

Unlike a fatalist who would easily resign to fate with respect to future situations, the Igbo as soft determinists are hopeful that tomorrow comes with a better package (echi ga aka mma). More so, they are rationally conscious of being held responsible for present actions deliberately performed. On this count the Igbo say: ihe onye metalu, o buru meaning that one is responsible for his actions. It is because of freedom, morality and responsibility which are accommodated by the Igbo concept of human destiny that makes the alterability of destiny meaningful and consistent.

Yet, admitting that the Igbo concept of human destiny is soft determinism presents us with the problem of incoherence. "If destiny is both unalterable and alterable and that prayer assists man to face the challenges of life seriously, which could lead to a change of fortune, destiny as destiny loses its meaning" (Adibe, 2009, p.72). Destiny by its very meaning presupposes a preordained life, fixed and unchangeable. It is therefore worrisome to assume that a life path preordained by an individual would be changed. However, it would be more tenable to hold that, based on the nature of God (who dispenses individual's lot) who is all good, that destiny is by its very nature good and latent. Hence, man a being endowed with rationality and freedom is charged with the responsibility of bringing to fruition the contents of his destiny. In this present conception, when we say that destiny is unalterable it means that what is programmed for an individual is fixed and latent. However, that destiny is alterable implies that the individual has a role to play in the realization of the contents of his destiny. The belief in destiny, no doubts among other things serves the purpose of assuring human beings that they have a role to play in the world, even if it is an assigned role.

### **Conclusion**

This last section seeks to recapitulate the scholarly efforts invested in this article. In a nutshell, this article sets to critically examine the concept of human destiny in the traditional Igbo-African society in order to address the inherent inconsistencies. Majorly, the problem hinges on the question of the alterability or inalterability of destiny, which no doubt borders on the problem of freedom and determinism. If we admit that destiny is sealed, fixed and given, and thus unchangeable; the question arises

as to the appropriateness of praise or blame. Yet the Igbo never relent in praising and/or blaming people for their actions. How do we reconcile this inconsistency?

Through a hermeneutic study of the Igbo conception of human destiny (akala aka), the article discovers that akala aka (human destiny) is on one hand, *ihe si na chi* (a package from the personal god). The implication is that destiny is the 'already- given', that is, what one comes to life with (*ovuru puta uwa*) fixed and unalterable. On the other hand, akala aka (destiny) is *ihe onye metalu* (the effect of one's action). This very understanding indicates that an individual plays a vital role in the shaping of his destiny. Hence, akala aka as *ihe onye metalu* is sustainable within the purview of human freedom upon which responsibility for action is justifiable. These two understandings no doubt connote determinism and freedom respectively. Hence, in Igbo thought system, determinism and freedom are indispensable arms of destiny. Man has a determined beginning but a free living; meaning that an individual is at birth bestowed with the gift of nature (*onatala chi*) which he must work out to actualizing through the plenary exercise of his freedom.

Lastly, this article maintains that human destiny in Igbo worldview far from being fatalistic falls within the gamut of soft determinism. Destiny only guarantees the potentials, not the actualization of life prospect. The latter depends on the efforts of the individuals. Little wonder the Igbo term for human destiny is Akala aka which connotes both 'the already-given' (akala) and 'the fruit of hardwork' (aka). Therefore, in Igbo conception of human destiny, determinism and freedom co-exist and are mutually inclusive.

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