

**IFE ARUSI NA IGBAKWURU ARUSI  
CRITICAL EXPOSITION OF THE DIFFERENTIAL-CONSEQUENTIAL  
LINGUISTIC INTERPRETATION**

**Jude I. Onebunne**

Department of Philosophy  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
juno.anyi@gmail.com, 08034074664

**Abstract**

In Igbo *religiocumtrado*-cultural *weltanschauung*, *ife arusi* (worship) makes a person *onye ogo muo*, that is, an idol worshipper, an idolater or a heathen while *igabkwuru arusi* (dedication) makes a person an *osu*, an outcast, within the abominable ambience and detestable practice of *osu* caste system. One place of idol worship makes one an *osu* and the other person *onye ogo muo*. A good understanding and interpretation of these conceptual lexicons show their differential-consequential bent with regard to *ife* (as in worship or commitment) and *igbakwuru* (as in dedication and taking refuge for protection) indicating that they are simply of the same semantic applications within the same relationship with *Arusi*. Using the method of critical analysis, the researcher finds out that *ife* or *igbakwuru* with regard to *arusi* as the *locus operandi* is a matter of linguistic expressions and or interpretation of purpose. That is, the act of identifying with *arusi* in question, be it in the form of *ife* (worship) and *igbakwuru* (dedication) solely lies with the subject's intention for the exclusive idea of protection and necessarily as a form of dedication. The societal negative appreciation with the act of *igbakwuru arusi* is therefore not only worrisome but inhumanly victimizing and just mere wickedness against humanity.

**Keywords:** *Ife arusi, igbakwuru arusi, osu* caste system

**Introduction**

In African-Igbo ethical world-view, life is of a primary and fundamental value to be cherished and protected. Splitting blood especially of a relation is a great taboo. At worst or rather to pay for great atrocities meted to a fellow human being or against the human society, one is banished or excommunicated in a way that spells death, *but not splitting blood*. By and large, life is considered the greatest value one may possess hence *ndu bu aku, ndu bu ife, ndu bu isi* and *ndu amaka*. These simply compliment Judeo-Christian practice and tradition that life is of primary value especially the human life. In our theme herein, the idea of *ife arusi* or *igbakwuru arusi* preoccupies our discussion as each of the single act towards the *arusi* connotes and implies a lot.

*Ife arusi* makes a person *onye ogoo muo*, that is, an idol worshipper while *igabkwuru arusi* makes a person *osu*, an outcast, within the contemporary dreaded and detestable *osu caste system*. It is disheartening that, one place of idol worship makes one *an osu* and the other *onye ogoo muoo*. A good understanding as well as an appreciable interpretation of these conceptual lexicons shows that *ife* (as in worship or commitment) and *igabkwuru* (as in dedication and taking refuge for protection) are simply of the same semantic application within the same relationship with *arusi* fulling same purpose (be it of dedication or worship) which might have been misconstrued over the years thereby making *igabkwuru arusi* more odious a practice than *ife arusi*.

In a statement, therefore, *Arusi* (equally spelt *alusi*, *arushi* or *arunsi*) is a spirit or image that is worshipped and revered in the Igbo or Traditional African Religion. In Igbo trado-religious pantheon, where *Chukwu* is the supreme being of Igbo spirituality as well as the source of all other Igbo deities and their different tasks, the word *arusi* refers to a number of deities often minor ones, associated with the terrestrial habitats like earth, rivers or market place. They act as spirit-forces for blessing or destruction, depending on the circumstances, and enforce punishments on "evildoers". In the foregoing therefore, the whole idea surrounding the implication of identifying with *arusi* in Igbo religious outlook and practise will be x-rayed within the linguistic differentiations and consequences in the act of *ife* and *igabkwuru*.

An online *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines *linguistic* as that which has to do with the scientific study of human language or speech including the units, nature, structure, and its modification as one tries to understand and appreciate the world around us. The operating word in the theme, consequential, has to do with following as a result or effect of something. The word *differential* is understood as alternative, disparate and non-equivalence or inequality. Therefore, the concept: *differential-consequential linguistic* as expressed in our theme has to do with mutually exclusive human speech and heterogeneous human language in the proper interpretation of the act *ife* or *igabkwuru* on or with *arusi* as the receptive connect of the those actions following those singular acts (*ife* and *igabkwuru*) towards the *arusi*. *Differential-consquential linguistic interpretation*, however, has to do with the understanding of the intricacies in the words expressing the action of *ife* or *igabkwuru*. This knowledge can be applied to improve the communication between people, contributing to the translation activities and assisting in all the literary efforts providing insights into one of the most intriguing aspects of human language, knowledge and behaviour. There is, of course, a definite differential and consequential effect in the linguistic interpretation of the purpose of the people involved in the act of *ife arusi* as against *igabkwuru arusi*. This work centres on the conceptual appreciation in the form of linguistic interpretation of the cardinal concepts in the theme and their purpose. *Arusi*, however, is a religious cultic being as

such than a traditional or cultural institution. Both acts, *ife* or *igbakwuru*, entail a form of celebration but with different religious bent and traditional innuendoes.

### **Understanding the Concept, Idol**

The traditional beliefs and religious practices of the Igbo people are highly diverse with certainty and credence which were passed down from one generation to another through folk tales, proverbs, songs, and festivals. The *africanity* of African literatures as well as the apt *orality* of the African oratures buttressed this age long fact. Although most Igbo people today are adherents of Christianity that is monotheistic but before its official advent, most of their religious beliefs and practices were within animism and theism- expressed in many forms of monotheism, polytheism and pantheism. One must, however, stress that animism builds the core concept of Igbo traditional religion which includes the worship of *arusi* as tutelary deities, nature worship, ancestor worship and the belief in an afterlife, reincarnation and vagaries of paranormals. Nevertheless, there remains a reverential place with regard to their understanding of theism in their belief systems and practices.

Theism is the belief in the existence of God and or gods. It's often regarded as a world-view of adherents that accept it as such. As well, there is a form of *differential a-theism*, that is, a veritable stand of not being God or god than a disbelief in God or gods. This form of belief, however, entails a kind of worship. Theism nonetheless is a belief in the existence of God who is viewed as the creative source of the human race and nature, hence, very immanent in the world. According to Ikenga-Metuh (1999:94), "our analysis of African world-view shows that most African societies recognise fundamentally two different types of divinities; the Supreme Being and the subordinate deities", that is, the creatures. Nevertheless, Ikenga-Metuh (1999:113) maintains that "African theism therefore has no apologies to make for its not fitting into one or other of the familiar western moulds-monotheism, polytheism and pantheism", rather it emphasizes that "there is one Supreme being who mediates his powers through a hierarchy of subordinate spiritual beings..." Ikenga-Metuh, E (1999:117) notwithstanding confirms that it can be approached through intermediaries: deities,ancestors and medicine and rarely worshipped directly. Theism, therefore, describes the belief in at least one God as it proclaims a dualistic relation between God (a being who controls events from outside of the human world) and gods in the world. Such gods as creatures, are typified as such in images rightly referred to as idols in a practise appreciated as idolatry with adherents idolaters.

An idol is an object of extreme devotion. It is, therefore, a representation or symbol of an object of worship. It is a *false god* as long as it is a human effort in trying to recreate or adopt a semblance of the Divine or Supreme Being. It is a false reality in the likeness

of something. Old usage refers to an idol as a pretender, impostor, a false conception. However, an idol is a spurious deity or an object that is adored or worshipped. Contemporary times regard idol as a famous person who is greatly admired or loved, for example an *American Idol* or *Nigerian Idol*. Nevertheless, an idol is popularly a graven image or representation of anything that is revered, or believed to convey spiritual power; a worship of which is regarded as idolatry. Idolatry, in Judaism and Christianity, is the worship of someone or something other than God as though it is God, a Supreme Being. An *Online Cambridge Dictionary* defines idol as *an object, or picture that is worshipped as a god*. *Dictionary.com* equally defines idol as *an image or other material object representing a deity to which religious worship is addressed*. It is, therefore, an image of a deity other than God receiving blind admiration, adoration, reverence and devotion. In a common parlance, therefore, idol is synonymous with *arusi* as such. There are different forms of worship of God among different African societies which has been belied with indiscriminate labelling of African Traditional Religion (ATR) as *deism* with many forms of polytheism, pantheism and theism. *Ife arusi* and *igbakwuru arusi*, nevertheless, are cults as well as forms of public worship of God or god in ATR as idol worship. Hence, idol worship has to do with *ife arusi* while *osu* caste has to do with *igbakwuru arusi*. Ikenga-Metuh, E (1999, 123) defines this act of cultic worship as “submission to the spirit and therefore proceeds by supplication, adoration, petitions and resignation to the object of worship. Worship can, therefore, be expressed by action as well as by words amidst rituals for oath, covenants, vows and consecration made in the name of the deity”. Here lies the whole thrust of *ife arusi* as well as *igbakwuru arusi*.

### **Appreciation of the Concept of *Arusi* in Igbo Cosmogony.**

The Igbos worshipped a host of *arusi* (gods and deities), are deities that are worshipped, revered and served in the religion of the Igbo people. They often create new ones for special events and happenings in their environment. Equally, the Igbo cosmology and cosmogony of visible interacting beings, that is, the Igbo world, is referred to as *uwa*. However, Okere, T. (1983) was premier in translating and use of the concept of being as *uwa* which literally means the world, englobing both the cosmos, nature and destiny. This *uwa* presents a balance between feminine and masculine realities while dividing the world into four corners ever controlled by the gods corresponding to *eke, orie, afo and nkwo* which are the days of the week in the Igbo calendar popularly regarded as market days. Equally, the days match with the four cardinal points corresponding to the four Igbo sacred days: *eke*-east, *orie*-west, *afo*-north, *nkwo*-south.

Igbo *weltanschauung*, therefore, has to do with Igbo realities. The Igbo world, like an African world, according to Oliver O. Onwubiko has to do with “world of inanimate, animate and spiritual beings”. This is the basis of Igbo religious ideologies. Igbo world-

view has something to do with Igbo realities amidst myths. That means, it deals with the way Igbo people sees realities surrounding them. In a nut shell, Igbo reality deals with Igbo cosmogony which is within the boundary of the origin of the Igbo world as a people providing symbolic categories by Igbo people, appreciating the arrangement of their existential realities, forming their existential harmony as a national people-sharing one origin by way of *natus*. Emefie Ikenga-Metuh (1999, 50) gave a succinct explanation of world-view thus:

A people's world-view has been described as the complex of their beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, the nature, structures, organisation, and interaction of beings in the universe with particular reference to man. A world-view seeks to answer fundamental questions about the place and relationship of man with the universe. Answers to these fundamental problems provide man with blue-print for controlling his environment and for establishing his social and political institutions. Conversely, knowledge of a people's world-view is a key to the understanding of their social, political and even psychological problems.

The *arusi*, the incarnation of Supreme Being, *Chukwu* or *Chi-Ukwu* in Igbo religio-worldview is also known as with different Igbo names in differing dialects. These deities, known as *arusi*, are tutelary or guardian spirits who are the founders of the communities or associated with the earth, rivers or markets. *Arusi* may be depicted as wooden figures and placed in shrines where they are the subjects of weekly and annual rituals that honour the deities who helped a community or family solve problems. Old members of the Igbo community still honour *arusi* today. These *arusi* all come from the female *arusi*, that is, the *ala*, the earth goddess who embodies the workings of the world. *Arusi* has other lesser deities that are accountable for many aspects of nature. According to an online study by Oluwaseun Osewa (2005-20022) in Nairland on *Arusi*

There are lesser deities in *odinani*, each of whom are responsible for a specific aspect of nature or abstract concept. According to Igbo-lore, these lesser *alusi*, as elements of *Chukwu*, have their own specific purposes. They exist only as long as their purposes do, thus, many *alusi* die off except for the universally served *alusi*. The top four *alusi* of the Igbo pantheon are *Ala*, *Igwe*, *Anyanwu*, and *Amadioha* (or *Kamalu*); other less important *Alusi* exist after these, some depending on the community. They are, *Ogwugwu*, *Uras* or *Ulasi*, *Ichi*, *Uchu*, *Iyi*, *Agwu* etc.

### ***Arusi* Complementing *Odinala***

Igbo world equally comprises of *odinala*. *Odinala* in central Igbo dialect is the compound of the words *ò dì* ('located') plus *n* (*nà*, 'within') plus *àla* (the one god). Other dialectal variants include *odinanị*, *odinanana*, *omenala*, *omenana*, and *omenanị*. The word *odinala* and all its variations are associated with tradition, religio-culture and customary laws of the Igbo people. *Odinala* comprises of the

traditional religious practices and cultural beliefs of the Igbo people. These traditional religious practices of the Igbo people are both monotheistic and pantheistic as well as polytheistic within the hierarchy of beings. God is first and foremost the source of all things in the hierarchy with other pantheon of spirits as *Ala, Amadioha, Anyanwu, Ekwensu, Ikenga* exists. These beings are lesser spirits prevalent in *odinala* expressly serving as elements of *Chineke*, the supreme being or high God.

Lesser spirits known as *ágbàrà* or *árúsí* operate as part of God though below the high God *Chineke*. However, *arusi* is understood as idol and referred as such. These spirits represent natural forces; *agbara* as a divine force manifests as separate *arusi* in the Igbo religious pantheon. A concept of lesser spirit exists as a masculine and feminine solar deity. *Arusi* are mediated by *dibia* and other priests who do not contact the high god directly. Through *áfà*, 'divination', the laws and demands of the *arusi* are communicated to the living. *Arusi* is venerated in community shrine around roadsides and forests while smaller shrines are located in the household for ancestral veneration. Deceased ancestors live in the spirit-world where they can be contacted. Below the *arusi* are minor and more general spirits known as *mmúò* loosely defined by their perceived malevolent or benign natures. These minor spirits are not venerated and are sometimes considered the lost souls of the dead.

*Odinala* in a loose sense describes the faith of the people bordering on monotheism and pantheism as well as polytheism. Nuances of distinctions must be made with regard to central genderless deity as the supreme being: *Chukwu*; the Ancestors as *ndiichie* and the minor spirits as *mmnuo* and spiritual forces mainly under the spirit class of *arusi* who are incarnations of the high god. When an *arusi* is assigned to an individual, it becomes the person's *chi*, a personal spirit or guardian-god, determining the person's destiny. *Chi* refers to the light and the day in contrast to the dark. The universal *chi* indirectly in charge of everything is *Chukwu* who is the supreme being that is beyond the limits of time and space

### **Understanding Ife Arusi**

*Ife arusi* is simply an idol worship and properly regarded as idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of an idol or idols—objects or images, such as statues, that are worshipped as the representations of deities or gods. Idolatry is regarded as the worship of a secret image or an idol as if it were a god. In ANET and monotheistic Abrahamic religions (namely Judaism and Islam) and Traditional African Religions or ATR (African Traditional Religion) idolatry connotes (and is considered) the worship of something or someone other than the *God of Abram, Esau and Jacob* and such worship was, of course, regarded as given to false gods. The word idol can also refer to the deity or god that is being worshipped. Often these idols are considered as symbols in relation to the

absolute but not the absolute in itself. They are icons of spiritual ideas or the concrete representation of the divine. These statues and images are not of course devoid of symbolism.

ATR, firstly used by Parrinder in his book published in 1954, often referred as African Religion as a lived religion and often regarded as folk or ethnic religion is not a religion of the book. It has over the years suffered great interference from within and outside continental Africa. ATR has been subjected to global ridicule through the exploration that gave rise to slavery, colonialism, capital flight and all forms of stolen legacies by way of years of plundering African of her human and natural resources. ATR amidst derogatory regards as fetishism, totem-ism, naturalism and animism, is a religion of a people from their world-view, even if it is tribal religion, ethnic religion or preliterate religion (cf. Ikenga-Metuh, E. 1999:3). Placed side by side with Abrahamic Religions, ATR is a religion that is traditional to Africans as a people sharing in one humanity. Man being a *homo religiosus* must worship something of which if there is no God man must have created one. ATR, therefore, enjoys a form of traditionality to African Traditional Religion and africanity to African Traditional Religion. In our context then ATR is properly expressed in *Ife Arusi* as a form of religion. *Arusi* has often been designated as *deities*, *gods* and as *spiritual forces*. It is regarded as lesser spirit operating as part of God. According to Onwubiko, O. A. (1991, 61) thus:

The African believes in the existence of spirits in general. These spirits can be grouped into two. The first type are those whose names are *known* and localised, enshrined and therefore regularly worshipped. The most prominent ones are often owned by a community or, at times, by a kindred. The family gods also belong to this first group. The second group are those whose names are *not known*, and as such are called bad spirits. These are not localised, that is, they are not associated with a particular community specifically and exclusively, nor are shrines erected for them anywhere. Sacrifices to them are often placed on the road sides, often on the forked roads, because they are believed to be wandering spirits and through which road they came out they would eventually meet sacrifice.

*Ife arusi* notwithstanding can be linked to the worship of the deities, gods and spiritual forces. It is regarded as idol worship as such. In this form of worship there is a kind of one's dedication to *arusi*. Such worship, however, entails commitment, loyalty, allegiance and enthusiasm. *Ife arusi* as part of African theism characterised by monolatry recognise the need of some form of mediators to facilitate man's approach to the Supreme Being. Ikenga-Metuh, E (1999, 110) stressed this idea further thus that "these mediators could be spiritual beings-deities, angels, saints, ancestors, spirit-forces; or they could be human agencies priests, medicine-men, prophets, diviners or kings, etc." In African Traditional Religion, often seen as *Deus Otiosus* (Withdrawn God)

by the West, therefore, God is usually approached through the intermediaries as against direct worshipped in other theistic religions.

### **Perspectives of *Igbakwuru Arusi***

*Igbakwuru arusi* means running to or towards *arusi*, idol, that is, taking refuge in a shrine. This single act of *igbakwuru* makes one *osu*. This single act creates a human situation with many despicable acts of all forms of slavery and ostracization. Despite the March 25, 1807's *Abolition of Slave Trade Act*, the *osu* and *ohu* practices still continue in some parts of Igboland, especially South-East Nigeria. Many communities are yet to do away with this heinous act against mankind and see them abolished. This form of active movement towards the abolition is always caused by something beyond one's will. Hence, the movement is definitely coerced. The will to survive and live among the people most often necessitates this *die-hard* move. The *osu* caste system as a traditional practice in Igboland discourages social interaction with *the other* persons called *Nwadiala* or *diala* (*real born*). *Osus* (outcasts), seen as unclean, were made to live in shrines or marketplaces, are dedicated to the deities (*Arusi*) of Igboland; they are considered as inferior beings and are usually separated from *others*. However, the origin and practice of the *Osu Caste System* goes back during the period when the Igbo city-states were managed by the dictates of the earth, known as *odinani* as well as the *ala*-deity enacting rules for the people. Some offenders who may be guilty of great abominations were cast away so as not to attract the earth deity's anger, calamity and curse. Such branded ones are identified as outcasts, that is, *osus*. All these maltreatment and inhuman punishment made the *osus* to try surviving at all cost. Equally, the desire to survive different forms of man's inhumanity among the people and the single desire to get justice pushes one to run for protection even at a maximum prize of ostracization and stigmatization of branding as *osu*. As the Igbo adage says he who runs and returns lives to tell the tale of his life.

*Igbakwuru Arusi* is not just a mere running to or going into the *arusi* domain. It entails a form of dedication and commitment as one's for protection from the *arusi* from the human oppression and all other presumed forms of injustices. By running to *arusi* one is safe and merely survives the human aggressive rot but gains a generational stigmatization. True enough such people who have taken refuge in *arusi* takes care of the place and feeds from anything that comes from the *arusi*. This act of taking refuge within the environmental-confines of idol is merely for protection and other forms of divine providence. It's a form of one's dedication and commitment to an idol. This form of dedication is not for mere worship but more for profound protection. Other ways of becoming a victim of *osu* is by killing an *osu* or caused *osu* to die without replacement automatically become an *osu*. As sacred streams in the communities, some form of close contact and relationship with the *osu* turns one into one.

### **The African-Igbo Human Person: A Traditional Subject of *Arusi***

Man by nature is *homo religiosus*. A typical African-Igbo Man is too religious as a result of his closeness to nature. African-Igbo man is nature connected. There is this man's innate need to affiliate with other lives, such as flora and fauna, plants and animals. This essentially means that humans have a desire to be near nature. The man-nature relationship has always been ambiguous, nature being seen as both a provider and an enemy. In classical Christian thinking, natural law refers to a universal moral standard that is natural and embedded in nature reached with natural light of reason. Hence, God is also nature, and thus nature is God. It is, therefore, very possible to connect with God through nature. God can be anywhere, any-time, and in any form. Our natural environment doesn't just teach us about Creation but as well leads us towards an appreciation of God especially in nature. Nature here inspires wonder bringing harmony in life. This idea often necessitates reverence and other forms of appreciation. Therefore, it is of popular opinion that if there is no God and gods as such man must as it is in his natural disposition create one. Our human nature is of negative and positive consequences and in the words of Iroegbu, P. (2000, 9), "often we wonder at the excellence, and marvel at the achievement of humanity (*positive*)...at the same time, we are dismayed at our incapacities. We are disappointed at our shortcomings (*negative*)...". However, man in his negative aspects, *homo lupus homini- man is wolf unto man-* in the words of David Hume, is very much responsible for the pros and cons in human existence. In this human enterprise man relates and belongs accordingly with and within the society amidst consequences that borders on African or Igbo ethics with much emphasis on community and of course communitarianism amidst principle of solidarity.

Iroegbu, P (1996, 92) supports this view thus: "the African's fundamental understanding of the human person is not individualistic or atomistic. Rather, it is relational and being-with-ness. He is primarily a being-with the neighbour". Iroegbu in this regard proposes a kind of *Umunna* ecclesiology that adopts everyone accordingly. Hence, Iroegbu, P (1996, 93) affirms "The outcome of the relational demands of ecclesia is that there must be a fraternity in which each member is given a chance and the help to a full, flourishing and happy member. In *umunna*, all are *umu* (children). Therefore, all are in fraternal co-existence with the others and filially with the *Nna*, God Himself". In this form of relationship, everyone enjoys a form of belongingness and one is neither banished nor ostracised. Onebunne, J.I. (2019a, 186) in the Chapter on *Being as Belongingness in African Religious Order* reiterates on this idea that "the African man is a religious man...who is responsible for his existence. Man has no option than to worship this Being and as well structure his lifestyle so as to meet up with the expectations of the Supreme Being who is considered as good and invisible". For Iroegbu, P (1996, 92), "belongingness therefore defines a central cord of *umunna*.

In it each member finds a sense, a fulfilment and an existential integrity. *Umunna Ecclesiology is an Ecclesiology of Belongingness*". Bujo, B. (2003, 24) in interpreting Ratzinger Christological Reflections reiterates on it thus: "to be human always means sharing life with others in such a way that, as Ratzinger puts it, *the past and the future of humanity are also present in every human being*." Being conscious of the place of the divine in the name of *arusi* in human existential life, the human person exploits the positive and or negative dispositions at his beck and call. Subjecting himself to *arusi* as in *igbakwuru* that connotes a negative act. However, subjecting himself in the act of *ife* denoting a positive enactment. The human person as a subject of *arusi*, remains the locus of interplay of the consequences of identifying with *arusi* as such.

### ***Ife Arusi or Igbakwuru Arusi: Differential-Linguistic Interpretation of the Consequential Purpose***

This singular act with *arusi* entails double differential implications as a result of the consequential purpose in approaching *arusi* as such. That is, the act of *ife* or *igbakwuru arusi* entails a kind of worship, dedication and supplication for protection. However, it is the intention and often the mode or reason for this act of *ife* or *igbakwuru arusi* as consequential purpose that spells out one's identification as such. *Ife arusi* and *igbakwuru arusi* are same-movement towards *arusi* in the form of dedication and commitment for some form of protection and gracious providence. *Arusi* remains at the centre of these acts as one comes by way of *igbakwuru* or *ife*. The one that comes via *igbakwuru* becomes a *victim of circumstance* while the one that comes via *ife* becomes a *victor of same circumstance*. All these are mere human acts. *Igbakwuru* unfortunately resulted in one becoming an *Osu*, an inferior state, second class citizens, with all forms of victimization and untold punishment in the form of disinheritance, ostracism, denial of membership in communal gathering, community social celebrations as marriage ceremonies and reception of chieftaincy titles as well deprivation of personal property. Despite all the influence of Christianity and contemporary societal progress, the *osu* caste system endures. *Ife* fortunately ended with one becoming a superior one as *diala*, a free born.

The perturbing question is how can a particular action done towards one being results in two extreme referential acts of odious and intolerable nature? Is this not as a result of human limitedness and mere victimization. The act of *igbakwuru arusi* as we know was a decision one takes so as to live beyond most human injustices. However, this gruesome situation was perceived and therefore was created by the *dialas* most probably to ironically protect victims as such

### **Human Life in African cosmic-ontology**

Life, in particular, Human life is of primary value. Without life, no other value is attainable. The African man values life so much that he does not like violence or anything that will make him to shed blood which is for them life. Onwubiko O.A. (1991: 23) reiterates on this stand thus “this idea of sanctity of life makes it an abomination for anyone, under any circumstance to take his own life...The Africans prize life above other thing.” Life as a primary value, therefore, becomes an opportunity for other values in life without which life is somehow meaningless

Many scholars from different academic disciplines have concurred that life is a primary value that necessitates other possible values. The sacrality of life flows from this great understanding and appreciable tenet. Hence, *ndubuisi*-life first and *nduka*-life is greater as Igbo names stand as such. Life first. As Kanu, A. (2015:244) rightly asserts, “the desire for life and its preservation in Igbo ontology is the *summum bonum* (the supreme good) and every other thing is expected to serve its realization”. This life is simply dynamic and very active as such. Kanu, A. (2015:245) observes that “life is the principle of activity, growth and fulfilment”. The value of life is linked specifically with quality of life within the human society. Unless there is life and precisely human life the issue of *ife* or *igbakwuru* does not arise. Life necessities warrant great human need for divine providence that may be sort in the act of *ife* and or *igbakwuru*. Therefore, the human person being as a social person in his quest for other existential realities that make living worth it encounters frictions amidst an ordered African traditional society as expressed in taboos and other stringent prohibitions. These taboos and or extreme societal prohibitions nevertheless help in the sustenance of such society against the consequent collapse. Colonialism and Christianity as well as commercialization with the exploration, however, saw the decline of Igbo Religio-Traditional Cultures and practices and the values amidst slave trade, deculturalization and depersonalization of African-Igbo man and imposition of western culture as acculturation. *Ife arusi* or *igbakwuru arusi*, therefore, falls within the Igbo belief system. Part of the disarray in Igbo religious crisis is seen in different religious ideological system that is in travail. *Igbakwuru arusi* as one of the this system has been handed down as part of the Igbo societal malaise.

Onwubiko, O.A. (1991:18) explains this when reiterates that life’s values and oddities are very central in the act of identifying with the idol. Such identification spells good or evil. The act of *ife* entails free worship and dedication while the act of *igbakwuru* connotes coerced worship and dedication. It borders in the intention for identifying with the idol. When it is freely done, it is mere identification with the soul act that man, as *homo religiosus*, which must worship something. When it’s coercively done, it is not just mere identification rather as the last resort for one to aver an impending human

doom or manlike catastrophe. Osu caste system established in *igbakwuru arusi* becomes an avenue with which Africans preserve and protect life at all cost in appreciation of the sacredness of life. In this candid expression that respects life against any form of shedding blood, life belongs to all and it's for all. The community in spite of what one might have done uses the act of *igbakwuru* in holding unto life in its inviolability thereby giving every individual his or her existence, that is, existential life. This reassures one on the dignity of human life against other lives. Hence, life is merely belongingness. Iroegbu, P and his academic followers echoed principally that "to be is to belong and to belong is to be".

### **Reference**

- Bujo, B. (2003). *Foundations of An African Ethic*. Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa
- Ikenga-Metuh, E (1999). *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*. Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Iroegbu, P (1996). *Appropriate Ecclesiology: Through Narrative Theology To An African Church*. Owerri: International University Press Ltd.
- Iroegbu, P. (2000). *Kpim of Personality: Treatise on human Person*. Owerri: Eustel Publications.
- Kanu, I. A. (2015). *A Hermeneutic Approach to African Traditional Religion, Theology and Philosophy*. Jos: Fab Anieh Nigeria Ltd.
- Okere, T. (1983). *African philosophy: A historico-hermeneutical investigation of the conditions of its possibility*. Lanham: University Press America.
- <https://www.nairaland.com/4488587/nairaland-owner-seun-osewa-full>
- Onwubiko, O. A. (1991). *African Thought, Religion & Culture*. Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Online Cambridge English Dictionary*.  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/idol>  
<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/idol>  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>