

HERMENEUTICS OF THE ONTOLOGICAL BASIS OF IGBO IDENTITY

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Abstract

The fact of a people having a culture, ontologically presupposes the peoples' rationality, concepts, mental abstractions, ideas, norms, beliefs and identity. Every person or people have a root or origin and which is traceable. The lost of the root or origin is as a matter of fact lost of identity. The worst calamity that can befall a person or a people, is the lost of identity or suffering of identity crisis. It is a calamity because it brought with it confusion, inferiority complex, inauthenticity, emptiness, lack of proper development and viewing oneself and his world in strange worldviews. However, the knowledge and realization of one's identity creates, enhances and sustains authentic development. The effects of the Igbo contacts with other cultures continue to pervade and misinform Igbo worldview and posited grave challenges to good understanding of true and authentic Igbo identity. The work will engage the method of hermeneutic analysis in addressing the problem. And through this method to enhance the understanding of the ontological basic of Igbo identity. By addressing the obscurities, ambiguities and misconceptions. The work was able to discover that Being in Igbo ontology, interact not in a chaotic manners, but done in consonance with innate ontological order. It discovered that the key to reality is found in man. Man (mmadu), is at the centre of the universe (uwa), and through his constituent elements has linked with both the physical and spiritual beings, both material and immaterial beings. It discovered that man (mmadu) is actively involved in the drama of life as an actor and he is value oriented. In Igbo ontology, existence of man (mmadu) is relational, not static and his identity is better defined and understood in his family and community. It discovered man (mmadu) finds meaning and identity in the idea and reality of "the other" and without the "Others", he loses his value. This work will help the Igbo to a better understanding and appreciation of himself and his identity.

Introduction

The Igbo people hold that the key to reality or knowledge of reality is found in man (mmadu). And in man (mmadu) there is a global vision of all the universe (uwa). To assert convincingly the authenticity of the Igbo existence, worldview and identity, a critical investigation into Igbo ontology is indispensable. Igbo man ceaselessly and consciously makes manifest efforts to be conscious of himself and to fight decisively and reasonably those causes which alienate him from self, his world and cultural heritage. Thus he has the twin-tasks of self-discovery and self-recovery which have remained top priority values since the African independence from his colonial masters. Thus C. Okolo (1987,37) opines: " There is indeed an obligation on the part of the African to know himself as Socrates was also commanded and to know the environment in which he lives. Through this Knowledge, the African attains the truth about all reality". There has been pertinent and uncompromising call or need for Igbo emancipation from foreign economic, socio-political and mental slavery, cultural alienation and identity crises. And as a result there was purposeful need for the correct tools or ways to carry out successfully this crusade. Hence the need and reliance on philosophy and in the words of J.I. Omoregbe (2007,4):

Human experience is the source of the reflective activity known as philosophy. This experience could either in philosophy be man's own experience of himself (subjectively) or his experience of the world around him (objectively). Hence philosophy could start from subjectivity or from objectivity. The early Greek philosophers began from objectivity.

However, one of the marked features of the contemporary African is his ardent desire to regain in John Paul Sartre's phrase, man's "existential integrity" which he paraphrases as "the original purity of his existence". This desire is not just for social progress, economic consolidation and stability, but above all for self-knowledge and self-actualization through the resources of his being and culture. It is back to his root as the source of his existence, purpose, survival and his world and identity.

The task of contemporary African philosophy is the projection of African personality, identity and African culture. This is also an important contribution to world knowledge and philosophy. And commenting on the major task of philosophy G.O Ozumba(2003,1) writes: "Philosophy is both a pathfinder and a heuristic for speculating for the future and for psychologically equipping men for the challenges of the present and the future'. Further more Pantelion Iroegbu(1994,111) defines African philosophy as: "í . the reflective inquiry into the marvels and problematic that confront one in the African world, in view of producing systematic explanations and sustained responses to them. It is an inquiry with two aspects, philosophical and African".

From the above assertions, we can deduce the tasks of philosophy in general and indeed as it includes the Igbo, as a critically reflection and investigation into the wonders and problems that confront the Igbo in his world and systematically and psychologically equipping him to respond to them. Its working definition is a critical reflection of the Igbo world, of Igbo man himself, his role and prospect in it. Its direct and immediate inquiry is not the truth of the whole universe and of man in abstract, but of the Igbo man, his world and his place in it. It is for the contemporary African thinkers to assert authoritatively their unique personality in the world and to find self knowledge from within and not outside their culture. Igbo ontology is the task of Igbo philosophy.

Igbo Ontology

There are many different senses in which things are said to be. And there is a fundamental question on how the individual things differ or relate to each other, thus S. E. Stumpf (1977,3) ontology is concerned with the study of the most fundamental categories of being and with the relations among them. The word ontology is from Greek word simply means the science of being. It investigates reality of things that are real, the existence. What prompted this fundamental search was the gradual recognition that things are not exactly what they seem to be, that appearance often differ from reality. It is based on the nature of reality. Being is an epistemological reality and all knowledge is knowledge of Being and all study is study of Being.

Ontology is inquiry into being in so far as it exists. It is the philosophical study of the nature of being, existence or reality in general as well as the basic categories of being and their relations. It also deals with questions concerning what entities exist or can be said to exist and how such entities can be grouped, related within a hierarchy and subdivided according to similarities and differences. The fundamental questions of ontology are: what can be said to exist? And into what categories, if any, can we different existing things? However various philosophers and philosophies have provided different answers to this question. Thus African and Igbo philosophy and philosophers have delved into this science of being. For the Igbo the universe contains all realities, both spiritual and material. And the universe (uwa) with its intelligibility and participatory nature in the creator's divinity is open to man's knowledge and interpretations. Igbo cosmological and metaphysical ideas determine the basic notions underlying their cultural, religious and social activities.

Traditionally, Igbo have the concept or the idea of what the word 'Being' or 'beings' mean. The Igbo word 'Ihe' or 'Ife' is the most appropriate word for Being. 'Ihe' is all embracing in meaning. It mainly means 'thing', but it could also mean or stand for material and immaterial, spiritual and physical realities, thus in the words of E. Edeh (1985,95): 'Ife' primarily refers to inanimate entities like the English word 'thing'. But by an expansion of meaning, it can be used to designate human and supra-human beings. In the same view, E. Aja (2001,54) opines: 'However, an Igbo term nearest in meaning to the term 'being' is 'Ife' or 'Ihe'. The Igbo, in an attempt to say what 'being' is ends in a tautology. However, 'Ife' or 'Ihe' generally means anything at all that is in existence or any entity or reality. Also the Igbo phrase 'Ihe nile di adi' means 'everything that is or exist'. Thus in Igbo you get these names 'Madubuife' (human being is something), 'Nnabuiife' (father is something), 'Nnebuife' (mother is something), 'Nwabuife' (child is something). 'Something'- 'ife' here means 'to be of a very great value'. In Obodukwu and some towns in Ideato Areas of Imo State, their highest words of appreciation is telling person who has shown great favour to someone 'I bu ihe o' 'you are something'. Also on another side, you hear the name 'Madukaife' 'human is greater

than a thingö. This is when compared with a being of lesser value to man.

It is also proper to consider the verb *ōto beö* in Igbo ontology. Before a thing is talked or thought about, it must exist (ihe ahu ga-adiriri). A.C Obi(2002,5) holds; "sense of being in Igbo metaphysics, identifies four Igbo verbs to translate the English verb *ōTo Beö*, in his word *ō -To Beø* is rendered by four Igbo verbs namely *ōlbuö, öldiö, ölnoö, ölsoö*. And he emphasized that the verbs can take on several suffixes depending on the demand of the sense of Being under consideration. Then according to E. Edeh (1985,96), *öThe Igbo verb to be in the sense to exist is idi. Idi used as an adjective can be suffixed to anything to show that it exists.ö* However the verb *ōTo Beö* can appropriately mean in Igbo *öodidiö*. It can be conjugated in Igbo as: "M di" or "adi m"- I am, "O di" ö he/she is, "O di" ö it is, "I di" ö you are, "Ha di" ö they are. It can be seen also in these examples ö "Mmadu di" ö Human beings are, "Chukwu di" ö God is, "Ihe di" -being is or a thing is, "Ihe di gasi" ö there are things or beings, "Muö di" ö spirit is, "Okwute di" ö stone is, "Ndu di" ö there is life, "Njo di" ö sin is, "Mma di" ö there is beauty.

Igbo ontology lies in the Igbo idea of the innermost nature of beings. Most often, a philosophical idea may be found concealed in a religious life and thought or expressed in religious language. Thus the religious language, attitudes and practices of the Igbo provide a great deal of insight into their conception of reality, that is the sorts of entities considered to be real or exist, thus E. Aja (2001,55) opines: ö The language of libation during social gatherings and healing sessions reveals, in clear and familiar terms, the entities that the Igbo or the Africans admit to be real and existentö. An object of worship or sacrifice must exist before it can be talked about. Then in such language of libation, *Chukwu/ Obasi bi na elu* (God in Heaven) is mentioned first followed by the deities especially the deity whose department or area of coverage the occasion is taking place, then to the ancestors of the locality, *mmadu* (human beings) and other relevant entities for the community. And R. Madu(1996,150) says öin truth religion is so prevalent in Igbo daily life that it is difficult if not impossible to draw a clear cut demarcation between the sacred and the secularö. Also according to

T.U Nwala (1985,37): "To the traditional Igbo, the reality of the spirit world is unquestionable and if you challenge them on this point, a lot of evidence is put forward to prove the existence of these spiritual entities."

In Igbo science of being, we recognize two main kinds of being- the creator and the created. Absolute/ supreme and finite/ limited beings. But the created or finite beings have subdivisions. The Creator/ Absolute being – *Chukwu, Chineke*, is the first in the order of being and importance and of different kind. He is the *Chukwu Okike*, He created other being even life itself ó öChikenduö (God; creator of life). He is the origin of vital force in Igbo worldview. In Igbo ontology *Chukwu* (God) is the one who has force, power in Himself. He gives life and force, power of survival and increase to other beings In the words of E. Aja (2001,57): öThe relation of the creatures to the creator is constant that is to say, the creature is by its nature permanently dependent upon his creator for existence and means of survivalö. In Igbo worldview, öChukwuö ó God is considered the highest being conceivable.

Igbo ontology is arranged in a hierarchy, according to the power and the role they play in the ontological order. *Chukwu* (God) is at the apex. He is the origin and the creator of other beings and the vital force in them. He is the fullness of being. Then lesser to *Chukwu* (God) are the created spirits (muo ndi ekereke) beginning with *Agbara* (deities), *Arusi* (spirit-force) and *ndichie* (the Ancestral spirits). After the created spirits, we have *mmadu* (human being) in the hierarchy. He is at the centre of the creation, öiheö (things) which are the lower beings ó animals (umuanu) plants, minerals etc. However, Igbo hold that although existent beings are individual forces, there is interaction of these forces with another, According to Ivan karp (2000,139); öBantu (Igbo) hold that created beings preserve a bond one with another, an intimate ontological relationship comparable with the causal tie which binds creature and creator.ö

For the Africans generally, existence is relational, unlike the West, where substances have individual or separate existence. Beings in Igbo ontology interact and this interaction is not a chaotic one, rather it is done in consonance with innate ontological order, thus for Ikenga Metuh E (1981,56): "There is a continuous exchange

between all the Igbo beings, irrespective of the class of being (visible or invisible) to which they belong. Men can be possessed by spirits and spirits sometimes incarnate themselves in the visible form. Men can influence the deities and the spirits through sacrifices, prayers and spells. Conversely, the deities can intervene in human affairs to bring order and blessings". And for V.Y Mudoribe (1988,139): "In all of them (beings), vital force appears to be essential signs of ordering identities, differences and relationships. From the extreme depth up to the level of God, there is a permanent and dynamic dialectic of energy: Vital force can be nourished, diminished or stopped altogether." There are continuous relationships among beings in Igbo ontology irrespective of the kind. And these relationships are guided by an established ontological order. Vital force is common to all being.

Vital Force in Igbo Ontology

In African and Igbo philosophy the concept of being is bound to the concept of force in the most abstract thinking upon the notion of being. And force is the nature of beings, in the words of T.U Nwala (1996,37) "Every ontological being is said to possess some spiritual essence. It is the active principle in every being. And this spiritual essence or active principle in every ontological being is the vital force. Also in line with Placid Temples submission on the Bantus idea of being, Africa and Igbo included, hold that "being is force and force is being". Ivan Karp (2000,69), thus "It is hard for the Bantu to separate the idea of force from that of being. For them, force is being and being is force". Also in the words of E. Aja (2001,53): "In agreement with Placid Temples findings, with regard to the Bantu, that there exists a reality in everything and in every being in the universe. It is in virtue of this reality that everything is force, this forms the basis of traditional African metaphysics.

For the African, the concept force is bound to the concept of being, even in the most abstract thinking upon the notion of being". On this Ikenga E. Metuh (1985,55) opines: "Nevertheless, the concept of being as interacting living forces is fundamental to the traditional African worldview. This is true not only of Bantu speaking Africa but also of some other areas as is illustrated by the rite of Ituju Ala (The Igbo rite of coding the land)". This "force is

could be seen as òvital forceö in every being no matter the grade or level in the rank of beings. Some African and Igbo philosophers have identified this òvital forceö as the first principle of being and it is life itself. Being is the manifestation of life, no life, no being. And nature is one of the first manifestation of life. Life is the basic characteristic of everything.

In this line of thought, M.N Nkemnkia (1999,166) holds that: "In the beginning there is life common to all creation, identical in all human beings and in all created things. All things having existence live a life of their own, proportional to the species and genus to which they belong. This is the basis of the hierarchy of values and the superiority of one genus to another". Also according to T.U Nwala (1996,44) òNdu (Life) is thus the activating principle sustaining all existence and also regulating all actions. It operates in all modes of existence.ö

Life is the underlying, identical and permanent common factor to every movement and to ever-changing reality. It is the highest form of dynamic expression of existence. According to Pantelon Iroegbu (1995,367): òLife may be defined as the active principle of the functioning of a being toward the realization of its full potential for its own good and for the good of the totality of beingö. The Igbo strongly hold that, life originates from God and God creates life. This fact found expressions in these names *Chi-na-eke* (the God that creates), *Chinwendu* ó God is the owner of life, *Chibundu* ó God is life. The Igbo cannot talk about life without talking about God.

***Mmadu* in Igbo Ontology**

Mmadu (human being/man) is at the centre of the universe. And from the analysis of Igbo ontology *mmadu*, is the link between the spiritual beings and the physical beings. He is self-conscious; he has knowledge and knows that he knows. He is the ðknowing Beingð. The key to reality is to be found in man. *Mmadu* (human being/man) makes critical investigations not only into his being but also into the reality and the Being of other beings. He is the only being among the other beings that is in search of knowledge; ask sensible questions and above all is able to find meaning of life and find meaning to events and his surrounding environments. In line with this M.N

Nkemnkia (1999,205) opines: "Africa speculation begins in man and his relationship with others similar to him and the worlds. Then it goes on reflecting on the reality of the worlds, always in relation with man and reaches complete fulfillment in God, the beginning and the end of existence."

Mmadu (human being/man) makes the understanding of himself and other realities possible and relevant. All other beings find their meaningful existence in the presence of man in the world. However, to investigate *mmadu* (human being/man) in Igbo ontology, is to investigate into the being of human being/ man in Igbo worldview. Thus, it is in *mmadu* that there is a global vision of all the universe. And as such, the fundamental question *õwho is mmaduõ* or *÷what is mmaduõ* (*Onye bu mmadu* or *Gini bu mmadu*), is tied to or reveals his purpose of being. For the Igbo the being of *mmadu* is to be actively involved in the drama of life as an actor rather than as a spectator, thus Igbo are pragmatic or value oriented. To investigate into the very *õBeingõ* of *mmadu* in Igbo is not going to be an easy ride. And certain terms about *mmadu* need to be clarified *õWho is man- õOnye bu mmaduõ*? And what is man- *õGini bu mmaduõ*? The question; *÷onye bu mmaduõ* (who is man) addresses the personality of man *õ" Onye bu onye a"?* -Who is this person? "Onye ka I bu"? -Who are you? This inquires your personhood. And C. N. Ogbujah (2006,24) *õin Igbo culture the idea of the person is for most part tied to the idea of the communityõ*. The Igbo term *õOnyeõ* translates the English word *õPersonõ*. Historically the concept of person is an invention of Christian thought. The occasion however, came with the theological disputes over the mysteries of the *õTrinityõ* and *÷incarnationõ*. It is in the efforts to discover a term or concept which could effectively be applied to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit without dissolving their individuality and not falling into the danger of heresy of making them three divinities. The term *õPersonõ* translates the Latin word *persona* or Greek word *õhypostasisõ* which represents something singular and individual.

However, the idea of Personhood in Africa/Igbo thought is a concept for community building, it reveals the evidence of man's dignity and value as far as the community is concerned. In other words, Person in African conception is more dynamic thus

according to Didier N. Kaphagawan (2000,66) says: "Since Temple's discussion of African conception of reality makes a basic yet questionable assumptions, that such conceptions must be in contrast to their Western equivalent. This has been most evident in the discussions of the concepts of person and personhood... Thus, it has been argued much in line with Temple's speculation that while Western philosophy defines personhood and personal identity in fairly static term, African peoples think of personhood as more dynamic."

In Igbo worldview, a person is better defined and understood in his family and community. Existence of man is relational. To exist is to live in a group, on this Richard H. Bell (2002,61) opines: "The notion of 'personhood' or 'being a person' is understood in many African languages and societies as an acquired status that is dependent upon people's relationship with their community". This ontological relational existence of man/person does not stop at relationship with the fellow humans but embraces other physical entities and spiritual realities. According to Ikenga Metuh E (1990,165): "Man ontologically is best viewed as a 'living force' in active common with other living forces in the world. Each person is a nexus of interacting elements of the self and of the world, which determines and is determined by his behaviour".

In Igbo worldview, Personhood or identity is rooted in the family lineage and the community. One is valued more, when he comes from a good family and community or tribe. In the words of M.N Nkemnkia (1999,112): "When one has to describe a particular person, it is common in Africa to present the person as 'coming' from this or that tribe, village, family etc. All this goes to show the quality of that person in relation to his belonging. If his origin is worthy of a good reputation, then he too is worthy, otherwise, he is not worth of listening to". For the Igbo life or existence is not an individual venture, "the meaning of an individual's life is found in and through his relationship with the other or others". *Mmadu* finds meaning in the idea and reality of the other. And without others he loses his value, in the words of Iroegbu P (1995,349): "The *umunna* (community) constitutes the fulcrum of interpersonal relationships. From it the individual draws his life-force."

In Igbo, *mmadu* is thought as humankind in its real and substantial unity. According T. Okere (1996,159) "The self as so far studied remains in a way only an abstraction ... in fact the self is never alone. The individual is never a pure isolated individual". Also Ikenga E. Metuh (1999,171) "when we review man, however from the ontological point of reference, we discover that he is a life-force in the midst of other life- forces in the world... to whom he is linked by a network of relationship". For the Igbo, no one can be his very self outside the relation with the others and the meaning of life depends on the relationship with the others. The metaphysical search for why "I" exist should coincide and link with the search of why "We" live. And C. B. Okolo (1992,64) "man is a being in process and his experiences grow along with him". In Igbo ontology *mmadu* is held in a web like relations and interactions with other realities. Thus J. I. Unah (2002,114) "Man is real by virtue of the way he is situated in the world, the way in which he is the centre of the world". Then on the question "Gini bu mmadu" (What is man)? This question tries to differentiate *mmadu* ontologically from other realities and also it addresses the fundamental constituent elements of *Mmadu*.

From the Judaeo-Christian point, the question; what is man? Has it that man is a creature of God, created in the image of God. And endowed with the body and soul. Specially equipped with intellect, thus in the words of Marcel Onyechoa (1998,79) "according to the Judeo-Christian interpretation, man is to be understood primarily from the stand point of his divine origin... Man is a being created by God and made in God image. Man stands at the point where nature and spirit meet." They believe also in the divine origin of *mmadu*. *Mmadu* was believed to be created by *Chineke*. However no clear creation account and in whose image *mmadu* was created. The Igbo believe strongly in the spiritual constituent element in *mmadu*. They hold that each of the constituent elements of man has important part to play in man's relationships and interactions with realities both in the physical world and spiritual world, on this C.O Uchegbu (2002,91) opines: "Man maintains relationship, therefore both with the physical or seen world of men (through his physical body or *anuaru*) and the unseen world of God and spirits (through his spiritual aspects or *chi*)."

Of course through *Ahu* (body), man is in touch with physical realities of the universe. *Ahu* (body) contains:- *aka* (hands), *ukwu*(legs), *ihu* (face), *anya* (eyes), *nti* (ears), *isi* (head), *ire* (tongue), *onu* (mouth), *imi*(nose). These in the body perish at death. Then through *obi* (heart) which is an essential organ and centre of human life, man is able to relate cordially with fellow man and other realities. Then *uche* (mind/intellect), it is the faculty of abstraction and where human thoughts originate. Through it *mmadu* is able to penetrate the knowledge of immaterial realities. *Mmuo* (spirit), through it man relates with spirit world. And it is the link of man with spirits and spirit- world. At death it leaves the *Ahu* (body) and travels to the spirit world. And it is that which reincarnates in a new body in the physical world. The Igbo believe that it is indestructible. However, without proper analysis and understanding these integral constituent elements of *mmadu* (human beings) and their roles, one cannot begin properly to make sense about *mmadu* in Igbo worldview. Through these constituent elements, *mmadu* is able to relate well both in the physical and spiritual worlds, whether he is alive or dead. Thus J. I. Unah (2002,114) òman is both spiritual and physical and any attempt to subtract one of the elements from man simply creates self-disorder.ö

Also we can understand òwhat is man?öö òGini bu mmadu?ö from the etymology and hermeneutics of the word òmmaduö in Igbo world view. In the traditional Igbo, names are not given any how. It must have some meaning or expresses some facts or beliefs about the being, person, family or group. The term *mmadu* is not just a label but a statement of facts and thought. Etymologically and hermeneutically òmmaduö is an expression of what the Igbo traditionally and ontologically hold for man- òmma ó diö or òmma ó nduö or òmma ó mu ó diö, which in the final analysis, expresses òthe goodness/ beauty of life/existence, the crown or glory of the universe. Thus also C.N. Ogbujah (2006,125) opines: òthe reality of human being represents the existence of beauty and goodness”. *Mmadu* is the reality that exists especially in òuwaö ontology. He has the greatest value, worth and respect among the created. The meaning of life or existence finds it highest form of expression in man. For Raph Madu (b1996,31), òexistence is one of the primary meanings of mmaduö

From the foregoing we have seen various aspects of the being of *mmadu* in Igbo ontology. The purpose of this exposition and analysis is to put one on the right track to the understanding of *mmadu* in Igbo worldview, his link with *öuwaö* (the physical and spiritual worlds), *Ala* (the land/earth) with God and the ultimate fulfillment /end of *mmadu*. It will help to the understanding of actions of man and ways to man's authentic development. It ensures an analytic, systematic rational inquiry into the concepts of *mmadu*, *uwa cum ala* in Igbo world. In line with these C.B Okolo (1985,30) opines: "It would therefore be a great contribution of Nigerian (Igbo) philosophers to throw the needed light on the nature of man to determine for instance, the exact source of his ills, whether it is within or without self or society or both." And according to F.U Okafor (1992,14): "Thus in the analysis of the evil in the society the concept of cause and effect is thus part and parcel of Igbo analytic process. However, the concept of man in a given ontology will serve as a guide in any attempt to promote self-discovery and self-recovery. The view that human being is of great value is central in the Igbo worldview. He is the expression of intelligence present in the world. And by being at the centre of the world (*uwa*), *mmadu* (human being) can only come to the true knowledge of reality by grasping the complexity of vital experience in a totality. In the words of Nkemnkia (1999,123), "In African worldview one cannot think about man separately from all other living beings." There are continuous relationships among beings in Igbo ontology irrespective of the kind. And these relationships are guided by an established ontological order.

***Uwa* (Universe) in Igbo Ontology**

Uwa (universe) in Igbo is an organic whole of earthly and heavenly realities, the physical and spiritual realities. In Igbo the concept *Uwa* has a multiple meanings, and it is all embracing. It connotes a totality of all that there is in nature. As the totality of reality, *uwa* shows the field where Ontological beings which inhabit both spiritual and physical interact. *Uwa* in Igbo ontology is and embraces the totality of realities. It contains both the physical world and the spiritual world, the visible and the invisible worlds. According to E. Edeh (1985,105): "The universe for the Igbo is a

unified whole of visible and invisibleí . The organic whole of the visible world spiritually blends with the divine, invisible world to give the Igbo the ultimate whole of all life."

Also Nwala (1985,31): "There is no strict dichotomy of the natural and supernatural worlds, they are just different order of beings and existence which are in constant interaction and communicationö. By *Uwa* in Igbo Ontology, it is the fundamental conception of whatever is. *Uwa* in Igbo world view embraces all beings/realities in Igbo Ontology. It is a coherent unity in which spirits, men, animals, plants and other realities are engaged in continuous interactions. Thus in the words P. Ireghu (1994, 144) : "In Igbo language there is only one *uwa*, comprising *uwa a* and *uwa ozo*. There is only one reality, the reality of *uwa*. There are no *uwas* (plural) but *uwa* (singular). Yet in the singularity is embedded plurality, hierarchy and multiplicity" .*Uwa* in Igbo is conceived as well populated with beings in a hierarchical order with *Chukwu* (God) at the apex, followed by deities, ancestors, humans, animals, plants, the natural objects and phenomenal in that order. It is both pluralistic and monistic. In *Uwa* we talk of constant activities among beings at the various levels in Igbo ontology. On *uwa* in Igbo world view G. Ezeani (2003,33) comments: "The Igbo perception of the world has been described to be curvilinear. What this implies is that they see things as linked up to every other thing. Nothing as it were exists and exercises its being in total isolation from other things, be they material or spiritual things. There is therefore such cyclic relationships among things that makes sometimes difficult to strictly classify their respective existential boundaries"

According to J.I. Unah (2002,107): "it is conventional and in fact convenient to describe ancient African view of the world as "One of extra ordinary harmony, one of synthetic unity and mutual compatibility among all thingsö. On forces in *Uwa*, Raph Madu (1996,59), opines:" Nothing, therefore moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The individual member's behavior or act, by extension affects the ontological order and consequently, the being of the entire human and non-human community". However "there is belief in the unity among beings, belief in the original cosmic (universal) harmony and order which unfortunately the action of human beings set upö. It is

evident that the ontological *uwa* (universe) was in harmony and organized. This could also be likened to the Judaeo-Christian creation account in the book of Genesis where it said that everything God created was good. On the original *Uwa* in Igbo world view F.U. Okafor (1992,13) comments "The Igbo regard the physical world as ontologically good. It is a perfect world in structure and a beautiful world in design. In the same vein "The Igbo think of evil as something that is not what it should be, something that makes the whole the unity of life in community less than what it should be."

From the expositions and analysis of *uwa* in Igbo ontology, we have seen that, it is made in such a way to enhance the ultimate fulfillment of all beings especially, *mmadu* (human beings) who is the centre of realities. According to J.I. Unah (2002,144): "In African Cultural World: Social and moral actions have ontological dimension. Infringing a taboo does not necessarily produce an uneasiness of conscience in the doer of the action: Instead infringing a taboo causes an ontological disequilibrium of the community". *Uwa* in Igbo ontology is all inclusive. It embraces all realities. It is perfect, harmony and beautiful in design especially to enhance ultimate fulfillment of beings. And since *mmadu* is at the centre of Igbo world his actions have much to do for the maintenance or disorganization of the ontological equilibrium.

Conclusion

Certainly from the foregoing, we have philosophically investigated and hermeneutically analyzed Igbo Ontology, the concepts man (*mmadu*) and universe (*uwa*). And the study is quite revealing, educative and salvific. Igbo ontology holds the existence or reality of certain beings both physical and spiritual so far as they exist. It also holds the unity of universe (*uwa*): the physical and spiritual worlds, and the interactions and intercommunications of these beings in the *Uwa*. "The ontological status of things in Igbo thought is determined and recognized not by any static characteristics that the object might have, but the action the object performs" The work discovered the ontological interrelatedness of *Mmadu* [man] and *Uwa* (universe) and discovered that through *mmadu* the goodness of *Uwa* (universe) could be known and appreciated. And

through *mmadu* the order and harmony in *Uwa* (universe) could be maintained, enhanced or disrupted. According to Ikenga Metuh (1990,71): "Man strives to be in harmony with God, the deities and his fellow men both living and dead. He feels himself in intimate rapport and tries to maintain harmonious relationship with the animals, vegetable and other elements and phenomena in the universe."

It is expected and proper for an Igbo to have a life of peace and harmony with *Chukwu* (God), Spirits, humanity and nature at large ó *Uwa* (universe). It is discovered that in this state *mmadu* discovers himself, his true identity, authentic and holistic development and his ultimate fulfillment. The work discovered from the analysis of the interrelatedness of *mmadu* and *uwa*, that *mmadu* is the expression of the intelligence and moral purpose present in the universe. And in this consideration the significance of òAlaö both as a religious concept and as a natural reality is discovered. Igbo have high regard for Ala. It has socio-economic, religious, moral and ethical relevance. *Mmadu* stands, lives, moves and builds on it. It sustains man with the food and fruits. At the same time the greatest crime in Igbo land is the offense against the land ó òimeru anaö [homicide]. If *mmadu* is at peace with ala and the rest of realities he will be accommodated, protected and sustained. Thus the prospect of the development of Igbo man and his world through self - discovery, self - recovery and the knowledge of his identity is sure and indispensable.

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