

## **The cosmological matrix of Igbo family structure and its transcendental reality in Igbo traditional religion**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper discusses the cosmological matrix of family in Igboland within the framework of its transcendental reality. The collection of data was from primary and secondary sources while interpretation of data was done using the area-culture approach. The findings reveal that the family is the building block of the Igbo community in which the propagation of the human race through procreation rotates. The study shows the cyclic cum fluid eschatological dimensional undercurrent of immortality of human person in Igbo Traditional Religion, a motif which underscores childlessness as an enemy to family continuity, preservation and enhancement. The paper recommends multiple-wife system, wife inheritance and arranged adoption to propagate children for deceased family members who died without children in Igboland.*

### **Introduction**

The mysterious and the non-mysterious in the cosmic order are enough indices to set humans up in a quest for the meaning of life. Thus human person in his/her wild imagination draws up a framework or road map of the world as he/she perceives it. In his/her perception, human makes assumptions, dogmatizes and gives attributes to the imagined order of realities like the supra-sensible and the other beings in the cosmos. One interesting thing about this quest is human flight to the realm of the supra-sensible or supernatural being or beings who, as it were, are given

transcendental qualities and are conceived capable of giving answers to the mysteries of existence, for instance the origin of the world, its age, mystery of life and death, what happens after death etc.

In all these human being pries into the realm of primordial realities on which he/she hinges interpretations and explication of time-space events. The whole perception of the universe by human is encapsulated in what we call a cosmology or a world-view. In other words, these perceptions and assumptions accruing from them give human person the sense of direction and purpose in his/her life and enable him/her to act purposefully and exercise a measure of control over his/her environment.

Since cosmology focuses its search light on the question of ultimate reality, such a quest is inherently a religious one among the Igbo of Nigeria. Like other African ethnic groups, the Igbo cosmology underpins her value scales and attitudinal orientations. Thus the Igbo socio-cultural and politico-economic institutions are basically the product of her cosmology. It therefore stands reasonable to posit that her family institution and all the paraphernalia of family such as marriage, procreation and values therein are explainable within the framework of her cosmology.

This paper argues that the Igbo family institution is built on a cosmological matrix, a matrix which is intricately and intrinsically anchored on a transcendental intentionality. The paper argues that the entire gamut of the family vis-a-vis marriage and procreation rotates on the cyclic nature of life for the Igbo in which there is no end to life. The paper finally argues that the Igbo value scales derive their driving forces from this belief in immortality. We therefore, posit without any qualms of doubt that if these arguments are logically, coherently and

systematically demonstrated, this paper will serve as the blue print for the evolution of Igbo identity and personality.

### **Exposing the theme**

One obvious anxiety that any scholar or researcher faces in his study of traditional religions in Africa nay traditional cultures is how to grapple with what is actually African or not as a result of the encounter between African and the West, an encounter in which the West with its superior fire arms aimed at a technical knockout (TKO) of African traditional religious culture. Ejizu (1985) elegantly pointed the scenario thus:

The prospect of the traditional religious systems of Africa, in the face of the persistent onslaught of the combined forces of the agents of socio-religious change in the continent (Western civilization, scientific technology, Islam and Christianity) has been a stock theme in most contemporary writings on the religious history of Africa. The anxiety arose primarily from the rather obvious tremendous toll which the so called Religions of the book (Christianity and Islam) have continued to take on African Traditional Religion. (p. 133).

Ejizu's observation speaks volumes as experiences have shown that Africa's traditional cultures have been eroded including her family and marriage institutions. Achebe's (1958) master best seller "Things Fall Apart" had earlier captured Ejizu's observation. Although these observations are apparent, there are

great areas of resilience of Africa's traditional cultures in the midst of the western incursions on Africa. These are encapsulated in the world-views of the various African ethnic groups, of which the Igbo of Nigeria is one.

### **The Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria**

The Igbo are one of largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and are based mainly in the Southern part of the River Niger. The word Igbo connotes both the people and the language. The Igbo, though occupy the present South Eastern states of Nigeria all the same, we have pockets of them in Delta and Rivers States as well as in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. The origin of the Igbo people has been the subject of debates and speculation. Two hypotheses have always prevailed in these debates among historians and ethnologists. These are the outside origin and the internal hypotheses.

As in the outside origin hypothesis, the Igbo tradition of origin is traceable to the East (Israel, Mecca or Egypt). One peculiarity about this outside origin hypothesis is that it does not suggest that all the Igbo are from the same place. Edeh (1985) maintains that from oral tradition, the Igbo claimants to this hypothesis base their argument on their particular kinship relationship and not of the entire Igbo people. Such notable claimants are the Onitsha Igbo and the Arochukwu Igbo. Oral tradition claims that Onitsha Igbo migrated from Benin of the present Edo State of Nigeria. This claim seems to be based on the affinity of kingship between Onitsha and Benin.

As for the Arochukwu Igbo, there is a strong claim of their outside origin. Frank in Edeh (1985) echoes this thus:

The Aros were quite a different racial type  
from the indigenous inhabitants of the Igbo

country. ...because the Aros were light in colour, they must have been among the people associated with the descendants of a Phoenician colony that had settled on the lower Congo in a very distant past and had intermarried with the natives. (p. 11).

Another outside origin hypothesis is the Jewish origin. Basden in Edeh (1985) lends credence to this view with reference to certain similarities that the Igbo share with the Jews. These include similarities in marriage customs, observance of the new moon and linguistic similarities. All said and done we can say that the above hypotheses are only speculative and probably intelligent guesses from the Western scholars who feel that nothing good or worthwhile can come from Africa. All the claims of outside origin of the Igbo show little or no validity at all. We are inclined to think for instance that the cultural similarity between the Jews and the Igbo can also be observed between the Igbo and other African tribes.

The internal origin hypothesis seems to be stronger than the outside origin one, especially when this is viewed from the area of archeological findings by archaeologists, ethnologists and sociologists. The researches of Thursten Shaw, Hartte and Onwuejeogwu are eloquent testimonies to the internal origin hypothesis of the Igbo (Edeh 1985). The Igboukwu Bronze archaeological findings were dated around 1500AD when the Igbo were already occupying their present location. Again Hartte's findings at Bende, Afikpo, Okigwe Awka and Nsukka have shown that the Igbo had settled in those areas even before 205 AD (Edeh, 1985).

Onwuejeogwu (1971), an Igbo ethnologist in his work on the Nri people of Igboland drew an insightful inference from the findings of Shaw and Hartte as to the validity of Igbo internal origin hypothesis. He contends that:

There is a strong continuity of materials between Nri culture of 580 AD and that of the present time that the undated objects collected by Hartte could mightily be said to fill one of the gaps between 580 AD and the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The internal origin hypothesis of the Igbo seems to enjoy popular support than the outside origin. More recently Ezebuilo (2009) made an insightful summary of favour of the internal origin hypothesis of the Igbo. He says:

The origins of the Igbo have been the subject of much speculation. However, studies based on testable facts clarify that the Igbo have lived in their country for tens of millennia. The archaeological finds at Ugwele Okigwe make an insightful proof of human activities in the theatre of Igbo civilization more than two hundred and fifty thousand years ago. Evidence of human-made tools like axes, pottery and carved stones dug up at the present day Enugu and Ebonyi States establish the credibility of the habitation of Igbo for a very long time. In other words, traditions of Igbo origin favour Igbo Genesis in Igboland. (p. 6).

We have made this historical excursus of Igbo origin in order to pave the way for our discussion of Igbo family values. This will equally favour the internal origin and whatever the Igbo are today, be it her family structure, marriage, social and political institutions, must have been developed by them. Thus this historical background of the Igbo helps us to understand Igbo identity. Ethnologically, the Igbo are an ancient race, a unique people with their specific cultural characteristics modeled in accordance with her cosmology. They are a people with versatile common sense and a unique capacity for improvisation, for adaptation, for industry and hard work, for ultra democratic ideals. They inhabit a compact stretch of land, speak the common language Igbo, though with many dialects and share a similar social system.

### **World-view vis-à-vis Igbo world-view**

A world-view is a totality of a people's assumptions. In other words, it is a body of beliefs about the universe which are common among members of any society and essentially demonstrated in their value systems and attitudinal orientations such as their philosophy of life, social conduct and morality. Since a world-view borders on beliefs about the universe, a world-view pries into the origin of the universe, how the universe is sustained and the nature of beings and their interactional networks within the cosmic order (Madu, 2009). Answers to these problems provide humans with a sense of direction and purpose in their lives and enable them to exercise a measure of control over his environment. A world-view is therefore a sub-conscious guide through life.

Since a world-view focuses its search light on the question of the ultimate reality, such a quest implicates the search for the

transcendental reality which is inherently a religious one (Madu, 2004). One can therefore maintain without any fear of contradiction that in a world-view is subsumed the entire gamut or thought-link in which human evaluation of life both on the temporal and non-temporal order can be hinged. Metuh (1987) echoes this assertion by saying that a people's world-view is the underlying thought-link or logic which holds them together. So the different peoples of the world have their different world-views, which provide for their owners the charter for their actions.

Among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria, their core traditional world-view on which their value system and attitudinal orientations rotate consists on a three-tier ultimately related but distinct worlds, viz the heaven, the earth and the underworld. Each of these worlds is well inhabited by beings of different categories and vital ranks as believed by the Igbo. The heaven is believed to be the abode of the Supreme Being, *Chukwu/Chineke* and such major divinities as *Amadioha, Anyanwu*. The earth is the home of the Earth goddess *Ala*, other minor spirits and human being. The underworld is inhabited by the ancestors and myriad of other spirit forces (good and evil ones).

Although this structural arrangement is believed by the Igbo, one observes that the strict compartmentalization of these spheres of existence cannot be sustained in practical terms. This is based on the premise that the spiritual beings are believed to inhabit the heaven, the earth and even the underworld. Even, human being can reach god and the deities through divination and can interact with the ancestors through libations. God and the deities and other spirit-forces can reach human being through revelations. So these spheres of existence and their believed inhabitants are only imaginary, fluid and unified in a way. This explains why in Igbo

world-view, there is no strict line of demarcation between the material and the spiritual, between the sacred and the profane for all coalesce into a unity. We are inclined to think that it is against this backdrop that Ejizu (1987) rightly observed that, “The traditional Igbo cosmology is essentially a religious one. Religion provides the unifying and basic vision through which everything is perceived. It is therefore not surprising that the Igbo traditional value systems and attitudes are prevalently religious” (p. 143).

It is against the above cosmological religious ambience that we shall situate our discourse on Igbo family values. This discourse can be understood and appreciated better when the fundamental characteristic features of this cosmology and attitudes are demonstrated and articulated upon.

### **Demonstration and articulation of Igbo value systems and attitudinal orientations**

Here Ejizu’s (1985) summation of the religious ambience of Igbo cosmology is very apt and relevant. He maintains that:

Igbo cosmology encapsulates a unified view of reality. The three realms which constitute the Igbo cosmic structure are very intimately related. And whatever happens in one is thought to affect events in the other two. Likewise, various spheres of the material are intricately interconnected, the human world, the animal world and the vegetable world as well as the inanimate order. Neither is the sacred sphere distinguished from the profane in any strict sense. (p. 143).

Indeed time-space events like social events and socio-political institutions are given religious interpretations. Nothing indeed happens by chance for in everything and circumstance, the hand of the divine is believed to be there. No wonder that, we can discern certain Igbo characteristic traits:

- (a) There is a notable power of symbolism among the traditional Igbo. Material objects like pieces of wood and stones are purveyors of supernatural realities and ideas. The *ofò*, for instance, is a symbol of ancestral authority and the *Ikenga* is symbol of power.
- (b) The Igbo are very much concerned in maintaining a cordial and harmonious relationship with the other forces of Igbo cosmic order. In fact, for the Igbo, the goal of interactions of beings is the maintenance of harmony and any breach of this is believed among them to bring disaster in the cosmic order. Any mysterious occurrences are explained through oracles and divinations.

Among the Igbo, there is also a very strong sentiment on community consciousness. The Igbo, like many other Africans are their brothers' keepers. This explains the strong solidarity that exists between them even in the diaspora. They form formidable unions whenever they are building union halls for their meetings everywhere they find themselves. Even before the Nigerian civil war, Igbo unions in Northern Nigeria had Igbo union colleges. Although individual existence and freedom are appreciated by the Igbo, all the same these are delicately balanced with the underlying philosophy of life-in-community. This life-in-community endorses and validates the fundamental philosophy of the family institution and structure on which the community is hinged.

### **Igbo family structure vis-à-vis marriage institution**

The traditional Igbo view of family is one which incorporates not just the physically living members but also the departed ones and the yet-to-be born. This family oneness is expressed or demonstrated visibly in Igbo ancestral homes and communal land with the ancestral symbolic objects and shrines, for instance the *Ofo*, *Okwuani*, and *Ngwuruchi* which littered in Igbo family homesteads in the pre-Christian era.

The family solidarity of the Igbo is also demonstrated in the burial of their dead ones who died natural and good deaths. These are buried in the family compound from where they even at death participated in the life of the family. They are believed to hear and follow all discussions made in the family and all activities transpiring in the family (Igwegbe, 2002). It is believed by the traditional Igbo that the worst radical form of breaking link with the dead was to bury them outside their family. The traditional Igbo therefore bury their dead in the family compound where they lived, toiled, rejoiced and died with the belief of being together in life and in death. For the traditional Igbo therefore, the living is one who enjoys a cordial relationship with his community while the really dead is one who is cut off with the network of relationships which characterize life. In a community or family, the individual is secure, wealthy, influential, powerful and immortal.

We cannot talk confidently of the Igbo family without discussing the foundation on which it rotates, that is marriage.

### **Igbo marriage institution**

Marriages in human societies traverse all cultures, though each culture may have its own modus operandi. It is generally accepted

by all cultures as a divine institution may be under the influence of Judeo-Christian tradition. Tombere (2015) seems to be aligned to this tradition as she says, “Marriage was instituted by God for the mutual fulfillment of the spouses and for propagating the human race through procreation” (p. 9). It is therefore through marriage that a family is established which becomes as it were the building block of societies and a place of growth in the concrete and essential transmission of the virtues which give form to human existence.

For the traditional Igbo, human existence is believed to be a prime value and every other thing is expected to serve its realization. Thus for the Igbo, marriage is contracted with the sole aim of continuing the family name and tree through procreation. Male children are valued more in this regard because unlike the women, they bear the family name and maintain direct and active link with the family till death and even after (Ugwueye and Umeanolue, 2015). Thus anything that jeopardizes life, for the Igbo, is vehemently resisted. This explains why a couple may shop from shrine to shrine, from one deity to another looking for offspring and good health.

Human life, its preservation and enhancement for the Igbo are core and crucial values which marriage and procreation are basically the foundation in its realization. Childlessness is considered a curse among the Igbo as it hits at the very root of the traditional primary value, life, which every person having received is obliged to transmit and thus ensure its physical continuity (Ejizu, 1985). According to Ugwueye and Umeanolue (2015), Christianity with its claim of having solutions to all problems has condemned the traditional ways of addressing the problem of childlessness in Igboland and proffered not up to scratch means of dealing with the problem. The tension and

pressure generated by this Christian inadequacy of handling the problem has led many childless couples to many detestable things.

### **Life, its preservation and enhancement as prime values in Igbo family/society**

Life, its preservation and continuity among the Igbo constitute the major core value on which other values relate. Values, as it were, are the greatest single factor that mould character and conduct. Okoye (2009) captures this idea thus, “Values represent basic convictions that shape the specific modes of conduct and ultimate objectives preferred by a people” (p. 69). Since Igbo core value is on human life and whatever life stands for, the Igbo are very meticulous in handling anything connected with the generation and propagation of human life. This explains why marriage affairs are handled seriously by the community and were not left in the hands of the intending spouses. Igwegbe (2000) echoes this beautifully thus:

The institution of the family, the decision to establish a home, the idea of being a parent was considered a very serious business. It was the responsibility of the community to ensure its own continuity through marriages. The community encouraged her mature and responsible members to marry but the community considered the sacred institution of marriage noble, high and too important a value to be left at the private initiatives of individuals. (p. 16).

From the above, one may say that families married and not really the individuals. This never meant that the individual had no

choice, but certainly the preference of the individual came second to the good of the community. Thus in marriage, family and group solidarity are fostered as essential values among the Igbo. Through marriage, Igbo value of community consciousness is vividly expressed and endorsed in the sense that different families engaged in marriage covenants engender the spirit of oneness among themselves. In Igbo marriage, involving different communities coming together in a covenant relationship, Igbo community is expressed.

This communality spiritually validates and establishes the psychological soundness, emotional sanity, social profitability and the individual benefaction in which large family system encourages in traditional Igbo community. The larger the family members, the more prestige and comfort the family would enjoy. Indeed, in traditional Igbo family, wealth was judged by its large personnel who were instrumental to the family's large farm productions vis-à-vis wealth. This explains the rationale for the multiple-wives system in Igbo traditional society. The multiple-wives system gives answers to quest for the fulfillment of all proper human instincts for the promotion of love and peace, for the satisfaction of the deep biological impulses of women and its will to perpetuate the family, the clan, the *polis* and the Igbo race.

Another crucial value derived from life, its enhancement and preservation in Igbo family is the principled respect of Elders. As we said earlier in this paper, the family consists of the living, the dead and the yet-to-be born. In Igbo family structure, beings exist in a hierarchical vital order of ranking with the Supreme Being, deities, spirit forces and ancestors ranking higher than human being. According to this order, the elder in the family ranks closest to the ancestors. So in the families, the elders are the transmitters of past experiences, the existential links of the past

and the present and the nuclear bearers of tidings to the unborn, the ancestors and the spirit-gods of the nether world.

The Elder is the democratically chosen representative of each extended family or clan. He is a leader, never a ruler, being an instrument for the executions of the religious, moral, philosophical and political will of the people, who remain the trust and final source of governmental power. In fact, this form of respect for the elders and the inherent promotion thereby of continuity in tradition frown at Methuselean authoritarianism, lofty Machiavellianism and wheel-chair romanticism.

So, we can say without all air of confidence that it is the duty of the head of the family to bring up the family members in the way they should go politically and traditionally. Respect for elders and the elders' obligation to the above duties guarantee the harmonious co-existence in the family. The elder has to train up his wards in the ways of loyalty and obedience to the powers that be as well as to insist that the wards conform with the customs, laws and traditional observances of the community.

Igbo language is another value which like her marriage institution has promoted a high level of homogenous attachment upon Igbo families and the entire Igbo society. The Igbo language is a trade mark for Igbo identity and unity and it is the view of this paper that Igbo language should be revived and encouraged among the Igbo.

In Igbo family which encapsulates the extended family system, the Igbo community finds a conspicuous voice. In this communality, the family found their strength and valour, a phenomenon that was demonstrated in the Biafra-Nigeria war where the Igbo showcased their bravery, courage and resilience.

The value of hard work is a wonderful endowment of the Igbo. The Igbo can sacrifice anything to benefit his family, his

people and his community. It is against this backdrop that one can appreciate and understand why the Igbo can survive in all ramifications in any part of Nigeria and even in the diaspora. Igbo unions exist strongly in every tribe in Nigeria, in the United Kingdom, the U.S.A. and in the Asian countries and in South Africa. Igbo fraternity any where they find themselves is the driving force for Igbo extended family system which validates and endorses the principle of “*Onye aghana nwanneya*” (being a brother’s keeper). We concur with Ezeoke (2009) that all Igbo values whether the core ones or the secondary ones are anchored on this dictum.

We have only selected some core Igbo family values and as such, we cannot say that we have exhausted them since values continue to evolve with time. What we have done is to itemize the Igbo family inner most values and convictions on which the Igbo family identity and personality hinge. Igbo family values therefore rotate on those virtues and principles that the Igbo believe and respect. Igbo values thus play key roles in her perception of their world as well as laying the foundation for understanding Igbo attitudes, behaviours and motivations. Consequently as the family is the building block of the society, the family becomes the core agent of socialization and custodian of values. Being closely knit together, the family becomes a promoter of oneness and unity, communality and the preservation and enhancement of human life.

### **The Igbo family and its transcendental reality**

In traditional Igbo life, the family is the nucleus of both individual and corporate existence, the area where a person really experiences personal consciousness of himself and of other members of the society which are believed to comprise both the

visible and invisible members. As we maintained earlier the family is made up of the living, the dead and the yet-to-be born members. We equally maintained that in marriage, the stage is set in the establishment of the family through which human beings who make up the family and part of the community are propagated.

In Igbo thought and belief, man or human being can be viewed from three different standpoints. Metuh (1985) echoes this thus:

Man, viewed from the standpoint of his origin and final destiny is best understood in relation to God his creator. Man comes from God. He has a definite mission to fulfill in God's plan and he will eventually go back to God. Viewed ontologically, man is a force in the midst of other forces in the universe.... Socially, Igbo doctrine of man strikes a balance between his personal identity as a unique individual person and his collective identity as a member of his society. (p. 181).

In fact, Igbo cosmologic myth, for instance the Nri myth of creation, ascribes the creation of human being and his/her sustenance to God (*Chukwu*) and that human holds a central position in the creative order. Human person enjoys a special relationship with God as he/she is endowed with intelligence and freedom. It is believed strongly that God intervenes specially and directly at the conception of each individual person for impregnation is not enough to bring forth a new human being.

This explains the pregnancy rites and rituals among the traditional Igbo.

Ontologically, human person is a living force in the midst of other forces in the world. Every individual person is a nexus of interacting elements, the self and of the world which determines and is determined by his/her behaviour. Thus human man interaction with other cosmic forces is purely for the maintenance of cosmic harmony. Metuh (1985) writes:

The goal of interaction of being in African (Igbo) world-view is the maintenance of the integration and balance of the beings in it. Harmonious interaction of beings leads to the mutual strengthening of the beings involved and enhances the growth of life. (p. 78).

Thus for the Igbo, the ideal things are integration, communion and harmony and to achieve these, the Igbo finds himself constantly consulting the diviner to assure himself that he is in the right relationship with all the forces of the cosmic order.

Therefore, the Igbo man, a product of marriage vis-à-vis family when viewed wholistically, is both divine and human operating on both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Thus family members, from the linkages are transcendently incorporated for a mission in the world which is to be an anchor point for the realization of cosmic harmony. This mission statement can be better understood and appreciated with a discourse on the constituent principles which the Igbo distinguish in an individual person.

### **The Igbo constituent principles in human**

The Igbo have four constituent principles which make up a human or an individual. These are breath or heart (*obi*), shadow spirit (*onyenyo*), destiny spirit (*chi*), and ancestral guardian spirit (*Eke*) (Metuh, 1985). All these constituent principles have divine-spiritual and temporal connections which make them to operate on both the transcendental and horizontal levels of existence. The breath is the animating principle in human person and the seat of affection and volition. It is spiritual and at physical death of a human, it dies.

The shadow spirit is visible in the form of a shadow cast by the human body while the real shadow is the real man, the individual person as created by God. The body that we see as Okoye or Anita is just an incarnate of the shadow spirit and it survives after death as an individual person and can become an ancestral guardian. The destiny spirit is believed to be an emanation of the creator, a spark of God in each individual, conceived as a spirit-double which resides both in the spiritual-ancestral world and in the individual. At conception the destiny in the ancestral world goes to God and chooses a package which becomes the lot of the would-be born child in his journey in life. At the physical death, the destiny spirit returns back to God. The ancestral guardians spirit (*Eke*) is the spirit of a deceased ancestor who reincarnates in a child. It is assigned to the individual at conception by God.

We have outlined these principles in human person in order to show the multi-dimensionality of man as conceived by the Igbo for a better appreciation and understanding of human in the drama of creation and continuity of the *homo sapiens* in the world. All the principles annunciated above taken holistically

centre on the place of human being here in the world and in the hereafter.

The coming of human person into existence is channeled through the principle of procreation which for the Igbo is borne within the marriage institution vis-à-vis family structure. Procreation as a by-product of marriage institution sets in motion the family which is the building block of the society where the essential virtues and values of the Igbo which give form to human existence are transmitted.

The Igbo family, as we said earlier, is made up of the living, the dead and the yet-to-be born. In the family, in which human person is at the centre, we observe a cosmic drama where the key actors namely god, spiritual forces and man are continuously engaged in the process of continuity of the human species in the world. In this drama, God is the key actor in giving life which man and woman through the union of their sexes are secondary actors. The children of the union have both transcendental and human principles which mark them out as unique. Human destiny spirit and guardian spirit are immortal and can reincarnate.

Thus the entire cosmic drama in Igbo family system centres on the immortality of man. This immortality validates and endorses Igbo concept of time as cyclic and not linear as in the western world. This idea of immortality equally validates and endorses the fact that, for the traditional Igbo, the world has no end, life is a continuum and there is nothing like hell or paradise as in Christian religion.

Since the whole family cosmic drama centres on immortality of man, human life here on earth is prime value which must be guarded and guided through diligence, hard work, industry and recourse to the patronage of the supra-mundane forces. Human person maintains a vital relationship with God, nature, deities,

ancestors, the tribe, the clan, the extended family and himself. We can thus see that the family is bound to God by the ties of creation and that this bond is eternal. Thus the Igbo family which is made up of the living, the dead and the yet-to-be born is premised upon this eternal bond on which the Igbo principle of the immortality of man is believed. Within the family structure, procreation becomes an eternal circle through which human lives forever. No wonder then that marriage is obligatory here and any childless marriage among the Igbo is regarded as a curse and must be resisted by all means. This explains why Igbo traditional prayers centre on offsprings and life. This also undergirds why a couple can shop from shrine to shrine, from crusade to crusade, from pastor to pastor asking for children especially males, even in this our contemporary age of globalization and scientific technology.

### **Conclusion**

The Igbo idea about the family vis-à-vis the values attached to the family is premised against the backdrop of the belief in immortality. The family is made up of the living, the dead and the yet-to-be born. In this structure, a family cosmic drama exists in which the three inhabitants are in continuous relationships in endless circles. The drama of immortality of human, the prime value attached to life and its preservation and enhancement find their meanings in Igbo family structure. The family which incorporates the mundane and the supra-mundane levels of existence is anchored on its divine origin and male-female co-operation in its realization. In the Igbo family structure, the cycle nature of life where there is no eternal paradise or damnation is validated and endorsed. The Igbo desire for a blissful life in the hereafter explains their hard work, industry and diligence here on earth for wealth and prosperity since one's status

here on earth determines one's status in the land of the dead which is believed to be a prototype of the life here on earth. Life for the Igbo is endless and immortal and this is what the family encapsulates and projects in traditional Igbo religion and society.

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