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IGBO COSMOLOGIC-ONTOLOGICAL CONCEPTION AND BELIEF IN REINCARNATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION

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ABSTRACT

It is a perennial duty of philosophers especially African Philosophers themselves to delve deep into many of the African traditional concepts. The aim, therefore, is to critically evaluate and re-evaluate them as to make them more scientific and validating the truth contains in those concepts. Man in every era has been hunted by the terrifying possibility of total extinction as he lives in a constant presence of the inevitability of death. Hence, the Igbo concept of reincarnation project a confluence of the idea of birth, death, soul, physical world and the spiritual world vis-a-vis their interdependence as well as the desirousness of an Igbo African man to make his relationship with both the living community and the ancestral community permanent. This idea is grounded on the African concept of the inseparability of the spiritual and the material worlds. Hence, given the obvious controversies accompanying the notion of reincarnation in Igbo-African Cosmo-ontological framework, the writer articulated in this paper a philosophical appraisal of reincarnation from Igbo onto-philosophical purview. The write in order to achieve this project, employed the method of philosophical appraisal. By the time the work is accomplished, it is hoped to have realized its aim of establishing that several theories about man and nature of the universe which were once held to be established truths have today been discarded on account of being either inadequate or no longer tenable or out-rihtly misleading.

KEYWORDS:Cosmology; Reincarnation; Body; Death; Immorality.

General Introduction

The discipline of philosophy contributes immensely to existing deliberation on the relevant and essential questions confronting man in the universe. Hence, philosophy offers a conceptual clarification and classification of various empirical and metaphysical questions. In so doing, it provides the framework of general interdisciplinary analysis and reflection, promoting the synthesis of relevant information and arguments. Consequently, philosophy is enabled to criticize some theoretical presuppositions, analyze many presumed facts and thereby question, evaluate and, or re-evaluate established concepts.

The concept of reincarnation is not left out in this marathon race. Philosophy in its ceaseless effort to reach to the core or profundity of every reality has gradually and systematically attained a laudable advancement in the area of reincarnation. The spirit behind man's quest for deeper knowledge of things is the innate endowment in man to know. Hence, man by nature desire to know as stated by Aristotle in his metaphysics (Aristotle; 1999, p.1). Meanwhile, it is certainly agreed by most philosophers that man's quest for knowledge is a perennial one as Hamlyn observed:

Question about the status and extent of our knowledge of the world, of ourselves and other people, not to speak of particular branches of knowledge, have occupied the attentions of philosophers for nearly as long as philosophy itself has been in existence (Hamlyn; 1970, p.3).

Igbo culture as conditioned by the Igbo cosmologic-anthropological view is replete with processes and rites of incorporation. Incorporation with the human community; incorporation with the living dead (ancestral community) as is ultimately demonstrated in the concept of reincarnation and finally incorporation into the cosmic realm. All these incorporations are in turn basically informed by Igbo ontological view of reality as one- unified whole. More so, "a human person... has therefore a destiny beyond mere corporeal existence" (Asouzu; 2004, p.149). Consequently, in lieu of this fact, man is also incorporated into the Divine by way of the cultic life of his community.

As stated earlier, the Igbo conceive life as cyclic. It is a process of birth, death and rebirth. Life is equally communitarian in nature for the Igbo. Onwubiko thus writes,

Ideologically speaking, the African world is a world of inanimate, animate and spiritual beings. The African is conscious of the influence of each category of those beings in the universe. Their existence, for the African, is reality; so also is the fact that they interact as co-existence beings in the universe (Onwubiko; 1991, p.3).

Who are the Igbo people

The Igbo is one of the largest single ethnicities in Africa. Igbo speakers mostly have their concentration in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. They have more than 18% of the total population of the country. Great number of them could be found in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. They have Igbo as their language. In Nigeria, the Igbo people are primarily found

Ebonyi state, Enugu state, Abia state, Anambra state, Imo state and stretching to the adjacent states, such as Rivers state and Delta state. The Major and most popular cities in Igbo include the following: Enugu, Umuahia, Nsukka, Nnewi, Asaba, Onitsha, Afikpo, Okigwe, Owerri, Aba, Abakariki, Awka, Orlu, Ekwulobia and many others (Onwuatiegwu; 2010, p.8).

Hence, the Igbo people are very generous, hospitable and as well deeply religious. They are naturally agricultural race. They have an enduring spirit and ability, very energetic and they are people of industry. Meanwhile, Igbo race by nature hate laziness with passion. They have the belief that group is strength and, therefore, live communal life. It is communalistic community in which an individual exists only in a community (Onwuatiegwu; 2010, p.9).

Cosmology and Belief in Reincarnation

Every single individual has his or her individual destiny which was chosen for him/her by his/her *chi* (God's likeness in man). However, this destiny has to be realized in the community of persons. Hence, man as the pilgrim of the divine on his journey to the earth- the world of sensible reality, found himself in a community which was there waiting for his or her arrival. The community followed him or her through his or her rites of initiations and rites of crises of life. The same community will assist at his or her death bed as well as performing his or her funeral rites for his or her safe home journey back to the spirit land – *ala mmuo*. This very community will continue to assist him or her even as he or she has settled in the ancestral community with sacrifices and libations. Abanuka summarizes this point thus:

The meaning of the individuals' presence in the community comes to its highest point when the individuals realize not only that their life and death are particularly theirs, but also that they must live their life and die their death in the community. Nevertheless, meaning as is so far attained by the individual is still limited by the framework set by the community (Abanuka; 2004, p.55).

Hence, reality appears to man first as human reality. In other words it is in the community of persons that the man realizes himself or herself as an individual person. The communalistic nature of the Igbo cosmos is manifested through families and communities.

Consequently, the ontological view of reality as one and the cosmological understanding of life as cyclic, therefore, necessitate the interaction, intertwine and intermingling of the spiritual and the physical. Hence, there is the possibility of transiting from one realm to the other. However, this interaction, intertwine and the intermingling of the spiritual and material (physical) is not to be understood as the intermixture or inter-permeation of the spiritual and the physical. This communion of the spiritual and the physical is demonstrated in the Igbo theology of masquerading (*iti mmonwu*) which affirms the cordiality that exist between the ancestors and the living. Hence, it is not illogical for the Igbo to tell stories of human beings trading with spirits and even lower animals in the same human market. Onwubiko affirmatively writes,

This is why it is not illogical for Africans to tell stories connecting animals, human beings and the spirit all acting together in a community; each in the story depicting a definite direction, or course of action (Onwubiko; 1991, pp. 3-4).

'Uwa', the world for an Igbo man does not merely imply the physical cosmos but includes the totality of reality – physical and spiritual.

With the above cosmological view, an Igbo man, however, does not see anything wrong or illogical in the idea of an ancestor coming back to the physical world in a newborn baby. More still, the Igbo understanding of judgment and retributive justice unavailingly necessitate the possibility of reincarnation. This idea enriched in the Igbo adage: '*Onye zakoo ya kpobe, o kposighi, ya gbawa unu*'. This implies that the world or life is a merciless creditor. Whatsoever one does here on earth is credited against one's name, the debt which one must pay either at once or install-mentally. Hence, failing to complete the payment demands that one has to come back to earthly life to make for a complete amendment.

...Punishment due to the life lived on earth is received in this world, so also is reward received; and this is in the returned life. Therefore it can be seen why the religion of many African communities is world – affirming (Onwubiko; 1991, p.90).

There may be certain things which one may have been taking for granted. Then at death man comes face to face with reality and, therefore, sees the world in its utter nakedness. By implication then, reincarnation offers man an opportunity to take corrections of his or her past life; to make restitution for his or her offences and then to realize his or her humanity to the full. Abanuka excellently affirms,

In this... case, since the potentiality contained in one's eke (destiny) must be actualized by the individual himself, it is believed that both those who do not discover their destiny at all and those discovered it late and were not able to fulfill it completely, must come back to this world to accomplish their uncompleted tasks (Abanuka; 2004, p.73).

Meanwhile, laziness is an unwelcome attitude in Igbo community. This is because the Igbo see life as:

...a continuous struggle for excellence and perfection as one's earlier rich and moral life cannot give him a place in the present. He must work out his admittance into the club of the ancestors each time he comes (Ogugua; 2003, p.26).

Obviously, the cyclic nature of life is to be understood better from the view point of Chemical law of matter: This law states that matter cannot be destroyed but can change from one state to another. There are four major states in which matter can change into: from solid state to plasma state; from plasma state to liquid state; and from liquid to gaseous state and back to solid state. Matter keeps on recycling in that fashion. Similarly, the Igbo conceptualize man as capable of transiting from birth through growth to death and from death through reincarnation to rebirth. This process continues until one is able to achieve ultimate perfection and thereby acquiring the status of a pure spirit.

Death

Death is necessary and an inevitable end awaiting each and every created being both man and animal, as well as plants. An Igbo man keeps himself ever conscious of this fact with the proverb: *'Igwe nile gaje n' uzu'* - every created being is destined to die. However, it is equally in the consciousness of the Igbo that,

Death is not man's final end. All who die continue to live somehow after their death whichever deaths they suffered. Even those who received no funeral rites continue to live, but their place of abode and their statuses differ (Metuh; 1981, p.179).

Ndi Igbo, nonetheless, see death not as an end of earthly existence but as an interruption of earthly dwelling. Hence, if one lived his previous life well, there is the hope of coming back to earth – *'makana ezi dim mma a gaa ya ugboro abuo'* and *'anu gbalaa taa echi bu nta'* – all pointing to the possibility of a second chance. Consequentially,

...prayers at funeral rites do not request increase happiness for the deceased in the spirit-land, but for his safe arrival there and his quick reincarnation with even greater prosperity and success (Metuh; 1981, p.181).

Body and Flesh at Death

At death therefore, the *'anuahu'* (the flesh) with which man manifest in the physical world is dropped and not the *'ahu'* (the body). The body is that unified whole that is the real man – which out of the *'anuahu'* (flesh) man becomes *'onye mmuo'* (human spirit). That is why the Igbo believe that a living dead can be seen but not touched. It can be seen because it has the *'ahu'* (body) but cannot be touched because it has no *'anuahu'* (flesh) which implies also that a spirit has no human feeling. Hence,

Igbo people consider death as the dissolution of one's corporeal nature. It is God's messenger which appears to the dying in the form of a skeleton with a staff with which he strikes his victim and transforms him into a spirit (Talbot; 1996, p.4).

Anuahu (the flesh) is, therefore, seen as a physical garment which man needs in order to appear and sojourn in the physical world of matters. Nevertheless, it is considered the most precious possession of man for his or her time here on earth since without it a human being turns a spirit man being or human spirit. Hence, it is by way of the *'anuahu'* (flesh) that the being of every single person makes contact with his environment as to dwell therein in full consciousness. Without *'anuahu'* the full consciousness is terminated or better put, is hindered, since an Igbo man has hope of reincarnation. Therefore, nothing in a strict sense changes when man on earth lays aside his physical garment – *'anuahu'*. He is the same man only without the physical garment with which man manifest in the human world. Mbiti hence writes,

It is clear that people view death paradoxically: it is a separation but not annihilation, the dead person is suddenly cut off from the human society and yet the corporate group clings to him. This is

shown through the elaborate funeral rites, as well as other methods of keeping in contact with the departed (Mbiti; 1969, p.159).

But no Igbo man is in a hurry to become a spirit not minding the awareness that that is ultimately the destiny of every man on earth. Then again, despite and in spite of the fact that the world - beyond is conceived as resembling the human world in every aspect, yet no Igbo is desperate to cross to the other side of the mountain. This unwillingness is clearly manifested in the proverbs: '*a na-agbanu agbanu aracha aka aga-akpawa ya n` uko`*', and '*nwa nza eji n` aka kariri odum no n` ime ohia`*' -These sayings, however, point to the uncertainty that characterize the world beyond. More so, the Igbo believe that every process or transition or change in life has to be gradual and systematic and not abrupt or haphazard. Hence, sudden death, accident or premature deaths are all considered evil or bad deaths (*onwu ojoo or onwu ekwensu*). If the formation of the human person is gradual and systematic as well as peaceful in the womb, the Igbo see no reason why man's earthly termination should not follow the same manner and process. This is because death is seen as birth into the spiritual realm or as going home. Hence,

Death is not the end of life. It is rather the end of one phase of life and the beginning of another. Many Igbo funeral songs describe death as *ila ulo* 'going home' or *ila mmuo* 'going home to the spirit-land' (Metuh; 1981, pp.169-170).

Therefore, for the Igbo, death is a process or a gate way through which every man goes back to his /her creator- *Onwu bu ugwo eji ani; onye kwuo ugwo oji onwere onwe ya* – death is an inevitable debt which each person must pay back to the mother earth in order to free oneself. By inference, therefore, man borrowed something from the earth, possibly the *anuah* (the flesh). Hence it must be given back to the mother earth if man is to free himself.

Death is not an Annihilation

Nevertheless, it is believed that after the departure of '*onye*' (the self) from '*anuah*' that *onye* continues to hover around as a ghost until at the completion of his or her second funeral rites which enables the dead to descend peacefully into ancestral world – '*ala ndiichie*'. Thus,

...it is commonly believed that when a person dies, his remains in this world for some times, wandering restlessly in the vicinity of his home and other places he used to frequent during his life time. After the completion of the funeral rite, the spirit enters the *Ndiichi*, ancestral shrine, meanwhile, his *Chi* goes for an interview, which has aspect of a judgment (Metuh; 1991, p.119).

Obviously, for every Igbo, life is supreme. As life is sacred and as a gift from God, an Igbo is ready to do anything within his reach to sustain and maintain this life. Hence, for the Igbo, life has no duplicate- '*ndu adighi abuo*'. However, this attitude should not be mistaken. Igbo people hate death even though it is a passage to 'paradise' (Ogugua; 2003, p.16). Nevertheless an Igbo does not necessarily fear death, rather he fears dying pre-maturely, sudden or accidentally and dying wretchedly or childless. The aforementioned situations are considered by the Igbo as evil or as a curse.

Hence, at a ripe old age an Igbo welcomes death with equanimity; knowing very well that he is only going there to join the community of his ancestors. “The wish of every Igbo man or woman is to rest among the souls of their ancestors and it is a very real and poignant hope” (Basden; 1966, p.278).

A natural death, therefore, is not annihilation; it is conceived as something wholly positive. If, as in the funeral song, death is seen as going home to the place from which man came, *Olawala n` ebe osiri bia n` uwa*, it would appear that the spirit-land is man's real home. Man is essentially a spirit, who comes from the spirit-realm, or pre-natal state, for a brief sojourn in this world – after which he returns. Life goes in a cyclic, alternating between the spirit-world and the visible world. Death is the gate way between the two states of existence (Metuh; 1991, p.171).

The need to bring the Dead back home

Finally, the Igbo also believe that the physical body or earthly body (*anuahu*) of every man is in all respect closely linked with that soil upon which one was born. Hence, wherever an Igbo man dies, there is always great effort to bring his or her corpse back home. This fact is taken into account come what may.

Hence, it is regarded as a dreadful misfortune to die and be buried away from home. Such a death is called *Onwu Nnwufu*, the death of a lost soul. All this explains the seemingly unnecessary expenses and inconvenience undertaken to bring home the corpse of a relative who dies hundred miles away (Metuh; 1991, p.174).

Admittedly, it is part of the earth in which a man is born that has the exclusive power to give the body actually what it needs to grow. Hence, the Igbo believe that it is as well the part of the earth in which a body is born that will at death give the body the vigour that will enable it to reincarnate. It is taken so, because, being buried outside one's community means not being able to join the ancestral community which is located just below the human community. Consequently, not being able to join the ancestral community implies impossibility of reincarnation.

Idea of Birth

Every Igbo man is conscious of the fact that child or children come from God as a gift to the human family. According to Metuh,

...at conception a new individual person is created by God. This is so in spite of beliefs about reincarnation. What reincarnates as we shall see is not the person hood of the ancestors but an aspect of his self (Metuh; 1991, p.110).

Hence, the Igbo give their children names such as *Chukwukere* – originated from God; *Akaekenwa* – man does not create baby; *Ejidikeemenwa* – a baby is not begotten by might or power, and so on. There is also the belief that the ancestors are in a privileged position to

request for children from God. Consequently, when it pleases God eventually to grant the request, it is an ancestor or a deity that God usually hands over the child to be led to the earth. The particular ancestor or deity in question is designated as ‘*onye noolu mmadu uwa*’ – the person that led or brought one to the human world of reality.

More so, the Igbo conceive birth as a process or passage into the physical sensible world of reality. The idea of journeying into the world presupposes the possibility of pre-existence somehow and somewhere from which one journeyed into the human world. This notion is in Concord with Heidegger’s idea of the thrown-ness of the *dasain* into the world. Hence, *dasain* all of a sudden found himself or herself in the world with all its facticity and vicissitude.

The Notion of Marriage

From the ontologically point of view, every Igbo man longs to live on as is expressed in the concept of reincarnation. Marriage institution, therefore, is highly held sacred and is considered very essential for the prolongation of man’s life on earth.

For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all member of a giving community meets: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just as spectator...(Mbiti; 1969, p.133).

Marriage is figuratively in the words of Onwubiko, a culture centre. Consequently, the journey from the ancestral community to the human community is made possible by way of marriage institution.

Notion of Birth as a Journey to the world

The world is considered or better compared to a market place by the Igbo. Hence, they say ‘*uwa bu ahia; azuta ahia azutaghi ahia oge zue a naa*’ – the world is a market place; where whether one has bought everything that one needs or not, one must go at the appointed time: hence the ceaseless effort that characterize an Igbo man. He is always pushing hard to be able to accomplish within the given time, that for which he journeyed into the human world in the first place. This idea is embedded on the notion that every individual has a destiny to be accomplished on earth. The destiny is believed to be chosen for the individual by the individual’s *chi* (the divine resemblance in man).

In accordance with this notion of man as a pilgrim of the divine in the world, a new baby is usually welcomed with: ‘*nwa m nno ije*’ or ‘*nwa biara uwa nno*’ – meaning baby that has arrived to the human world you are welcomed. ‘*Ab initio*’ an Igbo man from cradle becomes conscious of his temporality on the earth.

The Idea of Soul

Igbo thinkers conceptualize the soul as an essential principle or vital force that proves the existence of man – ‘*ume ndu*’ (the engine of life). It is the core of being which man is. Man in Igbo ontology is free from the body and soul dichotomy which characterized the Western

thought. Man is not a composite of soul and body but, rather the unity of spirit, soul, and body. This being, man is, has a centre and the centre of a man is the soul. The body is the aspect of the soul and the soul is the aspect of the body. Hence, man is not made up of body and soul. Instead everybody has a soul. In considering the inseparability of the body and the soul, Prof. Oguejiofor writes,

...the conceptual inseparability of a person's body from his soul is an out crop of the inseparability of the spiritual and the material world in Igbo conception (Oguejiofor; 1996, p.22).

The relationship or rather, the unity of the soul and body is likened to the unity that exists between a circle and its centre. Hence, every circle has a centre. The centre is not out of the circle and the circle cannot be without a centre. The centre of a circle is part and parcel of the circle. Therefore, the body and the soul are nothing but two aspects of one and the same thing. The body for the Igbo is not merely tangible and physical; for we have as well spiritual bodies.

The soul then is the essence of being which manifest in the body. Body and soul in a sense could be compared to Aristotle's act and potency; and Aquinas' existence and essence. Therefore, the idea of separating the body and the soul sound very much unreasonable and abominable to an Igbo mind with his unified notion of reality.

Critical Evaluation and Conclusion

Evaluation

Obliviously, the Issue of reincarnation has generated with it a lot of controversies, contradictions and as well as paradoxes. The Latin word *carnis* implies the flesh which the Igbo call 'anuahu' – the material body. Hence, the proper interpretation of the word reincarnation is not entering into another body, rather, it means entering or taking another flesh. However, *corpus* is another Latin word which implies the body and not the flesh. Hence, Latin as well as Igbo language have a clear distinction between the body and the flesh – '*ahu and anuahu*'. *Anuahu* is simply regarded by the Igbo as the physical clothing or as the body cover with which the individual person appears in the physical sensible world. *Ahu* connotes the personhood of the individual person since the body for the Igbo is a unified entity.

Reincarnation therefore, is the process of assuming another flesh. Moreover, re-incorporation on the other hand stands for the process of assuming another body. In the framework of Igbo ontology, being is conceptualized as force. Hence, instead of saying hierarchy of being, the Igbo will prefer the hierarchy of forces (*ike di n` awaja n` awaja*). Therefore, the Western dichotomization of body and soul is alien to Igbo – African ontology. As we have seen, therefore, it is not the soul that survives death but the real persona, the unity of the soul, spirit and body. Consequently, the Igbo as well conceive '*anuahu*' as a material garment with which man manifests in the physical sensible world of reality. Within this material garment- '*anuahu*', the body is a physical body but outside it, the body becomes a spiritual body. From this line of argument, one can possibly drop or puts off the material garment '*anuahu*' as well as can take up another garment just like a yam tuber planted in the garden can decay and takes another flesh, to say. If we are to go by this philosophical line of thought, one can therein see clearly and without any doubt that reincarnation can stand within the framework of Igbo African ontology.

Therefore, the ancestor takes or informs another flesh and not another body. The operative word is '*carnis*' and not '*corpus*'. Consequently, many philosophers on reincarnation such as Onyewuenyi have not possibly explored this aspect and hence have erroneously maintained that reincarnation cannot stand within the frame work of the African ontology. In the first instance, every child is a reincarnation of his or her parents, clan and community. A child then is the prolongation or extension of a particular lineage; hence, the worst calamity that can happen to an Igbo man is childlessness. This is the reason why among Igbo people, someone's offspring or relative is considered as that person's '*akpukpa*', *agbo*, or *aforo* (aworo) – the person's extension.

Secondly, as man manifests in the physical world or sensible reality with material body- '*anuah*' (the flesh), so he/she equally manifest or demonstrates his/her presence through his/her particular characters or essential qualities. And as we all know, character trait runs in the family. Hence, whenever some characters or essential qualities of an individual is unbendingly discovered in any of his/her children or relatives; if the individual in question is still alive, the Igbo will say '*nwa a yili nne ya (nna ya)*' or '*nwa a bu aforo nna ya or nne ya*' or again '*nwata a bu onuno nne ya (nna ya) kpomkwem*' – this child resembles or is the carbon copy of his father or her mother. But if the individual in question is no more alive then the Igbo will say '*O bun ne ya (nna ya) noro ya uwa or lolo – uwa*' – it is the mother or the father, as the case may be, that has reincarnated in the new born. Meanwhile, the flesh, characters or essential qualities are all garment through which an individual manifest his/her presence in the physical world. Hence, *ilo-uwa* (reincarnation) does not necessarily mean that the ancestor as the unity of the soul, spirit and body has come back to life.

After all, the Igbo like every African believe that at creation each individual person is given a unique *obi* (soul), a unique *chi* (the breath or image of God in man) and *eke* (the residue of the essential qualities of the ancestors). Even if a person's soul is to be transferred to another person's body; we must remember that the soul is affected or influenced by the body that it inhabits. Hence, such a soul will no longer be the original soul since it has been affected or influenced by the new body.

From Igbo ontological view, man is not a composite of the body and the soul but a unity of body and soul. Hence, the soul and body are but only two sides of one and the same reality. The soul is that which keeps the body in being and the body is the aspect of the soul.

In that case, therefore, it contradicts human reasoning to say that man is the unity of soul & body and at the same time conceive that the soul can leave its particular body and inhabits another body. Every soul and body is unique. Hence, from Igbo ontological point of view, a particular soul cannot possibly assume another body other than its particular body – as both are two sides of one and the same reality (in other words, they are the aspect of one another).

Nonetheless, the relevance of reincarnation to an Igbo in the attainment of his or her eternal destiny is not questionable. The Igbo, as a result of the notion of reincarnation, see life as a continuous struggle for excellence and perfection; hence their hatred for laziness. That is why an Igbo can survive in any situation come what may. They are, therefore, very competitive, and many misconstrued this for aggressiveness.

Moreso, no Igbo person would like to be deprived the opportunity to reincarnate and thereby be eternally cut off from the continual relationship with the living members of his or her family. Such an incident is considered calamitous. Hence, the energy that propels an Igbo towards a moral upright life and towards struggling for self-actualization and self-realization is the innate desire to be with his or her people. Then, an Igbo will prefer his or her community rejecting his opinion to the community rejecting him or her. Therefore, the worst punishment that can be given to an Igbo – African man is ostracization.

The idea of the Igbo praying for the safe arrival of their deceased in the spirit-land and for their quick return with even greater prosperity and success does not necessarily imply (depict) their not believing in the existence of a permanent abode of perfect rest. After all, the Igbo have the concept of an ancestor achieving the status of a pure spirit and at which point the ancestor stops reincarnating and, thereby, enter fully into the community of '*ndi ahughi anya*' or *ndi mbu na ndi egede*' (the invisible ones or pure spirits).

Consequently, the Igbo proposed two types of death: death as an interruption of earthly existence and death as an end or final full stop to earthly existence. Those, incapable of reincarnation are considered dead in the true sense of the term, since they have been ostracized from the cycle of life. However, those who still have the qualification that will enable them to reincarnate, are not really dead, since they are not completely cut off from the cycle of life, hence, they are called the living deads.

The cycle of life is demonstrated by the Igbo in one of the moon light plays called '*Aka ji igba*'. *Igba*, here, represents or serves as a symbol of life. All children involve sit in a round (circular) form on the ground. In a relay-race manner, the participants keep exchanging, hidingly, the *mkpuru igba* (the pebble of life or the symbol of life) from one person's hand to the other, singing:

The person that holds *Igba* (the symbol of life)

O h o o o o h o o o- ohoo

Igba goes round

O h o o o o h o o o- ohoo

The with *Igba* hand it over to me

The person within the circle, *Igba* has gone behind you

O h o o o o h o o o- ohoo

As the play is going on in that manner, the person in the middle keeps searching for the *igba* from one hand to the other, until he or she eventually discovers it. Once he or she dictates the hand with the *igba*, the struggle to snatch the *igba* away from the hand ensues. As the struggle is still on, the group intones the song:

O je-agbagbu gi-o, e kwena mgbadike (He or She will over power you-o,
be strong and never allow that to happen)

If the man in the middle succeeded in taking the *igba* off the hand holding it, he or she will take the position of the former holder of the *igba* and the former holder of *igba* will thereby replace

the man in the middle of the circle and the play continues in that fashion, until the members are satisfied or tired.

The person within the circle in the above narrated play stands for every individual person and how each individual person in the Igbo-African world is tirelessly struggling to keep himself or herself within the circle of life. No sane Igbo would wish to be cut off from the circle of life for that would mean an *onwu pii* (the real death) for an Igbo.

Conclusion

In summary, therefore, the process of death for an Igbo man in the real sense is nothing but birth into the ancestral world; typical of the process of birth into sensible material world of humanity. Immediately after death, the real man – ‘*onye mmuo*,’ is still somehow attached to his or her physical body- ‘*anuahu*’ with some kind of emotional cord. Within this period, therefore, the ghost is believed to be still wandering and hovering around the grave, the family and familiar places. Hence, through the process of second funeral rites the connecting cord is severed and only then will the real man, now ‘*onyemmuo*’ then sinks into the ancestral world for rest.

In the ancestral realm, the Igbo still conceive life there as resembling exactly life in every manner. That is why the traditional Igbo more often, more readily and more gladly throw hoe, machete and food items into the graves of their relatives. The phenomenon of throwing of things into graves demonstrates in a vivid manner their belief in a conscious life after physical death. The materials equally serve the purpose of reminding the dead of the pleasures of earthly life and, hence enticing or rather arousing in the dead an irresistible desire to earthly existence as soon as possible.

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