

## THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF “ONYE NA ‘CHI’ YA” IN THE IGBO COSMOLOGY

Amanambu, Uchenna Ebony, PhD

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Anambra State

[ebonyuchem@gmail.com](mailto:ebonyuchem@gmail.com)

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.19692.39043

### Abstract

*The correlations and arguments between religion and reason have been serially intriguing both within the social and academic circles. Religiosity has gone too far in the history of mankind that man seems unable to live without religion. Religious practices of “onye na chi ya” in the Igbo cosmology is an unbiased investigation into the history of Igbo people who are occupying the southeastern and some parts of the south southern part of Nigeria. The study also delves into the hermeneutics foundations of the concept of praxis vis-à-vis theory of personal destiny, guardian angel and mobile god (“chi”) belief system in Igbo worldview. The study analyzes the impacts and results of the “chi” on the possessors’ belief system in Igbo land and it seeks to unearth how it has reshaped the worldviews and general existence of the people.*

**Keywords:** Religious, Practices, “Chi”, Igbo and Cosmology.

### Introduction

Historically, religion has remained an interesting multi-sectoral phenomenon in the existence of human being and the society. It has attracted both the admirations and criticisms of scholars, historians and atheists. For instance, Karl Marx sees religion as the “opium of the masses” and Lenin describes it as an “inexpressible foulness”. Contrastingly, one of the most influential thinkers of religion in the first half of the twentieth century, Rudolf Otto, best known for his analysis of religion as an “experience”. The “experience” underlies everything about religion. He calls this experience “numinous” and says it has three components which are often designated with this Latin phrase: “mysterium tremendum et fascinans”- fearful and fascinatingly mysterious. He describes the numinous as a “wholly other” with blank wonder. This “wholly other” is entirely different from anything people experience in ordinary life because it evokes a reaction of silence. But the numinous is also “tremendum” as it provokes terror by presenting itself as awe, absolute, unapproachable, majesty and might. Finally, the numinous manifests as “fascinans” and in spite of its

fearfulness, it portrays the glimpse of potent charm, attraction, mercy and grace. Religion has continued to be an illuminating phenomenon to man. But it takes a rather forceful spike in the Igbo cosmology where with the concept of “Chi” explicates the aspects of the sacred philosophy of the people. Without an understanding of its concept, life does not make sense in the Igbo cosmology. Hence, this study will appraise the concept of “Chi” and its impacts on the possessors (Onye) in the Igbo cosmology.

### Clarification of Terms

**Religious:** To be “religious” is the act of practising religion. Cicero in Nmah (2009) holds the view that religion came from a root word *leg* meaning to take up, gather, count or observe the signs of divine communication. Karl Bahner described religion from the word *religere* which means binding oneself back to one’s origin or goal or to bind oneself fast to God (p.22). Therefore, to be religious can be described as the sacred attitudes of an individual toward who and what he/she believes in.

**Praxes:-**The plural of praxis derives from the Latin and the Greek word “pratein”, literally meaning to do. Praxis is the process of using a theory or something that one has learned in a practical way. It means the practicality of a belief and the application of knowledge or skills to solve a problem and achieve results. It is defined as an accepted practice, custom and an idea translated into action or something in reality rather than something in theory. *Onye na chi ya* is an abstract or theoretical ideological belief that everybody has a destiny and guardian god whose duties are to guide and preserve an individual against dangers and ensure that the person attains greater height in life.

In the view of Kragh (2007), *Cosmology* is a term that can be traced to the 1730s but its appearance in a scientific sense came after the Second World War. *Logos* being the root of “logy” means “an account”. The preliminary working definition of cosmology is simply “an account of the cosmos”. The anthropological definitions of cosmos rely on the proposition that ideas about the cosmos are integral parts of human, cultural and social systems. Bell (1997) argues from the complex subsystems of cosmic exchange that underpin mundane systems of behaviour which include issues like the socio- economic exchange designed to reinforce individual and social existence within the cosmos (p.122). Gumerman and Warburton (2005) argued that for cosmos to be truly comprehended, a culture must have some sense of its cosmology. In other word, it must be viewed

in relation to the conceptions and perceptions which people have about themselves and their heavens.

Meanwhile, an archaeologist, Darvill (2008) defines cosmology as being the worldview and belief system of a community based upon their understanding of order in the universe. A worldview is a mental model of reality, a comprehensive framework of ideas and attitudes people exhibit about their world, their lives and how the answers to the wide range of questions such as who and what are humans, why they are here and what are their purposes in life? The term, "worldview" as employed by Darvill above, has earlier been described by Metuh (1981) as a complex of beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, native, structure of the universe and interactions of being with particular reference to man. It is against this backdrop that the major problems of man are conceived, assessed and solutions achieved. These include not only the problems connected with life and happiness but also fears, purposes and social and religious institutions (p.48). As the word itself suggests, a worldview is an overall view of the world. It is not a physical view of the world but rather a religious, spiritual, economical, philosophical and an all-encompassing perspective of everything that exists and matters to human beings.

Contextually, the religious praxes of "onye na chi ya" in the Igbo cosmology means the belief that every man has a destiny and guardian god whose duties are to guide an individual into attaining the goals and aspirations of his/her life, preserve him against dangers and ensures the person lives his life to the fullest. It is an abstract or theoretical ideology that manifests with practical and empirical results in the total existence of an Igbo man anywhere he finds himself.

### **Praxis- The Antitheses between Theory and Practice**

The concept of practice or practicality often implies the act of doing something which will produce evidential results. It is usually contrasted to the idea of theory which has more to do with abstract ideas or phenomenon. Theory is the real knowledge while practice is the application of that knowledge to solve problems. In many ways, this is a legacy of Aristotle with his three-fold classification of disciplines as theoretical, productive and practical. The basis for the distinction of each of these lies in the purpose each of them serves.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) argue that the purpose of a theoretical discipline is the pursuit of truth through contemplation whose telos is the attainment of

knowledge for its own sake. The purpose of the productive sciences is to make something. The practical disciplines are those sciences that deal with ethical and political life and their telos is practical wisdom and knowledge. (p.32). Meanwhile, Bernstein (1983) argues that there may be no prior knowledge of the right in praxis as regards to means by which the end of a particular situation is realized. The end is specified in terms of deliberating about the means appropriate to a particular situation (p.147).

When people think about what they want to achieve, they alter the way they might achieve their goals. As men reason on the way they would go about something, they are likely to change their goals. Gadamer (1979) reasons that there is a continual interplay between ends and means and in just the same way, there is a continual interplay between thought and action. This process involves interpretation, understanding and application in “one unified process” (p. 275). All these are worthy to be engaged in as human beings. The value of praxis is that it is simply an action based on reflection.

However, Carr and Kemmis (1986) warn that praxis is always risky as it requires that a person “makes a wise and prudent practical judgement about how to act in this situation” (p. 190). This is similar to the concept of determinism which has received different interpretations. Some people misunderstand it with another concept called fatalism which emphasizes that the world is predetermined by supernatural power known as fate. Praxis is an action that embodies certain qualities such as a commitment to human wellbeing, the search for truth and respect for others. It is the action of people who are free and able to act for themselves. Praxis could be summed up as an informed action and the process of taking action in practice whilst acting within a theoretical framework of thought. Engaging in abstract theory can only be useful as long as it inspires and informs concrete action and the action must be informed by deep thinking and justification. Freire (1970) used “praxis” as a different term to describe this unity between theory and practice.

### **Stimulus, Interpretation and Response Theory**

This theory is propounded by George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) who was born into a congregationalist family of Calvinism and supported progressive causes for social reform like the women’s rights. Trained in social psychology and philosophy, he spent most of his academic career in the philosophy. Mead was an associate of John Dewey (1859-1952) who was an important American writer

and public intellectual. He is generally regarded as pragmatist who sees habit as an issue that Weber and Parsons found very difficult in explaining in their theories of social action. He argued that there are cycles of habit, reflection, rational consciousness, behavioural change and much of human action and interaction that are habitual and reflexive with only occasional reflection and consideration.

Furthermore, Farganis (1996) affirms that George Herbert Mead emphasizes the importance of the social world as leading to the development of various mental and physical states of man through social interaction. He did not foresee people as media that can be put into action by appropriate stimuli or even as subject to the power of social facts as Durkheim, Marx and other social thinkers on religion had argued rather he sees people as thoughtful and reflective creatures whose identities and actions spring up as a result of their interactions with others (p.158). For him, what distinguishes humans from non-human animals is that humans have the ability to delay their reactions to stimulus. Human beings possess intelligence which is the ability to mutually adjust actions. He agrees that other animals also have intelligence because they can act together or individually to adjust how they react to stimulus. Human beings differ from animals because they have a much greater ability to adjust to each other and achieve interaction meaningful to all parties involved. While humans can do this through involuntary gestures, Mead thought it more important that they can do this through gestures and symbols that are significant and meaningful. As a result of this greater intelligence, humans can communicate, plan and work out responses rather than merely reacting in an instinctive or stimulus-response manner.

This theory is adopted in the study because the idea of “chi”-destiny god in Igbo cosmology is an abstract, a mental and a symbolic ideology that is stimulated and concretized through the general actions, attitudes, behaviours and aspirations of Igbo people.

### **About the People of Igbo Land**

Ogbuaku (2008) argues that history deals with the study of past-past events and developments. It is not only learned from the myriads of books on the discipline of history but also transmitted orally from one person to another and from generation to generation with errors and distortions such as method entails. Compression of history therefore is a useful and commendable means of passing on information of more than common interest and a systemic account of the past

people, the modes and consequences of their pattern of life, their mistakes and achievements (p.5). The study of history of people does not only provide data but serves also as a guide for planning, improving on accomplishments and modifying other misjudgments so as to make the world a better place for human habitation. A synthetic diffuse data can diffuse animosity, controversies and bad blood between people and their various religious leanings in any given community.

The historicity of Igbo people has been an exciting academic and historical adventure. The history surrounding their origin has been the subject of much speculation. Onwuejiogwu (1987) employs the concepts of glottochronology and lexicostatistics in explaining the origin and date of Igbo people. Glottochronology is the technique of collecting and calculating basic words of languages in order to work out centuries of separation while Lexicostatistics is the same technique used to establish relative degree of linguistic similarity and difference. There are hypotheses or conjectures on the origin of the Igbo and these are sourced from the fragmentary oral and local traditions, the nexus between cultural traits and archaeological discoveries. All these tend to throw up at least three perspectives on the origin of the Igbo people.

The first perspective deals with the archeological findings. Hartle (1967) submits that Archaeological findings indicate that the Igbo people have inhabited parts of south-eastern Nigeria by 2000–3000BC. Afigbo (1975) affirms that the antiquity of the Igbo origin on logistic evidence probably goes back to five or six thousand years. Isichei (1977) avers that the history of Igbo people dates back to 5000BC. She believes that the first Igbo man that inhabited the land must have come from the areas further north-possibly from the Niger confluence (p.1).

Anozie (1979) argued that Igbo people are traditionally migrants and in tracing the origin of the Igbo people, there have been four archaeological findings—the Ugwuele, Afikpo, Nsukka and Igbo-Ukwu. These sites have produced abundant and scientific evidences of the fact that at least between 100,000BC and 5,000BC, man has started his cultural drama in what is referred to as “the theatre of Igbo land. Ugwuele site suggests that the makers of the Ugwuele stone artefacts might have settled near the site engaged in hunting and gathering food and trapping of animals. Onwuejiogwu (1987) explains that the upper dates of Ugwuele overlapped with lower dates of Afikpo and Nsukka which had similar pottery types. The shreds recovered were fired and associated with stone tools. In

addition, the pottery is similar to the contemporary Igbo pottery found in both Afikpo and Nsukka today indicating a conservative community. The picture that emerges is a Stone Age culture area extending from Nsukka to Aba and from Okigwe to Abakaliki and Afikpo area, with its factory site situated at Ugwuele.

Anedo (2012) argues that the first possible inhabitants of Igbo land were the Cross Riverine and Anambra valley-Nsukka escarpment. In each of these areas, later Stone Age sites have been evacuated. A rock shelter at Afikpo was first inhabited about five thousand years ago by people who made rough red pottery and variety of stone tools, hoes, knives and others. Excavators at the University of Nigeria Nsukka uncovered the pottery of about 4,500 years old and a rock shelter at Ibangwa, a town in Nsukka yielded to this account.

The second perspective is internal migration hypothetical and Nri myth as propounded by the likes of Isichei (1977) which indicates that Igbo people migrated from the Benue or from the Enugu area for which the Niger-Benue confluence is regarded as the original homeland of the people. It was probably from there that the original Igbo hunters and gatherers migrated southwards to the Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta.

Meanwhile, the Nri Myth states that the father of all Nri was Eri. He was sent by Chukwu-supreme God from the Sky to the earth. Expanding the myth further Afigbo (1981) asserts that as he arrived, he sat on an anti-hill because he saw a watery and marshy earth. Eri complained to God about it and God sent an Awka blacksmith with his fiery bellow and charcoal to dry the earth. Having done the job satisfactorily, the Awka blacksmith was given *Ofo* as a mark of authority. As Eri lived in the world, Chukwu fed him and his people with "azu-igwe"-heavenly fish. But this special food vanished after Eri had passed away but he had one of his surviving sons called Nri. Later Nri complained to God about food and God told him to sacrifice his first son and daughter and bury them in separate graves. A directive Nri complied with and after twelve days which represent the three-Igbo-market days (*Izu na ato*), yam and cocoyam grew from the grave of his son and daughter respectively. Nri and his people ate these food and they slept for the first time. May be the results of these sacrifices made Nri to kill his male and female slaves and buried them separately. Just as it was earlier stated, after *Izu na ato*, an oil palm and a bread fruit tree called ukwa grew from the grave of the male and female slaves. With this new food supply, Nri and his people ate and prospered. Chukwu asked him to distribute the new food items to all people but Nri refused because he bought them at the cost of sacrificing his

children and slaves. Chukwu made a bargain with Nri. For agreeing to distribute food to all the people around, Nri got number of rights over his surrounding people. One tradition says:

As a reward for distributing food to the other towns Nri would have the right of cleansing every town of an abomination (nso) or breach, of crowning the "Eze" at Aguleri, and of tying the Ngulu (ankle cords) when a man takes the title of ozo. Also he and his successors would have the privilege of making the Oguji, or yam medicine, each year for ensuring a plentiful supply of yams in all surrounding towns, or in all towns that subjected themselves to the Eze Nri. For this medicine all the surrounding towns would come in and pay tribute and Umunmdri people then could travel unarmed through the world and no one would attack or harm them (pp.40-42)

Furthermore, Anedo (2012) posits that early nucleus of settlement in the northern Igbo land is confirmed by Igbo tradition of Umueri clan which includes the ancient Nri state. The tradition holds that Igbo people and Igala people descended from the same Nri but while on transit, the Igala people went to their way, Agukwu, Amanuke, Nteje and Igbariam went to different directions. With time, other proto Igbo population dispersed more widely in the forests of Igbo land. They came to concentrate especially in what much later became Owerre, Okigwe, Orlu and Awka divisions.

Apart from Awka, these are areas Afigbo (1981) grouped as the core areas of Igbo land and they formed a belt and the people in this area have no tradition of coming from anywhere else. Migration from this area in the recent past tended to be in all directions and in this way, the Igbo culture gradually became homogenized. In addition to this pattern of migration from this "core area" other people also entered the Igbo territory in about the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. Many of these people still exhibit different characteristics from that of the traditional Igbos—for example geographical marginality, the institution of kingship, a hierarchical title system and the amosu tradition (witchcraft). As time went on, some Igbo-speaking peoples claimed that they were not from Igbo race.

The third perspective deals in external migration theory. In this case, Afigbo (1981) believes Igbo people are among the numerous Negro Africans (p.1). Basden (1983) traces the origin of Igbo people to the Jews. Before then, the Igbo ex-slave Olaudah Equiano had similar ethnographic and cultural grounds

advanced the thesis of the Hebrew origin of Igbo people. D.W Jeffery impressed by the feature of dual division of Igbo social structures traces Igbo people to Egypt. Ogbu (2008) postulates the external migration theory that asserts that Igbo people descended from the Jews.

Okorie (1983) also holds that the Igbo people migrated from Judah. His story gives explicit dates, names and map of this migration of the Igbo from the Middle East. This theory states that the ten tribes wandered out of the present day Palestine during the Assyrian assault in which the ten northern tribes of Israel fell about 718BC. Many of the tribes in the northern Israel of the time wandered away in different directions and got intermingled among different tribes and cultures and disappeared from history. Even though there is yet to be any scientific and biblical explanations concerning the history and whereabouts of these displaced tribes, the theory still holds that a tribe in northern Israel at the time of the Assyrian assault called "Scheckenigbo" was among the tribes that wandered out of northern Israel. They wandered down to Egypt but remembered what happened to them in Egypt and left Egypt again and trekked further south. Along the way, because of fear that the Assyrians could still go after them, they dropped "Schecken" in their name and adopted only "Igbo". They continued to wander southwest Africa and intermarried with the people on their way, until they came to the present day Nigeria. On reaching the Niger, most of them crossed over and settled while some of them remained at the west of the Niger which is the Delta Igbo of today.

Ogbukagu (2008) avers that before the arrival of Vasco Da Gama on the bight of Biafra in the fifteenth century, Igbo people were greatly advanced in technology, inventions and industries relating to arts, iron and metal works. Examples of these facets of advancement in technologies comprises music, drama, medicine, carving, weaving, ceramics, iron and bronze casting, religion, drawing and painting.

Kalu (1980) believes that the first contact between Igbo land and Europe came around the mid-fifteenth century with the arrival of the Portuguese. This contact began from 1434 to around 1807 in the Niger coast. These contacts served as a contact point between the Africans and the Europeans. Having begun with the Portuguese explorers, it was extended to their Dutch and the English counterparts. At the initial stage, the emphasis was on trade instead of building empires. The trade consisted primarily of slaves but with the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, a new trading era opened up. The new form of trade

concentrated on raw material products such as palm products, timbers, elephant tusks and spices. By this time, the British had begun to combine aggressive trading with aggressive imperialism. By 1900, the area that had been administered by the British Niger Company became the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria which also incorporated the Niger Coast Protectorate. Before being officially conquered, Igbo land was treated as a British colony. Between 1900 and 1914 (when Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated) there had been twenty-one British military expeditions into Igbo land. In 1928, Igbo men were for the first time in their history forced to pay taxes.

However, Ogbukagu (2008) observes that this subjugation did not go without resistance as there were cultural protests in the early decades of the twentieth century. A nativist religious movement called the “ekumeku” was founded. It was inspired short-lived but with feverish messianic enthusiasm. The report of proposed taxation of Igbo women sparked off the 1929 Aba Riots, a massive revolt of women that has never been encountered before in Igbo history (p.66).

The Igbo people as stated by Nzomiwu (1999) live in the tropical region of Africa. They are mostly found in Anambra, Abia, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi states. Some others are found in parts of Delta and River States. Igbo land lies between latitude 5° and 7° north and longitude 6° and 8° east of Greenwich line. Igbo land is bounded on the north by the Igala and Tiv people, on the east by the Ekoi, on the south by the Ibibio and on the west by Bini and Isoko (p.1). Igboland is the abode to people known as ndi Igbo and it covers all the Southeastern Nigeria and some parts of the South southern parts of Nigeria. They are surrounded on all sides by other tribes such as the Bini, Warri, Ijaw, Ogoni, Igala, Tiv, Yako and Ibibio.

From the above account, it is not known exactly where the Igbo language started separating from its Kwa sister-languages but it is assumed to be around where the Igbo now live, which would help to explain the absence of Igbo linguistic enclaves. Igbo people have since maintained self-governing structure that has protected them and served as their legal justice system before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria. The system of Umunna or kindred men are people whose genealogical relationship can be traced to a common ancestry and they constitute the strongest and most effective means of managing and controlling excesses in a community. It is also an essential vehicle for the maintenance of law and order in Igbo land. One of the notable facts about Igbo culture lies in its length and continuity. Igbo tradition ensures the protection of culture, values, family

system, tradition, religion and conviviality of the people. From the primordial times, Igbo people lived on farming, hunting and gathering as means of survival. There has been a clear cut distinction between the Igbo civil government and cultural government and their modes of government fashioned their existence. As result of the British expeditions to the Igbo land, the people summarily parted with many aspects of their civil independence.

### ***Hermeneuticalising Onye Na- "Chi" in Igbo Cosmology***

Odili (2013) suggests that hermeneutics should be involved in the study of human related activities (p.45). Mbonu (2013) argues that hermeneutics should not be reserved for sacred texts alone. According to her, hermeneutic is derived from the Greek word Ερμηνευτης (sic) meaning "interpreter". In turn, it is related to the Greek god named "Hermes" whose role it was to interpret the message of the gods (p.97). Hermeneutics as the methodology of interpretation is concerned with problems that arise when dealing with meaningful human actions and the products of such actions, most importantly, word and text in a phrase, clause, statement or sentence. As a methodological discipline, it offers a toolbox for efficiently treating problems of the interpretation of human actions, texts and other meaningful materials. In that case, it is all about interpreting a choice text in a statement hence the need to situate the phrase "onye na-chi ya".

"Onye" is a term employed to describe a person. It is a word that signifies a human being. It does the job of a pronoun in English language. It is a nameless being, an unknown person or a person who is yet to be known. However, "onye" must either be receded or preceded by another term to express a complete thought and action.

"Chi" is one of the terms used to denote one of the pantheon gods in Igbo land. The people had all kinds of deities and all of them are known by the concepts of "chi". Some of these gods ("chi") are regarded as merciful, loving and favourable to mankind while some are not. The only difference is that the Supreme Deity is known as the ChiUkwu- meaning the greatest God. Metuh (1981) posits that the characteristic features of Africa traditional religions are that God is usually known, approached and worshipped through the intermediaries of deities and ancestors (p.13).

In Igbo language, there are two distinct meanings of "chi" and they include a god-agent and a transitional period between night and day. Etymologically, both

terms reveal a common phenomenon as they are related to the sun and can be connected to Chukwu-literally known as the Great "Chi", the Supreme Deity. It can be added that the word "Chi" has more than three connotations in Igbo cosmology. For example, it applies to the Supreme Being, it denotes any being either human or divine who acts solely in the name and authority of the Supreme Being. Human agent could also be called "Chi" if he or she has acted as an agent of providence to a fellow human being. There are individuals who have prevented their fellow human beings from committing suicide or dying in accident. A good in-law who helps change the condition of his/her in-law is called "chi" hence the phrase, *ogo bu chi onye* meaning one's father in-law is one's "chi". There is seemingly another contradictory maxim that goes thus, "Mmadu abughi chi ibe ya-human being is not "chi" to his fellow human being" and "Mmadu abughi Chukwu meaning human being is not Chukwu-Supreme Being". These imply that deities as explained with the concept of Chi are pivotal in Igbo traditional system and an integral part of their belief and existence. However, Chukwu remains the Supreme who occupies the apex of the hierarchy of spiritual beings.

Apart from partaking of the nature of Chukwu, as a god-agent, "chi" doubles as spirit of terrestrial being responsible for the creation and destiny of men. Achebe (1958) made the statement "Onye kwe chi ya ekwe"- "When a man says yes, his "chi" affirms it" and it portrays Okonkwo and his kinsmen with the idea behind the Igbo philosophical aphorism implying that a man's actions affect his destiny as determined by his "chi". The Umuofia clan believes in a personal god called "chi" whose impacts can be noble or ignoble. Okonkwo's "chi" is considered benevolent because he strongly says "yes" and his "chi" concurs. Okonkwo's actions to overcome adversity and poverty seem justified just because he is guided by his "chi" but his denial of kindness, gentleness and affection for less successful men hurt him. They claim that Okonkwo's palm-kernels had been cracked for him by a benevolent spirit and that his "chi" is also described as being "awake" when in reality he has labored for his success (p.21).

### **Limitations to the Deterministic Role of "Chi" in Igbo Cosmology**

Unoka, the father of Okonkwo is said to have "chi ojoo" or bad personal god and evil fortune followed him to his death. It was too bad that he had no grave. However, he actually caused his misfortune by spending his days on merriment rather than working hard. Hence, he left nothing behind for his son. Achebe (1958) avers that Unoka had gone to the oracle to find out why he still had poor

harvest in spite of the prescribed sacrifices he offered to the gods and was also in good standing with his "chi". The oracles confirmed that Unoka was in good standing with his "chi" but insisted that he should go home and work harder because mere offering of sacrifices would not make him reap bounteous harvests. Thus, having a good "chi" must be complemented with industriousness.

In contrast to the earlier stand of Umuofia clan on the benevolence of Okonkwo's chi and asserted that he is an example of one who said "yes" to his "chi" but his 'chi' refused to give assent to his affirmation. He could have boasted of being a self-made man but his kinsmen think otherwise. The explanation is that no one can go beyond his "chi". This is because he was sent on exile out of his clan, Okonkwo later came back but was disappointed that even his son has joined forces with the white missionaries and he also blames his "chi".<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, Okonkwo's personal god or "chi" was not made for great things. His second wife, Ekwefi is also noted with the concept of bad "chi" because she has given birth to numerous children but only one survived. At the celebration of another new birth, other people speculated that Ekwefi did not blame others for their good fortune but her own evil "chi" who denied her any. As a matter of fact, the Igbo people do not give up or get discouraged. The principles of "akara-aka"-God's assignments, "ife si na chi"-derived from god and "onye kwe chi ya ekwe"- When a man says yes, his "chi" affirms it" serve as ideology of consolation, encouragement and determination.

### **The Corollaries of "Chi" in Igbo Cosmology**

Metuh (1981) clarifies that "chi" in Igbo cosmology is in relation to the Supreme Deity a guardian and destiny spirit associated with person's destiny and which directs its realization. He identifies the controversies between "Chi" and "Eke" as they are conceived in terms of personification. He states that God Almighty creates an individual and gives him a "Chi" and an "Eke". "Chi" chooses the child's destiny from the many parcels of fortunes put before the child by God while "Eke" lets the child into the world. Chukwu gives one existence, "Chi" gives destiny while "Eke" gives personality. However, the roles of both "Chi" and "Eke" are secondary and subordinate to Chukwu. They are created by Chukwu to direct the destiny and personality of an individual.

Ekwunife (2007) argues that "Chim"-my personal destiny spirit, "akara-aka"-the intricate God-given activities stamped in one's palms and "eweke"-charisma are

related terms. While “Chim”- my personal destiny spirit inspires the correct use of “akara-aka”-God given activities or preordained activities of man in the structures of this world, “ewele”- charismatic gift perfects man’s activities for the optimal benefits of man and the society at large. The use of “ewele” will adversely affect both the “chi” and “akara-aka”. It will consequently boomerang on the man who freely abused the gift of God. Hence the terminology, “chi ojoo” (bad destiny) used to explain the experience.

This chi is assigned to everybody right from birth and follows him/her up till death by the Supreme Deity. Ogbukagu (2008) posits that the conviction of the Igbo man about himself has goaded him into meaningful life. An Igbo person’s belief and practices cannot be violated without debasing him and all he stands for. Igbo man does not see himself as an isolated being but sees himself as always in association with God, arusi (idol), ancestors, communities, land, properties and other people.

“Chi” is the destiny spirit who is believed to be the spark of the Supreme Deity in a man directing his day to day affairs. The people of Achara Isuochi, Umunneochi L.G.A of Abia State have sayings that “onye chi ya anoghi na izu ya adighi anwu”-a man whose destiny god has not approved of his misfortune will never suffer or die. “Chi nyere nwata ji toro ogologo ga enye ya mbazi o ga eji egwuputa ya”- the god that gives a child long yam will give him the long rod he will use for digging it out. A man’s destiny is determined by “chi” who is variously interpreted as his 'personal god' or guardian angel. Chineke, the Supreme Being created man and at the same time endows him with his nature and destiny. This nature and destiny are spoken of as “uwa” and the personal “chi” which every human being possesses. Thus if any person does something characteristics of him/her, the Igbo say o bu etu uwa ya di meaning “it is how his/her nature is”. These aforementioned three beings are benevolent gifts from God.

When the affairs are successful, the “chi” is praised as Chioma or Chimuanya but if it turns sour, the “chi” is regarded as “chi ojoo”. However, the problem lies with the possessor the principal architect of evil in the cosmos. To redress the confusion or misfortune brought by the misuse of these gifts, many options are available to man. These options include sacrifice, simple and complicated prayers, divination, special atonement and being of good behaviour. Nevertheless, when all these practices fail to achieve a result, Igbo people will resort to this philosophical aphorism “o natara chi”-“it is what was given by

God". There is no doubt that Igbo people believe that Chiukwu-the transcendent God who lives far away above the sky becomes immanent through the emanations of "Chi" and "Eke"

The fourth and last word in the phrase is "Ya" - just like the first term is used for a person. It points to human being especially where and when the speaker or the writer chooses to omit the name of the person being referred to. It cannot be used for animals, stones, trees and other non-living things.

"Onye na chi ya" is the psychological, philosophical and religious explanations to the total existence, vision, rights, mission and goal of an Igbo man. This is a belief that God almighty is personal to him by creation and will not abandon him under any condition of life. He believes with his "Chi" -the creator God, he can become prosperous any place. "Chi" in Igbo cosmology is conceived and perceived as a way of counting the time of the day, divine elements or humans and in other components of creation also as the individualized presence of Chụkwụ-the supreme God.

### **The Religious Praxis of Onye na "Chi Ya" in the Igbo Cosmology**

At this point, efforts are made to analyze the practicability and results of the chi ideology in Igbo cosmology. It will also apprise some of the impacts of the belief on the possessors of chi in Igbo land.

**Sense Of Pragmatism:** "Onye na chi ya" religious philosophy makes Igbo people very pragmatic with life. Achebe (1958) presents Okonkwo as a man who contributed to his own bad fate of being sent on exile. He was consumed by his personal ambition and he failed to understand the basic Igbo philosophy of complementary dualities and consequent tolerant and accommodative principles inherent in that philosophy (p.146). He had forgotten the philosophy that it is praiseworthy to be brave and fearless but sometimes to be a coward. This is because often people stand in the compound of a coward to point at the ruin where a brave man used to live. The man who has never submitted to anything will soon submit to the burial mat.

This suggests that saying "yes" must be understood within the framework of the dominant world view of the people. Igbo people hardly ever resign to fate, they hardly give up in a struggle hence the philosophical ideology, "ka na achu aja ikpe a na ama ndi mmuo"- keep offering sacrifice to absolve ourselves from blame so that the blame will be heaped on the invisible spirit. This is similar to

what Freire (1970) encapsulates when he foresees the oppressed finding their new way to intellectual and social freedom rather than repeating the mistakes of their oppressors.

**Show Of Human Consideration:** Ogbukagu (2008) posits that people of Igbo extractions are tolerating and accommodating but very uncompromising in combating aggressive forces militating against their business interests. The people can be very zealous and courageous in defending themselves and their rights against any aggressive drives generated by external factors. They are emotional to family ties, lasting love and unity among different members of their families' heritage. They would rather opt to deprive themselves of certain benefits than allow their fellow unfortunate members of their own families or community wallow in discomfort and misery.

An average Igbo man in the cosmology of "Chi" is expected to work for the interest of the members of his family, extended family relatives, in-laws and larger society. The poor and the weak are often factored in the affairs because their "Chi" has not responded to their "yes" and therefore should not be blamed. And anything can change for good tomorrow.

**Uncompromised Stand On Results:** The "chi" seems to awaken to offer protection when a member of the tribe is endangered. Ogbukagu (2008) affirms that their stock-in-trade include ensuring success in marriage, traditional religious practices and good children up-bringing among others. Igbo people scattered all over the world are determined, resourceful and progressive group who often surmount every challenge and gaining advantage over every stubborn situation of life. They are always targeting excellence even in diaspora. Despite their usual servitude and calculated humiliation and dehumanization, some Igbo are identified who still excel in those attribute of the Igbo race.

An average Igbo person finds it difficult to compromise his thirst and quests for results and achievement. He believes that his "chi" is capable of assisting him achieve the results.

**Dependently Independent:** The idea of "onye na chi ya" has reinforced the belief in "igwe bu ike" literally meaning "number is strength" which deeply emphasize the complimentary role of every individual in any given society. Still from the Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo could have ascribed his achievements to his personal ingenuity alone. But his journey into exile out of his

clan proved to him the limitedness of personal ingenuity. He realizes that he needs his kinsmen just as they need him.

The system of kinsmen in Igbo land consists of people whose genealogical relationship can be traced to a common ancestry and they constitute the strongest and most effective source of strength, authority, power and confidence in Igbo land. Life outside them can be boring and very risky because it is believed that “ozu si we nsi, enyi ka nwanne alaa” - “when a corpse begins to decompose, the best friend will run”. The concept of dependently independent is borne out of the idea that even though an individual has right to his/her actions and inactions, achievements and failures, the person’s general attitude must be factored in the wider society because nobody is an island.

**Bad Political Players In The Nigerian Version Of Politics:** In Nigeria, politics changes everything and commands virtually everything. The principle of a “winner takes it all” has deepened so much that many people are asking when the right people will ascend to the throne. The idea of “onye na “chi” ya” has also affected the political worldview of Igbo people. In the past, they were derogatorily regarded as money lovers. In fact, when the writer lived in the northern part of Nigeria, a certain man told the story of how they were told of the sudden death of the great Zik of Africa. Then the former premier of the north, Ahmadu Bello brought some bags of money and dropped them beside his head. As soon as the money was brought and kept, the people went and hid themselves. They peeped from where they hid and saw Nnamdi Azikiwe wake up and began to count the money. The man for a long time did not allow any Igbo man into his compound as a tenant.

It was later that some of these misconceptions began to unfold. For example, in 2015, majority of Igbo people expressed their disapprovals over the horrible affairs of the Nigerian state by not coming out to massively vote for Dr Goodluck Jonathan as they have done in the past neither did they massively vote for Major Gen Muhammadu Buhari (rtd). Even when it led to the infamous 97% versus 5% votes theory in making key appointments into government by President Muhammdu Buhari seem to be targeted against them, many people have hoped that they would fall in line like others in the 2019 election yet they repeated their minds. They believe that nobody has any right to change one’s covenant with his “chi” -personal god. They are labeled as bad politicians even by their own sons and daughters but it has not changed them. It has not only attracted these labels

to them but also it has labeled them as stubborn, rebels and hatred from other people.

**Sense Of Morality:** Nwala (1985) identifies the concepts of destiny among the Igbo by citing two Igbo philosophical sayings which are, whatever befalls a man is what he settles with his "chi" - *ihe ya na "chi" ya kpara* and *onye kwe, "chi" ya ekwe*, meaning that if a man wills, his personal "Chi" wills also (p.46). While the former sounds fatalistic and unalterable, the latter provides an Igbo man an escape route from the clutches of fatalism. With this hindsight, the element of fatalism of destiny which leaves an individual without mercy is mitigated by ascribing some will power and initiative to man. One can influence one's "chi" by brave or good conduct and this knocks the horn out of fatalism in Igbo philosophy. Igbo people believe that if a man is at peace with his God, his personal god and his ancestors his harvest will be good depending on the strength of his arm. If otherwise, it will be a bad ending. This implies that the efficacy of the human will depend on a sound moral life as that is the only way he can be at peace with his god and his ancestors. "Chi" is like a personal guide which pilots a man's prospects and determines his fortunes.

**Senses Of Enterprises And Progress:** Aristotle avers that the mark of a prudent man can be seen in his ability to deliberate rightly about what is good and what is advantageous for him. The thought is not in particular respects such as what is good for his health or physical strength but what is conducive to the good life generally. Therefore, without running the risk of exaggeration, Igbo people are by their praxes of "*onye na chi ya*" very industrious and enterprising people. The development and growth of any part of Nigeria can be measured by the number of shops and properties owned by Igbo people in that area. Arguably, they believe that "chi" does not only accompany them within their zone but beyond their zones. They are competing with the nomadic Fulani about the occupation of interior villages in Nigeria. They believed that their "chi" will always guide and bless the work of their hands. This belief does not imply the laziness of expecting that manna will fall from heaven. There are groups in Nigeria that cannot survive without the government intervention but an Igbo man provides all his needs because he believes that his "chi" will give him the wherewithal to do so.

**Sense Of Justice:** Basden (1983) argues that among the Igbo people, there is a distinct recognition of a supreme being-benevolent in character Who is above every other spirit, good or evil. He is believed to be in control of all things in heaven and earth and dispenses rewards and punishments according to merit.

Anything that occurs for which no viable explanation is forthcoming is attributed to Him or His enemy called *ekwensu*—the devil. But *Chukwu*, the Supreme God has at His service many ministering spirits whose sole businesses are to fulfill His commands (p.215). The concept of *onye na chi ya* means that the actions and inactions of everybody will be rewarded.

**Sense Of Mutual Respect:** Majority of Igbo people live outside their society both in Nigeria and in diaspora. Igbo people hardly fight against their hosts anywhere rather they strive to respect anyone who come their way simply because they believe everybody carries his/her gods around. The concept of “*onye na chi ya*” teaches Igbo person that everybody has a right for his/her action, opinion, thought and choice and must be answerable and accountable to his/her actions.

Moreover, it has made the people realize that no condition is permanent. It is often soliloquized *ejigh ututu ama njo ahia*—“nobody should conclude that favourable sales end with the morning market”. A big man can be poor tomorrow and that a poor man can be rich tomorrow hence the need to show respect to everybody regardless of status.

## **Conclusion**

The religious praxis of “*onye na chi ya*” in the Igbo cosmology is a philosophical, abstract and theoretical ideology that result into concrete actions. It is an idea that produces results over their existence and society at large. It is a mental and spiritual mindset that works, directs and guides Igbo people to the realization of their desired results in life. Igbo people believe that every individual has a personally abiding god that is closely connected with *Chiukwu*- the great God. This “*chi*” controls the individual in a day to day function, behaviour, benevolence and misfortunes. The Igbo cosmology places man at the center of the universe. The general notion in Igbo land is that man’s destiny is given by God, determined before birth and is consequently both unalterable and alterable. The idea of “*chi*” explains the elements of luck, fortune, destiny or fate unique to an individual. The Igbo say of a lucky man *o bu onye “chi” oma*. The concept of “*chi*” in Igbo worldview gives the people a central, explaining and unifying theme that integrates their various fields of thoughts and beliefs. “*Chi*” is inextricably linked with another religious and philosophical reality known as “*Eke*”, another complementary spiritual force and “*uwa*”—nature. All these deities are associated with the act of bringing reality to the natural world. They constitute the foundation of Igbo intelligence, providing a satisfactory

explanatory model for the diversities of human personality and the broad category of causation with which concrete and empirical achievements are attained by the people.

## References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. Edinburgh: Heinemann.
- Afigbo, A.E. (1975). *Prolegomena to the study of the culture history of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*. Oxford University Press.
- Afigbo, A.E. (1981). *Ropes of sand studies in Igbo language and culture*. Ibadan: university Press.
- Anozie, F.N. (1979). Early Iron Technology in Igboland: Llejja and Umundu', in *special Book issue of West African journal of archeology*, vol.9.
- Basden, G. (1983). *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*. Lagos: Academy press.
- Bell, C. (1997). *Perspectives and dimensions*. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- Bernstein, R. J. (1983). *Beyond objectivism and relativism: science, hermeneutics and praxis*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Darvel, T. (2008). *Archeology in concise oxford dictionary of archeology*. Oxford: oxford press.
- Ekwunife, A.N.O. (2007). *What will be, will be why pray?* Lagos: priceless
- Farganis, J. (1996). *Readings in social theory: the classic tradition to post-modernism*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Penguin.
- Gadamer, H. (1979). "The problem of historical consciousness". In *Interpretive social science*, eds. P. Rabinow and W. Sullivan. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1979). *Truth and method*. London: Sheed and Ward.
- Gadotti, M. (1996). *Pedagogy of praxis a dialectical philosophy of education*. New York: Suny Press.
- Gumerman, G.J. and Warburton, M. (2005). "The universe in a cultural context": an essay in Fountain, J.W Sinclir R.M. eds. *Current studies in acheoastronomy: conversation across time and space*. Durham: Academic press.
- Habermas, J. (1973). *Theory and practice*. trans. J. Viertel. Boston: Beacon Press

- Hartle D.D.( 1967). "Archaeology in eastern Nigeria". In: *Nigeria magazine*, No. 93, June.
- Holub, R. C. (1991). *Jürgen Habermas, critic in the public sphere*. London: Routledge.
- Ilogu, E. (1974). *Christianity and Igbo culture*. London: university press
- Isichei E.(1975). *A history of the Igbo people*. London: Macmillian.
- Lobkowitz (1967). *Theory and practice: history of a concept from Aristotle to Marx*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Mbonu, C.N. (2013). "Biblical Exegetical and Hermeneutical Approaches" In Ejizu C.I. Ed. *Fundamentals of research methodology in humanities*. Porthacourt: Uniport
- Nmah P.E. 2009. "Conflict between two religious cultures: achieving reconciliation". *Journal of religion and human relations*. Vol.1 no2.
- Nwabara, S. (1977). *Iboland: a century of contact with Britain 1860 -1960*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Nwala, T. U. (1985). *Igbo philosophy*. Lagos: Literanmmed.
- Nze, F.C. (2009). "perspectives on qualitative research methods" In Nabude, P.C.,Nkemnebe, A.D, &. Ezenwa, M.O. (eds). *Readings in research methodology and grant writing*. Nimo: Rex Charles & Patrick.
- Nzomiwu, J.P.C (1999). *The concept of justice among the traditional Igbo: an enquiry*. Awka: Fides
- Odili, J.U. (2013). "The historical approach to religious study research" in Ejizu, C.I ed. *Fundamentals of research methodology in humanities*. Porthacourt: Uniport
- Ogbukagau, I.K.N.T (2008). *Traditional Igbo beliefs and practices*. Enugu: Snaap.
- Okorie, I.(1983). *The history of the Igbos and the chronology of events*. Enugu: Cecta Pub.
- Onwuejiogwu, M. (1996). *An Igbo civilization: Nri kingdom and hegemony*. London: Ethiope.
- Onwuejiogwu, A. (1987). "Evolutionary Trends in the History of the Development of the Igbo Civilization in the Culture Theatre of Iboland in Southern Nigeria" in *Ahiajoku lecture*. Owerri,
- Shaw, T.(1970). *Igbo Ukwu: an account of archaeological discoveries in eastern Nigeria*. London: Faber and Faber.

- Smith, M. K. (1994). *Local education, community, conversation and action*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Strauss, A. (1964). *George Herbert Mead on social psychology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Talbot, A. P. (1969). *The peoples of southern Nigeria: a sketch of their history, ethnology and languages, with an abstract of the 1921 census*. London: Cass.
- Taylor, P. (1993). *The texts of Paulo Freire*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Warnke, G. (1987). *Gadamer. hermeneutics, tradition and reason*. Cambridge: Polity.