



**Original Research Article**

**Satan and Traditional African Deities as Two Complimentary and Contradictory Spiritual Agents of Social Control among the Igbo of Nigeria**

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This work x-rays the subsisting tendency by both the Western allied scholars and their Christian counterparts to conceptualize every spiritual force within the Traditional African cosmological field of communication particularly among the Igbo of Nigeria that has no root in Christianity, its positive polar dimension notwithstanding, as being part of the complex theory Satan (Devil) in Christian cosmology; thus by the same token interpreted as *Ekwensu*, a concept which has become the generic interpretation of the Christian Satan and Devil. What it means is that spiritual elements in their communication with man are principally judged not by their stated objectives and *raison d'etat*, but merely by their forms and geo-cultural identity. Thus for the Igbo, both *Ekwensu* which is literally interpreted as the Biblical Satan and the benevolent spiritual elements that function as agents of social control are categorized as agents of Satan. On the contrary, this paper avers that there must be a separation between the good from the evil within the Igbo realm of cosmological communication as it is applicable in the Christian cosmology based fundamentally on their social control roles. It further questions to the notion of *Ekwensu* as the Christian Satan who is in direct opposition to God the Creator in terms of status and roles, against the background of the existence of other malevolent spiritual forces in Igbo cosmology.

**Keywords:** Satan, Ekwensu, Deities, Traditional African Religion, Christianity.

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**Article History**

**Received:** 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021

**Accepted:** 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021

**Published:** 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021

**Cite Article:**

Nwaezeigwe, N. T. (2021). Satan and Traditional African Deities as Two Complimentary and Contradictory Spiritual Agents of Social Control among the Igbo of Nigeria. *Journal of Culture, History and Archaeology*, 1(3):26-42.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Igbo (Ibo) of Nigeria inhabit the southeastern fringe of the Nigerian Federation. They constitute of the three major ethnic groups in Africa's most populous nation. Mainly Christians yet strongly attached to their traditional value system with the accompanying feasts and festivals they represent what in modern parlance could be described as an enigma of Black African identity. Thus while they could be classed as one of the most westernized Black African groups, they remain closed attached to their fatherland and by the same token attached to their cultural values. As Simon Ottenberg succinctly put, "The Igbo are probably most receptive to change, and most willing to accept Western ways, of any large group in Nigeria". In his concluding

observation, Ottenberg wrote:

Yet, paradoxically, of all Nigerian peoples, the Igbo have probably changed the least while changing the most. While many of the formal elements of the social, religious, economic, and political structure, such as lineages, family groups, and secret societies, have been modified through culture contact, many of the basic patterns of social behavior, such as the emphasis on alternative choices and goals, achievement and competition, and the lack of autocratic authority, have survived and formed part of the newly developing culture. But basic patterns of social behavior, of interpersonal relationships, have changed little, though new symbols of success replace old ones and new goals appear (Ottenberg, 1959).

What it means in this regard is that while the forms of Igbo culture underwent some drastic changes or modifications, the structures remain embedded in commanding socio-political and to a large extent religious framework of the society.

If one therefore goes by Clyde Kluckhohn's definition of culture as "all the historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exists at any given time, as potential guides for the behavior of man," (Beals and Hoijer, 1965), then it would be most appropriate to define the culture of social control as those customarily defined norms and acceptable frameworks on which a given society's pattern of behavior is regulated. In other words, it is the mechanism on which the standard social behavior of a given society is measured. But most importantly is the fact that in every framework of social control in traditional African society, as it is in other areas, religion forms the fundamental pedestal on which social control measures are anchored.

Religion, as Max Muller rightly defined it is "the perception of the infinite under such manifestations as are able to influence the moral conduct of man".<sup>1</sup> And since the ideal goal of every organized society is to uphold a high level of morality among the people, the factor of religion becomes not only commanding but the very source of legitimacy in all matters of social control. Major A.G. Leonard in supporting this commanding role of religion among the Igbo wrote:

To get a clearer and thorough insight into the characteristics and temperaments of a people, it is, I think, essential first to obtain a comprehensive grasp of their religion, even before attempting to master their laws and customs (Leonard, 1968).

Professor Radcliffe-Brown did not spare much time in putting more emphasis on the above position, partly parodying Fustel de Coulanges, he wrote:

We cannot; as Fustel de Coulanges says, understand the social, juridical and political institutions of the ancient societies unless we take religion into account. But it is equally true that we cannot understand the religion except by an examination of its relation to the institutions (Radcliffe-Brown, 1941).

Igbo belief system forms part of the greater web and general pattern of the African traditional religion, which in its diversified forms and characters professes one common belief in a Supreme God who created heaven and earth and their fullness therein and who, they believe cannot be reached without intermediaries. The belief in a life after death forms another point of unity in all religions. This is the fundamental unity of all the religions of the world, the nature of these intermediaries being the only major basis of disputations, since it is the nature of these intermediaries that indeed defines the form and structure of their respective liturgies. African traditional religion and indeed Igbo could therefore be defined by what Basden (1966) called, "a circumscribed belief in a supreme being and a future life."

On the general character of African religion, Professors Dike and Ajayi were to comment thus:

A belief in the continuity of life, a life after death, and a community of interest between the living, the dead, and the generations yet unborn is fundamental to all African religious, social, and political life (Dike and Ajayi, 1968).

It is on the basis of this latter definition that one intends to define the roles and place of Satan *vis-a-vis* communal deities in Igbo cosmology. In approaching this problem however, an overview of the fundamental aspects of traditional Igbo beliefs becomes necessary.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from A.G. Leonard (1968) *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes* London: Frank Cass, 78

### Fundamentals of Igbo Traditional Religious Beliefs

Among the Igbo, three levels of religious belief could be identified. These include the Supreme Being (*Chukwu*), the Deities (*Alusi*), and then the Ancestors (*Ndichie*).

#### The Supreme Being among the Igbo

The Supreme Being (God) is respectively known as *Chukwu*, *Olisa*, and *Obasi*. The last term is particularly common among the Cross River (Southeastern) Igbo group and is believed to have its origins from the Ibibio term for the Supreme Being. But *Olise* appears to be the root term for the Supreme Being since its variant *Orisha* is common among the Yoruba and related groups. Among the Edo, the term *Osanobuwa* for God also seems to be rooted in the Igbo use of the term—*Olisaebuluwa* meaning the same description of the Supreme Being.

However, many terms are used to describe the divine attributes of the Supreme Being. Among these are *Chineke*, *Chukwu-onyeokike*, *Chukwu-okike* and *Eze-chitoke Abiama* as in the case of Nsukka sub-group of Northern Igbo, all meaning God the Creator. Similarly, *Chukwunweike* is interpreted as the all-powerful God; *Olisaebuluwa* in the vein stands for God the author of the world, among others. Ilogu clearly explains the concept of Supreme God among the Igbo thus:

The word *Chineke* literally means 'the God who creates', and indicates the people's belief in a supreme, beneficent source of creation. He is the author of heaven and earth; he sends rain and makes life grow. The word *Chukwu* is used to express a belief in a Supreme Spirit or World Over-soul (*Chi* means 'spirit', *ukwu*, 'great'). This is the nearest approximation the Igbos have to the more philosophical concept of the one behind the many which is found in Greek religious thought, or to the principle of coherence in western philosophy (Ilogu, 1985).

The point which is worth explaining here is that God as defined by both Christianity and Islam is neither foreign nor strange among the Igbo before the coming of both religions. This is to further state that the concepts of heathenism and animism often employed by Christian missionaries as convenient and derogatory description of African traditional belief system can no longer be sustained by the present state of our knowledge.

Professor Donatus I. Nwoga attributes this error of judgment to what he describes as "the failure to appreciate that a people's religion is part of a larger structure of the thought, and that it is the function that is assigned to religion within that structure that determines the position of the forces within the religious pantheon" (Nwoga, 1984). As Cardinal Francis Arinze rightly put it:

The missionaries found that the people had a firm believe in God, in spirits good and bad, and in ancestors, and that their worship revolved especially round the worship of ancestors and the spirits, although God was often invoked at prayer and names were given in His honor to children (Arinze, 1973).

Among the Igbo, formal organized religious worship of both the Supreme God and the intermediary angelic deities and saintly ancestors does not exist but most worship activities are personalized. Group worship of deities and ancestral spirits where they exist only form part of the circle of annual feasts and festivals that most probably re-enacts the community's history and social charter. In fact what could be defined as religious worships among the Igbo are isolated spiritual phenomena that revolve round occasional supplications to Angelic deities and ancestral spirits for defined individual and community's needs in which the Supreme God—*Chukwu* is often invoked as the General but remote Overseer. Thus as Cardinal Arinze puts it, "for the Iroman God is supreme, and, as He is rather far away, He has created the spirits and willed that we worship them" (Arinze, 1970).

However, there exist isolated instances where *Chukwu* is worshipped with a designated shrine. Rev. Father Dr. Raymond Arazu revealing this as an observer-participant wrote:

Contrary to views expressed by various authors of books on Igbo traditional religion, I would insist that *Chukwu* is definitely paid practical cult in my town Ihembosi in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State. On the tableland on which the town is situated, is a mound overgrown with trees and shrub, which is the shrine of *Chukwu*. It stands for all to see in the centre of the *Eke* market, the main market of the town. The mound and the overgrowth are known as *Okwu-Chukwu* (the shrine of *Chukwu*). A whole native week is dedicated every year to

the worship of *Chukwu* at the ancient shrine, by the eight villages of the town. Everybody takes part in the ceremony, men, women and children. The annual feast for *Chukwu* in Ihemposi town is called *Igba Okwu Chukwu*.... I have personally participated in the event (Arazu, 1982).

One fact which is evident from the above observation is that *Chukwu* among the Igbo is not in any form represented by statue of human or animal likeness. This seems to further establish not only his character as the Supreme God but further re-defines the assumption that polytheism forms the basis of Igbo religious belief. But most importantly is the fact that beyond these occasional supplications is the inherent culture of daily individual supplications among the Igbo especially by the elderly and titled men, which is often carried out by the medium of kola-nut with *Nzu* (a native chalk made of special white clay) after formal absolution with water. In fact the ritualization kola-nut as the fundamental tool of Igbo worship and formal prayers in gatherings has remained the basic spiritual identity of the Igbo. Even after formal Christian prayer has been made in social occasions, the presentation and breaking of kola-nut often follows with a solemn ceremony of special prayers. Professor Ik N.T. Ogbukagu paints a glowing picture of a formal traditional Igbo morning prayer as practiced in his home-town Adazi-Nnukwu thus:

In Adazi-Nnukwu, the first thing a housewife does, especially in the olden days every morning, is to deliver a kolanut and water for washing hands to her husband at *obu* for a brief thanksgiving ceremony and praying for a new day to provide them with good health and things (Ogbukagu, 1997).

In other words, the Igbo believe in the cosmology of personal and self-accounting intimacy with the Supreme God. This is anchored in a form that resembles the mosaic conception of man being created as a resemblance of God. Among the Igbo therefore, man's existence is anchored in that spirit of God in him, that spirit which makes him breath the air of life which if ceases to function defines the end of his life on earth.

This life-giving spirit which legitimizes the form and structure of divine conceptualization of man is called *Chi*. A number of scholars have in want of appropriate interpretation defined *Chi* as "personal god", like in the case of Chinua Achebe associating Okonkwo's phenomenal rise to prominence to the role of his *Chi*. As he put it:

If any man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo. At an early age he had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land. That was not luck. At the most one could say that his *chi* or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly, so his *chi* agreed (Achebe, 1958).

which, although conveying a form of personification of the Spirit of God in man, but whose form and meaning in reality goes beyond that. In effect such interpretation tends to interpret the concept in the context of idolatry. Rev. Fr. Emmanuel I. Ifesieh defines *Chi* as "God, who is personal to each person" (Ifesieh, 1989). Ilogu explains the context of *Chi* in these words:

One of the most striking doctrines of the Igbo is that every human being has, associated with his personality a genius or spiritual double known as his *Chi*.... The *Chi* is given by *Chineke* at the time when the child is formed in its mother's womb. It is also believed that the *Chi* is sometimes part of the soul of a noble ancestor, who has chosen to be reincarnated in order to be a special influence for the good of the child (Ilogu, 1985).

On the other hand, Sabine Jell-Bahlsen seems to give a deeper and more precise definition of *Chi* in Igbo cosmology. Speaking of the origin of *Chi* as an intrinsic property of the Supreme God, she wrote:

To Igbo speakers, the supreme God is known as *Chi-Ukwu/Chukwu*, the god of creation and destiny. As in many other African religions, this entity is unlimited, beyond shape, age, and gender, and too vast to be contained in temples or man-made images. An abstract force, *Chukwu* is unlimited and transcends the image of an old white male, with blue eyes, and long wavy, grey hair portrayed by some contemporary artists who take clues from Christianity. The word *chi* could roughly be translated as "soul", "spirit", "life force", "essence", or all of the above. *Chi-Ukwu/Chukwu*, then, could mean "Great Soul/Great Spirit/Great Life-

Force/Supreme Being” (Jell-Bahlsen, 2014).

But it is indeed Chinua Achebe’s interpretation that roundly seems to us nearer to the ultimate answer to what *Chi* stands for in Igbo cosmology:

In a general way we may visualize a person’s *chi* as his other identity in *spirit land*—his *spirit being* complementing his terrestrial human being; for nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing beside it (Achebe, 1975).

However, whatever may be the context in which scholars view *Chi* in Igbo cosmology, the central interpretation of the concept revolves round its fundamental root from the Supreme God. In other words, it underscores Igbo belief in one Supreme God of the universe who is the fountain of life and creator of man. It is thus a clear validation of the supremacy of God within the realm of Igbo cosmology. But most fundamentally is that it defines the individual’s connectivity to the Supreme God, thus forming the fountain from which a man’s self-criticism and outward judgment of values flow out. In other words, it defines a man’s existential qualities as instituted by the Supreme God.

This explains why *Chi* has remained the most prefixed and suffixed word in Igbo personal names. A few instances from the personal names of three internationally known Igbo novelists will suffice in this case. The first instance is Chinua Achebe, whose first name “Chinua” is a shortened form of “Chinualimogu”, meaning “let *Chi* do the battle for me”.

The second instance is Buchi Emecheta, whose first name “Buchi” is the shortened form of “Onyebuchi”, meaning “who is *Chi* or to put it in its more detailed form—“Onyebuchi-ibeya”, meaning who can claim the status of *Chi* for his peer? The third instance is Chimamanda Adichie in which “Chimamanda” translates to mean “My *Chi* will not fail me”. It is therefore from the pedestal of *Chi*— the fountain of a man’s life that the Igbo go further to explain the roles of other pantheons of spirit in their existence as both individuals and community.

### **Deities (*Alusi*)**

Among the Igbo the next to the Supreme Being in the hierarchy of worship are the Deities. The term “Deity” is generically defined as *Alusi* and forms part of the anthropological complex of pantheons. Ilogu provides a long list of these pantheons. These include according to him, *Anyanwu* (Sun), seen as God’s messenger; *Igwe* (Sky), seen as the abode of the Supreme God from where rainfall comes

and *Ana* (Earth-force deity). There is also *Amadioha* or *Kamalu* as the case may be (Lightning and thunder). These form what Ilogu classifies as next in ranking to the Supreme God (Ilogu, 1974).

However against Ilogu’s classification, within the context of Igbo cosmology the Sun, Sky, Earth, Thunder and Lightning, are not in their common form defined as Deities among the Igbo but are rather taken as instruments of Supreme Being’s power and authority over man which are used to sustain man’s life on earth when viewed in the physical sense. For instance, the Sky is regarded as the abode of the Supreme Being from where he sends the Sun to provide light for the day, the moon light in the night, the rain for crops and all living things to be sustained, and thunder and Lightning for show-casing his power and authority and for dispensing retributive justice; while the earth on the other hand provides abode for the living. For the Igbo therefore these celestial elements are not considered as Deities or what are popularly known as *Alusi*. They however could be transformed to the status of *Alusi* when manipulated esoterically for specific purposes.

Most of the well-known oracles of pre-colonial Igbo, such as the *Agbala* of Awka, *Kamalu* of Ozuzu, *Igwe ka-ala* of Umuho, and *Ubinu Ukpabi* popularly known as the Long Juju of Arochuku fall within this category (Ottenberg, 1958). They were never worshipped in the sense the people’s perception of the supreme-being, but were and still regarded as having the capacity to determine petitions, whether in the form of juridical services or for solution to some social problems.

For instance the Sun becomes deified as “*Anyanwu na Agbala*” which is with associated in this regard with an esoteric woman known as *Agbala* with the power of clairvoyance and believed to dwell in the Sun (Achebe, 1958). Similarly the Sky only becomes deified when it is applied in conjunction with the Earth to justify the Supreme Being’s superiority in judgment to earthly beings, as in the case of *Igwe ka Ala* Deity of Umuho. *Kamalu* of Ozuzu which is a dialectical variant of *Amadioha* in the same sense plays the juridical roles of Thunder and Lightning; while *Ubinu Ukpabi* (*Aro Chukwu*) which stands for the “Oracle or Deity of God claimed the authority of God to adjudicate. On the other hand, Earth-force Deity (*Ana*) becomes only deified when it is connected with the departed and deified ancestors and under such circumstances cannot be separated from the latter in esoteric definition.

In addition the above Deities are what could be defined as territorial Deities connected with specific areas of influence. Every traditional Igbo community exists within the spiritual orbit of one or more of such Deities, whose identity,



roles and functions are defined territorially. In other words, a Deity's power-base or sphere of influence could extend to include several communities and even sub-groups. In conceptual terms therefore, these Deities represent the Christian concept of Angels which is trans-literarily defined in Igbo language as *Ndi-Mmo Ozi* (Spirit-Messengers).

Structurally, *Alusi* is classified into two categories. The first category is *Aro* which is often associated with Rivers, streams and springs and mainly located in forestlands or outskirts of the communities; while the second is *Ogwugwu* which is associated with terrestrial environment and mainly located within the community dwellings. In fact because of the connecting arteries of most rivers, *Aro* are often connected with either an entire community or groups of communities.

Principal examples include *Oboshi* of Ibusa associated with Oboshi River in Ibusa, *Iyi-Oji* of Ibusa associated with *Iyi-Oji* River of Ibusa, *Iyi-Oji* of Odekpe, Aboh, Oko, and Ndoni among other Riverain Igbo communities associated with River Niger, while the *Iyi-Oji* of Nkwelle-Ezunaka is associated with Oyi River.<sup>2</sup> The *Onishe* Deity of Asaba is associated with the River Niger and remains a domineering force in even till this day in the life of most indigenes of Asaba because of its connection with the putative progenitor of the town Nnebisi.<sup>3</sup>

The *Adofi* Deity which is associated with Adofi (Ase) River took its source from Owerre Orubor and meanders through several communities such as Ejeme-Uno, Ejeme-Aniogo, Utagba Uno, Ossissa, Isselegu, and Inyi among others where its spiritual influence holds sway. Others include *Ogbuide* of Oguta associated with Oguta Lake (Jell-Bahlsen, 2014); *Adoro* of Aro-Uno in Nsukka connected with the Adoro Spring (Azubuike, 2011); *Idemili* Deity associated with both Agulu Lake (*Ezu Idemili*) and Idemili River covers a wide of communities in the present Anambra State of Nigeria (Nwaezeigwe, 2007); and most significantly is the often called Long-juju of Arochukwu popularly known among the local communities as *Ibinu Ukpabi*, which is associated with the Enyong River (Nwaezeigwe, 2013). It is indeed from the original name of the Deity that the name: "Arochukwu" was adopted. However, the underlining characteristic of the *Aro* is that they are mostly situated isolated from the dwellings of the associated communities and this explains why they are deemed to be more potent than the terrestrial *Ogwugwu*.

This further explains why even such Deity often associated with a spring known as *Ngene* is deemed very potent.

*Ogwugwu* genre of Deities on the other hand is mostly associated with a single town, Village, or kindred. They could be acquired from another community of institutionalized through the aid of esoteric experts for particular purposes either for collective protection or defence against enemies or unwanted intruders. *Ogwugwu* could also be institutionalized for the promotion of the overall progress of a given community, village or kindred. Yet some could be associated with specialized trade such as *Idigwu* also known as *Ese-uzu* which acts as the guardian Deity for professional Blacksmiths which is the Igbo counterpart of the Yoruba *Ogun* (God of Iron as it is generally called). Similarly, *Amadioha* also known as *Kamalu* (God of Thunder) which represents the Yoruba *Sango* could also be institutionalized for the purpose of inflicting retributive justice. Indeed among the Igbo there were myriads of *Ogwugwu* genre of Deities as many as they were kindred and villages in pre-colonial times because of the need for intra-community protections against malevolent spiritual forces from both internal and external forces.

### Deified Ancestors (*Ndichie*)

The third level of worship is the reverence accorded to Deified Ancestors cosmologically known as *Ndichie* who are associated with *Ana* (Earth-Force Deity) regarded as their abode. Serious contraventions of the social order like murder, manslaughter, adultery and some other acts defined by the given community as *Nso-Ana* (Taboo) are defined as desecration of *Ana*.

Ironically, the *Ana* can only become potent by the presence of *Ndichie*— the Deified Ancestors of the community. In other words the concept of *Ana* in Igbo cosmology only represents both the physical and spiritual abode of the ancestors and thus cannot be defined in isolation of the ancestors of the given community. This explains why *Ana* is often propitiated in a designated place defined as the original abode of the ancestor or ancestors of a particular community or lineage and often symbolically marked by the planting of *Egbo* tree (*Newboldia Laevis*), also known as *Ogilisi* among some communities. The main function of *Ana* is the regulation of socio-political actions of the associated community in relation to one another through the framework of set values founded on customs and tradition.

The Deified Ancestors who act as both the connecting link between the living and dead, and intercessors between their living kinsmen and the Supreme Being are seen as the main esoteric force behind the enactment of all the fundamental laws of the land defined as customs of which

<sup>2</sup> The present writer in addition to being an initiated Priest of *Oboshi* and *Iyi-Oji* Deities of Ibusa has done extensive fieldwork on a number of Deities in Igboland.

<sup>3</sup> Asaba, (1978) *History and Development* Asaba: Asaba Development Association.

their contraventions are defined as *Nso-Ana* (taboos). This further explains why the contravention of *Nso-Ana* is the same as a sin against the ancestors and its propitiation can only be carried out through a designated priest— *Eze-Ana* (literally defined as King of the land), *Okpala*—oldest male surviving descendant of the ancestors or any other person from the line of the ancestors so designated by custom to perform the rites of such propitiation.

The ancestors have their chief representatives in the land of the living as the titled elders called *Ndichie*. Thus, as with the Christian Faith, *Ndichie*-living represents the Saints-living, while *Ndichie*-departed represents the Saints-departed. This belief not only explains the unity between Christianity and Traditional Igbo Religion in the concept of life-after-death, but equally agrees with the concept that a person carries with him to the land of the dead his good or bad deeds on earth. But most importantly is that it provides the ground on which one could draw a parallel between the Traditional Igbo Religion and the Roman Catholic faith.

E.G. Parrinder attempts to draw such a parallel when he wrote:

Perhaps the African attitude of the different classes of spiritual beings might be expressed approximately in terms used in Roman Catholic Theology. *Latria* is used to denote that supreme worship which is due and accorded to God alone. *Dulia* is the reverence and homage that should be paid to saints and angels. *Hyperdulia* is used of the special homage paid to the Virgin Mary (Parrinder, 1974).

Relating the above characteristics to the African situation, the pundit of African traditional religion continued: "It might be helpful to speak to *Latria* for the Supreme Being alone in Africa, with *hyperdulia* for the gods and *Dulia* for the ancestors" (Parrinder, 1974).

It therefore follows that just as the Roman Catholic faith agrees with the concept of life after death with the associated spiritual potency of the departed Saints, so do the Igbo within the context of their cosmology. And just as the Catholics also believe that Virgin Mary carried with her to the other world, the status of Mother of God, and thus able to communicate with God, so the Igbo believe their ancestors to be in the world beyond possessing the power to intercede on behalf of their descendants living on earth. In the light of the above comparison, it would be erroneous to assign to the African religion that status of ancestor-worship. For if it is the general belief that Virgin Mary is revered rather than worshipped, it

would then be utterly wrong to assign to the ancestors the status of gods.

But one impression which needs to be corrected in this form of classification which is endemic in Traditional African Religion is the illogical use of the term "god" to define all these pantheons of spirits including their symbols. This is because the Igbo by their cosmology are monotheist and believe only in one Supreme Being as the ultimate source of life. Among the Igbo therefore *Chukwu* remains the only and one God before them with the letter "G" which stands for the Great "*Chi*" and have no space for any minor spiritual element described as god in small "g" form in their cosmology. This is obvious by the fact that there is no concept like *Chi-Nta* (Small *Chi*) in Igbo cosmology to provide the basis for the use of the term "god" in any form.

The concept of *Chi* in Igbo cosmology as explained in details earlier is founded on the personification of the spirit of God in man and if there could be any concept of "small God" (god) then it should be personified in man; which in many senses allies with the Biblical concept of man as a being formed in the image of God. Every other spiritual pantheon goes with specific classification and name. In essence the Igbo have a generic name for their Deities which is *Alusi* and this does not in any form equate with the term and meaning of "god". Etymologically *Alusi* originates from the expression: "*Alu kwusi*" (let abomination stop).<sup>4</sup> *Alu* in every sense of its interpretation stands for abomination, *kwusi* in the same vein means to stop an action. *Alusi* among the Igbo symbolizes a Territorial Angelic Being instituted by the Supreme Being to regulate the social behavior of a given community in the manner of a spiritual court of law. The Igbo believe that *Alusi* does not kill an innocent man and thus does not belong to the category of malevolent spiritual beings in Igbo cosmology. This succinctly explains why every Deity among the Igbo fundamentally functions as agents of social control and thus cannot be defined as a "god" in small letter "g" who is either in opposition or in competition for supremacy with the Supreme God. The concept of "god" as applied in Igbo cosmology by successive scholars of Christian theology is a misnomer borne out of lack of knowledge of the essence and meaning of African belief in Deities and the Supreme Being. So long as the Angel in biblical theology does not equate with a god, it becomes absolutely a misnomer to classify a Territorial African Angel (Deity) as a god, particularly when viewed in the context of the form and meaning of the term "Deity."

<sup>4</sup> This interpretation is widely accepted by a cross-section of Ibusa elders who in every case were not able to provide an alternative interpretation.

### The Phenomena of Biblical Satan and Ekwensu in Igbo Cosmology

The concept of “evil” as the opposite of “goodness”, and God as the author and symbol of goodness and Satan as the author and symbol of evil forms the fundamental basis of the Christian faith which appears universal in all religions of the world. For instance John Mbiti in justifying the commonality in this belief wrote thus in relation to the Vugusu:

Some societies see evil originating from, or associated with, spiritual beings other than God. Part of this concept is the personification of evil itself. For example, the Vugusu say that there is an evil divinity which God created good, but later turned against him and began to do evil. This evil divinity is assisted by evil spirits, and all evil now comes from that lot. Thus, a kind of duel exists, between good and evil forces in the world (Mbiti, 1970).

Although differing worldviews occasioned by differences in culture, environmental exclusiveness and historical experiences which subsequently evolved into distinct belief systems or precisely religion, may affect the way this concept is interpreted among different peoples. Take for instance, “war” with its attendant killings and destruction of property is definitely “evil”, yet great warriors are eulogized in every society and those who fear to go to war are derided as coward. But what is central in this belief is that the concept of evil remains the same in all societies even though in its detailed application relativity of judgment may determine the character of its interpretation within a given time and space. Thus in dealing with the conceptualization of Satan as synonymous with the *Ekwensu* of Igbo cosmology, one must first understand the meaning of both concepts within the context of their respective historical time and cultural space.

According to *Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary*, Satan is described as the “chief of evil spirit, the adversary of God, and the tempter of human beings; the Devil: the fallen angel, Lucifer.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* described Satan as: “The angel who in Jewish belief is commanded by God to tempt humans to sin, to accuse the sinners, and to carry out God’s Punishment. The rebellious angel, who in Christian belief is the adversary of God & Lord

of evil.”<sup>6</sup> For *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* Satan is “the archfiend; chief of the devils; instigator of all evils; the rival of God; the Antichrist.”<sup>7</sup> But it is indeed *The Dictionary of Bible and Religion* that attempts to provide a clearer etymological picture of the term “Satan”:

The word, meaning simply ‘adversary’ is seldom found in the Hebrew OT, where it refers to David (1 Samuel 29:4), the sons of Zeruiah (11 Samuel 19:22) and David’s enemies (1 Kings 5:4) including Hadad the Edomite (1 Kings 11:14) and Rezon (11:23). In a few places the term seems to have a special significance equivalent to ‘the adversary’ and apparently refers to that ruler of evil beings who is constantly set in opposition to God’s purposes.<sup>8</sup>

Having gone so far in defining Satan as he stands out in Christian cosmology, which in most parts dwelt on his attributes, actions and objectives, a comparative of definition of *Ekwensu* in Igbo cosmology in the same light forms the next step.

Among the Igbo a number of spiritual forces defined as malevolent and which act against the progress of the individual and the society at large exist in seeming opposition to the earlier mentioned benevolent and seemingly positive-oriented spiritual beings. Among these include *Ekwensu* generally defined in Christian parlance as Satan or Devil which is the primary focus of the present study and *Akalaogoli* defined as the author of ill-luck associated with the spirit of those dead men and women who led bad lives or died improperly or were not given proper burial rites. *Ogbo n’uke* on the other hand is associated with violent crime and *Agwu* acting both as the spirit of misfortune, disorganization, madness and at times applied in divination.

In this respect *Agwu* attacks a person’s *Ikenga*– the individual’s spirit of success in enterprise and adventure. In practical terms, *Agwu* represents the counter- force of adventurism and success which is symbolically represented by the cult of *Ikenga*. A person who is possessed by *Agwu* is described as “*Onye Agwu na akpa*”. While individuals deemed to be under the spell of *Agwu* are required to

<sup>5</sup> *Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary*(1999), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1248

<sup>6</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2012), Samsung Galaxy S4 App

<sup>7</sup> *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: an illustrated Encyclopedia*(1962) New York: Abingdom Press, 224

<sup>8</sup> *The Dictionary of the Bible and Religion*(1986) Nashville: Abingdom Press, 934



undergo the process of exorcism in what is called *Isa-Agwu*, some communities carry out annual exorcism of *Agwu* through a festival called *Ili-Agwu*. The essence of this festival is to ward off potential negative elements against the overall success of the community before the new farming season which represents the Igbo New Year. *Agwu* in Igbo cosmology clearly stands apart as a negative force working against the forces of success.

Ogbukagu gave a long insight on the nature of *Agwu*:

It is known from experience that *Agwu*, (one of the divinities) can be capricious to extreme, in that he can hinder, or may help bring prosperity, calamity to some members of the society. It is the divinity that really is responsible for divination, revealing of hidden mysteries of world and human destiny, the guardian of traditional medicine men (Ogbukagu, 1997).

*Ogbanje* also known as *Iyi-uwa* is another spirit of misfortune that attacks mostly female destiny and thus attempts to obstruct an individual's *Chi*. *Ogbanje* is believed to cause the frequent death and reincarnation of a child thus causing the parents the pain of infant mortality. Achebe aptly pictures the character of this spiritual phenomenon when he narrated Ekwefi's agonies as prompted by *Ogbanje* and the processes through which Ezinne— Ekwefi's only surviving child was spiritually delivered (Achebe, 1958).

*Ekwensu* no doubt is one of the most used terms to describe any action that seems opposed to the will of God among contemporary Igbo who have chosen to see it as a synonym to the Christian Satan of devil, but how far this thesis stands to the test of the evidence will be revealed in due cause. It is not uncommon to hear people particularly among Igbo Christians seeking alibi in the exclamation "O bu *olu Ekwensu* (it is the work of the Devil (Satan)". But the questions which beg for answers are first, does *Ekwensu* in Igbo cosmology represent Satan as defined by the Christian faith? If one may ask, who or what is *Ekwensu* in Igbo cosmology?

The Anglican missionary to Igboland Archdeacon G. T. Basden was the first writer to not only give a concise definition of the concept of *Ekwensu* as the chief adversary to God within the framework of traditional Igbo belief working definition but to provide a deeper insight into its character in his two classics on Igbo culture. In his first work he summarized the character of *Ekwensu* thus:

Among the Ibo people there is a distinct

recognition of a Supreme Being – beneficent 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 visible explanation is forthcoming, is attributed to either Him or His eternal enemy *Ekwensu*, i.e. the Devil. But *Chukwu* (as he is called) is supreme, and at His service are many ministering spirits whose sole business it is to fulfill His commands. It is interesting to note that Death is spoken of as one of the servants of God.... Besides the recognition of a Beneficent Being, there is a profound belief in an Evil Spirit. The two are eternally opposed to each other, each striving to influence mankind for good or evil, but *Chukwu* is always classed as superior to *Ekwensu* (Basden, 1921).

But it is in his later work that Basden elaborated on his definition of the nature and character of *Ekwensu* in Igbo cosmology formally adorning it with the garb of Christian cosmology:

Eternally opposed to God is His arch-enemy "Ekwensu" (the Devil), whose one purpose is to frustrate the goodness of God and to disseminate evil. He is the author of all that is bad, and to him is attributed the worst ills to which man are subject. He, in company with innumerable associated spirits, is under the domination of God and can do no more than God condescends to permit him to do. "Ekwensu" and his subordinate spirits are at God's service at all times; they function in order to fulfil His commands (Basden, 1966).

It is surprising both Cardinal Francis Arinze and Canon Prof. Edmund Ilogu whose works were supposed to be follow-ups to Basden's deeper insight, possibly acting on the impulse of their vocation as Igbo Christian clergymen only provided shadowy illuminations of the concept of *Ekwensu*. Putting *Ekwensu* in the category of the "wicked Spirits" Arinze wrote:

The Ibos are concerned only with those spirits that come into contact with mankind. Those whose names are known and who have shrines and priests are generally

regarded as benevolent, or neutral, or as severe to those who disobey their laws. But there is a host of unknown non-human spirits who are regarded as malevolent. The name *Ekwensu* did not come with Christianity. *Ekwensu* have no images (*nkwu*) and receive no sacrifice (Arinze, 1970).

Ilogu had in his major work on Christianity and Igbo culture stated:

The idea of evil spirit having a separate existence and operating in conflict against the benevolent creator god never existed in Ibo religious thought. *Ekwensu*, which literally means the deceiver, is the Ibo word used to translate the Christian and biblical word "Satan". The concept the word *Ekwensu* represents is new and is borrowed from Christianity (Ilogu, 1974).

He later elaborated his views a decade later in these words:

Evil is sometimes personified in a vaguely characterized being called *Ekwensu*. He is not as ultimate as God the creator, but he is free and all-powerful in leading people to evil. There is no dualism in Igbo religion, but all forms of evil perpetrated by man are due to the diabolic working of *Ekwensu*. God allows *Ekwensu* to have his way, but God's power is supreme, and when He wills, *Ekwensu's* power melts away (Ilogu, 1985).

Coming against the views of Basden, Arinze and Ilogu which could be defined as apologetically Christian in cosmology are those of Rev. Fr. Dr. Raymond C. Arazu, Prof. John Anenechukwu Umeh, Rev. Fr. Prof. Ikenga Metuh, Prof. Damian Opata and a host of other scholars. These scholars rejected the high profile cosmological status accorded *Ekwensu* as defined through the looking-glass of Christian theology. To them *Ekwensu* constitutes one of the numerous deities in Igbo worldview with specific functions. They go further to prove that contrary to widespread Christian-anchored views, there are instances of shrines and associated worship dedicated to *Ekwensu* deity. By this view they question the validity of the Christian interpretation of the *Ekwensu* in Igbo cosmology to mean one and the same thing as the Satan or Devil of the Christian worldview.

Debunking Arinze's thesis on *Ekwensu*, Arazu wrote:

By Arinze's standards, *Ekwensu* would come under benevolent or neutral spirits because, in spite of what he says about *Ekwensu* (which he understands as a generic name for evil spirits), this god (*Ekwensu* is a proper name for a spirit) has a shrine in Ukpok town in Mbanano Local Government Area of Anambra State, and has a priest and a feast period in the year. Moreover we have had a town called *Umu-Ekwensu* (literally Children of *Ekwensu*), and a couple of villages elsewhere. In Ukpok town there is a hill known as *Ugwu-Ekwensu*. In the light of all these, which Arinze did not know, *Ekwensu* would, therefore, be a benevolent or neutral spirit (Arazu, 1982).

Rev. Fr. Prof. Ikenga Metuh in anchoring this misrepresentation on the inability of early missionaries to find an appropriate equivalent of the Satan in Igbo worldview however failed to provide an appropriate definition of the concept. According to him:

Efforts to find a figure in the Igbo traditional world-view to represent the Christian concept of the Devil have led to the identification of an Igbo deity, *Ekwensu*, with the Christian Devil. In the Igbo translation of the Bible, in the catechisms and hymn books of various Christian churches, the Devil is translated and identified with *Ekwensu*. This has led many writers to represent *Ekwensu* in Igbo traditional religions as the archenemy of *Chukwu* and the supreme author of evil. It is necessary to point out at once that this dualism does not exist in Igbo religion.<sup>9</sup>

It is however J. A. Umeh who appears to be most emphatic in his characterization of *Ekwensu* as a benevolent spirit. In his words:

What the evil forces and the evil ones among the Igbos are, has not been a subject of controversy or confusion until the

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from Damian U. Opata(2005) *Ekwensu in the Igbo Imagination: A Heroic Deity or Christian Devil?* Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers Limited, 28

colonization of Igboland and the importation of foreign religion. Since then, one of the Igbo traditional spirits of war and victory, namely *Ekwensu* has been mistakenly dubbed the devil (Umeh, 1999).

Umeh went further to provide a definite definition of the concept of *Ekwensu* in a most detailed analysis that borders in most part of the exclusive language of *Afa* divination thus:

*Ekwensu* is the beautiful one in Igboland and in ancient Egypt. It is a war god with countless victories as *Oha Obala/Ora Obala*. In Igbo *Afa*, it is saluted as *Ekwensu Ugotugbuluagwo*, i.e. Eagle that pecked the evil serpent to death.... *Ekwensu* the Eagle spirit of war and victory glides down the earth with its countless victories.... *Ekwensu* is also confirmed to be one of the benevolent lunar deities. The Igbo *Afa* terminology *Ora Obala/Oha Obala* literally means child of the God of light or child of the sun, which means the moon, the Eagle, and *Ekwensu*.... It is indeed a ridiculous absurdity for any Igbo person to talk of *Ekwensu* as a devil or an evil spirit as the Eagle and the moon and the child of light have never been associated with evils or evil ones but have always been associated with achievements, good victory, success and the beautiful ones.<sup>10</sup>

Much as Umeh's position would seem to present a radical departure from the popular conception of the character and meaning of *Ekwensu* in Igbo cosmology, it is however fraught with misrepresented esoteric allegories woven round the mystics of *Afa* divination which mostly defy such literal interpretations as presented above. Leaving the concept of *Ekwensu* as "Traditional Igbo Spirit of War" for a later analysis, its reference in the *Afa* divination process needs to be addressed first.

It important to note that the term "*Oha Obala/Ora Obala*" literally means "blood of the people" in Igbo language—*Oha/Ora* (depending on dialectical base) means "people" and *Obala* meaning "blood".

<sup>10</sup> Umeh, *After God Is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination and Sacred Science in Nigeria Vol. 2*, 196-7; Quoted from Damian U. Opata (2005) *Ekwensu in the Igbo Imagination*, 27.

In esoteric *Afa* language however, *Oha Obala/Ora Obala* means "*Ugo*" (Eagle) which could be further translated to mean "victory", "success" or "leadership", whichever applies within the esoteric process of *Afa* divination. But when *Oha Obala/Ora Obala* is inverted to "*Obala Oha/Ora*" it automatically translates within the *Afa* esoteric process to mean "*Ogwu*" (Charm or medicine) which could also be further translated to mean any instrument that blocks a man's progress. In some divination process, *Obala Ora/Oha* could also appear as "*Obala Ose*" depending on the choice-word of the particular *Agwu* (Divination Deity) in application.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, *Ekwensu* enjoys a specific class of interpretation within the esoteric *Afa* process that stands against the meaning, character and objectives of *Oha Obala/Ora Obala*.

It is described here as "*Okala Ogheli*" and could also appear as *Ogbo n'Uke*. It is associated with such esoteric companions as *Obala Ora/Oha* and *Obala Ose* (Charm/medicine), *Osowu* (Witchcraft), *ObalaOkala* (deceit, lies, theft, robbery), *Usaka* (hypocrisy, crime in general), *Ogoli na Abo* (Mourning), *Ogoli Ose* (Shame), *Obala Odi* (Stubbornness), and *Eto Odi- Mgbuchi* (Obstruction), which also be interpreted to mean "Witchcraft". Within the *Afa* cosmology, *Ekwensu* is never classed as *Aka Ose* i.e. *Alusi* or *Aro* (Deity). In the same vein, opposed to *Ekwensu* within this esoteric field of interpretation are *Aghali Ogheli/Ora Ogheli*— Children, *Odi Otule*— Father, *Akakwu*— Ancestors (*Ndichie*), *OdiObala*— Mother, *OseOtule*— Happiness, *Aghalin'Abo*— *Ikenga*, among other benevolent *Afa* interpretations.<sup>12</sup> Umeh's interpretation of *Ekwensu* within the esoteric cosmology of *Afa* divination cannot therefore stand the test of the evidence. However, it is indeed Rev. Fr. Prof. Anthony Ekwunife that appears to move closer to what could fit a proper definition of *Ekwensu*:

What then is the African/Igbo concept of *Ekwensu*? Basically, *Ekwensu* in Igbo traditional thought is that ontological mysterious violent force which when aggravated or invoked could be effectively used either for good or destruction. Every divinity or deity, disembodied dead human beings, ordinary

<sup>11</sup> Evidence of Godwin Igboamalu Okafor, a.k.a. Alusi-Igbakwu, Aged 56 years, Traditional Medicine Practitioner/Diviner, Isiokwe Quarters, Igbakwu, Ayamelum Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria, 26 August, 2016

<sup>12</sup> Evidence of Godwin Igboamalu Okafor, a.k.a. Alusi-Igbakwu

living human beings have this element of mysterious violent force within them. When this violent force is used for redressing wrongs or punishing a malicious offender or false oath swearer, the *Ekwensu* in the particular agent becomes a good force. But when it is arbitrarily used for destroying people indiscriminately or damaging their property and even affecting their health, the *Ekwensu* becomes a destructive violent force.<sup>13</sup>

In concluding this aspect of finding a working definition of *Ekwensu*, Prof. Damian Opata's provocative work appears to provide a veritable ground for further analysis. Copiously inclusive of legion of views on the meaning and character of *Ekwensu*, with a strong tilt towards Umeh's positivist school of thought as supported by Arazu and other positivist thinkers who define it as malevolent in character, Opata anchored his strength of analysis on the prevalence of shrines or deities dedicated to *Ekwensu*, the naming of certain topographical landmarks like hills, communities, farmlands as well as associated festivals in many Igbo communities after it (Opata, 2005).

But what he failed to explore deeply is the essence of such shrines, naming and associated festivals; for such could have provided the basic anchor of analysis required to determine the true meaning and character of *Ekwensu*. For instance, in one account he wrote:

In Umulokpa, Uzo Uwani Local Government Area, Enugu State, during certain festivals the people proclaim the importance of *Ekwensu* and *Ikenga*. They do this by raising both hands up to the sky saying: *Ekwensumee! Ikengamee!* (My *Ekwensu*: My *Ikenga*!) (Opata, 2005).

He went further to conclude quite erroneously albeit accepting his limitation on the knowledge of the concept of *Ikenga* in Igbo cosmology:

The linkage of *Ekwensu* with *Ikenga* is very significant. If *Ikenga* is generally accepted as a symbol of achievement among the Igbo, is there then a possibility that *Ekwensu* is cooperative component of *Ikenga*, or are the

two merely linked together in the Igbo psyche as symbols/gestures of self-actualization and achievement? There is great need for a further investigation of this phenomenon as it may open up greater insights into even the nature of *Ikenga*. Given the way the Igbo abhor evil spirits, it is unlikely that any Igbo community would proudly and publicly acknowledge and acclaim *Ekwensu* in a celebratory manner if it were in any way connected with evil (Opata, 2005).

First is his apparent mistranslation of the statement: "*Ekwensumee! Ikengamee!*" to mean "My *Ekwensu*: My *Ikenga*!" In Igbo the expression or word "*mee*" simply translates to the word or expression "act" or "do" without any dialectical variation and not "my". If one goes by Opata's translation it should have been "*Ekwensu mu*" and "*Ikenga mu*", "mu" here meaning "me" or "myself" whichever applies within a given context. So the expression was quite explanatory: "let *Ekwensu* act and *Ikenga* act, since it is an undisputable fact that *Ikenga* stands for the positive actualization of a man's objective in life. In other words, *Ikenga* stands as a counter cosmological force against the activities of *Ekwensu*, as will be fully explained in succeeding section.

What is obvious however is that most of these scholars are in agreement that the translation of *Ekwensu* to mean the Christian Satan or Devil is not supported by the evidence. But what remains however is to determine its true meaning in terms of its character. In other words, whether it stands for a benevolent or malevolent spirit? Even Opata in the midst of his apologetic drive to sustain his argument for a benevolent *Ekwensu* deity could not stand the test of the evidence in respect of the reverse, even though he tried to seek refuge on an extraneous judgment. As he put it:

Surprisingly, that is, going by the trend of this research, it is at *UgwuEkwensu*, Ekwuluobia, that the people perform what they call *AjaEkwensu*, i.e., where they placate *Ekwensu*. They use dirty rags and all manner of odd assortments to carry out *ajaEkwensu* on this hill. This is one instance in which *Ekwensu* is regarded as evil. But this has a twist to it. My informant, Rev. Fr. Dr. Onyeneke, CSSP, says that he obtained it from his father, a devout Christian. In other words this piece of information is already

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from Damian U. Opata (2005) *Ekwensu in the Igbo Imagination*, 31



problematized at source (Opata, 2005).

The questions which follow from the concluding part of the above statement of fact is, do we have to discard the validity of the evidence just because the informant is a devout Christian? What if the informant had stated the otherwise as a Christian, what should have removed it from the clog of sectarian bias to become a valid evidence? One fact is evident in Opata's analysis. Having fixated his mind on a "Benevolent *Ekwensu*", his vision becomes blurred to any evidence which tends to state the contrary.

Basden's account in this respect is one evidence which cannot be so easily discarded since it was written at a period when Christianity was still a novel idea and had not eaten deep into the fabric of Igbo cosmology. Recalling a festival in honour of *Ekwensu* among the Igbo West of the Niger, the Anglican Missionary wrote:

It has been remarked that there is no apparent evidence which might definitely indicate devil worship. There is, however, something of a modified nature. Though "*Ekwensu*" is not worshipped, he is honored in conformance with his own principles. This is found more particularly on the western side of the Niger where it is customary to devote three days in the year to placate the devil by walking in his ways as closely as possible for a time. They are known as "*Ekwensu's*" days. All restraint is cast aside and the (pagan) folk give themselves over to unbridled license. Sensuality and other forms of wickedness are, for the time being, accepted as normal. Every man and woman is at liberty to indulge as freely as they please. By acting thus, they will honor the devil (Basden, 1966).

Basden's account of this festival is further validated by his reference by way of note to similar event in Onitsha as recorded by another Anglican Priest, Rev. J. Taylor on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1858 (Basden, 1966).

It should be noted that in every Igbo community, feasts, festivals and sacrifices dedicated to any transcendental force are driven by certain defined objectives. The question then is could the character of such festivals dedicated to *Ekwensu* be the same with other deities as shown by both Opata's account on Ekwuluobia and that of Basden on West Niger Igbo? Just as Nwoga earlier made us to understand, "it is the function that is assigned to religion within that structure that

determines the position of the forces within the religious pantheon" (Nwoga, 1984).

Thus since it is the objective of a given action or idea that defines its character and the character defining its essence, one can therefore arrive at the true meaning of *Ekwensu* by first defining the objectives of such festivals through their character, which further lead to the essence of such festivals. Based on the character and essence of festivals associated with *Ekwensu* therefore, it becomes definitely clear that the spiritual force as personified does not belong to the class of benevolent spirits as defined by Igbo cosmology. Rather by its character and meaning as defined through the associated festivals *Ekwensu* definitely stands for a malevolent spirit.

It is evident from the body of Igbo beliefs that not only are the malevolent spirits personified but clearly defined by their respective characters, functions and attributes. In other words, the identity and character of each spirit are defined by their actions—negative or positive, on human beings. For instance the Igbo in describing the actions of *Akala-ogoli* or *Ogbanjedo* do not define them as *Olu-Ekwensu* (work of Satan) neither are they defined as *Ndi Olu-Ekwensu* (Agents of Satan) as it is defined by contemporary Igbo Christians acting on the impulse of Western Christian misrepresentations of the character and meaning of traditional Igbo belief system.

*Ekwensu* thus has its defined character and functions which makes it distinct from other malevolent spirits. Most appropriately *Ekwensu* is associated with wider disturbance of the peace of the community through quarrels, physical conflict, violence and shedding of blood by means of what could be defined unjust. For instance, lying, and theft are associated with *Akalaogoli* madness, while laziness and misfortune are believed to be influenced by *Agwu*.

In all these cases *Ekwensu* neither assumed the role of overlord or instigator. The only spiritual counterpart to *Ekwensu* in Igbo cosmology is *Ogbo n'uke* which has earlier been mentioned as appearing as an alternative concept to *Ekwensu* during *Afa* divination. But *Ogbo n'uke* is often associated with individual actions or group of individuals operating within the psychic mind-set of youthful exuberance. Thus *Ogbo n'uke* is a spirit associated with particular age-set. "*Ogbo*" meaning "age" and "*Uke*" meaning the "spirit of violence associated with youth".

Among the West-Niger Igbo *Ogbon'uke* often reoccurs in prayers and caution statements. A typical prayer in this regard goes: "*Chineke gbodo anyi n'ogbo n'uke*" (God the creator shield us from the roaming spirit of violence). The prayer could also go in another form like: "*Chukwu nna gbodo anyi n'uke n'idobolo*" (God the father shield us from

the constancy of the roaming spirit of violence). Here “*Idobolo*” stands for the interfering spirit of “frequency” or “reoccurrence”.

In caution statements parents, particularly mothers are often heard saying to their children, particularly males, (since youthful violence is often associated with boys): “*Zeali ogbo n’uke*” (Evade or be cautious of *Ogbo n’uke*). There is also the case of stern caution “*Weli nwayo n’uke n’atu ka awo*” (Be careful for the spirit of violence jumps like toad). *Ogbo n’uke* is therefore associated with such crimes as affray, fracas, manslaughter and murder, including such acts as suicide, wife-battering, brutality and even accidents that lead to injury and destruction of lives and property. The actions of *Ogbo n’uke* are therefore internalized within a definite community and defined as an intervention of ill-luck.

*Ekwensu* on the other hand transcends the individual action to encompass those of a community or group of communities. This explains why *Ekwensu* could be invoked, appeased or warded off by communities depending on the particular community and their needs at any particular moment. This further explains why *Ekwensu* has shrines in some communities. Thus as a spirit of organized violence and destabilization of the peace of the community, some people carry out ceremonies in form of festivals exorcizing it from the community, while some propitiate it as a weapon of war to be used against their enemies.

The character and essence of *Ekwensu* in those communities that institute shrines in its honor are likened to the relationship between man and bees. Bees are eternally destructive to human beings when they attacks by their stings, yet the same bees could be positively harnessed to provide honey for human living as well as harnessed negatively as a weapon against one’s enemy when invoked to attack. It is like employing a confirmed armed robber as a political thug against one’s opponent. The question here is does that assignment invalidate the definition and character of the man as an armed robber? This is the case of *Ekwensu* when it is instituted as a deity or provided with a shrine. It is therefore clear that *Ekwensu* does not fit into the class of benevolent spirits in Igbo cosmology as equally defined by the esoteric *Afa* cosmology.

It should be noted further that in all the communities associated with *Ekwensu* festivals or shrines, the latter is not worshipped as it is the case with well-defined benevolent spirits in Igbo worldview but propitiated.

Thus those activities defined as festivals in honor of *Ekwensu* are instituted communal rituals designed to appease the malevolent spirit of *Ekwensu*. This explains why such festivals lack formal feasting in food and drinks as in other festivals dedicated to benevolent deities but rather, are

characterized by wild and licentious displays. This also explains why those who officiate in such festivals have no defined priesthood status as in the case such deities as *Ana* and other benevolent spiritual forces. Instead appeasements of *Ekwensu* either through the festivals or designated shrines are often led by those whose roles in the community are associated with war. For instance, the priesthood of the *Ekwensu* shrine in Anaku, Ayamelum Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria, is held by the *Odogwu* of the town— the designated leader of war in the community.<sup>14</sup>

Another instance is the case of Ibusa, an Igbo community west of the River Niger where the present writer hails from and presently holds the chieftaincy title of *Odogwu*— Traditional War General. *Igba-Ekwensu* festival is celebrated to mark the successful end of the traditional Igbo year and preparation for a hitch-free new farming year devoid of the obstructive acts of *Ekwensu*. It is customarily held between the months of January and February every year, but which in past few decades was brought backward to the first week of January to coincide with the Christian celebrations of Christmas and New Year. Its chief celebrants are the four High War Chiefs who by order of seniority are the *Ikwele*, *Odogwu*, *Uwolo* and *Iyase* assisted by members the *Ogbuu* (initiated members of the traditional war cult).

During the festival the *Ikenga-Oha* (the collective Cult of achievement, adventure and war for the whole town), which is functionally under the custodianship of the *Ikwele* is carried round the town through designated routes with *Okanga* war music and dance called *Igba Ine-Eshishe*. On the following day which is the *Igba-Ekwensu* proper, the three War Lords of the town— *Odogwu*, *Uwolo* and *Iyase* with their respective members of the *Ogbuu* warrior cult perform the ritual pouring of libation on the *Ikenga-Oha* at the palace of their leader— the *Ikwele*; while on the third and final day, the *Ikwele* performs the final appeasement of *Ekwensu* called *Ichupu-Ekwensu* (chasing away *Ekwensu*) which normally takes place at the outskirts of *Ezukwu* quarters, the traditional home-quarters of the *Ikwele* and *Odogwu*. In essence while *Ine-Eshishe* represents the triumph of *Ikenga* as a positive force, *Igba-Ekwensu* represents by its character the symbolic cleansing of the community of malevolent acts of *Ekwensu* in the year ending for a clean entry into a new farming season.

It is therefore an undisputable fact that *Ekwensu* in Igbo cosmology does not enjoy the status of a benevolent spirit neither does it equally fit the accolade of an angel, much more that of Satan as interpreted by the Christian Church in

<sup>14</sup> The present writer as the *Odogwu* Ibusa his home-town had attended the *Ekwensu* Feast at Anaku on several occasions on the invitation of the *Odogwu* of Anaku.

Igbo land. It is in fact best described as the “Spiritual Bee” of Igbo cosmology, deadly yet could be harnessed for a positive end. An instance is the *Ekwensu* shrine within the *Adoro* Deity complex in Alor-Unor, Nsukka. Azubuike Ezugwu explaining the roles of *Ekwensu-Adoro* in this regard stated:

The name *Ekwensu* in Igbo cosmology generally denotes a negative perception. In this case, *Ekwensu Adoro* has an important role to occupy in the worship of the deity and in the life of the people. This shrine is located at *Adoro* forest. The major purpose or function was protection both in the positive and negative dimensions. When a person performs a marvelous act, he or she will visit the *Onu Ekwensu* to identify with the divinity or show appreciation. Negatively, when an individual commits a spectacular act such as murder, he or she escapes to *Ekwensu* Shrine where nobody can attack him (Ezeugwu, 2011).

Compare this scenario when somebody who committed such crime is confronted with *Ana* Deity. In fact Ezugwu only failed short of revealing to us the subsequent status of those who became refugees to *Adoro* Deity or what he referred to as perpetual “Devotees” or what is popularly known as “*Osu*” on account of their heinous crimes (Ezeugwu, 2011).

It could therefore be stated that what the Igbo converts to Christianity actually did was to elevate a popular malevolent divinity among the Igbo to the status of a major malevolent Christian divinity that sets itself as a major opponent to God. In furtherance to the same misrepresentation, they went further to classify even the tested benevolent divinities on which the peace and order of primordial Igbo society was founded as being part of their “Satan”. The question then is, what is the basis for the Christian classification of those benevolent forces that act as the counter-balancing factor to the malevolent forces as Satanic, given their obvious character, roles and defined essence,?

Take for instance the “*Ana*” (Earth-force deity) which functions as the fundamental force of moral control; *Ndichie* (Deified Ancestors-dead) who function as both the transcendental guardians of *Ana* deity and principal intercessors between their living kinsmen led by *Ndichie-living* and *Chukwu*. Under what standard measurement then could they be defined as part of the satanic team? It is out of question that every Igbo understands the gravity of any transgression when it is defined as *Nso-Ana*. Azubuike

Ezugwu in stating the roles of *Adoro* deity in Alor Uno explicitly pointed out the positive roles of this deity as an agent of social control:

*Adoro* is said to have the power to detect criminal behavior, dishonesty and sexual laxity. As a matter of fact, *Adoro* instituted taboos known as *Nso Adoro* to police the community. Most of these upheld morality include the instructions against theft, wicked charms false witness, lies, poisoning and adulterous acts. If any person goes contrary to these laws, *Adoro*, it is believed will inflict him. The sign would usually be a protrusion of the tummy or swollen legs. In other words, *Adoro* has been responsible for the shaping of the character and customs of the people throughout the ages. She instituted effective ethical norms that guide the people of Alor Uno. Even among the Christians, the fear of *Adoro's* wrath restricts them from engaging in reckless immoral behavior. One of the most prominent surviving measures instituted by *Adoro* is the one restricting married women from extra-marital sex. The consequence for breaching of this law is madness. In the 1980s, many Christians fell victims of this and were not spared by *Adoro* (Ezeugwu, 2011).

Further emphasizing on the role of deities as agents of social control, Adannia Igboanuzue wrote concerning the *Ngene* deity of Oraifite town in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State:

*Ngene* is just one of the numerous deities in Oraifite. To mention but few of them are *Nkwukwula*, *Ogwugwu*, *Ulas*, *Azuogbu*, *Ogwugwu ezike*, *Anyatu* and *Edo-Uno Umuafa* etc. *Ngene* plays his role in Oraifite. It has helped in maintain order and peace and also helps in resolving issues between two or more parties. Some people who may have problem regarding theft, snatching someone’s wife, and land dispute or family quarrel resort to *Ngene* for settlement (Igboanuzue, 2012).

The same case also applies to such deities as *Iyioji* of Ibusa, Odekepe and Nkwele-Ezunaka as among others. It is a

common knowledge that these Deities do not punish the just. In fact false accusers who could not sustain the fact of their cases are punished with same severity. It has indeed become fashionable to use the names of these benevolent and law-enforcing deities as effective bait for extracting truth from individuals at extreme points of denial. This brings us to the question, what logic defines *Adoro* and other deities as Satan or agents of the Devil in the light of the aforementioned roles as effective agents of social?

## CONCLUSION

Going by the analysis so made obvious, one fact is pertinent: Like the world of Christianity and other belief systems, the world of the Igbo belief system fundamentally rests on the pedestal of cosmic duality- the positive and the negative. But unlike the Christian worldview, the only force that defies this duality is *Chukwu*, described variously by his attributes, be it *Chineke*, *Chukwu-okike*, *Chukwu-Abiama*, *Olisebuluwa*, among others.

To the Igbo world therefore and without prejudice to the invading extraneous worldview of Christianity *Chukwu* in his infinite existence as the creator of Heaven and earth and all that are found therein can neither be competed with nor opposed by any other transcendental force. For the Igbo, evil exists because God permits it to exist as a balancing component of the universe in creation and not as a competitor. The concept of an Almighty God standing in opposition to Satan or whatever negative force as defines by the Christian worldview defies the logic of omnipotence of *Chukwu* and thus is not acceptable within the core terrains of Igbo worldview. This position stands the test of the unsettled logic of Christian creation myth which lacks of any evidence that assigned or attributed to Satan the creation of what is defined as "evil" while God created the "good".

Thus to the Igbo, the mission of man on earth is likened to a person given an examination by his instructor with the aim that passing the exam will "uplift" while failure will "damn" him. Definitely if the man aligns with the spirit of failure by not studying hard, he fails. On the other hand, if he aligns with the spirit of success he passes. The question here is who created both platforms of failure and success? Definitely it is the one that created the examination. As the Igbo would say, *Enu-uwa bu afia, onye zusia onaa* (the word is a market, one departs after his transactions). And in this market one is expected to make profit either in selling or buying. By core Igbo world view therefore, *Chukwu* stands at the apex of the Universe from who flow all the component elements of the world both negative and positive.

One could liken this Igbo world view of the mission of man on earth to the Parables of Jesus Christ on the "Labourers in the Vineyard"<sup>15</sup> and, "the Ten Talents."<sup>16</sup> In other words both the Igbo and Christian worldviews agree that the world is a market. Both also agree that there is a stage of stock-taking after the business and appropriate profits granted, and both also agree there is a new place of abode after departure from the market, although both may not agree with the nature of this ultimate destination of man after his business on earth.

But most importantly, both worldviews agree that in the pursuit of this market objective, there is interplay of the forces of both success and failure each radiating from a transcendental spiritual force. To the Christian worldview, it is the interplay of the forces of God and those of Satan. On the other hand, it is the interplay of several positive but departmentalized forces and several negative but departmentalized forces, all radiating from the realm of the ultimate power of *Chukwu*. For the Igbo therefore, the negative forces are not grouped into one spiritual potentate as in Christian worldview. Each negative element has its distinctive dimension and level of interaction with man, in the same manner that each positive element has.

As earlier pointed out, *Chukwu* in presenting both features of duality in the world enjoins man to align with the positive dimension of this duality of existence. This is however without prejudice to the fact that both the positive and negative exist for each other. In other words, what is good cannot be defined without the existence of the bad. One must exist in order to be used as basis of judgment for the other.

In Igbo cosmology therefore, every spiritual force acts in accordance with its defined mission and functions as ordered by *Chukwu* and not under the guidance of a superior spiritual being standing as the chief opponent to *Chukwu*. In effect, every evil or negative spirit is an extraneous interference to the perfect will of God to which God gave man the knowledge and wisdom to counter. Thus the concept of Satan personified as the chief opponent of God does not seem to find a suitable place in Igbo cosmology.

In conclusion, it needs to be stated that the Igbo Christian interpretation of Satan as *Ekwensu*; the conception that every spiritual force within the Igbo Cosmological field of communication that has no root in Christianity, its positive polar dimension notwithstanding is synonymous with Satan

<sup>15</sup> *Holy Bible: Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Chapter 20 verses 1-16

<sup>16</sup> *Holy Bible: Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Chapter 25 verses 14-30



is smack of ignorance of the cosmological essence of the Holy Scriptures. The fact cannot be denied that the strength of Christianity in Igboland today rests strongly on the primordial foundation of a strong magnetic-field of transcendental virility. This transcendental virility not connects with the Igbo personality which is inextricably bound to pride in Igbo culture, and most fundamentally, their identity and consciousness as one people have common destiny in what is called Nigeria today.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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