

The Re-Birth of African Moral Traditions as Key to the Development of Sub-Saharan Africa: The Igbo Paradigm

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This work is set against the backdrop of the Sub-Saharan African environment observed to be morally degenerative. It judges that the level of decadence in the continent that could even amount to depravity could be blamed upon the disconnect between the present-day African and a moral tradition that has been swept under the carpet through history; this tradition being grounded upon a world view. World-view lies at the basis of the interpretation and operation of the world. It is the foundation of culture, religion, philosophy, morality and so forth; an attempt of humans to impose an order in which the human society works.¹ Most times when the African world-view is discussed, the Africa often thought of and represented is the Africa as before in which it is very likely to see religion and community feature as two basic characters of Africa from which morality can be sifted. In his popular work *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe had above all things shown that this old Africa has been replaced by a new breed and things cannot be the same again. In the first instance, the former African communalism in which the community was the primary beneficiary of individual wealth has been wrestled down by capitalism in which the individual is defined by the extent in which he accumulates surplus value. The African individual within the stress of the capitalist invasion lost the old community morality and has been incapable of developing a third, the earlier two having eluded them; mired in the unfamiliar capitalist terrain, the corresponding society devoid of tribal, ethnic, kindred, clan and family ties which sustains communalism did not evolve. What remained is the imbalance between the capitalist system and communalist consciousness as there is the amalgam of western democratic society and citizens steeped in African tribal consciousness. In the second instance, religion which is another essential character of Africa is problematic. Africans have adopted a religion which completely excludes their ancestors, sacred institutions, persons and spaces. Yet the morality that could possibly be acquired via this new religion has been elusive of an African hold. Against this backdrop, the present writer thinks that the old African moral community has been lost in the morass of foreign ideologies that has plagued the continent from the 19th century. Why can't democracy be sustained, diseases and poverty eradicated, rocket technologies initiated, large industries and megacities constructed, maintained and sustained in Africa without foreign interventions? The simple explanation is that the African moral community once destroyed has not been reconstructed; moral ideas and institutions, moral persons and group of persons, moral situations and environment have been subjected to the jangling discord of their western models. The present work identifies Sub-Saharan Africa especially as morally impoverished; proffers reasons for such claims and establishes the grounds for the possibility of the reconstitution of a moral community which will serve as a springboard for sustainable development in the continent.

Sub-Saharan Africa is made up of all the countries of West, Central, East and South Africa; numbering about forty-seven countries. It is the area of the largest concentration of black

population in the world. This part of Africa bears the true colour, character and identity of Africa whenever and wherever that word is mentioned. At the same time it is the area worst hit by the

historical scramble for Africa, the subsequent colonial and post-colonial influences and the pressure of globalization. The gaze of Sub-Saharan Africans through so many western machineries has been turned away from within the rich content of its environment and cultural evolution to the external inducement of attractive western definitions and patterns. Consequently, the former is mired in the contempt and agony of unfulfilled and unrealizable desires and tormented by the ugly sight of an abandoned project represented by their stagnant socio-economic, political, religious and moral environment. In more practical terms, more than three quarters of the African continent which fall within this territory under review are ravaged by wars, insurgencies, political turmoil, poverty, disease, corruption and so forth.

The present researcher is of the opinion that these anomalous situations are as a result of the abandonment and fossilization of African moral traditions and the adoption of a culture whose moral orientation could be understood in the African parlance as permissive, accommodating, indulgent and mollycoddling. Nevertheless instead of a beneficial management of the open windows of this new morality, the African, most often, takes advantage of it for private or individual gains. For instance, Transparency International² takes the indices of the level of corruption in various countries of the world each year. For 2014, thirty-five (35) out of the forty-seven (47) countries of Sub-Saharan Africa scored below 40% in a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Meanwhile this evaluation is based on the perceived level of public sector corruption. According to the report, "A poor score is likely a sign of widespread bribery, lack of punishment for corruption and public institutions that don't respond to citizens' needs." This character should be foreign to Africa since such a situation as this will be contrary to communalist social ethos which holds supreme the good of the community. However, if we go by the 50% benchmark suggested by Transparent International as the score below which corruption is imputed, then we have forty-three acclaimed corrupt countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Anthonia Soyngbe:

The major problem confronting Africa today is the general level of discipline and morality which over the years has given birth to pocket of vices in the continent. Gone are the days when morality and discipline used to be virtues. Today, it is the exact opposite.³

This kind of worry has been raised at various levels and fields of academe with various solutions proffered. For instance, Yonah Matemba of the University of Glasgow, Scotland writing about his native land, Botswana had advocated for specialization in Moral Education as a prerequisite for qualifying to teach Moral Education.⁴ He was reviewing a clime where Moral Education is regarded as an offshoot of Religious Education with the danger of not considering the secular nature of the society and possibly laying down the foundations where conflicting moral theories and principles may be the order of the day. The subtle lines threaded by Yonah Matemba is that Sub-Saharan Africa (Botswana) has become the harbinger of varying moral traditions especially that which is championed by the various religions that have made remarkable in-roads into that territory; insinuating that a single of such traditions may not be enough to educate the whole people in morality. He fears that doing that would mean setting varying and sometimes contradicting moral standards all at the same time. Even when his advocacy is heeded, the nature of this new secular morality is still worrisome because it is not just going to be foreign but may not connect to the African spirit or appeal to the African moral sensibilities and value. The present researcher thinks that in the midst of religious diversity and philosophical variations, the common area for interaction is African culture and tradition to which every African would easily connect. In this paper, we examine the moral situation in the Sub-Continent likes of which have been mentioned above, review some African moral traditions using especially Igbo paradigms and then recommend the re-birth of some which may still impact on the life of today's African peoples.

Western and Eastern Moral Traditions

Moral traditions are patterns of moral judgements of human actions. As traditions, they may be expected to have the character of being handed on from generation to generation but it may not be so in the sphere of western morality. Segun Gbadegesin argues about acceptability or non-acceptability of that which is handed on, what is handed on and how it is handed on as making up the character of tradition.⁵ To qualify to be tradition that which is handed on must be accepted. In this sense within this context about the west we will discuss moral currents or moral revolutions.

Western Moral Currents: Whenever western morality is discussed, it is viewed as a philosophical discipline as if there was no western morality before Socrates. The various Dialogues of Plato seem to impress that Socrates is at the inception of western ethics. Apparently nothing else can be said about western morality if cue is not taken from the teachings of Socrates. Although this philosopher had no writings credited to him, the much he was made known by Plato credits to him the statement: “An unexamined life is not worth living”. He was an avid promoter of critical thinking and moral reasoning. Remarkably, Socrates was accused by the state of corrupting the minds of youth, was convicted and sentenced to death by poisoning (he drank the hemlock). If this is the beginning of western morality, then western morality has always been a revolt against tradition and human actions based on reason. Plato furthered the explication of human rational capacities in his tripartite soul theory, the cosmology of a dualized world (forms and appearance) and the illustration of the allegory of the cave. Obviously in all these Plato posited human intellectual and rational ability as superior; relating to the world of forms which he understood as real but a chimera. He flawed the concrete world and sensible reality which he categorized as appearances and imitations. Aristotle widely reputed as the unfaithful student of Plato was drawn to practical wisdom and empirical inquiry; understanding the material-sensible world as real. He understood “practical wisdom (*phronesis*) as being necessary for

deliberation about what is good and advantageous if people want to move toward their human purpose or desired end goal of happiness or well-being (*eudaimonia*)”.⁶ Nevertheless he remained faithful to Plato’s rational foundations deviating from his master only in the application and interpretation of the realms of existence.

Another defining moment in the development of western ethics is the medieval era its major exponent being Thomas Aquinas. The erudite saint extensively read and did elaborate commentaries on the Philosophy of Aristotle. Basically, Aquinas adopted Aristotle’s idea that the end of life is happiness and saw to it that he taught humanity the path to that end. Again like his master, Aristotle, Aquinas held firmly the supremacy of reasoning whose purpose is to be applied in the practical areas of life to achieve happiness. The point of divergence between Aristotle and Aquinas is in identifying the end of human engagement in performing actions

Aristotle stresses our status as rational animals and describes the happy life rather broadly as “the life of activity expressing reason well.” Aquinas, on the other hand, emphasizes our status as beings created by God; the point of the ethical life for Aquinas is, correspondingly, not just a life of flourishing rationality but, more specifically, a life of intimate union with God. Thus, while Aristotle is highly interested in moral education and character formation, Aquinas sees the deeper purpose of moral education and character formation as preparing us for union with God. Aristotle believes that having the right moral character is necessary for the flourishing human life, and that the right use of reason will show us what counts as the right sort of moral character. Aquinas believes that we are created in God’s image, and that we flourish most when our likeness is closest to that image — that is, when we most closely resemble God in the ways appropriate to human beings.⁷

Aquinas did not just add the God dimension to Aristotle’s Ethics; he also introduced Jesus

Christ and the Bible as principal elements of his practical wisdom. Unlike the ancient Aristotelian morality which was cloned to the intellect then, medieval morality was closely related to religion.

In the modern period, Immanuel Kant made another giant stride in western moral philosophy. In series of critiques, Kant showcased the pre-eminence of the Will which he identified as the originating point of right human actions. Kant distinguished between heteronomous and autonomous will. Heteronomous will derives from extrinsic motivations and aims at personal satisfaction through hypothetical imperatives while autonomous will derives from intrinsic motivations and aims at universal good through categorical imperatives. In constituting the Categorical Imperative, Kant made this primal statement: "Always act in such a way that the maxim of your action can be willed as a universal law of humanity."⁸ Kant's will has been described as self-legislating and self-authenticating but Kant kept reason as the rudder which drives this individualizing and individuating self to universal good. Kant, like his predecessors, kept faith with the enduring tradition of western morality – the supremacy of reason though with Kant reason became so radically other and isolated others. At the same time it is clear that Kant was threading the delicate grounds of the dialectics between individual reasoning and collective good and that is where the Categorical Imperative and its understanding of Duty as the mode of every human action is of essence. Kant advocated that human beings should perform every action as a call to duty; not counting individual benefit. Good moral actions for Kant must be altruistic but at the same time rational. Kant walked the precincts of setting the will free from its medieval imprisonment in the territories of reason but it was Rene Descartes who first saw to it that the will is associated with the freedom of choice and that this freedom is unrestrained and unrestrainable.⁹ Subsequently the theme of "Will" was going to pervade western thought: "Will to live" (Arthur Schopenhauer), "Will to Power" (Frederick Nietzsche) and so forth.

It was Nietzsche who brought western moral discourse to its apogee with his work: *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Here Nietzsche

distinguished between Master and Slave morality; either of which corresponds to a positive or negative life situation and each driven by the will to power. Nietzsche subscribes neither to master nor slave morality because both do not operate like the free spirit. They are all held captive within their own normative boundaries.¹⁰ Nietzsche opined that both the masters and the slaves were driven by resentment and hypocrisy. This way Nietzsche criticized and laid to final rest Jewish and Christian moral traditions seeking to replace them with the new order of the free spirit which he referred to as the *Übermann* possessing the *Über Mensch*. Thus western morality excluded God and religion, took hold of the world and operates it with free will.

Oriental Moral Currents: *Buddhism* - the fundamentals of Buddhist morality was set down by Shakyamuni Siddhartha Gautama Buddha who may have lived between the 6th and 5th BCE. Not satisfied with stereotypes of Hindu spirituality, he sought enlightenment and founded a new mysticism built on prescriptive morality. The fundamental quest of the Buddha was how to deal with *Karma*. *Karma* is the interior principle that drives *Samsara*. Sometimes the west may understand *Karma* as a Hindu rendition of Greek *Nemesis*; it is rather an internal mechanism whose content is ignorance that brings about endless cycles of re-birth (*Samsara*) which itself is viewed as laden with chastening pain and fear. Enlightenment for the Buddha is the solution to *Karma* and *Samsara*. To achieve this, he preached the Four Noble Truths which included:

1. The truth of suffering (*Dukkha*)
2. The truth of the origin of suffering (*Samudāya*)
3. The truth of the cessation of suffering (*Nirodha*)
4. The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering (*Magga*)

According to Julia Hardy, "First, these are not truths that are noble, but truths that have been realized by the (spiritually) noble. They might more accurately be called four realities of life known to those who are spiritually aware."¹¹ The

nature of the Four Noble Truths is that they are practical, real and static. According to V. F. Gunaratna:

Not only do these Four Truths form the heart and core of Buddhism, these Truths are also so far-reaching—touching life at every point, so encompassing, taking in every aspect of life, that no amount of thinking on them can ever be deemed sufficient or complete until such thinking reaches the level of a definite spiritual experience, as distinguished from a mere theoretical understanding of them.¹²

It is within the fourth noble truth that the Buddha expounded on his morality which is represented in the Eight-fold Path. The Eight-fold Path is the expansion of *Magga* and the end of *Dukkha*. They are: *Samma Ditti* (Right View), *Samma Sankappa* (Right Intention), *Samma Vacha* (Right Speech), *Samma Kammanta* (Right Action), *Samma Ajiva* (Right Livelihood), *Samma Vayama* (Right Effort), *Samma Sati* (Right Mindfulness), *Samma Samadhi* (Right Concentration). This Eight-fold Path can be divided into three components: *Wisdom* (right view, right intention), *Moral discipline* (right speech, right action, right livelihood), *Concentration* (right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration). Apparently, Buddha's prescriptive morality took on the semblance of the Jewish *Halakha* and boils down to an instrument of religion. As would be expected, the morality of Buddha has fallen into heavy criticism especially by Arthur C. Danto in his work: *Mysticism and Morality: Oriental Thought and Moral Philosophy* (1987) where he contends that oriental morality has nothing to offer to western morality except for Confucianism. Danto thinks that Buddha's practical morality does not conform and cannot be subjected to rational principles and therefore does not take into account the fundamental human freedom of choice which is the hallmark of western morality.

Arthur C. Danto argues that necessary conditions on genuine morality include a robust notion of human moral agency and constraints that recognize that actions are

praiseworthy (i.e., have positive moral worth) only if they are performed voluntarily, in accordance with explicitly moral rules, and out of a motive of concern for the moral worth and being of others.¹³

Buddhist morality is not a mental conformity to a rational process but a mental and physical involvement in a mystical rudiment through which the enlightened self emerges free from *Dukkha*, *Karma* and *Samsara*.

Confucianism made a paradigm shift from traditional Buddhist morality; it became more philosophical than religious. The founder of this oriental current is Kong Qui (551 – 479 BC) who famed as Kong Fuzi rendered in English as Confucius. He could properly be called an Oriental version of Socrates because he employed instruction as the means of disseminating his doctrines. His teachings are put together in *The Analects* which may have been collected by his immediate disciples, containing the anthology of brief passages which are the direct words of Confucius and his disciples.

The Analects, which is composed of about five hundred independent passages, is divided into twenty “books.” Some of these books seem to have originated as strips authored, over a period of years, by a single group, and separated into bundles according to dominant themes¹⁴

While Socrates' was Dialectics which was written in the form of dialogue and aimed at sifting the best answers to ethical objections, Kong's was Analects written in the form of monologue which is aimed at giving directions to human actions. The key concepts in Confucius moral teachings are: *Ren*, *Junzi*, *Dao*, *Li* and *Tian*. The primary ethical concept in Confucianism is *Li*. *Li* is a set of ritual propriety which seem to demand absolute and unquestioning conformity, though in some places, Confucius would seem to offer reasons as to the alteration or modification of *Li*. It appeals to tradition and culture handed on from immemorial times and aims at the enhancement of the life of society. According to Robert Eno, Confucius “identified “manliness” (or, in non-sexist terms, the qualities associated with

constructive social leadership) with the firm disposition to place the needs and feelings of others and of the community before one's own".¹⁵ This manliness is the ability to undertake the demands of *Li* without question and hesitation as was his instruction to his disciple Yan Hui.¹⁶ On the other hand, *Ren* is the most important concept in Confucian morality; it involves the active daily cultivation of character which evokes five basic virtues: seriousness, generosity, sincerity, diligence and kindness. Other ways of understanding *Ren* are benevolence, humaneness and goodness. Robert Waxman understands *Ren* as the highest level of achievement so much so that the achiever becomes a kind of role model. "An individual acquiring *Ren* is mastering the way of virtue, morality, compassion and love. This individual is reaching the highest levels of moral perfection in a specific aspect of life."¹⁷ Just as Jesus Christ, Lao Tzu, Mohammed, Krishna are considered as possessing *Ren* so also are Michael Phelps, Tiger Woods, Serena Williams, Albert Einstein, John Paul II also possessors of *Ren*. Confucius rejected blind adherence to rules and advocated empathy and altruism towards others. These refer to actions by and on which the ideal of society is built. Nevertheless *Junzi* is the development of the profound individual who employs his mind both to study and understand. It is the *Junzi* who always manifests the quality of *Ren*. While *Junzi* is existential, *Dao* is ontological order of things. It contains both the way things are and the way things should be. These two aspects of *Dao* may be rendered essence and existence. Essence or the way things should be or Being as it is may also be represented as *Tiandao* while existence or things the way they are in human experience may be represented as *Rendao*. Consequently *Dao* may be just transliterated as "The Way".¹⁸ *Tian* is the ultimate good in Confucianism. It is symbolized by the sky and translated especially by missionaries as God.¹⁹ *Tian* is the ideal good; elusive but accessible by *Junzi*.

It is important to note that western stereotypes which has always been used by its scholars to interpret other traditions makes it difficult for the profound understanding of philosophical and ethical traditions that does not conform to those stereotypes. This informs why

Immanuel Kant pungently rejected Confucianism as having no philosophy to offer and no idea of the good.

Philosophy is not to be found in the whole Orient ... Their teacher Confucius teaches in his writings nothing outside a moral doctrine designed for the princes ...and offers examples of former Chinese princes ... But a concept of virtue and morality never entered the heads of the Chinese. In order to arrive at an idea ... of the good [certain] studies would be required, of which [the Chinese] know nothing.²⁰

In spite of this, we should understand that the separation of entities as found in western ontology especially from the modern era is totally absent in Confucianism. The harmony in the various dimensions in moral consciousness in Confucianism was expressed by Jeffrey Richey thus:

Aware of its source in *Tian*, it seeks to maximize *ren* (co-humanity -- i.e., how humans ought to treat other humans) through apprenticeship to *li* (ritual) so as to exercise *de* (moral charisma) in a manner befitting a *junzi* (profound person -- i.e., the Confucian ideal).²¹

Taoism or Daoism could be understood as an offshoot of Confucianism and is based on the philosophical and political principles expounded in *Tao Te Ching (Dao de Jing)* purportedly written by Lao Tzu in the 4th or 3rd century BCE. Its focus is on *Dao*, "The Way" or "The Path". Adherents of Taoism observe another version of the Confucian silver rule: "Treat others as you will want to be treated"; this is referred to as the way of the Tao. The most important Taoist ethical principle is *Wu Wei*. In the face value it may appear as lethargy, aloofness or indifference; it is rather non-action, apathy and passivity. It is based on the conviction that there is a greater good always found over above any present good. Taoism advocates internal and personal spontaneity in performing actions, aiming at greater good and placing the other first in all considerations. Livia Kohn laid much emphasis on good intention to achieve *Te*

*Ching*²² because community is supreme and the self is diminished; greater good for the greater number of people. The ten precepts of Taoism as reflected by Livia Kohn include:

- Do not kill but always be mindful of the host of living beings.
- Do not be lascivious or think depraved thoughts.
- Do not steal or receive unrighteous wealth.
- Do not cheat or misrepresent good and evil.
- Do not get intoxicated but always think of pure conduct.
- I will maintain harmony with my ancestors and family and never disregard my kin.
- When I see someone do a good deed, I will support him with joy and delight.
- When I see someone unfortunate, I will support him with dignity to recover good fortune.
- When someone comes to do me harm, I will not harbor thoughts of revenge.
- As long as all beings have not attained the Tao, I will not expect to do so myself.²³

Tao Te Ching is at least a hundred years older than Buddhism and Siddhartha may have read it before becoming Buddha. It merges the macrocosm and microcosm; the cosmos and the community; the individual and the society to create a harmonious unity.

African Moral Traditions; the Igbo Paradigm

Here we explore the enduring trend in Igbo moral culture. The present researcher belongs to the school of thought that understands African Philosophy and Religion as homogeneous. However African homogeneity may not be understood from the particularities and specificities seen in the variety of cultures in Africa but with the fundamental and nucleic idea which interprets the universe; the overt and covert relationship between terrestrial and celestial bodies; the inter and intra relationship in the human community and the harmonious

conviviality that preserves and endures (in) everything. Concepts can be seen in every individual African culture to depict this idea. Be that as it may the present researcher appeals to six moral concepts found among the Igbo people of Nigeria to give the enduring moral traditions in Africa which once eroded sustains the culture of depravity, impunity and corruption in the continent.

Igbo Moral Categories

1. *Ala*: This is the primary, primeval and principal category of morality among the Igbo. *Ala* is the earth; a physical manifestation of common humanity and the custodian of morality. *Ala* also symbolizes motherhood and fertility. The Igbo do not look to the sky or engage in an ascent to raise humanity to a transcendent height; they rather condescend to involve themselves with *Ala*. Simply put, in Igbo Morality one looks down not up. “*Anyaaala*” is a very common Igbo moral concept. Literally that idiom would translate “earth eye.” But that translation would be nonsensical to any Igbo. It rather expresses the fundamental principle of Igbo morality which advocates caution, diligence, knowledge, tact, gracefulness, respect and so on. On the other hand “*Anyaelu*” is an idiom that expresses negative morality – carelessness, indecency, ignorance, inarticulate, uncoordinated and so forth. *Ala* is earth but for the Igbo it is spirit, life-giving principle and moral finality. The earth is deified and the Igbo involve themselves with it to sanctify and preserve it in order to be protected and provided for by it. No Igbo would even dare to violate *Ala* because its wrath is unprecedented. The central place of *Ala* in Igbo morality is underscored by the connection of all traditional moral concepts to *Ala* (*Omenala*, *Nsoala*, *Iruala*). It is important to note that what the present writer is simply positing is that *Ala* is the aim, purpose and end of good life. To live a good life is to ensure the social, spiritual and environmental health of the Igbo community without which there is no peace and tranquil for the Igbo person. Good life is for the good of the community.

2. *Ome*: This is the highest moral category among the Igbo and contains values and norms which aim at upholding, preserving, fostering and enhancing the life of the community. This community is peopled by the living and the dead. Crispinous Iteyo in analyzing Placide Tempel's view of the Lumba as regards the community of human persons wrote:

The ancestors constitute the most important chain, binding humans to God. They occupy an exalted rank, in that they are not regarded as the ordinary dead. They are, in Tempel's view, spiritualized beings, being higher on the ontological hierarchy, participating to a certain degree in the divine force. After the first fathers were the dead of the tribe, following their order of primogeniture. They according to Tempel's formed a chain through which the forces of the elders exercised their vitalizing influence on the living generations.²⁴

Ome is of primordial origins; no Igbo can give its history because in every age *Ome* is Pre-existent. It is made up of all prescribed and acceptable actions aimed at the maintenance, sustenance and enhancement of the life of the community. These actions are normative, customary and traditional. *Ome* is made up of all good conducts that has been performed in the past, that are still being performed and that will always be performed; it is the reference pool of Igbo morality. The Igbo had no elaborate literary systems, so *Ome* is not preserved in any writing but it is encoded in the memory especially of the elders and are expressed in their everyday life through actions that imprints them in the mind of younger Igbo or through occasional practical instruction. The Igbo do not go to school to learn good morals, they grow up in a moral environment imbibing and cultivating themselves in *Ome* which is everywhere. The concrete manifestation of *Ome* is *Omenala*. *Omenala* may translate as culture, norms, values and customs. Note that this word is made up of two important moral categories, *Ome* and *Ala*; it simply means the acceptable ways in which things should be done. While *Ome* stands for the collectivity of good conducts, *Ala* represents the

location for the performance of good human actions. *Ome* is the moral instrument for the preservation and sustenance of *Ala*; it can sometimes be used as the principle of restoration of the sanctity, purity and dignity of *Ala*.

3. *Nso*: This concept is both metaphysical and moral. As metaphysical, *Nso* is the other side of being in Igbo duality; it is nothing as opposed to being. In morality *Nso* is made up of prohibitions or taboos which must be strictly avoided. Keeping away from or avoiding *Nso* certainly guaranteed the enhancement of life in the social and spiritual sphere. The *Dibia* who are the sages and human operators and sustainers of the Igbo world know too well that the fundamental principle of effective operation is: *I malu nso Chukwu; malu nso Ala, onwero ife I chelu aka ghalu ime ya* (If one knows and keeps faith to God's prohibitions; knows and keeps faith with the earth's prohibitions, nothing will be impossible to achieve).²⁵ This profound moral disposition of *Imanso* (knowledge of and keeping faith with prohibitions or outlaws) is not just *Dibia's* prerogative or exclusive; every Igbo is taught so and expected to live so. In treating this subject matter, Emezie Ikenga Metuh seemed to have mixed-up two moral concepts, *Nso* and *Aru*. E. I. Metuh had averred:

The term *Nso*, forbidden, is used to describe offences which disrupt relations with the supernatural forces. Each deity and spirit has its set of *Nso* or taboos. The ancestors, too, have their *Nso*. The most serious among the *Nso* are *Nso Ala*, taboos of the Earth deity. These are believed to threaten the stability of society itself as well as that of nature, because the Igbo say that apart from the sky, everything else rests on the earth, the most heinous crimes against nature are the *Aru* or abominations. Some abominations are immoral acts, others include the acts of irrational beings; it is *Aru*, for example, for a hen to hatch just one egg.²⁶

To set the stage for the mix-up he again wrote:

This principle does not apply to certain categories of sins which threaten the

ontological order, or *Nso*. The birth of twins is *nso*. It is *nso* for a child to cut its upper teeth first. Children guilty of these offences are thrown away or given to the *Nri* priests. It is *nso* if an animal gives birth to one of another species. Abortion is also an *nso*. These are evidence that the natural order has been disturbed and must be redressed.²⁷

The present researcher thinks that Emefie I. Metuh did not get it right here because in expressing the occurrence of these two phenomena among the Igbo the verb ‘*Mere*’ is used. In the first instance the Igbo would say: “*O mere nso*” (he/she/it did *nso*); they may not say “*nso mere*” (*nso* happened/occurred). In the second instance, the Igbo can say both “*O mere aru*” (he/she/it committed *aru*) and “*aru mere*” (*aru* occurred/happened). This simply means that the verb “*Mere*” can be both transitive and intransitive; in the case of *Nso* only the intransitive form makes sense while in the case of *Aru* it can be both transitive and intransitive. Therefore, the Igbo do not refer to the birth of twins, cutting of the upper teeth first, animal giving birth to another species and so forth as *Nso*, but *Aru*. It is only this way that one can make sense of the reaction or response of the Igbo to the situations of twin-birth and others like it. Again, it is not the child or the animal who committed the offence but that they are unfortunate channels through which a cosmic disharmony showed forth. It is true these are not the main contentious issues here, but deserves mention to place these moral concepts in perspective. Every *Nso* is in the final analysis *Nsoala*. This is the combination of *Nso* and *Ala*. In other words, it is *Ala* which is violated whenever there is a breach in the observance of taboos and prohibitions. Furthermore, *Nso* is a concept that underscores the Igbo world as basically a moral world. For instance, the efficacy of *Ogwu*²⁸ is predicated upon the effective application of every *Nso* that relates to it. It then goes to say that any *Ogwu* without *Nso* cannot be effective; *Nso* must be such of ethical or moral value. However the word *Nso* has taken on entirely new meaning courtesy of the western missionaries to be “Holy”.

4. *Aru*: The word can be transliterated as abominations and anathemas. *Aru* is the nihilation or negation of being; it threatens the essence of life itself and cripples every movement and interconnections in the physical, moral and spiritual sphere. They are those human actions which are considered to distort the sacredness of the community life by making the earth on which everything stands profane and life-diminishing. They are crimes that threaten the ontological harmony of the Igbo world.²⁹ Actions that amount to *Aru* threatens the stability of the earth; the Igbo consider them as rocking the foundations of their empirical existence. In its practical expression, these nuances abound *Imeruala*, *Iruala*, *Uruala*, *Imearu*, *Aruruala* and sometimes *Arurugbada* or just *Aru*. Actions like murder, theft, adultery are viewed as *Aru*; they attract sanctions which may include ostracism or expulsion from the community and the ritual cleansing of the land referred to as *Ikpuaru*. No one would ever want to be subjected to the ignominy and shame of the consequences *Aru* may bring. It is important to note that the situations and circumstances in which the actions that may amount to *Aru* took place contribute a lot to adjudging the crime so or otherwise.

5. *Njo*: *Njo* is the collective noun to express everything that could be referred to as *Ajoihe*³⁰ in the moral sense. *Njo* became convenient for the Catholic missionaries to transliterate ‘sin’; their protestant counterparts rather preferred the word “*Mmehie*”. May be the interest of the missionaries was to find a blanket word which could contain all the negative moral categories found in Igbo; *Njo* and *Mmehie* achieved that. Another way of rendering both are *Mmejo* and *Mmehie*; which will all mean mistake, offence, screwing-up, fault, falling short of the standard. These Igbo words are rather descriptive of the moral situation but are not exactly nominal of them. Again in no circumstance is this word connected to *Ala* which is the principal moral symbol in the culture. This absence is very important; it simply means that these concepts are incapable of sustaining any Igbo moral consciousness; a consciousness that derives from and is oriented towards *Ala*.

6. ***Ofo na Ogu***: Many discussants of Igbo morality take on the principle of *Ofo na Ogu* as the central ethical concept of the Igbo. Christopher Ejizu³¹ recounts that an Nri myth of origins represented *Ofo* as the guiding light given to Eri and his wife Nnamaku³² to help them navigate through the earth. The significance of *Ofo* has been severally represented by various authors – ancestral symbol,³³ spiritualized socio-political symbol of leadership, authority, truth and justice,³⁴ truth, justice and fairness,³⁵ and so forth. Remarkably all of these conceptualizations of *Ofo* point to the same things – *Ofo* is the one moral position or standing which gives the Igbo a firm footing in the world, a good standing with others and a connection to the ancestors of the land. It could be derived that the Igbo's is basically a moral world; moral consciousness is therefore the singular mode of living in that world. It is in lieu of this that John A. Umeh wrote:

Thus, religion to the traditional Igbo person, was not mainly once-in-seven-days show of dresses, trinkets, and public display of largely feigned piety, morality and ethics, but indeed an inseparable life of every Igbo man, woman, animals, plants, the elements and indeed all in the universe. And in sleep or while awake, that was Igbo life, the Igbo world, Igbo religion, Igbo socio-political practice, Igbo moralities and ethics. All these are encapsulated in the holistic principles of *Ofo na Ogu*.³⁶

Ogu is the couplet of *Ofo*; they both go together and can be separated. *Ogu* is a moral state of being which presupposes one's flawless bond with nature and *Ala* in particular. *Ofo na Ogu* is the complete unimpaired expression of that moral state in which by being the best he/she can be, one is guaranteed the best of life and anything he/she may desire. *Ofo na Ogu* is the moral and spiritual disposition achieved through the observance of *Ome*, peace with *Ala* and avoidance of *Nso*, *Alu* and *Njo*.

An African perspective of Western Moral Currents

In Africa today, it is western standards which determine moral judgments of human actions. To dominate African moral consciousness the west had to attack and efface these foundations in preference to a more rationalized and idealized tradition. It is important to note in the first place that the Western moral currents were founded on the initial revolt of Socrates against traditional Greek morality; that revolt exalted the individual reason over above religious and community needs, regulations and recommendations. This same trend trailed further developments in that ethical history. On the other hand, African morality has no history; no living person knows why things are done one way and not the other way; things are rightfully done if they are done the way they have always been done and vice versa. Western moral consciousness will first of all instill the disposition of revolt on the African mind which looks on the moral environment with the desire of destroying it. Secondly, African morality is predicated upon religious and traditional instincts while western morality is predicated upon rational and ideological instincts. Taking on these new western instincts, the African questions the rationality and veracity of the old moral ways and may end-up destroying them because most times there may be no rational basis found.

Furthermore, since it is religious instincts which grounds morality in African life it is important to understand the religion which replaced the former traditional religion and the nature of its God besides. What remained of the Supreme Being through medieval metaphysics into modern ontology and contemporary anthropology of European Philosophy and culture was transported into Africa in the name of the Christian God. The being and existence; functions and operations of this God appealed more to the intellect of his adherents. While this God presents to be more or less a product of human reason, subjecting oneself under his influence became a rational process open to the choice of human beings. As at the time of his entrance into Africa very many Europeans have exercised the freedom of this choice to reject

him. This God was said to have showed forth in the world as a human being, humbly born, over-powered by human beings and killed; condoned and contained some heinous crimes including those who murdered him in the name of love and forgiveness. Sweet as the story of this God may sound, it does not most certainly appeal to African sensibilities. Various reviews of the reception of the Christian religion in Africa have shown that the first generation African Christians were lured into the religion by the excitement of new trends, promise of a better socio-economic life, greater belongingness in the new order of society and so forth more than the sense the religion or love for the God of that religion. From time to time they relapsed to the traditional religion because the gods and the system of that religion assured them more of the integrity and survival of the African moral universe. To the African mind this God would seem to compromise standards and permit evil; yet in the face of social, economic, mental and political pressure, the African was left with no much choice. If the African will be part of the world; the new order of human society that was inexorably closing in on him, then he must accept Christianity, understand and interpret it through the prism of his own religion. So, for the African, Christianity is a religion he attends but is not involved in. It is an extraneous reality to which he chooses or is mandated to go to and then goes back to his life which most times are not informed by the tenets of that religion. In Christianity, the religious environment does not extend beyond the Church, so the religion has very little if not nothing to do with the economic, social and political life of the African except at the level of rationalizing over their logical connections at times allotted to religious activities; being Christian at those levels is far-fetched.

Religion for the African has been an exercise in involving the gods to better human living. With Christianity which accompanied a socio-economic-political order which effectively achieved better conditions of human living, membership in it alone guaranteed the religious quest of the Africans. Meanwhile the gods and spirits of African Traditional Religion are both subject to human will and open to human manipulation. In the Igbo version of that

religion, it is said: "*Ikenga m adighi ire m suo ya oku*" (If my *Ikenga*³⁷ is not potent, I will set it on fire). Somehow in as much as *Ikenga* is a spiritual reality, it is human beings who constitute its effective and material cause. As would be expected, the spirits of Christianity at the Igbo disposal may stand the danger of the predicament of *Ikenga*. This explains why the Igbo could engage in the most heinous crime even when faced with the holiest of Christian imageries or symbols. Again, it is true that Christianity adopted the idea of *Chukwu* to show the Igbo the nature of the God it preached, at the same time the Christian version of *Chukwu* presented a comfortable proximity to the Igbo mind that he stands the danger of being caused and manipulated. Christianity also armed the Igbo and African with potent tools to take on this God and manipulate him (Bible, Sacraments, Sacramental and sacred spaces). Lastly, the Christian God does appear to compromise in the moral sphere and permit moral evil. Otherwise he offers very easy and affordable remedies to situations of infringements in the moral order. However, if these African perspectives of Christianity and the Christian God could be reversed, it is only reason which can attend to that. Unfortunately, reason alone is incapable of setting the African practical world in motion.

The consequences of this African Perspective

Western civilization is in the character of isolating entities that make up the world. Isolated things in the western world relate in a logical sequence or rational coherence and not by concrete and material connections. As a result of this, morality isolated from other aspects of human life relates to those other aspects of human life by logic and reason. In African cosmological thought-pattern isolation is expressed by the number 'One'. The number 'One' is dumb, immobile, incapable of relationship and open to manipulation. Not only morality, but all other entities of the world isolated as they are in the western thought-pattern open themselves to manipulation in the African world. Once through western paradigms all aspects of the African world existed independent of others, there arose the possibility of isolation *ad intra* of particular spheres. For

instance, the western paradigm isolated morality from religion and from the community. Consequent upon this, morality has no content, is non-relational and is totally incapable of impressing the African mind. Furthermore consequences of moral infringements were lightened and bearable that the African mind can undertake the risks of their consequences and go ahead to renege on them. Western individualization and isolation of entities necessarily gave rise to the capitalist structure in the social order; totally uprooted from the foundation of his being and existence, western moral orientation made of the African a rolling stone that gathers no moss.

The present researcher simply makes the case that there are two moments in the discussion of western morality. The first is represented by the Socratic beginnings captured in this work as revolt. To realize his full moral potentials, the western mind should break the circle of established ethics, norms and values to construct a state of being through a rational process. That revolt impinges on the supremacy and domination of society to project the individual who assumes the status of lord and master of nature. The second is represented by Kantian perfection captured in this work as reason. Kant takes on the individual who reasons by default; he rationalizes himself into the duty of making his own laws and obeying them; stating the ground of his individual authentication. The ultimate implication of all these is that imbibing this revolutionary and rational tradition, the African moral universe has been impaired and greatly flawed. The gods, spirits and symbols of morality have been overthrown and the moral institutions disintegrated. In the midst of this morass, the African stands before the danger of being regulated by nothing, respecting nothing, caring about nothing and understanding human actions as having no fatal consequences provided it conforms to the logical designs of its own individual reason.

Intercultural rebirth of African Moral traditions in western ethical schemes

From the on-going we make out the judgment that the western rational traditions has

wrestled down African practical traditions in morality and many other aspects of human life. We also made the case that African environment is not better for all these are worth. Corruption and impunity which has characterized governance and administration in the public sector of many African nations can be blamed on the destruction of the African moral environment and the various institutions that sustained it. While western morality is a product of studied and reasoned concepts and ideologies in a coherent logical pattern, African morality is a product of practical engagement with the environment and in the institutions of that environment through age long and immemorial tradition. While these two appear diametrically opposed in orientation and purpose, the present writer seeks the meeting point of their complementarity.

Christianity and western civilization has had its toll on Africa and has come to stay. The new consciousness they brought on board is not opposed to doing good and being dedicated to it. Everywhere in the world it seems that it is in the DNA of the black race to take and maintain the place of the child of the world. Though we know that it has not always been so in history, yet we have to seek out why it is so now and what could be done about it for Africa to come to maturity and stand at par among other nations of the world. As it were the African spiritual world peopled by human beings and spirits, operated by energies and forces, where animate and inanimate things are living and capable of motion; moral world where every singular action is a link in a chain of community bond and ancestral/spiritual connection which may not all the time conform to reason should at the same time connect with western world view and patterns. Already a greater majority of Africans have been born into, trained in and imbued with western consciousness and world view. It is important to note that these Africans have not been fair and true to African traditions. They may not be blamed in a sense that in the scheme of Christianizing and westernizing them they had first of all to rid themselves of mental and spiritual connection to Africa. Again this is because the agents of that exercise approached Africa with a stereotyped model of social order, civilization, science and technology armed with

western education and Christianity as hammers to knock Africa into that shape.

It is time for Africans to develop a new hermeneutical approach which the present writer couches as a 'Participatory Phenomenology'. In this approach, the student is not different from the object of study. The content of the new hermeneutics should be passionate accounts of personal involvement with the African moral environment through the old institutions. In practical terms taking the Igbo paradigm again, *Otuogbo* (the age grade systems), *Nze na Ozo* (the nobility cult), *Otundichie* (the ancestral cult), *Mmonwu* (the spiritual cult), *Umuada/Umuokpu* (female prestigious cult) and many others should be revived with elite participation. The present researcher does not think that these are opposed to western civilization and Christianity but only constitute the background for their re-interpretation. The African consciousness need to be woken from its morbid and fossil state even as Africans are constrained to interact with the new world order and contemporary globalizing human consciousness. These institutions must be at the background of the design and conjecture of African democracy, education, Christianity and so forth.

Conclusion

The former classification of the third world included China, Japan, India, Singapore, Dubai, Malaysia; today it is no longer so. These countries have been worked and are being worked up to take over the former first world and dominate it economically, ideologically, politically and technologically. This mega feat was not achieved by increasing the quantum of western consciousness and civilization. Each of these countries had successfully separated the junks from the nourishers, looked inward to rediscover their indigenous institutions to connect with their national spirit to build a new

consciousness and confidence that can only be locally effective. An African development cannot be invented in an American laboratory; it cannot be designed on a Asian drawing board. An African development must be interiorly and integrally African. This development is not about social amenities and infrastructure; it is about culture and structure which exists and can be found in the African environment, by Africans and for Africa. Born through the auspices and trained in the western anthologies of African exploitation, Africans having assumed the role of lords and masters became the exploiters and destroyers of Africa. This work has recommended a new hermeneutics in which Africa should not be just a land of rich minerals and vegetation; a beautiful continent of diverse cultural heritage and hundreds of languages. Africa should also be a moral and spiritual universe in which the community is the primary living organism where every individual person is distinguished in the performance of only those human action which enhance the life of the community and where actions that impair, impede, threaten or diminish community life attract mortal consequences. Evidently that is also what Africa used to stand for. In the exercise of re-birth, the present writer also advocates for the further studies of African institutions which sustained the former moral universe with a methodology represented in this work as 'Participatory Phenomenology'. In simple terms while western phenomenology studies and interacts with elements under study by isolating them from other entities and creating an artificial environment for them to show-forth in and of themselves, African participatory phenomenology involves itself with the object of study in its very natural habitat and reports back personal experience and relationship. There is need for Africans to re-discover Africa by their active participation with and in Africa and to re-interpret Africa in their own African terms.

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²⁸“*Ogwu*” is a complex concept in Igbo Philosophy and culture; it at the same time stands for potions, magic, sorcery and indeed everything that can effectively affect nature and bring about alternate reality. *Ogwu* the main business of the *Dibia* especially *Dibiaogwu*.

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³⁷*Ikenga* is one of the principal deities of Igbo Traditional Religion. It is a horned deity that represented and guaranteed manliness and prosperity; held by any full grown and matured adult especially those intensely engaged with life. It is the force through which the Igbo penetrates the most difficult and challenging terrains of life