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Review Article



The Dibia in Igbo Traditional Socio-political and Metaphysical Economy: An Interrogation

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Abstract

This work is carried out to fill the epistemic and hermeneutical gap within Igbo socio-metaphysical space. Notable works have been done in Igbo studies, however, the place of the Dibia in Igbo ontology has been neglected, hence the current work. The researchers combined library and fieldwork approaches in executing this work. In the end, the research notes that modern Igbo people have neglected the place and activities of the Dibia. Noting that the Dibia being the active presence of the God[s] among the people is an indispensable persona in the Igbo existence. Therefore, the current crisis of relevance the people are experiencing is a result of this neglect. The works, therefore, conclude that if the Dibia and her activities are brought back to the centre stage of Igbo existence, the socio-political and economic crises of the moment would have been a history

Introduction

The Igbo world is an amalgam of the physico-spiritual existences. Okoro [1] describes existence in this ontology as a ‘communion of forces’ and inseparable spiritual and material realms of reality. For Ifemesie [2] there is nothing absolute in Igbo ontology as everything, however, apparently independent depends upon something else. This is further captured in the words of Metu [3] thus:

The goal of interaction of beings in African world-views is the maintenance of the integration and balance of the beings in it. Harmonious interaction of beings leads to the mutual strengthening of the beings involved and enhance the growth of life. A harmful influence from one being weakens other beings and threatens the harmony and integration of the whole. Thus, one of the bases on which the African mode of life rests is participation or profound communion within the universe.

The Igbo people strongly believe that whatever happens to them must have some link with the spirit world [4]. Therefore, people trace every life event to a particular spirit [5]. In consequence, Nelson and Moris [6] aver that the Igbo universe is populated by myriads of spiritual beings and that

every department is controlled by a particular force/spirit. Now given the cause-effect ideation of the Igbo people: ihe anaghi eme na nkiti ‘every event has a corresponding cause’. Therefore, there is a constant effort to find out not only the cause but also the remedy of every misfortune that occurs in society [7]. In this vein, Anedo [4] resonates, that the day-to-day life of an average Igbo man was consciously or unconsciously guided by the quest for the knowledge of the future. The average Igbo person irrespective of his/her intellectual and economic status will go to any length to find the cause of his/her fortunes/misfortunes in all areas of his/her life.

The traditional Igbo person is faced with the challenge of how to handle the multifarious forces [spirits] that pervade the socio-spiritual horizon. Some of these forces set out to upset the spiritual balance that the universe required to sustain mankind and other creations. Here, Nnoli [8] enunciates the negative activities of some of these spirits when he notes, ‘Ndi-Igbo [Igbo people] believe that the primary threat to security and survival was mostly spiritual and not physical’. It is this assumption that gave birth to the popular Igbo adage, ‘Ajommuo ka an aya oburo ajo mmadu’ [it is the spirit, not human beings that is the trouble and

dread of the people]. The foregoing gives insight into the rationale for the Igbo man's insistence on maintaining the delicate balance or cordial relationship between him and the spirit beings. [9]. Hence, the people seek help from the Dibia.

The Dibia, though there is no univocal definition of the word/concept of the Dibia in the English language or any other language for that matter, however, generally the Dibia is understood as the [Wise ones], people with special metaphysical insights, knowledge, and skills, which aid them to guard, guide and direct the ordinary people [Ofeke] on how to live successfully and achieve their dreams. The Dibia aids the people in how to outmanoeuvre the wicked spiritual forces within the Igbo universe. The anti-security activities of the bad spirits can only be checked by the pro-security activities of the good spirits, which only the Dibia have the skill to employ [8].

Here, Umeh [10] describes the call of the Dibia as originating from Chukwu [God] Himself. It is the Chukwu Okike Abiama that calls the Dibia into this divine vocation in sharing HIS personality. So to be a Dibia is to share in the unfathomable wisdom of Abiama. In the epic description of the call and vocation of the Dibia Umeh [10] enunciates:

...the Dibia – the one possessed of the Holy Spirit – Agwu-. Then the one will get into the right placement with ancestral spirit and other spirit and power that be. And one will be given the Ofo Dibia, the Ikenga Dibia, Abia Nkita, Afifia na Ogwu, Akpa Dibia and Akpa Agwia, other Dibia paraphernalia and equipped with essential faculties and perspectives- All these ever before one comes out of one's mother's womb into this plane of consciousness.

Against the backdrop of his call, the Dibia was set out as a special person with mystic insight to handle the perennial/odious challenges facing the community. The Dibia stands in the mystical highway between the seen and unseen world to control the spiritual traffic that unites God and mankind through the instrument of Ogwu [Charms]. Ogwu functions mainly to combat as well as neutralize the actions of bad spirits that tend to cause havoc within the human environment [8].

Research methodology

The researchers selected experts [those with special knowledge of medicine, charms, and traditional culture of Igbo People from across Igbo land]. Those selected are mainly from Anambra and Ebonyi states. 15 people were randomly selected and interviewed, however in no particular order [Table 1].

- The benchmarks for selecting participants include the following:

- The participant must have expert knowledge of Igbo traditional culture
- Must either be a Dibia or come from a Dibia family
- Must be an adult, who is initiated into adulthood rites
- Must not be below fifty [50] years of age
- Must be an Igbo person
- There is no gender consideration in selecting participants

In maintaining the rights and privacy of participants, the researchers designed a participant enlistment form, such as informed consent and snowball forms. The consent form guarantees the participant's right to protection and anonymity, while the snowballing effect permits the participant to refer or nominate other participants who are qualified to the researchers. The researchers had an eyewitness account of some of the Dibiacraft as demonstrated by some of the Dibias

The study adopts a qualitative method, using the Key Informant Interview [KII] guide. By this, the researchers conducted an in-depth face-to-face interview with the selected participants [11-13]. The questions were administered to the participants and answers were audiotaped throughout the discussion. See the interview tool in Appendix 1. The questions in the protocol apart from the initial introduction, which deals with the brief biodata of the participants, are Six [6] in number. The questions were structured to address the major themes of the research –a General Understanding of the person of the Dibia and the nature of Dibiacraft among the Igbo people. The nature and call of the Dibia, the training of the Dibia, the relevance of the Dibia in Igbo traditional society, why and how the Dibia became maligned and neglected in modern Igbo society, and the effect of the neglect on the Igbo social-political and religious life of the modern Igbo people. The questions were designed by the researchers following an interview guide with one or two questions addressing each major theme of the research. The protocol was verified and validated by the researchers, who are experts in their various fields related to the research.

The sequence of the interview followed a four-pattern

Appendix 1

Research Protocols

1. Who is a Dibia?
2. How is a Dibia called and trained?
3. What are the differences between Dibia and other Igbo religious actors like the priest, rainmakers, and bone setters?
4. What is the relevance of Dibia in Igbo traditional society?
5. How did the Dibia lose their relevance in the modern Igbo society?
6. What are the effects of this loss of relevance on the modern Igbo society?

Table 1: Oral Interview.

S/N	Name	Village	Age	Occupation	Date of Interview
1	Madam Onwuegbu	Igbo Ukwu Aguata LGA	84	Dibia	02/06/2019
2	Eze Dibia Isinze	Alor-Idemili North LGA	71	Dibia	10/06/2019
3	Ngborie Nweke	Uburu-Ohaozara LGA	86	Dibia	05/07/2019
4	Nweke Ukpa	Uburu-Ohaozara LGA	88	Dibia	05/07/2019
5	Chima Nweze	Okpoto-Isielu LGA	64	Herbalist	25/06/2019
6	Nwagwu Ichita	Okpoto-Isielu LGA	72	Black Smith	25/06/2019
7	Mgbada Ekweotu	Okpoto-Isielu LGA	69	Dibia	25/06/2019
8	Mbam Nweze	Okpoto-Isielu LGA	74	Wine tapper	25/06/2019
9	Rebecca Onwe	Okpoto-Isielu LGA	62	Traditional Birth Attendant	25/06/2019
10	Chita Ochu	Okpoto-Isielu LGA	56	Trader	25/06/2019
11	Ijita Oka	Okpoto-Isielu LGA	67	Dibia	25/02/2019
12	Nnakire Nwosu	Uburu-Ohaozara LGA	76	Dibia	28/02/2019
13	Madam Ochulor	Alor-Idemili North LGA	71	Herbalist	03/03/2019
14	Ugwuoke Idiba	Alor-Idemili North LGA	69	Priest	03/03/2019
15	Ezenwanyi Azaka	Alor-Idemili North LGA	78	Nwanyi nmiri	03/03/2019

topic discussion order. The first order focuses on the personality of the Dibia, the second focuses on the call and training of the Dibia, the third order focuses on the relevance of the Dibia in Traditional Igbo Society, and the fourth deals with the effect of neglecting the Dibia and all they stand in modern Igbo society. All the interviews were audiotaped and they varied in length of time. All interviews were conducted in English language and Igbo dialects as the occasion required.

Ethical consideration

The researchers obtained informed consent from the participants/respondents and ensured that the information collected would be used strictly for academic purposes. The researchers also explained the nature of the study to the participants in their dialect for those who do not understand the English language. They were also made to understand that they are free to withdraw at any point they wish. This ensures the autonomy of the participants.

Brief discourse on Igbo metaphysical origin and basic ontology

The question of Igbo metaphysical origin and migration experiences has elicited several scholarly debates. Therefore, there is a need to put down a line or two on the people's mythological journey without any intention to dabble into the debate. This researcher accepts without equivocation that the Igbo people had a mystical rather than social/biological origin. This mystical origin theory has been clearly documented by world-class scholars like Catherine Acholonu Olumba, a professor of literature and Igbo metaphysical anthropology, and Anenechukwu Umeh, a professor of architecture and a mystic/Dibia by calling. The duo scholars toeing a mystical line of thought have demonstrated in clear terms the veracity of Igbo mystical origin.

Umeh, who hails from the lineage of ancient Dibia maintains that the Igbo people have a general belief that their progenitors existed before the beginning of the material world. According to him, there is a time-tested myth that situates that the father of the Igbo nation dwelt with the creator [Chukwu-Okike-Abiama] in the state of pure light and endless eternity. With the water-tight relation between this unnamed Igbo progenitor and Chukwu-Okike-Abiama, the father of the Igbo people had the capacity to evolve himself in any form he wanted and the ability also to make himself both visible and invisible. Here, the Igbo patriarch existed as the first son in the company of his father, who is also known in the Igbo mystic circle as, 'The Creator, The Wisdom personified and Revealed. Umeh [10] explains on nature of this first world:

In the beginning, Chukwu-Okike-Abiama [God] lived with men, women, animal, birds, other spirits etc., in uwa mbu [first world]. It was a monolithic place of, inter alia, true knowledge, idyllic happiness, supreme wisdom, complete wealth, perfect mercy and great power. It was a place [state] of perpetual divine light and melodious music. All live together without compartmentalized structure, called building [Uno]. There existed one building –Obi-Chukwu-God's holy of holies, a building or sacred house.

Acholonu-Ulomba, who has done a massive ethnographic study on Igbo mystical origin and migration enunciates on the state of this first existence thus, '... there were enough in nature, history, archaeology, and metaphysics to tell me that the Igbo were there before the beginning of everything ...that their root is to be sought among the Gods themselves' [2003]. Scholars in the likes of Adiele Afigbo and Anselm Adodo, share in the idealities of the mystic origin of the Igbo people as they aver that the Igbo patriarch lives in close proximity with God. In this state of existence, there was neither night nor sleep but an endless day, where no physical sun shone. In this state of eternal bliss, there was

no labour nor toil, nor desire nor suffering, and no death was known. Mankind thus shared in the immortal state of the creator. In this state, mankind had no physical body but could assume any type of body at will as he shared divinity with Chukwu [14-17].

The monolithic state was sustained by Chukwu Himself. The secret of the power of Chukwu was hidden in His Obi [the sacred house]. The only law governing this pristine existence was that all creatures would keep the sacredness of the Obi by not coming near or peeping through its secrecy. Umeh [10] describes this period before the deluge in the following lines:

...From time to time Chukwu would enter His Obi and locks Himself. No one except Chukwu Himself knows what He was doing there and why He kept entry to the Obi strictly out of bound and what He did there in secret...

This state of pure existence has never been documented by any civilization. The closest to what we are doing presently can be found within Egyptian mythology [18]. However, some mystics and mythologists like Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung had a glimpse of this Igbo mythological discourse. However, some ancient signs and symbols representing this lost nature of man can be found in some autochthonous communities, like Hawaii, Aboriginal Australia, Ethiopia, Egypt, etc.

In some traditions, there is the myth that Chukwu-Okike had a wife, whose name was Mgbafor, though He had procreated with Mgbafor, Chukwu-Okike never allowed her entry into His Obi. This oral tradition that accredited Chukwu with having a wife, thereby attributing gender to the genderless being [reality] has been questioned in several quarters, hence the general assumption among the Igbo people is that Chukwu is genderless but the tradition of Mgbafor being a keeper of gate for Chukwu has been sustained as Adiele Afigbo notes that Mgbafor was simply a gatekeeper [19].

The eternal union between Chukwu-Okike and mankind was destroyed through the general conspiracy of all creatures when they instigated Mgbafor, who was the gatekeeper of the sacred Obi-Chukwu to peep into the Obi as to find the great mystery and the secrecy that Chukwu hid in the Obi. She did their bidding and the consequence thereof was that a flaming gold tongue of fire escaped from the Obi and broke the purest estate of monolithic existence into pieces. Mgbafor died in the process as her spiritual self was separated from her material one [10,20]. This incident that caused the catastrophic explosion of the monolithic world is known in the Igbo language as 'Odachi'. Odachi means great universal bang. It is as a result of Odachi that the entire mankind became physical and lost their spiritual nature.

The universal outgrowth of Odachi is the physical evolution of planets, stars, and satellites in order to inhabit mankind and other creatures that have become material. This is with the aim of preparing the entire creature, including mankind for a return to the original pristine existence. It is against this backdrop that the Igbo people developed their basic metaphysical ontology as follows.

• The created order/the universe

Without reference to the pure estate of existence, Igbo people accept that the present physical world is a purposeful creative act of Chukwu. The incident that resulted in the deluge was within the creative plan of Chukwu. Hence, the great universal explosion resulting in the separation of the spiritual bodies from the material was according to the creative purpose of Chukwu. Umeh [10] notes that 'Odaghini Okwalu' which translates as magnetic field, is a mystical balance that sustains the different and various planets, stars, and satellites in their axis and prevents them from colliding with each other. In the concept of Odaghini Okwalu, the Igbo people proffer an idea of eco-balance and harmony that nature needs to run smoothly [10,21]. The Odaghini Okwalu holds the present universe from nose-diving into the spiritual gorge, which the Igbo people call 'Ikele kwum mmuo'

The people in an attempt to explain this mysterious creative action of Chukwu linked the creation of the world with the creative process of 'Itu aku Olisa, which means the mystical throwing of Olisa's kernel. In most ancient traditions, there are seven kernels which represent a mystic sign of creation. However, the seven kernel game is the limit an ofeke [non initiate or non Dibia] can throw, while the Dibia has the chances of throwing up to sixty-four [64]. This is the complete circle and purest and deepest estate in creation and it is only Chukwu-Okike that has achieved this great circle. According to Umeh, sixty-four [64] corresponds to the total of sixty-four [64] root words of the sixteen mystical seeds of 'Afa' [divination]

The 'afa' game starts with the throwing of one – [ube mgbu game]. This is the symbolic rethinking of the first world [uwa mbu]. Some features of this world can still be found in some ancient mystical traditions/circles. One of these is the mystical greetings of 'Om'. In describing this ancient greeting, Achololu [16] notes, 'tracing the etymology of the word, 'om-phatos' through the Sanskrit, Greek and the Kwa family of language, we find that in the Sanskrit, the word, 'Om' is an intonation of the name of God, a sacred sound, a short form of a triple vowel sound 'a-u-m'. This sacred greeting found in some ancient mystic traditions like the Sirius and the cult of Issi and Osiris is a fallout of the inheritance from a pure estate of existence. Umeh enunciates that this belief is a reminder to the people

that at the end of seven/eight journey in this material world, humanity will return to its original estate of pure spirit in union with its creator.

• **Chukwu-Okike Abiama**

The Igbo traditional religion stands on quadrate pillars. These four [4] pillars, which form the complete metaphysical sphere of the people's ontology are Chukwu-Okike Abiama, the Ancestors, the Human beings, and the Non-Human beings [8]. Within this quadrilateral, it is only the humans and a certain number of the non-humans that dwell within the duality of materiality and spirituality, while Chukwu-Okike, the ancestor, and a greater number of the non-humans dwell entirely in the realms of spirituality. Chukwu occupies the most important and envious space within the Igbo metaphysical universe. However, people do not know His/Her name, gender, or nature. Hence, Chukwu-Okike Abiama is only a description based on personal relationships, interactions, and experiences of the people. Therefore, the Igbo people do not ascribe any gender to Chukwu, who they consider to be dwelling in mystical obscurity.

For the Traditional Igbo people, the only quality that Chukwu-Okike personified is 'Wisdom/Knowledge'. Hence, in Igbo ontology, no human attributes/qualities such as goodness, mercy, benevolence, love, justice, emotions, etc., are attributed to Chukwu. For the People, Chukwu does not interfere in human affairs [Nnoli 2017] [8]. However, Chukwu-Okike provides all human needs through his personal spirit in each individual. This personal spirit is known as 'Chi'. Chukwu-Okike manifests Him/Herself through His/her agents. These agents are part of the Ezumezu [the Godhead]. They are the Earth Goddess [Ala], The Heavens [Igwe] and The Sun [Anyanwu], and Thunder [Egbe Eligwe] [15].

Notably, Igbo people are monotheistic in their beliefs and practices. They believe in Chukwu-Okike, who alone is a combination of masculinity and femininity. Chukwu is considered as both Mother and Father of all creations. The Igbo people are also polytheists. Polytheism was developed as a consequence of Igbo belief in the ability of human beings to become Gods, through the process of self-mortification and or by attainment of wisdom [17]. Further, the traditional Igbo people incorporated animism into their mainstream religious belief. This is an outgrowth of their firm belief in the all-powerful God, who has the ability to inhere everything He/she created [22]. Hence, the Igbo demonstrate their honour to Chukwu-Okike by honouring the natural environment, which Chukwu Okike is conceived to have inherited.

Though the people do not have clear imagery of Chukwu-Okike, they have intoned that the earth Goddess is the

natural/material representation of Chukwu. According to Acholonu [17], the earth is the most potent ruler in the affairs of mankind. The earth Goddess ensures order and harmony among the people and the social system. The Earth goddess rewards virtue and punishes criminality. The Mother Earth [Ala/Ani] rules with Ofo na Ogu and uses kola nut as a mystical link/communion between humankind and the spiritual beings, which includes other deities, ancestors, unborn progenies, and sometimes Chukwu-Okike. Acholonu [17], gave an apt description of the powers of Ofo within Igbo mystical ontology in the following lines:

Ofo is the unfalling power of the spoken word rested on a sacred tree of the deuterium Senegalese family, the stick of which when ritually consecrated is imbued with the supreme power of the earth's life-force and becomes a potent unfailing instrument in maintaining order and justice within Igbo micro-macro environment. It works with kola nuts-oji, which is the symbol of divine communication with the Igbo and will ultimately unite all children of light under one umbrella –love.

Ofo also works with the kola nut-oji-. The latter is a symbol of perfect communion and unity between spiritual and physical inhabitants. Ofo has a companion called Ogu. Ogu signifies justice, right action, and equity. Ogu is therefore the force driving Ofo. Ogu represents impeachability before Chukwu-Okike and all created beings.

• **The Chi**

Next in the hierarchy of importance in Igbo metaphysics after Chukwu-Okike is the 'Chi'. Chi is the spark of Chukwu-Okike [Divine Spirit] in the life of all created beings. Chi is the metaphysical incarnation of Chukwu-Okike in all the lives of all creatures without exception. The Chi of the individual guards and influences individual destiny. Umeh [10] enunciates that everything in nature has Chi, which it shares with the universal Chi-ukwu. In his own words, 'The spiritual and timeless essence of all in the universe and beyond are respective 'Chi', which aggregates into Chukwu [the Great Chi] or part thereof'. This idea portends the fact that there are numerous tiny chi's in the great universal and massive 'Chi' [Chi-Ukwu] of the universe.

It is Chukwu that provides the creatures with the personal Chi as a companion to the individual creatures through the thick and thin of this earthly journey. Nnoli [8] avers, 'Chi enables the individual to navigate the vicissitudes of life and l. In more recent studies, scholars of Igbo anthropology equate 'Chi' with guardian angels, human conscience, and problem solvers. However, one may note that those scholars may have been influenced by modern religious thoughts. Thus, to designate Chi with the role of guidance violates the principle of cultural and metaphysical hermeneutics. This

is because Chi does not guide, hence, guidance is part of the functions of Igbo ancestors different from Chi.

The major role of Chi is bonding, ennobling, fellowshipping, and interacting with the individual acolyte it is attached to. However, the relationship is one of voluntary rather than compulsion [21]. This idea of the voluntary bonding of Chi gives credence to the Igbo adage, 'Onye kwe chi ya ekwe' [If one agrees his Chi concurs]. This voluntary relation between Chi and the individual creates an atmosphere of freedom for both the individual and his Chi so that the individual can withdraw from his/her Chi at any time the relationship may be considered a burden to the individual. However, since there cannot be a replacement for Chi, any individual who breaks faith with his/her personal chi must face the world alone without spiritual aid, influence, or support from his/her chi.

Here, the presence of Chi in the individual creation, especially, human beings is the demonstration of the non-intervention and non-interference of Chukwu-Okike in the life of its creations. Notably, Chukwu-Okike [Creator-God] does not aid any individual in achieving self-reliance and development. Thus, Chukwu-Okike expects Ndi Igbo to apply their brain to bring a solution to the various tasks of life. Hereto, success depends solely on the quality of time applied to work and the effect of hard work, enterprise, and adaptability to the natural/works environment [23]. The pre-colonial Igbo society does not pray for rain to aid them in their agricultural work, rather they affirm that rain will fall and often employ the services of rainmakers and magic to cause rain to fall. While other people wait and pray for rain to fall and sometimes make sacrifices to induce the gods to send rain, the Igbo people affirm that it will rain and often use their brains and Ikenga to cause rain to fall [8]. This non-interference is evidenced in a lack of worship for and prayer to Chukwu. For the Igbo people, Chukwu created mankind and gave them order and authority to rule the world and as such, meddle in the affairs of mankind and the world. Thus, in Igbo traditional religion, there is an obvious absence of both worship and prayers to Chukwu. However, the people deal and relate with the chi, which is the Chukwu within the individual soul. Anselm Adodo reiterates, '... it is through the role of chi that the Igbo person becomes the god of his/her environment and the creator of and shaper of his/her fate [2001].

The force that can enable one to achieve the God consciousness in him/her is only the force of Chi within the individual. It is the realization of their oneness with Chukwu that made the Igbo people not include worship or prayers to Chukwu or ancestors or any other being whatsoever as part of their spirituality. Then if the people do not pray to nor worship Chukwu nor the ancestors or any other deity,

the question most relevant at this point is by what means do they interact with metaphysical realities that pervade the material horizon? In answering this question, Nnoli [8] observes, 'The truth is in Igbo religion, there is affirmation not prayers, in a similar way in Buddhism there is meditation not prayers. Affirmation is different from prayers because it does not make request rather the individual affirms what he/she wants'. It is the firm belief in the positive action of Chi that made the people not to pray but to affirm. Notably, the spiritual force behind affirmation is human will joined with the activities of the Chi. The Igbo person after affirming what he wants and sealing the affirmed desire with the Chi, stands to effectuate the affirmed desire. Hence, affirmation aided by the agency of personal Chi invokes the spiritual powers within the person to act without in order to bring about the desire that is affirmed.

• The ancestral spirit

In the Igbo metaphysical universe, there exist other spirits which include the spirit of the departed progenitors [Ndi-Ichie]. The ancestors are believed to be indispensable in the existence, progress, and final activities of the Igbo person. They are the guardian spirits, as they provide security and aid in the survival of the individuals [8]. The ancestors live in close proximity with the human beings. The people interact with the spirit world through ancestral images and symbols [8]. Here, adults, those who have gone through the initiation rites of adulthood, carry the image and symbol of the ancestral figurines to all socio-cultural and political gatherings. The figurines of the ancestors represent the physical spirit of the ancestor in the midst of his/her people. Hence through the means of invocations, they are made to participate in all activities of the human society. At all important gatherings whether private or public, the figurines of ancestors are placed in conspicuous sitting positions like the human agnates and are recognized as being present as any other physical person in the occasion.

This action has serious spiritual implications for the people. The first implication is that it makes the ancestors to be part of all the decisions taken in the meeting. They share in the feasts, as kola nuts, wines, and food are first offered to them before human beings. This action symbolizes the holistic nature of the Igbo universe. The ancestors, though dead still considered themselves as part of their families on earth, hence they are involved in all affairs and activities of the families as well as the community. Nnoli [8] innovates that the ancestors are not happy whenever they are isolated, alienated from, and/or neglected in the family and/or community they once belonged. It is this activity of giving food, drinking, and romancing with dead patriarchs that is misconstrued in some quarters as ancestral worship. Here, Nnoli [8] clarifies this misunderstanding:

...the ancestral spirits do not need sacrifice in order to do their duties as part and parcel of the society. All they wish is not to be ignored or neglected. In any case such interaction between humans and spirit go on everyday within the household, unseen and unheard of by non-members of the household.

Though Igbo people do not worship nor sacrifice to their ancestors, however, a recent ethnological survey carried out in some communities in Anambra and Ebonyi States reveals that most Igbo geophysical landscapes are dotted with shrines of various sizes and shapes in honour of the ancestors. Here, it was discovered that shrines are simply built as mere visible means of interaction between human beings and the ancestral spirit. It is a meeting point between the seen and unseen world. In the shrine, the people have sacred communion with their ancestors. Against this backdrop, Okoro [21] notes that in Igbo metaphysics, the shrines tower from sacred to the material, covering the spiritual, moral, and political spheres of Igbo existence. For Okoro therefore, the shrine is the symbol of ontological harmony rather than a place of sacrifice or worship. The shrine from Okoro's postulation is not only a spiritual centre but also a centre for socio-political rendezvous. Hence, the shrine in Igbo metaphysics is a symbol of solidarity between humans and spirits in a harmonious relationship.

Questions have been raised on the slaughtering of different kinds of animals that go on in the shrines, especially during festive periods, and the blood of animals that often greet one in the shrine. Do these activities not represent worship and sacrifice to the ancestors? Here, most Igbo scholars of socio-anthropology and metaphysics are in agreement that the blood of the slaughtered animals that dot the shrine is not a sign of worship nor sacrifice to the ancestors or any other deity, rather it is just a food shared by both the living and the dead [ancestors] [24]. This assumption is based on the fact that the Igbo people generally believe that the spirits of the ancestors can and often desire to wine and dine with the living offspring. However, mere human beings do not understand and cannot understand the ways and means the spirits eat and drink, therefore, they misconstrue the spiritual relationship between the Igbo people and their ancestors as worship/sacrifice [8,15,21].

• **Ogwu [Charms]**

The Igbo people recognize the presence and activities of bad spirits within their ontological universe. The bad spirits are responsible for upsetting the social structure as well as human destinies. Ekeke [25] describes the relationship between human beings and the bad spirits in the following lines:

Another study of the activities of the spirits shows that they may cause terrible harm on men. This they do through causing madness or epilepsy and any other terrible sickness. In some cases, they may possess people to prophesy ... During the height of spiritual possession, the individual in effect loses his personality and acts in the content of the spirit possessing him/her...The spirit may drive the person away, making him to live in the forest.

Within the purview of these malevolent spirits, which upset the security apparatus of the people and society the place of Ogwu [charm] in Igbo ontology could be understood and interpreted. Ogwu is therefore the protective mechanism against malevolent forces that dot the material universe. Nnoli [8], notes that Ogwu is the instrument for meeting the challenges posed against the security and survival of the people.

Ogwu as a physical object is simply a symbol of a security pact between human beings and good spirits. It is prepared by the Dibia with regard to a particular situation at hand. Hence, there is ogwu for the preservation of life, fertility, and security, and some for curative ends. The main function of Ogwu is to neutralize the actions and activities of the malevolent spirits that cause havoc and death to the people [26]. Furthermore, belief in medicine is one of the philosophical underpinnings of the Igbo metaphysics. According to Umeh, the proper word for medicine is 'Ogwu'. The Igbo science of medicine springs from the Igbo theory of forces [27]. Ogugua further avers that "for the Igbo people, especially the 'Dibia', they know that there are diseases that have physical causes and others that have non-physical causes. This is why Igbo medicine is administered for particular purposes and individual cases and not prepared for and kept for treatment of similar cases. The essence of ogwu, whether for healing or for warding off the evil spirit is to give mankind the needed peace and stability in the spiritio-material world.

Ritual actors in the Igbo ontological Universe

The Igbo world/universe oscillates within two worlds apart, the spiritual and the material. The world of the spirit and the world of the humans. Within the Igbo universe, there are no clear demarcations between the two worlds. However, the spiritual world superintends and controls the material world. This gave vent for the place and offices of ritual actors, whose duty is to act via media/intermediary between the spiritual and material world in order to maintain an ontological balance that nature needed to function optimally. Some of these indispensable ritual actors apart from the Dibia are Rainmakers, Traditional bonesetters, and Priests

• Rainmakers

Rainmakers are indispensable ritual actors/personae within the Igbo metaphysical economy, while rainmaking is defined as a science of weather modifications/ritual that attempts to invoke rain [28]. The term also refers to those traditional practices, rites, rituals, thoughts, and capabilities of controlling the weather. The importance of the rainmaker and the act of rainmaking is predicated on the fact that most African communities are agrarian communities, that depend on rain to grow their crops and maintain their livelihood. Thus, rainmakers' task is to use both herbal and mystic knowledge not only to induce sufficient rainfall throughout the year but also to ensure that there will be no flooding and hailstone that will destroy human life and property [29].

On the nature of rainmaking in Africa, especially among the Igbo people, Nche [30] notes that the enterprise of rainmaking is both individual and community-based. On the one hand, there are some individuals, who are bestowed with the magical powers of inducing rain. On the other hand, rainmaking activity is a community enterprise. Haruna [31] working among the Guruntun and Bubbare communities of Bauchi State aver that the act of rainmaking is hinged on an individual but went further to qualify the individual as a priest. He describes the priest/rainmaker in the following lines, 'The Priest [also the high priest], who makes the rain comes from one of the clans called Gyual from Tora. He is called Vurlimbo in the language – 'the man who does not tell lie' Haruna further reiterates that the rainmaker/priest also called a spiritual leader must be an old man, who is respected by the community and one who has a great deal of knowledge about climatic conditions of the area. The priest/rainmaker in inducing rain makes two [2] types of prayers to bring about rain. The choice of prayer is dependent on the severity of the drought. In a situation of slight drought, it is only the affected tribe will approach the rainmaker/priest, who takes them to the baobab tree, where he offers prayers for them. When the drought is severe, affecting the entire community, the elders approach the priest/rainmaker, who takes them to the mountain and offers his prayers at the top of a particularly flat rock [31].

In another development, Ombati [28] maintains that the prerogative of making/inducing rain in an off-season resides with God alone. Nonetheless, he notches that God does not just send rain arbitrarily, thus God grants responsible men/women the permission to induce rain even in an off-season. Here, rainmakers are the people bestowed with powers to lead the community [28]. To this scholar, the act of rainmaking resides with a select people or group of people and not individuals. For him, these are those considered pure in heart, mind, and body and are free from worldly sins [28,32].

In many Igbo communities the act of rainmaking resides with a group, a family, and perhaps clans, yet some individuals, lay people may still be bestowed with mystic powers to make rain. They may not be cultic personalities but ordinary individuals, who may be professionals in other fields of life but either by family inheritance or divine calling are bequeathed with mystic powers for rainmaking. Here, we observe that rainmaking powers reside with the community but may still be operated by select individuals, who may be priests or lay people.

• Bone setters

Traditional bone setters are lay practitioners of bone manipulation [33]. The traditional bone-setting enterprise dates to a dateless antiquity when human beings began hunting and invariably began to suffer fracture [33,34]. It therefore suffices that traditional bone setting predates the introduction of allopathic medicine in African communities. Here, Opoko, Okpoko, Okezie, and Sebs-Okolo [35] subdivided traditional medicine, in Africa, into seven nexuses namely, herbal medicine, traditional birth attendance, traditional surgery, traditional medicinal ingredient marketing, traditional psychiatric, and traditional therapeutic occultism. The traditional bone setting is classified under traditional surgery.

Traditional bone setters or in modern terms physiotherapists are those, who specialize in the physical manipulation of parts of the human body. World Health Organization [WHO] [36] therefore describes traditional bone setting as the health practices, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs incorporating plants, animal, and mineral-based medicine. It is spiritual therapies, manual techniques, and exercises applied singularly or in combination to diagnose and treat fractures in the human body. Undoubtedly, traditional bone setters may not be exposed to former education. They are ordinary people, who the God[s] had bestowed with special mystic insight. In the words of Okpoko, et al. [35] 'the traditional bone setters claim that the God[s] chose whom they wish to use for healing'.

Besides being called by God[s] some traditional bone setters inherit their knowledge from their progenitors, who had passed the knowledge, skill, and experience to them through oral tradition and practice. So they acquired the skill as part of their ancestral heritage [35]. Therefore, in most cases, bone setting/healing enterprises are given to some families as their entitlement, and as such, these families keep the expertise as their family secret and business. This position has been collaborated in the works of Ali, Egwu, Ono, and Ewa [37] when they write, 'The study reveals that traditional bone setting is handed down from ancestors' This agrees with Dada, Yinusa, and Giwa [38] that the training is

passed from one generation to another through skills and experiences acquired as part of the ancestral heritage.

However, there is also the idea of mystic origin. Hence Ali et al. [37] note that some bone setters they interviewed testify that although they inherited the art at some point in their initiation they continued to be taught and guided through dreams by either the family ancestors or the guarding spirit of the family. In some cases, the practitioner notices that he/she is being controlled by an unseen force, who then reveals the skill, medicine, and method to the agnate human bone setter. However, in spite of all varying manifestations of spirit contacts, there is the general belief that bone-setting enterprise is a family and clan business bequeathed to the practitioner through the ancestors.

• **Priest**

The priests are regarded as intermediaries between other human beings and the specific deities they represent. For Onwurah [39] whenever one thinks of a traditional priest among the people, one thinks of a witch doctor, a medicine man, and/or a juju priest. The traditional priest for Onwurah fulfills the requirements of these appellations. The Igbo traditional priest may be designated a witch doctor, which means that he/she hunts out witches and cures those who have been bewitched. Against this backdrop, the priest is considered a Dibia. This is because he/she has become an ally to the people against the machinations of the witches and wizards [20]. Onwurah notes that Meek is correct not just because Dibia is always a witch doctor but because a witch doctor is always a Dibia /diviner. As for being a medicine man, who is also a herbalist with a major concern for ogwu, portion/medicine for healing the sick and preparing magical remedies, the priest, who also doubles as a Dibia fits perfectly into the office. It is on this note that Anedo [4] notches that Diviner also known as Dibia afa was generally regarded as a priest by the people. In this regard, some causal observers consider priests as Dibias/diviners. However, some priests are diviners like the Dibias but not all diviners are priests [41]. Owing to the prominent place the priest occupies in the Igbo metaphysical universe, the people have divided the office into two [2] realms. These are the family priests and the priests of various deities.

• **The family priest**

The decentralization of the organizational structure of the Igbo has given birth to the lineage system being a prominent determinant factor in the socio-political and religious life of the people. This system bequeaths the Okpara/Okpala [First Son] with enormous responsibilities of holding the family 'ofo'. Therefore, the Okpara ministers in the family shrine as the prime priest. This does not warrant a special call by any deity nor does it require any special apprenticeship. The

first son of each family therefore becomes a priest because of his position as okpara. His training comes by observing the father and most often participating/assisting his father in performing family rituals. Onwurah captures the scenario vividly in the following lines:

The Okpala, first son ...is the bearer of 'ofo'. Earlier he had helped his father to run the family socially, economically and religiously. He had occupied the position of officiating priest even during his father's life time...so in the absence or death of his father, the responsibility of offering family sacrifice falls on him without any dispute whatsoever.

The Okpara in Igbo land is laden with a lot of socio-political duties, however, his ritual duties assume priority due mainly to his lineal proximity to the dead [ancestors] [Ikenga-Metu 1987].

• **The priest of divinities**

The second realm of priesthood in Igbo society includes all priests who serve particular deities within the community. This priest officiates in the community/village 'Alusi' or 'Mmuo' [Shrine]. This type of priest is addressed as Eze-Mmuo [King of the deity/spirit]. The priest knows, hears, and speaks with the deity. The priest therefore becomes the physical representation or embodiment of the deity he is serving. Eze-mmuo type of priests are not Dibia

Notably, the Igbo geophysical landscape is dotted with many shrines, representing several deities, thus there are as many of such priests –Eze-mmuo- as there are many shrines/deities within a community. Therefore, if a devotee wants to make a sacrifice to the deity the devotee simply goes to the priest. But in some wary situations that bring confusion to a devotee/a group of devotees and/or the entire community on the source of the quagmire woe then the people will of necessity consult the Dibia-diviner, who through the third-eye will divine the cause, the particular spirit responsible for the calamity, the appropriate propitiation and which deity to receive the sacrifice.

Onwurah [39] hereto notes that Eze-mmuo does not offer sacrifice to appease evil/bad spirits, except where the Eze-mmuo doubles as a Dibia. The major duty of Eze-mmuo –a priest among the Igbo people is to mediate to his divinity on behalf of anybody who comes to him to make an offering or sacrifice or to seek protection or vengeance for a particular deity. In most cases, the person comes on his/her own but in some other cases, the person is directed by a Dibia. The priest [Eze-mmuo] has also the responsibility to aid the people in fixing the annual feast of the community deity and other major community events, like the new yam festival and the beginning of the farming season. Eze-mmuo is the custodian of the tradition and religion of the people.

He preserves religious treasures and knowledge. He takes care of his shrine and keeps the emblems, images, and symbols with utmost reverence.

• The Dibia in perspective

Earlier scholars in an attempt to define the word, 'Dibia' have fallen into certain epistemological/ ideological misdemeanours. This has resulted in their wrongly equating the Igbo concept of Dibia with the Western category as 'divine healer', 'witch doctor' 'herbalist' etc. However, recent research has shown that English or any other word equivalent is inadequate to explain the Igbo word, 'Dibia'. [9]. Therefore, the real meaning of, 'Dibia' must be sought within the Igbo literary discourse. Umeh [9] made a startling attempt in this direction as he writes, 'The terminology, 'Dibia' in demotic Igbo language is made up of two words, Di and Abia. Di means husband, adept, or master. Abia means knowledge and wisdom'.

By this explanation, Umeh links the Dibia ideality with the Igbo concept of the creator [Chukwu-Okike Abiama]. For Umeh, Abiama denotes the knowledge and/or wisdom that reveals Himself. Thus, Dibia must be considered within the linguistic ambit of holistic knowledge expertise. In an interview with Madam Onwuegbuna Maduka, from Igbo Ukwu, who belonged to the purest race of the Dibia lineage gave an insightful description of the 'Dibia' as "Ikuku". This is literally interpreted as wind or air. For her, Dibia is like the air that you only have feelings of without knowing the source, mission, and end. To this another notable Dibia, Eze Dibia Isinze from Alor in Idemili LGA, adds that Dibia is like a wind/air and as such no power on earth can defy its potency. Madam Maduka avers that Dibia symbolizes the ancestral spirit, whose real identity is unknown to any human. Ekwealor [42] notes that to the ordinary Igbo person, the Dibia lives in two worlds [the spiritual as well as the human worlds]. He further describes the Dibia as wise, intelligent, and one who has solutions to all human problems. Generally, Igbo people, regard Dibia as that spirit that masquerades in human apparitions. Umeh [10] notes that a faint idea of the meaning of Dibia is only possible through various rigorous searches into Igbo metaphysics. However, names and descriptions given to the Dibia can be an aid vide in catching a glimpse of the meaning.

For Umeh [1981], Dibia is Onu muo [The voice of the Spirits –God[s]]. By this definition, he links the Dibia with his/her activities to the Agwu spirit. Umeh maintains that the Agwu spirit is likened to the Biblical Holy Spirit. In this connection, he enunciates that the calling of the Dibia comes only from Chukwu through the agency of Agwu [Holy Spirit]. This suffices that Chukwu shares His/her spirit with the Dibia through Agwu [[9]. The Dibia is often taken full possession of by the Agwu spirit and as such

the Dibia becomes only a spokesperson of the God[s]. For Umeh [10] the relationship between the Dibia and Agwu can be summarized thus, '...The Dibia speaks the voice of Agwu, thinks the thought of Agwu, and performs the skills, miracles and feats of Agwu. He hears with the divine ears of Agwu'. Here, Anedo [4] enunciates that it is the Agwu spirit that controls the Dibia to the extent that the Dibia's personality is immersed and lost in the Agwu spirit. Iroegbu [43] describes Agwu as the great ally of the Dibia, who determines the personality and destiny of the Dibia.

Overtly, the Dibia shares the creative essence of Chukwu-Okike-Abiama, which is technically called 'Biame'. This translates as 'come and perform' or come and act' [10]. Within this close metaphysical relationship between the Abiama and the Dibia. The later obtains free entrée to what the Igbo people call the mystical circle of 'Edumee me Chukwu'. Edumee me Chukwu bequeaths the Dibia the executive potency of Chukwu Himself. The Dibia experiences the Edumeeme Chukwu through the means of mystical incantations aided by the sacred spirit of Agwu. It is within and in constant and conscientious abode in the Edumee me circle that the Dibia becomes a potent and viable mouth piece of God. Therefore, to remain within the Edumee me circle, the Dibia must always purify Him/herself through strict moral rectitude and ritual ceremony.

The Igbo people rate or classify Dibia into two reins- The Nne Dibia and Nwa Dibia. The classification is based on the laborious and tasking training that a particular Dibia must undergo to qualify as a Dibia. The Nwa Dibia, on the other hand, refers to a small [baby] Dibia. According to Umeh, Nwa Dibia is regarded as 'Ofeke' in the circle of the Dibia. Ofeke denotes non-Dibia, who through laborious and time-consuming studies and ritual processes of Isata ogwu learns herbs and some good ogwu from the Nne Dibia. They may be technically regarded as apprentices, who after learning herbs and acquiring some ogwu may proceed to practice the Dibia craft. Nwa Dibia though in practice still has certain limitations as some forces may not obey him/her. However, Nwa-Dibia, who is desirous of making notable marks as a Dibia may take advance training. This training will enable him to acquire more spiritual powers/potency. In an interview with Mgborie Nweke, a renowned Dibia from Uburu in Oha-ozara Local government, enunciates that any curious Nwa-Dibia may through rogued training, discipline, and demanding ritual process of 'Ida Ogwu' [literally translates falling into ogwu or immersed in Ogwu] acquire more spiritual powers.

On the other hand, the Nne Dibia is called by Chukwu Okike Abiama and possessed by His sacred spirit- The Agwu-. Thus, the Igbo people remark when they see Nne Dibia - 'Dibia di n'alu' [Dibia is in the body]. This axiom implicates

the fact that the Dibia is known by His/her spiritual and physical makeup. The Nne Dibia is considered as born with abilities and faculties such as:

- Ifu Uzo; seeing beyond the ordinary. The Dibia by this ability sees and interacts with God [s], forces of nature, and all ancestral spirits.
- Aka Ile: potent and curative hands. Here, the Dibia creates ogwu and offers healing and solution to the myriad problems besetting the people.
- Onu Atu: powerful mouth. This is the divine mouth of the ancient Igbo creator-known as Atu. [Atu is known as Atum, which means 'powerful mouth' in ancient Egypt]

Through these innate spiritual qualities, the Dibia becomes what the Igbo call, 'Obala Otule' which literally translates as the mouthpiece of the God of light.

In the class of Nne Dibia, one could discover some recognized specialities. Basden [44] made this observation, though he mistakenly regarded it as classifications. Recent research therefore reveals that rather than being classification, it is specialization and these are:

- Dibia Afa
- Dibia Ogwu
- Dibia Aja
- Onye Igbu Aja
- Ora nmili or mmili

Following these areas of specialities, some researchers erroneously describe the Nne Dibia with the following appellations:

- Diviner
- Priest-performer of sacrifice
- Traditional healer-practitioner of medicine.

In these categorizations, some people include rainmakers as belonging to the Dibia family [44] However, Basden notes that there is no straightjacket categorization of the Dibia family into these groups, hence, he observes that some Dibia could double or even combine these offices. This assumption was confirmed by Nweke Ukpua, a notable Nne Dibia from Uburu-Oha-ozara in an oral interview on the 5th of June, 2019. The octogenarian notes that some Dibia combine the art of seeing and talking with the God [s], ancestors, and other deities of the land with healing powers. These set of Dibia, the lady Dibia avers can also practice medicine and

produce ogwu- curative drugs/substances and exorcise evil spirits. They have the ability to prepare protective ogwu for people and perform sacrifices to appease the spirits/God[s] when occasion demands.

Perhaps, it might be the foregoing ideation that made Onwuejeogwu [45] think that the Igbo Dibia could be classified as a general practitioner. This is in the sense that they operate in all the Dibia offices, while others are specialists, who only operate in one of the Dibia offices. However, what seems to be the classification or categorization of the Dibia family among the Igbo people is not a functional categorization but a classification based on the sacred Spirit-Agwu that possessed a particular Dibia. Here, Umeh [10] notes that there are Two [2] types of Agwu that exist in Igbo Metaphysics. These are:

1. Nne Agwu [Mother Agwu]
2. Ebo Agwu [Lineage Agwu]

Madam Nweke Ukpua confirms the existence of these two nature Agwu. She, however, retorts that it is very rare today to find any Dibia possessed by Nne Agwu. As for Umeh [46] the rarity in the Dibia family possessed by Nne Agwu is not only evident but also a general concern among Igbo metaphysicians. In his own words:

...the Nne Agwu Dibia is very rare to come by throughout Igbo land. In Nnobi for instance, in recent times, one hears of Seven Ebo Agwu [Ebo Agwu Dibia Assa] ... But from time immemorial there is one Nne Agwu [Ofu Nne Agwu].

In Okpoto, a community in Ishielu Local Government of Ebonyi state, where part of the ethnographic study of this work was done, there is no idea of Nne Agwu Dibia. This community is a reputed Dibia lineage in the Northern Igbo region yet Nne Agwu Dibia is not found there in recent times.

The Nne Agwu by description is 'Agwu Okponku' [The generic Agwu] Hence, the Nne Agwu ideality subsumes all other Agwu segments like Agwu Dibia, Agwu mmili, and Abia Nkita [10]. This suffices that all other Agwu manifestations are simply the offspring of the Nne Agwu. Therefore, any Dibia possessed by the Nne Agwu is known and revered as Ezumezu Dibia [Holistic Dibia]. Such a Dibia becomes the true image and definition of Dibia in Igbo culture.

On the first hand, any Dibia possessed by the Ebo-Agwu can only practice his/her Dibia office within the limited endowment of the lineage Agwu. The Dibia may occupy singular or multiple offices as ascribed to the Dibia by the Ebo-Agwu. On the other hand, the Dibia possessed by the Nne Agwu renders a holistic service to the people. Such a Dibia is called 'Nwa Anwu' [Child of light]. By this, the Dibia is known and regarded as the mouth piece of God [s] [47].

God's representative on this conscious plane. The Ebo-Agwu Dibias are the individualized role players for the God of light on earth [10]. The Nne Agwu Dibia is the archetypal Dibia that comes next to God, while the Ebo Agwu Dibia comes next after God for the specific roles allocated to the Dibia by the Agwu of the Lineage.

The Dibia in Igbo socio-political and metaphysical economy: An interrogation

For the Igbo people, life is defined within mysterious and ambivalent categories. Therefore, the people make constant efforts to preserve themselves from total annihilation by human and spiritual urchins [48]. Thus, whenever one's life seems threatened by disease and other misfortunes, one takes various steps to hunt and address the source of the problem [49]. The people believe that the cause of ill-health could be natural and/or spiritual, hence they look beyond the physical to their spiritual sources [49]. They accept that it is the unseen marauding forces that blotch the metaphysical universe and upset the socio-economic and metaphysical balance. In consequence, brings about poor health and a socio-political quagmire within the Igbo cosmic universe. This gives the background to the prominent place and roles the Dibia occupies in Igbo metaphysics Nze [50].

The Dibia employs a variety of techniques to discern the spiritual cause of a particular malaise. The cause of misfortune may be traced to a violation of taboos, moral failure, offense against a spirit, or a bad personal fate (chi). Madu [51], opines that sickness is an indication of a deviation from the natural and cosmic harmony and to restore this harmony (health/life), the intricate forces that operate in a web-like fashion must be discerned and normalized [50]. Here, any disharmony within the Igbo traditional social system is a signification of a disjunction of relation between the material and spiritual worlds. The socio-spiritual disharmony often manifests itself through physical catastrophes like diseases, epidemics, earthquakes, drought, and poor agricultural yields [53]. Therefore, when misfortune strikes any Igbo village, the first person to be consulted is the afa-diviner [Dibia Afa]. The diviner will tell which particular spirit has brought the calamity, possibly tell the motives, and also list the types and nature of propitiation to be done so as to restore the strained relationship [53].

The Igbo universe is encased in metaphysical mêlée and riddles, hence the people are always enthused to finding out about their future or destiny [54]. The periscope into the metaphysical universe is the origin of the act and practice of divination among the people. For Austin [53], divination is used for two overlapping purposes in Igbo traditional society:

- To determine that which cannot be ascertained through empirical means and

- To choose the correct course of action among several probable alternatives.

Overtly, the diviner in attempting to discern the will of the God[s] gains control over future events and perhaps plans around them [55,56]. It is accepted by the people that through divination all secret events would be easily revealed through the extraordinary knowledge of the Dibia [54]. Summarizing some of the socio-economic roles of the 'Dibia, Umeh [54] enunciates:

The diviner's role in the society extended beyond religious reasons. Socially, on allegation of theft, the diviner was invited to detect the culprit. In a choice of trade, work, wife or husband, the diviner played an important role. The role of the diviner extended to the agricultural spheres of life as well.

The Igbo people engage the services of a Dibia to avoid crises in their economic, religious, and socio-political life. Remarkably, divination was the exclusive reserve of Dibia, who also doubles as a seer, diviner, healer, and some cases priest when he/she performs sacrifice to appease the God[s]. The Dibia through divination becomes a veritable instrument in social organization, crisis management, and cultural preservation.

Our study reveals that the Dibia is the maker of Ogwu. Ogwu denotes the entire activities carried out and natural products administered to bring about holistic healing. All that is employed to secure one's health and protection, to destroy one's enemies, to bring about one's physical, psychological, or spiritual healing is generally grouped under traditional medicine, which the Igbo people call Ogwu [49]. The Igbo traditional medicine is based on the principles of symbolism, causality, relationship, belongingness, participation, manipulation, and harmony. It is from this myriad of principles that the "logic" surrounding Igbo traditional medicine and the role of the Dibia in harnessing and administering healing could be discovered. The Dibia do not only consider their medical practice as a vocation from God but claim to have been under the tutelage of some powerful deities. Hence, to a typical Igbo Dibia, ogwu is impotent and its efficacy depends directly on dynamic divine intervention [6,57]. Thus one of the major roles of Dibia is the creation, procurement, preparation, and administering of ogwu [10].

The Dibia performs multifarious activities within the Igbo metaphysics. Being the mouth piece of the God [s], the Dibia, therefore occupies a vantage position in the socio-political, economic, and spiritual life of the people. The Dibia prepares ogwu and also performs various sacrifices either to atone for the offences of the people or to appease God [s]. The relevance of the Dibia is defined in his/

her ability to maintain the ontological balance in nature through sacrifice- Ichu Aja/Agba Aja. Overly, in ichu/igba Aja, the Dibia becomes an intermediary between the seen and unseen world of realities [58]. Note that ichu/igba Aja is undertaken by one for oneself on the advice of the Dibia and/or in dreams through a benevolent spirit or ancestor [10]. From either source, it is still the Dibia that performs the sacrifice for the clientele.

The ontology of the Igbo people makes ichu/igba aja quite fundamental in Igbo traditional belief and practice. Aja defines the state of human health, prosperity, procreation, and security. The centrality of Aja and the role of the Dibia in it is expressed in the following maxim: 'Ike adighi ogbenye ichu aja okwelu chi ya onwu' this literally means 'when the poor lack the potency to do sacrifice he/she resigns to fate' The implication of the maxim is that as long as one is willing and able to perform sacrifice, all things being equal, one would achieve all one's desire in life, which may include but not limited to good health, long life, prosperity, security, and procreation. Thus, as long as one is able to perform Aja, one's life is guaranteed [59]. This ideation is expressed clearly in the Igbo maxim, 'Chi naalu aja odi ka Dibia ana agwoka' [if one's chi accepts one's sacrifice the outcome would be ascribed to the Dibia's great potency and skill]. While Aja can strengthen one who performs it, it can on the reverse weaken one's opponent [s]. This assumption informs the Igbo idiom, 'Achugbuo dike na aja ewere mgburu tigbu ya' [The strong person that is weakened by sacrifice is shamefully defeated in a battle]. Aja when properly performed by an experienced Dibia programs one's mind for success as it banishes the fear of the unknown and engenders optimism for victory in any battle of life. Sacrifice engenders creative thinking and releases potent words.

However, the place of the Dibia has been maligned and relegated in the modern socio-economic, political, and religious arrangement of the modern Igbo society, hence the crisis of relevance experienced in all spheres of Igbo life and development. The maligning of the Igbo Dibia, resulting in a crisis of confidence, corruption, political instability, and religious slavery, is an outgrowth of many factors. This ranges from overriding and defaming the Igbo cultural heritage both Christianity, colonialism, and modern technology. Ugwu and Ugweye [60] enunciate this vitiation on all that is Africa and her religion and culture in the following lines:

It is a point of fact to note that early Europeans, anthropologists, ethnologists and historians have cast aspersions and poured sarcasms on the nature of African Traditional religion. The religion of Africans has been mishandled by many misinterpretations of these foreign investigator leading to misconception.

The colonial onslaught of total enslavement of Africans [the Igbo people inclusive] through their agents was aimed

at the total destruction of every value, idea, and culture that was indigenous to the people. Thus with superior military technology Africa became a conquered territory and a subdued people. Christian missionaries under the cover and protection of the colonial overlords unleashed the final blow to African intellectual and value heritage by condemning all that are African as they consign them to the realm of Satanism.

The institution of the Igbo Dibia was a great missionary target of all European missions [61]. Anedo [4] reiterated the negative outcome of the activities of both colonialism and Christianity in Igboland and on the people, 'The Igbo people faced several challenges of acceptability due mainly to the plethora of ideas and belief system engendered by the social dynamics in the contemporary Igbo society' [62]. This has resulted in an expression of doubts about whether divination actually works. The querying of divination and by extension the Dibia as an embodiment of the Igbo metaphysical world brought the Dibia and all it stood for to the court room of standard scientific methodological procedure and epistemological verification by the western standard. This requires that all that the Dibia do be subjected to empirical verifications and verifiability.

This has resulted not only in a personality split of the contemporary Igbo person but also in the total vitiation of the Igbo moral values that had been an aid vide in notching the Igbo traditional society together. This has given birth to corruption, kidnapping, and the violation of the sacredness of life, resulting in socio-political and economic instability and personality crises that have become the undoing of the Contemporary Igbo society. In the traditional Igbo society, the God[s] guards the community and her property through the Dibia, who employs divination as a tool to unveil every secret there were no security challenges because the God [s] was at the centre of the peoples' life and activities. Therefore, the a need to bring back the Igbo traditional/metaphysical heritage to the core of Igbo life if the crisis of the present must be resolved in the near future.

By means of bringing this Dibia institution back to the public life of the Igbo people a new mind reorientation should be adopted [63]. Here, African traditional values and institutions should be incorporated into the nursery and primary school curriculum, perhaps alongside Christianity and Islam. Public lectures and spiritual demonstrations of Dibia craft should be promoted. Dibias should be encouraged to practice their craft in public thereby demystifying the seeming secrecy that is bedevilling the Dibiacraft. The Dibai art of healing should be incorporated into the training of medical officers in Nigeria Universities, especially the Universities within the South Eastern States as in some other parts of the world like China, India, etc. The Dibia should be encouraged to form associations for close monitoring of their activities by both themselves and the Government.

Findings

In carrying out this work, the researchers made the following startling discovery about Igbo metaphysical ontology and the pace of the Dibia in Igbo metaphysical economy thus:

- The Igbo world oscillates between the spiritual and the physical or rather is an amalgam of the spiritual and material world. However, the spiritual world superintends the material world
- The Dibia in Igbo traditional society stands as the epicentre of the Igbo metaphysical world. The Dibia is the mediator and/or unifier of these worlds apart.
- The Dibia is the mouthpiece of God. [onu atu] among the people. The Dibia are regarded as the embodiment of wisdom, which they share with Chukwu Abiama, who is wisdom personified.
- Though, there are other ritual actors among the Igbo people, who are aid vide to midwifing ontological harmony in Igbo society-these are the priests, the bonesetters, the rainmakers, etc., however, the Dibia can not be replaced by these ritual actors. Thus the Dibia is an indispensable personae in the Igbo metaphysical economy.
- The Dibia create preservative, protective, and healing medicines [Ogwu] for the good and stability of the society.
- However, with the arrival of western civilization, Christianity, and modern/advanced technology, the Igbo native science and knowledge became quarantined into metaphysical obscurity. Therefore, the Dibia and all they stood for lost their relevance and prominent place in Igbo modern society. The result became a personality crisis, lost of traditional values, corruption, socio-political and economic instability, and security crisis that have become the daily experience of modern society.

Conclusion

The Dibia in Igbo metaphysics oscillates between the material and spiritual horizon of the Igbo universe. The Dibia occupies a vantage position in the social/ontological structure of the Peoples' existence. The Dibia is considered partially human and partially spirit as he/she operates freely within these duo worlds of the Igbo universe. They are agents of, spokespeople to God[s] and visible presence of God [s] among the people. They not only maintain peace and a peaceable society but also maintain ontological harmony between the visible and the invisible world of the people. By this, they fight against the forces of nature that inhibit human progress, security, and prosperity. The Dibia through

the agency of Ogwu offers curative services to the people thereby sustaining their healing and health needs. The Dibia is a mystic mediator between the human world and the spirit world and acts as a healer, scribe, teacher, diviner, and advisor of the people in a community. Therefore, the Dibia is an indispensable ritual actor in the Igbo metaphysical economy and as such should not be neglected. Therefore, the contemporary Igbo society needs to explore the services of the Dibia for effective and sustainable development. This is in the realization that many people still rely on divination to make decisions in critical situations in their private and public lives, in spite of the overwhelming influence/manifestations of science and technology.

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