



BELIEF IN CHUKWU, DIVINITIES AND SPIRITS: THE ANCHOR OF IGBO CONTRIBUTIONS TO NIGERIAN NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The Igbo is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They have had chequered socio-political, economic, technological and cultural histories in Nigeria since 1960. Their perceived vagaries of fortunes, rooted in the defeat they suffered during the Nigeria-Biafra war and its aftermath, have not deterred them from contributing significantly to national integration and development efforts in Nigeria. These sustained contributions are anchored on their belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits, who are believed to have the power to reward good deeds and punish injustice, oppression, marginalization and all forms of bad deeds. The paper identifies conflict with Christian doctrines; lack of proper and digital documentation; possible emergence of syncretistic practices; lack of interest in religious activities among the youths and influence of globalization, among the challenges facing Igbo belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits. The paper recommends, among others, the need for Christians to appreciate Igbo traditional values that are not obnoxious and use them along their Christian doctrines and promotion of Igbo traditional religious and cultural heritage by the Igbo at home and in the diaspora through social media, as the way forward. The paper concludes by stressing that whatever that will be done to strengthen Igbo belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits should be highly encouraged in order to sustain their contributions to Nigerian national integration and development striving.

Key words: Beliefs in Chukwu, divinities, Igbo, national integration, Nigeria, development .

Introduction

The Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria are highly religious, sociable, peace-loving, accommodating and thoughtful in nature, and are endowed with a rich cultural heritage. They are known for a long history of belief in Chukwu or Chineke (the Great God or God the Creator), divinities and spirits, believed to be agents of Chukwu or Chineke, that assist him in the theocratic governance of the universe. Kalu (2002), in corroborating the above, remarks that belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits constitutes a vital element of Igbo world view. The above world view shapes the whole fulcrum of Igbo life as it wields enormous influence on their general philosophy of life, mentality, emotional state, interests, choice of actions, personal and inter-group interactions. Igbo traditional religion is closely bound up with their traditional way of life, which determines the contour of their socio-cultural identity in a pluralistic Nigerian society. Like their counterparts in other parts of Africa, the Igbo, according to Onwuliri (2011), tailored together their great ideas about moral life, cultural achievements, social organisations and institutions, political systems and the building of their past

civilisations under the influence of their traditional religion. To the Igbo, the way of Chukwu, divinities and spirits is the way of peace, love and unity. *Uzo Chukwu n' ndi mmuq bu uzo udo, ihunanya n'idi n'otu*".

Thus, identification with Chukwu, divinities and spirits means identification with peace, love and unity. As observed by Onunwa (2005), one outstanding feature of the Igbo traditional religion is that it is an important factor of unity and an agent of peace and co-existence, which refuses to impose itself on anyone. Igbo traditional religion does not engage in a forceful attempt to convert people or adherents of other religious groups to itself. It is a religion that respects fundamental human rights and freedom of people to choose their religion and belief system without molestation or coercion. Central to Igbo traditional religion is the belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits and this animates other beliefs and practices inherent in the religion.

The above belief has, no doubt, influenced the general contour of the Igbo holistic development, which is tinged with a traditional fear of the punitive power of unseen forces within their environment. This has also led to the establishment of a

strong moral order that fosters the development of a dynamic Igbo society, where peace, unity, social economic progress wield a considerable influence. The Igbo being propelled by this belief have contributed and keep on contributing to Nigeria's national integration and development. This knowledge is alien to their counterparts from other ethnic groups in Nigeria. While others who know this very well, often fail to acknowledge it, possibly because of hatred or Igbo phobia, so as to deliberately deprive the Igbo the good name, praise and credit they merit for their untiring contributions to national integration cause and development. Whether hated or loved, the Igbo remain who they are. They are quintessentially peaceful, tolerant, accommodating, forgiving and nation builders, who creatively and ingeniously build bridges between people from other ethnic groups through socio-economic linkages. These traits flow from the fountain of traditional religious cum cultural backgrounds of the people, which shape their attitude to life and perception. It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine "belief in Chukwu divinities and spirits: the anchor of Igbo contributions to Nigerian national integration and development.

The Igbo People of Southeastern Nigeria

The Igbo are one of the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria. They reside in the Southeastern part of Nigeria and speak Igbo language. With a population of over 50 million, the Igbo rank among the five largest nationalities in Africa and possibly among the top ten in the World (Ihejirika, 2010). Geographically, the Igbo inhabit the five states in Southeast geo-political zone, which are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. They are also found in large numbers in parts of Delta and Rivers states and in neighbouring African countries like Republic Benin, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon. They exhibit complex cultural and dialectical traits as they exist in diverse sub-groups, with their own dialects, customs and traditions. Prominent among the Igbo sub-groups are the Nri, Ngwa, Onitsha, Anioma, Mbaise, and Ohuhu (Nwokeji, 2026).

Their landmass, which covers a total surface area of approximately 41,000 square kilometers, is bounded on the west by the River Niger, over which lies Delta and Edo states, on the Southeast by Akwa Ibom, on the Northeast by Cross River state (Ofomata, 2002). The Igbo live in a rain forest zone, which favours agriculture and development of verdant vegetation with gigantic trees. Land is owned communally by kinship groups and is apportioned to individuals for various uses (Britannica, 2006)

Igbo Marginalisation in Nigeria Since Independence

Ndigo have consistently faced marginalisation of immense proportion in Nigeria since independence in 1960. A lot of socio-political and economic impediments have been cast on the ways of the Igbo, through manipulative public policies, crafted to undermine their capacity to compete favourably with other ethnic groups, in all aspects of human endeavours. The situation became more pronounced after the Nigeria-

Biafra war (1967-1970), when many Igbo faced economic and political exclusions, discrimination in civil service appointments, human right abuses and general injustices.

The Igbo got estranged from other ethnic groups in Nigeria, especially northerners, during the January 1966 coup, which led to the death of many prominent northern politicians and few from the East. (Obaro, 2006). The north, having perceived the January 1966 coup as "Igbo coup" directed against their leaders, decided to stage a counter coup of July 1966 in which they brutally killed about two hundred (200) Igbo officers in the Nigerian army, and many Igbo civilians living in the North (Ihekweba, 2016). Many Igbo were forced out of northern parts of Nigeria without their property. The trauma associated with the Igbo massacre and egregious displacement from the north, as well as the attendant hardship and frustration made the Igbo to feel the pains of marginalisation and hatred as the then government of Gowon turned blind eyes to their plights. The aura of mutual hatred which followed the Igbo during the period has remained till date. The non-challant and hypocritical approach which the government of Gowon gave the implementation of his 3Rs policy of Reconstruction, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of the defunct eastern region devastated by the civil war, pointed clearly to marginalisation of great proportion.

After Gowon-led Federal Military government had declared the war as having ended on "No victor, No vanquished" basis, he went ahead to treat the Igbo as the vanquished and rendered them financially helpless and incapacitated with his post-civil war punitive fiscal policy of Twenty Pounds (£20) flat rate refund, irrespective of whatever amount they deposited in Nigeria bank before the outbreak of the war. The above policy was a deliberate strategy designed to keep the Igbo from recovering from the economic devastation (Nsoedo, 2019).

The Igbo have been so much marginalised in Nigerian politics. Other ethnic groups (the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani) have consistently conspired and made efforts against the Igbo, to strategically exclude them from main stream politics, where the winner takes it all. The Igbo have been made to only play the second fiddle. No Igbo man has had access to presidential seat in Nigeria since her Independence in 1960. The question every Igbo man keeps asking today is "*kee ihe ojo anyi mere e ji eme anyi otua n' Nigeria*" (What evil did we do to deserve all these discriminatory treatments in Nigeria). No man, no president, politician or spokesperson from other ethnic groups, has given answer to the above heart-touching question. Ihejirika (2010), in corroborating the above, remarks that the political exclusion of the Igbo in post-civil war Nigeria coincided with the free-for-all treasury looting enterprise led by the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba triumvirates, who saw Nigeria as their spoil for winning the war. They looted and continue to loot Nigeria as they looted and raped the Igbo. Ironically, they exposed their political folly, naivety and leadership incompetence as they are still brutalizing the nation, in their effort to brutalize the Igbo (Ihejirika, 2010).

In creation of states and local government areas, the Federal government manipulated the whole exercise to favour northern Nigeria. The south east zone became the only zone among the six geographical zones that has only five states, while other zones have six states each (Aribisala in Nsoedo, 2019). This situation has made the southeast the only zone with the least amount of revenue allocation in the Federation. Besides, there is a deliberate underuse of the seaports within the Igbo axis. The Onitsha/Asaba seaport is almost becoming moribund due to underuse and neglect. There is no well maintained and equipped International Airport in Igbo land despite the fact that many Igbo people are international businessmen and women, globe-trotters, industrialists and international scholars that require the services of International Airports. The present Enugu and Imo Airports are mere shadows of what a standard airport is and ought to be.

Another areas of marginalisation are deliberate abandonment of federal roads in Igbo land to decay and lack of grading of such roads, recruitment of fewer number of Igbo people into Army, police, immigration, prisons and federal civil service, excessive number of police checkpoints and army road blocks in south east zone (Nsoedo, 2019).

Justification of Reactionary Behaviours of the Igbo As A Marginalised Group

The Igbo have reacted in many ways to their perceived marginalization in Nigeria since independence. These include socio-economic, political and separatist reactions. The Igbo have thought it wise to believe in themselves and in their Chukwu as a way of extricating themselves from the sinister patterns of political, economic and socio-cultural marginalisations and to rebuild their war devastated land and economy. The Igbo turned massively to self-enterprises, entrepreneurship and apprenticeship system. They began to emphasise their age-long philosophy of "*Onye kwe chi ya ekwe*" (One who believes in his ability to succeed will surely receive the consent of his chi). The Igbo engaged in various kinds of trade (*Izuhia*), learning of trade (*Imuahia*), learning of handwork (*Imu-aka-oru*) and engagement in the strategic marketing of other people's goods with their consent at a price that raises capital (*Igba osoahia*) and creative involvement in available legitimate businesses (*Ike kete orie, onye ujo abaghi aba*), as ways of making wealth, facilitating personal and collective economic growth and contributing to national development (Idemobi, Okafor, Dike & Anyika, 2024).

Today, the Igbo have transformed cities like Aba, Onitsha and Nnewi into formidable commercial centres of international standard without government support but through self-help enterprises, entrepreneurship and apprenticeship system. This positive reactionary approach of the Igbo to their economic disempowerment and marginalisation, especially immediately after the Nigerian Civil War, has paid them off by repositioning them to the main stream economy of Nigeria, as well as major contributors to national economic growth.

The perceived marginalisation of the Igbo has also led them to repeated calls for equity, social-political justice, restructuring, true federalism and rotational presidency in Nigeria. The Igbo

have continued to cry foul in politics as a result of the perceived political injustice to which they are victims, calling for equal political representation, fair share of national cakes, and incorporation of rotational presidency in Nigerian constitution to enable an Igbo man taste the seat of a Nigerian President. They are strongly insisting on a united Nigeria without discrimination. The Igbo are unequivocally demanding for a wholesale restructuring of the country without reservations. Restructuring, according to them, would be ideal for returning the country to the era when the regions managed their economic and political affairs, which made it possible for all the regions to thrive at their respective paces (Nsoedo, 2019).

There is now a continuous rise in the rate of separatist agitations and an increase in activities of self-determination movements such as Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Igbo land. These movements are sources of expression of tantrum of the oppressed child. They have shown their grievances over marginalization through civil disobedience, non-violent protests, demonstrations, social media campaigns, sit-at home orders and demand for a referendum (Heerten & Moses, 2014)

One may not be surprised that the Igbo, as a perceived oppressed and marginalized group, have taken different steps to show their discontent with the situation of things in the Country, as well as to liberate themselves from obnoxious socio-economic and political policies that limit their potentials as a people. Igbo believe in the philosophy "*onye ajuru anaghi aju onweya*" (An abandoned person does not abandon himself). A child abandoned, provoked or beaten by his or her parents or elderly siblings will invariably express tantrum through a motley array of actions or behaviors within the socially permissible range of infantile reactions.

Igbo Belief in Chukwu, Divinities and Spirits

Belief in God called Chukwu or Chineke in Igbo language, is cardinal in Igbo traditional religious practices and culture. Chukwu is said to be the creator of the Universe, the mighty king, transcendent, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipotent judge of the universe. No typical Igbo man doubts the existence of Chukwu as he is seen as the source of all lives. Without Him, nothing exists. He is the Supreme Ruler of Heaven and Earth, who possesses everything to a superlative degree. He is incomparable and unsurpassable in majesty, immutable and impeccable in judgement (Onwuliri, 2011). The word Chukwu means Great God or Great chi. The word Great is used to distinguish God from other lesser gods that also wield significant influence in the affairs of man. Heaven is believed to be the original abode of Chukwu from where He rules the entire universe.

The Igbo affirm their strong belief in Chukwu through various names they call their children. As observed by Kalu (2002), hundreds of personal names borne by individuals out of significant experiences of the finger of God in their lives, together with prayers offered in different situations and

events, all these give us good insight into the peoples ways of representing their varied conceptualization of Chukwu (the Supreme Being). Names such as Chukwudi (there is God), Ikedi Chukwu (God is powerful), Chibueze (God is greater), Ifeanyi Chukwu (Nothing is hard for God), Onyeka Chukwu (Who is greater than God), Chukwuemeka (God has done so well), Chigozie (God bless us), Ifunanya Chukwu (God's love), Chukwuemerie (God has won), Odinaka (It is God that will decide), Chiudo (God of peace), Udochukwu (Peace of God), Amarachi (God's grace) and so on, are the peoples expressions of the major attributes of God as conceptualized by the traditional Igbo. (Kalu, 2002).

The Igbo believed that Chukwu is the giver and preserver of life, thus they value life and whatever that sustains and promotes the sanctity of human life. Waste of life through act of violence, insecurity, brutal killing of innocent people is conceived as an abomination (*aru*) which Chukwu does not like. Chukwu is the author of peace and peaceful co-existence and love (*Chukwu bu onyeisi udo, mbiko onu n'udo ya n'ihunanya*). This good knowledge of Chukwu in traditional Igbo society is explainable from deep and rational appreciation of the values of life, peace, unity and peaceful co-existence among the people.

The Igbo, in addition to their belief in Chukwu, the Supreme Being, evince strong belief in divinities who are spiritual beings created by Chukwu to assist Him in controlling different aspects of nature for ultimate maintenance of harmonious relationship between humans and the world of spirits. Notable divinities in Igbo land include Anyanwu, Amadioha, Ala, Agwu, Igwe, Ahiajoku. Anyanwu is the deity in charge of Sun light and preservation of crops, health of all living things and productivity in Igbo traditional religion. Amadioha, which is also called Kamalu, is known as the god of thunder and lightning and retributive justice. His original shrine was located at Ozuzu in the present day Rivers State of Nigeria. People came from different parts of Igbo land to seek help and justice from Amadioha's shrine at Ozuzu (Onunwa, 2005). Hence many people refer to him as "Amadioha Ozuzu".

Ala is known as the earth goddess. This occupies number one place in the hierarchy of gods in Igbo land as no community is regarded complete without the shrine of the god of the land (Onunwa, 2005). Ala is associated with fertility, morality and justice. According to Aguwuom and Aguwuom (2017), among the spirit forces in Igbo land, Ala is regarded as more powerful in the direct intervention in the affairs of men and for this reason it is often referred to as the great mother earth who owns all men (*Ala nwe mmadu nile*). It is also regarded as the source and custodian of public morality and as the dispenser of justice.

The shrine of Ala is taken care of by a shrine priest called Eze Ala, who is usually the eldest male in charge of the kindred or family. The kindred or community identity, values, tradition, customs, ritual observances and cultural heritage are inextricably bound up with the cult of Ala and are animated by its stringent injunctions.

Most urgent prayers and sacrifices go regularly to Ala divinity, who is believed to have the capacity to pass on the prayers and sacrifices to Chukwu, who takes final decisions or actions on them. Thus, Ala divinity is a means to an end and not the end itself (Onwuliri, 2011). The Igbo affirm that Ala is in charge and supervises "*Ogu*, the moral order" and the "*Ofo*" symbol of righteousness, truth and justice on behalf of Chukwu. The force of the Ala divinity can therefore be said to be the source of the efficacy and potency of *Ofo na Ogu* in Igbo religious scheme of things, while *Ofo na Ogu* constitute representatives of the spirit forces, the society, state and the sacred tradition (Aguwuom & Aguwuom, 2017).

They also believe in the existence and relevance of socio-religio-spiritual functions of Agwunsi, a deity of divination, traditional herbal medicine and a spirit that guides traditional medicine men (*Dibia Odinala*) in sourcing different herbs for the cure of diverse ailments among the people. The clearest and indispensable sign of a vocation to be a dibia is possession by agwu spirit (Arinze, 1970).

Igwe, the sky god, is another divinity that is revered in Igbo traditional religion and culture. Igwe is believed to be the husband of Ala, the earth goddess. Igwe is said to be the source of Ala's productivity and viability. Ahiajoku is the god of yam and agriculture. He supervises all farming activities and ensures that farms are protected from harm during the entire process as well as guarantees high yield. It is believed by the Igbo that Ahiajoku has the power to punish evil people with poor yield or crop failure during planting seasons.

The Igbo equally recognize the presence of spiritual beings that have their dwelling in natural entities such as rivers, lakes, lagoons, trees, mountains, hills, valleys and caves. These are special places that have special historical significance attached to them. The spirits protect the innocent and assist the poor and helpless who seek their help, they also avenge evil acts, crimes and malpractices (Okaba & Kilani, 1995).

Igbo Choice of Contribution to National Integration and Development in Demonstration of their Belief in Chukwu, Divinities and Spirits

The Igbo firm and age-long belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits influences their individual and group behaviour, checks their excesses and spurs them to engage in positive actions that impact positively on the society and national development. In spite of their perceived marginalization and political exclusion, they chose to toe the path of good citizenship, peace, unity, and employed obedience to constituted authority and unwavering contribution to national integration.

The Igbo consciousness of the retributive power of Chukwu (the Supreme Being and creator of the Universe) is a great factor in the crave for unity among the Igbo and between them and their neighbours in a multi ethnic Nigerian Society. To the Igbo, Chukwu delights greatly in peace, unity and good

neighbourliness. Chukwu abhors all forms of violence, conflicts, fights, wars, killings, oppression, discrimination and marginalization of the weak and poor in the society. Hence the popular saying, "*Ndi Igbo bu umu Chukwu*" *The ejiri mara umu Chukwu bu udo, idi n'otu, ihunanya, njiko aka eme ihe, n' onye aghala nwa nneya*" (English) Ndi Igbo are sons of Chukwu. Sons of Chukwu are known by their life of peace, unity, love, cooperation and one being one's brother's keeper.

Igbo belief in Chukwu, to say the least, engenders in them willingness and great love for peaceful coexistence. Their belief in Chukwu is guided by the cardinal principle of "live and let live" that guarantees co-existence of people of diverse cultures, faith and languages (Onunwa, 2005). It is the belief of the Igbo that "anaghi eji njo akwụ ugwo njo", evil shall not be paid back with evil and hence, they show love and right hand of cooperation to people from other ethnic groups in the economic, political and academic circles, not minding their negative attitudes toward the Igbo.

During President Buhari's administration, he made his appointments all north affairs, though favoured few Yoruba, but entirely excluded the Igbo. Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe while lamenting over insensitivity of Buhari's administration to other ethnic groups while making appointments, decried his willful exclusion of the South east zone from appointment into the National Defence Council and the National Security Council (Busari in Nsoedo, 2019). A lot military officers from the South east zone were unceremoniously retired from the army. His anti-Igbo administration left many federal roads in the South east in terrible conditions. This did not perturb nor discouraged the Igbo from pursuing national integration and positive nationhood through diverse contributions. The Igbo, through the power and support of Chukwu, Okike Abiama (God the Creator of heaven and Earth), have continued to soar higher in both local and international business and in industrial circles, contributing to socio-economic development of Igbo land and Nigeria, carrying along friends and business partners from other ethnic groups in their business leadership management. Hence, the popular expression and philosophy "Chukwu bu ike anyi, God is our strength". Their entrepreneurship and wealth creation spirit is second to none (Nwakoby et al, 2023 in Idemobi, Okafor, Dike & Anyika, 2024). Chukwu, no doubt, has blessed them with unusual prowess in commerce and other economic endeavours. As observed by Idemobi, Okafor, Dike and Anyika (2024), they have through their enterprise and the Igba-boi apprenticeship model spread throughout Nigeria and other African nations. They are known for the creation of inclusive business environment, characterized by integration of prospective business associates from all parts of the nation, through seamless regional and national linkages with a motley array of supply chains.

In the education sector, the Igbo have not only waxed great, producing intellectual giants in different fields of academic endeavours, but have also promoted philosophies and values that foster national integration and positive nationhood. Belief in Chukwu is ingrained in Igbo culture and is inextricably tied to it. The Igbo have the culture of educating the youth and

children to develop the philosophy of rational thinking and making informed and balanced decisions on all issues affecting the society in a multi-ethnic Nigerian Society. They are made to internalise the cultural values of respect, honesty, love, tolerance, trustworthiness, obedience, dignity of labour, justice, equality, freedom, patriotism and courageous rejection of oppression. Among the Igbo people, hardwork and industry are highly cherished and esteemed (Iloanya & Nwanagbo-Ben, 2021). These core values are very cardinal in paving the way for national integration and development to flourish in our country. In the political sector, the Igbo have not hesitated in according politicians from other ethnic groups the needed support for the actualization of political victory. The Igbo remain focused and hopeful in the midst of perceived marginalization, believing power belongs to Chukwu. To them, Chukwu puts men in positions of authority and also removes men from such positions at will. Hence the philosophy expressed in theophoric names – Chinaemeze – It is God who makes people kings, Chinweike – God owns power, Chikaodinka – It all depends on God, Chukwujekwu – God will speak and so on. Even when others deny them of political support, they do not withdraw theirs, when they have the opportunity to revenge. Till date the Igbo believe in *Chukwu deraa, odewo, mmadu apughi ihicha ya – what Chukwu has written is written, no man can clean it*. The implication of the above is that their uniqueness, greatness and superiority as a people are ordained by God and are, therefore, uncontestable.

Igbo belief in the existence of spirits is associated with behavioral regulations and practices that make them to align their lives with social order. To the Igbo, the fear of spiritual forces is the beginning of disciplined life and communal solidarity. Sustainable maintenance of social order among a people is a central pillar of national integration and national development. Social order and communal solidarity which hold sway among the Igbo, as a result of their high regard for ancestral spirits, spiritual forces (ndi mmuo) and so on, have helped them to build a strong sense of communal unity, oneness and environmental consciousness (kalu, 2002), which ultimately impact on national integration. Collective responsibility and mutual cooperation among the Igbo is the anchor of their contribution to Nigerian national integration.

They also have high value and respect for life (*ndu*) because it is a gift from Chukwu and Ndimmuo (Spiritual forces) help to preserve it. Murder, terrorist attacks, kidnapping, violence and so on are regarded as acts that desecrate life and are, therefore, forbidden in Igboland.

The spirits empower the Igbo traditional justice system, made operational by traditional oath-taking, inflicting immediate and harsh punishment on those who are guilty of false oath. This helps to settle easily conflicts disputes and crises that hampers communal peace and development (Onunwa, 2005). Similarly, entrenched in their traditional justice system are values that promote national integration and development. Such as *Emenyere Nwaogwugwu, emenyere Nwanosike, as you show favour to Nwaogwugwu, show favour also to Nwanosike* - an expression that emphasizes the necessity of

fairness and impartiality in Igbo daily life and social interactions among themselves and in their relationship with people from other ethnic groups. Fairness and impartiality remain indispensable ingredients for the actualization of sustainable national integration and development in a developing nation like Nigeria. Another one is "*Onye aghala nwanneya*" which means "let no body leave his brother behind", an expression of a mindset that is preoccupied with the quest for collective interests and general well being of all. This has helped to boost human capital development, sustain community development, family members business cooperation, and daily livelihood among the Igbo (Idemobi, Okafor, Dike & Anyika, 2024). The Igbo crave for and uphold a holistic development approach that carries everybody along, irrespective of tribe and ethnic group (*Agbako aka nyuo mmamiri, ya akpo ufufu* (Ihejirika, 2010). The above explains the power of joint efforts and power of majority in pursuit of a project, whether at local, regional or national levels. *Igwebuike* meaning "strength in numbers/majority is strength" (Ihejirika, 2010). This implies that there is strength in Igbo identification with the Nigerian nation as a whole for rapid achievement of national development.

Challenges facing Igbo Belief in Chukwu, Divinities and Spirits

Belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits among the Igbo is currently faced with certain challenges which seem to undermine their intrinsic and inherent values as well as goals in Igbo traditional religion and culture. Some of these challenges include:

- a) Conflict with some Christian values and doctrines: Some of the beliefs the Igbo hold about Chukwu, divinities and spirits conflict with Christian beliefs and doctrines, which make them to be described as fetish, hence could not be incorporated in the daily lives and practices of Igbo Christians that constitute majority of the population of the Igbo.
- b) Lack of proper and digital documentation of Igbo traditional belief system: Most of the core Igbo traditional beliefs about Chukwu, divinities and spirits are fast being forgotten and relegated to the margins of history because they are not documented for preservation for generations of the Igbo. Consequently, their perceived roles and impacts on national integration and development are lost.
- c) Possible emergence of syncretistic practices: The blending of belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits with Christian religion by contemporary Igbo people results to syncretism, which waters down both traditional Igbo religious values and Christian values among them.
- d) Growing loss of interest in religious activities among contemporary youths: The dwindling interest of the youths in religious activities in the recent times is impacting negatively on the growth and development of Igbo traditional religion
- e) Influence of globalization: Globalization has resulted to one global village with one culture

dominated by Western conceptual schemes. Igbo religious ideals are fast being engulfed in the vortex of overwhelming influence of Western cultural ideals, which make their belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits seems less important and religiously otiose.

The Way Forward

To ensure that Igbo traditional religion and its concomitant belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits are strengthened and repositioned to make positive impact on the people's daily life, for meaningful contributions to national integration and development, the paper makes the following suggestions as the way forward:

1. Christians who constitute majority of Igbo population should value and appreciate Igbo traditional values and practices that have positive impacts on the socio-cultural and religious lives of the Igbo. They should not condemn those Igbo traditional values and practices because of their Igbo traditional origin. While only those beliefs that are obnoxious and inhumane should be denounced. This will help to reduce, to the barest minimum, the perceived conflicts between Christian doctrines and beliefs people hold about Chukwu, divinities and spirits in Igbo traditional religious worldview.
2. Proper codification and digital documentation of Igbo values that accrue from Igbo belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits, which are cardinal ingredients for promotion of national integration and development, should be pursued with zeal and sustained commitment.
3. The youths as the future leaders, should be encouraged to imbibe the tenets and values of Igbo traditional religion and culture, especially those associated with belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits, both for their continuity and sustainable national integration and development. When the tenets and values inherent in Igbo belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits are inculcated in the youths, they have been inculcated in the whole nation. The youths are the pillars of the nation. When they are successfully integrated, the entire nation is, no doubt, integrated.
4. The Igbo at home and in the diaspora should embark on global campaign for the revival of Igbo traditional religion and cultural heritage, through the instrument of social media for promoting cultural motifs, beliefs, practices of Igbo traditional religion, promotion of Igbo cultural pride along global citizenship, promotion of traditional crafts, arts, and as well as youth education on the relevance and fundamental values of belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits. These will help to cushion the effects of globalization on Igbo belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits.

Conclusion

Igbo belief in Chukwu, divinities and spirits, no doubt, is associated with values and ideals that promote national integration and development in a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation like ours. The core values inherent in the above beliefs have impacted positively on the life, attitude and identity of the Igbo, helping them to make regular contributions to Nigeria national integration and development strivings, even when they have personal and collective reasons to join the agitation for self government, amidst perceived marginalization.

The Igbo see their past, present and future as absolutely dependent on the wishes of Chukwu, his mercies and kindness, animated by divinities and sustained by spirits. The fear of Chukwu, divinities and spirits is the beginning of the resolve for a life of peace, tolerance, unity, cooperation and partnership with all tribes and ethnic groups for the actualization of national integration and development in Nigeria. Therefore, whatever that will be done to strengthen the above belief among the Igbo should be encouraged.

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