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IGBO VALUE AND CARE FOR LIFE

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It is evident that such concepts as life and value are appropriate topics for reflection. But if reflection on simple human existence appears to be a profound mystery and the end of our earthly life is also a mystery, how much more mysterious must also be the terms «concept», «life» and «value».

Life, like moral, is certainly a problematic subject. Much of its problems arise from differences in definitions, wrong concepts, attitudes to life, and above all, the limitation of language. Language to express or explain the term 'life' in the most suitable manner. This is because, «it is precisely in living that we encounter problems».

Life is a whole, an entity, a compendium, a mystery, and an encyclopedia of its own. In a sense, it is the principle or the source of those activities associated with growth, nutrition, reproduction, breathing, thought, and so forth. It is manifested through some forms of activities. Life is a continuum, such that we are either dead, living, existing, or moribund. But there are varieties of ways of living our life. It is within these varieties, that we stamp 'self', destroy or better it.

That life is more than mere ideas is certain. The words to convey certain ideas, concepts, as we pointed out earlier, are perfectly inadequate. This stares at us when we run into discussing things like the concept and value of life and especially among the Igbos. This is because, we are engaged in the complex process of discussing and analyzing the innermost consciousness of the Igbo in a language, English or any other, which shares neither cultural background nor linguistic system with the Igbo language. Hence we have therefore, to retain a consciousness that we are engaged in a translation exercise with all the tendencies to distortion of thought and emotion which is involved in translation. This we shall experience and notice more in the treatment of Igbo proper names and the proverbs. Also there is the problem of trying to express in English pattern and concepts for which there are
no equivalents in the language. That is to say, the problem of interpreting and translating Igbo concepts into western concepts. Again, because Igbo language is predominantly oral, it relies more effectively on symbolic non-verbal form of communications as is demonstrated in their proper names and concepts. However, all these problems and many others, we have tried as much as possible to overcome.

There is no doubt that our era has indeed been an era of 'holocaust'. An era in which life has become so 'cheap and mean', with millions upon millions of innocent lives being sacrificed in pursuance of policies born out of racial and religious motives, with political ambitions on the part of individuals and many governments as well, as is being witnessed in many parts of the world today. Simply because men have lost the true concept and value of life.

Everyday the problems of suicide, abortion, murder and the so called 'mercy killing' continue to assume more and more alarming dimensions world wide. Hence, there can be no better time and a better opportunity to investigate and unearth the traditional affirmation of the truth about life, with a new appreciation of its value and its worth among the Igbos of Nigeria than now.

The present article is only a part of the whole exploration which covers Igbo concept and value of life in the light of the Christian doctrine on life's value. It is the conviction of the author that it would give the reader an idea of Igbo mentality towards life. 'Human life is sacred and those who violate it not only offend the divine majesty and degrade themselves and humanity, they also sap the vitality of the state of which they are members'.

To give thanks is a sign of goodwill and appreciation for 'goods' or 'helps' received. Hence I sincerely express my profound gratitude to my Local Ordinary, Rt. Rev. Dr. M. O. Unegbu and Fundacion Vasconia for their financial assistance, Prof. Dr. Augusto Sarmiento, Prof. Dr. Jaime Pujol, Prof. Dr. José Morales, Prof. Dr. José Luis Illanes and all who in anyway helped towards the production of this work.
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I. AN INTRODUCTION

In our everyday experience of life, we encounter cruelty, misery, love, happiness, and goodness. But to some, our life is only an awful spectacle of pain, misery and suffering that ends in nothing. For such pessimists, the world is something which ought not to exist. Among such pessimists, we have Schopenhauer for whom the existence of the world is meaningless. He wrote:

«We have not to rejoice but rather to mourn at the existence of the world, that its non-existence would be preferable to its existence; that it is something which ought not to be» 1.

This way of reasoning puts the origin, meaning and value of life to question. It makes it even more absurd speaking of life as gift. As Schopenhauer again remarked: «It is evident that everyone would have declined such a gift if he could have seen it and tested it before hand» 2. To this, we say categorically no! For the Igbos as we saw in their concept of life, life is basically a gift from God, a precious and unique gift, which they always look for and do everything to receive.

It is thus in this line of thinking that we reckon with some other thinkers who see meaning in life; but such a meaning having its foundation in God. As the great Jewish existentialist Emil Fackenheim rightly pointed out: «Whatever meaning life acquires, is derived from the encounter between God and man» 3. Hence the meaning of human life «cannot be understood in terms of some finite human purposes, supposedly more ultimate than the
meeting itself. For what could be more ultimate than the presence of God? It is only when man looks and moves beyond himself that he can really understand and appreciate life. This we demonstrated in our discussion on the Igbo concept of life.

However today many seem to value, appreciate and respect life only in terms of what one makes, does, achieves, possesses, and accomplishes in life. In talking about the value of human life, the primary question should be: Is human life ever worth-while, does it or can it have any value and meaning in itself? That is to say, what is really the value of human life? In this chapter, we want to find out how the Igbos respect and value life. And for a better approach, this chapter is divided into three sub-sections: Respect and value of life; Care for life; and Offenses against life in Igbo traditional society.

II. RESPECT AND VALUE OF LIFE

1. Respect

We have had the opportunity to examine in the early part of this work some basic qualities of the Igbo-people. Respect is one of those fundamental qualities that play an indispensable role to how the Igbos appreciate and value life. As an Igbo adage puts it: *Adighi amụ aka -ekpe na nka*—left hand is not learnt in old age. The concept, the idea, the life of respect and respect for life is as second nature to the Igbo as his religion because they are among the basic education and values that a child is meant to acquire, and which are acquired too, very early in the childhood. Just as Basden observed:

«Proper behaviour is instilled rather than taught, it develops from childhood and becomes part of his subliminal consciousness».

Igbo respect for life is greatly demonstrated in their respect for old age and *Omenala*—the moral power house of Igbo society. As F. C. Ògbalu rightly noted: «Igbo regard age as sacred, a by-product of their theocentrism and humanism». The order of seniority in age determines the procedure of doing many things
in Igbo society. A case in point, the taking of shares, the breaking of kola-nuts and so forth follow this accepted order. The elders are seen not only as representatives of the ancestors but also as the symbol of solidarity and promoters of inherited values. Hence a child must respect and show signs of respect to all his elders, his parents and all who are older than him, in all forms and circumstances. Respect says Ogbalu, «implies both in word, thought and deed»\(^8\). A case in point, the junior dare not flippant or talk much before a senior nor answer back in case of a rebuke by an elder. He must listen attentively to the words of the elder which are 'words of life' and wisdom. «The elders are supposed to be nearer to the spirits and ancestors on account of their age and wisdom»\(^9\). They are symbolic presence of God and ancestors\(^10\). The elders on their own part, were always conscious of their position in the community as repository of communal wisdom and values, and therefore maintained some decorum in whatever they said and did, using their practical experiences acquired not through academic knowledge but by long and judicious association with nature and individuals. An Igbo proverb summarized it thus: *Ihe okenye no ala bu, nwata kwuru qto ogagki ahụ ya* —what an old man saw setting, a child cannot see, even standing. No wonder then okafor saw respect for elders and chiefs as an «authentic human value transcending space and time and driving from conditions immanent in nature and in consequence must be preserved»\(^11\). This view of preserving and retaining the traditional respect for elders and seniority principle as a fertile base for the respect for life was highly shared by Bishop Shanahan because it is a recognition of human value\(^12\) and consequently an authentic appreciation and love for life.

Because the child must respect the elders and always very conscious of their presence in all his actions, and because the elders were ever conscious of their symbolic representation in the society, fundamental and ontological values underlined by the *Omenala*, such as truth, the sacredness of life and respect for life are meticulously guided and guarded. The *Omenala*, call it tradition, is the final court of appeal in all matters, without which and the elders and cherished values would phase out one after the other because of the 'mad rush' for novelty by the young. Igbo value and respect for life is directly linked and strongly founded on their respect for humanity.
The Igbo have always placed the highest value upon life and human person thanks to the *Omenala*, their traditional respect for seniors and elders. We now turn to demonstrate how the Igbo as well manifest their value of life in other aspects of their living.

2. Value of life

We have earlier seen that religion is the main principle that dominates the life of the Igbo and sets a definite tone in their relationship with their surroundings, fellow men and value system. The Igbo's value system says Okoro «are anchored in his belief system and mostly determined by his relationship to Chukwu, the gods, ancestors and to nature». This is because values and beliefs are often linked in shared cognitive and moral system, in terms of consistency or compatibility. Hence to understand a particular value, it has to be investigated in the context of this system of ideas if its natural significance is to be understood and appreciated as well. However, apart from the values of their belief system, the Igbo have other values which they live out in their daily life, which are also the rock foundation on which the Igbo society is built. Among such values includes what Matungulu Otene calls «the African value of fecundity» —i.e. love for children and family. The Igbo as we saw in the previous chapters also have profound respect for old age, life and so forth.

But what are values? Values are what people cherish, what they consider to be important and worthwhile. The idea of value has a positive connotation and affords incentives to actions. What people value, they desire. It is also possible to talk of a negative value —that is, something which is not desired. A value can as well be individual or societal. That is to say, what an individual or a society considers desirable, worthwhile, worth living for and dying for. Hence every value has a context and logically relative. Not in the sense of absolute relativism but by the mere fact that before the universalization of any particular value, it must have an original point of reference, a cultural context from which its universal validity could be deduced.

In this section, we are concerned with Igbo value of life; a positive and universal value as manifested in Igbo names, proverbs, transmission of life and care for life.
a. Names and value of life

One may be tempted to ask: what is in names? Are names not mere tags or labels for personal identification? How can a people’s concept and values be manifested or demonstrated in names? These questions may appear simple, but they are very existential and indispensable for the appreciation of the place of names in the value of life among the Igbo society.

For some, names are really tags and labels for identification and nothing more. This seems to be the underlying principle for some European and American names like: Mr. Pot, Mr. Broot, Mr. Chair, Mr. Coco and so forth. But for some others, names are not just tags or labels. They are expressions of mind, thought pattern, concepts, ideals, beliefs, life and life history. That is to say, an expression of emotions, a living personal memory, records of events and individuals that have been associated or connected with it. Hence to ‘own’ or know one’s name amounts to getting hold of his personality, «self and mentality». This mentality, we notice among the Hebrews.\(^{15}\)

Among the Igbos, like many other African countries, names always have meaning and are most often symbolic.\(^{16}\) They reveal sentiments, aspirations, hopes, fortunes, misfortunes and values. They are accurate records of the peoples beliefs, moral concepts and way of life, wishes and aspirations. Names are not just tags. As Wieschhoff rightly observed:

«Names are not merely considered as tags by means of which individuals may be distinguished but are intimately associated with various events in the life of the individual as well as those of the family.\(^{17}\)»

This idea, Ebo Ubahekwe also shares in all its totality.\(^{18}\) The Igbos give their children names according to the circumstance, be it social, religious, political and so forth, that is connected with the birth. A child born when a family has «laboured» long for a son could be called Obiyo or Obilo —rest my mind, while a child born when there has been troubles and quarrels in the family groups or village could be called udokamma—peace is better. One born after a long struggle and suffering in life with eventual success could be named —Onyekwere— who believed. This
name could also be applied to a child whose mother was in «pain» in conceiving and begetting a son. In this way emotions and minds are expressed, this idea Leonard beautifully expressed thus:

«To every name itself is attached a significance of expression and an intensity of human emotion... and not only is this attachment of living personal memory but it is a record of persons and events that have been associated and connected with it... the state of the parents or of the family affairs when it is born or a remarkable event in the town» 19.

The Igbos believe that the name contains more than the mere ‘sound’ or ‘words’. They do not believe in the attitude of what is in a name? The name for them is «ensemble» of their mentality and life.

In a synthesis, for the Igbos, it would be: tell me your name and I will tell you whom you are. A further explanation and analysis of some Igbo names, as we shall presently do, would be a hub for understanding and appreciating more Igbo value, love and respect for life.

b. Some names which show value of life

Ndùbùisi Life is primary and first. Hence life seen as the «first value» that must be preserved and protected.

Nnọrọm It is a shorter form of Nnọrọm ele ụwa ka onye nwụru anwụ mma —to be alive and watch the world is better than being dead. This shows that life is worth living and is appreciated under all circumstances. Nothing could reduce the value of life.

Ọsondu It is also a shorter form of Ọsondu agwu ike, that is to say, no one ever gets tired running to save life. This shows that nothing can be considered more demanding in an attempt to save or protect life. All has to be endured in order to ensure the safety of life.
If life permits or allows. These names demonstrate that life determines whatever man can do. Nothing is possible without life, the determinants of all other values.

Life worths more that riches (wealth). It is the most precious of all wealth to be possessed by man. This does not mean that the Igbos do not search for wealth. No! But the point is, any pursuit of wealth that puts life in danger is totally discouraged because as the Igbos say; Ndụ adighị abuo (life is not double-two).

Some are simply called Ndụ life. Its aim is just for the family to keep in mind the value of life; the need for life; the central place of life in all actions and above all, the love and respect for life.

c. Some names showing love of life (over death, etc.)

Onwụbuko Death please! It is a kind of prayer and 'request' to death to spare life. For a family that has sadly witnessed the death of a number of her children, such a name is normal for any subsequent child. It demonstrates also a kind of disgust over the 'painful' effect of death.

Ozoemenma May it not happen again. It has almost the same implications as Onwụbiko; a prayer that death may not strike again because life is preferred to death.

Onwudiwe Death is wicked, heartless. If death is so, life was therefore seen as kind, good, lovable and to be desired.

Onwụkwe If death permits, and one lives, he can achieve his life's desire. It show a kind of despair over death and a desire for life.

For the Igbos, life must be loved and death dreaded. However, in as much as the Igbos manifest value for life in their names, they never loose sight of the fact that life is absolutely
God’s gift. Hence they have such names as: *Chinenyendu* —God gives life. God is seen as the source and giver of life; *Chinwendu* (God owns life) and not man; *Chikwendu*— If God permits life, we shall live and achieve our desires; *Ndudjnakachi* life is in the hand of God and never in man’s or wealth. It is often shortened as ‘Nakachi’; *Chibundu* —God is life— an identification and personification of God with and as life, hence the need for absolute respect for life. Finally *Kelechi* —thank God, for the gift of life and praise him for same— *Tochi*.

From all we have said and seen above, we could safely affirm that Igbo names are not merely nominal. They contain and convey values. Hence in nothing, not even in their custom can we grasp their mentality so plainly as in their names which «in fact express and demonstrate all that is human, all that is best and worst in them» 20. In fact, Igbo value of life does not depend nor drive from the quality, or on circumstance, or on what one has accumulated, his position of power or position in the society, but on the fact that life is primary and above all, a gift from God-Chukwu. This is why everyone tries to live a life in fulfilment of his name. The traditional names are pace-setter for the bearer, a code of conduct for him —*Ihe akporo onye k’qhu*— what one is called, is what he is.

We shall now use the Igbo proverbs to demonstrate as well, their respect, love and value of life.

3. *Proverbs and value of life*

The Igbo like every other human race, have observed their environment and interacted with it. They have as well embedded their observations and reactions in their wisdom sayings —the proverbs and language 21.

Igbo proverbs are in fact only an extension of the facts of life which they manifest in their personal names. They are wisdom contents of the *Omenala* which are so philosophically and symbolically represented in a precise manner meant to be understood only by the wise and the cultured.
«They are philosophical and moral expositions shrunk to a few words and they form Mnemonic device in societies in which everything worth knowing and relevant to day-to-day life has to be committed to memory».

Proverbs have been characterized as the distiled wisdom of the ancestors, used to express the moral as well as the ethics of the society. A mode of speech which draws from the cultural attitudes and societal values. Hence «they perform an ideological function by making available the ideas and values encapsulated in these memorable and easily reproduced».

Proverbs are strongly rooted in experience, that is to say, they are «derived from a detailed observation of the behaviours of human beings, animals, plants and natural phenomena, from folklores, beliefs, values, attitudes, perceptions, emotions and the entire system of thought and feelings of a society».

Among the Igbo, speaking in proverbs is very much appreciated. To speak always in a very plain and «simple» language is perceived as talking like an inexperienced little child, because for the Igbo, «

Ilu bu mmanu eji eri okwu»—proverbs are oil with which words are eaten.

It is a mark of wisdom and a demonstration of oratory ability to colour one's talks with proverbs. It serves all purposes and the Igbo respect and appreciate the value and weight of the proverbs in daily life. The are always desired in speeches.

«The special merit of the use of proverbs is that they go back to the pre-colonial days and consequently one can use them to prove that certain ideas, concepts, practices, values, respect for human—life, existed among the Igbo before the advent of Christianity and western civilization and thus are original Igbo concept and not borrowed from foreign cultures»

Just as the Igbo's deep respect for life is demonstrated in their personal names, (as we had earlier seen), so also is their respect for life further conveyed in proverbs. Now, we examine a few of them to buttress our contentions all along. Just a few would suffice because it would not be easy nor very necessary analyzing very many of them.
«Mmadu agaghị eji maka ụnwụ na amụ were rie Nne ya» — one cannot because there is famine and eat his mother. This proverb shows there is no amount of hardship, nor circumstance, no matter how difficult or agonizing, that can justify or warrant the «destruction» of an innocent life. Destroying of an innocent life is seen as ‘Aru’ — an abomination.

«Onye di Ndu ga-eme ihe ochere» — He who is alive will accomplish his thoughts. This demonstrates the necessity of life in all that man can accomplish. Life is basic. Life is primary. Life is foundational. Hence it is very much valued and respected. It is not sentimental. NO! It is rooted in the blood of the Igbos. Ndu bu isi — Life is primary. Ndu adighi abuo — Life is not two the Igbos would say.

«Ana ekwu maka nnewyi mmiri riri, gi anakwu maka akwa qma» — A woman drowned is being talked about and you are talking of the cloth she is wearing. In some proverbs, a lot could be deduced. It could show the value of life over everything else. Sometimes it is a rebuke to those who place their value on material (things) wealth over life. These two senses are demonstrated by the above proverb. It is the belief of the Igbos that «Onye di ndu n ‘akụ (akpa) akụ» — only the living gather wealth because without life nothing is possible. And since common sense is an invaluable factor in the preservation of life, a lot of emphasis is laid on it as shown in this proverb: «A dighị asị onye marala ihe bilie na anwu» — a wise man is not told to get out of the sun.

It is no exaggeration saying that the Igbos have absolute value and respect for life. For them, life is sacred and must be sacrely handled. This is as a consequence of their religious perception of reality which is manifested in all facets of their life.

III. CARE FOR LIFE

Life for the Igbos has an absolute value, hence it is respected and cherished as it is demonstrated in their respect for old age, personal names and transmission of human life. The Igbos believe that because of the profound religious and moral value of life, it must also be cared for and preserved. This care and preservation
of life they translate into action and apply to and in their day-to-day life.

Sacred as life is, the Igbos see moderation as a sure means to preserve life, because as it is said: *Ebiri ka otorqo, okoo afo* —if you eat as it sweets, you get a swollen belly. It is only discipline that promotes life. It preserves and protects life, because *Okenye asu ghi nsu ogbaa ama* —if the old man does not stammer, he reveals a secret.

The Igbos demonstrate their care and value of life at every stage of life, right from the very moment of conception, by a woman to the very point in time when the matured ‘human life’ leaves for the highest stage of the true and perfect life. As Eliade rightly observed:

«Human life is not a smoothly continuous process, but is broken into stages. There is life and death, becoming and passing away, and in this alternation man is continually returning to primeval period and is thereby the object of divine creative activity where he can enter a new stage of life, as a new man, until he has reached the highest stage of the true and perfect man» 31.

All these stages of life from conception, birth, puberty, marriage and death, though transitional, are closely linked in an ontological perspective and value. Their transitional stages like some of the seven sacraments, mark the turning point in life and are often accompanied with various religious and cultural acts. Much more fundamental is the Igbo recognition of life as *Onyinyechi* —God’s gift, which imposes on them an obligation to care for, protect, defend and nourish that gift— life, from the very moment of conception to when it goes back to the giver.

The Igbos take every step necessary to care for life from the very sign of its existence or pregnancy, the period of birth and puberty. These we shall now examine for they are the main stages in life’s journey.

1. *Pregnancy and care for life*

If marriage is the most important event among the Igbos, and a sacred function in which every «rational» man is expected
to participate, it is because of its unique place in the transmission of
life, procreation and therefore the perpetuation of the family lineage
and name. This is why any marriage that has no possibility of con­
ception, that is transmission of life is as never was. For the Igbos,
no marriage is ‘fully accepted’ until pregnancy occurs and life
brought forth. Consequently, «first pregnancy becomes, therefore
the final seal of marriage, the sign of complete integration of the
woman into her husband’s family and kinship circle» 32.

From the moment of conception, the new life in the womb
and the expectant mother are objects of special care and treatment.
The woman becomes a special person and receives «exceptional» 33
special treatment from the family, extended family, Ununma, and
all relatives. This is because, for the Igbos, it is unquestionably clear
that what the pregnant woman is carrying in her womb is life—a
human being. One may ask how? The Igbo agwugwa or gwam-
gwam-gwam- riddle answers and explains thus:

Gwa m, gwa m, gwa m gwa m’
Tell me, tell me, tell me, tell me.
mmadu abu n’eje n’uzo
two people going on the road
mmiri n’ama otu
one is drenched, bitten by rain
ma odighi ama nke ozo?
and the other is not? 34

The answer usually is a pregnant woman. The expectant
woman is carrying life—a human being in her womb, hence while
she is being drenched by rain, the one in the womb is not. For
the Igbos she deserves special care and protection because pregnan­
cy marks the beginning of a new life, indicating that a new member
of the community and society at large is on the way.

This care for life, which is clearly shown through the care
for an expectant mother is further demonstrated by the many taboos
and regulations, in form of prescriptions and prohibitions, on what
to do or not to do, which the expectant mother, and sometimes,
the husband must observe because of the sacred nature of her state.
It is a practice among many African countries and they vary from
place to place. However, all are aimed at protecting the life of both
the mother and the new life in the womb. Though there might
be other reasons, such as hygienic and religious. Mbiti observes that:

«One of the most common regulations concerns sex­
ual intercourse during pregnancy... as soon as a woman
realizes that she is expecting, she and her husband completely stop having sexual intercourse until after birth.\textsuperscript{35}

The Igbos believe that intercourse during pregnancy is not only dangerous to the new life in the womb, but will also cause the mother’s milk to dry up. Thus plunging the feeding of the new life after birth into a dilemma. Among the Igbos, children are usually fed on their mother’s milk till about two to three years after birth. That is to say, till the child begins to walk. As Parrinder correctly observed: "if not during the whole of pregnancy, at least towards the end and lasting on for two years or more after the birth of the child. The usual idea is that intercourse will harm the child, and cause the mother’s milk to dry"\textsuperscript{36}.

Besides this sexual regulations, there are several dietary and food prohibitions for pregnant woman. They are forbidden to eat certain foods and animal, while some are highly recommended. It is feared that the forbidden foods would interfere with the health and safety of both the mother and the new life or would cause misfortune to either or both of them. The recommended foods are believed to be of positive help and may even facilitate birth as well. A case in point, in Obowo, an expectant mother is not allowed to eat Eju —snail, because, it is believed that if she does, the child would stream water from the mouth after birth. It is called "igu omu mmiri". She is as well forbidden to eat the meat of antelope, because it is believed to cause hemorrhage and thus endangering both the life of the mother and the child and also making abortion an easy possibility. An expectant mother is equally asked to abstain form eating the meat of Nebi —grass cutter, as it would induce premature, prolonged and painful labour. This is deduced from the peculiar habit of running forward and stopping suddenly of this animal.

However, pregnant mothers are very much encouraged to eat the meat of Mgbada deer. The deer is known for its agility and it is strongly believed that by eating the meat of this animal the expectant mother would acquire this quality. This would in turn help her during labour, so that it would be easy and the new life would be brought forth with little or no pain or danger. She is also advised to chew much of Nzu —a kind of edible white chalk, for this is believed to ‘strengthen’ the body of the child.
Finally an expectant mother is told to keep away from any strenuous works, emotional disturbing impressions that might prove hazardous and dangerous both to her and to the new life in the womb. In all these «dos» and «don’ts», no doubt they may have some scientific truths in them, but basically, they are fruits of peoples’ deep, long tested experiences and interaction with nature.

The Igbos, true to their nature, do not stop or remain satisfied with the prescribing of these «dos» and «don’ts» for the pregnant woman, they pray for them too. Prayers are made to Chukwu—God, the ancestors and to the spirits to ensure the protection and safety of both the mother and the new life in the womb. Confirming this Parrinder wrote:

«So when a woman announces to her husband or mother that she is pregnant there is rejoicing, and precautions are taken to ensure normal gestation and delivery. These precautions include both medical and spiritual attention. A sacrifice of thanks is made to the supreme God, or to the family gods or ancestors who are naturally interested in the reproduction of their family.... prayers are offered for the health of the mother and her baby».

These prayers are usually long, vary in form and very often accompanied by ritual offerings and sacrifices. However, ejaculatory form of prayers are also very common. A case in point, in some places, in the sixth month of a woman’s pregnancy, her husband takes a fowl, kola-nuts, palm-wine, alligator pepper, and cowries to the oldest man in the community, who is believed to be nearer to the ancestors and their representative in the community, to assure the ancestors that the new life in the womb—the baby, will be quite welcomed in the family so that there is no need to work its premature death or permit evil influence to do so. According to Talbot, at such a sacrifice, the old man prays thus:

«Ndiche! look at your child. Let no evil thing touch her, if it be a girl let her come forth head first, if it be a boy let him come forth head first».

This is usually made before the memorial post which symbolizes and represents the ancestors.
In other places like the Ache area of Enugu, Meek observes that when a woman becomes pregnant, the husband goes to her wife’s village and presents a chicken to Ezeala—the chief priest of Ala. The priest standing before ihu Ala—the shrine of ala—prays thus:

«Ala, this man has married our daughter and has paid the bride-wealth to her parents. He has brought this chicken to you as your share of marriage gifts. His wife has become pregnant and we beg you to protect her and to bring forth the child without difficulty».

However, when the pregnancy is between its second and sixth month, a more suggestive rite known as Aja Nkita—dog’s sacrifice, is performed. The husband obtains a branch of an Ogirisi tree and some gravels from a river-bed. The senior member of the woman’s Úmụnna comes to the husband’s home and plants the branch of the Ogirisi tree besides the husband’s barn. The gravel is laid at the base of the Ogirisi tree. He then directs the woman to kneel besides the life’s symbols and holding a dog provided by the husband speaks as follows: «we have planted an Ogirisi tree», in order that the child to this woman may flourish like the Ogirisi tree we have set gravel from the river-bed besides the tree in order that, as gravel remains when the river dries up, so may this woman’s child remain alive after the waters of childbirth have broken». A young man catches the dog by the head and an old man and old woman from the husband’s kindred grip it around the woman’s head. As this is done, the officiant says: «may the child you deliver whether male or female, be born alive and remain alive». This is said four times, and each time, the pregnant woman repeats the officiant’s words. Finally, the officiant says: «bear children, male and female, but let the males exceed the females in number». The dog is now slain and the blood allowed to pour over the stones. The flesh is cooked, and pieces are deposited on the stones. The liver is cut into two, and one half is given to the husband and other to the wife. The officiant then addresses the wife saying: «you and your husband must agree to be sweet-mouthed to one another». The wife says, «we do agree even as we are about to eat sweet thing together». She then places a piece of the liver in her husband’s mouth, and he also
does the same to her. Having eaten the liver they embrace each other» ⁴⁰.

There are many other elaborate rituals at pregnancy to protect the new life. One cannot hope to give here even an approximate and adequate picture, but suffice to say that all these elaborate rites and prayers as above, eloquently demonstrate Igbo preoccupation with ensuring that the tender new life in the mother’s womb is preserved, protected and cared for before birth» ⁴¹. All possible precaution is taken during pregnancy to protect and safeguard both the new life and the mother. Expectant mothers are specially treated. They are ‘handled like an egg’. Their joy and happiness is always and everywhere sought for. «Great shame», says Esomono, «fall on anyone who shows no respect to a pregnant woman, who beats her, or does anything harmful to her, whether by word or by deed. She carries two lives and these lives deserve double consideration and care» ⁴². No wonder the Igbos say: *Asị achaghị achaghị achara nwanyị di ime* —if nobody is allowed to pass, a pregnant woman must be allowed. This shows the double consideration given her, because of her sacred state, and the unique role and duty she is about to perform giving forth to a new life and consequently ensuring the continuity of the family life and lineage.

But one may be tempted to ask, and rightly too, if all these steps are taken to preserve, protect, and guard the ‘presumed’ life in the womb, what then happens at the birth, when the life is brought forth to light? This and other possible questions, we hope to treat in the following section.

2. Birth and care for life

That the Igbos recognize what is in the womb from the very moment of conception as a new life that must be protected and cared for by every positive means cannot be questioned. This we have seen and demonstrated all along. But how do they, Igbos care for this life at and after birth? Above all, what does the birth of a new life, i.e. new child signify for them?

The birth of a new child —new life, is an event that is hailed with great joy among the Igbos. It is an event which involves not only the immediate families but the whole lineage and village
—a great demonstration of love for life. The arrival of a new life which is a process that begins ever before the actual arrival of the child in this world and which continues thereafter, marks the continuity of life —of the family, lineage and umunna.

Chukwu —God, brings the child into the world, but it is the society that ‘creates him into a social being, and into a corporate person, for it is the society which must protect, feed, bring-up, educate and in many other ways incorporate the new life into the wider society. «Children», says Mbiti, «are the buds of the society and every birth is the arrival of ‘spring’ when life shoots out and the community thrives. The birth is therefore, the concern of not only of the parents but of many relatives including the living and the departed» such that the child cannot be exclusively «my child, but only our child»; and as the Igbos bluntly put it «Nwa bu nwa qha. Qbugh} otu onye nwe nwa».

The traditional Igbo birth generally took place outside the woman’s house and usually at her backyard called ‘Mkpuke’, and on banana leaves, and there were usually women specialists, —not modern nurses, who helped the woman during labour. Men are hardly allowed to be around, because, it is said that the child would be ashamed to be born before men.

During labour, the old man in the family or the husband of the woman himself, as the case may be, takes a seed-yam— ‘ji’ with which he draws a straight line down the woman’s forehead and abdomen, thus wishing that the birth be ‘straight’, that is, without complication. As he does so, he prays to Obasi di n’elu —God on high and Ala to help the woman to deliver freely. He finally goes to the threshold of the compound and praying again says: «Chukwu Abjama come I pray, and help this woman to deliver safely, let not the child die in her womb». He then cuts the yam into two or four pieces and lays them on the ground saying: «Anyanwu, —the sun spirit, take this yam to Obasidi-n’elu. Obasi, it was you that made the child and placed it in the womb, come and undo the wrapper which you tied. Ancestors, our fathers and Ala come ye and help this woman to deliver her child safely».

Immediately after the birth of the child, the women specialists announce the event with songs, —Oro qnu, dancing praising God, and the bravery of the woman. The first sign of the
perfect arrival of the new life is the child’s cry. Should the child by ‘accident’ fails to cry, he is made to, because it is the only sign of his vitality and what actually ‘sends out the message’ that a new life has really arrived. Then the husband is invited to come and see the oma —good thing— life. He usually replies with gun shots in the air and finally meets the women specialists and others who must have gathered around, with gifts of kola-nuts and wine. The women in turn paint his right hand, if the child is a male, or his left, if it is a female, with Nzu. This is finally followed by festive jubilation by the whole Umuuma, relatives, and friends. Usually people demonstrate their appreciation, love and solidarity to and with the family by presenting the child and his mother with gifts-material and monetary. In some places, the money is thrown into a bowel containing fresh and clean waters. This bowel of water is generally known as the ‘Nwu mmiri nwata’.

The woman then enters the period of omugwo—a period of intensive care and protection for the mother and the new life. It is usually 28 days or what the Igbos call Izu asaa-seven weeks, following the Igbo traditional counting system. In this system of counting, 4 days is equal to an Izu—a week. It is derived from the four market days of Nkwo, Eke, Orie and Afọ.

The Omugwo is usually very expensive, but it is joyfully borne because of the new child and the fact that the woman has ‘proved herself’ fruitful. She is exempted from all works and even from going to the market. During the whole period of Omugwo it is customary that the proper (i.e. biological) mother of the nursing mother, or her senior sister, or mother’s senior sister, in the absence of all others, and not her mother-in-law, who takes care of her. She stays with her, cooking her food, looking after her and assisting her in bathing, feeding the new baby and in other various ways. At times, other elderly women from the kindred group ‘drop in’ to give a helping hand. All these are done to ensure that the life of both the mother and the new child are protected and properly cared for. It is actually a sort of fattening period. As Uchendu noted:

«A mother who leaves the seclusion without adding flesh to her body is gossiped about by other women, she is not kind-hearted, they will say or she ate a hippopotamus and still showed a skeleton.»
It is a period of ‘special eating’. Nothing is spared in feeding her and the child well. She is as well placed on a special kind of soup called *Mmiri Ogwu* to help clear and strengthen her womb.

Many visit her and her child to show their love and solidarity. Among the Igbos, it is bluntly regarded as a sign of ill-will not to visit a nursing mother around you. At times, even the parish priests pay such visits to their parishioners. Such a visit not only gives joy to the families but also encourages them in their faith. All visitors are lavishly entertained with food- *Ugba ogi*, *Nzu*, meat and wine. The visit of children are very much appreciated and desired.

Another area in which this care for life is demonstrated at birth is in the mother’s permanent company with the new-born. During this nursing period, the child is carried on the mother’s back or bosom or that of any female member of the kindred or village. This direct contact between the mother and the child gives the new life a deep psychological sense of security. The mother and her child also share the same bed. Keeping the child apart from the mother is seriously frowned at. It betrays lack of love and regard for one’s duty as a mother. Confirming this, Basden says:

«Sleeping accommodation for the baby is a share of the mother’s couch. The Igbo mother thinks this the proper place for her offspring. To suggest a cot would raise doubt of the woman’s affection towards her child: it would be equivalent to treating the child as an object of little, or no importance than a common utensil.»

This idea certainly makes nonsense of the modern attitude of ‘synthetic’ mothers, who not only sleep differently from their new born babies, but also carelessly leave them at the total care of a baby nurse.

Just as every possible thing —food, love or otherwise are kept at the disposal of a nursing mother, she is also expected and demanded to be at the full service and complete ‘disposal’ of the new life. Usually among the Igbos, the child feeds mainly on her mother’s milk and water till he begins to walk. Hence, a mother can suckle her child anywhere and any time taking out her breast openly and without any feeling of embarrassment or
shame. Breasts are the symbol of life, and the bigger they are, the more people appreciated them, because it is a sign that the mother has an ample supply of milk for her child. It must be remarked here and underlined too, that among the Igbo, like many other African countries, there is nothing 'naked' or 'sexy' about a nursing mother bringing out her breast to suckle her child anywhere —public or private. It is her duty and must be religiously carried out. It is her pride as a mother. As noted above, this appears to be the ideal in almost all African countries.

The Umugwo is closely followed by the naming ceremony. It is an important event in Igbo society. With the name, the history and life of the entire family, kindred, village and even the whole town could be known.

The birth of a new child marks the beginning of a new life in the family and society. It is an occasion of great joy for everybody and especially for the mother because in a unique way it marks her full integration into the family, a seal and consummation of her marriage, and more if a male child. The arrival of the new life in the family ensures the continuation, not only of the physical line of life of the family but also of the immortalization of the parents' name here on earth. No wonder then the periods of pregnancy and birth are surrounded and protected with many prescriptions and prohibitions. But the new life has to be integrated into the wider society, where he must lead and live life. Hence we now turn to some of the rites for this integration. We have in mind the puberty rites.

3. **Puberty Rites and care for life**

As a child grows he is initiated into full adult life through various rites and rituals in form of initiation rites or puberty rites. Among the Igbo, some of these rites and rituals are mandatory and indispensable for full participation in the life of the community. They also help to equip one for life as we shall soon demonstrate.

Three kinds of initiation rites could be distinguished; those which comprises the collective rituals whose function is to effect transition from adolescence to adulthood, and sometimes,
they are obligatory. Ethnologically they are called ritual puberty rites; the second group includes all types of rites for entering a secret society, a bud or a confraternity; the last category of initiation are the type that occurs in connection with a mystical vocation, such include the vocation of the medicine man—'Dibia'. Our interest and main concern is to use these rites and rituals, without going into their complications to demonstrate how the Igbos use them to care, and prepare for life's battle.

The puberty period is a great transition from adolescence to adulthood, and therefore moments of considerable rituals. The underlying objective being to constitute the individual into an adult, a full person, and to introduce the person into the society, to sexual life and to marriage. The puberty rites and rituals are usually only for the girls. According to Parrinder «among the Igbos of Nigeria, there are fattening-houses for girls. Here maidens are secluded for months, fed on fatty foods, and their bodies anointed with oil, so that she becomes as buxom as possible». As seen from above, this rite for the girls involves some confinement and fattening. It also involves practice in home management. They go into seclusion leaving aside all forms of work but for those which are parts of their instruction. During this period, instructions on behaviours, customs and religion, which has been on for years in their families, are now increased and made more explicit to help them for full participation in the adult life.

They are properly cared for to prepare them for both the psychological and physical involvement and shocks of marital life. As Esomonu noted:

«Psychologically such a rest period, ranging from two to six months, help girls to get over the shock of the first menstruation experience, physically they fatten to prepare for childbearing. The aim of the fattening is to prepare girls for motherhood».

The initiation for the boys (and girls) is one of the key moments in the rhythm of the life of the individual, which is also the rhythm of the corporate group which the individual is a part. It is usually marked by a period of withdrawal from the community to live alone in the forest or in specially prepared huts away from the village. During this period, they are given instruc-
tions on many secrets of life. Mbiti observes that 'initiation rites have a great educational purposes, the occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated. It is a period of awakening to many things, a period of dawn for the young. They learn to endure hardship, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey, they learn the secrets and mysteries of the man-woman relationship'⁶¹. The initiation period is really a time of great learning about life and life's mysteries.

The withdrawal is a symbolic experience of the process of dying, living in the spirit world and back to life again. Thus dramatizing that they are now new personalities having put away their 'childish things' through a series of separation rites. No wonder it marks a solemn introduction into the adult life, and implicates entering into a state of responsibility and acquisition of rights, while new obligations are expected of them by the community.

There is no doubt from all we said above, that the basic aim of the girls' puberty rites is to prepare them for motherhood, ready to continue the 'perpetuation' of the family physical line of life, and mother craft because the ceremony normally ends with marriage. For the boys the main objective of the initiation rites and rituals, being always «to prepare them effectively for the precarious life of continuous struggle and endurance, which is the lot of man in life»⁶². It is certainly through these rites and rituals —for both the boys and the girls— that the corporate life of the Igbo society is revived, its rhythm given a new momentum and vitality renewed. But can this new momentum and renewed vitality be disturbed? In other words, are there acts that could work against this renewed vitality and new momentum? If yes, how do they directly or indirectly affect life? Put in another form: what are the offenses against life in traditional Igbo society and how do they react to it? This we shall now probe and explore.

IV. OFFENSES AGAINST LIFE

1. Offenses and punishments in general

In the previous sections, we saw that the Igbos have profound respect for life, love life, value and care for life more than anything
else. For them, life as the greatest gift from God, must be transmitted to sustain its continuity. Hence they take as much steps as possible to care for it and protect it from the moment of conception, through prohibitions, prescriptions, and rituals. A positive demonstration of their value of life. But are there acts that could militate against the proper development and fulfillment of this life, both of the individual and as well as on the community?

As in all human communities, social order and peace are recognized by the Igbo as essential, sacred and indispensable for the fostering of life. *Mmadu* —man— does it not mean 'let peace be' and the totality of all goodness for the Igbo? Because the sense of corporate life is so deep among the Igbo, it becomes inevitable that the solidarity of the community must be maintained, without which, it would be disintegration, destruction, disorder, and life would be impossible to sustain. Order is very necessary for peaceful human living and co-existence and for the development and fulfillment of human life.

This order among the Igbo is conceived of primarily in terms of kinship relationship as we saw in the previous chapter. This simultaneously gives rise to many situations of tension since everyone is related to everyone else through blood or common ancestors. Thus deepening the sense of damage caused by any strain of such tension. A case in point, if Obi steals, murders or commits suicide, personal relations are at once involved because of the deep blood relationship and as a member of the corporate body.

Hence, it becomes not only a personal offense(sin) but also an offense against the community and its consequences as well affect, not only the individual involved, but also the whole body of his relatives. As Ogu observed:

«In the Igbo traditional concept of sin, and forgiveness, the personal element does not exist outside the communal dimension, and the communitary element does not exist without the personal elements. Both dimensions harmoniously blend».

As a result, there exist many laws, customs, set forms of behaviour, regulations, rules, prohibitions, observances, and taboos
constituting the *Omenala* —moral powerhouse or moral code, and ‘*nsọ ala*’ which defines various kinds of social relations and behaviours approved by the community as contributing towards harmony. The *Omenala* as well provided sanctions against those considered by the community to be dangerous to the peace and order in the community. Any breach of the *Omenala* is *Aru* —an abomination, for it is an act of destruction to the accepted order and peace. And it must be punished by the corporate society of both the living and the ancestors. This is because the Igbo community does not only subsist on the collective solidarity of the people living who share common customs, beliefs and identical world view, and who are linked by blood relationship but also on the ‘living dead members’ of the community —ancestors.

The life and well-being of each member is as well that of the entire community. Hence, anything which disturbs this life and well-being must be removed by appealing to the *Omenala*. The appeal to the *Omenala* is final in all kinds of offenses. An offense could be understood either in the legal, religious or moral sense, but ‘in a society with single religion as the Igbo, the distinction between civil, religious and moral offenses and the punishment they incur can be at times very difficult to determine’. That is to say, there were no radical or absolute distinctions between civil, criminal or moral offenses. All offenses are *Aru* or *Imeruala*. Confirming this view Meek wrote:

> «Religion and law are so closely interwoven that many of the powerful legal sanctions are derived directly from the gods.»

The most superior power and the most prominent in controlling morality are *Ala* earth spirit, and «ancestors». The greatest offense being against *Ala* and they are called *Ime nsọ ala* —abomination, such that the word ‘*Onye, Uru ala* or *Onye Uru*’ describes a deliberate evil doer, as long as he remains in the state of wrong doing. He is also called *Ajọq Mmadu*.

The sanctions were mainly religious sanctions because the Igbos believe in the ability of the spirits and the ancestors in punishing any offender. As we have noted in many places in this work, the Igbos absolutely believe that the spirits and the ancestors were interested in the moral probity or improbity of the individual
member of the community as invisible corporate members. In this way, all offenders are punished. No one escaped punishment.

All offenses, whether deliberate or accidental were punished. Just as Olisa remarked:

«One curious fact about crime and punishment in Igbo society was that criminal motives were frequently not examined carefully, so that accidents were punished as if they were deliberate crimes».

By committing an offense, the person not only puts himself under the anger and wrath of the spirits and ancestors, but also the whole community. This was why in the «Things Fall Apart» of Achebe, after Okonkwo had accidentally killed Ezeudu’s sixteen year old son, the whole community had to punish him because «if the clan did not exact punishment for an offense against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender, as the elders said, if one finger brought oil, it soiled the others». In most cases the only way to put the wrong right was to compensate the injured person and the community and also appease the ancestors and Ala through sacrifices. Hence it could then be said that the essence of Igbo morality is that which is more «societary rather than spiritual» it is a morality of conduct rather than a morality of being. In a word, it is «a dynamic ethics rather than a static ethics for it defines what a person does rather than what he is».

Having seen the concept of offense and the possible manner of punishment in Igbo traditional society, we now consider and examine some of the offenses that are specifically directed towards life in a direct or indirect manner. We have in mind such offenses as suicide, abortion and murder.

2. Suicide and life

Among all the human rights, the right to life is the most fundamental, for there can be no further rights or duties unless there is someone living, someone there to have them. Just as the Igbos say, Ndu bu isi —life is primary, life is first.
Life is a natural right to man. This cannot be doubted. It is self evident. My very nature as a person demands that I have the right to life, for I can do nothing without life. This the Igbo understood perfectly as this name Nduke —if life permits, suggests. And as we saw in the second chapter of this work, life for the Igbo is the highest and most precious gift from God —Onyinye chi. Like Fagothey observed, some gifts are given outright and others have strings attached. All God’s gifts are restricted, not because of any lack in his generosity but because he has to make us responsible for their use when He entrusts them to our freedom. Freedom itself is perhaps God’s greatest gift, but we are not allowed, though we are able to misuse it.

If life is a gift to me and really mine, why cannot I do with it as I wish? Why can’t I destroy it when I wish and as I wish? Again, Fagothey says:

«Life has been given and its allotted span goes with the gift. It is not ours to decide when we have had enough of it and tell God we are quitting.»

This shows clearly that life, though a gift, it is a gift with «conditions» attached to it. No wonder, suicide appears to be thoroughly perplexing and confounding.

Suicide is said to be «the direct killing of one’s self on his own authority.» That is to say, the «taking of one’s life; the human act of self-inflicted, self-intentioned cessation.» Hence, as a human act, it embraces a multitude of underlying motivational states, both conscious and unconscious and is influenced by multiple factors, no one of which can be regarded exclusively as the basic cause. However, above everything else, suicide must be willed and voluntary. It must be at least a premeditated act.

Because the Igbo believe that God ‘owns’ life, —chinyendo, and that it is a gift from Him to man-Onyinzechi, nobody is allowed to dispose of his own life on his own authority. No reason justifies it; whether directly or indirectly. It is not only regarded as an act of cowardice and the refusal to face life courageously, but also a means of arrogating to one’s self the power that belongs to God alone. It is a great Arou and a great pollution of the land, which must invite the wrath of Ala, the ancestors, and the community as a whole. As Leonard A. G. rightly noted:
Among the Igbo particularly the act of suicide is looked upon with manifest deprecation and horror, it is not of common occurrence, ... it is generally spoken of as devilish or as evil death» 75.

Suicide is a kind of death which no family would wish or pray for, for any of her members. It is dreaded for many reasons. Suicide does not only dent the name of the family but it is also an attack on human life, transmission of life and perpetuation of the family lineage and name. The Igbos see it as a great curse to a family.

Among the Igbos, it is an Omenala —traditional practice, to refuse a worthy burial to anyone who commits suicide. He is usually thrown to Ajq qhia —bad bush and his body never allowed to touch the earth. He is not only refused by the community, but also by the mother earth, which he has polluted by his act. A worthy burial is the desire of every Igbo because it assures his reunion with the ancestors. As Basden observed:

«The Igbo will endure everything demanded of him in this life, will put up with the hardship, the misbehaviour of his children, indeed anything, in order to ensure that his burial will be properly performed. His whole future welfare depends on this, and hence it takes at all times almost prominent place in a man's calculations» 76.

To deny someone ground burial says Esomolu, is the Igbo «summum malum». It is the desire of every Igbo man to be accorded an honourable burial when he dies 77. One of the greatest misfortunes and evils that can befall a man or a family member, is to be denied a ground burial because of suicide or any other evil deed-Aru.

Suicide is so abominable and treated with the greatest ignominy among the Igbos, so much so, that if one kills himself by hanging, no member of the community can bring the body down. Only a stranger or of course a 'Dibja' —Medicine-Man can. Nobody touches the corpse because the person that hangs himself has polluted the land-Omeruola ala. These are vividly portrayed and dramatized by many Igbo literary works. A case in point, «The Concubine» of Elechi Amadi aptly dramatizes this idea in the
form of a dialogue form the suicide of Madame: «... 'this is bad, very bad», Nwokekoro the priest of Amadioha said. The question is, who will bring him down?» Chima asked «Only a dibia of course. No ordinary man will dare bring him down» someone explained. «That is clear even to a child», Chima said,... suicide is so abominable that we cannot do otherwise, «wosu said, shrugging. Late that afternoon, Anyka arrived in the village. Armed with amulets and powerful charms, he cut down the body. He fortified two strangers, who were to bear the body, against evil spirit. Then began the long trek to Minita the forest into which bodies rejected by earth were thrown».

Again we read in the «Things Fall Apart» of Achebe about the hero, Okonkwo, a man who fought for his success in life, a man who said yes and his Obi and Umunna also said yes, the roaring flame of Umuofia, a great wrestler and warrior, who out of frustration, because the religion brought by the whites at Umuofia is greatly changing his cherished traditional ideal, murdered the messenger, and hanged himself, was not even buried by his people. Achebe describes the situation thus:

«Then they came to the tree from which okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead. «Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him, said Obierika. We have sent for strangers from another village to do it for us, but they may be a long time coming». The District commissioner changed instantaneously. The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs. «Why can’t you take him down yourselves?, he asked. It is against our custom,» said one of the men. It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offense against the earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansman. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. That is why we ask your people to bring him down, because you are strangers’. «Will you bury him like any other man?» asked the commissioner. «We cannot bury him. Only strangers can. We shall pay your men to do it. When he has been buried we will then do our duty by him. We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land».
To demonstrate how annoyed they were with the commissioner and his men, and how unfortunate it is for a man, and more, a great man of Okonkwo’s status to have committed suicide, Obierika, Okonkwo’s greatest friend who had been gazing steadily at his friend’s dangling body turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously: «That man was one of the greatest men in Úmúoñja. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog...»

From the above dialogues, it is very clear that among the Igbos, suicide is never looked at in ‘good faith’. It is an evil, a great pollution of the land, and an abomination. It is completely wrong, irrational and uncharitable to take one’s life, a life that has been cared for, and protected for, all along by the society, for any reason, ‘just’ or unjust. No wonder such a body is treated with the greatest amount of disrespect. Life is a precious gift of God. It is in this line of thought that Esomọnụ remarked:

«The reason for the aversion to suicide seem to be that the Igbos see in it not only the taking away of life which constitutes pollution but also ingratitude to the ancestors and the community which has lavished all its care on him during the different stages of development»

And in the words of Aquinas, «For anyone to kill himself is to go against his natural inclination, and that charity whereby everyone is bound to love himself. Therefore self killing is a mortal sin being against the natural law and against charity». In every sense it is completely wrong to kill oneself, at least for the natural love everything has for itself and the natural tendency or instinct of self-preservation.

If the Igbos treat the taking of one’s life with such an aversion and strict adherence to the Omenala to the general attitude towards the dead body and its burial, what is then their attitude or reaction towards the killing of the unborn, the innocent fetus in the womb? In a word, what is their attitude towards abortion? This we hope to examine now.

3. Abortion- ‘Ite Ime’

Among the hotly controverted issues of our time —i.e. of today is the question of abortion. So much so that we seem to have
been polarized into pro-abortion and anti-abortion forces, with almost all sides using at times, dishonest and immoral tactics to carry points. This is certainly a distressing problem of our time and day.

Abortion is conceived as the destruction of life after conception and before birth. It is bound by non-conception on the one hand and by infanticide on the other. In other words, it is the expulsion of the living fetus from the womb—uterus—before viability, i.e. before it is capable of existence outside the womb or independent existence of the mother. Consequently, this ‘deliberate ejection of the non-viable fruit of the womb from the mother’s body or killing it while it is still in the womb’, excludes all premature delivery of a viable fetus as long as it can be kept alive, and all ‘natural miscarriages’.

In Igbo context, abortion is called ‘Ite ime’ or ‘Ishi ime’—removing of pregnancy. But since the object of our discussion is abortion as an offense against life in Igbo traditional society, we may as well ask: what is the traditional Igbo attitude to abortion properly so called? Just as we have seen from its definition above.

Abortion properly so called, was very uncommon in the traditional Igbo society before the advent of Christianity or the colonial period. What was common was miscarriage. Many early anthropological works on the Igbos were very silent about the theme of abortion, unlike other themes such as; suicide, murder, rituals, sexual crimes and so forth. This silence can only be interpreted to mean and justifiably too, that abortion properly so called was not common and that it was foreign to Igbo culture. There are actually many and valid indications to suggest this view—that the idea of abortion properly so called, was totally alien to Igbo thought pattern and culture. The attitude of the Igbo society towards barrenness as a curse. Human fertility was so much cherished as one of the greatest gifts and blessing form God, so much so that every Igbo woman looked forward to and was very pleased being pregnant. Again, the fact that miscarriage was regarded as a loss of human being, because they believe the product of conception—fetus, is a human being in the full sense of the term as long as it is in the womb as we had earlier seen somewhere in this work. All these facts militate against any easy attitude towards any deliberate abortion. There are little or no positive evidence of such easy attitude. There was a wholesome acceptance of and respect for
life in all its totality, form or state. The Igbos love children and cherish having them. For the traditional Igbo society, the theological and philosophical ‘games’ and ‘battles’ on whether life begins at conception or at later stage has no place. Life for them begins at the moment of conception as we had earlier seen and to suggest otherwise would seem to them ‘just a sort of casuistry which an anti-papist might describe as Jesuitical’.

Because the Igbos strongly believe that life lived in absolute isolation from other human lives is not, or never would become ‘human’; and because there is appreciation of the fact that human life in its proper meaning is impossible without the co-operation of the rest of nature through which and on behalf of which life now exists; and because life is seen as communal, abortion like suicide and other crimes against life in Igbo society, is therefore not a private offense —‘my sin’. It has its communal perspective. Man’s conduct is regulated in detail by the Omenala, which one must not only observe, but must also be seen observing it by others. Igbo society is one, in which «kinship makes a person intensely ‘naked’, and moral demands are uncomfortably scrutinized by everybody so that a person who fails to live up to them cannot escape notice».

And as Uchendu remarked:

«The concept of good life among the Igbo is so built on the transparency theme that the individual dreads any form of loss of face».

From above, it is clear that one’s actions though personal and private in the strict sense, is perceived first from the societal effects in Igbo society. Confirming this in relation to abortion, Lazarus wrote: «Actually abortion is a social phenomenon for many reasons. It involves in depth the relationship between two human beings, the woman and her child, it has repercussion on the couple and on the family and in an even wider sense, on the social environment in which they are integrated. For this reason abortion cannot fail to arouse the interest and intervention of the whole community».

The Igbos strongly uphold that if one has the will to enter into sexual union, he must also be ready to accept the responsibility for the out-come. Hence, such names as Ajunwa —child is
never refused, because *Iheyinwo*—there is nothing like child and therefore *Nwahiri*—let the child stay. This also explains the reason behind the elaborate care, prohibitions, prescriptions and taboos that surround a woman from the moment of conception till birth and up to the time the child begins to walk, and the many initiation and puberty rites and rituals from childhood to adulthood, just to integrate the child into the society and sexual life. A case in point, in the girls' puberty rites, as we saw earlier, they are among many other things tutored on how to be good wives, marital relationships, which necessarily include how to sleep with their husbands and when to refrain from sexual intercourse, to avoid what the Igboos call *Ime oghom*—unwanted pregnancy. If a woman 'takes in' while nursing a baby, both his husband and herself are ridiculed by the society. They are made object of caricature. For the traditional Igbo society, everything about sex is sacred and must be treated so. The life in the womb is seen as object of respect and care. Any attempt to do away with it, is strongly punished. The modern Igbo youths to avoid some of these punishments when they are guilty, usually run to the towns.

To procure abortion in the traditional Igbo society is an abomination—*Imeruala*. An abomination as we saw in the previous section, embraces serious personal and moral crimes, such as incest, pregnancy within a year of the death of a woman’s husband, willful abortion, patricide, murder, suicide by hanging etc. It is a grave offense against the earth spirit, the ancestors, and of course, the community. It is a desecration of the land, the abode of the ancestors, believed to be sacred, and thus requires an expiatory—(purificatory) sacrifice to cleanse the polluted land, appease the earth spirit, the ancestors, in order to ward off their wrath and finally get reconciled with the community. There is the strong belief that if such an abomination is not atoned for, be it ever secretly committed, the penalty is sure to descend on the culprit’s head or on his relations and descendants. «To hide one’s abominable offense or refuse to sacrifice», says Arinze, «is to lead a dangerous life, to walk on a tight rope, to play with fire», because if it is ever known, as is always the case, the person is not only «ostracized and cut off from social communications», but also «denied worthy burial if he dies». This usually deter people from committing abortion.
Another deterrent and serious punishment for abortion and other related offenses, which all offenders hardly escape from is the use of satirical songs with the name(s) of offender(s). This is usually very effective. Confirming this, Leith Ross, writing about the punishment for a girl who indulges in illicit sexual intercourse before marriage proper wrote:

«Should she (a betrothed girl), have intercourse with her fiancee or at any rate conceives by him before the proper time i.e. about four years after her first menstruation... she would be looked down upon by her companions who would make her a song; This ‘making a song’ i.e. bringing shame and ridicule on the victim... is a popular and very effective form of Igbo punishment» 93.

These songs are usually a literary composition being essentially a criticism of the folly or offense which it holds up to ridicule, scorn, or expose. «It also makes it easy to express deep-seated feelings not permissibly verbalized in other context». In other words, one can say publicly in such songs, what one might not say privately to a man's face and get away with it. It is approved, maintained, and sustained by the society for maintaining order and sanity in the community.

These songs are usually sung in the nights, during the Egwu Onwa—moon-light plays, or during the display of masquerades, and in the recent past and of course now, by musical groups. Among these musical groups, special mention must be made of the» Agbata-ekuru-nwa» in Obowo and Mbaise areas of Imo State, the famous ‘Abigbo dance group’ of Chiokoneze of Mbaise. In one of her songs, the ‘Abigbo’ dance, in order to prove that abortion is murder asks: «Agbogho tere ime omaghi si ya eliele nwa mbu?»—a young girl that committed abortion, does she not know that she has buried her first child? In another song, to ridicule Christian girls who commit abortion or take abortifacient and go to confession, they sang: «I will go to Obinigwe to buy abortion medicine to eat. I will go to Obinigwe where passing six girl nurse babies. Please Father forgive me for it happened that way to me. Please Father forgive me for I did not know I was pregnant... First Friday girl, the Priest will not forgive you. Legion of Mary girl, the Priest will not forgive you. Morning Mass girl, the Priest will not
forgive you. Because you did it and then bought abortion medicine to eat. Because you did it and then bought abortion medicine to eat." These songs and the likes are used to expose, ridicule and punish offenders with cynical comments and criticisms. They exist till today and as observed above, it has proved and still proving very effective in Igbo society.

The masquerades are also used, not only to expose and ridicule such offenses but also to punish in concrete form, all offenders. Their authority is never questioned because they are believed to be 'the dead among the living'— the ancestral spirits personified. Hence the usual respect accorded to the ancestors are equally given to them. Consequently people try as much as possible 'to keep their hands clean' at least to avoid being publicly disgraced by the *Mmonwu*— the personified ancestral spirit.

From all we have said above, it is thus indisputably clear that abortion properly so called was a dreaded offense in Igbo traditional society. It was seen as a great abomination-*Arù*, for which the offender(s) must be punished. Like suicide, abortion was seen as a wicked act against the innocent child, aimed at destroying the continuity of the family lineage in particular and the community in general.

If the traditional Igbo society have such a punitive and abhorsive attitude towards suicide and abortion, how do they react to murder? This we shall discuss next.

4. *Murder-'Q chu'*

In the previous sections, we examined the attitude of the traditional Igbo society to such offenses as suicide and abortion, and saw that they were considered as serious abominations, grave offenses against life, the earth spirit, the ancestors, and the community as whole. They are offenses which can never go unpunished. They were seriously punished with purificatory rites, criticisms, and ridicule. And nobody guilty of them, secretly or publicly, ever escaped these ordeals.

If 'simple' and 'private' suicide and abortion, unmistakably attracted the wrath of the earth spirit, the ancestors, and the entire community, how much more would murder? Was it lightly taken or even more seriously taken?
It is a fact that certain moral values are universally considered as fundamental and essential in all societies and cultures. A typical universal fundamental value is the inviolability of human life. All peoples uphold this principle of the inviolability of human life, which derives from the equality of all men in their intrinsic dignity as human-beings. This is basic in all respect for life.

In civil laws, distinctions are made between murder and manslaughter. Murder supposes malice afterthought and thus full voluntaries, while manslaughter is taken as an accidental killing. Very often the civil law judges only by and with external criteria. But we are in the area of morals, and morality takes into consideration all factors and mostly the act of inner freedom which flows from knowledge.

Because murder supposes malice afore-thought, and full voluntariness, it is thus defined as; «the direct killing of an innocent person»⁹⁶, —i.e. one who has not forfeited his or her right to life. Murder in most cases is a product of human malice or passion. Thus murder is a wicked and inhuman act. An arrogating of right which belongs only to God. And because the Igbos regard life as sacred, worthy of all respects, all cares, and protection, murder was thus seen as an intrinsic evil act. It is an abomination and hence it is included in the major prohibitions of Omenala called Nso ala⁹⁷.

Among the Igbos, a murder could be out of Oghom—accidental, or murder properly so called —i.e. an outright determined will to kill. The former is called a female Ochụ while the later is called a male qhụ. Hence we read in Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart', when during the funeral of Ezeudu, Okonkwo accidentally killed his sixteen year old son, it was referred to as a female Ochụ. Whether male qchụ or female qchụ, it is always seen as a crime against the earth spirit, the ancestors and the community as a whole. As we read again in 'Things Fall Apart':

«It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female, Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years»⁹⁸.
From the above quotation, it is clear that the Igbos distinguish between premeditated or willed murder—male *qchu* and un-premeditated or accidental murder—female *qchu* or *oghom*. They are all *Arů*—abomination, *nsọ ala*, and like all other crimes against the earth spirit—*Ala*, all offenders must be punished. No murderer ever escaped punishment. As Basden rightly remarked: «*O gbulu qchu adeli olo*, «which means that a murder does not go unpunished» ⁹⁹.

We may be tempted to ask: Why do the Igbos punish all murderers and all forms of murder? The most basic answer would be that for the Igbos, murder is a grave injustice; not only to the innocent victim, but also to the community that has ‘given in all’ to care for and protect the life; a serious offense against the earth spirit—*Ala*, who is the custodian of public morality in conjunction with the ancestors. As Achebe once again observes: «the land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them. A man’s life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors» ¹⁰⁰.

The theme of justice is central in Igbo morality. It is one of the main pillars of Igbo morality and regulates the relationship between man and man. The Igbos, says Donnell, «have a strong sense of injustice and are keen to sense your friendly or unfriendly attitude towards them» ¹⁰¹. And for Jordan, the Igbo ‘notion of good and evil were exceptionally clear and painfully patent to the wrong doer’ ¹⁰². The Igbos believe absolutely in the principle of ‘tit for tat’, eye for eye and life for life. Hence the proverb—‘*Egb e bere ugo bere, nke si ihe ya ebele nku kwapu ya*’—let the kite perch and let eagle perch, whichever says that the other will not perch, let his wings break off! One would make no mistake in saying that the principle of *Lex talionis* is operative in its extreme form among the Igbos. It was because of justice that Okonkwo had to be punished for an accidental murder of Ezeudu’s son. We read:

«*It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messenger. They had no hatred in their heart against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman*» ¹⁰³.
In the above passage, one may be struck by the fact that among the Igbos, justice does not respect anybody. In the question of justice, brotherhood, kinship or friendship are kept aside, as is evident in the participation of Obierika, Okonkwo's greatest friend in the destruction of his properties. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo, but were following the principle of justice as enshrined in the Omenala —the Igbo moral power house. Injustice was perceived as a kind of Mmegbu and it is very much dreaded by all. To call someone onye Mmegbu is to give him one of the worst tags as a bad person.

The gravity of punishment for murder among the Igbos depends on the kind of murder, whether it is a male ochu— wilful murder or a female ochu, —inadvertent murder. However, one punishment stands out basic and can never be dispensed from, or compromised with; —i.e. the purificatory rites to cleanse the land polluted by the shedding of another's blood through murder, so as to ward-off the wrath of the earth spirit and that of the ancestor. Because murder was in all cases an offense against the earth spirit —Ala, it was the duty of the whole community to take reprisal on behalf of Ala as her messengers. «If the clan did not exact punishment for an offense against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As the elders said; if one finger brought oil it soiled the others». Hence the land must be cleansed as in the case of Okonkwo. «They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman».

However, in the case of a premeditated murder, the offender automatically forfeits his right to live. He is killed or allowed a little time to hang himself. Esomonu remarked that should he delay action, he was prompted to do so by having a suitable rope handed to him. The Igbos say: «Ogburu ozu n'ozu na-ala». «The punishment for murder was so prodigious that it was always dreaded. In case of wilful murder, the Igbos adhere to the principle of ‘Lex Talionis’ of Exodus. Anyone who strikes a man and so causes his death must die (Ez 21: 12)». There were no questions of compromise on this. It was very clear to the Igbo traditional society. This explains why Okonkwo after he had ‘bravely’ drawn his machete and descended twice on the court messenger, stood, looked at the dead man, went off and hanged himself.
In the case of a murder committed inadvertently, besides the total destruction of the murderer's properties, he was also expected to flee the clan for a stipulated number of year, usually seven to fourteen years. This is to allow the anger of the earth spirit-Ala, and the ancestors to cool down, after which the murderer may be allowed to return and rejoin his clan. However, to be fully admitted into the community, he must have to pay some reasonable compensation to the relatives of his victim and, the purificatory rites performed as well. A case in point, in Achebe's «Things Fall Apart», these punishments were clearly demonstrated in Okonkwo's accidental killing of Ezeudu's sixteen year old son. We read:

«Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart. The confusion that followed was without parallel in the tradition of umuofia... The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land» 110.

Fleeing was not enough. It was only a part of the punishment. The destruction of his properties must be carried out as well. Hence «as soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from the Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his ban» 111. Sometimes, murderers who flee their clan, never return to it again in life.

If, however, the murderer had killed a married woman, or a pregnant woman, which means killing two people, compensation must have to be paid in respect of the two lives, to the husband of the woman and the community. Generally, the murderer(s) hand over a young man and a virgin girl for a substitute. In this way, justice would have been made and peace allowed to prevail. Once again, we read in «Things Fall Apart», about the reactions of Umuofia and Mbaino communities, when a daughter of Umuofia community was murdered while she had gone to market at Mbaino: «... and in a clear unemotional voice he told Umuofia how their daughter had gone to market at Mbaino and had been killed. That woman, said Ezeugo, was the wife of Ogbuefiudo and he pointed to a man who sat near him
with a bowed head. The crowd then shouted with anger and thirst for blood». But after deliberations by Ụmụọsia community, ‘an ultimatum was immediately dispatched to Mbaino asking them to choose between war on the one hand, and on the other the offer of a young man and a virgin as compensation’. The Mbaino community, afraid of Ụmụọsia community and wisely too, accepted to compensate. Hence when Okonkwo of Ụmụọsia arrived at Mbaino as the proud and imperious emissary of war, he was treated with great honour and respect and two days later, he returned home with a lad of fifteen and a young virgin*. The young virgin was given to Ogbefi to replace his murdered wife while the young lad-Ikemefuna became the child of the entire community under the watchful care of Okonkwo.112

In as much as the offenses of suicide, abortion, murder and the likes are uncompromisingly punished, murder in the case of inter-community wars or inter tribal wars, and murder in an attempt to safeguard the integrity and ideals of the community are praised. They are almost always rewarded as mark of bravery. St. Thomas Aquinas seemed to be thinking in line with the Igbo thought pattern when he suggested that «if a man be dangerous and infectious to the community, on account of some sins, it is praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed in order to safeguard the common good»113. Among the Igbos the idea of common good is very much cherished as we saw in the first chapter of this work. The highest common good and value is life.

This is Igbo traditional society, her strict justice with regard to the inviolability of the human life and her respect for this inviolability. Life is sacred and he who violates the sacredness of human life through murder must pay the supreme penalty. Just because life is sacred. Not to kill a murderer would mean to fail to have regard for the supreme ontological and true value of life in the order of values. Hence for the traditional Igbo society it is a powerful witness to the sacredness of life. The God given life. And true witness can be shown only through the strict administration of ‘active justice’ when the sacredness of life is violated through suicide, abortion, or murder. Just to deter future murderers and offenders. They strongly believe that certainly no other punishment not even the modern long term imprisonment can achieve this aim of installing the due respect for the value of
life, as the traditional Igbo society would wish it. Just as Fitz-james Stephen remarked:

«No other punishment deters men so effectively from committing crimes as the punishment of death. This is one of these propositions which it is difficult to prove, simply because they are in themselves more obvious than any proof can make them. It is possible to display ingenuity in arguing against it, but that is all the whole experience of mankind is in the other direction. The treat of instant death is one to which resort has always been made when there was an absolute necessity for producing some results».

From all we have said above, we could safely affirm that Igbo respect for life and value of life is solidly based on their profound recognition and acceptance of the inviolability of life and its sacredness. They have a natural humane attitude towards life. Life for them is the greatest value that one possesses. These names— Nduka and Ndubusi among many others as we have seen are a clear demonstration of this fact. For them, life has to be preserved and loved, no matter how miserable it may seem to appear. The Igbo value and care for life is made possible, thanks in part to the Omenala—the moral power house—and the social setting of the Igbo community. A community where almost everyone is related to everyone else by a blood link, a community with high cooperative spirit and very altruistic, a community where every person is a check to everyone.

Because the Igbos love, respect, and value life, they as well care for life from the very moment of conception till death. They do not stop at caring for life. They equally use all possible positive human effort to defend life against any action that threatens to destroy or deny life of its value and sacredness. This is why they go to the ‘unfortunate’ extent of demanding life for life in the case of wilful murder, while in the case of suicide victims are denied proper burial. NDU BU ISI —Life is first, life is primary—and of unlimited intrinsic value and we cannot but have absolute reverence and love for life in all forms and at all stages.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Cf. Chapter one of this work. These qualities: religiosity, hospitality, and co-operative-spirit were fully discussed.
8. Ibid.
13. Cf. Chapter one of this work.
15. Cf. Gen 27, 36; 1 Sam 25, 23.
18. Cf. Ubahakwe, E., Igbo Names: their structures and their meanings, Ibadan University Press, 1981, p. 99. He added that in a more general sense, a name points to the values of the society into which the individual is born.
20. Ibid., p. 551.
21. Language is here understood as the carrier of culture, constituting the wrap and woof of the mental life of a given society. An indispensable instrument in understanding and appreciating adequately the thought pattern, belief system and value standard of a given community.
23. Ibid.
27. Cf. The section on the offences against life.
28. Abomination embraces serious personal and moral crimes against the earth spirit-«Ala». It includes such offences as: Patricide, suicide, incest, willful murder and abortion and stealing of farm crops especially *yam*, etc.
30. An European may not fully understand this proverb because they love sun and sun-bathing. For the Igbos the sun, because of its heat, the Igbo land being in the tropical climate, it is not wise to be under the sun. It is very dangerous to be under the sun for a long time. Hence, the proverb above.
33. We say exceptional because, in traditional Igbo society, all married women are specially treated, respected and honoured, their age or status notwithstanding. They are no longer looked upon as «okoro» but now as responsible and matured.
34. The four times questioning is not accidental. For the Igbos, the number four is sacred. In our treatment of «*oji*» as a philosophical concept of life, we saw that any «*oji*» with four lobes is a kola of peace. Cf. Chapter Two-«*oji*» as life. We must also remark here that there are many kinds of riddles in Igbo society: Tonal riddles, personified riddles, the-odd-one-out riddles, mystery riddles the high sense riddles and the entrapping riddles. All these are used to teach one moral value or the other. For more details Cf. OFO EBGU, J., *Igbo Identity and Personality*, op. cit., pp. 164-169.
37. Ibid., p. 91.
40. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. I got this information from my late father, Anuolam J. Maduakolam, C. 120 yrs. died in 1974. He often said: «we who are born behind the house and on the banana leaves are stronger than those of these days born on beds and foams».
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48. In and around Obowo, the women usually put their invitation in a form of song: «Onye ọma di mma, bịa gburu m aka- 4 times, Nwa di mma eh! ye rukwe m aka eh». -If you appreciate good things, come and congratulate me-4 times, child is good, yes! may it reach me.

49. We saw in the previous chapter (two) that kola is a symbol of life.

50. It must be remarked that water is a symbol of life as well for the Igbos. Hence they refer to a healthy person as one who has ‘water-oozing-body- Onye ahụ n’ata mmiri.


52. The word ‘carrying at back’ does not do justice to the Igbo idea and expression that is thus translated. The Igbo say «Ikwq ọwụ or Iku ọwụ». For the Igbos, only ‘things’ and a ‘dead thing’ are carried. ‘Ikwq or Iku’ symbolises a kind of ‘intimate intimacy’. A case in point, the Igbos would not say that one alive is being carried in the car, but rather would say: ‘onye akewu’ in the car. While for a dead body in the car, they would say: ‘Ozu ebu’ in the car ‘Ibu ‘is the right word for ‘to carry’.


54. We had earlier noted that there were sexual regulations to avoid the drying up of the mother’s milk during and after pregnancy-birth, for a period of about two to three years.

55. Cf. MBITI, J. S., African Religions and Philosophy, op. cit., p. 120.

56. For more details on the meaning and value of names in relation to Igbo concept of life, see the section on this —Chapter— on «value of life».

57. According to Eliade, Initiation dents «a body of rites and oral teaching, whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated. In philosophical terms, the initials equivalent to a basic change in existential condition, the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation, he has become another»: ELIADE M., Rites and symbols of Initiation, Harper and Row Publishers, New York 1958, p. X.


59. PARRINDER, E. G., African Traditional Religion op. cit., p. 95.

60. ESOMOŅU, L., op. cit., p. 162.

61. MBITI, J. S., op. cit., p. 122.


63. Cf. Chapter one for more details.

64. OGU, C., Igbo Reconciliation, op. cit., p. 10.

65. It must be pointed out here that the standard of conduct in traditional Igbo community was expressed in oral form-unwritten, and the forbidden acts were recognized and punished as an offense against the tradition-Omenala.
66. Punishment as used here must be differentiated from revenge, which is the vindictive response of an individual against one who has offended him, but should be understood as the action of the community against anybody who has gone contrary to the Omenala and by so doing has threatened the common good and peace.

67. ESOMO NU, L., Respect for Human Life, op. cit., p. 182.

68. MEEK, C. K., op. cit., p. 20.

69. This describes offences which are infringement upon something marked out-sacred-the word 'nso' for the Igbo signifies two different but co-relating things: one negative and the other positive.

70. OLIWA, M. O., Taboos in Igbo Religion and Society, in «West African Religion II». University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1972, pp. 4-5.

71. ACHBE, C., Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 87.


73. Ibid.

74. Cf. ESOMO NU, L., op. cit., p. 192.


76. BASDEN, G. T., Among the Ibo of Nigeria, op. cit., p. 17.

77. Cf. ESOMONU, L., op. cit., p. 194.


80. Ibid., p. 147.

81. ESOMO NU, L., op. cit., p. 195.

82. THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, 2a 2ae, q.64, a.5.


84. Cf. GONSALVES, M. A., Fagothey's Right and Reason, op. cit., p. 250.

85. Here we mean all interruptions of pregnancy by causes which are beyond the control of the free will and human efforts. Such as-illness, infections, insufficiency of hormones, etc.

86. The word removing does not really explain effectively the Igbo word-Ite ime. The word Ite ime, implies a kind of human manipulation-a perfect human act.

87. Cf. Chapter two, section B, on the pregnancy and care for life.

88. ESOMO NU, L., op. cit., p. 184.

89. UCHENDU, V. C., The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria, op. cit., p. 17.

90. ESOMO NU, L., op. cit., p. 198.

91. When they do happen as they hardly do, both couples in order to avoid public castigations and ridicule, usually resort to the use of or application of native concoctions and herbs prepared by a herbalist «Dibia Mgbogoro». This in most cases do claim the lives of both the mother and the child. Hence people usually prefer having the child born than risking their lives.

92. ARINZE, F. A., Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, op. cit., p. 35.


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98. ACHEBE, C., *Things Fall Apart*, op. cit., p. 89.
100. ACHEBE, C., op. cit., p. 85.
103. ACHEBE, C., op. cit., p. 87.
104. «Mmegbu» is from two words: 'Omume' -act, action and 'Igbu' -kill, hence 'Mmegbu' means an act of killing. It could be a killing of spirit or a person. Sometimes it could be used for cheat.
106. Ibid.
110. Ibid., pp. 86-87.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
113. THOMAS AQINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a 2ae, 64, 2.