



## LIVING TOGETHER IN AFRICAN COSMOLOGY: A CASE STUDY OF IGBO LAND

By

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### Abstract

*This study examines the Igbo concept of communal living which remains homo-centric and human centered ethical model with a holistic approach to both economic and social security engrafted in social structures. This social ethics is a revolutionary concept which the blind can see, the deaf can hear, and which the lame can identify, and appropriate. This human centered body politics which inspires and empowers Ndigbo to draw on moral osmosis to engage in social transformation, nation-building, and sustainable development is constitutive in the religious dimension of community in the traditional Igbo background. This study was prompted by the general decline in public morality which does not only remove interdependence, reciprocity, and equality, but also depreciate, degenerate, and degrade human dignity. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to investigate and unearth the primordial affirmation of the truth about our moral heritage with a new appreciation of its worth and role in the traditional Igbo society. This study using descriptive and sociological methods, betook itself to explore this concept that gives rise to the idea of collective responsibility, inter-dependence, and human living which among others promotes discipline, reduces crime, and humanizes relations. The findings reveals that the concept also inspires Ndigbo to look up to the future with hope and expectation for a good reward here and hereafter. The study emphasizes the effects of erosion of cultural values particularly in the bonds of inter-personal and inter-group relationships resulting in ungodly philosophies such as extreme individualism, materialism, secularism, consumerism, and the prioritization of wealth over persons which became its hallmark. Therefore, the study recommends the incorporation of Igbo spirituality and consciousness of human dignity to remove alienation, deprivation, and oppression now prevalent in contemporary society.*

**Key words: African Cosmology, Communalism, Humane Living, Inter-dependence, Human Dignity.**

### Introduction

The sense of community and humane living are highly cherished values of traditional African life. This statement remains true in spite of the apparent disarray in the experience of modern politics and brutal internecine wars in many parts of the continent. For traditional Africans, the community is basically sacred, rather than secular, and surrounded by live away from the communities of their home-towns (Shorter, 1975; Ejizu, 2003). In particular, every Igbo man necessarily lives in two worlds. He is not only a member of a family, he is also a member of a community, a state, and a world. He is not only a private person; he is a public citizen. Generally, Ndigbo do not like the monks, hermits, and ascetics deliberately turn their backs on life and on men and women to live in the deserts, on tree tops, pillar tops, caves, and caverns (Barclay; 1971). Rather like other Africans, traditional Igbo possess “the basic instinct of gregariousness with the rest of human-kind. Families and members of kin groups from minimal to maximal lineages, generally live together and form community” (Ejizu; 2003:2). Every Igbo is born into a community where the person shares in the community life, spirit, and collective responsibility (Onwu, 2002).

The individual is in the first place a member of his community and is defined by his community. This is exemplified in the existence of community farmlands, streams, economic trees, barns, markets, shrines, masquerades, ritual objects, festivals, myths, customs, traditions and beliefs. The understanding of the traditional Igbo about the community is that it is “a unity of the visible and invisible, the world of the physical living on the one hand and the world of the ancestors,



divinities and the souls of children yet to be born to the individual kin group” (Isiramen; 2010:459). Buthelezi (1991) in Okoro (2014:3) explicates more on this Igbo concept of wholeness and integrative nature of all things when he asserts that;

*It is often rightly been said that Africans have a sense of wholeness of life. The traditional African religion was characterized by the motif of the wholeness of life . . . the continuity of fellowship between the living and the dead were analogous to the interplay between the natural and the supernatural worlds. Life was such a whole that not even death could disintegrate it.*

Notably, the Igbo have a cosmic view of life and as such all beings that exist came into being through a common source. Accordingly, they conceive man to be basically and essentially a being in relation, a social being, ‘*sue generis*’ in Durkheimian language (Uchegbue, 2009).

In keeping with this view, Omoyajowo (1975) rightly points out that today be cut off from one’s natural relation with the soil and with society is seen as a curse similar to that laid upon Cain in the Bible. It is the African’s incorporation in society that really makes him a man and forms his self-perception and self-interpretation. It is in keeping with this understanding of man that Ray (1988) opines that the African believes that “I am because we are, and since we are, I am. I exist because I belong to a large group or I am not alone and since I am not alone, I realize that I am alive and I exist” (Uchegbue; 2009:124). Admittedly, the Igbo lives in community. It needs to be stressed that this love of company is no doubt one of the chief causes for the existence of innumerable societies, clubs, and vital public institutions in Igbo land. The people under study here presently live within the South East of Nigeria. The Igbo geographical area is what scholars call a culture area; rural or urban, manifesting distinctive characteristics or traits. According to Onwu (2002:2) "the Igbo see themselves as one people and at the same time, outsiders see them as a homogeneous entity. They are a unique people."

Eze (2013:190-191) underscores the important belief and sense of the community among the Igbo thus:

*A person is a person through other people strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through the recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative inter subjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only as a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our common creation; we are because you are and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance.*

The implication of the above thesis which explicitly defines the basic hermeneutical understanding of communalism is that, the Igbo define themselves within the community of other people and not just as individuals within a community. Okoro (2014:5) reiterates that “it is this notion that makes the individual to be rooted in the community that one’s personal identity is defined by what you give to the community.” Against this background, researches similar to the present study had been carried out by various scholars. Ejizu (2003) examines African Traditional Religions and the promotion of community living. Akpomurie (2009) highlights the role of age grades and communitarian values in rural development. On the other hand, Uchegbue (2009) focuses on the concept of man's spiritual companions in Igbo traditional thought.

After an in-depth analysis of the various empirical literature, it was found out that a gap exists in literature. Instructively, none of these studies considered living together in African cosmology an Igbo example. This is the yawning gap this study seeks to fill. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to explore the Igbo communitarian values which remains *homo*-eccentric and human centred ethical model with a holistic approach. On this note, this study using descriptive and sociological methods betook itself to do a critical examination on the theory and practice of communal living in traditional Igbo communities. To achieve this, the study adopted a qualitative method of social research. It is theoretical in nature. Secondary sources of data collection were



equally employed to give the study the needed attention. The data were generated through journal publications, textbooks, internet sources, and participant observations. And now the elephant in the room is: what factors are involved in this distinct socio-cultural ideological framework? What are the effects of the erosion of this *homo-centric* and human centered ethical model in contemporary society? This study spotlights that there is a somewhat 'holy grail' that binds all persons of all Igbo communities, regardless of social status, creed, clan, and sex together in an inseparable manner (Okoro; 2014).

According to Okorochoa (1992:168-169) what exists is a "total way of life characterized by interchangeableness and mutuality in all aspects of life. Communalism or *Onyeaghala Nwanneya* (Igbo) or the *harambe (Kikuju)* motif remains the font of collective life and existence." This is crucial because it defines in practical terms Igbo ideology of community living. Nonetheless, the study discovered that the infiltration of modern technology, the neglect of moral instructions in various families and institutions of learning as well as the undue imposition of the western economic capitalist system have given rise to the erosion of communitarian values in contemporary society. Accordingly, drawing from the Igbo experience, this study recommends the appropriateness of the incorporation of spirituality and consciousness of human dignity as bases of the community in contemporary society. The study is structured into five sections. Following the introduction, section two is the conceptual framework. Section three espouses the Igbo communitarian values, while section four presents the analysis of the study and discussion of findings. Section five is the conclusion.

### The Conceptual Framework

Communalism is the practice in traditional Igbo society which values community togetherness, solidarity, and care for one another. The traditional Igbo had a deep sense of community. The popular sentiment among the Igbo as found in most other African societies is as Mbiti (1990:106) correctly puts it, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am." This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. Accentuating to this fact, Onwu (2002) writes that individual existence and freedom are appreciated, but they are delicately balanced with the underlying philosophy of life-in-community. This life-in-community is captured by the Igbo concept of *Umunna/Umunne/Ikwunne*. *Umunna* is a spiritual idea embedded in Igbo origin. The concept of democracy (*Oha, Umunnakwuru*) which is contained in Igbo philosophy of republicanism is deeply rooted in Igbo life and through as embodied in the *Umunna* concept. This perspective represents a distinctly African socio-cultural ideological framework and the bedrock of Igbo communalism. Gyekye (1996) lends credence to this assumption as he conceives communalism as

*The doctrine or theory that the community (or group) is the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society. This places emphasis on activity and the success of the wider society, not necessarily to the detriment of the individual, but rather to the well-being of every individual member of the society (Eze and Chukwuma; 2013:96)*

Inferably, communalism is derived from this intrinsic value for human life and the network of community and interrelatedness linking every aspect of cosmic order.

Additionally, Madukwe and Madukwe (2010:279) affirm that communalism denotes concern for "human beings and their well-being. There is a care for one by all. There is the bearing of one another's burden and everyone is his brother's keeper. There is a mutual assistance for one another." The haves help those who do not have so that no one perishes because of wants while his next door neighbor lives in affluence. There is sharing of virtually everything. This form of existence permeates all aspects of Igbo life and is expressed in diverse ways in their social and economic relationships. For example, land was communally owned and individuals who owned land never sold them. Putting this in perspective, certain cash crops such as oil bean (*ugba*), apple (*udara*), pear (*Ube*), bread fruit (*ukwa*), and kola nut (*oji*) though may be privately owned they were for public use. Those who owned them were not at all to cut them or destroyed them at will without



serious sanctions from the community. No individual has the right to take his life. Suicide was a taboo and whenever it occurred serious ritual cleansing was carried out to placate the offended earth-goddess (*Ala*). The clear surmise is that for the Igbo, in their social life the expressions: (*onye aghala nwanne ya*) (be your brother's keeper), *Igwe bu ike/Oha bu ike* (there is strength in multitude), *so m adina* (let me not exist alone), *umunna bu ike* (one's relations are a source of strength), *Oha ka mma* (the community is ideal), and *umenwanne* (the tender feeling of one's kins) among others, allude to the fact that no man is an island and that life is not lived in isolation.

It shows that communalism was "preferred to individualism. Life was lived in a community and it emphasized corporate personality against individuality" (Okwor and Onah; 2012:167). Onwu (2002:9) corroborates that the Igbo ideology of interdependence recognizes that unity is strength – *oha/igwe bu ike*, it among others promotes discipline, reduces crime, and humanizes relationships. Although Igbo religion recognizes personal/individual salvation, but it exists mainly for the preservation of the collective life (*umunna/Ikwunne*) and of the community (*Oha*). The critical point here is that respect for religious philosophy inspires them to look up to the future with hope and expectation for a good reward here and hereafter. On this premise, Okwor and Onah (2012:166) note that "people assisted their neighbors without charge in building their huts in the farmland, in marriage, in child upbringing, during occasions for joy or sorrow. The guiding principle of living in the community was 'I am because we are.'" In this vein, the different individuals' socio-political units are closely knit together. This collaborative tendency among the Igbo has been described by some scholars as African humanism.

According to Aboyade (1980) in Akpomurie (2009:200) African humanism

*Elevates the human factor of production to the level of participation in the development process by viewing production as an inseparable part of distributive relations. It seeks to achieve egalitarianism through a deep sense of man's responsibility to his community. Through the holistic approach to economic and social relations, it attempts to blend individual and social morality as a basis for social consensus and social action.*

Flowing from this idea, communalism is the community consciousness and solidarity by all for one and one for all in traditional Igbo society. Ostensibly, there is no conceptual tension between the common good and the good of the individual members of the community, for the common good embraces the basic goods of all the members of the community. Accordingly, if the common good were understood as the basic good, Gyekye (2010:16) subsumes that there "would be no need to think of it as a threat to individual liberty as touted by Western liberal thinkers, for, after all, individual liberty is held as one of the basic goods of the members of the society." It is worth elaborating this point a little. Igbo social ethics is expressed in many maxims that emphasize the importance of the values of mutual helpfulness, collective responsibility, cooperation, interdependence, and reciprocal obligations. For example, the Igbo proverb, *mmadu no ndu, maka ibe ya*, that is, one exists because of and for the other is non-negotiable because to be, is to belong. Hence, human development is their watchword (Ndukwe; 2011).

As a result of this ontological bond, individuals in African communalism have social responsibility towards one another as well as towards the entire community. This, however, does not imply that the hold which the community has over the individual was so constrictive that the expression of his individuality is muzzled and completely frustrated. Rather, there was a harmonious synthesis of individualism and communalism. This implies that African communalism is quite distinct from the Rousseauan collectivistic, totalitarian general will; the Hegelian totalitarian whole, and the Marxian self-alienating communism (Ezedike; 2009). African communalism, in its universal sense, is co-extensive; there is consensus and constant consultation covering every aspects of their lives from individual to group levels – including marriage, education, and funeral (Onwu; 2002). Against this background, the traditional Igbo cosmology is the basis of indigenous Igbo social, ethical, political, and religious attitude which remain relevant in contemporary society. To underscore this, Onyibor (2016:113) remarks that "the concept of the world whether sensible or



supra-sensible held by a people in a given culture has a vital influence on their attitude to and evaluation of life and death."

Okafor (1992) in Onyibor (2016) equally asserts that "cosmological and meta-physical ideas determine the basic notions underlying our cultural, religious, and social activities. In fact, these notions necessarily though, sometimes covertly shape our behavior and thus guide our actions." Accordingly, Igbo cosmology is basically anchored on perception vis-a-vis assumptions or beliefs. Admittedly, Igbo perception of their world determines their attitudes and actions. Similarly, Uchendu (1965) holds that Igbo cosmological perception is not only their theory of the origin and character of the universe, it also contains perception for the societal moral ethos, which dictate rules governing both interpersonal relationship as well as man's relationship to his environment and to the supra-sensible. Moreover, in it is to be found the explanations for the family background patterns of Ndigbo. From the above analysis, cosmology as used in this study means a philosophical theory which studies the material world with regards to its origin, structure, and ultimate end. It suffices here to state that the fundamentals of Igbo traditional cosmology consist of belief in the Supreme Being, *Chukwu*, belief in the reality of the ancestors, and existence of spirits, both good and evil, belief in duality, belief in reincarnation (*ilo uwa*), and choice of destiny. This opens the door to Igbo communitarian model.

### **Igbo Communitarian Values**

Among the many Igbo communitarian values, only the following will be discussed.

#### **i. African Family Structure**

In the African social structure, family is an esoteric community that emphasizes the web of a pedigree. Such as community may be by consanguinity, affinity or fosterage. The main essence of calling it a family is to give every member a sense of belonging and that of security. When family becomes larger than what a compound or a village can accommodate, it becomes a clan. Thus, family life is central in their worldview. Opata (1998) in (Eze; 2012:75) posits that family life is

*Very central in Igbo life and thought. One can say that Igbo make a great show of the family, children of their parents, and parents of their children, children of their brothers and sisters as well as of other relatives, clans' people, and in-laws.*

The family structure in traditional Igbo society is a tie on the members. His father is not just the person biologically responsible for his conception. His mother is not necessarily the woman who physically gave him birth. According to Sarpong (2014:6) he may have as many as fifteen

*Fathers and ten mothers. In the ideal situation, each one of these would treat him as his biological father or mother would. Since he has several 'mothers' and 'fathers', obviously he has many more brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces. In fact, in some African languages, the words cousin, aunt, uncle, do not exist. One's father's brother is one's father and one's mother's sister is one's mother. Therefore, the African family is very much extended.*

This implies that the average African considers himself as his brother's keeper.

Accordingly, the wholesome human relationships can be "found within the institution of the family. The extended family system is still being practiced in many African communities today" (Uduigwomen; 2009:559). This is the reason why in African cultures the word 'brother' is used to cover various and complex family relationship linked by blood ties. But the word is also used, significantly, by persons between whom there are no blood ties, thus, the word is used comprehensively. Gyekye (2010:13) elaborates more by saying that the comprehensive meaning given to the word 'brother' in African cultures is "intended, indeed, to lift people up from the purely biologically determined blood relation level onto the human level, the level where the essence of humanity is held as transcending the contingencies of human biology, race, ethnicity or culture." The common membership of one universal human family constitutes a legitimate basis for the idea of universal human brotherhood. This idea is depicted in the Igbo maxim: *Agbata obi mmadu bu nwanne ya*, that is, your neighbor is your brother.



The Igbo adage: *Egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwa ya*, that is, “Both the eagle and the kite should perch; whichever denies the other the right should suffer a broken wing”, which its equivalent in English is: “Live and let live” says it all. The point being emphasized is that the traditional extended family is cooperative in spirit and practice. Okwueze (2004:246) makes an apt submission thus, “marriage, pregnancy, childbearing, upbringing, and training of children, respect and obedience to parents and elders, building and maintaining relationships, protecting the norms of the community are all sacred religious obligations in traditional societies.” Understandably, there are no lazy or idle persons in the community. Each person is taught to share whatever he has with other members of the extended family and each person is expected to contribute his quota to the common pool. Uduigwewomen (2009:560) has furthered the position by saying that no one is “expected to sit back on the labor of others, those who do their best but cannot make any contribution to the common pool are however protected and not made to suffer want.”

Apparently, marriage and family life were therefore the structure upon which the moral growth of the society depended and only the conception of marriage and family relationship as sacred religious relationship sustained this. For example, it was socially impossible to find an orphan in traditional Igbo society. This is because those upon who this “responsibility to take over the moral upbringing of the biological orphaned fall on saw same as their sacred duty and obligation to be everything known as father and mother to the biological orphan” (Okwueze, 2004; 274). Amadi (1982:58) explains that as a result of this system

*The individual was never without help. No one was absolutely destitute, so the kind of insanity that is caused by the pressures of urban life and by loneliness was virtually unknown in rural Nigeria. In a system which had no asylums, poor houses or old people homes, the eagle and kite system proved very effective.*

It is clear, then, that the wealth of the family was communally and collectively produced, owed and enjoyed through its rituals, taboos, powerful public opinion and sanctions as noted earlier.

Furthermore, Okwueze (2004) and Nwankwo (2022) have identified the family unit as a vehicle of moral education among the Igbo. According to them, in the family, every grown-up member has a moral obligation to give moral advice to all other younger members. This training usually starts from early childhood. Continuing, the authors add that the village owes it as her responsibility to control the behavior of its members in order to maintain the morals and values of the society. The village exerts wider influence in the moral education. The culture of multiple parenting in Igbo traditional society is based on the concept of *nwa bu nwa oha* (a child belongs to all). It is in this respect, Degbey (2011) in Eze (2012:74) opines that “in traditional system there is hardly the illegitimate child. Even where parents are dead, a child would always have parents – a cushion against the odds.” Eze (2012:74-75) makes the interesting point that

*The pattern and system obtainable in traditional Igbo society make it obligatory culturally for the society to bear the responsibility of the child's upbringing. In the training cipher, the social and moral norms of the community are defined. This helps to safeguard the material and spiritual norms, customs, and traditions which are used to shape the child into a moral conscious being.*

A practical translation of the idea of brotherhood leads to such social and moral virtues as hospitality, generosity, concern for others, and communal feeling.

## **ii. Respect for the Sanctity of Human Life**

In view of the premium placed on human life by all notable religions of the world and particularly Igbo traditional religion, no one is empowered to take human life. Instead, it should be preserved under every circumstance. Ndukwe (1964) in Ekwue (2006:42) remarks thus, “the whole tune of the philosophy of most African people is life affirming.” For example, the names, *Ndubisi* (life is supreme), *Ndukaku* (life is greater than wealth), and *Ndubueze* (life is king) express the premium the Igbo attach on life. As Ilogu (1974:173) rightly puts it, “*Ndu* or life is the *summum bonum*.” Njoku (2001) in Asuquo (2009:347) summarizes the Igbo concept of life as follows:

*God is the originator of life, the Creator of man, the universe, and the sustainer of creation . . . . Life is meaningless without land; this includes land, and all other*



*properties which make life worth living. Life is a communal affair. It involves a relationship and communion between man, God, ancestors, divinities, other men and the land. This relationship, must be based on certain rules and regulations for it to succeed.*

As a corollary, Onwu (2002:9) argues brilliantly thus, Igbo world is “principally anthropocentric. It is for this understanding the *Igbo say Ndu bu isi* (life first). Due to the heavy accent which the traditional Igbo place on human life, they go to any length in order to preserve it.

This development Onwu (2002) plausible argues, makes the Igbo respect life more than any other ethnic group in Nigeria. Since the Igbo respect life, kolanut breaking will always remain for them a celebration of life. Onwu (2002:7) lent emphasis on the great respect the Igbo have for life when he said that:

*Onye wetara oji wetara ndu (he who brings kola brings life). Among the Igbo, everything that is, has a life and to be alive is the aspiration of every living thing. Oji (kolanut) is life because he who brings it brings life in the dual sense that signifies welcome and friendship and that the prayer for good and long life which precede its breaking and eating would be accepted by the ancestors.*

It is in this light that the Igbo fought a thirty months gruesome war from 1967-1970 to preserve the life of the Igbo people. In the same vein, notable Igbo leaders of blessed memory unanimously agreed that “To Restore the Dignity of man” was to be the motto of the first indigenous university, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. That motto represents the finest formulation of the finest Igbo minds, the collective affirmation of Igbo faith in the worth and dignity of man. It remains for the Igbo a vision, a mission, and a commitment.

Consequently, norms are couched to protect life from violation. The first norm is to treasure life that is, respect for life or dignity of life. The second is to support each other including animal and plants jealously and to do the utmost in one’s power (Okoro; 2013). In a significant sense then, these ethical values on the sanctity of life moves life from the sphere of materiality and gives it a transcendent reference. For instance, the import of the Igbo names *Ndukaku* (life is greater than wealth), *Ndubisi* (life is supreme) will suppress environmental degradation, security threats, wars, conflicts, separatist agitations, and terrorist attacks. Otherwise, the country’s unity and progress will continue to be threatened until the core values that promote law and order, respect for elders, and sanctity of human lives, brotherliness, honesty, and respect for tolerance are appreciated and adhered to. Overtly, people will stop seeing themselves from individualistic stances but also from materialistic stances. This seems to be the origin of ‘*omenala*’ (custom of the land) which is derived from the Mother Earth (*Ala*) and sanctioned by the ancestors (*ndichie*). *Omenala* in Igbo land contains prohibitions which regulate human behavior, maintain purity, and sustain community life. These prohibitions are known as *Nso Ala* (taboos). They also involve seasonal celebrations like *Iri ji* (new yam festival) and *Igo Aro* (new year celebrations). Onwu (2002:9) claims that the essence of Igbo morality was “primarily to keep the harmony, well-being, and effective co-existence of members of the ‘community’ made up of the living, the dead ancestors, and children yet unborn. The implication is that among the Igbo, *Omenala* is communal rather than individual.” When colonialism failed to harness her charismatic resources to address these issues and merely sought to reconstruct elements of the world view, the danger of failure lurked closely.

### **Erosion of Communitarian Values in Contemporary Society**

The finding of the study reveals that the Igbo communitarian ideality to a great extent has been eroded by the advent of Western culture and civilization. Expectedly, the culture conflicts the Igbo sub-nation are experiencing nowadays. Okoro (2008:215) rightly affirms that

*There is no gain-saying the fact that majority of the Nigerian populace are beset with psycho-somatic trauma, occasioned by the undue imposition of the western economic capitalistic system, which not only is at variance with our values and world views but also contradicts it. The Western economic paradigm aims overly at the systematic marginalization of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.*



In a similar reaction, Isiramem (2010:464) asserts that “the foregoing influences occasioned by commerce, colonialism, and foreign religious among the Igbo have affected reverence for community life and the spiritual beings in business matters.” For instance, some Igbo, who have embraced Christianity, distance themselves from indigenous religion and castigated those that have remained faithful as people destined for hell. The story of Enoch in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* illustrates how some Igbo Christians began to turn against their culture in apparent response and agreement to the new civilization. Enoch was under suspicion of killing and eating the sacred python. He went further to desecrate and unmask the *Ogwugwu* masquerade in the public. The disregard for the community and disrespect for its ethics became the order of the day.

Apart from questioning traditional norms, new mores have been introduced through globalization and urbanization which ushered into Igbo community what Shorter (1990) in Isiramem (2009:465) describes as

*Four tragedies of Africa - pollution, impoverishment, disorientation and secularization and these have led to one of the greatest problems of Igbo communalism. Urbanization and money economy have given rise to new ideals, new ethics and new patterns of living as well as new socio-economic possibilities.*

Consequently, this study notes that the enviable tradition of community before individuals have metamorphosed into ungodly philosophies such as tribalism, individualism, god-fatherism, humanism, materialism, consumerism; and the prioritization of wealth over persons have become its hallmark. Evidently, sense of community has been replaced by acute individualism. Mutual antagonism has created a situation that has transformed the ideals of ‘all’ to ‘oneself’, and an increasing ‘jungle mentality’ where the only governing principle is to ‘survive by all means’. It is only against this backdrop that one can possibly explain the increasing propensity towards great selfishness, indiscipline, dishonesty, ritual killings, kidnapping, baby factories, child and women trafficking, electoral and examination malpractices and different forms of fraudulent practices now prevalent in Igbo community (Ezedike, 2009; Isiramem, 2010, Iroanya; 2022; Nwankwo; 2022).

In a similar contribution, Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:133) state that

*Traditional sanctions and taboos are no longer treasured and a new way of life begins which leads to a new kind of morality. Unchastely which at a time was a grievous crime, now appears to be the order of the day. Respect for elders is on the decline. Traditional hospitality and generosity, which make each his brother’s keeper is replaced by a new morality which stresses selfishness as a virtue. Almost all that is good in traditional society is lost to Western civilization.*

This view is buttressed by Oduyoye (2001:95) when she said that “all has changed, other cultures, other styles, of life, modernity, the technology we acquire with brutality, especially in the urban areas, have undermined the goodwill that was the origin of hospitality. They are incompatible with traditional African hospitality”. Ejizu (2003:15) scathingly denounces the prevailing radical social change when he quips that “the destabilization of the traditional religions have clearly left wide gaps in the social structure particularly in the bonds of interpersonal and inter-group relationship”. Accordingly, African societies are visibly in a state of transition, a stage of betwixt and between, with the attendant anxiety, tension and confusion being felt at virtually every facet of life of the people.

## Conclusion

In this study, we have engaged in a hermeneutical exposition on communalism which permeates, pervades, and animates the traditional social institutions, norms, and celebrations in Igbo land. The study noted that the guiding principles of living together in Igbo cosmology are, ‘I am because the community is’ and from ‘each according to his ability, and to each according to his needs.’ The social cohesion and solidarity resulting from the communal living, enhanced the community spirit of the Igbo, and offered the individual both economic and social security. In the light of the foregoing, we reach the conclusion that Igbo communitarianism is positive, result-oriented, and is a recipe for maintaining social order and just society. It builds strong foundation for





personal, interpersonal, organizational, national, and international peace-building. Regrettably, the study discovered that the situation has changed radically today.

The influence of colonialism, globalization, foreign religions, and cultures which began with the incursion into Igbo land by the colonial masters in the late eighteenth century AD, has impacted seriously on their socio-political and religious thought and life. Consequently, ungodly philosophies such as extreme individualism, god motherism/fatherism, materialism, consumerism, and the prioritization of wealth over persons have become its hallmark. Resultantly, there is the loss of freedom, self-respect and dignity. There is also marginalization, poverty, and deprivation, the exploitation of women and child abuse, robbery and corruption as well as injustice, which removes interdependence, reciprocity, and equality. Against this backdrop, this study recommends the incorporation of Igbo spirituality and consciousness of human dignity to remove alienation, deprivation, and oppression occasioned by the undue imposition of the western economic capitalistic system on the contemporary society.

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