Ezigbo Mmadu: An Exploration of the Igbo Concept of a Good Person

by

Christopher Agulanna, Ph.D.
agulanna3@yahoo.co.uk
Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

The Igbo term for a good person is *ezigbo mmadu*. It is a term that is descriptive of good character or positive moral conduct in a person or group of persons. Among the Igbo, a person is referred as *ezigbo mmadu* who possesses good conduct or moral fiber – qualities that are worthy of emulation by others. But *ezigbo mmadu* is not merely descriptive of a person's character or conduct; it is also expressive of a person who is equable, unflappable, even-tempered and level-headed. *Ezigbo mmadu* has as its converse, the phrase *ajo mmadu*. *Ajo mmadu* is a term used to describe a bad man or woman, where the word *ajo* means 'bad', that is, the opposite of 'good'. A person is *ajo mmadu* who is flawed or defective in character. With particular focus on *ezigbo mmadu*, the Igbo identify some special qualities of life a person must possess before he or she can be so described. In the pre-colonial setting, for example, apart from the possession of good moral conduct, a person was considered *ezigbo mmadu* who respected the customary laws of community and was loyal to the preternatural forces that ruled in the cosmic order. In this paper, however, it is discovered that the challenges of modernity and the harsh social environment in which the modern Igbo have found themselves seem to greatly tint their conceptualisation of who an *ezigbo mmadu* is. This paper does not only identify reasons for the devaluation of this once venerated concept or social exemplar; it also proffers possible remedies to overcoming this social snag.

Introduction

In this paper, I examine the Igbo concept of a *good person* (*ezigbo mmadu*, in the Igbo language). In the discussion, I will consider, among other things, who the Igbo would normally regard as a *good person*, those special qualities of life that they think qualify an individual to be called a *good person*. In discussing this theme, some vital questions may be posed as follows: How may a good person be distinguished from a bad person? Is the concept *good* one that can be defined or characterised? Or is it, as some philosophers are wont to say, a word that is indefinable? These are some of the questions that this paper will seek to provide answers to.

But before I get into the discussion proper, it will be necessary to make a few general remarks about the history and demography of the Igbo. To capture it in form of a query: who are the Igbo, and what place do they occupy in history? A simple answer to the question would be to say that the Igbo constitute one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The other two groups are the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani.

In terms of the exact number of communities or language groups in the country, no consensus of opinion exists among scholars. However, some have surmised that there are about 370 ethnic communities while others have identified about 250 language groups. But as one informed opinion captures it, from all the suggestions provided, it may be safe to conclude that there are between 248 languages and 374 community groups in Nigeria (see Eluwa *et al*. 1988, p. xii & Dioka 1977, 55). It is worth remarking that the number of dialects spoken by the assemblage of groups in the country are too numerous to list or catalogue. However, in spite of the diversity of social norms, languages, and traditions among Nigeria's various groups, great effort is constantly being made to blend or unify the disparate groups into an agreeable whole.

Nigeria's population is estimated to be about 140 million. However, many are skeptical concerning the accuracy of this figure. The reason is that census figures have always been contested in Nigeria because they are often manipulated for political advantage. But although Nigerians may disagree about their census figure, what is not a subject of controversy is the fact that it is the largest country in Africa by population, and the tenth among all countries of the world. Going by United Nations projection, Nigeria's population will reach 289 million by the 2050. If this estimation is anything to go by, what it means is that in less than four decades from now, Nigeria will end up as the 8th most populous country on the globe (see http://esa.un.org/unpp/). The only major factor that may greatly hamper this population boom is the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is rapidly decimating the populations of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Nigeria's population growth merely reflects the growth of its different units. With particular reference to the Igbo group, population estimates put their number at a little over 20 million. Again, this figure is a matter of conjecture, as the Igbo, like the other peoples of Nigeria, complain of a deliberate under-estimation of their population figure by Federal estimators in order to place them in a position of disadvantage in the distribution or allocation of resources in the society! Here, we need to remark that as long as the country bases the allocation of resources on population size, Nigerians will never cease crying about the manipulation of such figures. Having said this much, it should be remarked that the issue of Nigeria's demography is not the focus of this paper; neither can the controversy surrounding it be resolved here. I have merely alluded to the issue of population as a background to the work and to provide a basis for the discussions that follow in this paper. The issues I have adumbrated above are preliminary and general in nature. With these remarks made, in what follows below I shall now delve into the main thrust of this paper. But first I begin with a clarification of the key concepts that I employ in the discussion.

Explicatory Note on Key Concepts

The Igbo language contains a variety of words to express approval and disapproval, good and bad, upright and perverse, pleasant and unpleasant, and so on. All these words embody moral connotations. Take, for example, the words *aru* (pollution) and *nma* (good): to commit *aru* (*ime aru*) is to do that which is morally reprehensible while to do *nma* (*ime nma*) is to carry out morally good actions. In the same vein, a man (or woman) may be described as *onye aru-rala*: literally, one who pollutes or abominates the land. *Ajo mmadu* is a phrase used to describe a bad man (or woman), where the word *ajo* means 'bad', that is, the opposite of 'good'. On the other hand, *ezigbo mmadu* is a phrase used to describe a good person or an individual whose actions or character traits are worthy of emulation. The phrase is also descriptive of one who is equable, unflappable and calm in character and disposition. In the English usage such a person would be said to be level-headed, imperturbable or unflustered. The words convey the same meaning. Aphoristically, a levelheaded person is said to be *cool as a cucumber*.

Following the type of clarification made in the paragraph above, I now undertake an analysis of some contrastive Igbo words or expressions as follows: *ihe ojo* (a bad action or thing) and *ihe oma* (good action or thing). Consider also, *ajo okwu* (a bad utterance or speech) and *okwu oma* (a good utterance or speech), etc. The first words in the pair (i.e., *ihe ojo* and *ajo okwu*) are words of disapproval while the second pair (i.e., *ihe oma* and *okwu oma*) is used to express a sense of approval. What is shown in the foregoing analysis is the fact that ethical notions such as *good* and *bad*, *right* and *wrong*, *duty* and *obligation*, *justice* and *injustice*, etc., are common to Igbo language and social life. The pursuance of ethical ideals, the hankering after a life of rectitude and the desire to live virtuously were ideals greatly cherished and approved by the Igbo, particularly in the traditional or classical setting. It is important to mention that ethical norms or moral values help ensure a condition of peace and social order in the human community. However, this is not only true of antique history but of modern society as well. Indeed, morality is a pre-condition for social amity and progress in the human community. The reason is that it contributes to social stability and advances human solidarity or the camaraderie feeling that is so necessary for mutual human achievement.

The Yoruba equivalent of e*zigbo mmadu* is *omoluabi* or *eniyan rere*. But as I have indicated above, the expression *ezigbo mmadu* – and by extension its Yoruba equivalent, *omoluabi* – is not merely descriptive of a person's character but also of the person as an atomic individual or human entity. Following this clarification, in this paper I shall not merely be concerned with examining the Igbo notion of a "good person" as with those qualities of life and character, which the Igbo see in a person before describing him/her as *ezigbo mmadu*. To give this paper perspective, I have decided to classify the Igbo social order into two broad categories as follows: the pre-modern world and the post-modern world. This classificatory scheme will help us come to a good assessment of how the Igbo have fared in the present day world order or society. More importantly, with the assessment, we shall be enabled to make prescriptive suggestions on ways the Igbo can be let go from their present psycho-social morass and loss of direction in a world order which is in a state of flux. But first, I undertake a more detailed analysis of the key concepts in this paper.

Ezigbo Mmadu Versus Ajo Mmadu: A Contrasting Elucidatory Approach

Earlier in this paper, I explained that the term *ajo mmadu* is the phrase the Igbo use to describe a man or woman who is seen as a bad person; or one who possesses a bad character trait. *Ezigbo mmadu*, on the other hand is descriptive of a good person whose character traits are good and worthy of emulation. But the phrases usually do more than these: *ajo mmadu* can also be used to describe a person who is evil by nature, not merely one whose actions are bad. In the same vein, *ezigbo mmadu* could refer to a good person, not merely a person whose conduct and actions are good or virtuous. By way of juxtaposition, the English equivalent of the Igbo expression *ezigbo mmadu* would be the phrase *good person*. And just as the opposite of *ezigbo mmadu* is *ajọ mmadu*, the phrase *bad person* is the opposite of the expression *good person*. Having made these clarifications, I should point out, however, that some confusion may arise or ensue from the type of analysis I have made here – confusion that may also engender some questions: What does it actually mean to say of a person that he or she is a "good" or a "bad" person? Do the value words *good* and *bad* merely refer to a person's conduct and character or to something much more? And is it not character (what the Igbo call *agwa*) that makes an individual either a good or a bad person? In posing these questions here, I do not pretend that I am going to provide final, definitive answers to them all. However, the failure to provide pat answers to the questions need not enervate or debilitate us. The reason is that in philosophy, the opinion is rife that questions and not answers are what create knowledge. Without intending to be bogged down with the veracity or otherwise of this philosophical claim, the much that is important here is to say that whatever conflict may arise in the use of the value terms discussed above may be resolved when we realise that to the Igbo it is character (i.e., conduct) that makes a man/woman what he or she is. An Igbo saying captures this idea succinctly: *agwa bu mmadu* (it is character that *defines* who an individual is). Again, the Igbo would say: *nma nwanyi bu agwa ya* (a woman's beauty is seen in her character). An English equivalent goes thus: "beauty is only skin-deep." By this is meant that we must never judge people by outward appearance only.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the Igbo are not alone in identifying "goodness" with good moral conduct or good character. Rather, such identification appears to be universal to most cultures of the world. From the discussion also, we see that the Igbo employ the word *nma* to denote or denominate both "beauty" and "goodness." It is for this reason that a woman who is considered to be beautiful and who is at the same time good natured is described as *nwanyi mara nma* or *nwanyi ọma*. In this context, we can substitute the word *nma* with *onye* such that we can talk of *onye ọma* (a good person); or *onye mara nma* (a person who is beautiful), etc. We can also talk of *nwanyi ọma*, or a woman who is good.

On The Proper Meaning of the Word "Good"

Any attempt to ideate or conceptualise what the term "good" is most likely to end in one form of intellectual disputation or the other. Indeed, among philosophers the belief that "good" is a word that does not give in to easy definition has become somewhat of an idée reçue; that is, a conventional or commonplace idea. Ever since the publication of G.E. Moore's highly important book *Principia Ethica* in 1903, philosophers have squabbled over whether *good* is a word that is definable or not. The question then is: Is the word "good" one that cannot be defined? An affirmative answer to the question will lead to asking what the defining characteristics or properties of the word *good* are. But a negative answer to the question will necessitate our asking why the word is indefinable. In seeking to answer these questions, however, it is important to mention that the concern for clarity has long been a major concern of the genre of philosophy known as language or analytic philosophy. Long ago, the British philosopher, G.E. Moore made his now famous statement to the effect that the word *good* is indefinable. In his words, "if I am asked 'what is good?' my answer is that good is good ... if I am asked 'How is good to be defined?' My answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it" (Moore, 1903). In holding this view, however, Moore did not mean to imply that we could not recognise actions or things that could be said to be good, only that we could not make a proper analysis of some moral concepts such as good and bad, because they are simple properties. Goodness, according to Moore (1903), is a unique, *unanalysable* and indefinable but simple quality which cannot be identified with any natural object but which we recognise when we see it in things.

So, how do we identify a good object (or action) when we see it? Moore says it is by intuition. But the question may be asked: what is this thing called intuition? In philosophy, intuition is the same thing as a priori knowledge; it is a form of cognition that is independent of reason or experience. The concept of intuition has remained important in the writings of philosophers from the period of classical antiquity until now. Etymologically, the concept is said to derive from two sources: the mathematical idea of an axiom (a self-evident proposition that requires no proof) and the mystical idea of revelation (truth that surpasses the power of the intellect).[1] By way of elaboration, intuition refers to immediate or instinctive knowledge or awareness that something is the case without having previously perceived or discovered it to be so. In epistemology, the claim that humans acquire knowledge by intuition has been criticised because of the charge that it is a claim that cannot be corroborated by experience or evidence. Beyond this charge, however, the fact still remains that to try to piece together the intellectual jigsaw puzzle created by Moore or his fellow language philosophers may not be an easy task after all.

But against the stance of the language philosophers, Africans are not generally enamored with the issue of the definition of words or clarification of concepts. The African is likely to consider such matters as mere exercise in intellectual dexterity and agility. Hence, the point needs to be made that for the African, the concern usually is not with arriving at the correct semantic structure of a sentence or an expression but with identifying normative principles that will aid human well-being and communal existence.

For the African, words only have significance if they help in giving direction to human life and aspirations. In other words, much as the issues of clarity and analysis may be important, they need not detract from the larger issues of life, such as the issues of justice, social harmony and moral responsibility. And no less a figure than Karl Popper has shown the limitations of analytic ethics, which according to him tries to provide an analysis of the nature of *good* without reference to the material interest of the moral agent or actor. The truth of the matter, according to Popper (1957, 237) is that any analysis of the nature of the good leaves open the question: "How does it concern me?" In his words:

> Only if the word "good" is used in an ethical sense, i.e., only if it is used to mean that which I ought to do could I derive from the information 'X is good', the conclusion that 'I ought to do it' (*ibid*).

The whole point Popper tries to make in his criticism of analytic ethics above is to show how hollow it is to discuss ethical or moral issues without reference to the practical realities of life. This point finds support in H. S. Staniland's remonstration that philosophers often "become so fascinated with the technical problems of their trade that they forget the human problems for the sake of which that trade exists" (Staniland 1979:5). Much of contemporary Western philosophy has for long been immersed in this type of error - the error of getting too fascinated with recondite intellectual matters that are not in tandem with concrete human needs. In Western thought, the existentialist thinkers had vehemently criticised traditional philosophy, which they riled at as too abstruse and as providing no solutions to human quandaries or social predicaments. For the existentialists, the philosophical enterprise will only hold meaning when it is able to show us ways to overcoming human anguish or anxiety. Hence, their appeal that the philosopher should get done with intellectual pranks or razzmatazz and instead focus on how to deal with the dilemmas of existence. As Popper (1976, 19) further warns, the surest path to 'intellectual perdition' is "the abandonment of real problems for the sake of verbal problems."

The Igbo, like the existentialists, conceive of human existence in a more practical and down-to-earth manner. They usually are not enamoured with trying to define the meaning of words as with trying to figure out how humans can come together to achieve communal wellbeing. The Igbo take it for granted that the individual is imbued with rationality and that this power to ratiocinate helps him or her to be able to discern (and choose) between good and evil. Indeed, for Africans generally, the "good" is perceived as that which promotes community interest and human wellbeing.

The "bad" (or, evil) on the other hand, is that which destroys the social order or communal harmony. In other words, the "good" is self-evident and palpable. Here then, not only is the *good* something over which we need not squabble about, it is also that it is to be preferred over the *bad*. This explains why in African culture bad behavior is usually censured or reprehended while good deeds receive social approbation or approval.

I believe the point about being able to discern between the good and the bad is well made such that we need not be bogged down trying to figure out what the word *good* signifies and what *bad* denotes. Rather than be mired in such semantic muddle, in the discussion that follows, I will concentrate on deciphering those qualities of life or action, which the Igbo think mark out a person as indeed an *ezigbo mmadu*, or "good person."

The Pre-Modern Igbo World

The Igbo have had a checkered history, dating back to the era of the obnoxious trade slaves until now. For this reason, it may be convenient to categorise the Igbo into the *pre-modern* and *modern* Igbo.[2] By the *pre-modern* Igbo I have in mind the Igbo people before their contact with the Europeans through slavery and colonialism. By the *modern* Igbo, on the other hand, I have in mind the Igbo from the period of Nigeria's political independence until now. This distinction is important as it will help place Igbo ideas and worldviews in their proper historical context. Here, the point must be made that Western culture has affected contemporary Igbo mores that one notices a marked difference between Igbo life in the pre-modern and contemporary world order. In the context of the present discussion, however, the Igbo – whether in the pre-modern or modern era – recognise some character references that define who a *good person* is or ought to be. What is more, for the Igbo there are some social indicators that are used to gauge a person that is adjudged as a good person, *ezigbo mmadu*. I shall discuss a few of such indicators in the sections that follow. Before getting into that discussion, let me briefly give vent to some Igbo catch-phrases that bear a close relevance to the core issues in this paper.

A close link exists between the Igbo concept of *ihe-oma* (meaning *that which is good*) and the notion of *ndu oma* (the *good life*). In the words of Nwala (1985, 143), the *good life* (*ndu oma*) is "the most general value cherished by the Igbo." It is by now clear that for the Igbo - whether in the pre-modern or modern setting, *ndu oma* and not merely any type of *ndu* (or life for its own sake) - is the *summum bonum*; that is, the highest value to be sought after. The Igbo saying, *ndu bu isi*, "life is of supreme importance," captures this idea clearly. And as T. U. Nwala further explains, "both in the cosmological order and in the day to day life and activities of the people, this important belief in the supremacy of life is reflected" (*ibid*, p. 144).

For the Igbo, therefore, it is only the person who possesses *ndu* (life) that can ever hope to live *ndu ọma* (the good life). By parity of reasoning too, it is only the man or woman who possesses *ndu oma* that can attain to the enviable position of *ezigbo mmadu,* (a "good person"). The high premium the Igbo place on life (*ndu*) is captured in some Igbo expressions or wise sayings. For example, the expression *nduka ego* or *nduka aku* literally means that life is greater than wealth; *nduka nma* means that life is to be valued over physical beauty. At some other times, the Igbo will express these ideas in different ways. For example, *ndu bu aku* reads somewhat like this: *life is wealth* - the idea being that it is only the one who possesses life that can think of amassing material wealth. And to reiterate a point made earlier in this paper, the foregoing expressions concerning the value of life also help accentuate the Igbo belief that life is supreme over all else. But beyond the mere possession of *ndu* (life), for the Igbo, there are some basic qualities of life or character traits an individual needs to possess before he or she can be said to be an *ezigbo mmadu* or a good person. In what follows I consider some of these qualities in a schematic way.

(A) Respect for Social Norms or Customs

The belief is common among Africans that no one can live successfully outside of the social setting or human community. Following this type of belief, we could argue that human beings are essentially *beings in relation*; or to use a Durkheinian terminology, they are social beings – *sui generis*. This is probably what Omoyajowo (1975, 34) had in mind when he held that among Africans, to be cut off from one's natural relation with the soil and with society is regarded as a curse akin to the one laid upon Cain in the Bible.[3] For the Igbo, from the time a person is born until s/he dies, the person is made aware of the value or importance of the communal group, of his or her dependence on the kin group, etc. More importantly, a person is only a "good person" (*ezigbo mmadu*) if he or she reveres the social custom or norms. For the Igbo, therefore, what constitutes the norm of right and wrong is nothing more than social custom. In this regard, a person's actions are judged as either good or bad depending on the approval or disapproval of the community.

By *community* in our present context is meant a people of one kinship or pedigree - and this irrespective of geographic spread or location. It is in this sense that we can talk say of the Igbo community in America, the Yoruba community in Brazil, the Hausa community in Senegal, etc. Generally, among Africans, community is believed to have redeeming features such that anti-social idiosyncrasies involving the individual may be redeemed by the renewal of communal contact or solidarity. It is also for this reason that Africans see community as being *supreme* over the individual. The opinion is also commonplace that the way Africans conceive of community is different from the way it is conceived in the West. Abraham (1992, 25) argues, for instance, that while in Western culture, community is conceived as a mere secular institution, in Africa, it "is conceived as having sacral unity, which comprises its living members, its dead (those who live in less substantial form) and its yet unborn children."

According to this conception, those members of the community who subsist in more substantial form are held to be in "constant communion with the dead [members] on grounds of kinship" (*ibid*). Explaining this point, Mbiti (1990, 106) says Africans believe that "the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately." Among the Igbo, this belief is reflected in the saying which holds as follows: "no man, however great, can win a judgment against his clan or community."

The foregoing analysis on the nature of community in Africa is well made. But the following question may yet be asked: how are the norms of community transmitted from one generation to another generation so as to make them socially acceptable or binding on members? This is a crucial question. Yet the answer to it is simple and straight-forward. In a non-literate society, like the pre-modern Igbo one, cultural norms or social customs were mostly transmitted orally. At other times, they were conveyed by other means as pithy sayings, religious indoctrination, or moralisms, etc. Over time such social customs were hallowed by members of the community, and eventually assumed the status of a religious dogma. With time also, disobedience to established norms was usually seen as sacrilege or abomination against the preternatural forces that weld society together. This explains why in primeval cultures social misdemeanours are punished with the severest sanction or penalty. The Igbo word for social custom is *omenala*. *Omenala* is derived from three Igbo words: *ome* (meaning *that which obtains*), *na* (in), *ala* (society). A fusion of these three words would read somewhat like this: *that (referring to cultural value or norm) which obtains in society*. In the words of Okorocha (1987, 101),

> The moral code of Iboland commonly spoken of as *omenala* defines various aspects of behaviour and social activities that are approved while at the same time indicating those aspects that are prohibited.

In its traditional or pre-modern setting, the Igbo society was governed by an elaborate system of rules, guides and sanctions. Even now, many of these rules still subsist. For example, there are rules on marriage and family life, guides on burial and initiations into secret societies as well as traditional sanctions for breaking the rules of the community. The Igbo also have the concept of *nso ala* or taboos. To break *nso ala* is to bring oneself under a great curse, often meriting the retribution of invisible powers and malevolent forces. Such acts as incest and bestiality animals are considered as terrible vices or *nso ala*. These could spell doom on an individual or the community as a whole. A responsible Igbo citizen (*ezigbo nwa afo Igbo)* is not expected to get into acts that could disrupt the social or rupture the social fabric that welds the society together.

(B) Loyalty to Ancestors

It is worth mentioning here that the Igbo world is *alive* with a host of spiritual forces, some benevolent, and others malevolent. In reality, not much of a distinction is made between these two different worlds or mode of existence. Usually, the expectation is that every sensible and levelheaded member of the community is fully aware of the existence of these preternatural forces. The world of the *unseen* is generally believed to be as *real* as the mundane one. Sometimes, the spiritual world is even accorded more reality than the terrestrial one, since whatever happens in the latter is a mere play-back of events in the former. Because of this link between the two realms, the living usually would seek close contact with the beings in spirit world. Remarking on the nature of African cosmogony, M. J. McVeigh asserts that "the sense of dependence in the face of the mysteries of life inspires the African with awe and reverence and impels him to enter into communion with the unknown" (McVeigh, 1974, 84).

The belief that humans are capable of *communing* with metaphysical forces in chthonic abode has some social advantage. One is that it is likely to inspire people to pursue a life of moral virtue in the social environment. It is such life that will sufficiently sanctify an individual to be able to enter into conational relations with those preternatural forces in chthonian existence. A popular Igbo aphorism holds as follows: *nezie, nezie, ezigbo nwa Igbo nhujuru ara nne ya afo ga asopuru ndichie;* meaning that a well-groomed Igbo who was well-suckled in his/her mother's breast milk would show deference to the ancestors. To be well-groomed in this context is to have adequate knowledge of *omenala* (that is, social custom). It is such knowledge that will indicate to the individual the need to live a life of high merit and social responsibility. My concern is not with the merit of the belief in a chthonic world or of preternatural forces said to inhabit such a world. On the contrary, what titillates me in the foregoing is the fact that although the traditional Igbo had no formal training in modern nutritional matters, yet were knowledgeable concerning the value of breast milk in helping nourish infants and imbuing them with good health and vitality – an idea that has been confirmed by recent findings in the fields of health and nutritional medicine. From the above, it could be inferred, therefore, that opinion expressed by some European scholars of the colonial era that traditional Africans possessed a *pre-colonial* or pre-scientific mentality is not true after all.

To return to the point on the role of ancestors in the social life of Africans, the Igbo, like other Africans, see the ancestors as maintaining a beneficent relationship with the living. The ancestors play such crucial roles as helping to ward off evil from the living members of their old communities. They also help procure good fortunes for their erstwhile family members, as well as ensuring that social amity prevailed in the human community. However, the relationship between the ancestors; the *living dead* as Mbiti (1957, 110) calls them - is a reciprocal one. In his highly popular book, *African Religions and Philosophy* Mbiti (*ibid*) describes the *living dead* as "a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who know him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits."

In the Bible we find a comparative illustrative example – the case of Lazarus the beggar, who although was dead, was *seen* alive in *Abraham's bosom* engaging in interlocutory discourse with the denizens of Paradise-heaven.[4] In Africa, the relationship between humans and the spirit forces in the underworld is mutual. Usually, people made ritual offertories to the gods and expected that in return the gods will help shield them from evil arrows or calamities. The failure of a god to keep to the terms of the agreement will lead to its being abandoned and, the suppliants will seek for a more responsive deity who will pander to their felt needs or desires. Perhaps this explains why in primeval cultures worshippers felt no restraint hopping from one deity to another or hobnobbing or consorting with diverse divinities at the same time.

(C) Good Moral Conduct

Alongside devotion to the gods and respect for customary laws of the land, the Igbo prize the life of morality or sound character among its members. In the old Igbo world; that is, the Igbo community before the influence of Christianity or European colonialism, a person was considered *good* whose life conformed to the moral codes of the group. Put differently, it was in keeping with those norms that welded the community together that the individual could be considered an *ezigbo mmadu*. The old belief (which prevails today) was that moral goodness has a mutually healing effect: it helped promote a mutual flourishing as well as enhancing social amity among members of the community. To sum up this aspect of the discussion, a good person, according to the Igbo, would be one who carries out morally admirable actions. Such a person would be decent, honourable and just. However, it is not enough to refrain from moral vices; in addition, an *ezibgo mmadu* should abhor or detest socially reprehensible actions. Generally, among the pre-modern Igbo, such acts as stealing, incest, adultery, or suicide were forbidden or frowned at by people. The belief was that moral vices, apart from generating social tension among citizens, were also sources of offences to the preternatural forces.

The Igbo use some words or catch-phrases to describe social vices or moral. Such words or phrases include the following: "nso ala" (that is, abominations or desecrations of the land), *ime aru* (moral pollutions), *agwa ọjọọ* (bad conduct), *ihe ọjọọ* (a bad act), etc. As with all moral communities, appropriate sanctions or punishments were usually meted out to social deviants or to those who violated the norms of society. Usually, when such violations occurred, ritual sacrifices or propitiatory offerings (*ichu aja*, in Igbo) were made to ward off the evils that may result therein. In reality, there are numerous other socially approved acts and qualities of life, which the Igbo project as marking out a person as an *ezigbo mmadu* or *good person*. However, for the want of space, and so as not to belabour the issues, I have left off discussing all these qualities or marks of life. Suffice it to say that for the Igbo, a *good person* would be one who is just, honest and hospitable; s/he is also an individual who shows respect to elders and co-operates with other members of the group to ensure that social order prevails in the community.

Ndu ọjọọ Versus Ndu ọma

But apart from the issues discussed above, the Igbo also make a distinction between what they describe as the "bad life" (*ndu ọjọọ*) and what they see as a "good life" (*ndu ọma*). The reason for this type of distinction is that for the Igbo, not every type of *ndu*; that is, life (or *existence*) is approved of or seen as person-enhancing. *Ndu ọma* is usually what the society cherishes. It is a life that is morally approbative. *Ndu ọjọọ*, on the other hand, is a life of misery, suffering and pain. By all intent and purposes, *ndu oma* is to be preferred over *ndu ojoo*; for while the former is a life of bliss and pleasantness, the latter is a life of desolation and wretchedness. Again, while the former is a life of respect and esteem, the latter is a life of scorn and disparagement. Now, if, as I have pointed out in this paper, the "bad life" is replete with all the negative factors I have mentioned already, then it follows that the "good life" is a socially responsible one. Usually, the Igbo regard as a "good person" an individual who carries out socially responsible actions. Such an individual should not only respect but also promote the good cause of his or her community.

Among the Igbo, as among other Africans, community usually has a strong hold on the individual. This is the point Nwala (1985, 46) makes when he says that among the Igbo, the *being* of community is prior or more important than that of its individual members. The reason for according community such significance is the belief that it is only in it (that is, community) that individual members can realise their goals or social aspirations. It is also for this reason that the idea of being ostracised by one's community is looked upon with great apprehension by the Igbo. I should also think that there is no society or culture where the individual takes delight in being labelled or consigned as a social pariah by fellow members. Usually, among the Igbo, a good person is generally known in the community as *onye na edozi obodo* (literally, one who sets things right in the community). At other times s/he is called *onye na eweta udo na obodo* (i.e., an emissary of peace). Here, it is clear that the Igbo place great premium on communal peace or social well-being. The hankering after social amity or the philosophy of *peace at any cost* finds its best expression in certain ideas as espoused by the British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes.

Hobbes lived at a period of much conflict, political wrangling and civil strife in Britain – the period of monarchy and European feudalism. In his world-famous treatise *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes posits a pre-social order of things in which men lived in a condition of social anarchy and violent conflict. In his popular idea of a *state of nature*, Hobbes tells us that at a time when men lived without a common *Power* to regulate social relations among them, human beings subsisted in a condition of social atavism and conflict – a condition, according to him, "which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man" (Hobbes 1985: ch. 13, 185). Under such a condition of social insecurity, people lived in continual fear and in danger of violent death. The crucial thing was not merely that men lived in utter misery or that their lives were constantly on the line but that the absence of social security hindered growth in industry, agriculture, commerce, science and arts. To compound the awful situation, Hobbes (*ibid*, 186) exclaims that the life of man in the state of nature was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

In the face of social atavism and conflict, what solution did Hobbes offer as a way of creating a condition of social ataraxy in the social space or human community? Hobbes' solution to the problem of social anarchy may appear strange (and it did appear strange to his contemporaries). He offered as a solution to social disorder, political absolutism; that is, a form of political arrangement in which the opinion of the people do not count much in policy matters or the decision making process.

Explaining the matter further, Piirimäe (2006, 4) says Hobbes employed the state of nature as a device for demonstrating the necessity of a strong and cohesive political society. By showing that the pre-political condition is an intolerable state of permanent conflict, he hoped to demonstrate the necessity of a social order governed by an undivided and absolute sovereign. However, against the Hobbesian stance, the greatest argument against political oligarchy or absolutism is that it gives *no* assurance to people about the certainty of personal security to themselves, their families, and friends. But as Richard Sklar would argue, democracy is to be preferred over every other form of political arrangement such as oligarchy or political absolutism. The reason for preferring democracy over oligarchy is because, according to Sklar (1987, 714), it is only in a democracy that "the norms of accountability" are guaranteed or respected. According to the argument:

> A political theory for development, then, would elucidate complementary relationships among democratic participation, constitutional liberty, social pluralism, and economic efficiency (*ibid*, 709).

The question may yet be asked: Why did Hobbes favour absolutism over constitutional political arrangement? His answer is that the worst fate that can befall humanity is a reversion to the state of nature – a condition he equated with a state of war or internecine conflict. For Hobbes, the antidote to such occurrence is is a sovereign with absolute power or authority. For him also, "whatever evils such unlimited power itself might bring, it is a necessary risk because the evils arising from the lack of such power are far greater" (Piirimäe 2006, 4). But as I have implied above, some of Hobbes' contemporaries, or even fellow contractarians would have found the idea of an authoritarian political leadership both bizarre and out of whack. For example, in their own versions of the state of nature, J. J. Rousseau and John Locke posited a condition of relative peace and social harmony in which people had access to private property and in which there existed a modicum order in the social space. Perhaps what makes the ideal of political absolutism unacceptable is that it has the tendency to engender tyranny in the political space. However, as Aquino (2009, 5), following Arendt (1958, 199), reminds us: tyranny is not a form of government but the very antithesis of plurality; the reason is that the tyrant thrives by isolating himself from the people and by isolating the people from each other. In reality, tyranny breeds the germ of its own destruction the moment it makes its appearance because it is unable to sustain the power to remain in the public space of appearance.

The truth, then, is that it is democracy, and not any form of dictatorship or political oligarchy that can enhance economic development and ensure social order in the human community. For as Sklar (1987, 714) reminds us, while democracy may be a *developing* conception, and is everywhere under *construction*, the indubitable truth is that the various *alternatives* to democratic development would always "be famine, war, pestilence, and death on a fearful scale."

The Role of Wealth, Affluence and Mercantilism

Beyond the issue of rectitude or the display of the appropriate character traits by persons, the Igbo also place great weight on the individual acquiring material wealth or riches. The reason, according to Nwala (1985), is because "the Igbo believe that life (*ndu*) must be sustained materially in order to be worth living." Wealth, then, for the Igbo, is something that is celebrated or eulogised. The belief that *ndu* can be sustained through the acquisition of wealth is given expression in the Igbo saying that the poor is *onye di ndu onwu ka nma*; that is, a person who is better dead than alive. Unlike what obtains in some Oriental cultures, especially among the Buddhists where suffering is usually accepted as a *normal* condition of life, the Igbo do not ascribe any positive value or significance to suffering or poverty. With the primeval Igbo, a person's social status was measured in terms of the substantiality of his material wealth or accumulation; or, in terms of the number of wives he had, his family's size, his social titles or status, etc. However, as important as the issue of material wealth may be, such wealth will only be counted as significant if it redounds to the benefit of other members of the community as well.

To reiterate a point made earlier, the Igbo usually attach great importance to community life. For example, the Igbo phrase, *ikwu na ibe* - in English, *person and community* - is a phrase used to express the idea that the individual needs the anodyne of community if s/he hopes to live meaningfully in the world. Another Igbo maxim, *otu onye abuhi osisi* –"no one is an island unto his or herself" - conveys the idea that no individual, no matter how strong, is capable of surviving alone in the world. The idea that no individual can exist or subsist without human fellowship is captured in the modern existentialist dictum that the individual is a *being-in–the–world*, or that s/he is a *being-with-others*, etc. The belief, therefore, is rife among the Igbo that it is through partnering with others that the individual can be safeguarded or secured from the vicissitudes of the natural environment. Put differently, it is through solidarity with others or camaraderie affection that we find peace and fulfillment in the world.

Igbo Life in the Postmodern World

Much of what has been said in this paper so far would apply, in particular, to Igbo of the pre-modern era. With the post-modern Igbo, however, things are a lot different. It may be important to inquire in what ways modernity has affected traditional Igbo values and social custom as a whole. Captured differently, how have the Igbo fared in comparison to other groups in the modern day Nigerian society, especially with all the social upheavals and political gerrymandering that go on in the nation?

In seeking answers to these queries, I must mention as a matter-of-fact that the Igbo society, like any other society, has gone, and is still going through transformative changes. This is to be expected since change is a normal condition of life. Long ago, the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus made the world-famous statement that everything is always changing, that the world is in a state of "becoming" or constant "flux." European colonialism, Western education and Christianity are three key factors that have had a transformative effect on traditional Igbo life and society. The effects of the changes generated by these three elements are well-documented in the literature that I need not rehash them here. Suffice it to say, however, that the Igbo "nation" of today is simply a parody of the virile Igbo race of pre-independence times. A brief picture of the Igbo nation, past and present may be helpful here.

There is the common belief among Nigerians that the Igbo are by nature energetic, hardworking, nimble-fingered and adroit. Similarly, many seem to believe that the survival instinct, or the quest to excel in life, is inbred in the Igbo. It is perhaps this belief that accounts for the claim made concerning the Igbo person that s/he will do almost anything to survive or stay alive. Perhaps this knack for personal or group survival among the Igbo could be explained in historical terms. Compared to some other prominent groups in Nigeria, the Igbo had a late contact with western civilisation. Unlike their Yoruba counterparts, the Igbo were late-starters in acquiring Western education. And unlike their neighbours in the Rivers and Cross Rivers, who live in the coastal lands and thereby enjoyed better agricultural yields and economic boom, the Igbo live in the hinterlands where the environment is harsh and the soil-type yields no good quality fruit. But as experience would later confirm, these ecological factors or environmental drawback were not sufficient to deter the Igbo from drawing level with the other groups in the nation. Being an energetic and "virile people, almost bursting with energy and unquenchable thirst for education," the Igbo were able to overcome whatever handicap they had, and did not only catch up with the early starters in pre-Independent Nigeria, but "have in many respects outstripped them" (Igbokwe 1995, 6).

Those who make this type of claim opine that, as evidence what they say, at the time of political independence in Nigeria, the Igbo had taken lead in many important aspects of the country's national life. They produced the first university graduate in the officer cadre of the Nigerian Army, the first President of the nation, the first Governor-General, the first indigenous Vice-Chancellor of Nigeria's Premier University, the University of Ibadan, etc. There are other items in this list of *firsts*. It is also alleged that at a certain point in the country's history, and through sheer hard work and industry, the Igbo controlled not only the key aspects of the country's national life but also its politics, economy, education and trade. Such success is said to have also bred many enemies for the Igbo. The idea of emerging from complete obscurity to great limelight carried with it some psycho-social tension, such that the Igbo became greatly resented by the other groups in Nigeria.

In his highly excoriating entry on Nigeria, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Chinua Achebe reflects on what he believes is the *origin* of the national resentment of the Igbo in Nigeria – a problem, which, according to him, is not only complex and complicated but also as old the country itself. The root cause of this resentment is summed up this way: "The Igbo culture being receptive to change, gave the Igbo man an unquestioned advantage over his compatriots in securing credentials for advancement in (the) Nigerian colonial society. Unlike the Hausa-Fulani, he was unhindered by a wary religion; and unlike the Yoruba, the Igbo man was unhampered by the traditional hierarchies. This kind of creature, fearing no God or man, was custom-made to grab the opportunities; such as they were, of the Whiteman's dispensation. And the Igbo grabbed it with both hands. Although the Yoruba had huge historical and geographical head start, they wiped out their handicap in one fantastic burst of energy in the twenty years between 1930 and 1950" (Achebe 1983, 46).

Beyond Self-Adulation: The Dilemma of the Contemporary Igbo

Beyond the self-adulatory claims the Igbo make about themselves, the reality on ground seems to suggest that there is not much about contemporary Igbo life that calls for celebration or excessive self-flattery. It is now commonplace to find among the Igbo the vulgar struggle for survival which manifests in the worship of money for its own sake. In the past, it used to be that the great concern was with the nurturing of the mind and the pursuit of knowledge. These factors, it was believed, were the key to leveraging a negative situation created by the hostile natural condition in which the Igbo find themselves. Here, it is important and apropos to mention that the Igbo land area not being arable for farming or large scale agriculture, the people had to seek for survival through the exportation of human labour to far away climes. Even now, most Igbo communities survive by the communitarian practice of having migrant workers also in the diaspora who make financial returns back to their ancestral homes. Such *returns* remain an important source of capital for rural development and the uplifting of the home base. However, this system of remittance by migrant urban workers to their ancestral bases is not Igbo-specific; rather, it is a practice that is common to most third-world societies. Even as these societies modernise, they still "retain their traditional communitarian characteristics that mitigate and contain the socially harmful consequences of functional differentiation" (Sklar 1987, 711). With the Igbo, the trickledown effect of remittances from its urban migrant workers to the home base helped to cushion the effect of a highly dreary and austere home environment.

The Igbo are famed for their pursuit of personal heroism through commitment to work and refusal to baulk in the face of cosmic antagonism. It is also usually said of the Igbo that they are *pushful*, aggressive, self-confident and typically impelled by the desire for personal achievement (See Oguejiofor 1996, 19-24 & Morrill 1965, 427). The Igbo, it is said, are noted for their enterprise, their creativity, and for their intellect. "They are notorious for their refusal to admit the constraints of geography and boundaries, of language and religion" (Macebuh 2002, 21).

Their attitude to government, the opinion further holds, is that of tolerance rather than acceptance. The reason is that they do not regard government as the determinant of their fate or destiny. The social philosophy which characterises this attitude to life "was suffused with optimism, with faith in the individual's ability, if not obligation, to surmount all difficulties, and with the hunger to put a personal stamp on his environment"(*ibid*, 11). Having said this, I need to remark, however, that the unrestrained quest for personal accomplishment was sometimes undertaken at the expense of communal well-being or security. To prevent this from happening, and in order to achieve a balance between the communal need and the individual's ambition to excel, the Igbo would prescribe what Macebuh (*ibid*) calls "extra-phenomenal sanctions"; that is, metaphysical measures, which helped moderate that over-weening attitude that the individual is of more value than the community as a whole.

This grand quality of the Igbo is, regrettably, a description of days gone by, of the values and attributes of an age that has been completely eroded or fast vanishing away. The present Igbo life is neither cheery nor eye-catching. The worship of money, the vulgar pursuit of material gain, the spirit of mercantilism as well as the abandonment of all ethical or social norms are the factors that define the contemporary life. Many have speculated on why things have taken such a bad turn for the Igbo. Many are wont to attribute current problem in the Igbo social life to the dislocations caused by the Nigerian Civil War and the disruption it wrought in "the fragile equilibrium inherent in traditional Igbo conception of man in society, a disruption that manifests itself especially in psychic anxieties that sometimes lead to anarchic behaviour."

Without meaning to be unfair on the people, the quality of being "pushful," self-confident or aggressive often portrays the Igbo in the mould of a people who are headstrong and heedlessly ambitious. Indeed, Echeruo (1979, 23) adverts the two words which help describe Igbo character are *headstrong* and *ambitious*. In my thinking, to be *ambitious* would be something necessarily bad when moderated or restrained by reason. But to be *headstrong* on the other hand, could be indicative of intransigence, pig-headedness or bare-faced wilfulness. Even as Echeruo would acknowledge, these two qualities of overt ambition and headstrongness have been the source, not only of Igbo strength but also of its "disaster."

Still on the theme of Igbo character or personality trait, we could be led to speculate on some issues of social relevance to Igbo social anthropology. The question may be asked, for example, how would the Igbo have reacted if it was the election of one of their kins that was annulled by the military junta on June 12, 1993? Would they, like their Yoruba counterparts, have followed the route of least resistance by employing the instrumentality of the media to discredit the military apparatus that refused to yield power to the obvious winner of that election? Or, would they have followed their natural instincts, by heading to the trenches to redress an obvious injustice done by the rapscallions in uniform? The answers to these questions are moot. I will restrain from speculating more on how the Igbo would have reacted in such case of perceived injustice.

In my thinking, the greatest harm the Igbo seem to have inflicted upon themselves is their declining commitment to education. The people seem to be willingly ignorant of the fact that learning is the *only* way out of ignorance or backwardness. In their vulgar struggle for survival or material gain, the Igbo have completely ditched the ideal of what in the common parlance is referred to as the *development of the brain matter*. Whatever gains the Igbo made during the period of British colonial rule in Nigeria was due, largely, to their unabashed readiness to embrace the white man's ways and learning. Indeed, the Igbo culture is famed for its receptivity to change. It was this willing acceptance of European ways that gave the Igbo the little edge they had over their compatriots during the colonial era. But the great question now is: How have the Igbo fared in post-colonial Nigeria? The honest answer would be to say that they have not fared too well. The Igbo are quick to blame their woes on the dislocations caused them by the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War of 1966 to 1970. They are also quick to shift responsibility for their failures on the brutishness of Nigerian life and what they consider as the *marginalisation* of the Igbo by the other groups in Nigeria. But as significant as these accounts may be, I am not convinced that they are sufficient enough to explain the cause of contemporary Igbo failures. I agree with Macebuh (2002, 12) that the Igbo bore *almost* exclusively the brunt of the Nigerian civil war. True, the brutality of the war and its after-effects are far too numerous and far-reaching to be explained away. For example:

> [T]he war destroyed the communal reference point of all action, and caused a shift in the hierarchy of values from reverence for age, knowledge, experience and maturity and wisdom, to the cult of youth and the rejection of the concept of apprenticeship, and therefore of accountability (*ibid*).

No matter what the causes of the Nigerian civil war may be, the truth is that wars –wherever they are fought, are always atrocious and destructive of life and property. The Igbo seem to have bemoaned the effects of the Nigerian war so much that people have become uncomfortable with their whimpering. While I am not implying that we can wish away the effects of so horrendous an event as the Nigerian civil war, I am convinced that a constant reference to it serves only to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists among Nigerians. As Barack Obama counselled his African-American compatriots who had been victims of great injustice in the American society, the path to true liberation is not to whimper over the ills of the past; rather, it lies in the ability to embrace the burdens of one's past without becoming victims of that past. It means that while we may be faced with injustice or discrimination as a people, we "must never succumb to despair or cynicism." It is failure to heed this form of counsel that has exacerbated the tension in the psyche of the Igbo. Not only have the Igbo given in to cynicism or despair in the face of perceived injustice, but also, their very psychological make-up has become warped by the feeling – real or imaginary - that they are not loved by the rest of Nigeria. The cynicism and frustration over their fortunes in the Nigerian Project have made the Igbo give up interest not only in the political process of the larger Nigerian state but also in matters that concern their own welfare.

The pessimism of the modern-day Igbo is marked by their possession of a new mindset. According to one opinion, "the prevalent, though hardly exclusive paradigm of the contemporary Igbo mind, is that which negates and refutes virtually all traditional norms and restraints." Do you suppose that this assessment is harsh and sour? There is more to come. This perverted frame of mind, which has been graphically tagged "the Alaba Market Syndrome," has as its cardinal presumption:

> [T]he proposition that wealth, no matter how acquired, is the measure of man, or woman. It preaches the supremacy of the wallet over the mind. It proposes a rejection, or abandonment of the intellect; and exhibits a profound contempt for education, even for the mere acquisition of utilitarian skills … It demonstrates, in action, a deep uneasiness with tested moral values. It is suffused with a stark vulgarity of consciousness. It worships at the hitherto unfamiliar altar of opportunism and irrationality. It is ostentatious and egotistical. And it thrives in the ramparts of the mob and of the trickster.

The transvaluation of those time-honoured values of the old Igbo world is part reason for the social dislocation and collapse of Igbo systems of social organisation. Everywhere in the Igbo community, one observes an upsurge in such social vices as occultism, armed banditry, kidnapping, business scams, to mention a few; vices that have had shattering effects on all the values that the people once held dear. It is important to mention here that cultism and kidnapping, which in the present-day Nigerian society have become instruments of social destabilisation and disquietude, used to be veritable tools of social organisation and communal cohesion. I interpret Maduka (1993, 62) as suggesting that among the traditional Igbo, for example, kidnapping was one of the weapons employed for promoting community welfare, especially during war situations where the need for social order and security were specially required. The need for social order and security is in reality what led to the evolving of the norms of morality and social sanctions in all pristine societies. In the discussion, I have implied that the present social distress that the contemporary Igbo face is caused, partly, by the disruption in the people's social values. Kalu (1993, 19) recognises this fact when he avers that "under the pressure of modern" life, Igbo ethical values have become *shattered* into such small fragments they seem not able to be gathered together any longer.

It is not simply that Igbo values are *shattered* or sullied, the situation has become so bad, says Kalu (*ibid*), that their compatriots now depict the Igbo with such stereotypes as "aggressive, exploitative, ambivalent and tactless." The Igbo have also become the butt of ridicule of their fellow citizens. For example, there is a popular wisecrack among some Nigerian groups to the effect that an Igbo would be all too willing to trade even his mother for mere pecuniary gain. Rightly or wrongly, the Igbo person is looked upon by his fellows as a potential fraudster, a crook, or as someone who habitually indulges in business scams.

A popular Nigerian label for qualifying a person who engages in fraudulent or dishonest business deals is *419*. Without doubt, several of the claims made regarding Igbo persona are often blinkered and exaggerated. But as an Igbo proverb reminds us, "If there is no crack in the wall, the lizard would gain no entry." The Igbo are the ones who through their actions and conduct have created the "crack" that have allowed their detractors to heckle or poke fun at them. They have a duty, therefore, to act to redress the negative situation in which they have brought themselves.

Redressing the Situation

The current confusion of the contemporary Igbo is not irredeemable. One of the ways to redress the existing bad situation is for the Igbo to recover themselves and to return to those social ideals which made them put price on certain members of society as *ezigbo mmadu*. But this will require a reinventing as well as a revival not only of the moral life, but also of the positive aspects of the people's social ethos or custom. Without meaning to rehash the things said already in this paper, the point has been made that in the old Igbo world, a person was considered an *ezigbo mmadu* if s/he carried out socially worthy actions, if s/he observed the social mores of the community, if s/he lived virtuously, etc. These days, however (and especially with the collapse of the values of the social life not only among the Igbo, but also in the Nigerian society as a whole), the Igbo seem to have completely jettisoned their cultural distinctiveness and the social heroism for which they were known. Over time, an *ezigbo mmadu* appears to be the man or woman who has acquired wealth, whether fraudulently or otherwise. The "mammon of unrighteousness" (to employ a phraseology made popular in the Bible)[5] is what is now commonly celebrated in most Igbo communities; and, nobody seems to bother how such wealth was acquired.

But there are people – both Igbo and non-Igbo - who are concerned, and who worry whether the Igbo will ever get over their current social predicament. Or, would the Igbo, like some great races of the past, atrophy or go into complete social disintegration? These are genuine worries indeed. But it seems to me that the Igbo race is highly resilient and possesses such great group pride that can make it spring back to national reckoning. Being able to overcome the harsh events of the pre-civil war days in Nigeria; and being able also to make some stride, no matter how haltingly, after the devastation that followed the civil war itself, is evidence enough that the race will not end up in social dissolution. However, for our hope in the Igbo future not to be dashed or disappointed, the people would need to do a number of things. One is that the Igbo need to collectively arise and rebuff the bad in them by embracing that which is good and honest. Two is the necessity of seeking moral rebirth by the adoption of those qualities of life and conduct that are both ennobling and socially uplifting. These, in my thinking, are pathways to Igbo recovery in the present Nigerian society in which they have found themselves. It is only after the Igbo have recovered themselves that they can truly begin their search for the "good person" (*ezigbo mmadu*) of the contemporary Igbo society.

Concluding Remarks

This paper explored the Igbo concept of a "good person" (*ezigbo mmadu*). I have shown that this concept refers to any man or woman who counterpoises his/her good with that of the entire society, and any man or woman who is an embodiment of sound character. Of course, the challenges of modernity and the harsh social environment in which the modern Igbo have found themselves seem to greatly tint their conceptualisation of who an *ezigbo mmadu* should be. We must, however, recover ourselves from the evil that has so soon overtaken us and resume our pursuit of the essential *ezigbo mmadu*. These assessments – about Igbo life in the contemporary world order - may appear sombre and sour; however, they are not meant to denigrate or unduly lampoon the Igbo race of which I am a bona fide member. On the contrary, my aim in this paper is to arouse the Igbo to positive action and conduct. The Igbo usually pride themselves with being "the Jews of Nigeria" or the Japanese of Black Africa. The great qualities of life for which the Jews and Japanese are known are their unequalled capacity to survive even in the midst of national destruction, social dislocation, or global rejection. The two races, it is commonly held, are imbued with great natural instincts to overcome social devastation and are capable of bouncing back to global reckoning in a short space of time. If the Igbo picture themselves in the mould of these two great races, they need to prove it by demonstrable action, not by verbal assent or mere word of mouth.

References

Abraham W. E. (1992), *Crisis in African Cultures*. In: Wiredu K, and Gyekye K (eds.). *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*. Washington, DC: The Council for Values and Philosophy.

Achebe, C. (1983), *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers).

Aquino, R. C. (2009), "The Dialectics of Power, Rights, and Responsibility," *Kritike* 3 (1): 1- 9.

Arendt, H. (1958), *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

Dioka, L. C. (1997), "Inter-group Relations among Nigerian Communities," In: Osuntokun, A. and Olukoju, A. (eds.), *Nigerian Peoples and Cultures* (Ibadan: Davidson Press.

Eluwa, G. I. C. et al. (1988), *A History of Nigeria for Schools and Colleges* (Ibadan: Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd.).

Echeruo, M. J. C. (1979), A Matter of Identity (Owerri: Ministry of Information).

Hobbes, T. (1985), *Leviathan* (1651), Macpherson, C. B., ed. (London: Penguin Books).

Igbokwe, J. (1995), *Igbos: Twenty-five Years After Biafra* (Lagos: Advent Communications Ltd.).

Kalu, O. U. (1993), "Ethical Values in Igbo Tradition of Politics," In: Anyanwu, U. D. and Aguwa, J. C. U. (ed.), *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd.).

Maduka, R. O. E. (1993), "Age Grade Factor in Igbo Tradition of Politics," In: Anyanwu, U. D. and Aguwa, J. C. U. (ed.), *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd.).

Mbiti, J.S. (1957), *An Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann).

_____. (1990), *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann.

Moore, G.E. (1903), *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: C.U. P).

Morrill, W.T. (1965), "Immigrants Associations: the Ibo in Twentieth Century Calabar," In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (4).

Nwala, T. U. (1985), *Igbo Philosophy* (Lagos: Lantern Books).

Oguejiofor, J.O. (1996), *The Influence of Igbo Traditional Religion on the Socia-political Character of the Igbo* (Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing Co.).

Okorocha, C.C. (1987), *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa* (Brookfield, U.S.A.: Avebury, 1987).

Omoyajowo, J. A. (1975), "The Concept of Man in Africa", *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. ix.

Piirimäe, P. (2006), "The Explanation of Conflict in Hobbes' *Leviathan*," In: *Trames* 10: 3-21.

Popper, K. (1957) *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

_____. (1976), *Unended Quest* (Great Britain: Fontana).

Sklar, R. L. (1987), "Developmental Democracy," In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (4): 686-714.

Staniland, H. S. (1979), "What is Philosophy?" In: *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy*, vol. III, nos. 1 and 2, January/July.

United Nations, Population Division. "World Population Prospects: 2008 Revision." Available at: http://esa.un.org/unpp/.

Endnotes

[1] For more on this see "Intuition." Microsoft® Encarta® 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

[2] In making this classification, I have not followed any particular pattern for classifying a people or a culture. Rather, the classificatory scheme is merely for the purpose of convenience and to give perspective to the discussion. And as I have already mentioned, the term the "pre-modern" Igbo is merely indicative of the Igbo people before the influence of Christianity and European colonialism. The expression, the "post-modern" Igbo on the other hand refers to the Igbo race after the period of Nigeria's political independence from Great Britain. In adopting the terms "pre-modern" and "modern," I have also been careful to avoid the use of such concepts as "primitive" or "pre-literate" because of the unnecessary controversy such terms are likely to generate.

[3] This Bible account can be found in the Book of Genesis 4: 8-11.

[4] This Bible account can be found in Luke 16: 22-25. In the account, the inhabitants of Paradise-heaven are depicted as engaging in the usual activities characteristic of people in the physical world.

[5] In the Bible, this phrase can be found in such passages as Matthew 6: 24 and Luke 16: 9, 11 and 13, where the term "mammon of unrighteousness" is descriptive of the uncontrollable quest for material wealth or acquisition.