

**THE THEORY OF FORCES AS CONCEIVED  
BY IGBO-AFRICANS**

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**1. Introduction**

In addition to the Bantu conception of vital force as it influences human behavior; there are also other aspects of African life where the further conception of forces can be detected. This work will concentrate on force (ike) as conceived by Igbo Africans. Some of them, any way, are already contained in the Bantu notion of forces. They are:

- (i) Force as given by ancestors
- (ii) Force from charms and magic
- (iii) Force obtainable from sacrifices
- (iv) Force in prayer, sacred objects and places

There is a conception of the Supreme Being as he who gives life, or he who gives force to other beings that are subordinate. Not only in Africa, all over the world, people have the belief that gods have power, force or energy (ike) over things that men cannot control or understand. These beliefs teach that gods are responsible for the creation of the world and the continuation of life in it, and that they control important events such as birth, death, disease and success. Gods, unlike men, do not die; they live forever and restore force to created things that lost theirs.

Man as force itself manipulates these forces; good or bad. C. B. Nze says: "ravaged by constant fears of insecurity in the face of forces of which man is one, the African (Igbo) resort to the making and creation of yet other forces in the form of charms for the purpose of controlling, checking and preventing the excesses of

malignant forces<sup>6</sup>”. On the whole, Africans believe in the existence of spirits in general, good and evil ones.

The good spirits are prominent and known and worshipped by a clan or community. It is usually localized and enshrined in a particular place where sacrifices are made for safety, blessing and good luck etc. These spirits are believed to have the force to receive from the Almighty what the community under its protection requests. The good spirits are merciful and will never allow any of the members of the community to get lost.

The second are the spirits whose names are not known. Often they are the wicked spirits or bad spirits of kindred. Sacrifices to them are often placed on the road sides, often on the forked road because they are believed to be wandering spirits, having the force, (energy or capacity) of coming through many roads – and when they do, they would eventually meet the sacrifice<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. Deities and spirit forces

The power (the force) of the deities and spirits as spiritual beings are found evident in Igbo proverbs. Their power far exceeds man. Men cannot afford to quarrel with them, nor can man undo what they have done. They can see even the most hidden things. This is why the Igbo say ... “Okenye ji abali eri oke, mmadu ahughị ya mmuọ huru ya”. Both deities and spirits can strengthen, by way of giving long life, good health, prosperity and enhance social status<sup>8</sup>. Both spirits can also bring death, understood as the denial of one

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<sup>6</sup> Nze, C. I., “Logic in African Charm Medicine in the *Nigeria Journal of Social Studies*” Vol. 4 No. 1, P. 23. Further discussions on the constitution of forces in African thought could be seen in J. O. Chimakonam *Introducing African Science: Systematic and Philosophical Approach*, Bloomington Indiana: Authorhouse, 2012, 96-97

<sup>7</sup> Onwubiko, O. A. *Wisdan Lecturers on African Thought and Culture*. (Nigeria: Toten Publishers Ltd, 1988) P. 55

<sup>8</sup> Metuh, I., *African Religion in Western Conceptual Schemes The Problems of Interpretation* (Ibadan: Claverianum Press, 1985), p. 30

or all these aspects of life. Sacrifices are offered to spirits to give life. The spirit that received man's offering is bound to pay him back with life. This is why the Igbo people say: Mmụọ riri ife onye, ji ndụ akwụ ya ụgwọ<sup>9</sup>.

The spirits can also punish, they can kill, whereas the deities are believed to punish or kill for correction or as a retribution for misconducts. The spirit forces are hedged around for a number of taboos, once any of these is infringed, even inadvertently, their reaction is automatic<sup>10</sup>. The Arụsị... are spiritual forces in nature which until when they are discovered by man, remains inactive. They become active once man discovers and begins to worship them. It is an instrumentality through which evil forces are controlled, their forces enfeebled. The real meaning of Arụsị is Arụ kwụsị (evil must stop) which is abbreviated as Arụ-sị. Thus the deities essentially are activated to help man guard against evil in the society.

The more offering these deities receive the more powerful they become and the more powers they have to bring fortunes or misfortunes. So too the less offerings they receive the weaker their powers become. Hence, if a community decides to stop all offering made to an Arụsị, its power would be gone, and it would become inactive. Hence the proverb that if an Arụsị becomes destructive it would be shown the tree from which it was made<sup>11</sup>.

Making an Arụsị to be less potent is dangerous as it portends calamity befalling the community responsible. Yes, Arụsị can be destructive if all sacrifices due to it are withdrawn. Actually, the destruction is not caused by Arụsị itself, but the absence of it which automatically brings to zero, its functional relation with the people it is meant to protect. The above suggests that Igbo regard

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

sacrifice as a process of restituting vital force<sup>12</sup>. Also, C. B. Nze comments “Constant efforts to maintain existing balance in the community and in the individual necessitate the offering of sacrifices<sup>13</sup>.” This means that the vital force which has also being likened to ikenga is responsible for maintaining this necessary balance by ordering the composite life forces (ijele)<sup>14</sup>.

Man, ‘mmadu’ is best seen as a composite of life-forces interacting with other life-forces in the universe. He is endowed with different principles or selves which link and allow him to interact with other beings in the world. For example, Chi links him with the entire universe of forces<sup>15</sup>.

Obi, as a life force, is capable of growth, diminution and death. By maintaining a harmonious relationship through rituals, man contributes to the strengthening or bonding of his life-forces. Man can further strengthen himself with charms and medicines<sup>16</sup>. In this way, it should be understood that the disintegration of man’s composite forces means death so also with other beings; injuries and diseases are also signs of partial disintegration. Scholarly attempts have been made to explain this using the instrumentality of African logic<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, the strength of man’s life forces is made manifest in his general well being, good health, large family, prosperity and good status in society<sup>18</sup>.

A person’s life force may be the object of attack by witches, sorcerers, unappeased deities, or evil spirits.<sup>19</sup> Man is a microcosm

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<sup>12</sup> Note of course, J. O. Chimakonam’s explanations on the difference between force (ike) power; vital force (ikenga) power to cause...often animated or embodied as in Arusi; and life force (ijele) tiny life giving molecules. Op Cit

<sup>13</sup> Nze, C. B., Aspects of African Communal 2 sm p. 63

<sup>14</sup> J. O. Chimakonam Op Cit P.

<sup>15</sup> Metuh. I. Op cit 98

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> J. O. Chimakonam Op Cit P. 2

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

of forces. Above all beings or forces is Chukwu (Great God), spirit or creator. He gives existence, power of survival and increase to all other forces. After him come the deities, and the founding ancestors (father) of different clans. These, though are one time human beings, dispose of great powers and influence because they were the first to whom God communicated his vital force, with the power of exercising influence on posterity. They constitute the most important chain binding men to God.<sup>20</sup> After them come the Ancestors and the other living dead of the family and tribe. Then come the living in order of primogeniture. Then under man and subordinate to him are the physical forces in the universe such as animals, plants and minerals.<sup>21</sup>

### **3. The Interaction of Forces**

The universe is like a spider's web in which all beings are linked together by a network of relationship and interact upon one another<sup>22</sup>. Harmonious relationships or interaction lead to the strengthening of forces of beings, while pernicious influences lead to diminution of being or disintegration of composite forces.

#### **Illustration**

This belief is illustrated by an incident which happened at Ozubulu, a town at the central part of Igbo land some years ago. The catechist of a Christian group, who had cut and sawed up an 'Iroko' tree to get some money to marry a wife for his son suddenly died one morning while working in his barn. While his church members prayed for the repose of his soul in the church, his relatives in the village consulted oracle which attributed his death to his failure to placate the spirit in the tree (vital force). (This incident occurred in 1979; his wife was later said to have died in a similar mysterious way). If he had acted fast by performing rituals

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<sup>20</sup> Tempels P., *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1969) p. 61

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

and sacrifice on recommendation, as Igbo metaphysical opinion would have it, his life would have been saved and equilibrium of forces restored.

The oracles ordered a series of rituals to restore the harmony to avoid more of such deaths, thus, all life forces and vital forces can influence one another for good or for evil. Harmonious relationships ensure stronger bonding of the life-forces of man. Greater part of Igbo religion consists of rituals and sacrifices to maintain or restore this harmony.

#### **4. Sacrifice as Restitution of Vital Force among the Igbo**

Sacrifices are offered to the invisible spirits, deities and ancestors to obtain favors or to avert dangers. This activity is appreciated by the Igbo on the predicate that man, not only an Igbo man, is not the master of the universe even though he is central in the world. According to Arinze Francis (a Roman Catholic Cardinal) the Igbo man offers sacrifices for four reasons: “the various ends of Ibo sacrifices can be grouped under four headings; (a) expiation (b) sacrifice to ward off molestation from unknown spirits (c) petition (d) thanksgiving<sup>23</sup>”. In his own view C. B. Nze sees sacrifice as a means of maintaining existing balances in a given community<sup>24</sup>. The idea behind the maintenance of balance is predicated on the understanding that imbalance or disharmony could have a spiritual cause, straining the relation between the living and the dead.

The Igbo conceive man as a force as he is dynamic. The vital force- – power is identical with man. So the idea of vital force is ontologically inseparable from man, hence the Igbo say, “mmadu bu mmuḡ”- man is a deity or (spirit in this context). There can be increase or decrease in vital force. There can also be a loss in vital

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<sup>23</sup> Arinze, F., *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion* (Ibadan, University Press, 1970). Pp 2 - 21

<sup>24</sup> C. B. Nze. Op Cit p. 63

force and this loss can also be restored by certain happenings around us.

Man is a being capable of growth and diminution, he is a force that can exercise a direct influence on some other forces; and other forces can also have their influences on man. By positive or negative deeds he can increase, decrease and restore the vital force of other beings. By harmonious relationship he increases his vital force as well as that of others; and by pernicious relation he diminishes either his or the other's vital force.

For the continued existence of the Igbo man, for instance, restoration or restitution of force is very vital. The only way certain of coding this is by sacrifice. Sacrifice therefore, becomes an inevitable tool for this revitalization. It also forms one of the commonest but most important demonstrations of religious worship and belief system among the Igbo people. Sacrifices are made for the protection of life and safety of property. For the guarantee of this protection, the Igbo people offer the sacrifices to the beings with potency of offering protection. This position is supported by Amaury when he said;

Only a clever 'Dibia' can make strong 'Ọgwụ' when he gives it to a man he tells him to make a certain sacrifices, example: a fowl to it weekly, otherwise the 'Ọgwụ' will die ...<sup>25</sup>

The Igbo believe certain ingredients are specifically potent for specific actions. Also, there is a belief that time, place, day, week are specific for certain kinds of sacrifice. This belief is hinged on force and their gradation. This belief made explicit in the proverb: "Obu sị na ike dị n' awaja n' awaja" or "Ovu sị na ike dị n' ọsụ" very much depends on the dialect one is expressing the reality. To corroborate the above, Onwubiko Oliver succinctly puts it, "For

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<sup>25</sup> Amaury, P. *The People of Southern Nigeria*, Vol. 11 (Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1969), P. 168

sacrifices to be efficacious and to achieve their purpose, the African believe that they must be offered at particular place, at a particular time of the day, week or year as the case may<sup>26</sup>.” Sacrifice therefore, is a sign that man is not a necessary being. He acknowledges the being of other vital forces; hence his need to seek external help.

The Igbo belief in sacrifices and their efficacy in the restitution of vital force cement their unmistakable belief in and acceptance of the reality of occult (hidden or latent) power, operation and engineering in Igbo Cosmo-ontology. C. B. Nze makes it clear thus: “Indeed, the Igbo man becomes a technician using sacrifices for the strengthening, maintenance and protection of man. If he is of this sort, he is in perpetual readiness to achieve a refill or else the engine would stall.<sup>27</sup>”

The operation or manipulation of occult powers lies heavily upon the fact that the Igbo generally, as for some other Africans, believe that the universe is like spider’s web in which all things are linked together by a network of relationship and they interact upon one another<sup>28</sup>”

Pernicious relationship leads to the diminution of forces while the harmonious relation leads to the strengthening of forces. Where forces are diminished or annihilated and there is a great need for their restitution, sacrifices are resorted to achieving this.

Sacrifices, depending on its very nature and the intention for which it is carried out, can also diminish or annihilate a vital force. The

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<sup>26</sup> Onwubiko, O. A., *African Thought Religion and Culture* (Enugu Snapp Press Ltd. 1991) p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> Nze, C. B. Op. Cit, P. 71

<sup>28</sup> Tempels, P. Op Cit, p. 61

use of sacrifice is Plausible following the oration of the ‘metaphysical principles’<sup>29</sup>.

Following the metaphysico-ontological principles in which beings operate, it is worthwhile that we go to explain the different levels or degrees of beings there are. In African cosmo-ontology “there is a belief that a cobweb-like relationship exists between men and the spirits and in the events of strains in the relationships, sacrifices must be offered to re-establish and stabilize balances as “constant efforts to maintain existence in the individuals necessitate the offering of sacrifices.”<sup>30</sup>

There are different degrees of beings. We have terrestrials, vegetative, minerals, in addition to spiritual, otherwise referred to as noumenal entities in Kant’s terminology. These noumenals are super, supra or praeter natural and precisely so their activities resemble their nature and degree of existence. Still among the supernatural or the terrestrial there is hierarchy but this is outside our purview.

Among these degrees of beings, none is more privileged and pre-eminent following the third metaphysico-ontological principles – the principle of proportionality which says “The ontological perfections are common to all beings, to each according to each degree”<sup>31</sup>. If the above holds true the forces generated by all beings must never be equal “Ike dī na dabam dabam”, “Nke onye ji eke abughị ya ka ibe ya ji eke” there is hierarchy of forces and relativity in strength.

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<sup>29</sup> Donceal, J. F. *Philosophical Anthropology* (USA, Sheed and World Inc 1967) pp. 14 – 15.

<sup>30</sup> Nze, C. B. Op. Cit, P. 63

<sup>31</sup> Shine, D. J., *An Interior Metaphysics* (Western Mass, Weston, College Press), p. 51

Seeing that each being is ontologically perfect (Nke onye diri ya), the perfection of each is native to each. Owing to this nativity therefore, the forces generated by all beings must never be equal. But because man is the only being that makes this enquiry about other beings, this ontological privilege makes him have an edge over every other being. This ontological 'gratia' is thoroughly appreciated by an Igbo-African and so he becomes well equipped to delve into any discussion of beings in Igbo or African cosmology. In this way, Igbo man's world view or being-in-the-world becomes homocentric or anthropocentric.

It is the man who makes the sacrifices. It is the man who prescribes the type of sacrifices to be made following the principle "like causes produce like effects". It is the man who knows the materials or objects or ingredients suitable for a particular sacrifice that can appease the spirit or deity that has been injured.

With sacrifice man controls the forces or activities of the spirit. Man even directs the spirit as a driver does a car. Man compels spirit to comply.

It is the belief of the Igbo that spirits are responsible for some of the events that happen in man's life, but some men are specially endowed with the understanding of this operation and can manipulate. Either prevent or suspend the powers of these spirits as soon as such reports are made to them.

The man is endowed with different principles of selves capable of strengthening his vital energy. These different selves in one are different forces in one (multi in parvu). With these principles of selves, the Bantu Africans for example hold that:

The Living Muntu (man) is in a relation of being to being with God, with his clan brethren, with his family and with his descendants. He is in a similar ontological relationship with his patrimony (his land with all that it contains or produces, with all that grows or lives in it). All acquisition brings an increase in vital

force in Bantu eyes: Everything which breaks into this patrimony causes it to deteriorate, or destroys it.<sup>32</sup>

The traditional Igbo man retrieves the power of the spirit, hidden powers as a scientist retrieves data from the computer. The Igbo belief in sacrifices, rituals and their efficacy are evidence of their unmistakable belief in occult realities.

When sacrifices of food items are given to the spirits, we do not expect that the spirits eat them as men do. They consume by appreciation and acknowledgement and finally abstract their essences. Thus to eat on the cosmos of spirits is in fact to appreciate. This understanding extends to our churches. When an item is offered to God, we know actually that God does not eat nor use money. But we believe God accepts our offering, tangible or intangible. It is therefore, stupefying to say that the dogs consumed an offertory meant for God; therefore the offertory was not appreciated.

In support, Kristensen mentioned types of sacrifices and the purposes. He puts them into two broad categories:

Those of positive aim of actualizing in nature and among men abiding and self subsistent divine life, and those with negative aim like atoning sacrifices or peace offering to ward off dangerous spirits and thus cause the illness to cease<sup>33</sup>.

The above classification was made along the lines of aims or goals. Similarly Evans Prichard refers to broad categories of sacrifices, namely (a) Piacular (b) Confirmatory. The former is designed to ward off any danger hanging over the people for any misfortune or grave danger as a sign of spiritual activity. No

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<sup>32</sup> Tempels, P., Op. Cit., P. 100

<sup>33</sup> Kristensen, W. B., *The Meaning of Religion*, Translate by Carman, J. Martinus Nijhoff (The Hague, 1960) p. 445

wonder he said ideas of propitiation of the spirit of expiation of faults (to placate the spirits against impending danger).<sup>34</sup> The latter are sacrifices which accompany social activities. Other authors like Hubert and Mauss say confirmatory sacrifices can be called sacrifices of sacralization which make the profane sacred; whereas piacular sacrifices of desacrilization make the sacred profane.<sup>35</sup>

Onwubiko A. O. outlines three kinds of sacrifices namely: expiatory, petitive and thanksgiving<sup>36</sup> according to their aims: to ward off evil spirits or placate enraged deity, to ask for a favor or blessing, and for blessings and favors received<sup>37</sup>. In his “Aspects of African Communalism” C. B. Nze named four types of sacrifices, expiation or atonement, thanksgiving, to ward off molestation, to harm others, or sacrifice made to kill somebody, that is, mortuary sacrifice.<sup>38</sup> With the above, it is clear that our belief in the efficacy of sacrifice and its utilitarian, pragmatic purpose are anchored on the reality of force as understood by Igbo-Africans.

However, whether these sacrifices themselves create any effect to the point that is empirically verifiable is outside the scope of this work. We have every excuse to defend the phenomenon as it touches all human religion, values and thoughts and none has been defended empirically. It is a belief system and precisely so, we have no option than to subscribe to the force of that belief which universally hold men together, the Igbo cannot be exempted in this.

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<sup>34</sup> Pritchard, E., *Nuer Religion*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1956) p. 198.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Onwubiko, A. O. *African Thought and Culture* (Owerri Totan Pub. Ltd. 1988) p. 56

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Nze, C. B. Op. Cit., P. 67 – 68

## 5. Charms: Externalization of Igbo African Belief in Force

The Africans, especially the Igbo-Africans, believe in the potency of charms and amulets. This belief also facilitates their belief in Christian sacramentals as both have trajectory functions of affecting an object not in close contact with them. The ability of the Igbo to employ charms to cause manifestations without physical contact has been explained scientifically. This was articulated in Chimakonam's discussions on the laws of African science typical of which is the one he branded the law of egwueji or law of the means<sup>39</sup>. Thus, it is feasible that through charms and amulets somebody's vital force may be enfeebled according to the intent of the user with regards to influence other people.

Chukwuemeka Ikeh in his *The Naked Gods* says:

Charms are believed to bring to realization, the power of the spirit ancestors. Yet it is believed that through the use of charm, obnoxious and implacable spirits and ancestors are controlled, driven away, or blind folded, such that their evil machination and punishment of the living are minimized and controlled<sup>40</sup>.

The Webster's Universal English Dictionary gives a workable definition of Charm as that which has "an alluring quality, a magic verse or formula: something thought to possess occult power. An object bringing luck; a trinket on a bracelet"<sup>41</sup>. For C. B. Nze on another hand, "Charms have magical powers or effects ... produce effects or control events or supposed as spells to govern certain natural or supernatural force"<sup>42</sup>. Since like causes produce like

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<sup>39</sup> J. O. Chimakonam. *Op Cit.* P.82-84

<sup>40</sup> Ikeh, C., *The Naked Gods*

<sup>41</sup> Geddes & Grosset. *Webster's Universal English Dictionary* (Canada, 2005)  
p. 53

<sup>42</sup> Nze, C. B. "Logic in African Charm Medicine" *The Nigeria Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 4 No. 1, p. 23

effects the metaphysical operation of charms function in accordance with this law. Scientifically, this has been branded *iwu-nyiri-onwe* or the law of uniformity and states thus: given any two things, if they are sufficiently similar then, they share some common properties. The reason according to Chimakonam is that by nature's pre-arrangement a good number of things fall into uniformity<sup>43</sup>. A better exposition of this idea is done at the chapter on the methods of African science<sup>44</sup>. Here, the author discusses among others, methods known as *ako-nyiri-onwe* (sem-science) and *ako-nso-n'azu* (causal science). These two methods variously describe how the idea that likes follow from likes dominate enquiries in Igbo African world-view.

Sometimes, preparation of charm follows the ontological principle of cause and effect, conaturality (*agree sequitur esse*). Charms are prepared with the materials which are inherently capable of producing effects that resembled them very much. Once the effect is produced there must be resemblance or similitude. The logic of "like effects follow like causes" is seen in the behavior of the materials used and the result achieved. The forces of the materials are inherent on their behavior. It is the natural behavior that manifests to the practitioner the actual effect which is capable of being achieved by it. In C. B. Nze's "Logic in African Charm Medicine", we can see that the logic that the principles as above mentioned follow is explicit in the ingredients concocted. Protective charm, for instance, is prepared by those things in nature whose actions are protective such as strong bulwarks, nails of a strong man, body parts of lion, leopards, tigers or other strong animals<sup>45</sup>.

Protective charms are used to invigorate, restore, and fortify one's vital force. On the other hand, love charm preparation demands the

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<sup>43</sup>J. O. Chimakonam *Op Cit.*, p. 85

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 52-63

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid*

use of attractive objects and good natured ingredients. For instance it may be necessary to use hearts of chickens pounded to smooth paste, beautiful and attractive leaves. This is because love attracts and so the ingredients are bound to be of ontological similitude.

That objects of nature speak language to the hearing of medicine man implies that the importance of any object is ontologically inseparable from the nature of the object. It is not by chance that we have sweet roots and herbs as well as bitter leaf and herbs. The sweetness or bitterness of leaf or root portends its importance and its usefulness, its effect when applied in a way nature requires.

Igbo Africans believe that the world is a forest symbols. Everything has a purpose there is sufficient reason for the existence of everything in everything. There are many indices in the natural objects when studied and observed closely. A Botanist or Zoologist will be better equipped to prescribe root, herbs, plants or animals that can be used to achieve certain effects. Some who are endowed by the ability to relate these functions look like “Onatara ndi mmụọ n’aka” or those who received these directly from the gods: For wrestling charm, forces can be tapped from cat or frog. Cat, for its agility and frog, for its flexibility, so that the Wrestler will be agile and flexibility before his opponent.

Also, prestigious charm would make the holder appear intimidating and powerful to his colleagues. C. B. Nze quoted Ezeabasili Nwankwo as suggesting:

The skull of a buffalo, the paw of leopard, one ram, the red feather of a parrot, the feather of an eagle, three quills of hedge hog, three whiskers of leopard and two cocks.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ezeabasili, No. *African Science – Myth or Reality*, (Vantage Press, 1977) p. 10. Quoted in Nze C. B., Loc, Cit. p. 26

These are objects which emit force inducing fear and respect. They are awe-inspiring by nature and so will behave accordingly following the principle “actions follow its being” or “everything acts according to its nature” “*agere sequitur esse*”. The behavior of objects of charm, the manifestation of their forces (ike) or being (ihe/ike) , here being is identical with force, is facilitated by adequate words proclaimed over them at least to reactivate the dormant forces. It is commonly observed that no African medicine man ever prepares any charm medicine without pronouncing the appropriate words over it. Solemnly calling each item used by its name<sup>47</sup>. The author quoted above argues that the word has itself the force of freeing the forces inherent in object of charm and makes them effective. The objects need to be conjured in order to release their energy.

No ‘medicine’ talisman, magic, horns. No, not even poisons are effective without the word. If they are not conjured, they are of no use in themselves. They have no activity at all. Only the intelligence of the word frees these forces and makes them effective. All substances, animals, juices are only vessels of the word of the Nommo<sup>48</sup>.

Other forms of charm too many to mention in this paper follows the same pattern of preparation. Francis Arinze holds that a charm is an object which by some mysterious, immanent and unconscious power, is believed to preserve from evil, disease, bullets or motor accidents or to make one succeed in trade, in love affair, in fishing, in catching thieves, in passing examinations<sup>49</sup>. This shows there are as many forms of charms as there are activities of men. Arinze

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<sup>47</sup> Nze. C. B. Loc., Cit, p. 27

<sup>48</sup> Muntty, J. J., *An Outline of the New African Culture* (N. M. Grove Press Inc. 1961). P. 133 quoted by Nze, C. B., Loc Cit, p. 27

<sup>49</sup> Arinze, F., *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion* (Ibadan, University Press, 1970) pp. 20 - 21

only pointed out the most prominent and common among them that receive patronage.

Belief in the potency and force of charms and amulets is one of the practical aspects of African traditional religion and philosophy. An amulet is an object generally inscribed with mysterious formulae and used by pagans as a protection against various maladies, as well as witchcraft. Charms seem to be synonymous with amulets and do not have a consensus definition.

Oxford dictionary defines amulet as: “Anything worn about the person as a charm or preventive against evil, mischief, disease, witchcraft, etc ..., it applies to all medicines whether internal or external, whose virtue or manner or operation is occult, it is a preservative, protective or charm.”<sup>50</sup>

Charms and amulets have functional relation and similitude. Both are believed to have trajectory power hence their action without physical contact is prominent. Charms are also believed to bring to realization, the power of the spirits and ancestors. Charms and amulets are sought by some African Igbo as means of warding off obnoxious and implacable spirits and ancestors such that their evil machinations and punishment of the living are minimized or averted.<sup>51</sup> This belief in charms and amulets is informed by their subscription to supernatural forces.

In the words of Ogbalu:

A number of popular beliefs are that man can cause sunshine or draught, harmattan, dryness, rainfall, thunder and lightning. Killing of opponents or enemies from far distance without contact or material weapons, that some families have special

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<sup>50</sup> James, A. A. M. and Bradley, H., *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Vol. 1. (Lond: OUP, 1933)

<sup>51</sup> Onwubiko, O. A., Loc. Cit.

talent of turning into animals like leopard, hawk, kite etc. That witches exist, that children suffer because of the misdeeds of their parents.<sup>52</sup>

From the above arises such question as to what extent can charms work? What is the rationale for believing in them?

## 6. Philosophy of Charms and Amulets

The Igbo African metaphysician is struck with awe at the vital forces in nature. He discovered there are various inherent forces and power in different realities. There are gradations of power and varieties which explain the Igbo adage attributed to a bird called Obu. '*Obu si na Ike di n'awaja n'aweja, Obu ji egbu agwo, ma agwo na-atu mmadu.*' "*Ka ima nkea, ima nke ozọ*".

These varieties of forces they discover in mountains and hills, caves, rivers, plants, birds and animals. Such birds like owl and parrot exhibit acts that are only possible or even hard for man. The strangeness of these birds expresses already strangeness of forces ontologized in them. From initial observation man could analyze the possibility of using or tapping some parts of plants and animals for healing and preventive purposes. These vital and mysterious forces can be observed in many realities that we may not be able to exhaust. For the purpose of this paper we mention a few.

### Anunu-Ebe

This is a special tree that is not very common but often found in the thick forests of Western and Eastern Nigeria, this tree has such ontological mysterious power that living objectives are not found within some specified radius near it. All its part radiate enormous radioactive power that sends shocks to or scotches whatever comes around it. It has repulsive tendency it is a natural charm, natural amulet wherever it is located.

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<sup>52</sup> Ogbalu, F. C., *Igbo Institutions and Customs*, (Onitsha, 1973) pp. 55 – 57.

### **Akwu Ojukwu**

This is a unique species of palm-tree or palm nuts. It has potency for treating various ailments. It is believed to have a neutralizing ingredient with which to destroy bad charms (ajọ ogwu) and ward off evil spirits. It is a natural sacramental, a 'holy water' of the Igbo people.

### **Orodo**

Our people say "Okochi egbu Orodo". Orodo is a kind of Lily flower that survives more in dry season. There is a force in it that makes it survive the scorching effect of sunshine. 'Orodo' can be used as an antidote against poison, physical or spiritual. Wherever it is planted around the house, it repels impending poison and renders impotent anyone brought within a particular radius of the house. It has psychogenetic effect on evil signals. Raymon Arazu confirmed seriously the potency of some natural objects charged with power. He referred to "the leaves, barks and roots of ... trees and plants ... known in Igbo esotericism as particularly potent against evil of all sorts."<sup>53</sup> "Arazu further commented: We have used the "Sacred" plants or parts thereof-to produce what we have named; (a) magic drug (b) Anti Witchcraft powder (AWP) and (c) Ojukwu oil."<sup>54</sup>

There is nothing wrong in self defence. God gave man the instinct of self defence, the instinct of specie preservation. Man defending himself against witchcraft, wicked forces in nature by amicable forces is not in any way wrong. There is nothing good in the world except good will. Good intention is the watch word. African traditional medicine is never complete without the knowledge and practice of esoteric self defence which has come to us as mantras

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<sup>53</sup> Arazu, R. C., *The Witchcraft Scourge: Ourselves Defence* (Awka: C. Martins Publishers, 2003), p. 6

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

(Nommo), objects charged with power, drugs, potions and even rituals.<sup>55</sup>

### 7. Evaluation and Conclusion

Igbo-Africans believe that from visible to invisible one can infer Igbo people look at external features and characteristics of an object because they are revealing. The attractiveness of a tree is seen in and through its reality, which is value-oriented.

When the African discovers the value of a being, perceives the forces inherent in it, sees its relation to other beings, then he employs his own power and the power of his words to harness the forces of these beings and sets them to work for his own goods<sup>56</sup>.

In order to vindicate the above facts C. B. Nze said that:

The Igbo of Africa have a sense and practice of observation. They observe things that are that is, realities that exist, their natures or essences. They form concepts and have ideas of what is<sup>57</sup>.

Elizabeth Isichei lamented the devastating blow, an inferiority complex introduced by missionary propagandists with their condemnation of our cultural practices as ‘joo joo’ that is, toy, when referring to our charms and amulets.

Our contact with missionaries has done a world of damage to our religious practices with which our physical security was inseparably associated: it has rubbed us of spiritual science without giving us an equally effective substitute we seem to go

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<sup>55</sup> Arazu, R. c. Op. Cit p. 5

<sup>56</sup> Nze C. B., “Logic in African Charm Medicine” In *The Clan Medicine in The Nigerian Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 4. No. 1 P. 30

<sup>57</sup> Nze, C. B., “Uncovering Logic in Igbo Language and Thought” *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies*. Vol. I. No. 1. Sept. (1998). P. 126.

sheepishly in the ocean of vicissitudes in the world  
without something concrete on which to rely our  
safeguard<sup>58</sup>.

The Igbo of Africa believe in the functional utility of charms and amulets and their empirical immediacy of their effect underlies the feeling that Christianity, with its accent on the 'patiently waiting for God's time', does not seem to have all the answers. It becomes feasible for these Igbo to believe that Christian faith needs to be reinforced with charms and amulets. In traditional Igbo religion charms and amulets are revered because they represent symbolic presence of supernatural protection against misfortunes or evil spirits. They are also signs of assurance of security, blessing and progress. The salient point in charms and amulets consist in the fact that the mystical power accredited to them is contained therein. Their efficacy is manipulated according to strict guiding rules and principles. The sacraments which are recommended as substitutes to the new converts are seen as symbols, visual aids that induce confidence in the blessing, protection, power and presence of God. The efficacy of sacramentals depends solely on the will of God, the Church's intercession and the faith of the individual who make use of them.

The Igbo of Africa have tendency to practical results in life. Their beliefs in vital force accentuate this fact. Sacramentals do not seem to be result oriented as its effect is not recorded within empirical immediacy. So they use charms, amulets in conjunction with sacramental or use sacramentals as if they are charms. This attitude is anchored on the belief that "Nwoke adighi agbaba onwe ya aka" – man does not stay without certain protection. Nature for him abhors a vacuum.

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<sup>58</sup> Isichei, E., "Seven Varieties of Ambiguity Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Mission". *Journal of Religion in Africa*. Vol. III, (London E. J., Brill, 1970) p. 220

The force as conceived by Africans, Igbo in particular is not an exclusive experience. The forces of the ancestors are also integral observances of the church. The Christians believe in the communion of the saints just as the Igbo Africans believe in the communion of ancestors. The ancestors like the Christian saints have the force of bringing blessings to the living. The venerated ancestors and the Christian saints are believed to be powerful intercessors. Both obtain favour, blessing, protection from evil spirits, healing for sickness, graces for prosperity and ultimate victory over the vicissitudes of life. This is confirmed in Roman Missal:

... in communion with them (saints) you give us their friendship. In their prayer for the Church you give us strength and protection. This great company of witnesses spurs us on to victory, to share their prize of everlasting glory.<sup>59</sup>

Goodness is like a perfume whose aroma cannot be restricted, but rather spreads in all directions ... so it is with the ancestors. There are inherent Christian practices in Igbo African belief. The Igbo Africans are respecters of nature and so use nature to their advantage. During the blessing of water during Eastertide the priest says:

... you made water an instrument of your mercy, for through it you freed your people from slavery and relieved their thirst in the desert. It was through water you announced ... the new covenant which you were to offer man...<sup>60</sup>.

The water is a natural object; the efficacy of it is reactivated by proclamation of adequate words. Natural things behave when

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<sup>59</sup> The Week Day Catholic Missal (London: Collins, 1975), See the 1<sup>st</sup> preface of the holy men and women, p. 67

<sup>60</sup> St. Mathews Daily Missal, Goddife Neale, Accester and (Dublin, 1974), P. 1690

words are appropriately used over them. In the same vein, among Igbo Africans, this realization was commonly known before the advent of colonialists, missionaries. The theory of vital force among Igbo Africans was as old as the Igbo nation. The documentation of this theory can be credited to the colonialist enterprise and the good things that came along side.

Through Prophet Elisha God commanded salt to be cast into water to make the foul water wholesome. God himself acknowledge the force in natural things otherwise being Almighty he could bring about the wholesomeness of water without using salt. In these way natural things, physical realities are indices, symbols for the really real. No wonder life is full of symbols. The world is a forest of symbols. Everything is a pointer to something unless undiscovered. If Igbo African used salt to prepare 'holy water' to ward off attack of the devils, it would be called charm, but when the same matter and form is used by the priest, it is now called sacramental.

There is, therefore, as we can see from the foregoing, no functional difference between charm and sacramentals. The difference is only seen in the officiating minister. This realization is brought to bear on the fact that many priest and pastors today continue the use of amulet, charm and sacramentals based on their understanding of forces to minister to people.

Father Raymond Arazu is already Ojenamụọ – Ojenamadụ in this practice, Late Father Gilbert Hilary Ohai, the Pentecostal Pastors in their miracle handkerchief to mention but few. Human nature is the same. Psychometric, psychokinetic experience, are native to human nature. What many lack is the force of the energy to translate their basic experiences in life so as to penetrate the core of reality.

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