

REINCARNATION IN IGBO SOCIETY: A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY.

AGU SUNNY NZIE (PhD)
Centre For General Studies
Cross River University of Technology
Calabar, Cross River State

Abstract

The discuss and facts of reincarnation amongst the natives of African origin can not be over emphasized, such the need for studies. Reincarnation is not only a mystery which Africans themselves cannot reasonably explain, The study of reincarnation in this work will be vast areas in the study of metaphysics if it is been studied from the different philosophical traditions, backgrounds and conceptual schemes in the world. Thus, to make this work to be more focused, it will concentrate on the concepts of reincarnation in the Igbo society or communities. Reincarnation the reincarnating spirit do not destroy the personality of the new born instead the child is seen to possess some attributes of the dead person.

Introduction

Reincarnation is a phenomenon in African philosophy that has exercised the mind of both African scholars and ordinary natives of African origin. Reincarnation is not only a mystery which Africans themselves cannot reasonably explain, but it is at the same time, a somewhat impossible occurrence which requires some ontological and existential explanations given the African world –view. It is a belief among the Igbo that there 0065ist two worlds , the land of the living which they call “Uwa” and the land of the dead called “Alammuo”, they also believe that when one dies, he has the spiritual power to come back to life again, and that this what the Igbo call “Ilo-uwa” (reincarnation. Now, the major problem with this aged belief in the African? Igbo ethno philosophy is that, Africans cannot empirically, scientifically, etc; explain the fact that, the old mature and long dead human is the person that has come to life as a child. This therefore presents reincarnation as a dogma, which does not have any solid-rational explanation and examination. But it appears that, the Igbo belief in the phenomenon of reincarnation has some truth given the many instances of its occurrence in different Igbo societies and communities. Many people have reported that, the new born baby at times comes to the world with some marks and some exact physiological features, which an elder in the family had when he or she was alive. Some of these instances and experiences of incidence of reincarnation places one in a dilemma between rejecting the phenomenon or not. Hence, the researcher believes that, it is through a vivid philosophical examination and an inquiry into the Igbo concept of reincarnation that this problem can be demystified. The study intends to find out what reincarnation actually means in Igbo society. It is going to enquire about the conflict between the Igbo traditional belief in reincarnation and Christian belief. As a philosophical research, it questions some of the existing Igbo beliefs in reincarnation. In Igbo culture, some children are believed to have come back after their death to start a new life. This starting of a new life after death is teamed “Ogbanje” and it is in Igbo society; translating this word it means “ogba”-going or running and “Nje”- twice, which means going twice or running twice. So the problem now is, do they actually come twice? Is it true that the same person comes back after death? Does it mean that one does not die completely? In substantiating their stand on the belief in this “Ogbanje”, some children believed to be “Ogbanje”, when they die some of their fingers are cut off so as to identity them when they repeat or come back. Some of these are the problems observed as regarding reincarnation but we shall look at it critically in this work, to know if it exists or not. The study is concerned with philosophical study of reincarnation in Igbo society which is surrounded with mysteries. The study of reincarnation in this work will be vast areas in the study of metaphysics if it is been studied from the different philosophical traditions, backgrounds and conceptual schemes in the world. Thus, to make this work to be more focused, it will concentrate on the concepts of reincarnation in the Igbo society or communities. However, allusion can be

made once in a while to show how it is being conceptualized in other African societies. In order to construct a truly Igbo perspective on reincarnation, this research dwells mainly on the traditional values and beliefs of Igbo society. It will employ the conceptual analysis method of philosophy. The work will depend on materials from the library books, journals and internet sources. The research will also make use of modern MLA style of documentation in its citations.

To make points clear here, this idea of common burial ground is only sustained today by those who by evident circumstances of life have come to understand that they can in no way be ancestors in Igbo tradition, thus are not candidate for reincarnation. The praise of the Igbo idea of the phenomenon of "Ilo-Uwa" (revolves) around the fact that although metaphysical in factual reality, still no right thinking person in Igbo land will rightly negate the existence of reincarnation. This claim anchors its fact on the very position that even those who theoretically claim that they do not believe in the idea of "Ilo-Uwa" here and there find themselves delving into such unconscious statement like; N' uwa m uwa ozo (in my next world), even if I should come to this world again, I will not do or I will do this or that. Therefore, if the members are not actually convinced that there could be a possibility of coming back to this world of material reality they would not have been making such assertions.

Nevertheless, this idea should not be misunderstood in the light of Christian doctrine of eschatology, where people are believed to go either to heaven or hell as the case may be due to their merit, measured with the scale of moral conduct of the person while still in this material world. This is because in the Christian ideology of eschatology, no one knows how the place looks like and they –the Christians do not have the idea of one choosing what he will do or do not do when he gets there in the after world. A sound look at this assertion will ultimately show that the person whatever the claim may be cannot extricate himself from this reality. However, irrespective of the clarity of all these arguments the point remains that there are still many unresolved issues as to what the actual nature of the phenomenon of reincarnation as it is understood in Igbo cosmology is. Notwithstanding this, the experience about this is a reality no one knows about it could deny. Despite the fact that it could be difficult if not impossible to explain it to an outsider or a foreigner, it remains real phenomenon.

In summation, the Igbo will posit that those who are concerned understand. To them (the Igbo) they will ask explain what, do whom, how and many more. Oh no! This matches with the axiom that life is larger than logic and this experience has come to prove the validity of this assertion. The implication of this doctrine deserves a resounding applause; in that it forms in the people a deep sense of morality. Thus, it lifts up the moral standard of the people whether consciously or unconsciously because all work towards attaining the standard for this qualification.

Therefore, the idea of "Ilo-Uwa" should be told to everyone and every child born should be made to know the implication of coming back to life and that the ultimate good for the Igbo person is to exist in this world of visibility, with which they will be able to build a structural community and life style that will lead to morally balanced society from their local towns to the whole country.

Understanding "reincarnation in the Igbo society" can only be possible for us if we are able to come close to our world as Igbo people. It is in line with this that we are going to review books on Igbo philosophy and African philosophy and if possible books on Western philosophy as it relates to the topic of our discussion. To understand reincarnation, we must first understand Igbo and African philosophy. In reviewing related literature, it will be good to note that the terms used in defining or explaining "Reincarnation" like ilo-uwa, ogbanje in Igbo Language or Abiku in Yoruba language or by whatever name given to it, cannot change the subject of our discussion; even though there is a difference in ilo-uwa and ogbanje or Abiku. Eneh noted; "Ilo-Uwa in Igbo language as aspect of African ethnophilosophy termed folk-philosophy by C.B. Okolo, is based on the myths of African people which according to him, cannot be verified empirically, logically and critically"

In Igbo cultural setting folk philosophy serves more for the people when they want to rest. Like the Greek philosophers, they tell these stories at the close of their farm work. They talk of the living-dead; *ogbanje* and their ancestors. In doing this, they educate the young ones. Their stories since, its full myths, to verify the fact of their story through the principles of verification is difficult. As such it is taken by Western philosophers as logical and critical. *onyewenyi* observed reincarnation in his own view as a theory. For him, "reincarnation is simply the theory that when the soul separates from the body at death, it informs another body for another span of earthy life. It has different variation like metempsychosis or transmigration of souls where the soul of a person inform an animal or tree."

The belief in reincarnation is aspect of Igbo philosophy. It is a theosophical belief, recognized one of the problems or mysteries relating to African philosophy. Going by the definition or belief of the Igbo, *ilo-uwa*, *Ekwunife* noted that; "ilo-uwa an identifiable personality in the African spiritual world is said to, in a mysterious but real way, incorporate his personality traits on a new unique born personality without destroying that personality or substituting himself for a new personality". Reincarnation as stated above, of understood in its nature is not an issue of the corporal it is an issue that can be associated with the spiritual world.

The Yorubas express this aspect of Igbo belief when they say: *Babajide*, which means, "father is awake and is here". This is a typical manifestation of an Igbo belief that the dead ancestors have a link with the living, and as such, should not be neglected. For the Yoruba man, "*Babajide*" shows his presence with them. It shows a temporal rest. The belief in ancestors is very clear to Igbo people. It shows that link everyday between the dead and the living. *Osayi* writes; "it is claimed that when one does to this world, one is reborn to the world of spirits and to return to happiness and harmony... one must, during one's stay on this earth, undergo many privations, experiences, sorrows and pains". The Igbo belief in the spiritual world is a strong one. That is why an Igbo man attributes everything concerning his existence to a spiritual being. Reincarnation is a spiritual aspect of an Igbo man. The Igbo world view is associated with religion. This was the main reason why Christianity was able to take root in the Eastern part of Nigeria and even among the Hausas and the Fulanis of Northern Nigeria who have strong belief in God. Since Christianity preaches life after death and they believe in Abraham as our father in faith, the real Igbo man who believes in the ancestral spirits also see Abraham as the ancestor of the Christians

Reincarnation in Igbo Worldview.

Having reviewed the contributions of contemporary authors on reincarnation, we are going to discuss reincarnation in Igbo worldview in particular. This is because reincarnation as it is, is an accepted reality in the Igbo man's world-view. The world view here is as it concerns an Igbo man's religion, culture and his anthropology. *Ifesieh* in *Madubuko* defines worldview as; "a body of beliefs about the universe which are common among members of any society and existentially demonstrated in their value systems, such as their philosophy of life, social conduct and morality, folklores, myths, rites and rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings, theologies, etc".

Ifesieh's definition of world-view will give us the basic and primary understanding of reincarnation as the Igbo people see it. Igbo people are the same when it comes to concepts like reincarnation, without minding the colonial and Christian influence. The idea of reincarnation in Igbo society is in our belief and is accepted as an existential reality in our society. For that reason, it has a value in our life and, such, influences our soul and moral life. Reincarnation is always heard of in our folktales, myths and that reflects in our burial rites and rituals. If anyone dies, the person is given a befitting burial so that the reincarnation of such a person can be accepted by the other ancestors who have gone before that person. In some way while one is alive, one is expected to behave in accordance with the society's norms, rules, ideas so that at death, the person can reincarnate. This reincarnation also is an important aspect of theological belief that is why the dead ones are always remembered in every religious ritual or prayers. They are remembered as if they are always present physically at every occasion.

This kind of cyclic relationship between the dead, the living and the unborn has been reported by Mbite as cited in Onwublko, “the living-dead solidifies and mystically bind the whole family. People say they see departed members of their family coming and appearing to them... African concept of family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. They are the buds of hope and expectation, and each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished: that is why progeny in Igbo culture is honoured and respected as being factual. It is through giving birth that one’s lineage is not extinguished. This shows the reason why the Igbo people have so much interest in male children. These male children grow, get married and start having children. It is in this process that the unborn members of that family can be life. The issue explains why Igbo man attaches a great value to land possession since it is man, not a woman who is not qualified to own land in the Igbo setting. At his death, he hopes and believed that he could reincarnate into his family to repossess his land. The living dead of the family is an important aspect of the African traditional religion and culture. In the breaking of the kola nut in prayers and in thanksgiving, the living dead of Igbo people are always remembered because it is from them that creation come into fulfillment for our physical presence to perceive .

ILO-UWA as Igbo Understanding Of Reincarnation.

From the above analysis of different confused , diffused, incorrect and misuse concepts in equation to the idea of IloUwa, it is now clear that the term reincarnation is quite different though closely related concept to the understanding of IloUwa in African cosmology. Therefore, if reincarnation, metempsychosis and Ogbanje not capture the actual meaning of the term IloUwa, what then is the actual and correct Igbo conceptual understanding of the IloUwa? To give a better answer to this question, it is pertinent that one has a good knowledge of the African understanding of the universe. The Africans see the universe as a composite of two worlds- physical and spiritual. The physical is composed of the living while the spiritual is made up of the living dead wondering spirits and other myriads spirits. Among these myriads of spirits in the spiritual world man is believed in Igbo ideology to be in constant relationships with the living dead, implying that the presence of the living dead in the community of the living completes the cycle of reality. This position brings to light the very idea that the Igbo family cycle is made of the living , the dead and the yet unborn. The living will die to go into stage of the dead while the dead enter into ancestral world to be reborn after a while , and the process continue.

Ilo Uwa in our people’s understanding simply means coming back to earth or world. There is no reference to the body or to bodies. The action of destination Uwa are what concern the Igbo. The person is independent of the body and that is why the body is not mentioned at all in the terminology. However, one has to admit that it is very difficult to give the actual meaning of the idea of Ilo Uwa a distinct definition since there are many conflicting views among even the scholars of Igbo traditional cultures. Ilo Uwa is the process by which certain categories of the deceased in African spiritual world of the dead are believed to be mysteriously.. but in a real way, capable of incarnating their personality traits on a newborn physical of a child or substituting for it. Hermeneutically, Ilo Uwa is an Igbo word that can be transliterated into English as “coming back to the world.” Nevertheless, this coming back should be understood as coming in the physical body or being born with material flesh in as it is an experience of phenomenon that cannot fit into word reincarnation.

However, it would be proper to point out here it is not everybody who dies can come back in the idea of Ilo Uwa rather, it is only those who have passed some necessary tests that do. The threshold mark for this qualification will be the subject of our next discussion. The Igbo theory of reincarnation helps us to see other dimensions of the self and we may start by inquiring what aspect of the self is believed to reincarnate. Surely, not the entire person as constituted before death since at last part of him, that is , the body or the skeleton can still be around while the reincarnation of the deceased is being noised abroad. Reincarnation in Igbo is known as Ilo-Uwa, returning to the world, not a returning into the physical but perhaps more accurately into Uwa/world in the sense of destiny or lot. The question: Oloro uwa onye? Whose world or destiny did he return to. Clearly shows that it is a question, not of the physical universe which is shared by all but rather of the inner world, lot or destiny or perhaps more accurately life cycle of the individual who often talk of uwa m

oxo, my next life cycle or uwa ya mbu, in his first life cycle otr use the well-known expresseion Uwa n’uwam na’alola, in whatever future life cycle I may retun to . belief in reincarnation is universal among the Igbos

Corollaries Of Reincarnation

Birth

Every Igbo is conscious of the fact that child or children come from God as agift to the human family. According to Metuh: “...at conception anew individual person is created by God. This ia so in spite of beliefs about reincarnation. What reincarnation as we shall see is not person hood of the ancestor but an aspect of his life” hence, the Igbo give their children names such as : chukwukere, originated from God; Akaekenwaman does not create baby;Ejidikeemenwa- baby is not begotten by might, and so on. There is also the belief that the ancestors are in a privileged position to request for children from god. Consequently, when it pleases God eventually to grant the request, it is an ancestor or a deity that God usually hands over the child to be led to the earth. The particular ancestor or deity in question is designated as ‘onyenoolummaduwa’- the person that led or brought one to the human world of reality.

More so, the Igbo man conceives birth as aprocess or passage into the physical sensible world of reality. The idea of journeying into the world presupposes the possibility of pre-existence somehow aaaaaand somewhere from which one journeyed into the human world. This notion lines with Heidegger’s idea of thrown-ness of the dasain into the world. Hence, dasain all of a sudden found himself or herself in the world with all its faciticity and vicissitude, from the ontological point of view, every Igbo man longs to live on as is expressed in the concept of reincarnation. Marriage institution, therefore, is highly held sacred and considered very essential for the prolongation of man’s life on earth.

For African people, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimension of time meet here and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is adrama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just as spectator...(Mbiti92)

Marriage is figuratively in the words of Onwubiko, a culture centre. Consequently, the journey from the ancestral community to the human community is made possible by way of marriage institution. The world is considered or better compared to a market place by the Igbo. Hence, they say’uwa bu ahia, azuta ahia azutaghi agia oge zue a naa’- the world is a market place whether one brought everything that one needs or npot, one must go at the appointed time; hence the ceaseless effort that characterize an Igbo man. He is always pushing hard to accomplish within given time, that for which he journeyed into the human world in the first place. This idea is embed on the notion that every individual has a destiny to fulfil on earth. The destiny is believed to be chosen for the individual by the individual’s chi. In accordance with this notion of man as a pilgrim of the divine in the world, a new baby is usually welcomes with:’nwa m nno ije’ or ‘nwa biara uwa nno’- meaning baby that has arrived to the human world you are welcome. ’ab inito’ an Igbo man from cradle becomes conscious of his temporality on earth.

Death

Death is a necessary and an inevitable end awaiting each and every created being both man and animal as well as plants. An Igbo man keeps himself ever conscious of this fact with the proverb: ‘Igwe nile gaje n; uzu’- every created being is destined to die. However, it is equally in the consciousness of the Igbo that , “death is not man’s final end. All who die continue to live somehow after their death whichever deaths they suffered. Even those who received no funeral rites continue to live , but their places of abode and their status differ” (Metuh 179). Ndi Igbo, nonetheless, see death not as an end of earthly existence but as an interruption of eartly dwelling . hence, if one lives previous life well, there is the hope of coming back onearth- ‘makana ezi dim ma a gaa ya ugboro abuo’; again ‘anu gbala taa echi bu nta’- all ponnting to the possibility of a second chance. Consequently, “... prayers at funeral rites do not request increased happiness for the deceased in the spirit –land , but for his safe arrival there and his quick reincarnation with even greater prosperity and

success” (Metuh 181). At death therefore, the ‘anuahu’ (the physical flesh) with which man manifests in the physical world is dropped and not the ‘ahu’ (the body). The body is that unified whole that is real man- which out of the ‘anuahu’ man becomes ‘omye mmuo’. That is why the Igbo believe that a living dead can be seen but not touched. It can be seen because it has ‘ahu’ (body) but cannot be touched because it has no ‘anuahu’ (flesh) which implies also that a spirit has no human feelings. Hence, Igbo people considered death as the dissolution of one’s corporal nature. It is God’s messenger which appears to the dying in the form of a skeleton with a staff which he strikes his victim and transforms him into a spirit” (Talbot 4).

Anuahu is, therefore seen as a physical garment which man needs in order to appear and sojourn in the physical world of matters. Nevertheless, it is considered the most precious possession of man for his or her time here on earth since without it a human being turns a spirit. Hence, it is by way of the ‘anuahu’ that the being of every single person makes contact with his environment as to dwell therein in full consciousness, without ‘anuahu’ the full consciousness is terminated or better put, is hindered, since an Igbo man has the hope of reincarnation. Therefore, nothing in a strict sense changes when man on earth lays aside his physical garment- ‘anuahu’. He is the same only without the physical garment with which man manifests in the human world. Mbiti hence writes, “It is clear that people view death paradoxically: it is a separation but not annihilation, the dead person is suddenly cut off from the human society and yet the corporate group clings to him. This is through the elaborate funeral rites as other methods of keeping in contact with the departed”

But no Igbo man is in a hurry to become a spirit not minding the awareness that is ultimately the destiny of every man on earth. Again, despite and in spite of the fact that the world beyond is conceived as resembling the human world in every aspect, yet no Igbo is desperate to cross to the other side of the mountain. This unwillingness is clearly manifest in the proverbs (‘a na-agbanu agbanu aracha aka aga-akpawa ya n’ uko’, and ‘nwa eji n’ aka akariri no n’ ime ahia’) – these sayings, however, point to the uncertainty that characterizes the world beyond. More so, the Igbo believes that every process or transition or change in life has to be gradual and systematic and not abrupt or haphazard. Hence, sudden death, accident or premature death are all considered evil (onwuojoo or onwuekwensu). If the formation of the human person is gradual and systematic as well as peaceful in the womb, the Igbo see no reason why man’s earthly termination should not follow the same manner. This is because death is seen as birth into spiritual realm or as going home. Hence, “Death is not the end of life. It is rather the end of one’s phase of life and the beginning of another. Many Igbo funeral songs describe death as *ila ulo* ‘going home or *ila mmuo* ‘going home to the world of spirit land” (Metuh 169-170). Therefore, for the Igbo, death is a process in a gateway through which every man goes back to his/her creator-

Onwu bu ugwo eji ani: onye kwuo ugwo oji onwere onwu ya’- death is an inevitable debt which each person must pay back to the mother earth. By inference then, man borrowed something from the mother earth, possibly the anuahu.

Hence, it must be given back to the mother earth if man is to free himself. Nevertheless, it is believed that after the departure of ‘onye’ from anuahu, that continues to hover around as a ghost until at the completion of second funeral rites which enables the dead to descend peacefully into the ancestral world- ‘ala ndiichi. Thus,

...It is commonly believed that when a person dies, his spirit remains in the world for some time, wondering restlessly in the vicinity of his home and other places he used to frequent during his life time. After the completion of the funeral rites, the spirit enters the Ndiichie ancestral shrine. Meanwhile, his chi goes before Chukwu for an interview, which has some aspect of a judgment (Metuh 119).

Obviously, for every Igbo, life is supreme. As life is sacred and as a gift from God, an Igbo is ready to do anything within his reach to sustain and maintain this life. Hence, for the Igbo, life has no duplicate- ‘*ndu adigh abuo*’. However, this attitude should not be mistaken. Igbo people hate death even though it is a passage to ancestorship. Nevertheless, an Igbo does not necessarily fear death, rather he fears dying prematurely, suddenly or accidentally and dying wretchedly or childless. The

aforementioned situations are considered by the Igbo as evil or a curse. Hence, at a ripe age an Igbo welcomes death with equanimity ; knowing very well that he is only going there to join the community of his ancestors, “ The wish of every Igbo man or woman is to rest among the souls of their ancestors and it is a very real and poignant hope” (Ogugua 16)

A natural death, therefore, is not annihilation; it is conceived as something wholly positive, if as in the funeral song, death is seen as going home to the place from which man came, Olawala n’ ebe osiri bia uwa, it would appear that the spirit-land is man’s real home. Man is essentially a spirit, who comes from the spirit realm, or prenatal state, for a brief sojourn in this world- a world and after which he returns. Life goes in a cycle, alternating between the spirit world and the visible world. Death is a gate way between the two states of existence (Basden 278).

Finally, the Igbo also believe that the physical body or earthly body (anuhu) of every man is in all respect closely linked with the soil upon which one is born. Hence, wherever an Igbo man dies, there is always great effort to bring the corpse back home. This fact is taken into account come what may. “Hence, it is regarded as a dreadful misfortune to die and be buried away from home. Such death is called OnwuNnwufu,, the death of a lost soul. All this explains the seemingly unnecessary expense and inconvenience undertaken to bring home the corpse of a relative who dies hundreds of miles away” (Ezenweke 198).

Ancestorship

Death is a welcome phenomenon for those who lived upright life. It is a ticket to the blessed world of the spirit. Even the Christians indirectly believe in this or at least, they have the concept that the dead go and that they have some impact or effects to the visible world. In the world of the spirit there are two cities. These are : the city of the good, the triumphant and the city of the bad, the wandering spirits. Those in the city of the good are referred to as the ancestor. Therefore, the ancestors are the triumphant spirits of the dead who lived uprightly while on earth. Ancestors are spirits of the departed spirits who are honoured as a result of their long –good, spectacular and extraordinary lives on earth. The idea of ancestorship can be conceptualized thus:

The deceased who are truly members of the families on earth; but they are no longer of the same plushy order as those who are still living in the plush earth. They are closely related to this world; but are no longer ordinary mortals. Because they have crossed the border land between this world and super-sensible world entering and living in the latter, they have become freed from the restrictions imposed by the physical world. They can now come to abide with their fold on earth invisibly, to aid or hinder them to promote prosperity or cause adversity (Osayi 123)

However, it should be noted that their primary duty is to promote good moral social order, communal order, unity, solidarity and ultimately they act as guardian spirits to their living loved ones. The only harm they can be to the living are always geared toward correcting wrong doings and fostering peace and harmony the community in general. This state is accorded not to every person but to only those that met the required conditions. The conditions are of two phases, the first phase is to be attained by the person in question when he is still alive while the second phase is to be done when he must have died. If the person in question did not meet with these conditions before death, he cannot be helped by the living when he must have died. These conditions are uprightness, custom observance, good death at an old age and other paraphernalia good characters. Come other conditions necessary for this transit that are done for the person when he must have died by the family members, are thus: good burial with all the rites accompanying it as to be discussed in the principles of reincarnation.

Befitting Burial

In traditional Igbo belief and culture, any person who dies needs a befitting burial rite. This is to enable the person gets to the ancestors and rest in peace waiting for the time for reincarnation. But those of them who are wicked or bad to the people or killed by their deity are not given such burial rites. Instead, they are thrown into the forest (Ajo-Ohia).

This will make them not to have place among the ancestors. Osayi noted:

Burial ceremonies are regarded by the Igbo as passport to another life in the spirit world. And because these individuals whose life course have been condemned for certain forms of evil are doomed to be “dead”, libation are never made to them and they are never invited in prayers either to “return” as now infant or to intercede for their families or relatives (Ayemewenre 49)

All these burial rites take time and money. But in the Western world, they do not observe such burial rites in anticipation of the next coming or return of the dead as reincarnation. In their case, they hire undertakers to bury the dead as they continue their normal activities. If things come to worst, the government will take responsibility and bury the person.

Qualification for Reincarnation

As just been noted that it is not all dead can come back within the range of “Ilo-Uwa”. By implication, “Ilo-Uwa” can only be seen in Igbo worldview and is only for those who died good dead in the cultural world view and with some other qualities. However to die a good dead entails dying a natural death and at an old age. Some of these are the qualification according to Igbo tradition for “Ilo-Uwa “ comes back to the world.

- One must have lived an upright life
- Must have a measure of wealth
- Must reach a ripe old age
- Must die a peaceful and natural death
- Must be given a befitting burial rite
- Must be buried within the family compound
- The presence of a male child

Prove of the Possibility of Reincarnation in Igbo tradition

Irrespective of all these expositions and narratives, one may ask is “Ino Uwa” possible, how real is it or is just a mere superstition or one of the many cultural ideologies that cannot be proved or simply an ordinary belief with no point for its justification. To arrempt answerinfg these queations we shall still need to go back into analyzing some points in Igbo world virew ddand from there traw analysis from experiences and testimonies of others. The Igbo conviction on the actual process by which man reincarnates varies.

Some hold that man reincarnates with his former body and all its characteristics, of height, strength and complexion, while many are convinced that at death our bodies lie there, food for worms; only the deathless spirit of God in the man reincarnate. The same group holds further that merits and demerits in one former life would determine one’s parentage on reincarnation in a new infant body capable of growing and unfolding to adult. This latter opinion is the one held by the majority of Igbo people. There are many apparent factors that convince the Igbo people in their belief in reincarnation

The reappearance of bodily marks of deceased persons on the body of new born baby is one of the bases for the Igbo belief in reincarnation. In the circumstance of mentally ill person who were violent in a past life and were constrained wearing handcuffs or ankle restraints for a long time before they died; it is believed that the scar of the wound caused by the handcuffs does appear on the wrists or ankle of some of them upon their reincarnation. It is the same with those unfortunate who perished by fire in a traumatic acciden6t; the scars of burn appear on the body of some such cases upon reincarnation. When such marks as I have pointed out appears on the body of an infant in whose family somebody in the past had such a handcuff or died in a fiery accident; no further proof will be needed to accept that the deceased has reincarnated.

Some Exclamations which Points to the Reality of Ilo Uwa

Igbo	English equivalents
Uwa m g’no	In the world I will come back to
Agam abu nwoke	I shall be a male
Uwa m g’ ano	In the world I will come back to
Agam aba ogalanya	I shall be rich

Uwam uwa ise
Uwam uwa assa

My fifth world
My seventh world

These terminologies go a long way in showing that the idea is not a mere folk tales. The Igbo people have such ardent conviction about the reality of “ilo Uwa” that they cannot be shaken away from their position irrespective of the current carried by the waves of Westernization, the doctrine cannot be shaken. Even while they are still alive, they refer to their next world which is no spiritual world but the world of the physical. Like one who is preparing to travel could be estimating what and what he will be doing when he gets and what he will not be doing there, the Igbo while still alive begin to anticipate what they will like to be or do when they come back to this world again.

Difference between Western View and Igbo View of Reincarnation

Every existential being has a relationship with the other beings whether they are rational or not. Colour, age, sex, language or location are all mere accident; nationality is the basis of all human beings. It is in this rationality of human existence that accidents are synthesized and at the same time taken care of. Before we have looked at the ways Western philosophers and contemporary Igbo philosophers have viewed reincarnation. Here now, let us find their differences and also their common grounds, which are basically a rational thing inherent in human existence. In this research work, it will be simpler for us to have the view that what we are discussing is a metaphysical issue meaning that metaphysics is the study of reality. Reality can be conceived in many ways- unseen and seen, that as inexperienced with our sensory perception and experienced with the senses. reality thus, has a hierarchy or levels of degrees. Starting from our everyday material, one can advance higher reality which cannot be seen with our experiences but with conceptual ability or ideas which is more real than the ones experience with our senses. Since it is metaphysics, we cannot neglect the ontological study of reincarnation from the Western or from Igbo perspective.

Progeny

This is a process of continuity of a family’s lineage in Igbo land; this is the main reason for the need of a male child. Its importance is such that, it is needed for reincarnation of the dead ancestors. Obi noted;” If an individual dies without children, no one will name his children after him. Such a person quickly enters into the realm of the unknown ancestors where their names are lost forever. So it appears that the final stage of a person depends on progeny. On the contrary, the western world does not believe in progeny as Igbo people do. For them, any sex, female or male is valuable and appreciated. Some do not even marry.

Reincarnation

Repeater of life of any sort in Igbo philosophy cannot be found in the same manner in the western culture. For the westerners, it is eternal recurrence of the same. They have the belief in the existence but not like the Igbo. In western philosophy beings are differentiated by their essences or nature while African say that forces differ in their essences or nature.

Eternal Recurrence of the same

This is the western view which is different from the Igbo view of reincarnation. For the westerner, all aspects of life return in an infinite number of times in identical ways.

Religion and Reincarnation

The Igbo man is a deeply religious man, for that he believes in life after death. This life after death for him is reincarnation. His religion is the belief in the works of the ancestors, where everyone including the title holder, “Ozors”, “Nzes”, “Ichies” take up his responsibility as it is in this world. But the Western world believes solely in heaven and hell even some of them deny them. For them, the just will rest in the bosom of God in heaven while the wicked will be punished in the everlasting flames of fire. It will be noted that both have same belief but have clear-cut differences in belief and philosophy on the issue.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The idea of reincarnation has been presented and the Igbo version of reincarnation known as “Ilo Uwa” has been looked at with a critical differentiation between the two. Therefore, it has been shown that the two are not the same thing as it is being held by many people even among the scholars. As a way forward, the Igbo idea of “Ilo Uwa” as we have seen should not be understood and intereted in the light of western concept of reincarnation. This is because of thefact that the two are quire separate and irreconcilable ideologies, though with astricking similarity, they are not the same .Precisely speaking , :IloUwa” is not reincarnation, they are different. However, there are some other miscellaneous acts of coming back to the world from the dead as in “Ogbanje”, and other accidental spirit manifestation in human forms, thes are not regarded as “Ilo Uwa” in its real sense/. Also a point worthy of indication here is the fact that the idea of metempsychosis as according to Pythagoras, Plato and in some Asian religious doctrine is alien in African world. Human soirit cannot reincarnate into animal, process of reincarnation the reincarnating spirit do not destroy the personality of the new born instead the child is seen to posssss some attributes of the dead person.

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