

A Critique of Traditional Igbo and Yoruba Moral Perspectives on Evil

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Abstract

Evil and its moral consequences are problematic as far as human societies are concerned, whether primitive or civilised. As humans experience or cope with the reality of evil in its various forms in daily existence, every cultural group finds ways of explaining and contending with it in its world view. Perspectives on the existence of evil are as real in Africa as they are in other parts of the world. Going by this, Africans have reflected on questions concerning what is evil culturally and religiously, both which cannot be detached from moral viewpoints on evil. Despite the influences of foreign cultures as Christianity and Islam, certain primordial convictions endured in Igbo and Yoruba cultures. As its objective, this article explores the moral issues arising from their traditional cultural perspective on evil, especially as relating to the existence of evil and moral responsibility. To achieve this objective, the article is woven around the following research questions: What are the distinctive Igbo and Yoruba traditional perceptions of evil in their world views? How do these affect considerations of moral responsibility? Methodologically, the paper applies philosophical argumentation and analysis in interrogation of the issues involved in its objectives.

Key words: Destiny; Evil; Freewill; Igbo; Morality; Moral Responsibility; Yoruba

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INTRODUCTION

A Brief Background of Igbo and Yoruba Peoples

Igbo and Yoruba peoples constitute two of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. While the Igbo mainly occupy the Eastern part of Nigeria, like Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states, the Yoruba people mostly occupy the Western part of Nigeria, in states like Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, Kogi, Ekiti and Kwara States. States like Delta and Rivers are also homes to large population of Igbo. The Igbo (a more migrant tribe) and Yoruba peoples have large number of residents found in different parts of Nigeria, the West Africa sub-region and in diaspora (Okaneme, 2014, pp.43-45). Mostly, before modern economic and social drives, the various inter-/intra-tribal conflicts and the trans-Atlantic slave trade were responsible for the dispersal of members of both tribes to many parts of the world like Benin Republic, Europe and the Americas (Essien, 2014, p.105). Apart from this, in terms of socio-political institutions, the two tribes have points of convergence and divergence. Igbo traditional socio-political institutions are characterised by a communal republican democracy while Yoruba socio-political institutions, though communal, are characterised by a monarchical system with many variants but similar structure in their cities, towns and villages. According to Oyeshile, 2007, pp.52-53):

All Yoruba kingdoms have kings as their religious and political leaders. This buttresses the fact that there is a strong fusion of religion and politics in traditional Yoruba society. The kings occupy certain hierarchical order as some kings exhibit more powers than others.

In this respect, the Yoruba political structure includes the *Oyo Mesi* system, a form of democracy in which the *Oyo Mesi*, a company of seven individuals (office holders) in government (namely, *Bashorun*, *Saamu*, *Alapinni*, *Asipa*, *Agbaakin*, *Laguna* and *Akiniku*) could challenge the overall authority of the Oba (king) and, thus, maintain

checks and balances in Oyo governance and rule (Johnson 1921, 70-71). Across Yorubaland, many non-Oyo *Mesi* forms of monarchy exist in which the Obas take decisions with their words carrying a note of finality. However, in most cases, the Obas take their decisions in consultation with their Obas-in-Council, comprising of the Obas and their chiefs in the different kingdoms (Crowther, 1852, p. i-vii).

Both Yoruba and Igbo political structures admit of the influences of both the physical and spiritual entities in governance. Apart from the fact that the Oba is perceived as the next to the gods, he belongs to all known societies and cults in his land, such as the *Ogboni*. In Oyo, all the members of the *Oyo Mesi* are ex-officio members of *Ogboni* cult, a conglomerate of personalities who primarily worship the earth and have political and religious influences on the Oba (Stride and Ifeka 1971, 299). Apart from the involvement of agencies as the *Umuna* (the family), *Oha na Eze* or the village assembly (an all-male and most effective arm of the Igbo executive that regulates issues involving prosecution of war, peace dialogues and so on), the *Ndichie* (a council of men who are believed to be capable of skillfully performing oversight functions as regards rules formulation/legal, military, communal oversight, executive and religious matters, being holders of the title of the *Ofo* which the Igbo believe to symbolise uprightness and justice), the age grades (members of groups within certain age brackets that execute the resolutions of the village council), the priests and the masquerades (regarded as spirits of the ancestors) are equally seen as being effective in ensuring that justice prevails (Ayittey 2006, 116-118). Apart from these, there are equally points of similarity and difference in the economic systems of the two tribes. While both systems take pride in their age grade systems as part of the social workforces, they also operate guild systems to drive or control their economies.

Prior to the modern era, the socio-political and economic structures of the Igbo and Yoruba tribes were hugely influenced by colonialism, Christian missionary evangelical activities that introduced wide Western education with its scientific and technological capitalist economic system, and Islam, with its Eastern orientations and philosophies. Despite these influences and their acculturation aftermaths, certain traditional practices still exist in both rural and urban Igbo and Yoruba cities. For instance, Igbo traditional village setup, usually organised in clusters of compounds or families, thereby forming kindreds, villages and towns, is still easily recognisable despite modern civilization (Gbadegeshin 1998, 292-294). Today, family heads, the elders, the age grades, and in some

cases, secret societies still play key roles in the socio-political structures of Igbo communities. Well-knit communal structures as the Igbos are equally observable in the rustic parts of Yoruba land, even though western atomism has weakened the communal bond to a very large extent. On religion, even though many people presently embrace Islam and Christianity and their attendant Eastern and Western behaviours, Igbo and Yoruba daily living and attitude to life are still, to a reasonable extent, conditioned by their traditional world views which guide their socio-cultural and political embeddedness in society. Hence, it is necessary for us to deliberate, albeit briefly, on the fundamental elements of Igbo and Yoruba traditional world views that will be necessary in understanding the discourse of Igbo and Yoruba traditional perspectives on evil.

IGBO AND YORUBA WORLD VIEWS

There are varying perspectives on what constitutes a people's world view. Oraegbunnam (2010, p.4) defines it "as the sedimentation of a people's conception of the way things are and how they should be." Kraft (1979, p.53) describes it "as the control box that governs the application of people's conceptualisation of their relationship to reality." Okafor (1992, p.3) conceives it "as the concepts of the basic notions underlying their cultural, religious and social activities." Similarly, Onuoha (1987, p.5) views it "as comprising a set of values, concepts, attitudes and images which guide man's perception and interpretation of facts and events." It is deducible that a people's world view represents the way and manner in which such people view reality, which is "context dependent." Oguejiofor. (2009, p.28) explains the wide variations and the narrow nuances that are comparative features of different world views. In the same vein, Nwala (1987, p.28) conceives it as comprising the "complexity of their traditional belief systems, habits, laws, customs and traditions." For the purpose of this article, we hold that a world view represents the fundamentals of a people's perception and conception of reality around them. Thus, we delineate the fundamental features of traditional Igbo and Yoruba world views as follows.

Both the Igbo and Yoruba believe in the existence of two worlds: the physical and the spiritual. The Igbo physical world is the earth while their spiritual world comprises of the sky and the underworld. By these, the Igbo world actually has three structures. The sky, the

highest realm, is the realm of the Supreme Being (“*Chukwu*,” or “*Chineke*” or “*Olisebruwa*,” the carrier of the world) and other deities as well as the stars, the moon and thunder. The moon, the stars and thunder are classified as spiritual beings manifesting in physical things. The Supreme Being heads the sky, created and supports all things and “no one equals him in power. He knows everything. He is altogether a good and merciful God and does evil to no one....it is from him that each individual derives his personal *chi*” (Metuh, 1999, p.45; Uke, 2007, p.210 and Arinze, 1970, p.17). The lesser but numerous deities and ancestral spirits commune, or sometimes act, as intermediaries between the living and *Chukwu*. The underworld is the realm of the ancestors. These deities and ancestors have the power to influence, help or inflict injuries and pains on their relations physically alive once they feel neglected by the living. The earth is the abode of human beings and animate and inanimate things. Some scholars opine that there is a fourth world, the world of the dead who were not admitted into the ancestral world and yet not living on the earth. This is not really a world because those dead are merely floating and have no place among men and the ancestors, either because of their sins or for not getting proper burial after death.

Like the Igbo, the Yoruba worldview accounts for three worlds. According to Olomola (1988, p.108), the Yoruba universe is a “three-storied structure: heavenworld above, earthworld and below it under-earthworld.” The first is the home of the *Orisa nla* (or *Olodumare* or *Olu orun* or *Olorun*, the supreme deity), the second being the home of all natural things on earth whether human or non-human and the third is the domain of the ancestors. Thus, the Yoruba believe in a pre-earthly existence, earthly existence and post-earthly existence. As is popular in Yoruba mythologies, different hierarchies of spiritual entities or primordial beings existed under *Orisa nla* before the beginning of times with some of them regarded as later playing or still believed to be playing roles on earth and in human affairs on a daily basis.

According to a myth, *Orisa nla* created the earth by sending *Obatala* to it through a rope with a sack of sands and a hen. While still dangling through the rope and was on the surface of the waters that then filled the earth, *Obatala* poured the sand on the waters and dropped the hen on the pile of sands. As the hen scattered the sand, land spread on the earth. According to a version, before their existence, *Obatala* was said to be responsible for

molding the bodies of all human beings (Gbadegesin, 2004, p.314). In this pre-earthly existence, there was also the *Ajala alamo ti n mo’ri* (*Ajala* the molder of the head) in *Olodumare*’s sphere. *Ajala*’s responsibility was to mold the heads of all humans, after *Obatala* molded their bodies, and allow them to go to the place of the *akunleyan* (kneeling to choose destiny) or *akunlegba* (kneeling to receive destiny), where they kneel down and choose their destiny and determine what their life would look like on earth before coming to the earth (Balogun, 2007, pp.121-124). Through this process, the earth that the *Orisanla* sent the *Obatala* to create became populated by humans. *Ajala* was a drunkard who sometimes, in his drunken state, was not a dutiful sculptor but molded heads as appeared good to him, with some heads being so beautiful and some very ugly. The destiny an *ori* (head) chooses on the day or place of *akunleyan* is his inner head (*ori inu*), a person’s real essence, which determines what he becomes when he enters the world. It is this *ori inu* (inner head) that determines what he ever becomes while the *ori ita* (outer head) is his figure-head status. It is that one that knelt down to receive *ipin* (destiny). After receiving destiny, a person joins the others who already existed on earth (Balogun, 2007, p.121). Many things are chosen at the place of choice of one’s destiny that determine each human’s earthly existence. This may be why some people may be very beautiful or handsome, believed to have been well molded by *Ajala*, but are so wicked because they chose wicked destinies. Reflecting on the works of scholars over many years, Balogun (2007, p.119) said,

...*ori* is regarded as an *orisa* (lesser gods) in its own right by the Yoruba. *Ori* is regarded as an individual personal god who caters for individual and personal interest while the *orisa* (lesser gods) exist for the interest of the whole tribe a clan (sic) or lineage. For this reason, whatever *ori* does not sanction cannot be given to any person by the *orisa* (lesser gods) or even by *olodumare* (God) himself. *Ori* is therefore an intermediatory between each individual and the *orisa* (the lesser gods/divinities). The *orisa* (divinity) will not attend to any request which has not been sanctioned by a man’s *ori*. No *orisa* (divinity) blesses a man without the consent of his *ori*.

The socio-economic and landscape orders of the three structures identified by Olomola (1988, pp.107-113) are considered similar. The earth is seen as the extension of heaven while the world of the ancestors is the habitation of the earth’s departed dead. The world of the ancestors and the earth are demarcated by a huge and thick soil of the earth. It is often reported that the inhabitants of the ancestral world sometimes complain of the earth’s people pouring sands into their things (soup, pots of dye, etc) as they dig in the areas where the dividing land between the two worlds is shallow. The Yoruba believe that there are routes connecting heaven and the earth and the land of the dead and the earth. The passageways are invisible (Olomola, 1988, pp.108-109). Yoruba chants and primordial myths account for the travelling of the gods

along the route from heaven to earth in time immemorial. They believe that *Ogun* (their god of iron and war) used the cutlass in his hand to create the passage for the gods during the trip (Osoba, 2014, p.44). Latter accounts do not deny the visibility of the route. As men choose destinies and travel the route to earth, they forget everything that transpires enroute, including the knowledge of the passage from heaven to earth, on arrival on the earth. How the route must have led to a woman's womb remains a mystery, though there are accounts of children jumping into their mothers' wombs in market places, on roads to farms and obscure places where a woman lacks protection or becomes spiritually vulnerable, either due to acting in disobedience to instructions from elders or walking at odd hours. Many women are reported to have given birth to evil children due to either not tying needles to the corners of their wrappers (as precautions, to ward off evil spirits) or walking in the afternoon when pregnant, which make the evil children to drive away the good ones (Ajayi, 2017, p. 3). What routes did the good children that were driven away follow into the wombs? Was it that they arrived on earth and existed in their spiritual states before they entered their mothers' wombs? How come they did not remember the history of the journeys before their arrival in the world?

As Olomola (1998, p.108) described, only those who are dead can see the passageway to the ancestral land while those who faint only see it like a flash. The highway runs through "seven forests and seven grasslands",

...encumbered by rushes, stopovers or road blocks and two streams, one of green (odo oro) and the other of blood-red (odo eje) waters. The rushes consist of very dense and repellent undergrowth so as to prevent earthlings from straying into ghostland; the roadblocks are guarded for the same purpose. Those earthlings who stray either by fainting or becoming unconscious through injuries or illness and who later recover are said to have had their passage blocked at some stage by ghostmen and ghostwomen members of their respective lineages who grilled them concerning their unscheduled homecoming and finally send them scurrying back to life on earth, with lashes and cudgels. The rivers between must be crossed to the other side before actual severance of cords of life on earth takes place. Those who have not crossed these streams can still be revived with charms and incantation, especially the latter which generally consist of the frightening description of the route to ghostland.

Obviously, human beings occupy central positions in Yoruba and Igbo worlds. On the Igbo world, Metuh (1985, p.109) reports that "everything else seems to get its bearing from and significance from the position, meaning and end of man." Oraegbunnam (2010, p.5) asserts that all "divinities exist to serve him and better his lot. He has a functional or pragmatic approach to these deities. This explains why a typical Igbo man can ceremoniously break his *ikenga* (a cult object of success and achievement) into two should it fail to perform." Hence, Oguejiofor (2001, p.40) concludes: "the anthropocentricity of African

(Igbo) traditional religion is one factor which explains the multiplicity of divinities in African pantheon" as each divinity is intended to secure the order, regularity, and predictability of specific area of man and his community" Oraegbunnam (2010, p.6). This description is true of Yoruba metaphysical views of the multiplicity of deities and the roles these deities play in human life and affairs. Among the Yoruba people, the moral and spiritual essences meet in the formation and activities of humans and the influences of supernatural entities on them.

The anthropocentricism of the traditional Yoruba and Igbo is rooted in the life affirming principles that characterise their worldviews, often reflected in their various religions, social rituals and festivals. Life for them should be esteemed, valued and protected at all times as well as celebrated when the need arises. This is often reflected in Igbo names such as "*Nduka*" (life is greater), "*Ndubuisi*" (life is first) and Yoruba names like "*Emilolu*" (life is greater), "*Ayeola*" (tomorrow's life) and "*Durojaye*" (wait to enjoy life). According to Oraegbunnam (2010, p.7), "the Igbo predilection for life is its this-worldly nature. The life that the average Igbo man seeks is this earthly life and this is perhaps why there is a widespread belief in reincarnation, a process by which a man will after death come back to this earthly life." He concludes that the:

...traditional Igbo views reality in a non compartmentalised manner. His political, social, economic, cultural, moral and religious aspects of life form a continuum. Everything seems to have a deeply religious substructure mostly in order to enhance human life.

Though Oraegbunnam appears to make pursuit of earthly life peculiar to the Igbo, it is also part of what the Yoruba people seek. The two tribes are concerned about not living this earthly life to destroy future spiritual life in the world of ancestors and to live so that one does not spoil his name or a good family name. Anything that negatively affects this life and meaningful existence is evil. As such, all possible efforts and consultations must be engaged in finding the cause(s) of problems and solution(s) to them to ensure that existence in this life is meaningful. Hence, Igbo and Yoruba traditional conceptions and understanding of evil are consequent on the effects of evil on human life, community existence and human future ancestral existence, and other things, which pervade their perception of evil and morality which is the subject of our next discussion.

IGBO AND YORUBA TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF EVIL

Discussions on the concept of evil are age long. The Western conception centres on things as the origin of evil in relation to divine existence, evil as the absence of good, evil as privation, evil as the conflict between God and

the devil and the aftermath of such conflict impinging on human moral will and conscience, causing unimaginable moral decadence or corruption in the world. In Igbo and Yoruba languages, depending on the dialects and cultural areas, evil is called by various names. Igbo call it “*alu*,” “*nsoala*,” “*mpu*,” etc, which can be translated as abominable act or simply abomination. Yoruba call it “*ibi*,” “*ohun/nkan buruku*,” “*jamba*”, etc. What is abominable to the Yoruba may include “*ibi*” but “*ibi*” and “*eewo*” (abomination or what is forbidden) do not have the same meanings and are not coterminous even though violating an *eewo* or committing sacrilege may be morally evil (Adegbandin, 2012, p.168). In both cultures, many things with many causes are regarded as evil, such as natural disasters, bad manners, sudden death, failed marriages and moral crimes committed either by the individual or the community, which they believe affect their ontological and cosmological existence both as individuals and as communities.

To the Yoruba, causes of evil include (1) the choice of *ipin*, activities of *Esu Elegbara*¹ (the trickster), activities of the gods, *aje* (witches) and other powers controlling the spheres of human existence. In the choice of one’s *ipin*, an individual that is believed to have chosen that natural disaster should befall him might prefer that, on getting to the earth, such disaster as he designated should befall him. Some persons choose evil natures that manifest on earth, say becoming armed robbers or thorns in the flesh of their parents and siblings. Hence, they become extremely wicked and cause havocs on the earth. Some individuals choose to be wealthy and influential with others serving them. In their choice, they may have approved that their servants would kill them and inherit their wives. In certain cases, they may also have chosen that sacrifices would be required to avert the crises or rectify any attendant problem. Disputably, *Esu* is seen as a powerful deity with whom different types of evil can be associated. As described by Wescott (1962, 337-338),

Eshu-Elegba is responsible for all troubles among men, and between men and gods. He is the instigator who tricks men into offending the gods, thereby providing them with sacrifices. It is said that without Elegba the orisha would starve. As a mediator between men and gods, Elegba’s two-way involvement prompts men to offend the gods on the one hand and aids the gods in their vengeance on the other. He is the force which makes men turn to the orisha both in expiation and propitiation, and without which the gods cannot exercise their vengeance. The Yoruba say ‘Eshu is the anger of the gods’, and that Eshu is the first to visit the victim of an orisha. When men are quarrelling Elegba is said to be present; when a man has done wrong he is asked if Elegba prompted him; and when, for example, a man’s house is struck by lightning, the Yoruba say that Eshu provoked the sin that resulted in the man offending Shango, the god of lightning. He is thus the agent provocateur and, in a sense, a messenger of the gods. Unlike other orisha, Eshu is not concerned with natural phenomena, nor is he especially concerned with

procreation, as they are. He is superior to the others in cunning, and many myths tell of the battles he has won at their expense. He is also described as a homeless wandering spirit, and as one who inhabits the market-place, the crossroads, and thresholds of houses. He is present whenever there is trouble and also wherever there is change and transition.

It is important to note in the Yoruba anthropomorphic worldview that *Esu* is regarded as the gatekeeper and door of access to the gods, whom anyone who desires to achieve anything meaningful must first propitiate so that the favour he/she desires from the gods will be possible and not debarred by *Esu*. He frustrates whoever fails to reckon with him by appeasement and allows him to experience evil, which may be in many forms. Besides the *Esu*, activities of the gods in forms of demonstration of their anger or punishing iniquity may bring evil on people or be termed as evil occurrences. As examples, *Sanpono* (the god of smallpox), *Sango* (the god of thunder) and *Ogun* may vent anger differently in their attempts to administer justice (Leroy, et al, 2002, p. 133; Adegbandin, 2012, p. 176). *Sanpono* may strike people with smallpox when offended. *Sango* may be said to have struck people when they steal or act unjustly. *Ogun* may be said to have drank the blood of an offender when a person believed to have done something wrong dies through a ghastly automobile accident or through circumstances involving dying by objects made of the iron metal. *Aje* and others, possessed by some spirits, may have been causing evil by placing curses on people or causing evil due to hate, revenge, retribution, deterrence justice or other personal reasons, just because they feel they possess the powers to control the spiritual spheres of human existence and do as they wish (Dasalu and Oyelakun, 2015, p. 24). The *Aje*, particularly, are sometimes regarded as the *alaye* (owners of the earth) or *eleye* (owners of birds). This latter description is due to the fact that they are believed to be operating in forms of birds or through spiritually possessing birds, and are consequently adorned with the metaphor of flying birds because they are believed to be capable of travelling to any place spiritually without their bodies actually leaving the location of the departure of their spirits (Oluwole, 1992, pp.2-12). Their spiritual activities are said to have often manifested physically thereby multiplying people’s sufferings and, in certain cases, sacrifices are also required to pacify them.

In the above descriptions, the Yoruba classification of evil embodies the physical, moral and metaphysical categorisations. The questions regarding the morality of it involves conducts of humans, the deities and other spiritual entities. Thus, it is possible for the gods to influence humans negatively and humans will still be held accountable for evil activities by other men who do not directly witness the influences of supernatural beings on them. For instance, *Aje* may lure or influence a person to do evil, say kill his mother, under the cover of ignorance

1 Some call it *Esu Elegba*.

and the person only gains consciousness after perpetrating the act or *Esu* may influence a person to commit sacrilege and murder for not propitiating him. In these and similar situations involving the gods and their influences on mortal men, the question of the morality of human actions always comes to fore. Invariably, going by the above, the physical may not be successfully separated from the spiritual.

The Igbo classification of evil does not strictly follow philosophical categorisation into physical, moral and metaphysical categories. Rather, their notion of evil can be grouped into three distinct classes, following Arinze's (1970, pp.34-35) grouping: (1) Moral acts, such as patricide, incest, stealing of yams and sheep, bestiality, willful abortion, pregnancy within a year of husband's death, suicide by hanging, and the killing of sacred animals. (2) Abnormal and unnatural acts, such as giving birth to twins (*ejima*), dying without anyone around to help (*ikpu iru*), pounding the pestle on the ground instead of in the mortar while pounding *fou-fou* (a type of food), even if it is by mistake (*isu odudu n'ani*), a woman climbing a palm tree, abnormal presentation in birth of a baby (*iji okpa puta uwa*), a child cutting the upper teeth first (*nwa eze-enu*) and fighting a masquerade (*mmuo* or *mmanwu*). 3. Abnormal behaviours on the part of some animals, like a dog or fowl crossing a corpse, a dog bringing forth only one whelp, a fowl laying only one egg, or a goat bringing forth its young without anyone attending to it (*ewu imu n'elili*).

Arinze (1970, p.35) further explains that "the criterion behind the first group is easier to understand. They are great crimes which defile the land. The second group embraces things so graded because they are regarded as abnormal, unnatural or unusual." For instance, a woman that gives birth to twins (*ejima*) is regarded as acting somewhat like lower animals that bring forth their offspring in double, while the contrary applies in the third classification of a dog giving birth to only one whelp or a fowl laying only one egg. The above third classification is peculiar, for it touches things not done directly by man but by animals which may be pointing to a crime committed but have been cleverly covered by the perpetrator. Hence, the Igbo reason that the land is defiled, the proprietor of such animals must consult the diviner (*Dibia-afa*) to ascertain the cause and appropriate ritual sacrifice to cleanse the land. Thus, they have two distinctive ways of expressing the two crimes, for instance, if Okafor steals yams, Igbo will say Okafor "*melu alu*" (Okafor committed a crime); but if Okafor's goat brings forth its young unattended, they will express it as "*Alu melu be Okafor*" (abomination happened in the house of Okafor), implying that Okafor may not be directly involved but that someone close or related to him has secretly defiled the land, while the earth goddess is crying for redress which manifested in the abnormal happenings in Okafor's household.

Like the Igbo, the Yoruba count the moral acts in the first group under Arinze's categorization as moral crimes. Like the second group, they also consider fighting masquerades and cutting of upper teeth first as evil, the former on the ground that masquerades are visiting ancestors and the latter on the notion that children who cut upper teeth first are extremely problematic, troublesome and disobedient. Yoruba equally see dying without anyone around as unfortunate (mostly, and evil in some cases, depending on circumstances). However, they do not consider giving birth to twins as evil but a blessing which is why the arrival of twins comes with real cognition and special celebrations as they are considered the property of the gods (Leroy, et al, 2002, pp.133-136). The Yoruba do not encourage women to climb palm tree. As such, women who attempt it may have the society frowning at them. If they fall through doing that, they may be considered to have deliberately brought evil on themselves. As in the third group, the Yoruba treat unusual behaviours of animals, such as dogs, as evil or signs of evil omen or impending deaths or an evil occurrence with severe impact. However, they do not view animal behaviours as signs of hidden crimes and do not think of a dog producing only a whelp or a chicken laying only an egg or a goat delivering its baby without human attention as evil. A dog or goat that produces only a whelp or kid or the hen that lays only an egg are all considered less productive or pets that are not good examples of species of pets to have.

From the foregoing, to some extent, descriptions of evil happenings and their interpretations in Igbo culture are similar to the happenings and their interpretations in Yoruba's conception and understanding of evil. The Igbo view that evil in the world is either committed directly by humans or indirectly by animals, deities and spirits, when provoked by human actions and inactions is also not alien to the Yoruba people, even though they may employ different linguistic expressions to explain things. To a certain extent, linguistically, Igbo and Yoruba views on evil can be located in their proverbs, folklores idiomatic expressions, etc. For instance, an Igbo proverb says, "*Mmadu bu n'uwa adighi mma*" or "*Mmadu bu njo al*" (Human being is the cause of evil in the world) and a Yoruba saying says *Esu leniyan or eniyan lesu* (humans are evil or causes of evil). To the Igbo, this implies that the world as created by the Supreme Being, "Chukwu," is not evil and does not contain evil per se, evil came into the world through human beings. Even when a particular evil is attributed to a goddess/divinity or spirit, they hold tenaciously that such evil came as a result of man's action or inaction in stirring the anger of the gods, which could be occasioned by not looking after them or total neglect of the duties towards them. There is similarity between this and our earlier view on the anger and activities of the *Esu* and the other gods in relation to humans. In every case, Umechukwu (1996, p.63) concludes, "the Igbo regard evil

as caused by man.” Scholars like Nwala (1985), Okafor (1992) and Mbaegbu (2012) justify views similar to Umechukwu’s, which they call cosmological optimism of Igbo theory of evil. Nwala (1985, p.29) specifically states that:

...there is a belief in a created universe which is controlled by the Creator Chukwu - Okike. Man is in the centre of this creation. He is endowed with freedom and its attendant responsibility. There is belief in the unity among things, belief in original cosmic (universal) harmony and order which unfortunately the action of the human beings upsets (in which case as with the Bible story the woman starts the confusion).

Similarly, Okafor (1992, pp.13-14) reiterates that:

The physical world is ontologically good. It is a perfect world in structure and a beautiful world whose architecture is subject of admiration...the apparent evil and imperfection in the world cosmic order usually caused by the actions of men.... A popular Igbo proverb says that “*madu bu njo ala*” man make the world evil. The Igbo saying that “*Uwa ezu oke*” which literally means that the world is imperfect does not imply any imperfection in creation but rather stress the insatiability of human wants.

Thus, for the Igbo, the above scholars attributed the existence of evil in the world to human free will through which man is potentially disposed to choose between good and evil. The Yoruba does not think that evil derives exclusively from man, due to the influences of other deities, yet they, on most occasions, hold humans responsible for the consequences of their actions, whether in issues raising direct moral questions or involving things to do to propitiate the gods to avert evil. For the Yoruba, serious questions are provoked when we try to reconcile human choice of *ipin*, which may admit of both soft and hard determinism, depending on the conditions obtainable in the outcome of the manifestation of one’s *ipin* and possibility of propitiation through sacrifices to lessen or modulate the impacts of an *ipin* on the individual who was said to have made the choice and forgotten the choice made on his way to the earth after crossing the *omi igbagbe* (river of forgetfulness) (Balogun, 2007, p.122). In our context here, determinism is the position that events are bound to result or happen in pre-decided ways. In the sense of soft determinism, events may happen if certain conditions subsist that are capable of yielding alternative deterministic outcomes, which may be to stop, reverse or modify the earlier determined outcomes. For hard determinism, outcomes of events are of fatalistic nature, with such events being bound to happen no matter the conditions put in place to stop, modify or reverse them.

The determinism described here may be moral, epistemic and metaphysical in nature. Going by the thought of the choice of *ipin*, an individual may not be said to be acting freely since his choices (of activities and conducts on earth) were predetermined and he is merely like robots that do what they are preprogrammed to do. The above positions on determinism in Igbo and

Yoruba cultures pose serious difficulty when we consider why rebukes, reprimands, moral corrections and moral education ought to be necessary in addressing moral vices arising from wrong conducts from humans that are moral agents whose actions are predetermined. An obvious problem here is that the ideas of human moral agency and determinism are contradictory, since the latter indicates unfree actions while the former affirms free actions. Thus, at this point, resolving the conflict between moral determinism and free moral conducts of moral agents becomes difficult to deal with.

This question of how to strike a balance between moral determinism and moral acts of free moral agents may arise when we examine the above views expressed by Umechukwu, Nwala, Okafor and Mbaegbu, in light of Igbo cosmo-ontological view of the personal god “Chi” and the choosing of destiny package before birth. There are divided opinions on the interpretation of “chi” destiny package and existence of evil in Igbo world. Some Scholars do not link the existence of evil directly to human beings but to human’s personal god, “Chi,” assigned to him at point of his/her creation, who chooses the destiny package before his/her birth. They base their interpretations on Igbo believe in “*iyi-uwa*” (destiny package) and “*ilo-uwa*” (reincarnation). On the choice of destiny package, the following long passage from Chinwe Achebe (1986, pp.18-19) reveals what transpires between the individual, his personal Chi and Chukwu at the point of creation, thus giving us an insight into the ontological complexity of Igbo notion of Chukwu, Chi and the destiny package.

When Chukwu created the universe, he imbued man with an attribute of His spiritual nature, intended to continue the creative process and to be the guiding force that gives meaning and direction to his existence. This known as Chi is unique to each individual. The role that Chi is meant to play in the life of each individual is so important that an equally significant ‘handing over’ ceremony as it were had to be instituted for each and every individual separately, this ceremony took place at ‘Akpu ojodogo.’ For some Akpu ojodogo is a huge rock situated in the middle of the river and for others, it is a unique Akpu tree where Chukwu handed over to each person his Chi, whatever the nature of Akpu ojodogo, it is here that Chukwu not only divests parts of his divine characteristics but invests man with it. Chukwu is thus perceived as simultaneously removed but present with man. He is seemingly away or removed from man because he delegates the creative process to Chi. Indeed he cannot be completely removed from man, since Chi is his ambassador and representative through whom constant contact with man is kept... Man on his part is allowed tremendous freedom and power of initiative to choose whatever attributes, talents or characteristics he wishes to possess as well as how he will like to use these qualities. The individual and his Chi at the Akpu ojogodo enter into a long dialogue culminating in a contractual agreement satisfactory to both. The individual’s Chi does not coerce the individual but through gentle persuasion make sure that the individual does not choose what he cannot cope with. When the individual has finished choosing and specifying the details of his life, the Chi agrees to support him in the achievement of his desires. A pact is then made between the

individual and his Chi to the effect that the individual will not deviate from the terms of the contract without consulting Chi in return for the support of his 'Chi'. This signed pact is known as 'iyi-uwa' the oath of life, which is sworn to by both at the Akpu ojodogo and witnessed by 'Chukwu'. Once, this is done, 'Chukwu' withdraws and leaves the individual to continue the journey to earth with his 'Chi.'

Arinze (1970, p.15) similarly observes that:

Most Ibos believe that each individual has a spiritual, a genius, a spiritual double, his Chi, which is given him at conception by Chukwu and which accompanies this individual (romantic) the cradle to the grave. Chi is strictly personal, hence the Ibo saying: Ofu nne na amu na ofu Chi adi eji (the same mother, yes: but not the same Chi). To one's Chi are ascribed a person's successes and failures, onye chi oma (a person of good Chi) is a successful or lucky man. If the individual fears some danger, he cries out: Chi m ekwena! (My Chi don't permit it!)

Following the same argument Ilogu (1974, p. 36) observes:

Man is believed to be created by Chi-ne-ke, the Creator God who also is the great spirit or the world's over Soul. At the time of birth this great spirit Chukwu gives to each man a part of his divine nature called Chi which becomes the spiritual double of the man throughout his life. Whatever abilities good or bad fortunes, successes, failures or weaknesses possessed by the man are often attributed to his Chi. Children of the same parents are therefore variously endowed by different kinds of Chi.

Metuh (1985, p.110) was equally of the same line of thought when he reiterates:

Personal god as spirit guardian is God's vicar in man. It administers the content of the parcel which he has chosen for the interest of the individual person. The person is completely ignorant of what his personal god holds in stock for him or her. This explains why a persistent misfortune or persistent moral lapse could be blamed on one's personal god. Similarly any undeserved fortune is regarded as a surprise package from ones personal god.

A critical analysis of the above views reveals that they all identify Chi, the personal god, as the one who chooses and supervises the implementation of destiny package for each human being. Mbaegbu (2012, p.317) added another angle to it when he reports that "they are at times invoked to explain a person's trait which one recognises and may want to get rid of but find it extremely formidable to effect any serious change." Hence, the Chi and the destiny package chosen for the individual are to be held accountable for both avoidable and unavoidable mistakes and evils in one's life. If the Chi is the implementer of the destiny package, how are we sure he is actually implementing the package as agreed? Also, Mbaegbu's (2012, p.317) observation, that there are certain "traits" (natural, physical or character traits) that an individual wishes to change but finds difficult to, as a result of his Chi's implementation of his destiny package, seems an express declaration of the complexity of balancing between claims of free moral agency and moral determinism. This complexity becomes clearer

when we examine the meanings of some Igbo (traditional) names, proverbs and cultural expressions which are often used to substantiate the role played by Chi in human affairs. However, the conflict between the Igbo claim that human actions are free and a human's making recourse to his/her Chi as the guide of the original agreement seem to fade when we examine names like "*Nkechinyere*" (as given by Chi) and *Chijioke* (Chi determines one's lot) which obviously refer to the dominant role played by Chi in running human affairs. Expressions and proverbs like "*Ife si na chi*" (good fortunes and misfortunes come from Chi) and "*onye cholu iga chi ya n'iru ga agbagbu onwe ya n'oso*" (whoever wants to go before or run ahead of his Chi will run himself to death), though demonstrating the origin of good and evil from one's personal Chi, are pointers to the deterministic influence of Chi.

Of all the above views that subscribe to the idea that one's Chi and destiny package are responsible for human evil inclination and actions, only Achebe's narrative acknowledge the introduction of an element of dialogue between Chi and the individual at Akpu ojodogo, where the destiny package (*iyi-uwa* or oath of life) is both chosen and taken. If the above myth of choice as expressed by Achebe is to be believed, because of its details and adherence to the principles observable in Igbo traditional world view, especially for the fact that it revealed that man was co-responsible for the choice of the destiny package, whatever comes as a result of the content of this package implicates every human. However, the Igbo believe that man is not determined to act in a particular way. Moreover, the content of the package may reveal his actions and inactions in his previous life which is now inherited through reincarnation. Ilogu (1974, p.37) explains:

Early in a young man's life the parents help him to discover by divination which of the dead ancestors had possessed the kind of chi with which their child is now endowed. Although the endowment of one's chi may be small and inauspicious, it is believed that a man through medicine, prayer and sacrifice, especially to the ancestors can finish his life more successfully than his chi originally intended. But if after all such efforts have been expended the man finally ends ignominiously then his colleagues would acknowledge that he had tried but his chi had not helped him much.

By implication, because the Igbo believe in the moral principles of double effect of human action or what may simply be explained as *when one finger touches oil it soils the rest* (*Otu mkpisi aka ruta manu o zuo oha*), whatever crime or evil the reincarnate ancestor must have committed in the previous life and not atoned for is believed to have vital influence on the personified reincarnate. Just as the consequence of good action or behaviour of man affects his community positively, the crime, evil and abomination of one person can have effect on the community. For instance, as Arinze (1970, p.18) argued, "If it is said that *Okafor melu alu* (Okafor

committed evil or abomination) or *alu melu be Okafor* (abomination happens in house of Okafor) a cleansing sacrifice is necessary. There is no question of hiding such a crime or trying to omit the sacrifice. The Ibos believe firmly that if such abominations are not atoned for be they ever so secretly committed, the penalty is sure to descend on the culprit or his relations and descendants.”

To Okafor (1992, p.14), “the apparent evil and imperfections in the world are not intrinsic. They are rather the negation of the perfect cosmic order usually caused by the actions of man and the spirits.” Edeh (1985, p.109) corroborates this that “...The three proximate causes of evil (in the Igbo) are the evil spirits, the elemental gods and human beings.” The elemental gods in Igbo religion are earth, water (rivers, seas etc.) air, wind, thunder and fire (sun etc). These are believed to be an extension or ambassadors of Chukwu believed to act as his agents to reveal human hidden crimes that escape human observations. Natural disasters like flooding, violent thunder storms, earthquakes, etc., are interpreted as occurring as a result of human negative actions that upset the cosmic order (*Ife adi eme na nkiti*). Events do not just happen without a cause.

Obviously, the above cornucopia of views is bewildering. However, though the Yoruba believe in the reincarnation of ancestors to live among their people, for various reasons as loving their lineage, completing unfinished businesses and attainment of all conceivable great purposes, the Igbo view on reincarnation introduces another dimension to the issues involved here. How long was it that Chi was allocated to accompany the man as his guardian and implementer of the destiny package, if we consider both the former and latter lives? Is the existence of the Chi a seamless one in which the continuity of its existence is guaranteed in between births and the same destiny package still implemented? Or, do people choose new Chi and new destiny packages at the point of each birth? If the existence of Chi is a continuum and the same destiny package is revitalized or implemented, will the Chi’s revitalization or implementation of the destiny package and holding a man responsible in new life for criminal activities of previous life and thereby causing his actions to be determined and the trend of his life to follow channels dictated by the old life not amount to conscripting him into the kind of life over which he has no choice? If he chooses a new destiny package but is dominated by the Chi, how will he be held responsible for the consequences of his new actions? If the proximate origins of evil include evil spirits and the elemental gods that are ambassadors of Chukwu, how is it that the Igbo adjudge human actions free?

Thus far, a critical analysis of the above views reveals certain interrelated Yoruba and Igbo traditional perspectives on evil namely: (a) exoneration of a supreme deity (Orisanla in Yoruba and Chukwu in Igbo), from

being the cause of evil; (b) attribution of evil to human choices, made before or during their earthly existence (c), maintaining that evil has independent and external existence (through spiritual beings), which can only be experienced through the instrumentality of human beings, either directly or indirectly; and (d) that what a European may perceive as natural evil is a moral one in Igbo and Yoruba perspectives, hence, no evil has an unknown cause. Thus, Igbo and Yoruba conceptual understandings of evil are anchored on their world views on destiny, free will and moral responsibility. Looking at the whole spectrum of Igbo and Yoruba ideas above, the same conflict between freewill and determinism is observable.

IGBO AND YORUBA PERSPECTIVES ON DESTINY, FREEWILL AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

As seen above, both the Yoruba and Igbo believe that humans made choices of their destinies in their pre-world existence. What is contentious in both Igbo and Yoruba views on destiny is whether an individual is adequately involved in the choice of his/her destiny and how the influences and choices external to him/her and unrecognised by him/her ought to warrant his/her being blamed or punished for the consequences of his/her actions and inactions. The logic behind Igbo and Yoruba believing in destiny derives from their life experiences rather than from abstract reality. Given this, certain explanations that inculcate abstract realities involving things not perceivable to naked eyes become difficult to take or ascertain in some cases.

In discussing the Igbo and Yoruba explanations on determinism and moral responsibility, it is difficult to explain the connection between physical and spiritual realities and how people are held responsible for what may be called non-direct or somehow indirect involvement in crime that both cultures perceive as direct involvements, with the idea of involvement really being questionable and inconceivable to minds outside the cultures. As discussed earlier, the Yoruba believe in *Esu’s* being capable of frustrating anyone that discountenances sacrifices to him, or does not appease him, making the person’s existence very miserable. He can also push a person to commit sacrilege or do evil. It is also said that the *Aje* are capable of luring or manipulating a person to perpetrate evil acts if not propitiated. In these instances, it is difficult to determine how a person may be said to have operated freely since there are external forces making him act contrary to his freewill.

The Yoruba and Igbo consider supernatural activities like someone killing another with charms, sending or invoking evil powers to harm people and witches killing people as moral crimes and evil. In some cases, anybody said to have confessed to such crimes was

killed retributively or banished because his/her activities were considered evil and inimical to the existence of the community. In other cases, supernatural means of investigation were engaged (consulted), like diviners using divination to explain the events that culminate in the crime said to have been committed. In these instances, they consider the so called offender(s) as evil doers (“*eni ibi*” in Yoruba and “*ajao mmadu*” in Igbo). At the same time, they perceive an offender’s act as a condemnable bad conduct (*agwa ojoo* in Igbo and *or iwa buburu* in Yoruba) or bad act (*ihe ojoo* in Igbo or *iwa ibi* in Yoruba) that is desecrating the land, an example of a bad life (*ndu ojoo* in Igbo and *igbe aye buruku in Yoruba*) (Agulanna, 2009, pp.19-20; Fayemi, 2009, p.169). However, the question of how someone could be held responsible for an act not directly involving him lingers. Is it not possible to base such conclusions on mere conjectures? Can a diviner not express his personal opinions or be bribed by people who wish to punish a perceived enemy to lie and consequently claim that an innocent person committed a crime? Is it not possible that there are battles for spiritual supremacy in the spirit realm such that information is perverted and an innocent person is made an offender? The grounds on which events may be termed evil and based on the freewill of the persons said to have committed crimes in the above-described situations raise questions that are difficult to explain.

Conflicts arising from the difficulty of really reconciling physical and spiritual dimensions in issues of human choice and moral responsibility occasion intense social conflicts. In particular situations in which physical assaults are seen to have been involved, the difficulty of proving the connection between the physical and supernatural subsists (Hellen, 2004, p.115). The difficulty is further amplified because terms expressing physicality are engaged in explaining the phenomenon and events. As such, a confusing understanding of terms leaves us in dilemma as to determining people’s involvement in what is termed evil. For instance, a plaintiff who says, in Yoruba, “*Oluwa mi, o fi oogun na mi o*” (My Lord, he really beat me with charms) is explaining a reality he thinks he understands so well but the Judge in the case has another meaning in mind. Seeking physical evidence to hinge his judgment on and confusing *oogun* (charm) with *oogun* (medicine) (same pronunciation), he rules that the plaintiff should buy either of the two pain relievers *phensic* and *panadol* and hold it in his hands to beat back or physically assault the defender whom he claims supernaturally assaults him. We may consider situations more detached from observable/physical reality as this, such as holding a person morally responsible for being a witch while he/she is not physically present at a location but accused of choosing to have supernaturally oppressed another person sleeping in his room with his doors locked. A person may also be said to have spoken into the air at one location that is miles away to afflict another that

he does not touch physically. These are realities which the Igbo and Yoruba consider as part of moral crimes. Fundamentally, this reality is a general African view, as Africans rarely separate spiritual from physical realities on the believe that one causes the other.

Despite the sometimes complex nature of the explanations of some phenomena, the Igbo and Yoruba conceptions about life provide both the setting and conducive environment for the development of thought patterns that follow logical sequence. For instance, observations show aspects of individuals’ lives or behaviours following particular courses despite attempts at preventing such or ensuring the opposite. It is, thus, assumed that such turn of events are part of the destinies of such persons (Gbadegeshin, 2004, p.316). In fact, in both cultures, persistent inexplicability of certain aspects of one’s character or behaviour or events surrounding one’s existence could be deductively assumed to be already predetermined to follow particular courses of events. In the past, the Yoruba made recourse to weird mythical stories to explain this type of situation, one popular one of which is the *Ajantala* story. *Ajantala* was the son of a hunter who hated the world, talked, stood up, walked, bathed himself, looked around for and ate food prepared for more than twenty persons and held people in contempt on the same day he was born (Tutuola, 1986, pp.4-5). He gave himself name on the day of christening and disorganised the naming ceremony, drove the guests away, inflicted great sufferings on and constituted an unimaginable terror to his family, the entire community and became a destructive and divisive character. His appearance, conduct, and all he did were considered evil by everyone that came in contact with him. Similar to *Ajantala*’s story are cases of people who are masterminds of terrorism, cultic activities and questionable behaviours in society. In cases where people find it hard to explain how they became who they were, despite parental and societal efforts at morally educating them, they sometimes concluded that their evil natures were predetermined. However, the question remains whether destiny is static and leaves humans helpless to find solutions to (overcome) evil nature and be morally responsible.

The Igbo believe in a world that is “infinitely flexible and fluid... and consider nothing as really absolute” (Nwodo 2004, p.255). The Igbo world view is an infinitely flexible and fluid one, where a human being is not totally helpless before his/ her Chi as man always consults through divination the spirit and ancestors in his / her drama of life. Similarly, the (traditional) Yoruba do not consider destiny as static which is why attempts are made to consult oracles, follow prescribed sacrifices to appease the gods and the ancestors so as to avert evil destinies. The traditional Igbo always try to maintain a delicate balance in a situation of multiple demands by applying the principles of “flow process and duality” (Nwodo 2004, p.256). For instance, as discussed above, Chi always

remains close to the individual as guardian spirit to ensure that his/her life is lived in accordance with his/her chosen destiny package. The Igbo believe in Chi therefore unites the three interconnected principles of individuality, destiny and achievement in their ontology. As Achebe (1998, p.69) reminded us, “a man is not totally helpless before his Chi, nor is the power of Chi over him.” For believing that something can be done to avert evil destiny or that the will power is strong enough to influence the determination of one’s life, even if such expression of will power is towards influencing decision involving the Chi and *ayanmo* through sacrifices, the Yoruba and Igbo recoil from the frontiers of absolutism. They emphasise that it is possible for a man through a strong effort of will to negotiate an unfavourable destiny. The Igbo adage that *onye kwe chi ya ekwe* (If a man says yes his Chi will also agree) and the Yoruba words *Aba t’alagemo bad a l’orisa oke n gba* or *Aba alagemo loris a ngba* (The chameleon’s suggestion is what the supreme deity approves, which best interprets as meaning that human wish is the command of the supreme deity. We noted earlier, in citing Balogun that the Yoruba believe that whatever a person’s *Ori* agrees to is what the gods grant). Hence, the philosophical explanation of destiny as rigid and inflexible goes contrary to Igbo and Yoruba believe in tampering with the supernatural to achieve one’s aims and live well.

Yoruba and Igbo, to some extent, share affinities in both existentialist and pragmatic views, on the notions of freedom and moral responsibility in relation to good and evil. They emphasise the importance of making self-defining, empirical and useful decisions and actions and, qualitatively, differ in their understanding of existentialism and pragmatism. The Yoruba, unlike the western existentialists, do not count humans as mere beings thrown into the world, without predetermined existence, who determine their fate by their decisions and are responsible for their actions. The idea of a predetermined existence is part of what informs or directs what the individuals in the world do and how they determine their existence and how to live self-determined lives. In some cases, their making useful decisions based on the consideration of a predetermined existence determines the pragmatic impulse of their existence. Though they encourage individuals to be self-defining and pursue achievements, the individual constitutes a part of the overall communal identity. Concerning the Igbo, Ekei (2001, p.97) notes that “with the existentialist they value the notion of making choices as basic presuppositions of ethics but markedly differ on individual as subject of choice in freedom.” The Igbo world view lays emphasis on “individual - with “ as opposed to “individual as subject of choice” as the focus of their freedom of human actions. Nze (2007, p.13) describes this as a way of man taking others into consideration while making choice of action, because his/her individual choice will later “roll on to become collective choices.” In other words, the

individual chooses for the community, while choosing for himself. He considers the communal interests alongside his own while making his choices. He does not just choose in isolation from others considerations. His choice in the words of Ekei (2001, p.99) “ is based on self-collective choice, which is altruistic and largely communalistic as opposed to self choice which has the tendency of self-seeking (sic) and exclusively personalistic.”

In considerations involving the individual, his choices and involvement in communal existence, the Yoruba individual seems more integrated into the community than the Igbo person and may be more reluctant in taking some decisions or final decisions on matters without considering the input of the elders or the cluster of relationships surrounding him, even if the community will greatly benefit. In some cases, the voice of the elders dominates. This is often influenced by many considerations guiding the choices of the Yoruba person. These include considerations of lineage, communal and ancestral bonds. Words as “*okun alajobi*” (the common bond of birth and lineage succession), “*ikunle abiyamo*” (inadequately translated *the kneeling position of a mother at childbirth*, a remembrance of a woman’s painfully endured situation of child delivery) are invoked in some cases to appeal to the consciences of those who are taking erratic decisions, violating human dignity by maltreatment to the extent of loss of life or provoking activities that will not yield overall best results for the entire community. Thoughts of the day one may face particular ancestors sometimes dictate human actions and good deeds, thereby making people to become morally responsible for the consequences of their conducts. According to Olomola (1988, p. 108), the Yoruba ancestors posthumously hold members of their clans and communities responsible for the consequences of their actions in the ancestral court. In this court, as soon as both leaders and their subjects arrive as individuals after their deaths, they are made to account for how they have kept the lineage relationships, laws and the cultural practices handed over to them by the ancestors.

On the overall, the Yoruba and Igbo notions of freedom depict freedom with others, with practical end results as the target. Hence, it is this tendency that informs their senses of character and responsibility expressed in the context of the relationship with members of the community and seeking the welfare of the community. Man is free in Yoruba and Igbo worlds, but his freedom is far from being that autonomous freedom of inconsiderate individuals but freedom that recognises the interest of others and is determined by moral responsibility to them. As Nze (2007, p.14) observed, the Igbo individual is free “even though his will is determined by his community.” If we further reflect on Olomola’s view on ancestral accountability, we can ponder on the question of when the Yoruba consider governance evil.

The Yoruba see an Oba’s reign as evil in some cases.

First, when the Oba does not do the necessary rites before or on ascending the throne. He is thought of as severing the links between him and the ancestors and embarking on a perilous mission that can bring all manner of physical and spiritual harms to the society (Stride and Ifeka 1971, 299). Second, when the Oba fails to make a good choice between calabashes containing *iyó* (salt) and *eeru* (ashes), amidst several other items like *ata* (pepper), *ito* (urine), *ida* (sword) as part of his coronation rites. In some towns they add/use *epo* (palm oil) and *iyèpè bintin* (a little quantity of sand) (pouring the sand in the oil) and (or) *omi* (water) and *ewe odundun* or *abamoda* (resurrection plant's leave) together in a calabash. It is customary among some Yoruba towns to place salt and ashes amidst many items in a room (or a designated place), blindfold the new king and let him enter the room to identify and pick the container of salt among the things. It is taken as a symbol of bad omen and evil reign for a king to pick the bowl of ashes. To them, salt is symbolic of sweetness and a reign devoid of pestilence, war, famine, and so on, while ashes symbolise the reverse of what salt represents. *Omi* stands for cordiality and peace with people while *Odundun* stands for longevity, peace, utter calmness or ease, since *odundun* leave has curative potency and, in comparison, the Oba is believed to have the power and authority to make all things run well in his town.

Generally, salt and ashes are often used by the Yoruba to test what the reign of an Oba will be like. In the process of choosing between the two items, in some places, a drummer beats a drum made of a hollowed log of wood, drumming heavily when the new king nears the salt or lowers the volume gradually when he is away from it and almost silent when he is by the bowl of ashes ("Enthroning A "Yorùbá King", 2013"). The drumbeats though may not be meaningful to outsiders, aim at saying either of two things: "The road is very broad and clear" or "You miss the road flatly." If the king does not understand the meanings of the sounds, he chooses the bowl of ashes to the stern shock and disdain of his people and becomes a bad reference point. On close examination, we will see that the whole process is an indication that the choice of salt (or other items similarly positive in significance) is not the decision of the new king alone but that of the whole community that he and the kingmakers represent. This shows that the choice aims at the welfare of the people. Third, the people still consider governance evil when an Oba's reign is chaotic or people witness evil happenings such as the outbreak of an epidemic, famine, loss of lives, and so on. Though failing to perform rituals or choosing ashes may be regarded as being responsible for the evils, cognisance may not be taken of an Oba's adequate performance of rights or choosing of salt if the people suffer or witness strange happenings. Other reasons may be found for why they think the evil happened, say the Oba or people near to him getting involved in sins or taboos that contradict the expectation of the gods. In this,

the Oba may not fail to address issues or propitiate the gods and the ancestors because of the fear of the wrath of the gods and ancestors and eventual accountability to both. If he addresses the issues, he is taken as making a choice in the interest of the community.

Contrary to western existentialism that conceives of freedom as the ability "to will" and "to decide" (Sartre, 1956, p.481) whereby thinking of freedom outside the will as an illusion, the Yoruba and Igbo conceptions of human freedom only become meaningful when conceivable within and in relation to the community. In fact human freedom is derived from a collective participation and taking others into consideration in choice making. In this, sharing of blames and praises for human acts is also regarded as communal. A person who does the community proud is their child while the person who does not is not their good child. Thus, good acts are justified on its ability to promote community interest and cohesion, while evil acts are abhorred because they disrupt both social and metaphysical order of community.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we examined the historical, mythical and metaphysical backgrounds to the Igbo and Yoruba conceptualisations of existence and what they consider evil and discussed the ideas of determinism, moral choices and moral responsibilities. We harped on the Yoruba's view on *ayanmo* (destiny) and the Igbo's orientation on Chi and the destiny package in considering the importance of choices and determining human moral responsibility and relating what is considered evil by both cultures. As the pre-chosen destiny, the *ayanmo* received through *akunleyan* or *akunlegba* and the Igbo conceptualisation of Chi as argued by some scholars seem to present human actions and inactions as something that is already determined by one's *ayanmo* or Chi through *iyi-uwa* (the destiny package). The bone of contention is not just the issue of determinism, but how outcomes of human actions are considered evil and morally troubling to society.

If taken seriously as true of the Igbo and Yoruba worlds, the receiving of the *ayanmo* with humans' consequent migration to the earth and Chukwu's giving part of his nature to humans (as Chi) at birth, which determines the good or bad traits in man, his successes and achievements, imply that man has no freedom of action and therefore not morally responsible for his actions and inactions. Just as Ekei's (2001, p.102) assertion that "Igbo concept of, and application of personal praise, reward as well as blame and punishment" disproves of this belief, so also do Yoruba ideas on commendations and blame, rewards and punishments debunk the belief. Also, the popular Igbo and Yoruba adages, "*onye kwe, chi ya kwe*" (If a person will, his Chi also wills accordingly) and "*Ohun ewi aye ba wi legba orun i gba*" (what the earthly decrees is what the heavenly accepts) seem to prove the existence

of individual freedom to succeed as well as the leverage to mitigate one's *ayanmo* or submission to one's Chi. Other expressions like "I mere *mma*" (You did well) and "Okare" (You did well or kudos to you); "Omume ya di *mma*" (His/her conduct is good) and "Iwa re *dara*" (His/her conduct is good or he behaves well); "I mere *ajo ihe*" (You committed evil) and "Ibi lo se yi o" (You have committed evil); and "Omume ya di *njo*" (His/her conduct is bad) and "Oniwa *buruku ni* (He/she possesses bad conducts) depict approval or disapproval of human actions. As Ekei (2001, p.102) noted, "praise" or "blame" is directed to the individual" as a responsible moral actor. Going by this, one may argue that considerations of *ayanmo* and Chi do not override individuals' freedom of actions and attribution of moral worth to human actions.

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