
The Ala Deity and Eco-spirituality of Igbo Traditional Religion: A Historical Approach

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Abstract

In African Traditional Religion, there is the belief in the Supernatural Being (God Almighty). This belief is also accompanied with other belief systems which form the structure of African Traditional Religion. These other beliefs include: belief in; divinities, spirits, ancestors, and magic and medicine. It is under the belief in divinities that 'Ala' deity belongs. 'Ala' commonly means 'land' in Igbo language, otherwise, popularly known as the earth goddess. The problem that bothers this research is that African traditional religion has been viewed by many people as polytheism, where many gods are worshipped without considering differing ecological variations in the belief to various spiritual beings by people of divergent geographical settings. 'Ala' deity for instance, and particularly, is recognized by the Igbo of South East Nigeria only, and is only worshipped in Igbo land, by Igbo people. More so, all these other deities, divinities, spirits, ancestors, etceteraetera serve as intermediaries to Supreme God whom they call *Chukwuokike*. The article aims at addressing the problem associated with generalizing African peoples' spiritual ecology, without paying reasonable attention to independent environmental attachment to particular spiritual being with special interest on 'Ala' / 'Ani' deity which is specifically recognized by Igbo people, installed and worshipped by Igbo people in Igbo ecological settings. It has been discovered that other Africans could be aware of 'Ala' deity, but could only be installed and worshipped in Igbo land. It recommends among other things that the Igbo should be proud anywhere to express the relevance of 'Ala' deity. The research adopts historical method. Data were gotten from primary and secondary sources. Data are analyzed with phenomenological and descriptive styles of data analysis.

Introduction

Human beings are geographically identified to certain socio-cultural lives, philosophy, and thoughts. These identities are characterized with religious beliefs and spiritual attachments, which in most cases influence to a large extent, the cultural practices of the settlers of a particular ecological environment. Among the Africans, religion, beliefs and spiritualities take virtually, or almost every part of their lives. Leonard in (Ugwu, 2014 p.9) points thus: "They (Igbo) are a truly religious people of who it can be said as it has been said about the Hindus that they eat religiously, dress religiously..." (Mbiti, 1969 p.1) adds that: "Africans are notoriously religious". Whatever happens to a typical African man has its peculiar religious interpretation(s). This has motivated the introduction of many gods, deities, divinities, etcetera to take charge of respective strata of African man's endeavours. Hence, there are: the god of the sun, earth goddess, spirit of divination and medicine, the spirit of the dead and living dead (ancestorhood – ancestors and ancestresses, marine spirit, etcetera).

In the history of South-Eastern geo-political zone of Nigeria, the environment is spiritually and commonly influenced by the special spiritual attachment to belief in the *Ala* Deity that is the earth goddess. Though, there are other spiritual regards to other spiritualities of the water, trees, caves, graves, grooves, rocks, mountains and hills, etcetera, but the *Ala* or *Ani* deity's regard acquires significant spiritual status anchored on the belief that every man walks, works and grows whatever he eats from the land *Ala/Ani*. The Igbo of the South-East Nigeria portray the earth – deity as the custodian of justice and truth in a way that if one appears suspicious in any case, he or she is bound to remove any foot wear he or she wears in giving verbal account of the matter on the floor. In the worship of most spiritual beings in the South-East of Nigerian ecology, worshippers are bound to pull off their foot wears in respect to the spirit being and as a signal to be truthful and committed to the order of worship.

The issue that constitutes the need to run this research centres on the problem that African traditional religion is concluded by many people including some Africans as a polytheistic religion where many gods are worshipped or venerated generally as Africans without considering divergent ecological differences in the belief to various spiritual beings by different people of divergent geographical settings. For example, the *Ala/Ani* deity is particularly recognized by the Igbo people of the South East only. *Ala/Ani* deity can be recognized but can never be worship outside Igbo land. More so, the deity is only worshipped in Igbo land and recognized by the Igbo people of the South East, Nigeria. Again, every African environment perceives other spirits, deities, divinities, etcetera as intermediaries to the Supreme Being/God. Therefore, their belief system is focused on the Supreme God (Creator God) *Chukwuokike* in Igbo language. The paper aims at addressing the problem associated with centralizing African peoples' spiritual ecology without serious attention to independent environmental attachment to particular spiritual being, with special interest on the *Ala/Ani* deity as a deity specifically recognized by the Igbo people, and installed or worshipped only in Igbo ecological settings. It is found in this research, that other continents, Africans, Nigerians, ethnicities, etcetera can be aware of the *Ala/Ani* deity, but it is worshipped specifically in Igboland, and recognized or regarded by the Igbo alone as their environmental deity and spirituality. It is therefore recommended among other things that the Igbo particularly the Igbo traditional religious worshippers should always be proud to express the relevance of the *Ala/Ani* deity wherever

they go even though it is only worshipped in Igbo land. They should always alert the younger generation on the link between the *Ala/Ani* deity and Igbo culture and tradition which influences the name given to culture by the Igbo as *Omenani/Omenala* and tradition as *Odinani/Odinala*. The paper uses historical approach or methodology. Data were collected from both primary sources, basically, through oral interview, and secondary sources, for example, text books, journals, internet materials, etcetera.

Conceptualization of Terms

The terms that are given some explanations are *Ala/Ani*, African/Igbo Traditional Religion, Igbo, and Ecology. The name *Ala/Ani* is a word that is traceable to Igbo origin. It is an Igbo language which could be translated in English language as “Land” or “Earth”. The spiritual regard given to Land or Earth in the Igbo ecology gave rise to idea of divinizing the Land/Earth - *Ala/Ani* (in Igbo language) with a peculiar divine significance that it forms one of the major divinities worshipped by the Igbo people. (Ugwu, 2004 p.39) explains thus:

There are different categories of divinities. First among the list are the primordial or arch divinities. They are believed to be the divinities of heaven since they were with the Supreme Being from the creation of the universe, and they usually participated in the creative work. Their origin are unknown. These include: (a) Earth goddess – *Ala* (b) Sun-god – *Anyanwu*, (c) *Orisa – nla* – the Yoruba god of purity. Other divinities are categorized into natural and human forms.

In the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria, ecological zone, the *Ala/Ani* is highly placed alongside the Sun-god i.e. *Anyanwu* in Igbo language. For the Yoruba as explained by Ugwu above, the *Orisa-nla* is peculiar to the Yoruba ecological zone in the highest rating order of divinities at least in Nigeria. But the interest of this paper is on *Ala/Ani* divinity. (Onah, 2004 p.78) discusses divinity thus:

They are believed of be those spiritual beings which exist but owe their existence to the Supreme Being, or at least having been caused to exist. In most of the cases they are non-human spirits; nevertheless, some powerful ancestors whose cults have been efficacious have been deified such are regarded as deified ancestors. These ancestors are connotatively referred to as hero gods as distinct from nature gods which can emanate or take stock from/in natural phenomena.

Divinity/deity is a spiritual concept that places spiritual status to being higher than man. African Traditional Religion has been defined by many scholars in the field. (Awolalu, 1976 p.275) defines African traditional religion as:

... the indigenous religion of the Africans. It is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of present generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a

religion that Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it. This is a religion that has no written literature, yet, it is “written” everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the people's myths, folktales... it is a religion whose historical founder is neither known nor worshipped...

In explaining Igbo Traditional Religion, (Ekwunife, 2003 p.1) in a similar vein defines Igbo traditional religion as:

Those living institutionalized religious beliefs and practices which are rooted in the past Igbo religious culture; a religion that was transmitted to the present overt and covert votaries by successive Igbo forebears mainly through oral traditions (myths and folktales songs and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, pithy sayings and names) sacred institutions like sacred specialists and persons, initiation rites, festivals, sacred spaces and objects and religious works of art; a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new religious experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities.

The definitions given to African cum Igbo traditional religion agree to the fact that it is indigenous religion own by Africans/Igbo. The religion is neither foreign nor imported. Igbo as part of the concepts given explanations in this research is an ethnic group in Nigeria. They are the major settlers in the South-East geo political region. (Nwankwo, 2007 p.1) identifies the Igbo thus:

The Igbo group occupies the South eastern triangle of the modern Nigerian nation. They constitute one of the three single largest cultural group in Nigeria. The other two of the West. Their land is located roughly between latitude 5 and 7 degrees north of the equator, and longitude 6 and 8 degrees east of the Greenwich. As the dominant culture group in the East, they inhabit the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. They equally constitute sizeable portions of Delta and Rivers States with strong spilt over in Edo and Kogi states.

This is exactly the ecological coverage of the Igbo people of Nigeria. Ecology could be viewed as both geographical and biological terms. That means that it deals with the study of living organisms and their physical environment. (Haekel, 1904 p.1) defines ecology as: “The scientific study of the processes influencing the distribution and abundance of organisms, the interactions among organisms, and the interactions between organisms and the transformation and flux of energy and matter”. Therefore, ecological spirituality of the *Ala* of the Igbo of South East deals with how the spiritual relationship attached to *Ala* by the Igbo people of the zone influences their interaction within their environment.

Structure of *Ala/Ani* Divinity among the Igbo of the South East, Nigeria

In African traditional religion, five basic belief systems form its structure. They include: the belief in God (the Supreme Being – Supernatural Almighty), the belief in divinities, the belief in spirits, the belief in ancestors, and the belief in magic and medicine. On the belief in God, African traditional religionists make a clear identification and attributes to the highest spiritual personality to Him (God) obviously in the names ascribed or accorded to Him by Africans., (Ugwu, 2004 p.32), points that: “The principal God of the Igbo is “*Chineke*”, or “*Chukwu*”. The first means the Creator God while the second means Great God. Among the Nsukka people, the name “*Ezechitoke*” is frequently used for the Supreme Being. It means the King Spirit that is the Creator”. As pointed by Ugwu, the people of the Western part of the Igbo land especially the Agbaja and Anambra neighbours call Him “*Ezechukwu Okike Obioma*”. It equally means, the King, Creator and Kind-hearted Spirit. In African ecological environment, different cultural groups and settings call Him different names. For example, the Yoruba call Him “*Olodumare*”, the Tiv call Him “*Aondo*”, we hear such names as “*Ngetwo*” given to Him by the people of Sierra Leone, etcetera. Theophoric names given to Africans portray the belief in God – the Supreme Being. For the Igbo, such names are: “*Chukwuagozie*” – God has blessed, “*Chukwuebuka*” – God is great, “*Chiamaka*” – God is too good, etcetera. (Gbenda, 1997 p.28) adds that God is expressed metaphorically in anthropomorphic terms thus: “God as father, God as Mother e.g. Matriarchal societies like Ovambo, Southern Nuba, etcetera, conceive or speak of God as mother – God as having big eyes that see everything. God as having large ears that hear everything, God as King”. Different people from various African ecosystem perceive God as Supreme Being.

The next in the structural order of African traditional belief system is, the belief in divinities. African religious adherents believe that there is invisible world occupied by the Supreme Being and His subordinating spiritual agents like divinities, spirits, etcetera. Divinities share the qualities of the Supreme Being as the emissaries of God. This is an equivalent of John 14:9 which states thus: “Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how says thou then, shew us the Father”. In this part of the bible, Jesus stresses that He shares close relevance and status with God the Father. More so, they are in the precision of God the Holy Spirit, but in African traditional religion, there are numerous spirits associated with and to the Supreme Being/God. It is in this belief in divinities that the major variable and essence of this paper is centred. The divinities are categorized into major and minor divinities. Among the most popular divinities at least in Nigerian traditional religious worshippers or adherents' psyche are: the Earth goddess – *Ala*, Sun-god – *Anyanwu*, and *Orisa-nla* – Yoruba god of purity. These divinities are graded as major divinities because they are in most cases believed to be divinities of heaven since they were with the Supreme Being from the creation and also participated in the creative work (Ugwu, 2004 p.16). This means that they assume divine creation status as creation associates of the Supreme Being (God). Other divinities which are taken as associated to natural and human forms are the next category of divinities. While nature divinities are attached to natural objects and forces, the heroes/heroines, etcetera, are those in human form. Nature spirits include: *Efa*, the market days, gods of agricultural products, etcetera.

There is also the belief in spirits. The categories of spirits in African traditional religion are: ghost spirits, *Ogbanje*, (born-to-die), spirits of witches and wizards, etcetera. The Africans believe in ancestors and ancestresses. They form the fourth structure of African traditional religion. The people call them the “living dead”. It is believed that African dead forebears who lived worthy and successful lives and were honoured with befitting burial and funeral are qualified to be accorded the honour as ancestors and ancestresses. This class of dead people are believed to be alive in the land of the living, and protect the interests and welfare of their living relations on the physical world from the spiritual world. The last but not the least, is the belief in magic and medicine. For Africans, everything in the world, has its religious interpretation(s). Therefore, the physical is inseparable from the spiritual. (Onunwa, 1990 p.80) expresses that:

Both the spiritual and physical realms of the universe are believed to work in a consistent harmony and are subject to an ordered systems and rhythm... the whole essence of man's religious rituals is to keep the system in a consistent harmony (to maintain the *balance*). It is in magic and medicine that the missing part of the complex whole (that is religious) which keeps the system in consistent harmony is consummated.

The belief in magic and medicine is concentrated on the conviction that there are pivotal spiritual forces or supernatural powers in the world that can be tapped and manipulated or controlled by man to maintain the *balance* in the system.

The structure of *Ala* or *Ani* divinity of the Igbo of the South East Nigerian ecological setting is built with mainly, these structural components of the African traditional religion. Most of these components if not all of them are installed in the shrine of earth goddess(es) in Igbo land. Since every supernatural or spiritual components of African/Igbo traditional religion operates in association or relationship with one another, the *Ala* or *Ani* deity or divinity is supported with other spiritual allies. They include: Supreme God – *Chukwuokike*, the Sun god – *Onu-anyanwu*, Ancestral spirit – *Ndichie/Ndihe*, and the spirit of Magic and Medicine – *Agwu* spirit. Each of these structural components of *Ala* or *Ani* has special or peculiar roles or status it plays or acquires. Therefore, *Ala* or *Ani* divinity defines the paramount to its existence and efficacy.

The *Ala* or *Ani* divinity of the Igbo is principally honoured in a special shrine most often owned by the entire village. It is always difficult to have more than one earth goddess – *Ala* divinity in a village in Igbo land. Chief Priest Nwannebuiké Udeh (personal communication, 9 December, 2020) expressed the surprises he witnessed in his emergence as the present Chief Priest of Aniaka Umuaji Aguobu-Owa Village earth goddess. He explained that series of divinations were done within and outside the community and the Local Government Area of Aguobu-Owa community and Ezeagu Local Government Area of Enugu State respectively by more than fourteen diviners. Yet, it consistently fell on him amidst six contestants even though he was not contesting. As a driver with his own registered bus with ENTRACO – Enugu State Transport Company, he was very much comfortable with his daily returns, and was not interested in coming back home to serve as a Chief Priest to any deity or otherwise. He explained that after emerging as the Chief Priest of Aniaka Umuaji Aguobu-Owa Earth goddess, he continued with his transport business, but the deity from divination and belief kept

disturbing his life by way of unhealthy living and minor accidents. But at a time, he said, he decided to obey the revelations of the divination and came down home to reside and take care of the divinity. Afterward, in an interval of six months, worshippers from far and near started coming to the shrine in search of solutions for their troubling problems and challenges. At the eighth month, a worshipper donated a brand new CG motorcycle to him in appreciation to the intervention the Aniaka earth goddess has made to his decades family problem. Mr. Celestine Agiya, one of the messengers of the Aniaka Umuaji Aguobu-Owa Earth goddess (personal communication, 29 December, 2020) confirmed what the Chief Priest attested but added that in a year and four months, another worshipper from a far has given the Chief Priest a 4 Runner Jeep in appreciation to the benevolence of the earth goddess *Ala/Ani* in his business. Mr. Kenneth Eneje (personal communication, 20 January, 2021) also adds that new structure/building is being raised in the shrine by a benefitted worshipper. It is worthy to note here that in most communities or villages in Igboland, Chief Priests of most earth goddesses *Ala/Ani* always hail from a particular kindred or family lineage. Though, for the case of Aniaka Umuaji Aguobu-Owa, in occasion of vacancy (that is at the death of the presiding Chief Priest), people from other kindreds or family lineages do contest, but none has succeeded in succeeding the office in the process of real divination.

In continuation with the structure of the *Ala* divinity, it is believed in Igbo land, that the physical cannot be separated from the spiritual. Therefore, human beings in their physical environment face a lot of problems and challenges. It could be issues with economy, politics or governance, social activities, health, etcetera. It is on this basis that the Earth goddess – *Ala/Ani* is surrounded with both sun-god *Anyanwu* divinity, the Supreme God representative – *Chukwuokike*, Ancestors spirit – *Ndichie/Ndihe* and the spirit of Magic and Medicine/divination (*Agwu*) are installed in the *Ala* shrine in most Igbo communities. These spirit beings have their individual mini shrines installed in the premises of the *Ala* deity. The paraphrenia used by the *Ala* divinity around Igboland include: consecrated *Ofo* – *Detarium Microcarpa*, *Ogu* (*Elaeis Guieensis* – That is the ritualized fresh palm frond, stones, main wooden gong – *Ikoru/Okpoto*, minor wooden gong-*ekwe*, metal gong-*ogene*, chairs, clothes, animal skulls, animal tails, traditional caps – *Okpu* – *Onunwanze*, traditional flutes, pottery materials, etcetera. Presently, the food and animals acceptable for sacrifices and worship in Earth goddesses – *Ala* shrines among the Igbo include: local or semi local breed cock or hen. Broiler is not acceptable Mr. Cletus Okolomma (personal communication 7 September, 2013). Yam (*Dioscrea*) is mainly used (not water – yam *Mbana*), *Inu/Ighu*, in place of cassava products, palm wine *Nkwu-enu* not raffia wine (*Ngwo*), beer can be used; malt and soft drinks are not acceptable. Mr. Christopher Okechi (personal communication, 2 June, 2021) states that goats are acceptable, ram, and cow. In the words of Mr. Christopher, sheep is not acceptable for sacrifice at the *Ala/Ani* shrine, offering and worship in the shrines of *Ala* divinity are virtual round South-East traditional religious settings. In most cases, *Ala* – Earth goddess have special animal for example, vulture – *Neophronmonachus* that delivers its messages to individuals, families, villages, communities. *Ala* also has diviners and foot (human) messengers. Let us look at the roles of the *Ala* and other spiritual beings surrounding the *Ala* – Earth goddess structure.

Roles of *Ala* – Earth Goddess and Other Spirit Beings in Its Shrine

Earth goddess – *Ala* services and handles divergent human, environmental as well as societal problems and challenges. People approach the divinity on occasions of festivities death, sickness, political issues, wealth/economy, and talent, societal disorder (plague, draught, etcetera) – wars and conflicts, spiritual challenges, title-taking etcetera. On the social and festival functions of earth goddess – *Ala* among the Nsukka, Northern – Igbo ecology is examined by (Onah, 2004 p.83) as it affects divinity festival of *Anumuje* of Adani people thus:

By the beginning of planting season, usually a date chosen in April, a popular period of festival is devoted in honour of the goddess. It is referred to as the *Anumuje* festival. It may be time and space consuming to enumerate all that is involved economically and socially during the feast. But suffice it to know that 'married daughters' of Adani are expected to come home for the feast. The feast is also a way of reminding the people of the role of *Anumuje* as mother, source of water, source of survival in hard times and source of fertility both for human beings and crops.

Anumuje is an *Ala*-Earthgoddess divinity among Adani people of the Northern Igbo ecological area. She is a mother-goddess acknowledged by the people for her roles as source of certain means of sustainability for the people. (Ekwunife, 2003 p.43) also emphasizes on the rituals observed by the Aguleri people of Anambra State at the appearance of every moon in the Igbo thirteen months lunar/annual calendar. The *Ala* divinity is consulted in these moon appearances for confirmations.

On occasions of draught and other social calamities, the *Ala* divinity is normally approached for solution. People also visit the *Ala* shrines on cases of premature and abnormal deaths in the view of Mr. Thomas Umeh (personal communication, 7th March, 2021). The *Ala* divinity is always consulted during political contest. Some politicians visit Chief Priests of *Ala* divinity to know their fate. During political crisis *Ala* deity can be approached to resolve issues between opponents. *Ala* deity is offered sacrifices for successful title taking. On economic/wealth and destiny complications, rituals and sacrifices can be offered to the '*Ala*' for stability. During health challenges, while medication is ongoing, *Ala* deity is always committed with the role of adjusting the spiritual realm to stabilize the bodily or physical disorder. These functions of *Ala* divinity are actualized on the principle of division of labour among the mini deities' shrines built in the *Ala* shrine.

When problems relating to health occur, the '*agwu*'-spirit of magic, medicine and divination arises to its office. (Madu, 1997 p.135) asserts that: "There is equally the recognition of the power of magic and medicine. In magic, man manipulates the spirit beings for his advantages and can also use magical medicine to change the cause of events. It is pertinent to emphasize here, that independent medicine, magic, and divination experts as herbalists, magician's diviners, and medicines-men (*dibias*) have their own '*agwu*' installed for them in their various homes. These people operate in both negative and positive ways, but it is the *Ala* divinity's mini shrine for *agwu*'s spirit that is assigned to define and punish or bless traditional medical and magical practitioners. (Asiegbu, 2006 p.25) observes thus:

The role of the *dibia* in this realm requires expertise. Further, the possibility of a person discharging effectively the numerous functions of *dibia* institution has given rise to the confusion in the terms and functions of the different kinds of *dibia*. As a result, we shall distinguish between the various types of *dibia*. No clear-cut boundary may, however, be drawn because their functions overlap. It is worth noting that however reputable a *dibia* may be, the effectiveness of his services depends on several factors: (1) *Chukwu*- the chief source of life....

The mini shrine installed for God-*Chukwu-Chukwuokike* at the *Ala* divinity shrine in collaboration with the *agwu* spirit shrine determine the effectiveness of that *dibia*'s magical or medicine. Mume in (Madu, 2004 p.27) concludes that: "... each specialized in different cures, ranging from physical cures to mystical ones, one can appreciate the fact that in Igbo Religion, there is a nexus between divination, healing by the use of herbal medicine depending on the type of sickness, and the ritual healing through the use of sacrifice". Some of these ritual healings are performed and influenced by the *Ala* divinity or deity. (Adibe, 2006 p.32) stresses thus:

Ala deity and ancestors worship play important role in medicine preparation. The *Ala* deity is invoked in some occasions as the deity who make the growth of medicine possible. But much often the particular deity whose potency is sought is given the invocation.

The ancestors are called upon as the original producers and inventors of medicines. *Ogwu* is believed to be handed over from ancestral knowledge and skill (Onwuejeogwu, 1997 p.81) in (Adibe, 2006 p.32). Adibe and Onwuejeogwu make it clear that both *Ala* divinity or deity, the *agwu* /*ogwu* spirit and the ancestral spirit unite or collaborate in dispensing and tackling health and health related issues.

Among the Igbo, economic life is not mere human search to be wealthy. (Adibe, 2008 p.235), (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979 p.92-94) in (Adibe, 2008 p.235) observe thus:

The Igbo people regards *Ala* divinity as a mother and a goddess is very close to their existence and through whom all they possess are possible. Without her gifts in the Igbo belief system, all would be lost. Thus sacrifices are offered to her before planting, at the first fruits and at the full harvest...

Adibe emphasizes on the view of Awolalu and Doparmu that they noted the priest of *Ala*, that is *Ezeala* plays a major role during communal worship of *Ala*, and during yam festivals. It is worthy to stress here that new yam festival appears to be the most central festival, and the *Ala* divinity receives great consent and sacrifices during, before and after the new yam festival in Igboland. Apart from the new yam festival there are also many traditional festivals in different parts of Igboland in which the *Ala* divinity is offered sacrifices. (Adibe, 2008 p.135) views thus:

The priest of *Amadioha* also has some roles to play in Igbo economic life as *Amadioha* divinity is believed to send rain and provides fertility for all economic advancement. The Igbo people believe that the devotees of *Agwu* deity are enriched by him... Hence, it is the divinity of the Igbo artist, wood sculptors, and blacksmiths. All Igbo craftsmanship like singing, dancing and *dibias*, and diviners of all grades have *Agwu* as their patron deity. *Agwu* deity is a deity of Igbo professionalism. Thus Igbo people give unreserved homage to *Ala*, *Amadioha*, and *Agwu* as sources of their wealth.

It is important to understand here, that even though the *agwu* deity is concerned with magic, medicine and divination, it is also believed among the Igbo of South East ecological Zone that *agwu* is a spirit that can cause and harmonize mental disorder. Therefore, it comes into play in the economic wellbeing; in the sense that it organizes human psychology to enable him attain the intelligence that would assist him in acquisition of wealth. More so, *Amadioha* is partner to *Anyanwu*-Sun-god because of their celestial unity. They are incharge of rain sun, moon, thunder etcetera, which are necessarily important to rainmakers for their professional engagements. Despite their economic roles, they collaboratively play some other roles in the traditional Igbo man's life.

Generally, *Ala* deity plays socio-religious role. In ordinary times, the *Ala* divinity is worshipped for continuous communication with the Supreme Being. Mr. Osmund Anike (personal Communication, 9 February, 2021) explained that in Igbo traditional ecosystem, noises of certain animals at certain days and times of the day always call for religious/spiritual enquiry into the unseen world. In matters of these nature families within the ecological vicinities make sure they confirm the omen of such animals' or animal's appearance(s). In this case, it is always the diviner of the *Ala* divinity that is assigned to confirm the cause(s) for the appearance(s) of such animal(s). In a very normal circumstance where the society do not witness any serious problem or challenges for a whole year, the community calls for celebrations and thanksgiving to God at the *Ala* deity's shrine while individual adherents go to their various homes and extend the same celebration. These religious activities take off from earth-goddess' shrine to keep the people's relationship with God unstained. The normal religious roles of the *Ala* deity are mainly directed to the *Chukwuokike* and ancestral mini-shrines in the earth goddess' main shrine. In marriage, war, etcetera, the *Ofo* of the earth goddess is ritualized for confirmation of the marriage, and war victory respectively. At war, some communities carry the *Ofo/Ikenga* of the earth goddess- *Ala* to the war front for victory. In fact, the religious history of the Igbo of South-East shows that *Ala*-earthgoddess divinity is immensely taken to a very great esteem, though the nature of this research would not permit a well-developed historical and intensive record of *Ala* deity in the Igbo eco-spirituality. Therefore, we pause here for recommendations and conclusion.

Recommendations

1. Other foreign religions (Christianity and Islam) in Igbo environment do not regard the African traditional religion let alone the earthgoddess-*Ala*. Having seen the roles and values attached to *Ala* deity, the Igbo Christians and others should stop condemning this belief system.
2. Igbo religious objects should be preserved for historical importance.
3. The Igbo traditional worshippers should always be proud of *Ala* and their religion.
4. Reasonable number of the young generation of Igbo environment should be encouraged to practice and promote traditional regard for *Ala* and Igbo traditional religion.
5. The moral education and value built in Igbo belief system in the worship of *Ala* should be promoted.

Conclusion

The existence of *Ala* divinity is peculiar and special for the people of the South –East ecological environment. The divinity is always owned and installed under a village or community's custody. The divinity has sophisticated structural being that accommodates other spirits including the representative spirit of the Supreme Being-*Chukwuokike*.

The *Ala* divinity is believed to undertake a lot of functions for the Igbo and even beyond. Her roles range from religious importance to social, political, economic, health, etcetera. *Ala* deity has historical value to the people that the ancestors and ancestress who died centuries ago assume enviable spiritual status associated to the *Ala* shrine. In fact, there are tendencies that these present and future generations of Igboland will promote the belief in *Ala* beyond the present state of the divinity.

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Interview

1. Chief Priest Nwannebuik Udeh, Enugu State, Chief Priest, 50 years, 9/12/2020
2. Mr. Celestine Agiya, Enugu State, Farmer/Spiritual Messenger, 61 years, 29/12/2020
3. Mr. Kenneth Eneje, Enugu State, Miner, 50 years, 20/1/2021
4. Cletus Okolomma, Anambra State, farmer, 71 years 7/9/2013
5. Mr. Christopher Okechi, Abia State, Masson, 51 years, 2/6/2021
6. Mr. Osmund Anieke, Anambra State, Carpenter, 70 years, 9/2/2021
7. Mr. Thomas Umeh, Ebony State, farmer. 76 years 7/3/2021