1. **Introduction**

The Igbos have a traditional belief system which is the sum –total of what they belief in, how they live their lives and their collective behavior and attitude towards life. It is by this belief and culture that the Igbos are identified among community of ethnic group all over the world. The ‘Igbo’ however, consists of both a language and the group of who speak this language .The people work collectively together to preserve their culture and traditions.

In the course of this paper, we are going to answer these questions what is Chukwu? using the traditional myth of the Igbo traditional conception of *Chukwu*, which relates their religious. And afterwards, we shall put these findings in a logical manner to justify them. Some words may be used interchangeably owing to the Igbo translation and its English equivalence.

1. **The Nature and Existence of God in Igbo Tradition**

Igbo is one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria; the Igbos are located at the southeast of Nigeria, to say the least among them, they are one of the most religious tribes in Nigeria. In the traditional Igbo religion known as *odinala*, it is believed that the universe is divided into four major parts, thus they have *okike*, *arushi, mmuo* and *uwa*.[[1]](#footnote-2)

They believe in the all-powerful and supreme being known as *Chukwu* (Great God) who created everything and through whom all things come. Everything on earth and outside the earth is in his power, and he controls them all. He sends the rain to earth, makes the trees and other plants to grow and bear fruits. They have different names they give to the creator; *Chukwu,* *Chineke, Oseburuwa. Chukwu* and *Chineke* are composed of the word chi and an adjective to qualify it. *Chi-ukwu* and *chi-neke*, *Oseburuwa*.[[2]](#footnote-3) He is represented by some cosmic features like the sun. They believe that the sun has some major attributes of *Chukwu. Anyanwu* as they call it (sun) is the source of power and energy; through its radiant light it reveals everything.

The Igbo accord great respect and reverence to the supreme God whom they feel unworthy to approach directly and thus leading to the believe of the minor gods called *chi.* They believe that these gods or deities have been commissioned by the Great God to carry their prayers to him and return his (God’s) blessings to them. These gods are also called *arushi.* They are given due reverence and worship as gods and there are many minor deities in the traditional Igbo religion. If any deity the numerous ones becomes too violent, it will be destroyed through performance of some rituals which will protect the community aganist the wrath of the gods after its destruction.

1. **THE CONCEPT OF CHUKWU**

Among the Igbo’s, *chukwu* is the source of all beings, Iwagwu calls it the ‘essence of being, all things were made through ‘*chukwu’* and without *chukwu* was made nothing. But at the heart and nerve centre of this, is *chukwu* who is the centre and nucleus of the fundamental universal substance and they strongly believe that everything comes from God and his major participation is united through the measure of *Chi* in the being of God.

The Igbo’s strongly believe that ‘*chukwu*’ is greater than all the spirits and beings both visible and invisible. Various names were attributed to *chukwu* which reflected the level of faith and confidence they have in him. For instance, *chukwu* which is a short form of *chi-ukwu* implies ‘Great god’ while *chineke* means ‘the god that creates’. They do not believe that anyone can accurately describe *chukwu* or make his perfect image that is why in the eastern part there is no of Nigeria were Igbos are not in their numbers ,shrine were the actual image of *chukwu* is carved or painted. However, in Igbo traditional religious system, it is a taboo to attempt providing an image of *chukwu*.

Therefore, *chi-ukwu* in the original Igbo religious thought was not conceived in the white man’s description of the west African high Gods as ‘*deus remotus’* or ‘*abconditus*’ he is mostly seen as the comprehensive depth of the universe, whereby he was both eminent and transcendent at the same time, he is above all the supreme being who holds and sustains the entire universe.

Originally, this kind of henotheistic conception of *chukwu* is vague that is why there is no specific image, shrine nor feast dedicated to him. But as omnipresent, he is seen and worshipped through various recognizable forms. Thus, despite the lack of a unified conceptual representation of *chukwu,* his ominous and ubiquitous nature still looms large in the people’s daily existence.

He is seen as the Lord who called all things into existence; man, earth and the fullness thereof. He is the ruler of the universe, things that transpire in life happened only with his permission. *Chukwu* holds together the web of all relationships between man and his environment. He is viewed as the ultimate source of the lesser spirits power and of the human beings; living and dead. The traditional conception of chukwu is overwhelming such that a traditional Igbo man finds it necessary to invoke his chi as the day unfolds.

The traditional Igbo finds it convenient to say their daily prayers, usually thanksgiving, confession of innocence (*Iju ogu*) at dawning of the day. They also name their children using the name *chukwu* because of their strong believe. Such names are; *chukwuebuka* (God is great), *chukwuemeka* (God does good things), *chukwuma* (God knows), *chukwukadibia* (God is bigger than native doctors) etc. The final ‘recipient’ of every traditional prayer is *chukwu* himself hence the conceptual vagueness could only be as a result of the consequence of religious pragmatism.

1. **THE NATURE OF CHUKWU (GOD) IN IGBO ONTOLOGY**

The Igbo’s radically rejected dualism, however, different, opposite or contradictory call things both mind and matter, living and non-living, positive and negative, were eventually reducible to only one principle. Opposites are reducible to each other and ultimately to the one basic substance. Thus, the aboriginal Igbos accepted all things. They subjected everything to the domain of one principle *chukwu*.

Igbo religious belief is sublimed to prayer which is repeated so many times at dawn, with the breaking of kola. The kola symbolizes all that is good in the earth; the Igbo man blesses the kola by inviting *chukwu* and the spirit to partake in it and then asks for blessings, such as good health, wealth, children, peace and peaceful co-existence with his neighbors.

Hence, the Igbo’s are not materialists. They would not explain issues with matters. The Igbo man’s position is contrary to David Hume’s presuppositions. Hume denied efficient causality from the point of view that it is ambience of experience and matter. However, the Igbo’s do not only believe in the existence of the spirit they also made matter to be dependent on the spirit. In other words, the Igbos accord ultimate legitimacy, causality and lordship to spirit over the material.

Moreover, notwithstanding the variety and multiplicity in the universe, the Igbo’s reduced all things to one spiritual substance ‘*chukwu*’ indicating that they are philosophical monists. They refuse to assign a separate ultimate cause to evil since they realize that evil is a privation of God, an imperfection, a non-entity, the absence of good or being. For them evil does require a cause. It is the Christians (not the fore fathers) that elevated *Ekwensu* (minor spirit of Igbo Spiritology) to the rank of anti-god or Satan.

The Igbo’s believe in only one God and for them he is not ‘*primus interpares’* (first among equals). He is transcendent {*chukwu*} he is the creator (*chineke*) he is always referred to by means of singular pronoun and verbs (*obasi di elu*) Great God (*gi bu ike* ) you are our strength, (*chukwu nna*) God the father, (bia were oji) come and take kola . He is the principle of ontological unity in the universe.

The nature of God in Igbo ontology is ‘*monopolytheism*’ that is ‘one and many’. The one is ultimate, a unifying factor among the many gods. *Chukwu*’s nature is absolute namely the principles of absoluteness, creation and continued existence and dependence of the many gods that are subordinates and mediators, designated to serve various in their areas of authority, power and influence.

This concept is indeed unique to the Igbo, it differs essentially from the Judeo-Christian and Islamic thoughts/categories of pure monotheism or polytheism. Monopolytheism or one God that is served by many gods disapproves of the foreign nature of the concept of the one ultimate being in Igbo ontology. It is traditional or natural and is the Igbo’s brand of theism.

1. **MUO (SPIRIT) A SPIRITUAL BEING IN IGBO METAPHYSICAL WORLD**

The Igbos is like other Africans traditional belief system, recognize the existence of the supreme being whom they call *Chukwu* ( the greater chi) or *‘chineke’* or *Ezechitoke* (the God of creation) or *Osebuluwa (*God, carrier of the world). Below *chukwu,* the Igbos also acknowledge the fact that this greatest chi has at his service, many ministering spirits whose sole business is to fulfill his commands. Thus, in the invisible world of the Igbos, they have so many spiritual beings of different qualities and roles such as; *Amadioha* (Thunder god), *Igwe* (sky god), *Anyanwu* (sun god), *Ala* (earth goddess), *Amosu* (witches or wizards), *Ekwensu* (devil), *Ogwu* (mystical and magical forces), *Akawgheli* (disgruntled dead men), *Ogbanje* (spirit born to die), *Ndi ichie* (living dead or ancestors) etc.…. These and many more spirits falls within the category of spirits in Igbo ontology. The Muo (spirits category) also falls into three sub categories which are; chukwu (greatest being), Muo (non-human spirits), and Ndi muo (Human spirits). These are spirits strictly speaking whether human or non-human because they have no bodily form permanently associated with them. Although they may have a shadowy bodily form, yet they assume different shape such as; human, animals, and plants etc. but without any bodily forms permanently attached to them.

Spirits such as God, other non-human and human that populate the invisible world of the Igbo’s are arranged in their hierarchical order as; (i).Uluchi (Bad death) (ii).Ndi ichie (living dead) (iii).Ogwu (magical powers) (iv). Ekwensu (devil) (v).Chi (personal god) (vi).Chukwu (greatest chi). Chukwu is the ultimate, the absolute and there is none like him in the hierarchy of beings, he is not within the rank and file of the divinities or deities or gods. He stays alone in his exclusive domain Eluigwe (Heavens) but he is also everywhere in the world.

**6. CONCLUSION**

It is quite complicated to clarify a particular belief of people in a cognitive manner. Nevertheless, this essay has in a concise way exposed the major beliefs of the ancient Igbo with regard to the concept of *chukwu*. Generally, the belief system of the Igbo is anthropocentric and this influences most of their beliefs.

In this paper, we have been able to achieve our said aim of employing some traditional myths of the Igbos to be able to expose their idea of *chukwu.*  And afterword, assess their belief with that of the eastern philosophers like Iwuagwu to achieve a rational justification of their belief.

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1. “Igbo People” *The free Encyclopedia,*

   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igbo\_people (26 Oct. 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Cf. Rev. Fr. C. P. Ohia, *Causality in David Hume, Immanuel Kant & Igbo Metaphysics* (Owerri: Springfield Publishers Ltd. 2004P. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)