



OMENANI AND THE ETHICS OF JUSTICE: A THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF VALUE EROSION AND SOCIO-POLITICAL AGENCY AMONG THE MODERN IGBO

Charles Amobi Ekweozor, PhD

Institution: Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS)
surge_geo@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

*The contemporary Igbo society faces an existential crisis characterized by the erosion of core cultural values and a diminishing socio-political influence within the Nigerian state. This study posits that this decline is rooted in a fragmented understanding of traditional Igbo religio-cultural institutions and cosmologies. This research aims to facilitate a "justice-consciousness" reawakening, arguing that the resilience of pre-colonial Igbo society was predicated on cosmological principles that positioned justice as the central ontological framework. Employing a **methodology** that integrates theological analysis with a "gap approach," the paper critiques the divergence between ancestral value constructs and modern perceptions. By examining the principles of creation and human agency through a biblical lens, the study identifies a significant discontinuity in value transmission. The **results** suggest that reclaiming the ancient concept of justice—rooted in Omenani—and synthesizing it with compatible theological frameworks is essential for restoring Igbo moral integrity and collective agency.*

Keywords: Igbo Cosmology, Omenani (Traditional Laws/Customs), Justice Consciousness, Religio-cultural Institutions, Theological Ethics, Value Erosion, Socio-political Agency, Continuity and Discontinuity

Introduction

The nexus between cosmological belief and socio-political stability is a defining feature of the Igbo civilization. Historically, the Igbo worldview was governed by a rigorous sense of justice derived from *Omenani*—the traditional body of customs, laws, and ethical norms inextricably linked to the land (*ala*), the ancestors, and the divine order (*Chukwu* and the pantheon of spirits). *Omenani* was not merely a legal code but a living cosmological framework that positioned justice (*ikwunzi* or equitable balance) as the central ontological principle sustaining individual conduct, communal harmony, and political order. Pre-colonial Igbo society demonstrated remarkable resilience and dynamism precisely because its institutions were anchored in this integrated religio-cultural cosmology, where moral violation disrupted both the human and spiritual realms, demanding restitution for the restoration of cosmic equilibrium.

In sharp contrast, contemporary Igbo society faces a profound existential crisis marked by the erosion of these core cultural values and a diminishing socio-political influence within the Nigerian state. What was once a people renowned for entrepreneurial vigor, republican ethos, and collective agency now contends with value disorientation, leadership failures, and fragmented identity. This paper argues that the current “dwindling fortunes” of the Igbo are not merely political accidents or outcomes



of external marginalization, but are symptomatic of a deeper theological and cultural amnesia. The decline is rooted in a fragmented understanding and transmission of traditional Igbo religio-cultural institutions and cosmologies. Modern perceptions have drifted significantly from ancestral value constructs, resulting in a discontinuity that undermines moral integrity and weakens collective socio-political agency.

This study employs a theological analysis integrated with a “gap approach” to critique the divergence between ancient and contemporary Igbo ethical frameworks. By examining principles of creation, human agency, and moral order through a dual lens of Igbo cosmology and biblical theology, it illuminates both continuities and significant discontinuities in value transmission. The biblical lens proves particularly illuminating, as it shares with *Omenani* an emphasis on justice as foundational to created order, covenantal responsibility, and communal flourishing. Where Igbo traditional thought sees justice as maintaining harmony between *mmadu* (human), *ala* (land), the ancestors, and Chukwu Okike Abiama, Scripture frames justice within the character of God and the imago Dei, offering complementary resources for ethical renewal.

Central to this research is the facilitation of a “justice-consciousness” reawakening. The resilience of pre-colonial Igbo society was predicated on cosmological principles that made justice the heartbeat of social and political life. Reclaiming the ancient concept of justice rooted in *Omenani*, while synthesizing it with compatible theological frameworks, is therefore essential for restoring Igbo moral integrity and revitalizing collective agency. This is not a call for uncritical traditionalism or romanticization of the past, but a critical re-interrogation of Igbo institutions aimed at bridging the gap between ancestral wisdom and the demands of modern existence.

Ultimately, this theological appraisal seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on African development by demonstrating that sustainable socio-political advancement among the Igbo requires a conscious recovery of ethical foundations. Without such a recovery, efforts at political empowerment or economic resurgence will remain superficial. By rediscovering the moral and cosmological wells from which their forebears drew strength, modern Igbos can forge a renewed vision of society—one where *Omenani* and biblical ethics converge to produce a robust justice-consciousness capable of addressing contemporary challenges while honoring the sacred heritage of the past.

Origin of *Omenani*

The Igbo politico-religio-cultural institutions are shaped and defined by Igbo *Omenani*. *Omenani* does not only serve as the fulcrum of Igbo moral and ethical codes but it is a phenomenal item on which the Igbo worldview can be understood, determined, and recognized. *Omenani*’s influence in Igbo society goes beyond what one would say is an ancient philosophy, rather *Omenani* is that which defines how life is lived in Igbo society regardless of whether one is Christian or not. *Omenani*, therefore, is not just a traditionally conceived idea or philosophy of the ancient Igbos, is a philosophy whose elements have intrinsically become the basis of defining how life should be conducted and practised by the ancient Igbos even with the contemporary Igbos. Its acceptability in Igbo politico-



religio-cultural society is still strong even with the advent of Christianity in Igboland since 1846. Its survival is because some of its elements have the same biblical meanings, purposes, and concepts as could be found in Judeo-Christian religion and therefore it becomes difficult to be erased from the social lives of the Christians Igbos.

The origin of *Omenani* or *Omenala* is a concept that could be considered as old as the word Igbo. As some writers would say the Igbo are autochthonous to the land where they are found and so with the practice of *Omenani*. *Omenani* means drawn from the land. No record about it has been able to state when the idea behind *Omenani* was conceived or when the practice of *Omenani* actually began. But what we have been able to gather is that *Omenani* has lived with the Igbos to date, and ever since, it has served as the foundation of Igbo moral, religious, ethical, traditional, and social code of Law and Order.

Omenani, as we had earlier pointed out, is what defines who an Igbo man is, what guides his relationships with his fellow human beings and cosmic order. Many Igbo scholars, theologians, religious leaders, philosophers, historians, traditionalists, etc. have extensively written on the subject of *Omenani* from our findings none has been able to point out where the idea of *Omenani* may have begun or what may have influenced the Igbo minds to have to conceive such an idea or state categorically that this is the genesis of *Omenani*. Nevertheless, we are going to look at the word *Omenani* to see how the Igbo scholars, theologians, philosophers, etc. have described and explained *Omenani* from the Igbo cosmological worldview. Having discussed the background of *Omenani*, we can now review how some Igbo authors have defined, examined, and made their positions on the concept of Igbo *Omenani*. We shall begin by looking at the works of Uche Jude.

Jude in his work, states that in Igbo traditional religion, law, justice, and politics are inextricably bound and embedded in what is known as *Omenala* (*Omenani*). It is often referred to as a moral code. By this code, every Igbo is directed on how to behave in every aspect of life, encompassing civil, criminal, socio-economic, and religious laws. This moral code was passed down through the generations, but it was never written down. It was developed through custom and derived from the interpretations of those who hold the *Ofo*, the titled men (*nze* and *ozo*), the council of elders, the age-grades, and all those who provide *Umunna* leadership (Uche, 2016a).

Jude in his work gave a comprehensive scope of the content of Igbo *Omenala* or *Omenani* by mentioning some of the elements of the Igbo *Omenani*. He summed up his understanding of *Omenani* by that *Omenani* is the basis of Igbo moral, ethical, religious, and cultural code. By his definition, it goes to show how the knowledge of Igbo *Omenani* has impacted not only the Igbo minds but also has helped to shape the Igbo worldview. From Jude's description of *Omenani*, it is evident that life in Igbo society is governed by Igbo *Omenani*. His further explanation showed that every aspect of life in Igbo society, be it civil, criminal, economic, religious laws and other social orders are directly regulated by *Omenani*. *Omenani* gives a comprehensive picture and the scope of what constitutes the Igbo moral and ethical code. However, as comprehensive as Jude's scope of *Omenani* is, one would expect Jude to go some extra mile in educating his readers about what has helped to give strength and relevance to *Omenani* and why it has remained a valid source of instruction in Igbo society.

Edmund Ilogu writes "*Omenani* is derived from the goddess of *Ala* (*Ani*) and sanctioned by the ancestors, it is religious in nature, although it fulfils moral, social and cultural functions. Its hold on the society derives from the power of the goddess and the ancestors. Hence, the unquestioned obedience which the community gives to it" (Ilogu, 1974a).



Ilogu further states “No breach of *Omenani* goes unpunished. Traditions prescribe the various things that have to be done to take away the evil aspects of such breaches or else the Spirit of the ancestors and Ani will plague the society. *Omenani*, therefore, becomes the means by which traditional Igbo society ensures conformity and justice” (Ilogu, 1974b).

In the case of Ilogu’s definition of *Omenani*, he majorly focused on three phenomena; the earth goddess and land (*Ala* or *Ani*) and the ancestors. These three phenomenal elements cover both the spiritual and physical life of the traditional Igbo people. Its validity anchors on two phenomena that shape life in every traditional society; the spirit world and the physical world. The spiritual world comprises the divinity and the living spirit – the ancestors.

Land being the home of the ancestors and also an inheritance from them makes it sacred. Hence, obedience is required of those who are entrusted with it. However, much as Ilogu did not go further to explain how land came into existence in Igbo Cosmology and its relationship with the creator, he was able to point out what he considered as the strength and beauty of *Omenani* which has justice in its background. Because no society survives where there is no justice.

In the view of Nwala in *Omenani*, he writes thus “*Omenani* is a community enterprise. It refers to the Igbo attitude to life and their basic conceptions about nature, society, and life. It embraces the whole system of civilization of the Igbo theory and practice. It contains within itself principles for propagating and protecting the Igbo traditional way of life. Myths, rituals, initiation rites, education and the socialization of the young, and sanctions were the means of propagating and protecting traditional Igbo civilization” (Nwala, 1985a).

In E. N. Njaka’s view of *Omenani*, he notes that “Laws and Order are maintained because the ancestors so desire and *Oha* commands. And the ancestors desire law and order because Chukwu must have approved them” (Njaka, 1974).

Nwala in his definition was able to give clarity. *Omenani* is a philosophical conception of how the Igbo people understand the cosmos rather than from the popular myths that “*Omenani* is the product of the spirit.” His work has helped to demystify the spiritual aura that surrounds Igbo *Omenani* as a spiritual gift to the living. By this approach, some elements of *Omenani* that stand in conflict with the word of God can be expounded and modified.

In consideration of *Omenani*, we also engaged the work of Chieka Ifemesia. Ifemesia writes: “Literally, *Omenani* means acting in accordance with (the stipulations of) the land while *Iwu* means something decided, enacted or struck, *Odinani* (what inheres in the land) and *Odibendi* (what abides in a people’s homeland), the synonyms closest to *Omenani* also emphasize the autochthonous and natural element in the concept of *Omenani* in contrast to the acquired and artificial quality of *iwu*, *Omenani* is inextricably bound with mother earth and her tenants, the ancestors and so cannot be easily altered or repealed; whereas *iwu* is enacted by living man and can be revoked by living man. *Omenani*, or *Omenala*, or *Odinani*, or *Odibendi* conveys the idea of customary law, which no one can really make or strike (Ifemesia, 1979a).

Ifemesia explained *Omenani* from its traditional myth’s conception, that is to say, that *Omenani* has been handed down to the living by the ancestors, which means it cannot be either tampered with or amended by mortal beings. This very popular view of the Igbo *Omenani* among the Igbos has been corrected in this work and has also been addressed by Nwala and Otakpo. Both have explained that



Omenani is a product of the human mind and not something that has a spiritual origin. Hence, it is a philosophical idea, initiated by the ancient Igbo who are struggling to interpret and understand the cosmos through the human mind rather than depending on biblical revelation.

Nkeonye Otakpo, who also did a study on the Igbo concept of justice using *Omenani* as a perspective in understanding law and order in Igbo cultural society, as stipulated in the Igbo articles of *Omenani*, writes, “In itself, *Omenani* is a principle that is not derived from outside itself. It is not just the background to something or to everything; it is the ground without a back. It is its own ground or foundation for all there is among the Igbo. It is a basic principle, or, following Kelsen, it is a basic norm. It is basic because no questions can be raised concerning the basis of its validity. As a basic norm, it provides the ground for the objective validity of Igbo thought and practice, or traditional way of life (Otakpo, 2009a).

In addition to the authors so far mentioned, we will also consider the view of Jerome. Njikwulimchukwu Okafor viewed *Omenala* from a generic perspective. Instead of using *Omenani*, which is drawn from the land, he used *Ala*. He writes, “*Ala* is sometimes referred to as 'Mother Earth'”. She and the ancestors are the custodians of Igbo morality. She also controls the minor deities. Because the minor deities are subject to *Ala*, they cannot make indiscriminate demands of the people without her clearance. And since she is a merciful mother, she protects her children from them. She herself does not punish without warning” (Second Vatican Council, 1975).

The summation of our literature review on the subject of *Omenani* has provided us with the basis to critique the philosophy behind the Igbo conception of *Omenani* and what the philosophy tends to achieve in Igbo religion, culture, tradition, and customs. But before discussing the limitations in the practice of Igbo *Omenani* and how it has helped to sustain moral conduct and actions in Igbo society, in our literature review we found that not much has been said on land or why land has become the epicentre for the formulation of law and order and standards for measuring ethical and moral values in Igbo traditional and contemporary society. In this regard, this work is saddled with the responsibility of unveiling the root knowledge of *Omenani*, conception, beliefs, and origin.

We hereby opine that *Omenani* defines the philosophy underlying the Igbo traditional way of life. Its conception came from their understanding of Land. The philosophy of *Omenani* has lived with the Igbo for many generations and could be as old as the word Igbo. *Omenani*, having lived as long as the people, has become intrinsic to their way of life and would remain the fulcrum on which Igbo culture, religion, customs, and socio-political dynamics drew their existence. The ideas that form the strength of *Omenani*, which also gave meaning and purpose to it, are rooted in Igbo understanding of the cosmologies. To the Igbo, Land remains the *grundnorm* (a Latin word that means the basic order or rule that forms an underlying basis for a legal system) of Igbo *Omenani*, with justice in the background. It is the ordinance that defines the Igbo morals and ethics. It spells out what is right and wrong, the dos and don'ts, and proscribes and approves what should be done in a situation where a breach occurs. Nevertheless, *Omenani* has its beauty in areas of purity and ethical and moral values. Its ethical and moral values have biblical undertones but some theological foundation differences. *Omenani* in the Igbo worldview. What do the Igbo people mean by the practice of *Omenani*?

Omenani is a compound word, which comprises two ideas. Each, however, can exist independently. “*Ome*” is an action verb that suggests acting according to our tradition (by looking at land as the focus



of developing an action). *Ala* is the earth's surface, which is a noun. It is on this land that the action initiated receives guidelines on how such action should be performed. Nwala's view on this understanding would help readers to see how land shapes the construction of laws, the philosophy of order, and an altitudinal development in the Igbo's attempt to ensure harmony between humanity and creation order. Nwala writes, "When the Igbo are performing some rituals or celebrating some festivities, and one asks them why such are being done, they will say: '*Anyi neme Omenala* – We are acting according to tradition (doing that which obtains in the land). When a person comes to marry their daughter, they tell him (once his candidature has been tacitly accepted) '*mee omenala*' – do the customary. When a young man shows disrespect for his elder or his senior, the Igbo will disapprove of this by saying '*Obugh Omenala*' – It is not *Omenala*, it is not according to our tradition" (Nwala, 1985b). While *Ala* or *Ani*, which we have earlier mentioned, is believed to be a creation of *Chukwu-Okike*, a realm that is inhabited by spirits, divinities, the spirit of the dead, and home of a class of deities (*Ala Mmuo*). *Ani* or *Ala*, according to Ifemesia, demonstrates both the complete integration and intrinsic humanness of Igbo Cosmology is the transcendental cult of Mother Earth (*Ani, Ali, Ana, Ala*). The earth was far away, the most important single factor in the many-sided life of the traditional Igbo community (Ifemesia, 1979b). *Ani* is symbolic in many aspects of the life of the Igbo people. It is seen as a source of life, which also denotes or symbolizes fertility. The Igbo traditional society sees land as the earth goddess and addresses it as Mother Earth. Therefore, in Igbo cosmology, the desire for the sustainability of harmony between the *Ani* and humanity and orderliness in the cosmic order is ensured by the contents on which the Igbo concept of *Omenani* is founded.

The Philosophy of Igbo *Omenani*

Igbo *Omenani*, is the corpus of the Igbo tradition, culture, religion, and customs (Arinze, 1970). *Omenani*, being the root of morality, and ethics in traditional Igbo society is believed to draw its meaning and understanding of life from the Igbo concept of land. *Omenani*, as it is known in the Igbo traditional parlance from the data so far, made available to this work does not suggest that it is founded on the relation of God as shown in the works of Nwala and Otakpo. Rather, its roots can be traced to human common sense, which is the works of both Nwala and Otakpo have shown that *Omenani* is the product of human common sense; a metaphysical-based idea, which suggests that it is a branch of philosophy.

The status, relevance, and nature that the *Omenani* seem to enjoy in the Igbo traditional society will now in any way come to par with the authority, power, and superiority that Christ has over creation.ⁱⁱ This fact that in the Igbo traditional society, *Omenani* is believed to have been handed down to the Igbo people by the Igbo ancestors, may have been one of those reasons why it has been accorded a divine status or perhaps because of how it came into existence, which the Igbo legends still see as a mystery. These ideas that are made around the *Omenani* do not make the knowledge that gave birth to it equal to the biblical revelatory knowledge nor stand at par with the person of Christ, who is the foundation of all knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, wherever the sources of the knowledge that gave birth to the Igbo *Omenani*, the sources cannot be far-fetched either from human common sense or from the Spirit world. Taxonomically, looking at the periscope of biblical-theological sources of knowledge on which the Igbo *Omenani* is founded.

Having looked at the hermeneutical foundation of the Igbo concept of *Omenani*, which serves and starts as the Igbo corpus of moral and ethical code, just as the Torah, it is found that *Omenani* is rooted in the Igbo concept of land. It is further affirmed that land provides the traditional Igbo society with the basis for the formulation of law and order. The philosophy that shaped and guided the concept of laws of purity, traditional and social laws, and assurance of harmony between society and



land was developed based on the Igbo concept of land. However, as much as the Igbo understanding of law, order, and the concept of land and order is found in biblical settings or narrations, it is found that the Igbo concept of *Omenani* has its roots in human common-sense knowledge and not God. The Hebrew concept of land and the Torah are shaped and rooted in God.

Igbo *Omenani* is what defines an Igbo man. It is part and parcel of his/her life; it is not only a tool for the identity of the Igbo nation but also a vehicular channel that fosters unity and peace among the Igbo-speaking people. Its survival and practice through history are tied not only to ancestral blood but also to its moral values, which have become part and parcel of the very Igbo life. However, there are other aspects of *Omenani* that are compatible with modern and Christian philosophies.

In the light of modern times and the Christianization of Igbo people through the Scripture, some aspects of Igbo *Omenani* that are considered not justifiable have been discontinued. But those articles that are justifiable but may have lost the reality of the time are either transformed or Christianized to fit into the present-day reality. The basic standard for justifiability is the Scripture. Because those who formulated those articles are human beings. And since they are human beings, they are limited in knowledge. Therefore, the Bible becomes the basis for a standard. The Bible's God-centred worldview becomes the foundation for the formulation of law and order.

The Concept of Land in Igbo Society

Land as a concept and its role and function among the Igbo transcend what the human eye or mind can comprehend. To the Igbo people, the land is much more than physical appearance, which human beings can feel, cultivate, dwell on, or exercise control over. Land in Igbo view has a deeper spiritual meaning than just a place for human use. Uche Okey Jude in his dissertation observes that "... at the root of the Igbo concept of justice is the idea of the land as the inalienable centre for defining human relationships individual transgression and communal redemption" (Uche, 2016b).

Land plays a dominant role in Igbo understanding and interpretation of the cosmos. Land, for them, is the pillar upon which rests the Igbo worldview. It is also the foundation and also the standard for measuring and regulating Igbo morality, ethics, attitudes, behaviours and social practice, and even religion, spirituality, and holiness.

John H. Walton states, "Definitions of ethics and morality are variables, depending on the source, and at times the terms are viewed as synonymous. I will use morality to refer to the behaviour that results from an inner conviction about right and wrong and 'ethics' to refer to those actions that represent attempts to conform to the best expectations of the society" (Walton, 2006). While Samovar et al., see land as an object that can help in conditioning and moderating human behavior (Samovar et al., 2013). Land, in principle, gives the Igbo the basis of identity and purpose. Land by its role and function seems to occupy a position of Divinity. The understanding of land as divinity is also similar to the Hebrew cosmology. Elmer A. Marten observes this pattern, "... indeed, so much are these infractions directly against the land that the land personified is vomiting out Canaanites (Lev. 18:24).⁴³¹ Land creates the image of a land-giver and decider of equity. Ogbalu notes, "For example, the earth (*ala* or *mkpu-ala*) is worshipped as the sustainer of all lives and fertility. Land creates the imagery of a champion of justice and defender of the weak. There is always an appeal or invocation to *Ala* (*ani nuru* or *ala nuru*) when one wants to show that one is speaking the truth or seeking justice. *Ala* (Mother earth) is believed to be all-knowing and punishes people for their unjust deeds (Ogbalu, 1974). Perhaps, this is the reason it is often said in Igbo domain, *Ani tegbu kwagi*, or *Ani nuru* (May the land kill you or may the land hear us). This anthropomorphic expression of land in the Igbo



worldview elevates land to an unprecedented status of superiority over other aspects of creation. The land is projected as having a parallel spiritual authority and providential power with the one that created it. Hence, in an Igbo setting, it is not surprising to hear phrases like *Ani nwe-madu mo ofo, ani di ike, ani chebeanyi, and ani ekwene ngwere gbaji*. The meanings of these Igbo words are given in the order they are written, (Land commands all and it is the embodiment of justice, which Ofo the symbol of justice submits to, land has power, land protects us, and land forbids evil and resists evil from taking place). Land supremacy over things that sprout out of it is further clarified by O. Agunwa as cited in Christopher Ifeanyichukwu Ejizu's dissertation. He observed that the supremacy struggle between *Ala* and *Ofo* was resolved by Chukwu in a judgment given between the two. The intervention of God between these two phenomena is found in Igbo myths that say, that when the struggle between *Ala* and *Ofo* on who is supreme, God, has to step in to resolve the issue of supremacy. "This has become necessary for God to decide whether *Ala* or *Ofo* had the right of supremacy on earth since a controversy had developed between *Ala* and *Ofo* on that score. God finally resolved that *Ala* had the supremacy of honour over *Ofo*, but that the latter would henceforth serve as a symbol of power and justice as well as the principal medium of communicating with him" (Agunwa, 1974). This further strengthened the biblical account of creation that recognized that land brought forth trees and plants as commanded by God, which entails that it has precedence over the *Ofo* tree. These phrases suggest the strength, power, and mystery of the land as well as its potency. All these variables may have helped the traditional people to develop the theology of land. The basis of Igbo understanding of land, and its attendant consequences when breached in the Igbo worldview, can be viewed from different perspectives of human life and each perspective has its phenomenal consequences that every fabric of their spirituality, culture, identity, geography, security, etc. Biblical narratives have clearly shown that God owns the land and entrusts human beings the same land for keep; who return will give an account of their stewardship to God. The Bible says: "The land is mine, says the Lord" (Lev. 25:23). Also, God has entrusted humanity with the earth (land) to live on as tenants.

Conversely, in traditional Igbo society or worldview, it is land that generates some of God's incommunicable attributes that distinguish God from his creation. The elements that shape Igbo core values are intrinsic to Igbo society and they are of great significance in measuring Igbo *self-identity*. The Igbo core values are obviously responsible for what may have contributed to setting the Igbos out from others and made them a unique, united people in the past. In looking at the Igbos of now, one question the most conscious "Igbolites" would be asking today is what has become of the Igbo of the past. In light of this question, it would also interest any conscious Igbo person to know that people who may have had a similar value of who they are in the past but are not reflecting the same today are seeking to discover where the gap may have started or where the present generation may have gone wrong, just as the Igbos would say "*ebee ka minri sib a ni opi ugboguru*." (Meaning, where did they miss it?). In the same vein, TheShepherd Loho-u-Ter Shadrach, a Tiv by tribe, has raised similar questions just as Oriji has, asking his Tiv people what has happened to the bonding force that glued the Tiv together in the time of war, threat, and social needs. Here are a few of his concerns. In his search to find out what has happened to the Tiv minds, he railed out his observations by saying:

In recent times, the younger generation of Tiv people like Revd. Fr. Solomon Mfa Ukeyima and Architect Al Utsha through their profiles and pages on Facebook and other social media platforms have been advocating for the Tiv unity." In the light of the quest for Tiv unity, Shadrack who is a Tiv extraction shares the same burden as any other Tiv youth remembers an ancient Tiv slogan that kept the people of the old together. This slogan was very popular in Tiv land at any of their gatherings. The slogan was: "*Ayatutu ka uno?*" meaning, who are the *Ayatutu*? The answer was "*Ka se.*" meaning "we are". "This slogan is rarely heard in Tiv gatherings nowadays as it used to be in the days of our



forefathers,” Anshi said that, nowadays, very few people know the history of this phrase. Because they do not know the historical origin of the phrase, they seldom use it without the conceived meaning attached to it. According to him “This slogan was the bonding glue of the Tiv people. Once it was called and the appropriate answer is given, it established unity between Tiv brethren”. He went on to say “In my view, the true history of “*ayatutu*” may be lost. What is more important, however, is the concept behind “*ayatutu ka uno?*” which was unity. “*Ayatutu ka uno*” is a Tiv way of calling for solidarity and brotherliness. The response: “*Ka se*” serves to assure one another that “we are together”. This slogan glued the Tiv people together and thus it is imperative to ask the Tiv nation if “*Ayatutu*” is still understood the way it was when the slogan was more actively used in the past (Shadrach, 2020).

Having seen the worries and desires of these younger Tiv people who have been pained by the recent attacks and killings in Tiv land by the herdsmen, has prompted them to go back to history and consciously try to find out what has happened to the “dreaded” Tiv people of the past. To them, they desire to find out what has happened to the Tiv philosophy of *Ayatutu ka uno* and how can the philosophy behind “*Ayatutu ka uno*” can be revived. However, as much as Shadrach may not be able to unravel the root concept of *Ayatutu ka uno*, he is confident that even the revival of the principles of *Ayatutu ka uno* will go a long way in re-establishing the spirit of *Ayatutu ka uno* among the modern Tivs. But in the case of the Igbos who may have had similar philosophies such as *Igbo kwenu*, to them, it is a “harvest” of double advantage because they need not go looking for who they are or to search for what has bound the Igbos together. Our works on the Origins of the Ndigbo and Africa Return to your Creator provide both the principles and the concepts of who they are and what informs their understanding of life: the Igbo concept of justice. So all they need to do is go back into history and find out who the Igbos are and reactivate the Igbo concept of justice, which is in the background of the Igbo concept of *Omenani*, where it is in line with God’s purpose for land. We had earlier mentioned that God in his plans for creation, has chosen justice to be the basis on which order can be restored and maintained in his creation. Therefore, it is based on justice that the Igbos of the past thrived because they were conscious of justice. Justice defines who they are. So, by the singular concept of justice, the traditional Igbo of the old stood out in their pursuit of life and even in the face of threat. Therefore, the consciousness of justice should become the panacea to launching the Igbos of today back to greatness.

Of all we have said about *Omenani*, at this point, what we would like to do here is to point out one of its striking beauties, which lies in making justice the basis for living. However, much as *Omenani* has its beauties, this does not suggest that everything about *Omenani* is perfect. *Omenani* has its defects, and those defects are contrary to theological and Biblical principles, which today have been discontinued or expunged from the religio-cultural practices. We may not to the long list of expunged items since the exercise is continuous. Therefore, if *Omenani* remains the foundation on which justice can be defined and interpreted in Igbo traditional society, then modern Igbos or the Igbos after the civil should make a deliberate effort to imbue the consciousness of justice in all they do as the people of the old did. The gap that exists and led to the discontinuity between the Igbo of the old and modern Igbo lies in disregard for justice concept as contained in Igbo *Omenani* by modern Igbos. Otakpo notes that “Justice among the Igbo is far more than an ordinary concept. It is far more than a yardstick for the measurement of individual conduct or the determination of desert. For them, justice is the root of life. It is the foundation of there is” (Otakpo, 2009b). We noticed that every component of *Omenani* heralds justice and points the user to act justly. *Omenani* requires that people living on land must be aware of the consequences and penalties of wrong conduct and actions. Otakpo writes, “*Omenani* is at the background of justice which is at the root of everything. It prescribes the sanction for breaches



of Igbo norms, ethical codes, etc., It specifies the rights, duties, and privileges conferred by those rules on a person in a particular situation” (Otakpo, 2009c). We strongly believe that there exists a basis of similarities between the Hebraic concept of justice and the Igbo concept of justice. The Igbo philosophy of life is driven by the concept of justice, a perception that shapes the Igbo understanding and consciousness that human actions on land are governed by justice, just as God has engrafted justice to govern human conduct and actions right from the beginning of creation (Gen 2:16-17). The creational concept of justice may have been the basis on which the Igbo concept of justice was based on their understanding of land. The Igbo’s beliefs in justice permeate every aspect of their lives and this can be seen in the manner the consciousness of justice guides their ways of life on land. The Igbo understanding of justice is because they believe that if one does what is right and just on the land he/she lives on, the land would not only protect the person but also provide for the person. So we would at this point mention a few expressions to show how justice rules their lives and how land enables them to do what is right and just. These few Igbo words connote justice or implied justice as they may relate to a given context in Igbo society

1. *Ugbogurū miarūm ma miarū nwunye di m.* (If one knows or desires what is good for himself/herself, he/she should do likewise to others: meaning fairness, equity, etc.)
2. *Nke onye metalū obulu.* (This phrase means that everyone must be responsible for his/her actions)
3. *Ọkụkọ tuhie,olu ahia ya.* (This phrase emphasizes the fact that whatever decision or action one takes, he/she must bear the consequences for doing wrong)
4. *Okenye kwuo omaghi kwu,ala etigbuo ya.* (This sentence reminds elders that whatever judgment they pass unjustly will stand against them)
5. *Nwa mmuo emegbuna nwa mmadu, nwa mmadu emegbuna nwa mmuo.* (This sentence is all about equity and fairness)
6. *Egbe belu Ugo belu.* (This phrase supports the act of equity and fairness)
7. *Onye bili,ibe ya bili.* (Fairness, equality, etc., to all)
8. *Onye anwuna ma ibe ya efuna.* (Goodness, rightness, and equality)
9. *Odili nwoke mma ya diri nwanyi mma.* (Goodness and equality)
10. *Ofọ ka ide ji awa ala.* (This phrase means it is only through justice that peace can be made)

In the case of land, the following expressions justify why land has the capacity to protect and defend those who dwell on it.

- Anazor - land protects us
- Anadobe - land holds this for us for safety/ protection
- Anichebe - land settle and protect me
- Anadazie - land settle
- Anagoru - land exonerate me
- Anaebua - land you have fattened me



The Igbo concept of justice has complementary similarities to the biblical-theological concept of justice, as rooted in creation. God, in the creation process, has eternally programmed that the attitude of human beings on land should be governed by his universal moral and physical laws. These laws took a sizeable portion of the warning God gave to the Israelites before they entered and occupied the land that he had promised their ancestors. However, we had earlier pointed out the basis for theological foundational differences between the Igbo concept of justice and the Hebraic concept of justice. We noted that in Judaism, justice is rooted in God, and while in traditional Igbo society justice is at the background of *Omenani*, which draws its meaning of justice from the Igbo concept of land. In the Hebraic context, the understanding of God's justice revolves around the Torah and God is at the centre. God, at creation, instituted two universal laws that stipulate how creation should function and relate to each other. These two laws bind creation together; the laws stipulate how human beings should relate with one another, with God and with the land. So any breach of these laws by human conduct and action would attract a penalty. The essence of penalty is to remind human beings of the justice of God. It is not a new law per se but a reinforcement of an existing law he instituted at creation. Hence, God forewarned the Israelites before entering the Promised Land that they should live according to the laws that bind creation together. God's covenantal relationship with Israel is a tripartite type: God, land, and Israel. His covenant with Israel is tied to responsibilities and promises. God's covenant with Israel, which is tripartite in nature, comprising God, land, and Israel, is not entirely a new kind of covenant. This kind of covenant had existed before the emergence of Israel as a nation. It has its roots in creation and that has helped us to see what happened when Adam and Eve sinned against God by disobeying his command on how they should live on land. But after the fall, God called Abraham out of Ur to build a holy nation. But before their journey to nationhood, God gave the Israelites a series of instructions on what they should do on land and how they should conduct themselves on land so that things go well with them. This covenant is sustained by three ultimate promises, without which life will become miserable on earth. The promises include the following: things go well with you, living a long life, and that the land will yield its increase or produce to human beings everything that God has spoken into it in creation. The promises of going well or that it goes well with you on land are captured in certain portions of Deuteronomy and other books of the Bible.

Deut. 4:40

Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it will go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time.

Deut. 5:16

Honour your father and mother as the Lord your God has commanded you so that you may live long and it may go well with you in the land your God is giving you

Deut. 5:33

Walk in all the way (path) that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and provide your days in the land that you will possess.

Deut. 6:3

Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Deut. 6:18

Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the Lord promised on oath to forefathers thrusting out all your enemies before you, as the Lord said.

Deut. 12: 25

Doing what is right in the eyes of God by staying away from things God has forbidden, so that it may go well with you and your children after you.



Deut. 19:13

Show no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you. (Your land must be purged of any kind of defilement whenever it is committed- by implication Ikpu-alu concept in traditional Igbo society.

Ephesians 6:1-3

Children, “honour your father and mother” which is the first commandment with a promise- that it may go well with you and that may enjoy long life on the earth.

God’s concern about how moral agents should relate to his creation and things that will go with them becomes the basis of human relationship with creation (land) in God’s creational laws. Creational laws demand that human conduct and actions should be in obedience to his universal theistic moral and physical laws. The rewards, benefits, and consequences of what becomes of human beings if they observe the instructions on how they should relate to God’s creation are drawn from theological and biblical narratives of the Holy Scriptures. We found that the book of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Ephesians, gave instructions, decrees, and commands on how human beings should conduct themselves in line with God’s plans and purposes concerning how human beings should live on land and be rewarded. At creation, God mediated a bond of relationship that binds him to land and human beings. This bond of relationship is not without responsibilities on the three parties. God’s responsibility is to ensure that everything that he has spoken into land is sustained by his creative power, while human responsibilities are to ensure that their conduct and action do not violate the law that sets land, and land’s responsibilities are to produce and yield to human needs as long as creation is in existence. In the same vein, in a situation where a breach of the sanctity and sacredness of land by human conduct or action occurs, the breach must be purged, or else it will result in the disruption of harmony that binds the parties together.

Having summarized our earlier discussions on God and his creation, creational laws; how these laws affect creation, and how human agents would relate with God and creation. We can now focus on how to use theological and biblical principles to examine and redefine Igbo *Omenani*. We had earlier pointed out that Igbo *Omenani* is a product of the human mind, which uses the power of reasoning to unravel creation. The conception of Igbo *Omenani* and its articles or elements by the Igbo ancestors were designed to help them formulate moral and ethical codes that would help the traditional Igbo society achieve stability and harmony in the cosmic order. Hence, *Omenani* emerged as one of those products of the mind as it tried to unlock the mystery behind creation. We, therefore, traced what could be the genesis of its conception and practice to the failure of those Hebrews who after having settled on the east of the Jordan got fascinated by the Canaanites' beliefs. A belief that seceded fertility and rain supplies to Baal and Ashtoreth. Thus, they allowed the Canaanites' beliefs to corrupt the revelatory account of creation that YAHWEH had revealed to Moses. Consequent to this development, they ended up having what we call a “mixed-worldview.” The ultimate consequence of the birth of a mixed worldview is the resultant shift of loyalty from God to land.

Having contrasted the foundational theological differences between theological and biblical knowledge of creation and Igbo *Omenani* and their understanding of creation, we can now use theological and biblical knowledge of God’s ordinances on how humanity should live on land or interact with his creation to redefine Igbo *Omenani*. The ordinances of God on how humanity should live on land or interact with his creation are governed by two universal laws of God. The universal physical law, which has its root in creation, is a law that governs the operations of all physical creation. However, it is not eternal because its existence is for a duration of time. While the other law



is the universal moral law. This law is rooted in God's nature, being, character, and action. Its existence is eternal and it does not expire because it resides in God.

The universal physical laws came via the spoken word of God, which brought creation into existence. These laws emanated as a result of God's word and were sustained by universal physical laws that govern every physical operation initiated in the three components of creation. These include the air mass, water mass, and landmass. Every one of these masses subjects its functions and operations according to the universal physical laws, which regulate and sanction actions that violate the laws that established each of these masses. Turaki writes that "Universal physical laws are creational laws, natural laws, and scientific laws. They all emanate from God's spoken word of power and were inscribed into creation to govern the physical nature of all creation. The physical nature of the universe is governed by these universal physical laws. Physical laws have their own internal sanctions. Laws are to be obeyed and not broken. Law and order are to be maintained in all of creation" (Turaki, 2021a).

The universal moral law is a law that has its roots in God himself. It is a law that governs the actions and conduct of every moral agent. It guides how moral beings interact among themselves and spells out their boundaries. Any violation of the law and order that governs their existence, or what binds them to their natural boundaries, or their conduct in relationships with the Creator and how they relate to themselves attracts a severe penalty. Turaki in his work observes that "Moral laws are rooted in God's nature, character, and attributes. They are not rooted in a spoken word but in the moral character and attributes of God. These moral laws are universal and eternal because God is Eternal, and his eternal nature is universal in scope. They are also binding upon all moral agents, human beings, and spirit beings. Moral agents are to emulate the eternal moral character of God" (Turaki, 2021b).

Having said all these concerning theological and biblical principles, we can now focus on Igbo *Omenani*, using theological and biblical principles to examine the root of Igbo *Omenani* on the one hand and the other hand to use the same principles to redefine *Omenani* and its practice.

From our study of Igbo *Omenani*, its birth falls under the African concept of social ethics. It is designed to determine and regulate Igbo social behaviours. Its primary aim is to serve as the Igbo benchmark for moral and ethical standards. It has all dos and don'ts and above all, the crust of its beauty lies in its justice mechanism. Justice is the background of its conception. Otakpo writes that since "*Omenani* prescribes the sanction for breaches of Igbo norms, ethical code, etc. It specifies the rights, duties, and privileges conferred by those rules on a person in a particular situation" (Otakpo, 2009d) go to suggest that the ultimate aim of Igbo *Omenani* is to ensure that justice remains the fabric of Igbo society. Since justice is the ground on which other values draw their strength then the consciousness of justice in Igbo society becomes the fulcrum that drives the Igbo self-identity. Having said all these beautiful things about *Omenani*, our question is how the conception of *Omenani* began. *Omenani* from legends and myths is a belief that is held and practised in Igbo traditional and contemporary society. It has become the corpus of Igbo moral and ethical codes. Before now, we have traced its origin, source, influence, sustenance, and impact in Igbo society, so in order to determine its conceptuality and contextualization in line with the scriptures, we would use theological and biblical principles to examine and redefine it. Since *Omenani* is a product of Igbo society, therefore, we would use theological and biblical principles of the definition of society to define and examine its conceptuality and also redefine its meaning and contextualization in the context of Igbo society and Africa at large.



Society does not evolve on its own; rather, it is determined, shaped, and functions by three fundamental sets of principles: God principle, creation principle, and human principle (Turaki, 2021c). These three sets of principles are the three pillars on which every society is built, and their meaning and purpose are drawn from the theological and biblical principles of society. But in the event that there is a default in any of these principles, the society is bound to crash. God in setting up a society, considered three factors, which include himself, creation, and humans as moral agents. These three bodies have become the basis for the growth of society. The healthiness of any society is tied to laws that bind them together. Each of these bodies exists and functions by certain principles. These three sets of principles are theologically based and would form the basis for critiquing the Igbo *Omenani*, its source of knowledge, and *Omenani* as the basis for defining Igbo society. The same sets of principles would help to establish the superiority of theological and biblical principles over Igbo *Omenani*, which is a product of human common sense. The table below is a summary of the differences between theological and biblical principles and Igbo *Omenani*, a product of land.

The Differences between Theological and Biblical Principles and the Igbo Concept of *Omenani*
God as the Basis for Theological and Biblical Principles vs. Land as the Basis for the Conception of Igbo *Omenani*

Theological and Biblical Principles (God-Principle)	The Igbo Concept of <i>Omenani</i> (Land/Conception/Characteristics)
God is self-existing and eternal.	Land is a creation of God; it is neither eternal nor self-existent, but is entirely subject to time.
God is inherently holy; holiness constitutes the absolute essence of His being.	Land is not holy in and of itself; rather, its holiness is derivatively imputed by God.
God is intelligent and functions as a supreme moral being.	Land lacks intrinsic intelligence because it is not a moral being; it possesses no emotions and holds no capacity to execute judgment.
God is transcendent, standing far beyond human comprehension and existing above the range of normal experience.	Land does not possess the attribute of transcendence; consequently, it is finite and measurable.
Ethically, God is holy, righteous, and loving. He is morally spotless in both character and action—upright, pure, and unstained by evil desires, motives, thoughts, words, or deeds. Because God is holy, He is the ultimate source and standard of righteousness (Elwell, 2005).	Land is programmed to function strictly according to the creational laws that established it. Land's ethical and moral values are imputed by God rather than generated by the land itself. Because land does not generate these values, it cannot judge moral agents; instead, God's moral and ethical principles serve as the ultimate criteria for judging moral agents on earth.
God, as a moral being, employs the moral and ethical principles inherent	Land cannot differentiate between good and evil since it lacks moral agency. However, it is programmed to recognize and



Theological and Biblical Principles (God-Principle)	The Igbo Concept of <i>Omenani</i> (Land/Conception/Characteristics)
within His nature to judge all moral creation.	respond favorably to good human conduct, while reacting negatively to human wrongdoing.

Creation Principle	Land Principle
Creation principles are mediated, instituted, and sustained by God.	Land cannot generate its own laws.
Creation principles originated directly from the spoken word of God.	Land cannot create; instead, it serves as a passive channel that yields fruit based on specific, divinely instituted instructions.
Creation principles are governed by a triad of cosmic laws: physical, moral, and spiritual laws.	Land cannot exist independently, nor does it possess any intrinsic power to sustain itself.
God's unlimited intellectual capability and omniscience guide and preserve His entire creation.	The existence of land remains subject to the divine laws that determine its ultimate lifespan. Land lacks intellectual capability and possesses no capacity to generate independent knowledge.

Human Principle	Trichotomous Human Nature
God is triune in nature. He exists eternally as three distinct persons in one essence: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is the ultimate embodiment of law, order, and cosmic harmony. Within the Trinity, there is no rebellion, conflict, division, or disobedience; the triune Godhead exists in perfect, eternal unity.	Human nature is tripartite in its structural classification, comprising the spirit, soul, and body. Each component is designed to operate in accordance with a divine hierarchy and in absolute obedience to God. However, the introduction of sin into humanity corrupted this pristine order and fractured the harmony binding them together. The original internal and external channels of communication were severed, plunging the human spirit into a comatose state.

Theological and Biblical Critiques of *Omenani* and Land

From the analytical framework provided in the comparative tables, a definitive judgment can be made regarding the Igbo concept of land and *Omenani* through the lens of theological and biblical principles. It is evident that attributing intrinsic holiness, judicial capacity, or independent divinity to the land within the traditional Igbo context—without explicit recourse to God—is a conceptual error born of an incomplete clarity of knowledge. Neither the land nor the tenets of *Omenani* can independently generate holiness, express emotion, transmit moral characteristics, exhibit intelligence,



or manifest transcendence. Only God the Creator possesses the absolute capacity to exhibit these attributes.

A breach constitutes any act that violates the law and order upon which societal norms are constructed. It represents a violation of the foundational covenant, the societal constitution that binds a people together, or the divinely established order of creational harmony. When a moral agent or a collective group of moral agents initiates such a breach—whether knowingly or unknowingly—the infraction must be atoned for. Failure to secure atonement disrupts the creational order and moral equilibrium, culminating in catastrophic consequences for the cosmic harmony. To resolve these breaches, specific sacrifices and rituals are prescribed and executed, as seen within Igbo society. The items required for these sacrifices must strictly align with the stipulations set forth in *Omenani*. Within Igbo tradition, the ritual process of enacting this atonement is known as *Ikpu-alu*, which literally translates to "dragging evil out of the land."

Given this context, critical questions must be raised: who is truly wronged when a sin is committed? Who actually receives the sacrifice of atonement, who is appeased, and who possesses the sovereign power and authority to restore the broken order caused by sin? Because *Ikpu-alu* is a religious ritual designed to restore peace, order, and harmony whenever human actions violate the laws binding moral beings to one another and to the earth, the traditional worldview positions the land as the focus of this reconciliation. The land is viewed as the sacred abode of the ancestors and the domain of Mother Earth (*Ala*), thereby making the land and *Omenani* the central locus of propitiation. However, if the land is designated to receive these sacrificial elements, what intrinsic qualifications does it possess to lay claim to these offerings or to stand as the aggrieved party requiring appeasement? Can land, by virtue of its material nature, reconcile offenders to itself or restore a fractured spiritual relationship?

The answers to these queries are readily clarified by the preceding tabular analysis. Land cannot serve as the ultimate focus of atonement because it is not a moral agent; it can neither express grief nor exercise the intelligence required to execute judgment. Because land is a created entity and not the Creator, it lacks the capacity to reconcile moral agents to a holy God, rendering it incapable of truly accepting or validating sacrificial elements. Consequently, the traditional concepts of land and *Omenani* must be systematically redefined by theological and biblical principles. Within this corrected framework, God becomes the true basis for understanding the land, and Jesus Christ emerges as the perfect, ultimate sacrifice for atonement and the restoration of humanity from sin. Ultimately, the source of knowledge underlying the traditional conception of Igbo *Omenani* is a product of human common sense; as a result, it is bound by inherent human limitations.

Furthermore, the articles and traditions of *Omenani* should not be utilized as absolute standards for measuring values, morals, ethics, and other social variables because they are products of the fallen human mind. Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve existed in a perfect state of mental and spiritual harmony. However, the introduction of sin corrupted human consciousness, resulting in the immediate loss of that original, flawless creational state. Consequent to the Fall, all subsequent



generations inherited this corrupted nature, ensuring that limitations inevitably constrain any ethical system produced solely by the human intellect. Graciously, God provided a comprehensive mechanism for the redemption of humanity through the redemptive work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The realities of human sin necessitate a clear distinction between God as the Creator and human beings as His creation. God is a supreme moral being existing as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—yet unified in one divine substance. At creation, He formed humanity in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:27). Reflecting His triune nature, God designed human beings in a trichotomous order of spirit, soul, and body, with each component intended to mirror the harmonious operations of the Godhead. Just as each person of the Trinity executes distinct roles, human beings are called to specific spiritual and physical functions. Delineating this relationship between the Creator and the creature helps identify which aspect of the human tripartite structure bears accountability for the entry of sin, and whether that same fractured faculty is responsible for the human ideas that generated *Omenani*.

The Value and Limitations of Justice in *Omenani*

Nevertheless, even though *Omenani* is fundamentally a product of the human mind, its profound beauty in cultivating a deep consciousness of justice within the Igbo worldview must be appreciated. By positioning justice at the core of *Omenani* and viewing the land as a symbol of social justice and the final arbiter of truth, the traditional Igbo worldview successfully instilled a robust ethical awareness among the people. This preoccupation with justice likely shaped historical Igbo self-identity, self-awareness, ancestral origin, and self-definition—traits that external observers have occasionally mischaracterized as a self-domineering attitude.

This deep-seated commitment to justice, equity, and fairness birthed powerful foundational maxims such as:

Ofo ka ide ji awa ala (An action anchored on justice and truth overrides all opposition; peace is forged only through justice).

Onye bili, ibe ya bili (Let the kite perch, and let the egret perch; a call for universal fairness, equality, and coexistence).

Despite these virtues, the concept of justice associated with the land and *Omenani* remains inherently limited because it is not explicitly rooted in the personal nature of God. Traditional beliefs frequently attribute an autonomous capacity to the land to execute, transmit, or vindicate justice, as reflected in expressions like:

- *Anagoru* (May the land vindicate and exonerate me).
- *Anigbogu* (May the land intervene and render final judgment).
- *Ani ebeanyi ajaighe* (May our land never permit evil or injustice to prevail).
- *Egbe belu Ugo belu* (Let the hawk perch, and let the eagle perch).

Commenting on the philosophy behind *egbe belu Ugo belu*, Victor Otakpo elaborates that this principle functions as a vital social mechanism designed to safeguard individual rights, privileges, liberty, and freedom (Otakpo, 2018). [2] Without such structural safeguards, the inherent human inclination toward self-centeredness, egoism, and unbridled individualism would reign unfettered, triggering destructive societal consequences.



If this conceptualization of justice serves as the foundation for constructing values, morals, and ethics in the Igbo worldview, then the justice derived through the lens of land or *Omenani* represents merely the tip of an iceberg. A far greater transformation awaits Igbo society if it grounds its understanding of righteousness in theological and biblical principles that recognize God as the absolute fountainhead of justice. What traditional society perceives as justice through *Omenani* is but a tiny speck compared to the vast, transformative ocean of divine justice available when God is made the center of their worldview.

Admittedly, there are cross-cultural instances where the land appears to act anthropomorphically, as if it possessed independent moral capabilities. Both ancient Judaic and traditional Igbo societies utilize striking parallel idioms, such as "the land will vomit you" or "the land will bear witness against you." Various biblical passages similarly employ this anthropomorphic imagery; however, these literary expressions do not imply that the physical earth possesses actual moral agency. In these instances, the land responds anthropomorphically simply because it was divinely programmed to react favorably to human righteousness and negatively to human wickedness.

Human Conduct: Good/Righteous ---> Land Response: Favorable/Fruitful

Human Conduct: Evil/Wicked ---> Land Response: Negative/Vomiting/Barren

Land cannot act on its own volition, nor can it independently discern good from evil. Furthermore, because the earth remains entirely under the sovereign will of the Creator, the natural laws governing its responses can be suspended or revised by God at any time. A clear demonstration of this sovereign intervention occurs in Ezekiel 36:13, where God responds directly to the cries of Israel. Demonstrating absolute authority over His creation, God instituted a new covenantal decree that effectively annulled the retributive laws of the land under which it had previously been operating against the people.

Re-envisioning *Omenani* Through a Biblical Lens

On the strength of these observations, integrating theological and biblical principles to redefine the Igbo understanding of land and *Omenani* holds immense transformative potential. If these scriptural principles become the primary framework for conceptualizing *Omenani*, contemporary Igbo society can experience a profound moral renaissance—effectively turning the land into a "paradise" on earth. To advance this thesis, further comparative research exploring the intersection of justice in Hebrew and Igbo worldviews must be deepened.

A close examination of specific Old Testament texts reveals how God systematically utilized land ownership to cultivate a rigorous consciousness of social justice among the Hebrew people:

- **Proverbs 22:28:** "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set."
- **Proverbs 23:10:** "Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless."
- **Deuteronomy 19:14:** "You shall not move your neighbor's boundary mark, which the ancestors have set..."

The severe ethical weight attached to these land boundaries is underscored by God's decree in **Deuteronomy 27:17:**

"Cursed is he who moves his neighbor's boundary mark. And all the people shall say, Amen."



While modern readers might view these boundary mandates as mere property regulations, the underlying principle is explicitly rooted in social justice. These laws demanded immediate, tangible restoration whenever a vulnerable person's land was stolen or altered. When such restorations occurred, true justice was visibly rendered.

Ultimately, re-establishing this absolute, divinely rooted consciousness of justice serves as the vital panacea needed to launch contemporary Igbo society back into true greatness. Justice stands as the total, supreme value that binds, contextualizes, and validates all other social virtues. It constitutes the common denominator of societal health, the root of human flourishing, and the structural foundation of stable existence. God consistently promises that whoever lives justly on the land, executing what is upright, good, and fair, will experience enduring prosperity. By building upon these foundational texts, future academic research can go a long way in rigorously evaluating and establishing the historical, cultural, and theological links connecting the ancestry of the Igbo with the ancient covenant people of God.

Conclusion

This work provides a robust ideological and moral foundation for renewed socio-political agency. By diagnosing value erosion as the root of diminished influence, it equips Igbo leaders and citizens with a “justice-consciousness” framework for political engagement. It calls for ethical leadership that prioritizes equity, accountability, and communal good over narrow self-interest or transactional politics. Re-emphasizing an *Omenani*-informed republican ethos (consensus-building, checks and balances) synthesized with biblical principles of justice and servant-leadership can foster credible, visionary politicians capable of forging strategic alliances and commanding national respect. The treatise can serve as intellectual ammunition for policy advocacy, constitutional reform debates, and movements that demand fair power-sharing, resource allocation, and restructuring in Nigeria, positioning Igbos as principled contributors rather than marginalized agitators. Therefore, if the Igbos of after the civil war should realign their understanding of how Igbo *Omenani* has helped to shape the Igbos of the old (the Igbos before the civil war), then the tendency of actualizing the Igbo political dreams will be a thing of the past. Bearing the same philosophy in mind, and deliberately and consciously integrating it into other sectors of life will harvest similar results as it is case with politics. The Igbo *Omenani* (or *Omenala*/*Odinala*) concept offers a powerful pathway for reintegrating Ndigbo into Nigeria’s political mainstream after the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), while preserving core Ndigbo values. This traditional Igbo way of life—encompassing customs, ethics, governance, and worldview derived from the land (*Ala*)—provides both a diagnostic tool for post-war challenges and a blueprint for principled resurgence.

Historically, the Igbo people were renowned across Nigeria and beyond for their entrepreneurial vigor, innovation, resilience, and excellence in trade, craftsmanship, and adaptation. From pre-colonial long-distance trade networks to the post-independence era, Ndigbo built thriving commercial empires through the famous Igba-Boi (apprenticeship) system, communal support structures, and an unyielding drive encapsulated in the philosophy of *Uwa bu ahia* (the world is a market). This treatise traces the erosion of these qualities partly to the disruption of justice-consciousness (*ikpe ziri ezi*),



ethical anchors, and the full integration of ancestral wisdom with contemporary realities. A deliberate return to *Omenani*(or Omenala/Odinala)—the Igbo traditional code of conduct, customs, and worldview rooted in harmony with Ala (the earth), communal accountability, and moral order—offers a powerful framework for reclamation.

Omenani embodies core values such as diligence (*irū ọrū*), fairness in trade (*ikpe ziri ezi na azumahia*), communal trust (*ntụkwasị obi n'etiti ndị mmadụ*), respect for covenants, avoidance of *nso ala* (abominations that pollute the land and community), and the principle of *egbe bere, ugo bere* (live and let live). These are not relics of the past but living ethical technology that once fueled Igbo success. By synthesizing *Omenani* with forward-looking strategies and ethical principles (including biblical parallels where they align with truth, integrity, and stewardship), we can inspire a new generation of Igbo entrepreneurs and industrialists who prioritize long-term value creation over short-term gains, corporate social responsibility, and sustainable community impact.

The treatise resonates deeply with the Igbo philosophy of *onye aghana nwanneya* (“do not abandon your brother” or “be your brother’s keeper”). This maxim is not a mere slogan but a foundational pillar of *Omenani* (also rendered as Omenala or Odinani) — the living Igbo customary law, moral code, and holistic way of life handed down through generations. *Omenani* embodies the customs, ethics, and spiritual order of the land (Ala), where justice is not abstract or adversarial but restorative, communal, and divinely sanctioned. It integrates truth, equity, fairness, and collective responsibility as expressions of cosmic and social harmony.

In *Omenani*, *onye aghana nwanneya* frames communal solidarity, mutual support, and collective upliftment as core manifestations of justice-consciousness. Justice (*ikpe ziri ezi*) is not the isolated triumph of an individual in a courtroom but the preservation of *obodo* (community) balance. An offense against one is an abomination (*nso ala*) that can pollute the land and affect all, just as the elevation of one strengthens the entire lineage and clan. This philosophy rejects the “pull-him-down” (*akpu akpu*) syndrome that fragments Nigerian society, replacing it with active kinship that extends *nwanne* (brother/sister) beyond blood to ethnic solidarity, mentorship, and shared destiny.

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