

SACRIFICE AS A REVITALIZATION OF VITAL FORCE IN IGBO-AFRICAN METAPHYSICS: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract

This research work is focused on discovering the metaphysical essences of sacrifice and vital influence of the same in human life. Also, it aims at using the research data to reveal, expose, revalidate, and finally establish the recurring truth about the potency and undismissible relevance of sacrifice in the chain of diminution and invigoration of vital force. Because the epistemological and metaphysical awareness of the import of sacrifice is meant to draw us in, at least, to the very awareness of human indulgence and rank in the scheme of Cosmo-centric affairs, it then behoves on us all to honestly seek for this vital knowledge, successfully gain it and use same in the determination of vicissitudes of life. Henceforth, we shall limit our discourse to the Igbo-African experience and rational belief on the import of sacrifice. And so, in this work, we committedly and saliently sought to accentuate in appraisal the instrumentality of sacrifice in the restitution of vital force in the region of Igbo-Africans. Consequently, this work will employ the method of philosophical appraisal as it stands to consistently reveal the extent to which certain restitutions are achieved through sacrifices and the quality of sacrifices which make such headways and breakthroughs in nature. Indubitably, this would go a very long way to restore the sanctity of sacrifice, revitalise the practice of restitution of vital energy and finally restore the dignity of man.

Keywords: Sacrifice, Ritual, Revitalization, Diminution, Atonement, Reparation, Reconciliation, Morality, Vitality.

Sacrifice refers to the ritual of offering something essential to curry favour, atone for sins, repair damages or appease god or gods to revitalise a vital force.

Introduction

Metaphysics as a branch of philosophy and a first-abstraction discourse delves and inquires into many spiritual essences of which one is sacrifice. The realm of immortality—God, spirits and ancestors has been metaphysically viewed and speculated by the ancient philosophers (such as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and host of others), Medieval philosophers (St. Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas) and modern philosophers such as Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Spinoza, Suarez, etc. to be hugely concerned with the greatness of humanity, and the entire fate of man hangs on its pillar. This has become a general understanding that 'the spiritual control the physical' and therefore, man embarks on the journey of self-discovery, intimation and reconnection with the realm of the spirits. To begin on the right path, the first being man must know and confront is self, the being of man, and this necessarily leads him to the discovery of the being of God, the maker of man, and then to the discovery of other spiritual beings. This

spiritual journey opens his mind to the metaphysical realities.

Consequently, the journey of self-discovery offers man the epistemology and the metaphysics of sacrificial ritual. Man, then discovers how to connect and reconnect easily with his maker and the entire realm of the spirits which he is part of, through his soul. Sacrifice becomes an essential ritual through which peace and harmony is maintained between the realm of the spirits and the realm of mortal beings. By implication, sacrifice performs the essential work of revitalization in the presence of diminution of the vital force, reparation in the presence of essential damages caused by atrocities, atonement in the presence of certain moral deviations caused by the societal decay in morality. Therefore, Igbo-African sacrifice performs the summative and regenerative functions of reparation, reconciliation and revitalization. These are the tripartite functions of sacrifice which naturally introduces us to the 'forms of sacrifice', drawing our attention to the nature of sacrifice and how the sacred ritual is supposedly carried out.

Forms of Sacrifice

The intentions of sacrifice and how a particular sacrificial ritual could be offered are considered and embodied the forms of sacrifice. In other words, the reasons for which sacrifices are offered which necessitate the forms in which they are offered is what we refer here to as 'forms of sacrifice'. Therefore, we shall discuss four (4) forms of sacrifice here; the four (4) forms of sacrifice are Expiation, Sacrifice to ward off molestation from unknown evil spirits, petition, and thanksgiving. We shall take them one after the other.

Expiation— *Ikpu Alu*

This form of sacrifice arises when man discovers that he has sinned and that his sins or atrocities close his door of blessing because God and other higher powers are obviously angry with him. In some cases, an expiation is done to remove the stains of abomination. The ritual practice of removing the stains of abomination through expiation in Igboland is called *ikpu alu*; *Alu* means abomination in Igbo language. According to Arinze, certain acts of immorality which desecrate 'Ani' (the Earth Spirit), and the ancestors are abominable and so:

Abomination in the first place embraces serious personal and moral crimes according to Ibo morality. Although there are local variations, these acts are generally regarded as such: patricide, incest, stealing of yams and sheep, bestiality, wilful abortion, pregnancy within a year of the husband's death, suicide by hanging, and the killing of sacred animals(Arinze,1970,p.34).

Therefore, abomination (*alu* or *nsọ ala*) includes those moral offences which the Igbo regard as unnatural, abnormal and doomable. Although expiatory sacrifices are mainly done whenever the aforementioned crimes are committed, there are other lesser offences that demand and deserve expiation (cleansing ritual). For example, many forbid women in their periods to enter their waters. In sum, expiation can also be conducted for a whole community in order to cleanse the sins of the community or public expiatory sacrifices in an Ibo town or village used to assume special solemnity in the sacrifice of

scapegoats(Arinze, 1970, p.36).

Expiratory sacrifice is required to be officiated by the eldest man and woman in a kindred. The person who has committed an abomination (*alu*) meets the eldest man and woman in the kindred to inform him about his/her intention of carrying out expiation for his/her abomination. The man fixes a date falling within the four market days (*Eke, Orië, Afor, and Nkwo*) of the Igbo calendar. The offender brings a fold of young palm (*omu nkwu*), a birdling (*ubulu*), a white piece of cloth (*akwa ocha*), a piece of egg (*akwa okuko*), and four pieces of kolanut (*Oji Igbo*) to Ajani (Earth goddess) of the kindred. These ritual items are handed over to the oldest man and he uses the kolanut to make some prayers calling on the four deities (*Eke, Orië, Afo and Nkwo*) and the Earth goddess to forgive the sinner and cleanse him of his abominable offenses. After the short prayers, the live birdling is tied to the young palm with the piece of white cloth, and the journey to the evil forest begins with the offender walking in the front while the oldest woman (*Ada*) walks behind him. They walk out from the shrine of Ani into the entrance of the evil forest through the village squares that are also market squares. Immediately they reach the entrance of the evil forest, the woman halts her movement in a solemn way and only the offender enters into the evil forest, makes a cleansing prayers again and throws the young palm with the cloth and birdling into the forest. Thereafter, he breaks the egg at the spot he stands asking the spirits and ancestors to cease their wrath and the birdling to unburden him. They walk back to the village in silence akin to a reclusive monk in meditations. That is the ritual of the expiratory sacrifice.

Sacrifice to Ward Off Molestation from Unknown Evil Spirits— *Aja Ochuchu Ajo*

Mmuo.

The Igbo use the means of divination championed usually by the diviners (*Dibia Afa*) to discover the cause of a particular ailment or the reason for which things are the way they should not be in the families. In consequence, when a diviner or fortune-teller uses his tools of divination to discover or divine the cause that is meant to produce a particular unfavourable effect in a given family and fails to see it from the known spirits like *Ikenga, Okuku, Ovuve, Okposi* and other known spirits, he then attributes the evil effects to unknown evil spirits. And then, the fortune-teller tells the unhappy molested person that he is being worried by bad and wicked spirits. These have no shrines. Their names are unknown(Arinze, 1970, p.37). The diviner usually prescribes the kind of sacrifice suitable and capable of stopping the evil machination from operating and causing more troubles.

This particular ritual of sacrifice requires that the sacrificer brings the following ritual items for the sacrifice: kolanuts, alligator peppers, a piece of egg, salt, a piece of white chalk (*nzu*), and a piece of black cloth. A special priest is invited to the house of the molested to bind the evil spirits. He performs this ritual after divining for the right ritual items from the spirit world. The ancestors and other known spirits are called upon to use their vital energies to subdue the unknown spirits and set the victim free. Some of the causes of molestations from unknown spirits can be recklessness, ignorance and desperation. It is reckless to enter evil forest and some evil altars without being in a high vibracoustic frequency and without observing certain rituals that will increase your vital force. Again, it is an act of ignorance to call on unknown spirits, invoking them into trees,

gourds and stones without knowing what they can actually offer; using the human vital force to invoke spirits and sacrificing to such spirits for power have disastrous consequences. Finally, it is an act of desperation to cry for help from any spirit at all without knowing the mission of such spirit. Some barren women sometimes become desperate in their search for a child and therefore draws the attention of some unknown hovering spirits in the environment. This also happens to some men who are desperate for wealth; they go about inviting calamities into their families by entering into unknown altars just to be rich.

Petition— *Aja Enyemaka*

Most of the Igbo sacrifices are petitive because the Igbo believe that every good fortune in life is necessitated by some good spirits somewhere and therefore, whenever there is trouble and incessant failure to get one's 'best of luck', they believe that there are certain 'spiritual encumbrances' withholding such favours. Consequently, he makes sacrifices to the gods or God; the latter is run to in rare cases, when other spirits fail him. There are many intentions with which the Igbo petition to the spirits. Among all the petitions, the greatest is life and second to this, is good health. This is the major reason why the Igboman, after praising God with the kolanut in his right fingers in the reflective mood commonly known as *igóófó*, usually begins his prayers with the following wordings: *Ndu mmiri, ndu azu; anyị ga-adịni o: iseee!*. Hence, The Ibos therefore offer sacrifices for good health, for the recovery of the sick, to stop epidemics, for the preservation of travellers, for life in general and against death especially where it is rather frequent or where it gets at young people(Arinze, 1970, p.39).

This particular sacrificial ritual provides the avenue to solve a particular problem which has hitherto troubles the petitioner. There are conditions under which a petition can be easily granted by the Supreme God or gods. The conditions include but are not limited to the unity of intention or purpose, the innocency of the petitioner, the purity of heart of the petitioner, the level of the vital force of the petitioner, and gratitude. The Igbo believe that '*A kpa akpa wee gbue Nevada na-ogaghi awa n'afa*' — if the daughter of the soil is sacrificed by the consensus of kindred, her spirit can neither disturb nor be divined'. Again, when the petitioner is innocent of the charges levelled against him, the petition for blessings and vengeance is likely to be granted easily. On the other hand, the purity of heart of the petitioner increases the chances of winning any spiritual case because purity is the medicine for impenetrability or impregnability; once you are pure in heart, you will always dine with the good spirits, and the bad spirits will be afraid of you because you are with the Supreme God who is the *actus purus* (the pure act). In addition, the level of vital force at the moment of the petition matters a lot; a low level of vitality can hardly propel a petition to the spirits while a high level of vital force easily avails the petition to the spirits. On gratitude, it is right to say that it is a petition for more blessings or favours. There is an Igbo adage which says that *E kene dike na nke o mere, o mee ozo*— If the powerful is praised for using his powers for the good of humanity, he is motivated to do more. By implication, if once petition is granted in the first place, it is expected that one shows appreciation to the spirits with some items like chickens, goats, cattle, etc; this act has a way of appealing to the spirits to do more.

3.3.4 Thanksgiving—*Aja Ekele*— *Aja Inye Ekele*

This is a form of sacrifice whereby a believer (worshipper) shows gratitude and heartily appreciates the goodness of God or gods in his life. In a traditional Igbo setting, a true worshipper always takes a recourse to the deities he worships, attributing his successes to them and therefore, sacrifices certain animals and tubers of yam (mostly four tubers) used as tools of the sacrifice. In some cases, a worshipper may be seeking for a favour from a deity and this warrants him to make a promise to the god that if such favour is granted to him in due time that he would certainly pay homage to it (the god) with a goat or chicken, etc. Onwubiko states that thanksgiving sacrifices feature when blessing or favours have been received (Onwubiko, 1988, p.57). People do thanksgiving sacrifices for different reasons and intentions. In some cases, as Igbo man carries out a thanksgiving sacrifice for a successful childbirth (*omumu*), he makes this particular sacrifice to thank the deity in whom he believes is responsible for the gift of a child. In some other cases, an Igbo man offers a thanksgiving sacrifice to the god of yam usually referred to as *Ifejioke* in Igbo land for a successful and bountiful yam harvest, and during the chieftaincy of *ozo* title taking.

However, there are two divisions of sacrifice and they include the positive and the negative sacrifices. The positive sacrifice is referred to as any form of sacrifice that assumes the position of peace offering, thanksgiving, sacrifice for the restoration of life and good health and the like. In short every virtuous sacrificial ritual is called 'positive sacrifice'. On the other hand, any form of sacrifice that causes imbalance in nature and brings unwarranted pains to other people is called 'negative sacrifice'. An instance of a negative sacrifice is the ritual practice whereby somebody sacrifices a particular animal on his personal occultic altar (*otumokpo*) bidding it to kill or maim another person. The question is: does such sacrifice work? The answer is Yes, it works because he controls the charm with a tool of sacrifice. However, the efficacy of this particular sacrifice hugely depends on the level of the vital force of the victim; it does not work on the person whose vital force is higher and more pristine than the vibracoustic frequency generated from the tool of the ritual sacrifice. Therefore, we shall end on the salient note of Mulumba, thus:

When sacrifices of food items are given to the spirit,
we do not expect that the spirit eat them as men do.
They consume by appreciation and finally abstract
their essences. Thus, to eat on the cosmos of spirits is
infact to appreciate. This understanding extends to
our churches. When an item is offered to God, we
know actually that God does not eat nor use money.
But we believe God accepts our offering, tangible or
intangible (Obiajulu, 2021, p.125).

Conclusion

The reality of sacrificial ritual is made very accessible and experienceable as it has become very essential in the belief system and cultural practice of the Igbo. This practice has been substantiated by the results and resultant potency from the ritual of sacrifice as sacredly performed in both open places and shrines; the Supreme Being (God) is revered and worshipped through the ritual of sacrifice and also are the duties of the various communities in Igboland. The efficacy and sanctity of this ritual practice has been

experienced consistently over the centuries that the viral influences have continued to remain admissible and undisbanded. The morality of sacrifice is predicated on the purification of the land and prevention of calamities ensuring from certain unholy indulgences.

Therefore, it would be right to say that, no immoral ritual can attain the status of sacrificial ritual since the latter is built on the foundation of morality and sanctity. In this regard, the ritual-killing which was prevalent during the precolonial era in Nigeria when some maidens were sacrificed either to certain community deities or in honour of the great lords of the land was done either as a grass ignorance or out of victimization initiative. Otherwise, it was not a practice of sacrificial ritual rather might represent another form of ritual which is alien to the original Igbo tradition. Hence, Arinze rightly avers that killing of human beings at funerals is not sacrificial (Arinze, 1970, p.88). Moreso, money-ritual-ritual-killing for money does not align with the meaning of sacrifice and therefore, defeats the objective and profanes the sanctity of sacrifice. The reason being that sacrifice, in the strict sense of the word, is not transactional. Consequently, the Igbo man sees sacrifices as a way of recognizing the Supremacy of God and the Superiority of the Spirits – the ancestors, gods and other servants of Gods in the world of immortality.

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