

# THE HERMENEUTICS OF HOPE IN AFRICAN IGBO ONTOLOGY

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**Abstract.** I will attempt some hermeneutical reflections on three generative themes in African Igbo ontology of hope. These three generative themes are: a) Hope as *Ìhè* (Light as Hope. Light of Hope. A light at the end of the tunnel. Hope as Reality/Essence/Substance) (ontological hope), b) Hope as *Nkuzi* or a part of *Nkuziology* (Life's teaching or social learning, the experience of life forms humanity) (epistemological/pedagogical hope), and c) Hope as *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya* (including Igbo names like *Nchekwubechi*, *Olileanyachi*, *Echi-di-ime*—tomorrow has promises, tomorrow is a day of hope or is a day to be hopeful) (anthropological hope). In Professor Pantaleon Iroegbu's trend of African Ontology or Metaphysics as the *Kpim* of philosophy, one is drawn to his African Igbo philosophical concepts. For instance, 'Kpim' is Igbo word for 'the kernel', the substance, the essence of a thing, the reality or the most real of reality; *Hypo-kaimenon* (Greek for underlying entity), etc. I will articulate and advance a hermeneutical equivalent to Iroegbu's *Kpim* (Igbo word for the kernel, the substance, the core of a thing, etc.) to another African Igbo word 'Ihe' (Thingness/Substance/Essence).

**Keywords:** hope; *Nkuzi*; *Nchekwube*; African; Igbo; ontology.

## INTRODUCTION

In this work, I will attempt some hermeneutical reflections on three generative themes in African Igbo ontology of hope. These three generative themes are: a) Hope as *Ìhè* (Light of Hope. A light at the end of the tunnel. Hope as Reality/Essence/Substance) (ontological hope), b) Hope as *Nkuzi* or a part of *Nkuziology* (Life's teaching or social learning, the experience of life forms humanity) (epistemological/pedagogical hope), and c) Hope as *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya* (including Igbo names like *Nchekwubechi*, *Olileanyachi*, *Echi-di-ime*—tomorrow has promises, tomorrow is a day of hope or is a day to be hopeful) (anthropological hope).

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In Professor Pantaleon Iroegbu's trend of African Igbo Ontology or Metaphysics as the *Kpim* of philosophy, one is drawn to his *Igbo* philosophical concepts<sup>1</sup>. For instance, "Kpim" is Igbo word for "the kernel", the substance, the essence of a thing, the reality or the most real of reality, *Hypo-kaimenon* (Greek for underlying entity),<sup>2</sup> etc. In an attempt to advance the philosophical richness of Professor Iroegbu's contributions to African Igbo Ontology or Metaphysics (or science of being and Being-itself), I will articulate and advance a hermeneutical equivalent to Iroegbu's *Kpim* (Igbo word for the kernel, the substance, the *core* of a thing, etc.) to another African Igbo word *Ihe* (Thingness/Substance/Essence/Entity). *Ihe* has got 2 different connotations depending on the context. These 2 different connotations mutually sustain the understanding of *Ihe* or Being. The *first connotation* is: *Ihe*—means—'Whatness', 'Quiddity', 'Essence' of a thing, the really real or the real thing, or reality itself. For instance, in African Igbo language expression: *Ihe mere ihe oji buru ihe obu*—meaning—'what or that which made a thing what it is' or 'what/that which really makes a thing a thing or whatever it is.' The *second connotation* is: *Ìhè* (Light, Disclosure, the ability to be known, to be transparent)—could be related to 'disclosure' or revealing nature (a liberal interpretation could be like German *Dasein*—as part of *Sein, Existenz*). *Ìhè* (Igbo for 'light' or 'revealness' or becoming known) is intrinsic to understanding *Ihe* (as being or the kernel of a thing, stuff, being, or Greek *ousia*). *Ìhè* (light) is directly and epistemically tied to *Ihe* (essence, substance or whatness).

It is only *Ihe* (quiddity, substance, essence or reality) that is strictly associated with *Ìhè* (light, disclosure or transparency). Without *Ìhè* (light, disclosure), the disclosing/transparent nature of *Ihe* (the kernel, substance, essence) will be impossible to comprehend or be encountered. In this inevitable association between *Ihe* (the kernel, substance or being) and *Ìhè* (light or disclosure), I will discuss the significance of *Ìhè* (Light as hope. Light of hope. A light for direction or revelation of being or truth)—as an essential aspect of African Igbo hermeneutics of 'Hope.' The idea of Hope could be communicated through an English expression like the 'light at the end of the tunnel' or 'reality' that truly reveals itself. While 'Hopelessness' depicts darkness, failure, disappointment, etc., I will take a look at some African Igbo expressions in relation to explaining *Ìhè* (light, disclosure, and substance, essence, reality or entity) as important to understanding African Igbo notions of 'Hope'.

### A) HOPE AS *IHE/ÌHÈ*

(i) African Igbo people often say: *Ihe kwuru ihe akwudebe ya*—meaning—'When a thing stands, then another things stands by it.' (This also means that without a substance, a source, a real thing; then there can be nothing else close to it. *Ihe* (being,

<sup>1</sup> Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, Owerri, International University, Press, 1995, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Uche Anozie, "The Problem of Evil in Plato and Gadamerian Plato", *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie*, 66, 1, 2019, pp. 116-129.

substance; *Ìhè*—light, disclosure)—keeps anything in being. It makes a thing possible or capable of being. It is like the word ‘substance’ (Latin, *Substantia*) or (Greek, *Ousia* or *Hypo-kaimenon*). Substance is something that is underneath or the underlying entity. As is a common African Igbo wise saying, it is strictly on something that another thing can stand upon. Nothing is super-imposed on nothing. On nothing *nothing else* stands. ‘Nothing else’ is not an underlying entity. One could relate this to my earlier works on African Igbo notion of *Mmadu* (person) as the beauty of life<sup>3</sup>, and *The Problem of Evil in Platonism and Gadamerian Plato*.<sup>4</sup> Without substance/quintessence/being there will be no shadow. Shadow is an accident. It is totally supported by substance or being. Accident (not a road mishap) does not exist in itself.<sup>5</sup>

(ii) Another enlightening concept is *Ìhè* in *Ihe-eke* meaning—The Light that creates. *Ìhè-Chukwu*—‘The light of God’—this could be considered to be the ‘action’ or ‘activity’ of Being itself. God (although religiously used does imply the ‘Being’ or ‘Entity’ that truly exists in himself, by itself, and for itself. Without this God or Being, nothing else has existence or being. There is also a Christianized utterance like *Ìhè si na-Ìhè* or *Ìhè Nke putara n’Ìhè* (Light of Light, The Un-caused Cause, Causality itself or from Reality itself) (ontological hope).

(iii) A third consideration of *Ihe* points to something unique in African Igbo Ontology. *Ihe-anyi* or *Ihe-anyi-chukwu* meaning—‘Nothing is impossible to God.’ The point of this African Igbo ontological/metaphysical expression is that ‘Ihe’ is actuality, becoming to being, Being, etc. The actuality or the becoming of the real is also the becoming of hope and hopefulness. The presence of the real reveals, or will eventually reveal, the most real. That which is eventually revealed is the real that becomes, or the becoming-being.

Epistemologically speaking, we know a thing in a limited manner, in potentiality, and truly know in actuality. There is nothing that is fully known in actuality in the physical world (Igbo: *Uwa nkea*). The most real is the most ‘true’ and the most present. To be present or this ‘presence’ is understood as that which eliminates the un-truthful, ‘hopelessness’, despair, helplessness, and builds optimism<sup>7</sup> or hope based on truth. Hope has also been translated in African Igbo language to mean ‘Nchekwube’—a kind of optimism for a positive outcome based on fate or destiny, an attitude of positive

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Uche Anozie, *Hans-Georg Gadamer and African Hermeneutic Philosophy*, Chisinau, Generis Publishing, 2020, p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> S. U. Anozie “The Problem of Evil in Plato and Gadamerian Plato”, pp. 116-129.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>6</sup> African Igbo language in Igbo Catholic/Christian Creed.

<sup>7</sup> Some Western scholars make a distinction between hope and optimism, especially Michael Himes (of Boston College, Massachusetts, USA). African Igbo Ontology of Hope does not subscribe to such distinctions because of the interconnection between the physical and the spiritual worlds. To have hope is to be optimistic in the determinations of our *Chi* and our individual/particular *chi*. Hope and optimism are not mutually exclusive.

expectations and understanding of the dynamism of reality, confidence in the unfolding of reality, and in reality's own time. Human beings (*Mma ndu*—the beauty of life) are part of this unfolding of reality. Unfolding of reality is the actualization of the fullness of humanity or human becoming (anthropological hope). In the following reflections, I will associate *Ihe* to *Nkuzi* generative theme of African Igbo Ontology of hope.

## B) HOPE AS NKUZI (LIFE'S TEACHING OR SOCIAL LEARNING)

The African Igbo people of Ngwaland<sup>8</sup> (Southeastern Nigeria) have a common saying: *Obu otu ihe uwa nu* or *Obu otu ihe uwa di* meaning—'That is how reality is or how things are', 'That is how the world is', or 'such is the world/reality.' It is a statement made in relation to acceptance of a situation of things, and hopefulness. 'Hopefulness' comes through truthfulness, true understanding, and forthrightness. Hope arises from Truth or Truthfulness. Hope does not work with falsehood, fantasy, 'make-belief' or something fake. I will relate this to epistemological/pedagogical notion of hope arising from *Nkuzi*—Life's teaching or social learning. Life experiences teach us about reality or truth or give us hope or give us hopefulness in actualized reality. *Nkuzi* does not take place in the false or fake. Life crafts us in the truth, not in the false or fake. Life makes us or cultivates us.<sup>9</sup> I consider this 'cultivation' through *Nkuzi* as part of our actualization of the fullness of being (understanding our *Ihe/Whatness/Essence* or Hope as *Ihe*). African Igbo people express this reality in wise sayings like: *Ndu ka Aku* or *Nduka* (Life is more than wealth) and *Onye Ije ka onye isi awomma* (A traveler is better experienced than the untraveled elderly person, or experience [of life] is the best teacher). A teacher is *Onye-nkuzi*.

For me, following the influence of Iroegbu, *Nkuzi* or teaching aligns with the *Ihe* or *Kpim* of education. *Ihe* or *Kpim* "is the quintessence, which is the thingness of a thing and the somethingness of something (Iroegbu, 2002:17)."<sup>10</sup> The African Igbo words *Ihe* and *Kpim* are related to *Nkuziology* (teaching) in African Igbo worldview or *Bildung* in German worldview. In Benson Peter Irabor and Okikiola Oludare Olufowobi's essay, "An Exploration of Pantaleon Iroegbu's Pedagogy of *Nkuziology* for Contemporary Africa," Iroegbu's view is outlined:

Analytically, *Nkuzi* means to knock, hit, strike aright or to repair, to shape to required proportion. On a piece of iron that is crooked or rugged, one hits with a hammer to straighten it, to make it fine. The same word is used for the verb, to teach, *nkuzi*. In this transferred, but very real sense, to teach is to knock, straighten or shape the pupil,

<sup>8</sup> This could be referred to as "Ndi Ngwa."

<sup>9</sup> S. U. Anozie, *Hans-Georg Gadamer and African Hermeneutic Philosophy*, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/43644897/An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_Pantaleon\\_Iroegbu\\_s\\_Pedagogy\\_of\\_Nkuziology\\_for\\_Contemporary\\_Africa](https://www.academia.edu/43644897/An_Exploration_of_Pantaleon_Iroegbu_s_Pedagogy_of_Nkuziology_for_Contemporary_Africa), accessed: 13 August 2021. See Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Kpim of Theodicy Proving the Existence of God Via Hermeholiontica*, Ibadan, Hope Publications, 2002, p. 17.

student or subject aright. This time it is not with harmer [hammer]<sup>11</sup> or stone, but with knowledge, instruction, wisdom and good example.<sup>12</sup>

I would like to emphasize here that ‘Nkuzi’ (*N-kuzi*) does not imply violence. It is all about cultivating a morally balanced person. Like the verb ‘kuzi’, it means hermeneutically to put to the right path or direction, to align properly, to put in the good state or good character. *Nkuzi* has nothing to do with defiling or dehumanizing the other person/student of life. *Nkuzi* does not take place in an environment of abuse or violation of the dignity of a person. It is a good learning experience or a life-long social learning experience. Time does not weaken the value/quality of the good, and so *Nkuzi* as a life-long social learning experience (the good) does not become undervalued because of age or time or circumstance.

I appreciate the resources and quotations associated with Professor Iroegbu in Irabor and Olufowobi’s work. For instance, “Nkuziology therefore, is the balanced upbringing, knocking aright, the teaching of the person to be balanced, good and respectful to order and goodness (Iroegbu, 1995, 264).”<sup>13</sup> The statement above affirms my own understanding of Iroegbu’s articulation of *Nkuzi* (teaching) or my advancement of *Nkuzi* by promoting *Hope as Nkuzi* as a generative theme in the hermeneutics of hope in African Igbo Ontology. However, I have chosen to avoid using the term “Nkuziology” because of the linguistic implications of anglicizing or westernizing an African Igbo concept-*Nkuzi*. For me, *Nkuzi* is a thought pattern, a logical approach, a study, a science or a systematic knowledge approach in its own right. *Nkuzi*, as a thought pattern or study, focuses on information for self-development through communication. It is about acquiring the basic skills for a genuine and fulfilling existence. It also includes a reformative or rehabilitative aspect. One could recall here my comments about the *Nkuzi* as the good that does not lose its value based on age, time or circumstance. It is a life-long social learning experience. In fact, it is an eternal good, an eternal truth. *Nkuzi* (teach/teaching) is about knowledge of the truth, the eternal truth, and the truth of life.<sup>14</sup> *Nkuzi* makes it possible for the manifestation of a life of purpose, a life in accord with one’s *Chi*. The manifestation of a life of purpose is same with the ‘manifestation’ of *Ihe* (*Ìhè*—light or direction or personal mentor or guardian or *chi onye*). In Irabor and Olufowobi’s work, it stated:

Thus, Iroegbu (2005a:221) avers that knowledge given in teaching has three basic foci: information, formation and reformation. It is information in that it is a commu-

<sup>11</sup> I added this correction.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/43644897/An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_Pantaleon\\_Iroegbu\\_s\\_Pedagogy\\_of\\_Nkuziology\\_for\\_Contemporary\\_Africa](https://www.academia.edu/43644897/An_Exploration_of_Pantaleon_Iroegbu_s_Pedagogy_of_Nkuziology_for_Contemporary_Africa), accessed: 13 August 2021. See Pantaleon Iroegbu, and M. A. Izibili, *Kpim of Democracy Thematic Introduction to Socio-Political Philosophy*, Benin City, Ever-Blessed Publishers, 2004, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/43644897/An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_Pantaleon\\_Iroegbu\\_s\\_Pedagogy\\_of\\_Nkuziology\\_for\\_Contemporary\\_Africa](https://www.academia.edu/43644897/An_Exploration_of_Pantaleon_Iroegbu_s_Pedagogy_of_Nkuziology_for_Contemporary_Africa), accessed on 13 August 2021. See Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, Owerri, International University Press, 1995, p. 264.

<sup>14</sup> There is no desire for that which is false or fake in African Igbo notion of *Nkuzi*. *Nkuzi* is always for the truth, the truth of life. *Nkuzi* is focused on the life of purpose.

nication of ideas and facts that are meant to be used to achieve some goals. It is Formation in that those facts given in information are destined to constitute the mental and personality structure of the recipient. They make him or her behave this way or that, thereby structuring the person's way of life. Teaching also has reformative function in the aspect that it helps to change already formed ways and manners of behaviour. Education thus reconstructs personality. It makes anew; and all things being equal, a better person for oneself and for the society in which one lives and operates.<sup>15</sup>

My goal above is to associate *Hope* to *Nkuzi* (from hope to *Nkuzi*) in order to identify this pedagogical aspect of *Hope* as *Nkuzi* (life's teaching or social learning). One should take a good note of the difference between *Hope to* and *Hope as*. For *Hope as Nkuzi*, it means that life teaches every one of us. Life teaches 'life' (how to live) or the art of living. The experiences of life are part of our human becoming or actualization of self (as a part of reality). The challenges or tragedies of life are not ends-in-themselves. They are rather life's teaching moments or means for human experience, true human becoming, en-wisdomization (enwisdomizing experience, to-make-wise experience), transformation in hope, and for the better. The experiences of tragedies help us develop our skills to aspire, to develop hope, or the skills to hopefulness. This hope or hopefulness is the anchor for our becoming or continuity of beingness. 'To be' is *to exist* with the hope that one's fullness of being is a task that should be accomplished.

In order to conclude this section, I consider the following African Igbo proverbs to be appropriate to *Hope as Nkuzi* or are pertinent to understanding *Nkuzi*. Let me explain these African Igbo proverbs in relation to *Hope (as Nkuzi)*:

a) "The smaller the lizard the greater the hope of becoming a crocodile."<sup>16</sup> This proverb means that one's personal condition of being will determine the quality of aspiration to become great or to excel. Hope lies in the beyond. The beyond is not necessarily that which is temporally distant. It is an interior quality and interior longing.

b) "Hope is a good thing and good things never die." It means that hope is intrinsically associated with being and the good. Hope is the interior longing or aspiration of being. Being-in-fullest is the aspiration of all beings.

c) "With a little seed of imagination you can grow a field of hope." It means that desire or imagination of being brings hope, and to hope/hoping is at the core of being. Every being has the spark or seed of hope. Imagination<sup>17</sup> is the "core" of being itself. It is the essence of being and hoping.

<sup>15</sup>[https://www.academia.edu/43644897/An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_Pantaleon\\_Iroegbu\\_s\\_Pedagogy\\_of\\_Nkuziology\\_for\\_Contemporary\\_Africa](https://www.academia.edu/43644897/An_Exploration_of_Pantaleon_Iroegbu_s_Pedagogy_of_Nkuziology_for_Contemporary_Africa), accessed on 13 August 2021. See Pantaleon Iroegbu, "Philosophy of Education: Ethics of Teaching profession" in Pantaleon Iroegbu, A. Echekebe, (eds.), *Kpim of Morality: General, Special & Professional*, Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books, 2005, p. 221.

<sup>16</sup> Professor Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu (an APGC research colleague) used this proverb during our July 24th, 2020 international conference on "From Discomfort to Hope" hosted by Alternative Perspectives and Global Concerns (APGC) Research Organization based in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

<sup>17</sup> In this case, imagination is not fantasy or the ability to use or combine past 'ideas.' Imagination is the transcendence of being.

d) “Your greatest hope is your greatest fear.” It means that life teaches us through the challenges in the moments of our lives. Our hope is the task of our being. We become our hopes. But what we become is not external or superficial to us. Our hopes are our internal (necessary) aspirations. Our aspirations challenge us in order to actualize ourselves to the fullest. Self-actualization is not to accomplish superfluity or that which is beyond being or human essence, core or *Kpim*.

#### KPIM AND ONTOLOGY: NKUZI (TEACHING/EDUCATION) AS THE ‘KPIM’ OF LIFE’S TEACHING OR SOCIAL LEARNING

*Nkuzi/Education/Paideia*, like any other human activities, cannot escape the realm of ontology/metaphysics or being. Ontology/Metaphysics, the ultimate reality or innermost essence, is central to any concept of education because it is important that any educational program be based upon fact and reality rather than on fancy, illusion (as sources of despair, helplessness and hopelessness). As earlier pointed out, I am of the view that there is an ontological desire for truth in us. The knowledge/quest/desire of the truth is the same for all rational beings. There is no desire for that which is false or fake in African Igbo notion of *Nkuzi*. *Nkuzi* is always for the truth, the truth of/about life. *Nkuzi* is focused on the life of purpose. The ontological and anthropological aspects of hope are especially important for educators because they are dealing with human beings (as part of reality). *Nkuzi/Education/Paideia* and educational process address the epistemological notion of hope (*Hope as Nkuzi*) without overlooking the ontological (the real essence of things) and anthropological (the real services/purposes of things for humanity or human wellbeing) dimensions of hope. At the foundation of African Igbo *Nkuzi/education* or life-long social learning is the understanding of the truth about being/reality or life itself.

I will take a brief look at Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* to highlight the inherent relationship or dynamism between ‘Hope as *Nkuzi*’ and ‘Hope as *Ìhè* (include Hope as *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya*) in African Igbo Ontology, and African Igbo language.

#### LANGUAGE: HOPE AS NKUZI IN PERSONHOOD

African Igbo notion of hope could be discerned in the richness of the ontology or metaphysics of beauty. At the core of the concept of beauty or the beautiful is hopefulness, disclosure, light, truth, reality, etc. In African Igbo language ‘mma’ (*mara mma*—beautiful)<sup>18</sup> is associated with disclosure, truth, reality and hope (to be and to continue to be real). The notion of *Mmadu* (Igbo word for person—as ‘the beauty of life’) is related to disclosure, truth, reality, and what makes life hopeful. The beautiful makes life hopeful or worth-living. The beautiful is a ‘hopeful’ pointer to Beauty itself.

<sup>18</sup> See my reflection above on African Igbo notion of the person as the beauty of life (mma , mma ndu, mmadu).

Beauty makes ‘the beautiful’ possible. The Greek word for the beautiful is ‘kalon’. Beauty could be expressed in German as ‘schön’—adjective for beautiful, ‘die Schönheit’—noun for beauty. For these different languages, the essence (the inner meaning) of the beautiful is expressible or communicable by the respective languages in their own ways. That means there is an inner dimension to language. Our languages express reality or being (language is ontology and ontological). Like Hans-Georg Gadamer the being that is understood is language. Language speaks us. Language or the ability to language comes through *Nkuzi* (teaching, education, cultivating/cultivate, discipline, upbringing, awareness creation, etc.) Hope as *Ìhè* (Ontology) and *Nkuzi* are united in the notion that language (*Okwu* in Igbo)<sup>19</sup> comes through *Nkuzi* (but *Nkuzi* understands/explains life as being/ontology). One truly knows ‘being’ through, and in, language. Language reveals this being of things.

Language is understood through *Nkuzi*. *Nkuzi* is possible through language. Language (*Okwu*) and *Nkuzi* are indissociable. *Nkuzi* makes reality become truly present. This present-ness of reality is the realization of hope or what is hoped for. *Nkuzi* makes hope real. *Nkuzi* gives hope. Hope as *Nkuzi* is the realization of self/personhood and reality through experience (not merely experimentation or repetition of a process).

In light of the above, hope as *Nkuzi* discloses understanding and meaning of reality, truth, knowledge and African Igbo notion of ‘Hope’ (*Nchekwube* or *Olileanya*), which emerges through the *Nkuzi* (teaching experience or social learning) of life. Germans will relate this sense of hope as coming through experience or lived-experience (*Erfahrung* or *Erlebenis*). It is also basically ‘Bildung’ (formation that gives hope, skilled in the hope for self-and-communal-sustainability) in German. In this sense, the purpose of experience is to gain knowledge and understand life/reality. This knowledge or understanding of reality (nature of reality) is also the reward of hope. In *Hans-Georg Gadamer and African Hermeneutic Philosophy*, I explained “Bildung” as “formation or education in the development of human culture and understanding of self. ‘Bildung’ points to a continual process or movement.”<sup>20</sup>

#### HOPE AND *CHI* (CREATIVE BEING) PHENOMENON IN AFRICAN IGBO ONTOLOGY (ONTOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL HOPE)

The dynamism between Hope as *Nkuzi*, Hope as *Ìhè* and Hope as *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya* in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is hermeneutically enriching. Okonkwo (Achebe’s main character) operated within his own structure of hope (nature of being). This structure of hope essentially aligns with African Igbo notion of ‘Chi’ (God) or ‘Chi-onye’ or ‘chi’ (personal guardian). One’s *chi* or *Chi* itself determines the ‘structure of hope’ (nature of being) of the person. This structure of hope is related to *Ìhè* (light or

<sup>19</sup> *Okwu Igbo* (African Igbo language), *Okwu Bekee* (English or European persons’ language), and *Okwu ndi obodo ozo* (a foreign language). *Okwu* is also ‘word’ or ‘logos’ or ‘being’ or ‘reality.’

<sup>20</sup> S. U. Anozie, *Hans-Georg Gadamer and African Hermeneutic Philosophy*, p. 99.



the disclosure of the individual person or group). In order to further explain this personal structure of hope arising from African Igbo names and life-world, I will take a look at Okonkwo's tragedy and hope in *Things Fall Apart*.

In African Igbo societies, Igbo names communicate the message of hope (*Ìhè*, *Nchekwube*, disclosure or light) in the being and names of their bearer. In *Things Fall Apart*, names like *Ikemefuna* (meaning—May my strength not be lost), *Okonkwo* (meaning—A male child born on Nkwo<sup>21</sup> market day), *Nneka* (meaning—Mother is superior or precious), etc. have deeper hermeneutical implications or bear hermeneutical weight in understanding the context and the specific message of truthfulness, reality and hope in the becoming or unfolding of the totality of reality in African Igbo world. Beyond *Things Fall Apart*, names like *Ndukaku* (meaning—Life is more than wealth) resonate with the idea that life gives hope. Life is more than wealth or riches. *Ndudiri* (meaning—As long as there is life, then there is hope or if there is life, then there is hope) affirms this appreciation of life as a hope-filled one. Other African Igbo names like *Ugo-ndu* (meaning—The beauty/splendor on life) draws on the beauty of life emphasized in African Igbo notion of hope and person (as the beauty of life). *Uju-ndu* (meaning—The fullness of life) is also a name that builds on the foundation of hope and hopefulness. *Uju-ndu* is the goal of life of hope. To be happy is to live in *Uju-ndu*. *Uju-ndu* is happiness and it is also hopefulness. *Uche* or *Uchechukwu* (meaning—The Will of God) is another interesting African Igbo name that captures the idea of Hope as *Nkuzi*. Hope is fulfilled through the 'Will of God' (God as *Chi-ka* or the highest of being/fullness of Being or Pure Being). It is only what is hopeful and truthful that gets fully fulfilled in African Igbo worldviews and literature.

The literature of a people gives one a new perspective of understanding their philosophy of life and hope. For instance, the interpretation of some African Igbo names, the hermeneutics of the notion of *Chi*—as individual fate in understanding tragedy remains for us an on-going hermeneutical project. In Okonkwo's tragic experience and that of his community, the following African Igbo proverbs were helpful to communicate African Igbo structure of hope or sense of hope as *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya*. The notion of *Chi* is necessarily tied to this hermeneutics of hope and hopefulness. This necessity is emphasized on the point that life itself is a gift. It is a gift that one has to allow to unfold till the end—the revelation of reality (fullness of life and happiness). Here are some African Igbo proverbs with *Chi* (as creative being/force or fate) that resonate with Hope or Hopefulness. For instance:

a) *Chi onye adighi n'izu ma mmadu egbuna ya* (meaning—If one's *Chi* [fate or destiny] is not in agreement, nobody can kill him). This means that 'Chi' (Fate, Creative Force or God) does not conspire against us or undermine our essential nature or self-actualizations. There is hope of success as long as the creative force or fate is on our side.

b) *Omere ma chi ekweghi ndi uta atala ya* (meaning—Whoever that has tried his/her best should not be blamed.) In relation to hope, *Chi* (fate or creative force)

<sup>21</sup> African Igbo worldview recognizes 4 market days: Eke, Orie, Afor, and Nkwo.

guarantees what we hope for and what we strive for. One cannot accomplish more than he/she is destined for. What one accomplishes is part of hope as *Nkuzi* and hope as *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya*. Achebe provides some other proverbs helpful in explaining hope as *Nkuzi* and hope as *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya*.

c) *Dinta muta igba agaghi, eneka amuta ufe akwusighi* (meaning—Men/Hunters have learned to shoot without missing their mark and I [Eneka, the bird] have learned to fly without perching on a twig). That was Eneka/the bird's response when it was asked why it was always on the wing. The hermeneutics of this proverb is on the question of hope and hopefulness. For the bird (Eneka) there is always a solution (hope) to every situation or problem. There is always a way out of every tough or life-threatening situation. Hope is associated with optimism out of a tough or an unpleasant situation. Hope is associated with the ability to adapt or adaptability for excellence. The challenges of life are not fully predictable but human beings can adapt to fulfill their essence or purposeful goals through their structure of hope.

#### HOPE AND TRAGEDY: THE STRUCTURE OF HOPE FOR ACHEBE'S OKONKWO

The African Igbo people use proverbs to express the wisdom of their communities, the traditions that must be handed down or transmitted through direct application in narratives (oral or written). Proverbs help provide the clearness that narratives seek to communicate.

On chapter fourteen of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* a proverb was used. It says, "[I]f a man said yea his *chi* also affirmed."<sup>22</sup> This proverb illustrates the double aspects of human existence. The double aspects are the divine and the human aspects of existence of hope. For a person to accomplish anything in African Igbo worldviews he/she must live in accord with his/her destiny or fate, and learn from the experience in line with his/her destiny. Destiny or fate is appreciated with hope for the good (even when the seeming bad thing happens or is the outcome). Every incident is hopeful experience as long as it is within the structure of existence of a person or a community, and facilitated by the divine (*Chi okike* or creative being). Some African Igbo people associated this *Chi okike* or *Chi-ka* (He who is the greatest. He is the greatest being that guarantees hope) to *Osebuluwa/Oliseburuwa* (The Being/He who holds the world/universe).<sup>23</sup> Existence involves an unpredictable aspect, which implies that a person has to first accept that he/she is capable of accomplishing a task before one's *Chi* (personal god or guardian) concurs with the same task.

A further discussion of the role of *Chi*<sup>24</sup> in African Igbo worldviews is necessary because of *Chi*'s place in their proverbs and in the events that happen in people's life.

<sup>22</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Canada, Anchor Canada edition, 2009, p. 131. See Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London, Heinemann, 1958, p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> Professor Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu brought this to my attention. He translated it as "He who holds the world."

<sup>24</sup> S. U. Anozie, *Hans-Georg Gadamer and African Hermeneutic Philosophy*, pp. 237-243.

A subtle but important distinction to note here is that *Chi* is started with a capital letter to associate it with Igbo religion (as respect to the divine or a higher being or source of being).<sup>25</sup> However, I will retain the use of *chi* (starting with small letter) as is in Achebe's book. They both mean the same thing. For the Igbo, according to Christian Anieke, *Chi* is an important concept in traditional society. It is defined as personal destiny or personalized providence "of the individual which shapes their history and destiny. Some see *Chi* as a divine emanation from...which is responsible for the individual's fate or destiny."<sup>26</sup> The complexity of meanings about the specific role of the *Chi* is still present in the statement made above. But *Chi* involves element of both fate and faith (personal duty blessed by one's *Chi*),<sup>27</sup> in terms of the support one receives from the gods in order to succeed or in hope to succeed in one's individual task. It is in this sense that *Chi*'s role could also imply the task of a mediator (a personal guardian<sup>28</sup>, a giver of hope or 'destiny helper'—as is currently used in contemporary Christianized African-Igbo narratives).

One's relationship to the Supreme Being (*Chi ka* or *Chi-okike*) is determined by one's relations to his/her *Chi*. Since *Chi* is only an individual relationship, rather than universal, there could be a lucky person (with a good luck *Chi* [*Chioma*] for hope as *Nkuzi* and *Nchekwube/Olileanya*) or even a bad luck person (with bad luck *Chi* [*Chiojoo*] in hope as *Nkuzi*). This reminds us about the place of predestination and freewill in African Igbo traditional world. In relation to the above, there are other proverbs among African Igbo that affirm predestination. For example: *Omere ma chi ekweghi ndi uta atala ya* (He/She that has done his/her best should not blame his/herself if there are failures). It means that we all have our limitations of success. Our hope is always to put in our own and unique best. Another African Igbo proverb says: *Onye kwe ma chi ya ekweghi, o ga-egbu onwe ya?*<sup>29</sup> (It means if one says yes and his/her *Chi* disagrees, should one commit suicide? It also means that one should be positive-minded and hopeful). The second aspect/statement of the proverb above: '*o ga-egbu onwe ya?*' (Should one commit suicide?)—aligns with the culture of hope and hopefulness. There is always a possibility that each person's *Chi* (personal god or guardian) could help reverse a tragic situation to become a fortunate or fulfilling or hopeful one.

In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, when some of the people of the community referred to Okonkwo as one who is pushing his luck and desperate with the gods, Achebe describes the scene in a proverbial manner, "people said he (Okonkwo) had no respect for the gods of his clan. His enemies said his good fortune had gone to his head. They

<sup>25</sup> I chose to capitalize '*Chi*' considering its religious connotation in African Igbo thought. The role of *Chi* or fate is essential in Okonkwo's tragedy.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Anieke, *Problems of Intercultural Communication and Understanding in Achebe's Representation of the Igbo and their Culture*, Enugu, Mbaeze Printing Press, 2008, p. 34. See Pauline Aligwekwe, *Continuity of Traditional Values, The Igbo of Nigeria*, Owerri, 1991, p. 173. See Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London, The Macmillan Press, 1976, p. 75.

<sup>27</sup> Raphael Okechukwu Madu, *African Symbols, Proverbs and Myths: The Hermeneutics of Destiny*, New York, Peter Lang, 1996, p. 183.

<sup>28</sup> S. U. Anozie, *Hans-Georg Gadamer and African Hermeneutic Philosophy*, p. 237.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 242.

called him the little bird *nza* (Igbo name for a small bird) who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his *chi*.<sup>30</sup> The essence of the *Chi* proverbs in the narrative is to sharpen the image of the hero (Okonkwo) and clearly present the depth of his struggles [with fate.] This same situation is reinforced through other *Chi* proverbs (in chapter fourteen) when Okonkwo returned to his community after his exile of seven years. Achebe's text presents it thus:

Clearly his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*. The saying of the elders was not true—that if a man said yea his *chi* also affirmed. Here was a man whose *chi* said nay despite his own affirmation.<sup>31</sup>

Okonkwo's character clearly surfaces at the stages of his life and within his quest for heroic status. Achebe paints a picture of a man who easily forgets and who hopes that the best has been set for him by destiny. While in exile Okonkwo's accomplishments grew and after his return to Umuofia things seem to improve for him. People felt "that his *chi* [fate or god] might now be making amends for the past disaster"<sup>32</sup> (in chapter twenty). It appears that the gods could change their mind and make things better or hopeful. In normal parlance, only finite human being could "be making amends."<sup>33</sup> I think Okonkwo could not change his own fate by himself alone without the higher approval of his *Chi*. If this is the case, it is in agreement with the line "that his *chi* might now be making amends for the past disaster."<sup>34</sup> (in chapter twenty).<sup>35</sup> I will add that Okonkwo's *Chi* addressed or made amends, and so that implied the culture of hope and hopefulness in his community. I shall now proceed to present the African Igbo notion of *Chi* as a core ontological concept since I have discussed about some 'chi' proverbs that reflect hope and hopefulness.

### C) HOPE AS NCHEKWUBE/OLILEANYA AND AFRICAN IGBO NOTION OF *CHI* IMPLIES HOPE (ONTOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL HOPE)

In African Igbo lifeworld, *Ihe-bu-ihe* means ultimate entity, main thing, the essential being or ultimate entity. *Ihe-bu-ihe* reflects 'Nchekwube' or 'Olileanya' (looking

<sup>30</sup> C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 31. See Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* London, Heinemann, 1958, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 172. See C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann, 1958, p. 154.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>35</sup> This is my reading of that line to express only a wish or a possibility for Okonkwo. Lindfors affirmed the complex nature proverbs. There are proverbs that express different views on the same issue. Bernth Lindfors, "The Palm-oil with which Achebe's Words are Eaten", in Francis Abiola Irele (ed.), *Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart (Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism)*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2009, p. 561.

forward to, 'expecting positive results or outcomes' based on the fact that the most real or the essential being or necessary being makes the real possible). This could be related to Necessary Being and Contingent beings' discussions (ontological and anthropological hope). The Necessary Being (*Chi*, *Chi-na-eke*, *Oseburuwa*) makes hope possible for contingent beings. In the Necessary Being is hope fulfilled for contingent beings. Contingent beings are historical beings. *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya* is part of our historical nature as contingent beings. *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya* implies contingency. It is the hope that emerges at the culmination of our historical beingness, within the universal history (that includes the African Igbo historical consciousness).

African Igbo notion of *Chi* is a generative theme for my reflections on *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya* (Hope). Hope is part of African Igbo people's historical consciousness and experience. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika, Okonkwo's friend, remonstrates that the new culture/civilization and religion has sent Okonkwo to an early grave. This argument suggests that Okonkwo through the narrative did not see any reason to act contrary to the wish of the gods and goddesses of his land. It is rather Okonkwo's fate or destiny or *Chi* that saw him end his life in tragedy. A person's *chi* (personal god or guardian or a mediator of hope) is a basic condition for hope in success. In my view, "[S]uccess or failure in life is measured in Igbo worldviews according to how one lived with one's destiny or... *Chi*. *Chi* defines an individual's personal destiny and the role of providence."<sup>36</sup>

The set goals or purposes of one's existence are simply what we all 'hope for.' What we hope for is part of the meaning of life or meaning of reality in African Igbo worldview. There is the presence of fate and personal decisions approved by one's *Chi*. One needs the support of his god to succeed in one's task. The *Chi* also acts as a mediator. A 'mediator' brings hope and resolution. Igbo say that: *Ebe onye dara ka chi kwaturu ya* meaning—Where one falls, is where his/her God pushed him/her down. Another African Igbo proverb states: *Agbisi gba otule, ya amuru ako* meaning—When the black ant stings the buttocks, next time the [buttocks] learns wisdom. (It means that if things have not happened to a person, he/she does not develop wisdom or, simply put, experience is the best teacher).

Following the above, my two hermeneutical conclusions are: first, Okonkwo was faithful to his *Chi* and to the Oracle and, second, Okonkwo's success was from his *Chi* (and so fate, fate lived with hope) and not necessarily from his hard work. His seeming 'personal' tragedy is a tragedy that has befallen Umuofia as a community going through the actual intercultural hopelessness or crisis. Of course it is a communal tragedy experience but it is not one without hope or *Nchekwube/Olileanya*. For African Igbos there is no insurmountable challenge or tragedy as long as one or the community recognized the interconnectedness of all things under the *Chi* (of human history). It is also in this similar sense that dialectics in Western philosophy is essentially a system of hope, of revival, of renewal or renaissance or rebirth. Every worldview is part of the

<sup>36</sup> C. Anieke, *Problems of Intercultural Communication and Understanding in Achebe's Representation of the Igbo and their Culture*, p. 34.

whole view of the world in dialectics of hope (like the process of *Aufhebung*—in German ‘to cancel’, ‘to preserve,’ ‘to raise up’ or ‘to sublimate’). This is form of contiguity in African Igbo worldview of hope or in hopefulness of actualized reality or existence. We live in ontological hope or hopefulness. For where there is life, there is hope, or, if there is life, then there is hope—*Ndu diri, olileanya di or Ebe ndu di, olileanya di*). To live is to Hope! Existence and Hopefulness are not mutually exclusive in African Igbo lifeworld.

### CONCLUSION

At the influence of Achebe and Iroegbu, as pre-eminent and unassuming African Igbo scholars, I have articulated African Igbo ontology of hope using three generative themes of: a) Hope as *Ìhè* (Light of Hope. The light at the end of the tunnel) (ontological hope), b) Hope as *Nkuzi* (Life’s teaching or social learning, the experience of life forms humanity) (epistemological/pedagogical hope), and c) Hope as *Nchekwube* or *Olileanya* (including, *Nchekwubechi, Olileanyachi, Echi-di-ime*—Tomorrow has promises. Tomorrow is a day of hope or a day to be hopeful) (anthropological hope). *Nkuzi* makes reality become truly present. This present-ness of reality is the realization of hope or what is hoped for. *Nkuzi* makes hope real. *Nkuzi* gives hope. Hope as *Nkuzi* is the realization of self/personhood and reality through experience (not merely through experimentation). This experience comes from the ‘craft’ or ‘formation’ or ‘molding’ or ‘upbringing’ that goes with *Nkuzi*. *Nkuzi* is not an abuse or should not be intended to defile/dehumanize the other person (a student of life). Our existential humanity is part of the unfolding of the totality of reality (Hope as *Ihe/Ìhè* —reality or light that reveals reality). Unfolding of reality is the actualization of the fullness of humanity or the fullness of human becoming (anthropological hope). These 3 generative themes on hope are intrinsically interconnected in African Igbo Ontology or worldviews.