

Factoring *Agwu* Among Other (G)ods in Isidore Diala's Inauguration of the Igbo Muse within African Literature

Uchenna David Uwakwe*, Benedict Nkemdirim Igbokwe

Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria

Email address:

davdumga69@yahoo.com (U. D. Uwakwe)

*Corresponding author

To cite this article:

Uchenna David Uwakwe, Benedict Nkemdirim Igbokwe. Factoring *Agwu* Among Other (G)ods in Isidore Diala's Inauguration of the Igbo Muse within African Literature. *Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 10, No. 1, 2022, pp. 31-37. doi: 10.11648/j.hss.20221001.14

Received: June 4, 2021; **Accepted:** June 30, 2021; **Published:** January 28, 2022

Abstract: The Inaugural lecture series at the Imo State University Owerri-Nigeria took a different turn in its 23rd version when Isidore Okeawolam Diala probed into a certain measure of the Igbo (meta) physical reality as it occurs in contemporary African Literature. With the title: 'Dionysos, Christ, *Agwu* and the African Writer, Diala seemed more inclined to justifying the outcome of the writer's acquaintance with the Igbo thoughts on *Agwu*, the god of creativity. Quite unfortunately, *Agwu* has never been known to have such positive view as to attract adherents. Therefore, Diala's presentation, which associates the god with creativity brings a unique perspective to *Agwu* even among Christian adherents who associate its wors*hip or patronage with paganism. While it should have seemed that the title of this inaugural lecture would dissuade the audience, the personality of the presenter as a practicing Catholic had rather generated an exciting kind of inquisitiveness. This paper examines how Diala inaugurated and deified *Agwu* within the African literary world, drawing also a measurable symbolism with the messianic placement of Jesus Christ. It is also noteworthy that Diala draws the classical estimation of Dionysos in Greek religion in certifying how the religiosity of *Agwu* obtains such significance as have given impetus to the works by African writers.

Keywords: *Agwu*, Christ, Dionysos, Metaphysics & Ritual

1. Introduction

At the 23rd edition of the Inaugural lecture series in Imo State University Owerri-Nigeria, Isidore Okeawolam Diala inaugurated the probiotic probabilities of deifying *Agwu*, associating its essence in the Igbo (meta) physical reality with the outcome on literary output in Africa. Presumably, with the title: 'Dionysos, Christ, *Agwu* and the African Writer' [4], there had been varied measures of apprehension among the audience prior to the presentation – especially, regarding the connecting point among the (G)ods in focus. Diala's audience was to integrate not only the admirers and beneficiaries of his intellectual merit, but also, those in his own university community, the spectators who had been initiates or ardent followers of the rites of the inaugural lectures, scholars in history or of the classical literary culture and many others who in spite of being cursorily acquainted with Dionysos as muse, were also being alerted to Christ's own muse. Indeed, for a greater section of the audience who

also believed that Diala's logic was going to be convincing, they still waited earnestly to apprehend what the mutation of 'Christ' or 'Dionysos into '*Agwu*' would yield.

Not only did *Agwu* have few adherents even among the Igbo, the advent of Christianity most obviously, constantly precluded the prospects of growing its patronage. In this regard, Diala's inquisition would precipitate a sharp affront with several Biblical injunctions on idolatry, especially the emphatic one by Paul the apostle to the Corinthian church:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? [14].

Nonetheless, before most members of this Inaugural audience had made up their minds to grace the occasion, there would have been a certain conviction that it was neither an event instigating the worship of *Agwu* nor of Dionysos. In spite of the subtle suggestion that coming to terms with the

intersections among the (G)ods would not come easy, the inclination to positioning *Agwu* at the forefront of the discourse of African literature was a pertinent attraction.

Nonetheless, to affirm that this discourse is inclined to (meta)physics is to also submit its texture to the demands of deconstruction. It becomes more imperative with a section of Diala's acknowledgements which recollects how, "Niyi Osundare (who on learning of this lecture, as he said from the mango leaves, sent his cryptic message to me: 'Write it deep / fly it high,'" [14]. In attesting also that Osundare provided what he considers as "the peerless template", [14] Diala submits a subtle apology to all, especially those who would not so easily grapple with the density of this lecture. It is in this regard that it becomes most imperative to deconstruct, if not interrogate the metaphysical consciousness underlying this lecture.

In giving exposition to deconstruction in literary criticism, Abrams and Harpham assert that it is a theory as well as a practice which instigates "reading that questions and claims to 'subvert' or 'undermine' the assumption that the system of language is based on grounds that are adequate to establish the boundaries, the coherence or unity, and the determinate meanings of a literary text" [1]. However, there is a certain risk of falling into the same offence that would compel further deconstructions. Cumulatively, each expose ascribed to the forebears of deconstruction; beginning with Jacques Derrida and extending to Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger has involved varying measures of deconstructing the investment of those philosophical elements which had been considered in each exposition. Abrams and Harpham also insist that "Derrida did not propose deconstruction as a mode of literary criticism, but as a way of reading all kinds of texts so as to reveal and subvert the tacit metaphysical presuppositions..." [1]. In other words, it is to mediate the complexity and elusiveness of such writings, by relating the configured knowledge, truth and identity.

One of the positive perspectives to the factorization of *Agwu* in Diala's lecture is that it yields a paradoxical certification that inaugurals have also assumed much of the title-taking status. Otherwise, this occasion for inaugurating *Agwu* would have been dismissed as being of less significance than other schedule's in the itinerary of the distinguished members of the audience for that day. The Igbo proverb which prominently defers to *Agwu*, as deity, is often used in pejorative contexts – *anaghi ahapu ebe ana echi ozo gawa ebe ana aru agwu* (no one declines invitation to a title-taking ceremony only to attend an occasion for the worship of *Agwu*). At the chieftaincy investments now among the Igbo, there are such common titular brands as *Ogbuagu* (one who is notable for killing leopards), *Ochiriozuo* (one that often gathers a crowd to feed/train them), *Akuruoulo* (one who brings home his wealth), etc. An Igbo proverb will always ask the question, how many leopards does a man have to kill before taking the title *Ogbuagu*. The accolades to each inaugural lecturer's strides in scholarship are accompanied by other appurtenances of culture that identify the lecturer within a given nativity and belief system. If indeed Diala's

inaugural inaugurates the relevance of *Agwu*, not just as deity with an Igbo identity, but also of a god whose influence has become prominent in African writing, it is crucial therefore to interrogate how the metaphysical is factored into the reality of (Igbo) African cosmology that Diala associates with creativity in literature.

2. Factoring Metaphysical Reality

Whether or not Diala sought to recover the 'Agwu' image does not assume a context that contests the supremacy or otherwise of either Dionysos or Christ. Indeed, this Inaugural became such eventful landmark in which known beliefs were made to erupt as fresh ideas attuned for scholarship in the humanities, the social sciences and indeed segments of the core sciences. While this does not come as an occasion to measure how scholars in the sciences weigh the matters pertaining to literary and cultural studies, it rather provokes some kind of exploration into the metaphysics of *Agwu* and the soul of creativity among African writers. The factorization of the *agwu* as a matter in literary criticism may also be seen to draw from a pool of scientific reasoning – afterall, the facts of science speak of matter as 'anything that has weight and occupies space'.

Much of the questions on metaphysics have only contributed in raising more questions than answers, given that, answers hardly mediate the crossroads of the two extremes involved – the objectivity of the sciences and the subjectivity of the humanities. More often than not, challenges in knowledge or truth considered to be in the realm of metaphysics defy the proofs of the physical scientist. Such reasoning, as the immortality of the soul and its quest for a re-union with a supreme being known to be its original maker, and whose place of abode is indistinct, have only been accepted as beliefs. Usually, they remain cogent among the group or community among whom it is accepted.

The underlying cornerstones of Diala's Inaugural lecture from which meaningful factors may be derived include: myth, ritual, tragedy, martyrs, heroism and identity. Given also that Diala adopts these terms in asserting the inalienable beliefs of the groups and congregations adherent to Dionysos, Christ and *Agwu*, it is logical to submit that there is a certain factorization in place. It becomes a derivation within the episteme of literature, just as the semanticist linguist would employ the inclusion of certain features in what they regard as 'componential analysis', in justifying semantic relatedness. John Saeed says that, "some semanticists have hypothesized that words are not the smallest semantic units but are built up of smaller components of meaning" [11]. The concepts mentioned earlier implicate the veneration of the (G)ods' performances as symbolic rituals for creating tragic heroes in the cultures where these (G)ods subsist.

In mathematics for instance, factorization simply involves identifying a number as a product of several *factors*. It is a process in which a certain factor (figures) is listed as a product of a given number. For example 2×3 equals 6; 2×4

equals 8 and 2×5 equals 10. Observably, it is in the process of factorizing the numbers 6, 8 and 10 that 2 as a figure is seen to occur in the three numbers. While this remains a simplified explanation of the principles involved in factorization, it also stands as the background for understanding even the polynomial kind of factorization.

Polynomial factorization has also been studied for centuries. In elementary algebra, factoring a polynomial reduces the problem of finding its roots to finding the roots of the factors. Polynomials with coefficients in the integers or in a field possess the unique factorization property, a version of the fundamental theorem of arithmetic with prime numbers replaced by irreducible polynomials [5].

The lowest common logical explanation of this derivation of a mathematical task is that dealing with 'polynomials', 'coefficients' and 'integers' would be unattainable without having to learn the preliminary lessons on factors common to simple figures, as had been presented earlier. It is in this regard therefore that we would appreciate Diala's submission on the soul of the African writer's adaptation from among the (G)ods in question here. Nothing would be lost in translating what the mathematician expresses with algebraic symbols, into the figures in literary terms. It is a logic which acquiesces to a possibility in the application of knowledge. It becomes not only relevant but also cogent where it certifies that such principles as those of Boyle and Charles had come from the observation of actions and reactions that proceed from what have been categorized as chemical elements.

Diala is concerned with how the religiosity of *Agwu* places a demand on creative literature, especially creativity of the African fibre – to the writer as well as the critic. Nonetheless, it seems that a lot more involvement with metaphysics is required in generating parallels for cogent adaptation. In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the derivation of Pythagoras philosophy is recollected in the dialogue between the comic character, Clown and Malvolio:

Malvolio: I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though the ignorance were as dark as hell; and I say there was never man thus abused. I am no more mad than you are: make a trial of it in any constant question.

Clown: What is the opinion of pythagoros concerning wild fowl?

Malvolio: That the soul of our grandma might haply inhabit a bird.

Clown: What thinkest thou of his opinion?

Malvolio: I think nobly of the soul and no way approve his opinion.

Clown: Fare thee well: remain thou still in darkness. Thou shall hold the opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits, and fear to kill a woodcock, lest thou dispossess the soul of thy grandma. Fare thee well. [12]

Within this dialogue, Shakespeare ensures that an acceptance or rejection of the (meta)physics of the soul, as pythagoros theorizes, becomes the basis for certifying Malvolio's (character) madness. Clown had passed the verdict that Malvolio was to remain in darkness. The fact that the latter had been in prison gives another clue to

Shakespeare's choice of certain synonyms for ignorance – madness, imprisonment of the mind and the refusal to contemplate prevailing ideas in ones age. But of more pertinence to the creativity required, Clown's place as a character of merit demands that Malvolio has to imbibe the given knowledge, (that is, being able to contemplate and further appreciate the metaphysical submission by Pythagoros) before his wit is certified – "ere I will allow of thy wits" [12].

The matter of martyrs which became prominent in Diala's espousal recollects how the cyclic reality in the regeneration of life from autumnal metaphor locates death with the acclamation of heroism. The Inaugural lecturer, Diala, elicits sacrifice, the kind that straddles martyrdom and tragedy, as not only metaphor but also the denominator among Dionysos, Christ and *Agwu*. The priests and ardent adherents are required to appreciate how the metaphysical consciousness along with given realities provoke the benefits of purification to the community(ies) at the instance of each epoch-making sacrifice.

The surface meanings to both categories become the springboard for attaining the deep implications. Diala embraces these concepts within the circle of literature in observing that, "...one of the most recurring and potent literary topoi is the tragic. Transcultural accounts of the origin of drama, and especially tragic drama, in magic, religion and ritual clearly locate the importance of tragedy at the core of the human adventure itself" [4]. In so doing, Diala ostensibly positions the literary craftsman (and the critic as well), as not mere observers of performances which implicate religion, more often than not, they are also affected by the geographical space which may transcend metaphysical planes of knowledge, albeit circuitously, the living, the dead and sometimes even the unborn. It is at this point that Diala connects their scientific posture, somewhat altruistically, with the origin of the dramatic (literature) thus: "like that of religion, is inextricably linked to human anxieties, fears, and the dream to master the mysterious universe" [4]. Most promisingly in this regard, the African writer is alerted to the kind of adoption which Shakespeare had done with Pythagoras, especially as it is significant in fostering and extending the relevance of myths within each geographical space where a given art form proceeds.

3. The *Agwu* Factor Among Other (G)ods

It is in the separate introduction of Dionysos, Christ and *Agwu* that Diala consolidates the logic which grants his escape from the tentacles of blasphemy. Each of the gods discussed, is recognized within given cultures and among the adherents whose religiosity become ritualized. This symbolizes the passage of seasons and manifestly connecting with fruitfulness of kinds, and in agricultural yield particularly. Diala observes that, "This embrace of agriculture accounts for the pervasiveness in most cultures of the myth of a fertility god who is mutilated and dies but is miraculously reborn through the invention of his father or

mother who is a higher divinity" [4]. The logocentricity in Diala's choice of 'pervasiveness', especially of this myth, detracts from any suggestion of the 'perverse'. But it is particularly made to give the first hint of the connection between Dionysos and Christ: "In a more complex version of the myth, the fertility god becomes a divine scapegoat whose death is often self-sacrificial" [4]. Diala goes on to identify the vegetation/fertility gods in Egypt, Persia, Sumeria, Syria, Tammuz and then that of Greece as Dionysos.

But, most emotive is the Dionysos myth – that Dionysos was born to Zeus the Greek God by his own daughter, Persophone the earth goddess. As it is suggested in Diala's exposition, the circumstance of Dionysos' birth had attracted threats to his life by his father's (Zeus) rivals, the Titans. Diala, alluding to Philip Freund's *Birth of Theatre* recollects that,

Zeus had Dionysos transformed first to a goat and then a bull to save him, but these ruses failed and he was dismembered by the Titans, incited by Hera, Zeus's offended wife. Zeus then swallowed his son's bloody heart and caused him to beborn again by the mortal Semele. This miraculous resurrection was hailed every spring with chants and vigorous dances by Dionysos devotees in mystic ceremonies. In hysterical rites, his initiates symbolically drank his blood (wine of new vintage) and partook of his flesh (slivers of roasted goat) in a drunken frenzy [4].

Abrams and harpham relate the simple (surface) meaning of mythology as "a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group" [1] The hint on the identity of the first god entity (Dionysos) in this discourse is that "The myth of Dionysos, of course is at the core of Greek tragedy" [4]. But then, in introducing Christ with a citation of Ali Mazrui's article, 'Sacred Suicide' [4], Diala suggests that the intrigues generated in his title might as well infuriate the conjecture of 'blasphemy'. The reasoning dutifully absolves Mazrui of such perceived iniquity, perhaps as part of the logic of rising above blasphemy in the Dionysos/Christ parallel placement and further on to the Christ/Agwu connection.

The Biblical accounts which form the basis of Christian doctrines is severally perceived as myth. The simplest explanations being that, among infants listening to Bible accounts, the belief in the stories of Abraham, Moses, Elijah and even Christ, is that the geographical setting of Egypt or the Judaic-Israel is in a certain location somewhere in a possible planet in the sky above. However, Christians grow into adulthood, not always doubting the truth in those stories, but understanding with maturity that the setting of the Biblical stories (mythic as they may sound) is actually on planet earth. Emphatically, Diala points to the evidences that in Christ's sacrifice, the agony which becomes the tragic indicator, is very much present. It is more symbolic in the fact that Christ had submitted to the will of His father. Diala recollects that Christ's agony at Gethsemane stresses the great cost and burden of His sacrifice.

Thus Christianity condemns suicide but exalts martyrdom

because while the former usurps God's dominion over all human life, the latter is a sacrifice that advances the cause of Christianity itself. The crucifixion of Christ is the perfect sacrifice because the victim is the only begotten son of God. John the Baptist uses the proper metaphor by identifying Christ as the divine scapegoat [4].

In order not to lose sight of the focus of Diala's proposition regarding 'Dionysos, Christ, *Agwu* and the African Writer', it is pertinent to appraise the possibilities that there are binary oppositions which are likely to infuriate the conjecture of 'blasphemy'. It is pertinent to examine how Diala's logic engages these deified figures within the conceptualisation of 'knowledge', 'truth' and 'identity'. In this reasoning, it would seem a much more deeper expression of blasphemy that the Igbo perspective of human sacrifice parallels the martyrdom of Christ. However, beyond this plane of perception is that fact which Wole Soyinka accedes to – the parallel placement of Ogun and Dionysos. The adherents of these gods have been more enthralled by their moralist inspiration and benefaction. Soyinka says:

Ogun, for his part, is best understood in Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethian virtues. Nor is that all. Transcending, even today, the distorted roof over the homeless, terrible guardian of the sacred oath; Ogun stands for a transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative justice [13].

Soyinka, using the Yoruba tradition for which Diala had also connected with the 'gods with tribal marks', gives a succinct elucidation of the African writers' own ritual. It is with this that the essence of the creative enterprise is invoked. This involves the ritual of celebrating what Soyinka relates to as "the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man", which in his explanation can only be recognised by "one who has himself undergone the experience of disintegration, whose spirit has been tested and whose psychic resources laid under stress by the forces most inimical to individual assertion, only he can understand and be the force of fusion between the two contradictions" [13].

Perhaps, it is crucial to appreciate Ola Rotimi's derivation of Sophocles Oedipus Rex in his *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. In this play, Odewale offers himself for destruction after the discovery of his true identity and all of the gruesome acts that had taken place in his ignorance. But much more than the Sophoclean derivation, in Rotimi's characterization of Odewale, not only is the Yoruba nativity present, Odewale's heroism could only have yielded the measure of empathy it has continued to attract with all of the tragedies provided for in his tragic flaw – anger and hasty (often irrational) decisions. But what usually elicits the gravity of the 'tragic' is that one (as it is with the philosophizing audience) may begin to wonder whether the tragic hero deserves the burden which the creative writer allots to him. It is for this reason that Diala, elsewhere, affirms that, as it is in "Sophocles *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus endures a self-punishment disproportionate to his offence: he neither willed patricide nor desired incest" [3].

It is in this regard that the creative writer is placed within

the jurisdiction of the Igbo conception of God as *Chineke* (God the creator), the one who invests his creation with a given path to 'destiny/fate'. If therefore, Christ at Gethsemane could only say "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." [14]. Beyond the connection of these (G)ods, is the dramatic significance that underplays the view of blasphemy. It is not quite simple to ascertain what would constitute more of the blasphemy – the yoking together of the Christian faithful along with the Dionysos/Agwu faithful (whether literary or religious) or the invitation to appraise African writers and their writings with double, if not, triple standards among these deified entities.

In this regard, the first contradiction, 'destructiveness' gives rise to the second, 'creativity' which is that process of ritualized re-creation of reality. It is the first contradiction that compels the second which involves the tragic submission in such rituals which seek to resolve the conflicts raised in the first. To give an exhaustive replication of these tragic recreations, Diala draws repeated instances from Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, *The Bachae of Euripides* and *Death and the King's Horseman* [4] where Eman, Tiresias and Olunde respectively demonstrate the commitment to be sacrificed for communal beneficence. And, much later, the reference to Okonkwo recollects Achebe's consciousness of these abiding intrigues in the Igbo *Agwu* myth as well.

4. Implicating Agwu in the African Writer's Consciousness

Each writer therefore recollects within the precincts of the plot structure involving the conflict, wading through complications, and pursuing the path to an emotive resolution. Nevertheless, what is known as the resolution comes neither to resolve the human-ingrained (tragic flaws) attitudes, nor to make the conflicts they incite less intractable. Elizabeth Isichei raises pertinent questions on, "how typical was this tradition of craftsmanship of Igboland as a whole? Was it something unique and evanescent, or was it a part of a wider and long continued tradition?" [6] The answers which Isichei offers to these questions, from the perspective of Igbo-Ukwu art, [6] relate in certain measures to Diala's identification with the ritual which the African writer performs. It is within this context that one appreciates the measures to which African literature pays regard to portraying the key confrontations with history, religiosity and power. Each of these elements is made to occur, in much more vehemence, than what was conceptualized as the promotion of 'art for art's sake'. Indeed, they are considered to involve matters that are likely to inhibit the survival of the African people, and their creative engagements.

Each myth, therefore, is construed to take up a performative thrust with all the accompanying rituals. Therefore, whether it is the novel, drama or poetry, tragic conflicts in these spheres of the society are prominent. The resolutions therefore come to relate a better knowledge of

those conflicting issues or forces that are usually invoked in the complication stage of any of these genres of literature. Diala cites Jude Aguwa who sheds light on how Agwu, In Igbo worldview, is compactly linked to the metaphysics of human fate. Diala cites Aguwa thus: "Agwu is the Igbo attempt to understand the paradoxes of life: *Agwu* is one of the answers Igbo religion has offered to explain good and evil, health and sickness and even life and death" [4].

In another seeming comparison of Igbo traditional myths with Biblical values, Chimezi Ogbedeto affirms the place of culture as "the corporate consciousness of a people and when impaired, the people are left without a set of ethical principles to act as their guide" [9]. Further on, in locating the Igbo tradition within the interrogation of culture, Ogbedeto includes, "the various customs, practices and traditions of the people referred to as 'omenala', and these guide their relationship with each other and define the roles played by each individual within the cultural setting" [9]. Specifically, Diala's concern is with how the 'agwu' myth impinges on individual attitudes of African writers to the *omenala* (what happens in the land), the cultural setting portrayed.

There is need therefore to involve Diala's key observations about 'Agwu' and then proceed with a more detailed exposition of what the derivation of the Igbo mythology in this regard yields in creativity. As has been observed, Diala's Inaugural lecture qualifies as a literary text, a poeticizing theoretical kind. In this kind therefore, the metaphors are dense. As has also been reiterated, the figures appear to be measured for a certain caucus of initiates. It is only in this perspective that one is permitted to present, with seeming imposition, details that give exposition to the figures with which the 'agwu' concept is foreshadowed. Citing Francis Cardinal Arinze, Diala recollects the manifestation of the *Agwu* spirit:

the spirit of giddiness, rascality, discomposure, confusion and forgetfulness whose possession is the indispensable signal that one has been chosen for the vocation of the diviner. One so possessed is usually stricken with a legion of variegated misfortunes until he accepts the calling of this relentless deity" [4].

The negative perceptions of *Agwu* appear to outweigh the positive ones especially as they are embedded in such proverbs as: *Agwu isi odi ososo anaghi ara ahu rie ewu isi akpukpa* – Being hasty is a kind of Agwu possession that compels one into the error of eating a diseased/infected goat; *Onye na acho Agwu ezumazu, Agwu isi aghaghi ima ya* – One who goes after a communal god (agwu) is often compelled to become its priest. Both of these proverbs suggest that the *agwu* kind of possession is common among those who possess intemperate, reckless and the hasty attitudes. It is in this regard that Diala recollects the dual perceptions of *Agwu*, citing Ikenga-Metuh who "identifies recklessness, wastefulness, and madness as manifestations of *Agwu* possession and explains that the afflicted could harness the power of *Agwu* for divination and healing by propitiating the deity" [4].

The view in this paper is inclined to the Ikenga-Metuh

perspective that *Agwu*, the Igbo god of craftsmanship is known to possess men of outstanding creative abilities and that when this happens, there are certain forces, evil in their manifestations which often tend to distract the possessed one from his craft. In this circumstance, a sacrifice known as *iwa/iru agwu* is made to bring the situation under control. Essentially, the family or community becomes aware of what has been done because the immediate society of the possessed person also benefits or suffers the outcome of the situation. It is in this regard that the malevolent posture of *Agwu* is often suggested. Nonetheless, it is with the sacrifice to the god that normalcy is restored and the benefits of creativity derived.

However, in appreciating Igbo names that recollect the association with *Agwu*, there are indications that the deity has a seemingly positive outlook. These include: *Nwagwu*, *Osuagwu*, *Nwaosugwu*, *Duruagwu*. In discussing Igbo personal names, Monday Onukawa observes how many of the Igbo names compounded with *Agwu* here (like *Osu* and *Duru*) have become often misinterpreted and made pejorative. Onukawa says that,

Osu was formerly a positive concept that became pejorative as the cult system to which it refers degenerated to a social stigma. The involvement of *Osu* in Igbo naming in association with the culturally valuable entities, and the interchangeability of *Osu* and *Duru*...in personal names are the major justifications of my assertion that *Osu* was a positive concept [10].

If, therefore, names like *Osuji/Duruji*, *Osuoha/Duruoha*, *Osuafu* and *Duruaku* are positive names, the same association in *Osuagwu*, *Duruagwu* and most other '*Agwu*' names would not have been negative. It is in citing Umeh that Diala presents the myth which submits the place of *Agwu* as the Igbo god of creativity. Diala credits Umeh with giving the full name of the deity as "*Agwu isi ora*," meaning the head of all things because,

Challenged by God to identify the mysterious contents of four carefully covered long baskets, all God's creation failed but *Agwu*, who through trickery found out that those were the four market days of the week: Eke, Oye, Afo, Nkwo. For this feat, God made *Agwu* the head of society and blessed him with the power of prophecy and healing and moreover consecrated him as the conduit through which the world would access God [4].

The 'God' factor in Igbo mythology is what draws the connection between *Agwu* and Christ. Again even where Diala suggests in his title that these (G)god entities instigate the craft of the African writer, he does not seem to exclude critics. As much as Diala cites his own creative and critical works, he pays due regard to the critics whose works, as veritable forms of ritualization, have impacted on creativity in African literature. And as he has observed, each of these identifies with the gods' "Tribal Marks" [4] of their gods, verily positioned in a mutually exclusive (alter)native posture.

Given that, the writer's characterization implicates the thematic thrust. Diala observes that *Ogun Abibiman* is identified by Soyinka as Dionysos' brother, indeed an elder

one at that. With this identity which each 'tribal mark' recollects, there might have been an inadvertent treading along the path of decolonization which became a Chinweizu et al pronouncement, giving effect to a realistic depiction of the cosmology and the mythology that frames it. In another instance, Diala says, "If, however, Soyinka exalts the ideal of martyrdom, Irobi is preoccupied with the efficacy of ritualized human sacrifice for the atonement of communal guilt" [4].

Each of these writers generates an altar for human sacrifice by contriving characters whose varied yieldedness to the burden of self-martyrdom, is perceived from the classical art as being of the Dionysian stock and in the orthodox religiosity, Christ-like. But of much more fruitful value, is the re-productivity of the sacrificial character in the chosen hero – that measure of yieldedness to death which Christ Himself, in several instances, expressed: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit'" [14]. It is the same mould of the sacrificial hero to which Paul the veritable apostle was called unto sacrificial living, out of which experience he enjoined Christian faithful, beginning with the Roman church, "that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice" (*KJV Romans 12: 1*). And to the Philippians, he also said: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" [14].

The pioneers of African literature were not only acquainted with the core doctrines of the Christian faith, as well as the myths in the Greek classical tradition, these had instructed their deployment of parallels in their own creativity. In *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, no doubt, was Igbo in all manifestations. Yet, his death by hanging on a tree is symbolic, just as the fact of his being associated with several messianic missions – claiming the victory over Amalinze for his *Umuofia* people, leading the delegation to Mbaino to ensure that *Umuofia* got a reparation for the untoward murder of a kinsman's wife [2] and much more the challenge against the totalitarianism of Rev. Smith's brand of British imperialism [2].

Nonetheless, to appreciate the *Agwu* influence on the Okonkwo character will involve explicating the possibilities of the choice of his name and its derivation from the Igbo market-based calendar. There are other facts of Okonkwo's resilience and successes in traditional agricultural practices and, of course his position in the political structure as a prominent titled- man. Izevbaye's thesis statement in a tribute to Achebe's first two novels affirms that, "the roots of Achebe's fiction can be traced in the West African experience of the art of writing" [7]. There may not exactly be any need for persisting inquiries into what might have driven each of these tragic heroes towards accomplishing each intriguing requirement, other than what they are moulded as characters to be – more of a (creative) literary endowment. The endowment seemingly explains how the shadows of the myths are cast by different generations of writers within the consciousness of intriguing experience.

Perhaps, in certifying that the construction of ideologies through myths have resulted from realistic experiences, Diala recollects that the Nigeria-Biafra War theatre was one

occasion of performance which could not have gone without the making of heroes – those of the epic stuff and to some extent of the tragic kind. Uchenna Uwakwe recollects how the heroic posture which Adichie invests Odumegwu Ojukwu's (part-fact and part-fiction) character with in her novel *Half of A Yellow Sun*. It is considered an ideological portraiture that is in itself mythical, mythical in fashioning historically tragic events, into stories that have to make strong impressions on the reading audience. It is in this regard that Uwakwe affirms how Adichie's protagonist, Odenigbo, "does not embrace uncritically the European schooling of Odumegwu-Ojukwu and countless other Africans, some of whom accept false ideas regarding Africa and Africans" [15]. It substantiates why Diala lists such Biafra warlords as, Odumegwu Ojukwu, Chukwuma Nzeogwu and Joe Achuzia whose exploits at the war front were mythified and turned from tragic stories to eulogies.

5. Conclusion

Cumulatively, the intercourse of the (G)gods in Diala's theorization beckons on the African writers' religiosity, an instinct which manifests in investing the burden of heroism on tragic characters who often become prominently faithful to a given call of communal worth. In exemplifying the *Agwu* instinct, Diala enumerates the several metaphors which Chinua Achebe adopts in projecting the tragic implications of Okonkwo's spirit as protagonist of the Igbo classic, *Things Fall Apart*. The magical investments by Umuofia *dibias* (native medicine men) at the beginning of the novel – preparing him for the wrestling championship and all other events, culminated in his willingness to die – eventual suicide. In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu subsists as another Okonkwo-specie – with his own measure of *Agwu*-driven hubris. Interestingly, Okonkwo's role is connected to the said 'ritualization', the making of the tragic hero, 'in a certain image'.

Diala observes that from Ulu to Christ, from *Agwu* to the Holy Spirit, perhaps gods need rebirths to remain alive! However, God is the abiding, permanent supreme reality whose existence does not depend on acknowledgment. For sure, it is the *idea* of God that mutates, that is, which is subject to eternal transformation as human understanding and circumstances continue to change. Diala's logic provides for a philosophical inquisition into the religiosity of *Agwu*, another metaphysical involvement of the trite between art and science. The factorization of *Agwu* among other (G)gods presents a theory that bears the prospects of multidisciplinary involvement. While Diala deliberately connects, and stringently too, with the literary implications of his lecture, the passion of religiosity engraved within the title also substantiates how art can be made to stimulate the human conscience and sensibilities by cutting across disciplines, for intellectualism essentially beckons on the human consciousness by appealing to the soul of man's humanity. More specifically, the literary minded scholar often aligns with the demands of humanizing the human conscience. In this circumstance, art transcends all involvements that potently implicate scholarship across disciplines.

Diala's Inaugural lecture might not have been contrived to project a wholistic description of the three (G)god entities in focus, after all, they have principally been invoked in respect of their determined passion for sacrifice. While Dionysos and Christ had been credited with a more extensive intellectual patronage, Diala has instituted a platform, more like a catalyst for philosophizing and theorizing the *Agwu* concept within and beyond the Igbo cosmic view, especially in the creation of characters with requisite emotional affectation. While the critic is alerted to the points of intersection in the intrigues among myths that have generated the adherence to Dionysos, Christ and *Agwu*, creative writers of coming generations are presented with another exciting template, a pattern for creating emotive personages in works of literature.

References

- [1] Abrams, M. H. and Geoffrey H. (2012) *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. (Tenth edition) Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- [2] Achebe, C.. (1958) *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- [3] Diala, I. (2014) *Esiaba Irobi's Drama and the Postcolony: Theory and Practice of Postcolonial performance*. Ibadan kraft Books Ltd.
- [4] Diala I. (2019) *Dionysos, Christ, Agwu and the African Writer*. presented at the Imo state University (23rd Inaugural Lecture) Owerri, Nigeria, May 23, 2019.
- [5] 'Factorization'. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Factorization>
- [6] Isichei, E. (1976) *A History of the Igbo People*. London: Macmillan.
- [7] Izevbaye, D. (1990) 'Achebe's First Two Novels: The Writing of A New Consciousness' *Eagle on the Iroko* (Selected Papers from the Chinua Achebe International Symposium).
- [8] Merriam-Webster online Dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphysics>
- [9] Ogbedeto, C. (2014) 'In Igbo Culture God Made Them Male and Female from Creation' *Igbo Identities in the Contemporary World*. Owerri: Whelan Research Academy.
- [10] Onukawa, M. (2013) *Gini Bu Aha Gi?* 24th Inaugural Lecture Series, Abia State University.
- [11] Saeed, J. (2013) *Semantics*. (2nd Edition) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- [12] Shakespeare, W. (2010) "Twelfth Night", *Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Glasgow: Geddes and Grosset.
- [13] Soyinka, W. (2007) 'The Fourth Stage: (Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy)' *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (Tejumola Olaniyan & Ato Quayson (eds.) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 364-374.
- [14] *The Bible* (King James Version) (Cor. 6: 14-15; Luke: 22: 42; John 12: 14; Philippians 1: 21.
- [15] Uwakwe, U. (2020) The Myth of Woman as Storyteller in *Half of a Yellow Sun: A Legacy from Achebe to Adichie*. *International Journal of Africana Studies Vol. 21: 1-2*. 65-83.