

# The power of sacrifice and word in Igbo magical powers

Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo

Philosophy Department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Email: ratzingerjunior2020@gmail.com

Copyright © 2024 Nwobodo. This article remains permanently open access under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Received 18th February 2024; Accepted 22nd March 2023

**ABSTRACT:** Sacrifice is a religious act in which an object is offered to supernatural beings in order to build up, maintain or restore a right relationship of men to pure or perfect order. It is an essential means of restitution of vital force. Sacrifice is an important aspect of every religion and occultic practices. Magicians are seen performing different kinds of sacrifices. These sacrifices are performed at different times of the day; in the morning, at noon and/or in the midnight when everyone including spirits are believed to must have returned from their daily engagements. While offering sacrifices, the magician utters words, incantations and prayers. The word is indispensable in the practice of magic. Considering the inevitability of these two; sacrifice and the word in the magician's practice of his calling, one begins to wonder what role they play. What is the role of sacrifices in magical powers? Why are these sacrifices performed with vocalized prayers? Are uttered words really indispensable in the practice of magic? Why are most of their prayers and supplications during the sacrifice voiced? A hermeneutic approach to this study reveals that sacrifice revitalizes the potency and the efficacy of the magic and also a way of manipulating nature to achieve the magician's goal. It also shows that voiced words of prayer are more potent than silent words of prayer.

**Keywords:** Igbo, magic, magical powers, sacrifice, the word.

## INTRODUCTION

Generally, sacrifice is seen as the killing of an animal or person or giving up of a possession as an offering to a god or goddess. It is a religious act in which an object is offered to supernatural beings in order to build up, maintain or restore a right relationship of men to pure or perfect order. Sacrifice seems to be very significant in the practice of magic. Magicians are often seen performing one sacrifice or the other at different times of the day, sometimes during the day time and at other times, in the midnight. As they offer their sacrifice, they keep uttering words of prayer, invocation and appeals to their god. This makes one curious about the significance of sacrifice in magical powers. Is sacrifice an indispensable part of magic? What role does the word uttered during these sacrifices play in the magician's profession? Does voiced prayer possess more efficacy and potency than silent prayers?

The idea of sacrifice has been well expressed by some scholars like Awolalu and Dopamu who concretely state that:

Sacrifice is the act of offering the life of an animal or person, or some object, to the divine power or powers. It forms an essential part of every religious ceremony, and it is fundamental to worship. Sacrifice is primarily a means of contact or communion between the divine and man. It serves as the best way through which man maintains an established relationship between himself and his object of worship. It is also valued as the most effective means employed by man to influence the divinity to be interested in human affairs. Right relationship with the divinity, as well as his favour, will be secured by giving him his dues (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979, p. 132).

While offering sacrifice, one makes his intentions and requests known through the power of the word. Heidegger in his writings emphasized the metaphysical import of

language which he clearly stated is the distinguishing factor between man, stones and all other existent (Heidegger, 1980, p. 82). Spoken words possess causal power which brings about magic. Walter L. Weston writes that "spoken prayer is one of the most powerful spiritual tools known to humanity.... The spoken word is the basis of divine power in all religious rituals and superior to thought, meditation, and virtualization..." (Weston, 1994, p. 172).

In this article, it is further exposed that sacrifice is quite essential in all religious practices and also in the performance of magic. Sacrifices are made to appease the gods, as a thanksgiving, in order to obtain favour from the gods and also to make special requests. The intentions of these sacrifices are conveyed through the power of spoken words. This essay elucidates the power of spoken words of prayer in the practice of magic. The study proceeds with a conceptual clarification of sacrifice, an exposition of sacrifice in Igbo magical power, the power of the word in Igbo magic and the conclusion of the work.

## A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE IGBO PEOPLE OF SOUTHEAST, NIGERIA

The Igbo people are an ethnic group native to the southeastern part of Nigeria. They are one of the most influential and largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, with a rich cultural heritage that spans centuries. Theories about the migration patterns of the Igbo people vary: some hold that they migrated to their present-day location from the north and possibly from the Nri region. Basden (1966) holds that the Igbo people are of Jewish origin due to the striking similarities in their cultural practices such as circumcision, marriage customs, birth rites, blood sacrifices, etc. Jeffreys (1946) argues that Igbo origin and history is traceable to Egypt. The exact origin of the Igbo people is subject to speculation as nothing is definitively known. This is because "there is no recorded history of the origin of the Igbo people, and there is no recorded historical evidence that the Igbo people migrated from any part of the world to their present position" (Orji, 1999, p. 1). However, archaeological evidence suggests that they have been present in their current homeland for thousands of years (Edeh, 1985). Despite being densely located in the Southeastern part of Nigeria, it is pertinent to note that a good number of Igbo people are located outside Igbo land. They are found in every nook and cranny of Nigeria, and practically, every part of the globe. The Igbo are great travelers with resilient and adjustable spirit. This accounts for their success even where others seem not to prosper.

The Igbo society traditionally consisted of decentralized and autonomous communities (Umeh, 1999). Each community had its own governing council, chief or king, and various age-grade associations. Igbo people were known for their republican system of governance, where

decisions were made through a council of elders, and individuals had the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process. The Igbo society was characterized by a mix of farming, trading, and craftsmanship. The Igbo people were skilled farmers, cultivating crops like yams, cassava, and vegetables. Trade was a significant aspect of Igbo economic life (Orji, 1999), and long-distance trade routes connected Igbo communities with other regions in Africa. *Ndi Igbo* traditionally had a rich system of beliefs and practices. They worshiped a pantheon of deities and spirits, with a strong belief in a supreme deity known as *Chukwu* or *Chineke*. They also had a priestly class and sacred groves dedicated to various deities. The Nri Kingdom, in particular, was associated with religious and spiritual leadership. Igbo people believe in the existence of visible and invisible world where the spiritual controls the physical. In Igbo worldview, there is constant interfacing and communion between the two worlds (Metuh, 1987). This communication link is maintained through sacrifices and spoken words – *okwu onu* (words of the mouth). It is through *okwu* – word that the Igbo man makes invocations and declarations upon himself. Spirits are invoked and his desires communicated to spirits being invoked through *okwu onu*. The Igbo believe in the efficacy and the creative power of words hence, you can often see an Igbo man muttering some words even while alone.

Today, the Igbo culture is a vibrant and dynamic blend of traditional practices and modern influences. The Igbo language, art, music, dances, and festivals have continued to thrive. The masquerade tradition, with its colorful costumes and performances, is a notable aspect of Igbo cultural expression. The historical background of Igbo culture is diverse and reflects the resilience of a people who have navigated through various historical challenges while maintaining a strong sense of identity and cultural pride.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF SACRIFICE

Etymologically, the term sacrifice derives from the Latin word - *sacrificium*, which is a combination of the words *sacer*, meaning something set apart from the secular or profane for the use of supernatural powers, and *facere*, which implies 'to make'. The term however has acquired a popular and frequently secular use to describe some kind of renunciation or giving up of something valuable in order that something more valuable might be obtained. Interestingly, Okpalike (2008) notes two nuances that could be deciphered in this etymological presentation of the word 'sacrifice'. In his elucidation he therefore demonstrates that:

From Latin *Sacrum* - 'holy' and *facere* 'to make, do or perform': thus, it would imply

"performing a holy act". This definition is more philosophical or abstract in presentation. Granted that every sacrifice is a holy act, this definition seems to swallow the practical and mystical aspect of sacrifice. However, 'to do or perform a holy act' should be understood in this context that a place, thing, or person is set apart for and consecrated to a divine personage... From Latin sacer "holy and-ficere (*interficere*) - 'to slay or kill', it would imply to slay a holy (separated) thing' or 'holy slaying'. This definition brings out succinctly the practical and mystical aspect of the term. Though it is implied in the first instance, this implication can only be known to few who may know deeper than mere words can reveal. *Ficere* is derived from *interficere* it also brings out a very important aspect of sacrifice – immolation (Okpalike, 2008, p. 33).

Consequently, by sacrifice we shall mean essentially a ritual process in which man embraces the supernatural as a response to the experience of the sacred power or a request to the transcendent reality upon which he feels himself dependent. In this relationship, there is a special communication and communion that significantly fosters the restitution of man's vital force by way of slaying another life as sacred offering to the supra-sensible beings. It bridges the gap between the spiritual and physical spheres by allowing the performer access to tap into the abode of the gods; the meeting point for the divine and human, the sacred and profane. The emphasis therefore, is on the increase of the performer's life force (vital force), an elevation of the animating power. Our use of sacrifice must be seen principally *inter alia* from the point of view of a restitutive principle. Therefore:

In a sense, what is always offered in sacrifice is, in one form, or another, life itself. Sacrifice is a celebration of life, recognition of its divine and imperishable nature. In the sacrifice the consecrated life of an offering is liberated as a sacred potency that establishes a bond between the sacrifice and the sacred power. Through sacrifice, life is returned to its divine source, regenerating the power or life of that source; life is fed by life. Thus, the word of the Roman sacrifice to his god: 'Be thou increased (*macte*) by this offering.' It is, however, an increase of sacred power that is ultimately beneficial to the sacrifice.... Sacrifice is the impetus and guarantee of the reciprocal flow of the divine life-force between the source and its manifestations (Britannica, 1975, pp. 128-129).

## SACRIFICE IN IGBO MAGICAL POWER

As a matter of fact, sacrifice is the central practice in every cultic worship or activities that involve the presence of the supernatural. Arinze, once asserts that "sacrifice, is the soul of Igbo cult. If it is removed, the traditional religion is almost emptied of its content," (Arinze, 2008, p. 22). However, theories have been advanced to explain the meaning, forms, and functions of sacrifice and offering, our interest is not to venture into such debate but to examine the significance of such acts in various categories of magical powers as demonstrated above. The idea of sacrifice among the Igbo is referred to as *ichuaja*. In its broad category, there are "*Ajanchupu* and *Ajanchunye*" (Okpalike, 2008, pp. 63-69), i.e., scarifies which are meant to be wholesomely offered to the spirits, and communion sacrifices respectively. Emphasis must be made that in the Igbo traditional religion like Nuer religion of the West Africa, sacrifice is performed on great many occasions from happy moments to occasions of crisis based on the stipulations of the oracle. "Every sacrificial action is a subject to *Afa* - 'divination'. It is the *Afa* that determines how, which, or what of a sacrifice" (Okpalike, 2008, p. 59). Its functions extend to every aspect of human endeavours and that is why sacrifice is performed practically, in all circumstances. Okpalike, however substantiates that:

*Ichuaja*, from the foregoing, is the act of slaying a victim, and this is ritually located within the liturgy of any of the objects of Igbo Traditional Religion (ITR). Slaying here should be taken in the broadest manner to contain the relinquishing of the life of the victim. To resign to this situation on the part of the victim in this instance is not a volitional act but a submission to a violent subjection. *Ichuaja* is the highpoint and is a recurring moment in all ritual activities of ITR. Thus, even when the victim is not slain physically, the dedication of its life to the object of worship is tantamount to slaying. *Ajanchupu* contains only two elements - oblation and immolation while *Ajanchunye* contains three elements-oblations, immolation and communion (Okpalike, 2008, p. 75, emphasis mine).

As much as life is regarded and emphasized as the most valuable offer in sacrifice, symbolized by the blood of the victim (animal or man), sacrifice can be bloodless in form of "'desacralization' (they make the sacred profane, they get rid of spirit from man) or 'sacralization' (they make the profane sacred, they bring spirit to man)" (Hubert and Mauss, 1970, pp. 198-199 as cited in Evans-Pritchard, 1970). In either ways whether bloody or bloodless, life is

liberated and thus made available to the divinities; hence, the destruction of the victim by immolation or otherwise are means by which the spirit entities or deity receives the offering as a gift in honour of the supernatural and to reverence the exaltedness of the supernatural powers. Notably, both man and nature are at advantage at any point a sacrifice is made because the vital energy is always enhanced in making recourse to the supernatural powers.

Also, Nze explains that, it will be grossly impossible for one to survive life situations without a hitch at one point or the other which in Igbo understanding of reality would require a sacrifice to restore order. Accordingly, he writes that:

On the other hand, it may be factitious for any man to live through life without failure at any stage. When the Igbo man fails in health, when he suffers loss of property or of a member of his family through death, he resorts to sacrifices to arrest the trend. The nature or form which his sacrifice takes depends on the purpose of offering it. Often the Dibia or medicine men establish the cases where sacrifices must be offered as well as their form or nature. Apart from minute details, sacrifices can take the form of bloodless offerings. In blood offerings, the materials of the oblation, generally an animal is slaughtered... the Igbo use assorted life giving materials for bloodless sacrifices. For example, wine, accepted as the 'blood of the grapes' is offered as the 'blood of the earth'. Eggs which are cool and soothing are offered as the uncontaminated fresh blood of the innocence. Yams, bananas, cocoyams, kola-nuts and other divine gifts are offered in sacrifice as 'embodiments of the life force.' Both in blood and bloodless sacrifices, life is omitted and returned to its origin. Man and nature therefore benefit from the overflow of life from its divine origin. It must be emphasized here that for the Igbo sacrifice is purely a leverage by which the reciprocal flow of the spiritual life force is maintained between the gods and spirits on one hand and man and his environment on the other (Nze, 1986).

The logic of sacrifice lies in its essence and purpose. It is in this logic that one understands properly the significance of sacrifice in magical powers. Every magical ritual is accompanied with a particular stipulated sacrifice suitable for the intentions of the performer who enters into a spiritual covenant with the gods or spirits. For instance, in witchcraft, sorcery and occultism, initiates at different occasions make appropriate sacrifices to the deities or

spirits; at initiations and when one makes a special request seeking for either elevation or additional powers; and/or equally in thanksgiving for a particular favour obtained. A witch makes a lot of sacrifice to gain for her a push to another stage of spirituality. Sorcerers engage in different sacrifices in order to influence the spirits and the decisions of the gods. They are known for their ceaseless sacrifices to the elemental beings (elements that are invoked during magical rituals) in their practice of spiritualism. These elementals (air, fire, water, earth and aether – spirit), are used as messengers in carrying out some dangerous spiritual task due to their high superhuman powers. Hence, blood sacrifices are always required to unleash their powers once they are needed for any accomplishment. Occultists equally perform sacrifices at intervals to remain in position of power and to renew their commitment with the fraternity. This idea of blood sacrifices particularly in these categories however is to strengthen the source of one's power base through the vitality of the blood of the victim. As already stated, blood in itself is the life force, and it is of diverse applications. There is "life sustaining blood, life-creating blood, waste and life dissolving blood" (Nnabuchi, 2010, p. 252). Blood sacrifice can be in form of offering animals, human parts, or the whole blood of the human victim; even the menstrual blood of women can be a great offer in making a particular preparation especially in black magic such as destructive spells and charms according to the deity's demand revealed by the officiating priest through divination. Such blood is seen as an uncontaminated divine fluid of the innocence with a lot of vital energy capable of destroying principalities and powers hinged on life creating and sustaining parameters.

The offer of menstrual blood in sacrifice as the occasion demands stands far stronger than the blood of animals. The obvious reason being that serious spiritual pursuits that require human sacrifice cannot have her substitute other than the life force from a higher being. Nnabuchi (2010) contends that the need for the sacrifice of human blood in occultic practices and ritual magic cannot be replaced since their embodiment serves as a means of strengthening the life force of other beings, and equally used for charging or revitalizing the powers of preparations. Thus, he emphasizes that:

Human blood, no doubt, is the ultimate in sacrifice and ritual magic. It can never have a replacement because no other animal enjoys similar psychic qualities in man. Human blood, being the life force in our body, is also, used to sustain life forces in other beings in man's shapes. If we are the prototype of what is above, it does imply that what sustains us have some bearing with our other bodies in sympathy with our physical counterpart. For this reason, human blood therefore becomes an indispensable tool in sacrificial endeavours

and pursuits... what is being emphasized here is that the application of animal sacrifice alone in great spiritual acts, which borders on life generating and sustaining activities, cannot withstand the onslaught of human menstrual blood. The availability of menstrual blood in every hamlet promotes priests and occultists who are disposed to black magic. Ladies and single girls are willing to exchange menstrual blood for money or can sell their pads to willing buyers. With little inducement, a single and unemployed menstruating girl can be engaged to sit over a charm, allowing menstrual blood to drip on it and if possible soak some as a means of charging it or revitalizing and reactivating it. The usefulness of menstrual blood is in three folds: [1] for evil and destructive works [2]; As tools of work for those practitioners unwilling to go through the rigours of asceticism; [3] To break spells on one's path (Nnabuchi, 2010, pp. 252-253).

Elsewhere, we explained much about the use of blood as a vital element in magic and equally its various ways of application. Again, sacrifice is an inseparable aspect of traditional medicine and exorcism. Occasionally, individuals who carry out these functions make sacrifices to *Agwunsi* deity, the god of medicine. Annually, festivals are held in honour and celebration of the deity. In such occasions, sacrifices are made by the possessors to strengthen their commitment and power base; in turn increase their vital energy. Such sacrifices could be mostly for thanksgiving and to ask for more powers in the service of the deity. Instances abound about individuals who are into diverse areas of traditional ways of healing based on different kinds of human diseases both natural and unnatural, (due to evil machinations); they make both blood and bloodless sacrifices occasionally for speedy healing of their patients. Native wound healers and bone setters are good in making sacrifice of healing since most of such cases of terminal sore and bone related problems as a result of minor or major accidents are due to evil machinations. Particularly, in the traditional methods of exorcism, sacrifice is always a major entity. Sacrifices are made to the gods and investors for deliverance, most at times to the possessing entity. As earlier noted, the *Dibia* who is the exorcist ascertains the proper sacrifices, how, where, when and whom it is to be made. In this sense, the primary idea is for the total restoration of the possessed either by settling a debt, breaking an existing bond (covenant) or a forceful displacement of the possessing entity as the name implies. Once the proper sacrifice is performed, the ontological order is restored.

Worthy of mention is that beyond all that has been said about sacrifice in all these categories of magical powers,

the Igbo equally make sacrifices to friendly forces in request of one favour or another, mostly for protection. One can go to a known deity and make sacrifice as a way of establishing a bond in which he hands over himself and his family to the protecting power of the deity. Such a covenant requires that a specific kind of sacrifice is expected to be performed at intervals to keep anew the relationship, bearing in mind that the world is gullible and there is always a continuous clashing among the forces in the ontological terrain. Hence, the need to always strengthen one's vital force in readiness for the unexpected attacks from unfriendly forces is always emphasized. Nze, convincingly maintains that:

The Igbo man recognizes that there is constant tugging in the universe. The ontological bounds existing in his world are always threatened by the ups and downs experienced by him. He is daily subjected to the unending pulling at and in different directions by certain, and in most cases unknown, influences. He finds himself like a reed bent in this or in that direction by some strong wind. These vagaries of change which by their nature are gradual or sudden and expected create fear in the Igbo man's mind. At different encounters and scalding with forces surrounding him, he feels shaken, emptied or at least run down. Definitely, there is need to top up, to raise the level of his vital force to what is normal. The Igbo man therefore makes sacrifices to redress the ontological imbalance, to reinstate him, to retain and restore his force. Indeed, the Igbo man becomes a technician using sacrifice for the strengthening, maintenance and protection of man. If he is of this sort, he is in perpetual readiness to achieve a refill, or else the engine would stall. From this point of view, therefore, man resorts to sacrifices to accomplish a rehabilitation of self and his environment before, during and after aggressive brushing with the attacks by unfriendly forces. Sacrifices are force, i.e.; its security (Nze, 1986).

Therefore, we reiterate emphatically that the significance or end of every sacrifice in magical rituals is demonstrated *inter alia* in its restitutive import. And to answer the next inevitable question, how does one's intention expressed in sacrifice and perhaps, becomes actualized after the sacrifice especially in all these categories of magical powers? This however brings us to another essential part of this essay: the power of the word in magical powers in the interpretation of Igbo philosophy.

## THE POWER OF THE WORD (*OKWU*) IN MAGICAL POWERS

Also, the word – *okwu* (in Igbo language), is indispensable in offering a sacrifice as well as magical powers. The word is the smallest unit of every human language that can be used independently. The word is the basic constituent of verbal communication. It is a universal human heritage seen as one of the defining evolutionary acquisitions that have set the *homo sapiens* decisively different from the rest of nature. Although, several beings in the category of animalia have the ability of sounds, none of them so far has been seen to be capable of the word. The dog for instance, can bark but its barking is more or less a reflex action. A well fed lark can sing its soul away while a happy parrot can parrot anything. All these however, do not translate into the word. Interestingly, Heidegger emphasizes the metaphysical import of language and endeavours to demonstrate that language constitutes the most integral and important epiphany of being. He states that speaking is man's fundamental anthropological value. Thus, he writes that:

Man speaks. We speak awake and in sleep. We are speaking always, even when we don't use words, but we listen, or we read or dedicate ourselves to a job. In one way or another we speak uninterruptedly. We speak because to speak is co-natural to us. Speaking does not come from a particular act of the will. Man is said to be naturally speaking and man in difference from plants and animals is a living being capable of words (Heidegger, 1973, p. 27).

In his later work, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger continues to stress the importance of the linguistic dimension of man. Clearly, he notes thus:

For to be a man is to speak. Man says yes or no only because in his profound essence he is a speaker, the speaker. That is his distinction and at the same time his burden. It distinguishes him from stones, plants, animals, but also from the gods. Even if we had a thousand eyes and a thousand ears, a thousand heads and many other senses and organs, if our essence did not include the power of language, all essences would be closed to us (Heidegger, 1973, p.82).

Sequel to the above, humans in every culture speak. What is spoken, how it is spoken and how it is cherished differ from culture to culture. Some cultures see in words no more than symbols of communication. However, the African perception of the word has a far wider signification;

its value transcends communicative, descriptive and existential function. The word is both speech and integral part of African cosmic ontology; a force in its own rite with enormous causal powers. It is a potent force that comes into manifestation when it is spoken or even written; an ethereal entity imbued with the power of creation. By the power of the word, we mean the efficacy inherent in the word; the ability of the word to influence and control things; to have a causal effect, to bring about the desired or intended results. In this context, it refers to how man essentially employs this inherent ability of the word as a force to exercise control over other forces in the universe. Aghamelu, remarks that:

In African philosophical perspective, words are the same part and parcel of the expression of the Cosmo-ontic cum religious elements of African culture. Words are as real as the realities they express ... also as efficacious as the potency of the realities they express. Words have inner contents and with words, the African can effect and affect his environments... It therefore, will amount to philosophical obstinacy to disregard the power of words. Words are not just physical things; they represent realities that are active... just as spirits, man, animals plants are forces; words have great force and are very efficacious (Aghamelu, 2006, pp. 79-80).

That the word is indispensable in every aspect of human endeavour including magic is indubitable. Human communication with divine powers is rooted in words whether spoken or muted in the mind. The whole exercise of prayer is a reutilization of the word. In prayer, the word serves as a vehicle of communication and expression of ethereal power. It is put to use on the level of the other, expressing causal effects on demons and demi gods. African religion depends more often in their worship on the spoken word in the form of spoken prayers. Writing on the importance of spoken prayer, Walter L. Weston writes that:

Spoken prayer is one of the most powerful spiritual tools known to humanity. It is a more powerful tool than thought, meditations, visualization, centering and silent prayer. It has historically proven its power as the basis for religious rituals. The spoken word is the best way for human to communicate and draw closer. The spoken word in prayer can draw upon the wisdom of sacred writings, the word of God. The spoken word is the basis of divine power in all religious rituals and superior to thought, meditation, virtualization, centering and silent prayer because of this. Think about it. If you were given time to aspire one

hundred people gathered for religious purposes, what the method would you use? Standing and thinking - silent meditation - inner virtualization - inner centering - silent prayer - or using the spoken word? The spoken word transmit energy that is information-bearing and acts of intelligence, God's power is extremely expressed more effectively and consistently through the spoken word than through any prayer silent activity taking part in the brain alone (Weston, 1994, p. 172).

Man brings nature under his control by the power of word. He names things and calls them into being. By his words he animates and empowers them to fulfill their function. They remain inert or useless unless called into being through the power of word. Janheinz Jahn is right when he notes that "Ape, cock, snake, iron, copper, tree and stones all belong to the category of things *kintu*. They are all *bintu* - forces without intelligence" (Jahn, 1961, p. 121). They lack activity. It is only through *muntu* - man that they can be given life and called into being. It is the instrumentality of the human person arising from their intelligence and rationality that makes things what they are and the spoken word completes and perfects things. Notes Senghor as cited by Jahn: "The prayer, or rather the poem that the goldsmith recites, the hymns of praise sung by the sorcerer while the goldsmith is working the gold, the dance of the smith at the close of the operation, it is all this - poem, song, dance - which, in addition to the movement of the artisan, completes the work and makes it a masterpiece" (Jahn, 1961, p. 126). Jahn, highlights further the power of words when he notes that all human activities such as curing sickness, fertility, search for happiness, and so on, are informed by the word. "All magic is word magic, incantation and exorcism, blessing and curse. Through *Nommo* (Bantu language meaning the creative power of spoken or word, man establishes his mastery of things. ... Every *muntu*, even the least of them, is by the force of his word lord over everything, over animal and plant, stone and hammer, moon and stars" (Jahn, 1961, pp. 132-133). *Okwu* or *Nommo*, is the creative intelligence; the creative and seminal force. It gives personality to the human person. In fact, the logic of African magic is essentially logic of *Nommo*; the manipulation of this cosmic word - force. With the word, creation in the African understanding is *ad infinitum*. Man, through the instrumentality of *Okwu* *onu/nommo*, keeps calling things into being. In witchcraft, sorcery, and occultism, it is the power of the word that is operational in the invocations and casting of spells. The word activates and empowers a preparation. Witches and sorcerers by this power give direction and purpose to their charms and spells. It is through *Nommo* that occults make their spiritual projections to their victims. Every ritual incantation, initiation processes and all the coven activities

receive their forms and significance in words. Thus, Nze rightly affirms that:

The word occupies a prominent position in African philosophy. The Africans believe in the power of words, and the logic in charm is based on their notion of 'words', 'causes', and 'effects'. For the African, there is an ontological relationship between words and other beings including their inherent forces or natural endowments. It is the force of words that activates and empowers other forces. With words, other forces are invoked, aroused and led to action. Words therefore, order and charge all other forces. Man is a talking being and willing being. Because man can speak and will, he controls the beings in the universe by the use of his word power. African charm medicine finds its logical basis in the ontological relationship existing between man, his word and things within the environment (Nze, 1998, p. 24).

The word is the force in African medicine that makes it effective and potent. Igbo traditional medicine rests on the practice or employment of the effective use of the word - *Okwu/Nommo*. Without the word medicine for the Igbo are placebos; they are powerless and ineffective in themselves. Their potency and effectiveness is only a manifestation of the genuine power of the word well-spoken by the medicine man. Hence, the stronger the word-force of the medicine man, the more powerful and effective the medicine will be. Therefore, the incantations, dances, songs and all that accompany traditional medicine are not only important but are indispensable ingredients that give the Igbo medicine the required potency. Just like Iwu rightly observes that:

Incantation exploits the power of the spoken word, the vibrating fiber of existence as denoted by rhythm and the participatory roles of designated images ... the power of the spoken word gives meaning, status and designation to 'things'. It is the word employed during invocation that confers life force, power and identify to the many fetishes used in traditional medicine. The word, *umendu*, breadth of life - without the word, material objects have little power of their own (Iwu, 1990, p. 12).

Just like in traditional medicine, the work of the diviner is only an impossible task without word. It is with the word that he makes his enquires communicating with the gods and spirits, the same word enables him to interpret and communicate his message to the people. Without words,

the work of an exorcist will be a simple display of an insane person's move like or even worse than the possessed; his gesticulation will amount to empty moves without force. But through the power of words, he exerts his authority on the possessing entity; it is the word-force that gives life to his commands and the fire that displaces and burns the unwanted spirits. The word-force is the spirit that reclaims, restores and reestablishes the possessed; it gives strength, healing and victory in both physical and spiritual purists. Again, the word in the Igbo sacrifice is a significant and an unavoidable necessity. Both the individual and collective intentions for a particular sacrifice can only be declared in words. Starting from the first stage of the ritual usually consists of greetings to the gods, the spirits and ancestors, the breaking of kolanut, pouring of libations and invocations to the declaring of intentions and slaying of the sacrificial victim(s), all these are accompanied by words or incantations. At the end of the priest's prayers, the person/people still respond 'Isee' or 'Ofo' or *Ooh* which means 'so be it'. To buttress this Arinze emphasis that, "the waving ceremony would also be done during the statement of the petition. It is unusual to omit it" (Arinze, 2008, p. 98). The words of the invocations open the ears and hearts of both human and spiritual beings.

Thus, it is the *Okwu* that plays an indispensable role of transforming the material offerings into spiritual gift thereby making them acceptable to the gods and the spirits. Hence, the word makes the communication and communion between men and the spiritual beings possible. The Priest, *Dibia*, use words of incantations to conjure up the spiritual forces to make the sacrifices efficacious. A lamentation such as the one below is not uncommon:

Chineke! Osebuluwa! Please listen to my plea.  
The oracle spoke and I heeded. I offered  
goats and chicken, I did the early morning  
dance. The turtle I provided the six cowries I  
tendered. Nothing they asked of me that I  
failed. And now father, will you stay there  
while these spirits torment me for nothing. I  
have not defiled the earth, I have not  
committed any abomination, and I have not  
blocked the path of an unborn child. Father  
does not look away while these spirits torment  
me. Is it not you who cares for children without  
mothers... You will not allow my enemies to  
laugh at me. You will not allow me to sleep  
before the fowls take their rest. Goats are  
munching their food on my head, please  
father almighty intervene on my behalf (Iwu,  
1990, p. 19).

Beyond all these, the word is a very useful element in other aspects of African life. It is very powerful in culture, agriculture, arts and procreation. In culture, it is both history as well as the embodiment of the history of the

people; the force and value of culture. In agriculture, it is the spiritual life force that produces all life and influences all 'things' in its shape of word. It is the word-force of the farmer that gives life to the planted seed. Jahn, notes that, "germinate and grow; speech and song must be added, for it is the word that makes the grasses germinate, the fruit grows, the cows go in calf and give milk" (Jahn, 1961, p. 125). The seed on its own have no activity and will remain inactive without the influence of the word-force which activates and directs its purpose. Hence, during any farming operation, a farmer and his team sing, chant, and even whistle in praise of both the land and the seeds to be planted. The word-force during such occasions provides the complementary energy necessary for the seeds not only to germinate but more importantly for them to yield abundantly. Imperatively the word creates and adds beauty and meaning to every work of art; and it gives life to its message and value nevertheless, it is the power of word that brings the process of conception to completion. Jahn writes that "even the act of conception which produces a human being, who is not only a physical, but also a spiritual creature ..., is a conception not only through the seed, but at the same time through the word" (Jahn, 1961, p. 124). Ogotommeli therefore demonstrates in this picturesque expression the magic of procreation by the transformational influence of word-force. Thus, he states that:

The good word, as soon as it is received by the ear, goes directly to the sex organs where it rolls about the uterus just as the copper spiral rolls about the sun. That word of water brings and maintains the moisture necessary to procreation and by this means; *Nommo* brings about the penetration of the uterus by a germ of water. It transforms into a germ the water of the word and gives it the appearance of a human person through the essence of a *Nommo* (Jahn, 1961, pp. 124-125).

## CONCLUSION

This article has been an exposition of the essence of sacrifice and the word in magical powers. In our hermeneutical and florid examination of the power of sacrifice and the word in magical powers, it has been shown that the whole ideas of magical powers are not just an African reality but an essential aspect of Igbo ontology: significantly meaningful in its own right. Witchcraft, sorcery, divination, traditional medicine, occultism and exorcism are different ways of expression and manifestation of magical power through the power of sacrifice and word; a causal life-force of creation and unimaginable possibilities.

Word - *Okwu* in the interpretation of Igbo philosophy is the life-giving force with which man masters and controls



all forces. It has a metaphysical significance; it is a spiritual force coming right from the spiritual breath of man. The word brings everything to a possibility by making creation a continuous process. *Okwu* has great power, is dynamic and very efficacious once uttered. It has an ontological relationship with man and other forces. It has power over the whole nature; most importantly, it is the essence of the Igbo personality. Igbo magic and Igbo traditional medicine; the word "accounts for change, production and generation in the matrix of magical powers in Igbo metaphysics.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

- Aghamelu, F. C. (2006). Traditional African medicine philosophical foundations and apologetics. *Essence Interdisciplinary - International Journal of Philosophy*, 3, 66-96.
- Arinze, F. A. (2008). *Sacrifice in Igbo traditional religion*. Onitsha: St. Stephen's Press, Inc.
- Awolalu, J. O., & Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *West African traditional religion*. Ibadan: Obi Onye Press & Books Industries (Nig) Limited.
- Basden, G.T. (1966). *Among the Niger Ibos*. London: Frankcass and Co. Ltd.
- Britannica (1975). 'Sacrifice'. in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 16. London: William Benton Publisher.
- Edeh, E. M. P. (1985). *Towards an Igbo metaphysics*. USA: Loyola University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1970). *Nuer Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- Heidegger, M. (1973). *Cammino Verso il Linguaggio*. Marsig: Milan.
- Heidegger, M. (1974). *An Introduction to metaphysics*, Trans by Raph Manheim. London: Yale University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1980). *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Trans by Raph Manheim. London: Yale University Press.
- Iwu, M. M. (1990). *Symbols and Selectivity in Traditional Medicine*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press.
- Jahn, J. (1961). *Muntu: An outline of the new African culture*. New York: Grove Press.
- Jeffreys, M. D. W. (1946). Dual organisation in Africa. *African studies*, 5(2), 82-105.
- Metuh, E. I. (1987). *Comparative studies of African traditional religion*. Onisha: IMICO Publishers.
- Nnabuchi, N. (2010). *The Red Bible*, Vol. 1. Awka: Life Paths Printing Press (Nig) Limited.
- Nze, C. B. (1986). Sacrifice as a restitution of vital force among the Igbo. *Africana Marburgensia*, 19(1), 29-36.
- Okpalike C. J. B. G. (2008). *Ichuaja in Igbo traditional religion: A comparative study*. New York: Universe, inc. Pp. 33-75.
- Orji, M. O. (1999). *The history and culture of the Igbo people before the advent of the Whiteman*. Nkpor Jet Publishers Nigeria Limited.
- Umeh, J. A. (1999). *Igbo people: Their origin and culture area*. Enugu: Gostak Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Weston, W. L. (1994). *Pray well: A holistic guide to health and renewal*. Wadsworth, Off: Transitions Press.