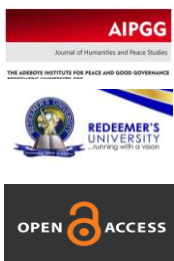


**Concept of uprightness, integrity, honour and goodwill in the worldview of
the Ebira ethnic group in Nigeria**

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Abstract:

The cultural worldview of a people encompasses their beliefs, philosophies, norms, ethos, taboos, superstitions and traditional practices which sum up to folklores. The values contained in the folklores are usually expressed and portrayed through ritual festivals, ceremonies, art forms, proverbs, riddles, and even through the significant given names. Therefore, every given ethnic group is peculiar with the worldview which forms the bedrock of their moral values and identity. It is not news that a good number of people in modern times hold onto an ill-informed notion that indigenous African traditions and practices are fetish. On the contrary, a deeper exploration into the cultural worldview of any given ethnic group in Nigeria will actually reveal that a good number of traditional practices were nurtured on the principles and philosophy of good moral values. This paper therefore explores the cultural worldview of the Ebira ethnic group in Nigeria as an embodiment of uprightness, integrity, honour and goodwill meant to guide and keep up the moral sanity of the people's thoughts and actions. Hence, the prevailing moral decadence will not thrive in our societies if the moral values embedded in the various cultural values such as in the Ebira cultural worldview are upheld and practiced with utmost sense of obligation and dedication.

Keywords: Ebira, Worldview, Uprightness, Integrity, Honour, Goodwill

Introduction

The Ebira otherwise known as Anebira Opete and Anebira Tao people among other stocks of Ebira ethnic groups occupies the central part of the present day Kogi State in Nigeria. The Ebiras traced their root to the ancient Jukun kingdom of Kwara'ara in the present day Taraba State, Nigeria, from where they migrated alongside other stocks of Ebira groups to their present location. This group of Ebira in focus, derived the distinctiveness of the name Anebira-Tao from their all season greeting *Tangwao* short formed "tao and ngwao" literally meaning watch your steps or be careful but extensively also connotes appreciation, commendation, accolade and applause. Okikiri opines that because the "Ebiras are forceful in nature, they hence often greet themselves

tangwao meaning be careful, tread softly or gently”¹ *Kaneri*, meaning congratulation for the breakthroughs of yesterday ushering a new day is also a form of greeting peculiar to Anebira that reflect the virtue of gratitude unto the creator for the privilege of life.

The Ebiras are courageous, forceful, energetic and resourceful. Ebira men are known to be ardent farmers (okuruku), hunters (ozube) and gallant warriors (okureku) of note. Ebira women are equally energetic and highly resourceful, creative and industrious especially with their traditional fabric weaving craft (ita oyih). The Ebiras are noted for travelling far and wide in search of fertile land to engage in their farming occupation. For instance, due to the rocky nature of their homeland, the Ebiras like some other ethnic groups dwelling in the rocky terrains of Nigeria permeate the hinterlands of some neighboring communities such as Edo particularly the Akoko, Etsako and Owan communities, as well as several other communities like Kaba and Ijumu, Ondo and Ekiti environs of the South-west Nigeria to engage in farming and hunting. Some of the people also travels up north of Nigeria such as Kano, Sokoto and the likes to engage in trade activities. Thus the Ebiras are known to be resilient and hardworking.

The cultural worldview of the Ebira ethnic group in Nigeria is an embodiment of virtues including uprightness, integrity, honour and goodwill meant to guide and keep up the moral sanity of the people’s thoughts and actions. These virtuous attributes encompassed in the Ebira cultural worldview are constantly expressed as a reminder via proverbs, idiomatic expressions, riddles, tales/story telling sessions, music; drumming, singing, chanting and dancing and annual festival performances. The various festivals such as Ekuechi, Echeane and Echeori beside other spectacular ceremonies are expressions or representation of the Ebira worldview. For instance, Ekuechi festival is a representation of the Ebira believe in ancestral visitation in form of masquerade. Ekuechi is significantly a festival of thanksgiving and cleansing. The Echeane is also a masquerade festival that is usually celebrated in honour of the Ebira women. It is usually celebrated to appreciate the good virtues of Ebira women as wives and mothers and a pillar of support to their family. Echeori is otherwise known as the new yam festival. It symbolizes fertility, purity, goodwill and peace. Thus, the traditional practices and performances among the Ebira people revolves around the essence of their existence and belief as enshrouded in their worldview.

Philosophy of the Ebira People

The identity of Anebira as the people are called is symbolic of good character, uprightness, integrity, honour, and goodwill. As earlier defined, Ododo echoes that “The word Ebira refers to the people themselves (or could be called

¹ 1 Okikiri, A. E. S. I. Units and Numericala in Ebira”Isa Oyizarika”. Hidden Treasure Publication, Makurdi, Nigeria. (2004). P. 12

Anebira), their language, their character and their geo-political location (et'Ebira or et'Anebira), when considered etymologically”² Okikiri affirms that the name Ebira connotes “good character and qualities of honesty, integrity, high moral ethical standard and good repute”³. The Ebira believes that the world was designed by the manifestation of (Ohomorihi) God’s greatness and goodness. Hence the philosophy that human beings were created to dwell in peace with one another. Ododo in the same context reiterates that “the Ebira worldview is positively disposed”⁴. He further explains that “the Ebira sees life as well and good and he is conscious of his conduct, careful not to bring his name into disrepute and consequently deny himself of access to frivolous lifestyle; that may disguise as good life”⁵. In essence, the Ebira sees life as essentially well and worth living. It is believed that the existence of man (human) is the essence of life. This philosophical believe is what encapsulate into the term Ozovehe, one of Ebira’s very symbolic essence of life related child given names (Oza – human), (Ovi – is), (Ehe – life/ earth) meaning human is life or human is the earth. This implies that the essence of God creating the earth is because of man. That is, life on earth will be meaningless without the existence and continuity of human here on earth. It then follows that earth will cease to exist the moment there is no more single human on earth. Therefore, as images (umomo) of the almighty benevolent God (Ohomorihi), man was originally created with the attribute of godliness and to live a good life by doing good to one another here on earth.

A renowned Ebira ancestral masquerade personage of old known as Okevere, expresses the Philosophy of Ozovehe in a song thus; “Ewuni andayi anumokuku avo, Awevuni oyi Ozi ireha ni o ko Ozovehe ni, Yi Ozi ireha ni o ko Oza ovehe ni o”⁶. The song says; thanks to our ancient progenitors and ancestors, who thought it wise to christened a child “Ozovehe” which means that the human person is life. In the same vein, Ehusani reiterates the Ebira philosophical view of the incomparable value of human and essence of life. He explains that the “Ebira and the Africans in general love life and this is reflected in the Ebira humanistic worldview encapsulated in the name Ozovehe (Oza ovi ehe) which

² Ododo, S. E. It’s only Bent, not Broken: Culture, Education, Politics and Performance Art in Ebira and Ogori. Published by the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA). (2014). P. 12

³ Okikiri, A. E. Ebira: Good Character. Hidden Treasure Publications, Makurdi, Nigeria. (2015). P. 1

⁴ Ododo, S.E. Eku Performance Art among the Ebira: An Interface of Religious and Techno-Cultural Aesthetics, African Culture, Modern Science and Religious Thought, African Centre for Religion and Sciences (ACRS), University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria. (2001). P. 165

⁵ Ododo, S.E. ‘Facekuerade’ Theatre: A Performance Model from Playing and Technical Aesthetics of Ebira-Ekuechi Festival in Nigeria, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis Submitted to the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. (2004). P. 95

⁶ Okevere Masque personage, Music Audio Cassette recorded during Ekuechi Festival Performance, Okene, Nigeria. (1980)

means the human person is life”⁷. This explains the notion that the essence of life is hinged on the creation and existence of man on the surface of the earth. In other words, the creation or existence of the earth without man implies that there is no existence of life in the actual sense. The Ebira believe so much in the essence of human life and existence of man as the paramount of all of God’s creation. In the same light, Emmanuel Ojeifo, a priest of the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, Nigeria, in his opinion as a columnist in the Guardian newspaper edition of May 1st, 2016 reviewed and re-echo of George Ehusani’s words that the Western world actually need to learn from the traditional Africans human development prone attributes and virtues. He further reiterates that the:

Traditional African may not know how to read or write, they may never enter a motor car, and they may be malnourished, but with the names they give their children, the proverbs that enrich their discourse, the songs that they sing, and the art forms that decorate their environment, they seems to answer to what is perhaps the most profound question of humanity today, that is, ‘what is the human person? The African (Anebira) answers by saying: The human person is life: Ozovehe ⁸.

In the same vein, Osakwe and Sule attests to the humanitarian characteristic of Anebira with the postulation that even in the face of war “The Ebira used to station arrow poison neutralizing herbalists close to battlefields to treat the wounded. It was because of the humanitarian concern of Ebira people that they stationed herbalists and traditional doctors at battlefields to treat the wounded”⁹. This humanitarian gesture was being extended to every wounded soldier irrespective of whose side of the army the wounded soldier belongs. Osakwe and Sule further affirm that “wars among the Ebiras were not fought with the aim of taking human life but to prove a symbolic victory” ¹⁰. This philosophy is what informs the Ebira love or preference for children, family bond and even hospitality towards strangers or visitors known as Ozoga (Oza uga) honourable or dignified fellows. Hence, the worth of human life to the Ebira is incomparable to material wealth. Popular Ebira folk song relay the priceless worth of a child over wealth, thus; Ekehi oniri Ozi hierenevenehu ke. Ewazusi ekehi ruvo duwasi nyeze zi? Ozi oyima owura nyeze. The folk song expresses that the priceless value of a child cannot be compared to money

⁷ Ehusani, G. O. An Afro-Christian Vision, Ozovehe Toward a more Humanized World. New York University Press of America, Inc. (1991). P. 121

⁸ Emmanuel O. George Ehusani and a more Humanised World; A Review. Guardian newspaper, Abuja, Nigeria. May 1st, Edition, (2016). <https://guardian.ng/opinion>

⁹ Osakwe, C. C. and Sule, S. Weapons Development and War Plans in Ebira Land. European Journal of Research and Reflection in Arts and Humanities. Vol 3 NO. 2. (2015). P. 56

¹⁰ Osakwe, C. C. and Sule, S. Weapons Development and War Plans in Ebira Land. European Journal of Research and Reflection in Arts and Humanities. Vol 3 NO. 2. (2015). P. 56

because while money is not worth celebrating, the birthday of child calls for celebration.

The Ebira believe in the joy of humanity and honour of a good name, perseverance and hard work rather than in material wealth. This ideology is portrayed in the meaning of a good number of Ebira names. An average Anebira may not be physically wealthy but will still find joy and pride in a life that is characterized by a living conscience (ivehune) that inspires integrity, uprightness and diligence. For instance, names like Onivehu meaning a man of conscience, Ometere meaning the virtuous or righteous one, Oyiza meaning goodness, Ozoiza a good person, Ozioiza meaning a good child, Onoruoiza meaning a good man, Onyeneoiza meaning a good woman, Omeiza a generous person, Ozavize meaning human is a blessing, Ozomata meaning human is endless, Ozozoma meaning everyone should give birth, Ozohu human is supreme over everything on earth, Oziohu meaning child is supreme, to mention, all portrays the essence of goodness, virtue and the supremacy of human over every other thing in the world. The Ebira do not give names that literarily or connotatively reflect the essence of material wealth like money to their children though in recent times the globalization of highly materialistic modern world is now influencing the emergence of names such as Onyekehi meaning the rich or wealthy one.

Thus, the Ebira humanistic point of view forms the foundation of the belief that the child must be properly nurtured so as to imbibe good moral virtues and ethos. Hence, the proverbial song thus: Wamozi wepa suro kovavi osivira?, Azeneneni eye kava nyinuzi duzi ovawurari, Ohine onyireyi, duzi ovawurari, ohine onyireyi. The interpretation of the song means; What do you think will become of your child whom the parent failed to nurture? Don't you not realize that the sweetness of bitter leaf only be achieved after a thorough wash? The song implies that it is pertinent to train, nurture and prepare a child for a better tomorrow. In other word, a child must be nurtured with good upbringing so he or she will be known for good deeds. This philosophy is what the Christian Bible encapsulated in the King James version of the book of Proverbs (22:6) "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it".¹¹

Ebira Creation Myth, Beliefs System and Spiritual Hierarchy

The Ebira believe in the existence of a supreme God whose abode is in heaven, the one who created everything including the spirits and humans. Ebira refer to this almighty God of creation as Ohomorihi (Ohi'omorihi); meaning the mighty maker of rain. They also refer to Ohomorihi as Ihineba (Ohi ananyi eba) meaning the mighty owner of the sky. The Ebira believe that every element in the firmament such as the cloud (Eguhi), the sun (Oi), the moon (Uhwe), the stars (Uzomi), the rainfall (Orihi) and even lightening (Apana Ihineba) and lightening (Inyanya), appearance of rainbow (Ogazi), the waters (Enyi), mountains (Ataba), trees (Ochi), the ground (Etesu), sand (Ezi) and even day

¹¹ Proverbs 22:6. Holy Bible, King James version

and night are believed to play very significant role in the affairs of human destiny as elements that have been designed by God to cohesively make the world a beautiful place for man to dwell. The Ebira in appreciation of God's benevolence would always acknowledge the important role of some elements of nature in the successes of each day. For example, Okevere, a masquerade personage captures this notion in a song thus; "Uhwe anachi dosoni vachi, avo, 2ce, Awevu asimi vagerononi o Uhwe ono"¹². Thanks to the last season moon that has ushered the coming of new season moon. Thanks to yesterday's moon, for it is you that avail me the privilege of seeing and meeting today's new moon. Similarly, another significant song that talks about the importance of appreciating the provision of our yesterday because today would have become yesterday at the dawn of a new day goes thus; "Eri disawu wasiori unakueri uhu, Ajini o ewa tamayi uhwo de, Onetu uhwo ajini sivara eri"¹³. The song is translated thus; yesterday availed you life and fed you, yet you turn around to insult yesterday. Today, please remember tomorrow because today would have become yesterday at the dawn of tomorrow. The song is pregnant with deep admonition that a heart of gratitude and humility brings favour and elevation while pride leads to destruction. Hence, one should be careful not to bite the hand that fed you.

Ebira Creation Myth

The world of Ebira people is enshrouded in several myths that connect the human world to the spiritual and ancestral world. This is because the human world is believed to be influenced by the spiritual world and that human beings transform into ancestors (Ohiku) in the spirit realm when they die here on earth. Hence, the peace of the human world depends on the harmonious relationship that is established with the spiritual realm. One of the significant myths by which, the Ebira worldview is shaped is the creation myth. The Ebira creation myth revealed that Ohomorihi (God) created human and gave them life to live on earth, as usually expressed at the beginning of prayer thus; Ohomorihi, Ohi ananyieba, Ohi anatu ehe, Ohi anatu Oza Kovasira inehe, meaning; Almighty creator, the owner of heaven, the creator of earth, the one who created and gave life to human to live on earth.

The Ebira creation myth has it that God (Ohomorihi) at the beginning of time on earth gave man a hoe with which he will work and make a living, and to the woman He also gave the wool processing and fabric making implements. This explains why the traditional fabric weaving (Ita/ achi oihi) among the Ebira is considered a god given cultural vocation for the womenfolk while farming is for the men folk. The story recall that once upon a time, man sent the woman to answer the call of Ohomorihi on his behalf to receive the secret of life totem

¹² Okevere Masque personage, Music Audio Cassette recorded during Ekuechi Festival Performance, Okene, Nigeria. (1980)

¹³ Okevere Masque personage, Music Audio Cassette recorded during Ekuechi Festival Performance, Okene, Nigeria. (1980)

because he was preoccupied with his farming activity at the time. Instead of delivering the secret of life totem to her husband, the woman confiscate the totem when she discovered the power therein. The woman's evil manipulation of the secret of life totem resulted into what is today known as witchcraft (Irakwo) associated with the womenfolk. The unbearable oppression of the womenfolk's witchcraft activities and evil manipulation of the sphere with the power of Irakwo in the human society brought about the emergence of the masquerade cult by the men folk to combat witchcraft. This is why the secret of the Ebira masquerade cult is vested in the hands of men. This age long myth clearly reveals that the essence of masquerade as a means of combating evil in the society has been part of Ebira traditional practices from the beginning of time. For instance, the masquerade cult among the Ebira is usually employed to pass judgment on evil people such as a witch in any family household in time past. The employment of the masquerade cult in the instance of getting rid of a confessed witch (Opochi) in a household or an evil person (Oza odivi) in the community is known as *jo'ote*. *Ote* is a ritual procession of Ogugu warlike music and dance performance usually led by some special judgment meting masquerade to unseat and excommunicate a witch from a household. The witch will be taken to a lonely cave known as Uteha in a wild forest to live the remaining part her life in misery all alone.

Ohomorihi

The Ebira believe that Ohomorihi is the almighty, all powerful, all knowing creator of heaven and earth. Ehusani explains that "Ohomorihi is the king who provides rain and provides life. He is the Ohi, the great creator, the one who created man and gave him life to live on earth"¹⁴ This believe is encapsulated thus in Ebira praise chant in for the supreme God thus; Ohomorihi ikokokokou, oricha bedu bedu, ovaraka dosi, ovaraka hiduma, odogodogo onuvoza emeturesu, oganagana onuvoza ekara, Adayi oparagada huyo, oku oza ohuru, oku oza atito, Adai ana nyi eri, ana nyi ajini, ana nyi uhwo, Adayi odimiri, ehe ana tu oza vehe doza vasira, Ohomorihi o. The beginning of every form of prayer, religious rite, ceremony and even performances of diverse kinds will always start with the presentation of kolanut following the praise chant to acknowledge Ohomorihi, the owner of life and (Ohinoyi) master of the universe before acknowledging other forces. Okevere, a renowned masque personage of old echoed the omnipresence and omnipotent power of God in a song thus; "Ohomorihi ewu mahi ne enene, Ohomorihi ewu mahi ne odu, Ohomorihi ewu mahi ne oruva, Ahaturaha onimayano uvadumi, Maye kuvadumive adami obanyi"¹⁵. The English translation of the song goes thus; Oh God, it is you I call upon in the morning, Oh God, it is you I call upon at noon, Oh God, it is you I call upon in the evening, I know that you will always come with me wherever I go, almighty father.

¹⁴ Ehusani, G. O. An Afro-Christian Vision, Ozovehe Toward a more Humanized World. New York University Press of America, Inc. (1991). P. 121

¹⁵ Okevere Masque Personage, Ekuechi Festival Performance, Audio Cassette, Okene, Nigeria. (1980)

In the same vein, another masque personage known as Ikerenyi of Ihima sang thus; "Eenyima anvazayiresu adayi obanyi, Anebira viyajeruhwe diyasuga yinda, Ivory enekuabayi iresu eyioza neberi usupa, Irayi omanisige dimatawubo. Usi ononivami chi tite bombom avoo, Oricha omame emejinajine mariawo. Adayi si epawu ku emiraza najinenyi enyi onivi, Masiye konemanyi oza remeyi abam bami taaruu, Onemanyi oza remeyi abam bami taaruu"¹⁶. The song is translated thus; Almighty father, the beginning and the ending. Ebira people, let us celebrate life and give praise to God. I call unto you almighty God, the umbrella covering humans and animals. Almighty God, grant me the power to jump over the pit that my enemy has dug waiting for my downfall whenever I call unto you. Father, take me and my people in your boat across the emery's water way. Almighty God, I have seen and known that you are not a partial King. The Ebira conceptual notion of the universe comprises of three worlds namely (1) *Idaaneku*; heavenly abode or the world of the dead. (2) *Ehe inahi*; the invisible sphere or world of the spirits and powerful forces including both the good and evil lying between the sky and earth. (3) *Ehe onozara*; the human world.

Ete

After the reverence of *Ohomorih* (God) the almighty creator of heaven and earth, *Ete* (earth; ground/ land) is the next force that Ebira belief system reckons with on the echelon of the cosmic forces of nature. *Ete* is considered as the mother of the human world in which the remains of human will be committed after death while the spirit of the dead departs to *Idaaneku*. In fact, a school of thought refer to earth (*Ete*) as a spirit and thus eulogizes the earth with this phrasal chant during any form of ritual performance; *Ete okpotoku onyi'oniyewa, odayi oza ri, odoza here*. Ibrahim explain that the interpretation and implication of the earth's eulogy as echoed above is that "from the earth, crops germinate and grow which man eats but man himself is subsequently eaten by the earth; symbolizing the burial of the dead"¹⁷. In essence, the man's body was created with the sand of the earth, man sojourn, tread and trample on the same earth from which his body was made. Man eats from the sand of the earth and man will at the end of his sojourn on earth return back to the bottom of the earth and once again becoming sand. Hence, *Ete* is significantly the center of the world's existence. This is why it is considered pertinent to be at peace with *Ete* by doing well to fellow humans and protecting even the natural habitat. In fact, it is believed that spilling the blood of a fellow human being evokes the anger of *Ete* against the evil doer, no wonder the world has been in agony and disarray with the advent of evil. In the same light, the Christian scripture reveal the beginning of evil in the book of Genesis (4:8) account of Cain who killed his brother Abel because of envy and hatred. This singular evil

¹⁶ Ikerenyi Asuku Obanyi of Ihima, Asusurayi; Ekuechi festival Performance, Audio CD. (2005)

¹⁷ Ibrahim, Y. A. Ebira Traditional Institutions. Nigeria Magazine (ed) Ashiwaju, G. Publication of the Cultural Division of the Federal Ministry of Information, Lagos, Nigeria. (1976). P. 55

act of spilling human blood prompted the pronouncement of curse by God on Cain for killing his brother and by extension on generations yet unborn thus; verses (10-12) "And the Lord said, what have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth"¹⁸. According to Ododo, "Ete has a dual essence of fortune and misfortune, compassion and reversion"¹⁹. Ebira believe that Ete plays a central role in the transition of life through death to eternity, this believe is expressed in a song sung by Ikerenyi, ancestral masque personage thus;

Ete opotoku, ete onyamiyewa irevu yi, Odidikidi okarumaba
huma huma, Ita ioza enehu onivaza ekuhi odirema,
Dayemirazami diyerehu ideyavakawuve, Asonivi sukata
dumivahurehi yi u etee, Eninekuochi, dekureta navo
weziziresu o, Sipodimiri geyi o sipodimiri geyi o,
Idiyavakawu ve sipodimiri geyi o²⁰.

The above song is translated thus; here, I come with presentation of kolanut to you, mysterious mother earth, massive and awesome, the glorious apparel that will be worn by everyone at the end of time. Give me and my household water and food to eat. Don't let the enemies force me to you, please fight on my behalf if the enemies come with sticks and stones. Discuss my case with the almighty, before we return to you, discuss my case with almighty.

In furtherance of being at peace with Ete as an important factor in the existence of the universe, the Ebira believe in the appeasement of Ete's presence by the enactment of certain ritual sacrifices at the center of a household compound known as (Ete'Ohueje). This implies that the spiritual essence of Ete is resident in every household compound and as such must be respected so that the household will be blessed with good fortune. Ododo reiterate the African believe that "when a child at play eats sand, it is seen as the ritual process of reconnection back to earth, first initiated through the burial of the placenta of the child at birth in a traditional Ebira setting"²¹.

¹⁸ King James. Genesis 4: 10-12.. Holy Bible

¹⁹ Ododo, S.E. 'Facekuerade' Theatre: A Performance Model from Playing and Technical Aesthetics of Ebira-Ekuechi Festival in Nigeria, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis Submitted to the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. (2004). P. 95

²⁰ Ikerenyi Asuku Obanyi of Ihima, Asusurayi; Ekuechi festival Performance, Audio CD. (2005)

²¹ Ododo, S.E. 'Facekuerade' Theatre: A Performance Model from Playing and Technical Aesthetics of Ebira-Ekuechi Festival in Nigeria, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis Submitted to the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. (2004). P. 95

Enyi

In Ebira tradition, Enyi which is water is a very important element of nature considered as a spiritual entity without which man can not survive on earth. The Ebira believed that water is life by which the existence of life is daily revamped. This is why Ohomorihi (almighty maker of rain) is considered the source of water Himself. He provides rain to water the earth and all that is on it. To the Ebira, no human being can fathom the mystery of water except God and as such no human can get angry with water. The implication is that since God showers His rainfall on earth for the benefit of every human, animals and plants, everyone should freely give water to the thirsty whenever the need arises. Water is also used to symbolize fertility, goodness and prosperity which is why water is usually poured on the feet of a newly married woman into a home by her mother-in-law or women of the household in the course of praying for the welfare of the new member of the family through the bond of marriage. In like manner, water is usually sprinkled by a father on the head and hands of a child leaving home to fend for him or herself in a far away land to attract success and good fortune. Water is also applied as a spiritual cleansing and healing on human and land.

Ori

Ori (spirit beings) hold the third place in the forces controlling the universe. Ori in Ebira tradition refers to spirits believed to be messengers of God to serve the interest of the earthly humans. Ori serves as mediator between human and the almighty God. The Ebira believe that Ori serves as a channel through which their needs are met by God. Ori is vested with the power to guide and protect every individual, family, household or community that seeks the help of Ori depending on the encounter with a particular Ori. It is believed that every natural element such as streams and rivers, rocks and mountains, valleys and trees are usually inhabited by a designated Ori (spirit). Though Ori are considered to be spirits but could appear either in human or any imaginable visible form to human as they desire. According to Ibrahim Ebira people believe that Ori can bring "peace, good luck, rain, good crops and prosperity. It can bring fertility to the soil and the women; it can ward off epidemics, untimely deaths and foreign invasions"²². He expatiates that Ori can thwart the plans of witches against a person, family or community. Though Ori will always be faithful to keep initiated covenant with human but the same Ori could work against the good of any devotee once the devotee refuse to fulfill the bargain or agreement of the existing covenant between them. Ikerenyi masque personage echoes the benevolence and protective attributes of Ori in a song thus;

²² Ibrahim, Y. A. Ebira Traditional Institutions. Nigeria Magazine (ed) Ashiwaju, G. Publication of the Cultural Division of the Federal Ministry of Information, Lagos, Nigeria. (1976). P. 57

Ori ogu ohuta anagisa navo wepemi harevu o, Isuvavo gavo
avo avoizani ozemeyi Ori inireba irayi osige mireyatawubo,
Anavo asavayiremeku bereoniraza o Oto onenini rewo avoo
dowagarahi avi, Eworihima dauduo dowagarahi avi ²³

The interpretation of the song goes thus; I present kolanut to you spirit, the third in command of the cosmic forces. I desire the goodness of your good fortune for human. The spirit of the ancestral shrine, here I come calling on you. Please don't turn your back on the masque personage and his people. Spirit of Ihima, I plead that you will thwart and nullify the boastful threat and evil plans of enemies.

Ori Celebration Phenomenon among Ebira People

The myth of Ori celebration among the Ebira differs from one community to another. This is because there are different kinds of Ori phenomenon depending on the encounters and experiences of every Ori devoted household, clan or community. In view of this study, the two popular Ori myth celebrated annually are that of Ihima and Eganyi communities. In view of this, Ododo confirms that "Ori is actually worshiped and celebrated in two towns of Ihima and Eganyi in Ebira land"²⁴. He further reiterates that Echeori is celebrated as new yam festival for seasonal renewal. This is not to say that all other communities do not perform rites in honour of certain Ori resident within a particular household and clan. For example, the people of Adavi also perform Ori rite annually to herald the harvest and eating of new yam. It is a celebration that last just a day, though whoever was chosen by oracle as Ori messenger must not partake of any leftover food for fourteen days. In fact, he is expected to eat only fresh pounded yam meal till the end of the fourteen days cleansing ritual enactments. Thus, the annual festival of Ori is symbolically a form of thanksgiving for the bountiful harvest of new yam. It is usually celebrated between the months of May and August among the Ihima and Eganyi communities of Ebira land and it is known as Echeori. The word Echeori is composed of Eche meaning feast, celebration or festival and Ori meaning spirit. The festival is composed of series of rituals, dance and musical performances in appreciation for protection, peace, good tidings, rainfall, fertility and bountiful harvest. Hence, the myth of how the celebration of Ori started in both communities of Ihima and Eganyi differs based on the varying encounters of the people of both communities with the Ori that is resident in their abodes.

The annual thanksgiving feast of Ori celebration among Ihima and Eganyi communities of Ebira land is known as Echeori. The word Echeori is made up of Eche meaning feast, celebration or festival and Ori meaning spirit or deity.

²³ Ikerenji Asuku Obanyi of Ihima, Asusurayi; Ekuechi festival Performance, Audio CD. (2005)

²⁴ Ododo, S.E. 'Facekuerade' Theatre: A Performance Model from Playing and Technical Aesthetics of Ebira-Ekuechi Festival in Nigeria, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis Submitted to the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. (2004). P. 95

The festival is composed of ritual sacrifice, dance and musical performances in appreciation for protection, peace, good tidings, rainfall, fertility and bountiful harvest. Beside the reverence of Ori, it is usually celebrated to mark the harvest and eating of new yam by Ebira people particularly among the Ihima and Eganyi communities. The concept of Ori among Ebira people means spiritual being through which people can seek the favour of Ohomorihi, the creator of heaven and earth. According to Ibrahim, the Ebira believes that "Ori dwells in stones, rocks, hills and mountains (Ireta, Ida, Ataba), cotton wool trees known as Ucheba and Opopanchi, pool of water, stream or river (Okuha, Irehu), earth (Ete)"²⁵. Thus, each Ori is usually named after its habitation or location (town), thus Ori ini Ireta; Ori ini Ida, Ori ini Ataba, Ori ini Ochi; Ucheba/ Opanchi, Ori ini Enyi; Okuha/ Irehu, Ori ini Ete, Ori Anihima, Ori Aneganyi, Ori Anetuno. Ododo (2004, p. 96) adds that, individual household can enter into covenant with Ori or invite Ori into their home known as (Ori Inohueje) household spirit as its devotees for protection, fertility and prosperity. Ododo expresses that God created Ori (spirit being or nature spirit) as intercessor between Himself and man. He further explains that:

Ori spirit functions primarily to protect its devotees against known or imagined enemies. They return to the source in double measure all evil machinations hatched against a devotee. Blissful existence for all those committed to the Ori is assured. If you commit yourself to an Ori spirit, you are insured against human evil, and also forbidden from doing evil against anybody. If you do, the hatched plan shall become your lot.²⁶

In the same vein, Ibrahim reiterates that Ori is referred to as "spirit whose potency lies between that of God and that of man. It is much closer, however to the latter than it is to the former because God created it"²⁷. The essence of Ori manifestation transcends mortal understanding. Ododo reiterates that the "Ebira believe that should there be drought; sacrifices can be offered to Ori to invoke rainfall from *Ohomorihi* the almighty maker of rainfall and creator of heaven and earth"²⁸. This explains why there is usually a heavy downpour of rain as soon as the *Onutuori* (Ori priest/messenger) finishes the ritual sacrifice on the hill of Ori during the festival. Though, the usual heavy downpour of rain

²⁵ Ibrahim, Y. A. Ebira Traditional Institutions. Nigeria Magazine (ed) Ashiwaju, G. Publication of the Cultural Division of the Federal Ministry of Information, Lagos, Nigeria. (1976). P. 57

²⁶ Ododo, S.E. 'Facekuerade' Theatre: A Performance Model from Playing and Technical Aesthetics of Ebira-Ekuechi Festival in Nigeria, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis Submitted to the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. (2004). P. 97

²⁷ Ibrahim, Y. A. Ebira Traditional Institutions. Nigeria Magazine (ed) Ashiwaju, G. Publication of the Cultural Division of the Federal Ministry of Information, Lagos, Nigeria. (1976). P. 57

²⁸ Ododo, S.E. 'Facekuerade' Theatre: A Performance Model from Playing and Technical Aesthetics of Ebira-Ekuechi Festival in Nigeria, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis Submitted to the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. (2004). P. 97

as soon as the ritual is performed on the hill of Ori may sound unbelievable, it is a reality till date. However, beside religious belief and supernatural manifestation, it will not be out of place to argue that the reason for the usual rainfall is not farfetched from the fact that the period of Echeori festival is usually the peak of rainy season. One may conclude then that the people have a system of weather forecast by which they could determine rainfall. As reasonable as this argument may sound, the people's belief which Ibrahim attests to that rain will surely fall whenever need arises for the people to consult Ori in view of delayed rain punctured our meteorological reasoning. It is generally believed by the Ebiras that the mountainous hills surrounding the settlements of Ebira Tao people have been a wonder of sort serving as stronghold and protection for people in those days of wars. Ododo reiterates Temple's affirmation of the significance of the hill that "the rocky hills surrounding the land served as defense shields against enemies in the days of constant inter tribal wars"²⁹. Ebira oral tradition recalls that in those days of inter tribal wars, Ori Ihima at different occasions did release swarm of bees from its chamber on the hill against invaders to complement the valiant of the gallant Ebira warriors; Archers and combatant soldiers.

This war in the history of Ebira according to oral tradition corroborated by Okikiri among other historians of Ebira culture is known as the Ajinomo war (Ireku Ajinomo) during which the Ebira defeated and warded off the remnant cavalry of the fulani/Nupe jihad and slave raiders from invading the land"³⁰. In the same vein, Ohida re-echo that "Ori-Ihima wonder dew was released from its chamber over Ebira land during the Nigeria civil war, to protect the land and people from the hovering bomber planes of the Biafran soldiers"³¹. Ebira oral tradition also reveal that there is a very symbolic existence of oracular Ori known as *Idakoriko* that has been a source of protection over Ebira land against attacks from across the river. Idakoriko is still revered today particularly among the group of ebira living around the river banks (Utenyi) of Ajaokuta. Oral tradition narrates the Idakoriko saga that once upon a time in the course of Ebira migration from Idah, a certain great man named Idakoriko on behalf of his people offered himself as a sacrifice in appeasement to the spirits resident in the river (Ori inenyi). It was said that Idakoriko descended into the bottom of the river at the place known as Ajaokuta today. A tree known as Obanjere emerged with a rock (Ida) from the bottom of the waters and spread across the width of the river to enable the people cross the river to Opete land after the dissension of Idakoriko into the bottom of the waters. Hence, Idakoriko (Ida Kokoroko) meaning solid rock became an oracular symbol that is revered among the Ebira especially those that resides around the River Niger bank on

²⁹ Ododo, S.E. Eku Performance Art among the Ebira: An Interface of Religious and Techno-Cultural Aesthetics, African Culture, Modern Science and Religious Thought, African Centre for Religion and Sciences (ACRS), University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria. (2001). P. 156

³⁰ Okikiri, A. E. Ebira: Good Character. Hidden Treasure Publications, Makurdi, Nigeria. (2015). P. 16

³¹ Ohida, P. Ebira Nation Prays, Life Books, Karlmedia Press, Kaduna, Nigeria. (2002). P. 56

the side of Opete. Ohida opines in corroboration of Ebira oral tradition of Idakoriko legend that "it was at the River bank (Utenyi/ uto enyi) that the Ebiras have their final resting symbol of an ancestral shrine anchored on the River Niger with all season visible presence from any direction"³². The sacrificial act of Idakoriko as recalled in the legendary tale is a reflection of selflessness and goodwill for the benefit of humanity which is what the summation of the Ebira worldview represents.

Conclusion

As a people, the ways of life of the Ebira otherwise known as Anebira is guided by the philosophy of benevolence as contained in their worldview. Hence the meaning of the name Ebira (character) is significantly an embodiment of virtues and good character trait (Anebira oyiza) which is expected to breed and sustain moral sanity amongst the people. No wonder, the Ebira expressed their humanistic view of life even through given names such as Ozovehe; Human is life, Ozavize; human is blessing, Ozavisa; human is worthy, Ozohu; human is priceless in God's creation, to mention a few. For instance, the Ebira believe that one builds up treasures in heaven (idaneku) when you extend a hand of kindness to both folks and strangers alike. This believes is emphasized and reflected through the name for strangers and visitors known as Ozoga which is derived from "Oza; human and Uga; honour" meaning human or people of honour. In essence, every human person will respect and cherish the life of a fellow human being if the life is human life is considered priceless by every individual. It is pertinent to conclude that the peaceful existence of human society depends on how much every individual and group of people upholds the tenets and philosophy benevolence fashioned after a humanistic world as embedded in Ebira worldview.

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³² Ohida, P. Ebira Nation Prays, Life Books, Karlmedia Press, Kaduna, Nigeria. (2002). P. 38-39

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