

The Causes of Evil and Human Suffering in Ogoni Traditional Philosophy: Towards the Multi-Causal factor Analysis

DEEZIA, BURABARI SUNDAY

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

E-MAIL: burabarisunday@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The reality of evil and human suffering in the world has long been a puzzle to human mind. Though over the ages, the various philosophical schools and religious traditions have formulated myriads of explanations to human predicaments; however, the problem of evil and human suffering remains a perennial issue in philosophy and religious discourse. It is against this background that this study is aimed to interpret the problem of evil and human suffering beyond the conventional narratives. The paper focuses on the origin, causes and purpose of evil and human suffering, as well as its practical solutions as practiced in the Ogoni traditional religious philosophy. In analyzing the subject matter, the study adopts the ethnographic method, using the historical and philosophical approach. Through this research effort, it was established that unlike the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions in Ogoni who trace the sources and causes of evil and human suffering to a 'mono-demonic factor,' the Ogoni indigenous people trace the sources and causes of evil and human suffering to a 'multi-causal factors.' More significantly is the fact that the Ogoni do not necessarily perceived evil and human suffering as the end in themselves. Goodness and evilness are dialectical and not diametrically opposed to each other. Hence, the Ogoni traditional philosophy does not give room for the problem of evil and human suffering, as its advantages in maintaining virtues and moral uprightness still hold sway.

Keywords: Evil, Human Suffering, Religion, Traditional Philosophy

Introduction

Evil is a reality that human has got to grapple with since the dawn of consciousness. Every religion realizes this harassing fact even though there are different ways of explaining it (Dopamu, 2000). Various philosophical schools of thoughts-Epicurus, Stoics, Plotinus, Augustine, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Teilhard' de Chardin etc- have through the ages offered explanations to the problem of evil and human suffering. Despite their efforts, the problem of evil and human suffering seems to grow more intense. This shows that the myriads of western theoretical explanations to the problem of evil and human suffering are more of metaphysical explanations, rather than giving a practical solution. It was further observed that almost all religious traditions acknowledged the existence of evil and human suffering but however; disassociate God from being responsible for the causes of evil. This then left the question, what are the causes of evil and human suffering in the world?

Evil and human suffering is widely seen and its scope is unlimited in human lives. All human suffers, the young and the aged, the weak and the strong, the guilty and the innocent etc. The paper is therefore structured to answer the How? Why? and What? questions about human predicaments. These are questions about the sources/causes, and purposes/solutions to the problem of evil and human suffering. In other words, through the Ogoni traditional philosophical lenses, the study seeks to re-interpret the problem of evil and human suffering beyond the conventional narratives.

Conceptual Framework

In attempt for philosophers to give a clear explanation to the concept of evil, stoicism, philosophical school founded by Zeno (342-770 BC) taught that the supreme good lies in pure and rational conduct, and the suppression of all human desires (McCain, 2008). They further taught that God is material; the universe is his body, and he is its soul (Boer, 2003), thus, a sort of pantheism. They believe that everything that happens is part of the system and plays a useful role within the

universal system. Even what we call evil is an integral part of the eternal plan, an integral part of the system and contributes towards the order and harmony of the universal system (Omeregbe, 1993). Good and evil are useful and complementary. This suggests that evil is necessary as a counterpart to good, that if there were no evil there could be no good either (Warnock, 1978). This however set a limit to what God can do, saying that God cannot create good without simultaneously creating evil, and this means either that God is not omnipotent or that there are some limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.

That is to say that evil is necessary as a means to good; and that the universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there are no evil. Thus, they work in harmony, in accordance with laws of nature.

Plato however argued that “evil is simply the absence of the good that everyone desires” (Plato 1982). The duality theory claims that evil cannot exist without good and that good cannot exist without evil, as they are the exact opposite states (Alawa, 2016). On the other hand both Plotinus and St. Augustine conceived evil in negative terms, Plotinus, the founder of the neo-platonic school explained evil “as the negation of being, that is, the lack of being (Omeregbe, p,105). Thus, evil is not a positive thing, it is not an entity, but the privation of being. St. Augustine who belongs to the neo-platonic school of philosophy sees ‘evil as a privation.’” Augustine added that since evil is not a positive thing, but only the negative of being, it does not make sense to ask who created it. For evil was not created and could not be created. He said, a thing can only be partially evil since evil is the lack of being, and nothing can lack being and still remain in existence (Omeregbe, p. 125).

It was in this view that Augustine defended that evil was not caused by God, for everything that God created is good, so God did not create evil, for only what is, can be created and evil is pure nothingness, but God has brought every being out of nothingness, hence it follows that every being brought out of nothingness is by that very fact corruptible (Augustine, 1960). Similarly, Spinoza recognizes nothing as evil, since all finite things are logically necessary modifications of divine subject. In the modern period, pessimism disgrace the problem of evil and badness by denying all meaning to reality; but if it is absurd and

meaningless it is open to the question that Schopenhauer considered the world on the result of being instructive will (Alawa, 2015). Arthur Schopenhauer is the great representative of pessimism. Carl Jung depicted evil when he says:

Evil as the dark side of God, and people tend to believe evil as something external to them, because they project shadow onto others. (1977, p. 15).

Leibniz distinguishes between three kinds of evil, namely, metaphysical evil, physical evil and moral evil (Omeregbe, p. 141). The evolutionist, Teilhard de Chardin sees evil in the world as part of the evolutionary process of the world. This simply means that the world is an evolutionary world which is gradually developing and evolving through a long process. He added that “evil is essentially disorder, but disorder is inevitable in an evolutionary system (Omeregbe, p. 141). Until the world gets to its goal, which Teilhard’ de Chardin calls “Omega point,” it remains imperfect and evil remains an integral part of it.

The Origin/Concept of Evil in Ogoni Traditional Philosophy

The Ogoni indigenous people, originally known as the Khana people are believed to have migrated from the former Gold Coast (now Ghana). The Ogoni people who currently occupy the Eastern parts of Niger Delta upland-Nigeria, are said to have settled in the seven kingdoms of Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyor-Khana, Taiand Oyiigbo, including Ban-goi (special unit). Administratively, Ogoni is made of Khana, Gokana, Taiand Eleme. The Ogoni speak related, mutually intelligible language of Khana as the central language and Gokana and Eleme (Deezia, 2018). The people are innately religious and thus see themselves as surrounded with the supernatural in a conscious affinity (Deezia, 2014). The awareness of her ubiquitous nature clouds their day-to-day activities, thus they believe in the inseparability of both the spiritual and the physical worlds, as there is a co-habitation, inter-relation and interaction of both. Hence, an Ogoni man is born religiously, he lives and dies religiously. In other words,

the people are wholly religious and religiosity permeates every sphere of their lives.

In Ogoni traditional religion and philosophy, the motifs of suffering are found in myths, folk lores or oral traditional beliefs and literatures. The Ogoni indigenous people therefore traced the origin of evil and human suffering to a time that existed, when the sky was very close to the earth, that human beings can touch the sky with hand. At that time there was no death, suffering or pains, and humans never lacked anything, as *Kawaa-Bari* (The Supreme Being) was directly involved in the affairs of man. However, a day came, while one woman was breaking fire-wood the axe got broken and the head fell into heaven, as a result of the closeness of the sky to be earth. *Kawaa-Bari* (The Supreme Being) picked offence at human's carelessness and disobedience. Hence, She withdrew into the sky where she now dwells. The result is that human beings were punished and could now die, and since then evil came into the world, and thus, spread throughout the world. This brings to mind the common expression in Ogoni *Torga le Neē* this is interpreted to mean that; ‘pain begin from birth, through childhood to old age and ends with death.’

In the Ogoni traditional Philosophy, ‘evil’ is regard as *pororor pia-nu*. It is in the negative sense; it denotes something that is not good, that is absence of good or the corruption of goodness. Thus no one desire evil. While suffering is expressed in Ogoni word as *Torga*, which means, an unfavourable situation which ought not to be. It connotes a gravely difficult, painful and dishonourable situation which a person undergoes as punishment for offences committed against the deities, humanity and the created order. This shows that the Ogoni word is ontologically linked. Thus, the expression: *nu ofo ne o bugara a* (whatever a man sows that he would reap).

On the other hand, anything or human that impedes the achievement of goals ideals, happiness and general wellbeing among the Ogoni people may be regarded as *poror-nee* (bad or evil person) or *poro-nu* (bad or evil thing). Again, the death of love ones is also regarded as ‘poror’ (evil) because such a loss will definitely bring a form of pain or sorrow to the people. Thus the expression: *pia nu e sira*

(bad thing has happened). This informed Ezeanya (1994) when he avers that;

Suffering of every kind-epidemic, sickness of all sorts, accidents, fire outbreak, natural disaster like flood and earthquakes were all attributed to the influence of the powers above man, both good and evil showing their displeasure at human offence (Salanke, 1992:19).

Sequel to this, the Ogoni also understand suffering as any kind of painful or difficult experience resulting from situations or painstaking efforts to achieve difficult objectives (Deekae, oral interview, September 5, 2017). It is in this regard that suffering is used to achieve spiritual heights. Hand work in terms of making serious efforts also involved some form of suffering. This kind of suffering brings hope and does not lead to despair or destruction. The Ogoni would say; *dumyii gāh* (he who succeed through hard-work is owned by the community); *O u, o u nā a wee dum nā* (through hard-work, a nobody can become somebody in the future). Thus, this kind of suffering is not a curse but attracts blessing from the gods. Greatness is achieved through hard-work. But the question remains; must one suffer first just to be blessed by God?

Therefore, the existence of *Poror* (evil) and *Torga* (suffering) is a reality or a fact that cannot be disputed. This is further vindicated as the Ogoni will say; *pianyōr-ue* or *porornyōr –ue* (the world is evil-Khana) *Poror Baraboo* (evil world-Gokana), *Pororeboo* (evil world-Elleme). Thus, it is clear that the Ogoni people see evil and human suffering as a vice or a misfortune. It is important to note that the people experience suffering from birth to death. This is further explained using the following diagram:

Sequel to this, in the Ogoni traditional philosophy, suffering is seen as remedial in character; it has the power to beautify and ennoble the character and the spirit of the sufferer. Unlike in Judeo-Christian religion and Western thought, where people feel the love of God guarantees that they will be able to have everything they wish- that life simply will be a “bed of roses” untarnished and untainted by anything.

In the Ogoni traditional religion there is no immunity from suffering. A man who has no sorrow in life often tends to be immature. Through the suffering that accompanies hard work, humans develop both physically and spiritually. It is through suffering that they learn to overcome those acts considered taboo/abomination which are capable of causing more suffering not only on the individual but also to the community at large.

Causes of Evil and Human Suffering in Ogoni: Towards the ‘Multi-Causal Factor’ Analysis

Both the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religious traditions affirms that the creator God is omnipotent, kind, good and loving. At the same time they admitted or acknowledged the existence of evil and human suffering in the world but do not hold God responsible for it. Because they have to account for the presence of evil in the universe, they look for its explanation elsewhere. In other words, they holds Satan or the Devil (a mono-demonic factor) responsible for evil; while Islam holds *Iblis* or *Shaitan* (also a mono-demonic factor) responsible for evil and human suffering.

However, the Ogoni do not postulate or trace the source (causes of evil and human suffering to a ‘mono-demonic factor’; an evil being that is solely responsible for the occurrence of evil and human suffering as observed in the West or in Judeo-Christian thought. rather the Ogoni traces the source/cause of evil and human suffering to a ‘multi-causal factor’; they conceived both good and evil as arising from the activities of Kawaa-Bari (The Supreme Being), bari (gods-deities, ancestors and personal god) and other entities. Hence, to the Ogoni, the activities of Kawaa-Bari (God) and the lesser divinities or gods (*baris*) is seen as the major causes of evil and human suffering in the world; while human activities as a result of freewill/choice constitute important secondary sources/causes. Below are some of the causal factors of evil and human suffering.

Divinities as a Causal Factor

Divinities are beings or gods that are subordinate to the Supreme Deity. Among the Ogoni people, some of those divinities that were brought forth into being for specific purpose and functions include;

bari-saā (the earth goddess), *naa-kaara* (thunder god) all of Gokana, and *Yor-Ziā* (god of fertility) of Luawii, the traditional headquarter of Babbe Kingdom. These divinities are not the end in themselves rather they act as intermediaries between man and the Supreme Deity.

Some of the ancestors are also canonized and deified as gods. This is peculiar to founders of kingdoms; founders of communities and those who must have live extraordinary and mysterious lives while on earth. When such ancestor is deified, he is no longer an ancestor as he graduate or transform into the status of a deity. In other words, in the Ogoni traditional philosophy, there is the notion of, and belief in, a spiritual world enveloping the visible world. Consequently, fortune and misfortune are the common place of daily experience. This brings to mind a common saying in Ogoni epistemology that ‘if you see something dancing on top of the sea, you must know there is another something underneath the waters playing the tune.’ So it is in fortune; misfortune; and human suffering. Their causes are not too far removed from the physical world of men. The good spirits, or gods, as the ambassadors of God are harbingers of good fortune. The bad spirits are the ‘tune-players’ of misfortune and human suffering.

Hence, the people believed that for a man to be truly human and successful in life, he must be in constant relationship with the Supreme Being (God) as well as the good spirits. These gods have power over evil spirits who, in tune, try to avoid confrontation with the good spirit. One thing to be noted is that the good spirit respects the freedom of man. Thus, if a man repeatedly opts to do evil, the good spirit respects the freedom of man. Thus, if a man repeatedly opts to do evil, the good spirits automatically withdraw their protective power. The man then falls victim to the evil spirits who take hold of him. He eventually dies a bad man to join the company of the evil spirits in their invisible domain. Again, some of the divinities are no more than personification of natural forces and phenomena. Among the Ogoni people, spirits are associated with rivers, rock trees and thick forest.

Predestination and Personal *bari* (god) as a Causal Factor

Spread throughout West Africa is the belief in the existence of an individual’s spiritual counterpart, his guardian angel. This entity is

referred to as *Chi* among the Igbo and Ikwerre, *Ehi* among the Benin, *Tamuno* among the Ijaw and *bari* among the Ogoni. The Ogoni concept of *bari* with small letter ‘b’ depicting the lower entity, especially in human destiny does not permit a precise translation into English. The concept has generally been described in anthropological literature as a person’s “second half”, his “invisible half”, his “Super ego”, his “Over Soul”, his “other self”, his transcendental self”, his major ego”, his “Spiritual companion”, “guardian angel”, “divine spark”, and so on. None quite explains the concept, but each does separately throw light on its various aspects. Hence, they are nearest possible translation.

Among the Ogoni indigenous people, it is believed that before a person is born into this world, it is the personal ‘*bari*’ that selects the destiny of the person before *Kawaa-Bari* (The Supreme Being) who normally endorses such as a choice, and gives the resources to achieve it. She also gives the person a spiritual guardian *bari*, to guide the person on Her behalf thus, *bari* is regarded by the Ogoni as the most important benevolent personal protection spirit (*Beebari*, oral interview August 16, 2017).

A man’s *bari* is thus associated with him as soon as he is born, the individual god, *bari*, has a hand or is actively involved in determining what a newborn child will be in this world. It is *Kawaa-Bari* (the Greatest Bari) who actually creates the new – born but through the mediatorship of *bari*, his personal God, God commits the child to the care of the parents. The active role of the personal God includes interceding with *Kawaa-Bari* (The Supreme Being) on behalf of the parents, and in conjunction with God, fixes the *bari* (destiny package) of the child, its total achievements and failure or what the child will be.

In other words, a man’s abilities and faults, his good and bad fortunes; poverty, sickness and death, are ascribed to his *bari*. Thus, when a person is in difficulties, suffering one form of evil or the other, it is sometimes explained that “that is how he was destined or fated”. A man may, however, be fighting against his fate. He may attempt to do what he has not been desired to do. If he attempts something in which he is failing, it is sometimes suggested that it is against his fate. A man’s *bari* is in constant communication with him. He might be seen in

dreams; a diviner may reveal his *bari's* ideals and wishes. On a practical level, his *bari* stands by him as a spiritual guardian and a god-father. Man being human can act contrary to his own predestined fate, which in any case does not really know except that is forever being teleguided by his *bari*. When in trouble or difficulty he may be asked by a diviner to go and “serve” his *bari* and appease him. It is important to note that no man can completely change his predetermined circumstances or fate, but can only appease or sacrifice to influence some aspect. This means that predestination is done in heaven before one is born and little can be done about it once one is born.

Thus, whether one becomes a king or not, a great or successful man or not, it is *bari* that pre-ordains it. This is clear in the Ogoni common expression; ***Kings are born and not made.*** This is what people mean when they proudly assert that they did not buy nor contest for a hereditary title, or for the leadership of a family or village. God through one's *bari* gave it. Yet, it is what one has willed. Sometimes this is a first-born male name, as he is seen as having been choosing-or has chosen to lead the family. Consequently, every bad thing is attributed to the individuals *bari* who in turns is blamed for his mistakes in life. At death the sum-total of the choices made by the individual's *bari* is sanctioned and ratified by *Kawaa-Bari* (The Greatest Bari). The Ogoni believe that these choices made by man's *bari* are inscribed by God on both palms of the child at birth, hence the Ogoni will say; *ereeba nu olu, le o kē a kaba* (What a man will be in life has been destined and written on his palms).

Evil and human suffering as viewed by the pre-modern Ogoni and scholars has some line not directly with man but with his personal god who chooses his destiny package at the moment the individual is born into the world. Unavoidably, evil and human suffering is blamed on one's personal god and destiny. This personal god and destiny assigned to man by God are also invoked to explain personal traits which one recognizes and may want to get rid of, but finds it extremely formidable to effect any serious changes. For instance, why are some people intelligent, rich, gifted, enjoy life, health and good for time, while others may born blind, deformed, foolish become orphans, die young or end up barren etc?

According to this view, each person's personal *bari* (god) and *gborsi* (destiny) are accountable for both the avoidable and unavoidable sufferings and mistakes in life. The traditional Ogoni believe that the Supreme Being (*Kawaa-Bari*) assigns a personal god (*bari*) to an individual which *bari* in turn brings a man all his good sometimes bad fortunes as well such as poverty and sickness by choosing the destiny package (*bari*) on which one's lot depend so much that every good and bad thing are attributed to it and also blamed for individuals suffering and mistakes in life. The Ogoni have names, proverbs and other cultural expressions which serve as traditional grounds for holding to this view. Some of such expression are *bari zī-zī neēlukee* (human personal *bari* differs), *Tereziā kē nē o bariliterally* interpreted to mean 'thank your personal *bari*'. This expression is used when one escapes danger.

Malicious-Evil Spirit and Mystical Causations

Beliefs about the causes and agents of evil and human suffering are best studied in the context of a people's cosmology or view of the universe. Thus, the Ogoni people's world-view is peopled with numerous mystical agencies whose hand may be suspected to be believed any usual event. Among the Ogoni indigenous people, human suffering and misfortunes are interpreted as the work of *poror adoṛ* (evil spirits), witches, or sorceress, and could also be attributed to bad or evil eye, broke taboos, perjured Oaths, or even to the Supreme Being, the deities or ancestors.

Deekae (oral interview August 5, 2017) asserts that among the mystical agencies of misfortune, some are regarded as fundamentally good and just, while others are fundamentally unjust and evil, God, the deities and ancestors belong to the second category. God spirits like the Supreme Being, the deities and ancestors may inflict some physical evil. When they do, it is as premonitory, corrective or punitive measures. It was in this view that Metuh (1987) asserts;

They are believed to be committed to the over-all good of the individual and the community, so that when they send a misfortune it is for the welfare of the sufferer or his community (p.161).

Just like every other Africa society, are Ogoni believe that God created man and brings him up as the father brings up his children. She protects, provide for, and sometimes allow them to be punished. Again, the deities and the ancestors often cause misfortune. In as much as they offer benefits, protection and good health, they at times punish. To Gbaranee (oral interview August, 2017), some of this spirits use their punitive powers more frequently and are thus dreaded. When they visit humans, they bring in their wake either sickness, some natural disaster-flood, fire outbreak, earthquake, disastrous harvest and famine-or even death. Yet they are not intrinsically evil, rather they are seen as agents employed by the Supreme Being to execute Her punitive measures on recalcitrant offenders.

Typical examples that come readily to mind are the goddess found throughout Ogoni, known as *Gbene-beka* (the great mother). This deity is believed to be the mother of all gods. She is the originator of small-pox epidemic; she holds an exalted position in the pantheon of gods. Budam (oral interview September 30, 2017) added that when the small-pox attacks her victim, the people does not complain, curse or condemned it, otherwise they become the next fatal victim. The songs of promises expected from the people are:

“I thank thee;
You great mother
For painting Miss ‘A’ or Mr. ‘B’
With your indigo or tattoo mark’
While others will appeal thus;
“Thanks to you great mother
I say having brought this disease
Even to my children too
I also know that you can
As well heal it for me’

Her weapon is small-pocks which is seen as a symbol that her wrath has fallen on the victim or the community. The Gokana thunder deity, *Naākaara*, is regarded as God’s agent acting through thunderbolts and lightening. Those struck down by lightening are not mourned; because God is believed to have punished them for their sin. Among the Ogoni

indigenous people there exist other spirit that are inherently evil. Some of these are disincarnate of human spirits, others are non-human spirits. Some are believed to be groups of anonymous spirits who may attacks individuals, families or communities. Others have the status of a deity. Under this category are those of the forest. They are malevolent and can kill even when not provoked. Prominent among the non-human spirits of the forest is *Tugū* manifest itself as a ball of fire, especially on a very dark moonless night. It abhors light and, when it attacks, it kills and leaves pieces of clay pot beside its victim. Mere sight of it is dreaded.

The Ogoni man also believes in another class of human-spirit called *akoori nee* (Ghost-Spirits), that is Spirits of disgruntled dead men, the “bad-dead” whose dead bodies were not buried or accorded with due and proper funeral rites. The Ogoni belief that such spirits have not reached the land of the spirits; they have not got the “passport” to the spirit land, that is to say, the essential requirements for the entrance. Consequently, they become wandering spirits living an aimless haunting existence and emphatically cannot reincarnate. Not all ghost-spirit are necessarily bad, only those who choose to be mischief-makers are bad and are called demons.

Reincarnation as a Causal Factor

In the Ogoni traditional philosophy, it is believed that death is not an annihilation of life but rather an inevitable sojourn considered to be transitory. It is seen as a gateway “between the world of human beings and the world of spirits, between the visible and the invisible (Mbiti, 1969 as quoted by Tasie, 2009). It brings about the regeneration of life; because death and reproduction are inextricably related. It is in the new burns that dead ancestors reincarnate into the human world to keep themselves in personal immortality and to perpetuate their lineage.

Hence, ‘Reincarnation’ becomes one of the cardinal hallmarks of the indigenous religious belief system of the Ogoni people. reincarnation is inherent in tribal beliefs and it is the successive transfer of one soul personality from one body to the other, that is to say that when a man has closed his earthly mission and the body has become lifeless, the soul essence is capable of migrating to a new body to

continue its life existence on the earth plane. Thus at death a person passes into another new human body. This is a clear indication why, among the Ogoni people, when a new born baby is born into a family, there is always that anxiety or quest to know which ancestor has reincarnated. Thus, the service of a reputable seer or diviner is required to know the very departed member of the family that has returned to the physical world in the new born baby. This could be ascertained through bodily signs and behaviour of the child as he grows up. If there are conspicuous identical marks and behaviour the reincarnate would be quickly discovered. It is also a strong belief that no another *Piogi*(soul) or *bari* (personal god) goes to another family to reincarnate, as the movement is always between the family and relatives. Thus, attaining ancestorhood and possibly reincarnating back to the family becomes the greatest hope of the Ogoni after death. It was in this view that Mbiti (1970) states that

To live here and now is the most important concern of African religious activities and beliefs. There is little concern with the distinctly spiritual welfare of man apart from his physical life. No live is drawn between the spiritual and the physical. Even life is the hereafter is concerned in the materialistic and physical terms. There is neither paradise to be hoped for nor hell to be feared in the hereafter. The soul of man does not long for redemption or for closer contact with God in the next world. (p.5)

No doubt, once death has occurred and the necessary buried rites observed, the dead is incorporated into the spirit land of the ancestors. While at birth, all rites and ceremonies are aimed at receiving the ancestral spirit that has “come back” to where “he” rightly belongs, particularly the ancestral spirit of close relatives. The Ogoni people also believed that any ancestor who considers his work on this earth unfinished may decides to come and finished it.

There is also a strong belief about another curious category of spirits. It is not certain whether these began as spirits of deceased persons or not. Though there could be points of disagreement within the African tribes as to the nature, causes and mission of these unique

children (Wotogbe-Weneka 2015). However, they are spirits known to the Yoruba as *Ābikū*, the Igbo as *Ogbanje* and to the Ogoni as *Akoor-poror*: That is, spirits ‘born-to-die’. These children are generally believed to have made pacts from the spirits world, to visit the earth briefly. And as such they initially please their earthy parents by their rapid growth, beauty, intelligence or cleverness, only to die prematurely when they would be of use to their parents, without any sign of ill-health (Wotogbe-Weneka, p. 221).

The belief here is that they are wander spirits who specialize in the sadistic mischief of finding the way into the wombs to be born in order to die. The mission of the *Akoor-poror* is to torment parents with the pangs of constant births and deaths of their children and to leave them childlessness and frustrated at the end of their child bearing age. Hence, the Ogoni people referred to the *Akoor-poror* as one of the most malicious-evil spirit and agents of misfortune.

Among the Ogoni indigenous people, a man’s status in life, determines his status as an ancestor in the spirit-world and the types of cult he is given. The king remains a king, the village headman and lineage heads remain so. Those who have taken titles still belong and are accorded the respect due to their rank in the ancestral cult. However, even though it is generally believed that all souls reincarnate but not all reincarnate into human forms. For a soul to reincarnate into human form, the prerequisite of having lived its previous life in a good and acceptable manner must have been satisfied. Wotogbe-Weneka further writes:

The social and moral life of a man, to a large extent, affects the reincarnation of the man after death. As a result, many people being conscious of this condition strive very hard to live a morally and socially acceptable life so as to earn them a human reincarnation. (p. 222)

A clear proof of this is seen when a good person dies through the natural death. Here, relatives begin to wish that he reincarnated into their midst, definitely not in the form of a beast nor a tree but that of a human being. Wotogbe-Weneka further noted that the bad ones who

lived extremely bad lives in their lifetimes would reincarnate into non-human forms. However, not all categories of bad lives attract the punishment of reincarnating in non-human forms, because those whose life patterns were fairly satisfactory could reincarnate in human form but certainly into undesirable level of human being. Hence, the Ogoni people believe that the evil and human suffering in different forms of deformities, bareness, blindness, impotence and other permanent disabilities as well as death are as a result of the sin committed, customs violated as well the negligence of the victim in his other world before reincarnating. Thus the saying; ***“You are what you are based on what you did in the later”*** that is to say that the evil and suffering experienced today have their roots in the past already lived life without the knowledge of the victim. In other words a reincarnate of one who did not live up to expectations in his previous life time, would always be reminded of such short coming that beset him in the then life-time.

Mystical Causations through Human Agents

In Ogoni traditional Religion the world has come to mean to have direct contact, union or marriage with God, supersensible world and supernatural being. While power, succinctly put, means the control of people and things, mystical powers could therefore be defined as the ability to harness, tap, manipulate and control a desired end or aim (Asuview, 2013). Hence, spirits are not the only causes of evil and human suffering. Among the commonest causes of human suffering in Ogoni religious belief are witchcraft, sorcery, neglect of filial duties to the ancestors, breaking of any of the taboos and sanction of the divinities, trampling on the moral values of the Ogoni society and thereby attempting to cause disharmony and disintegration among the people.

In other words, besides God, the deities, ancestor’s evil spirits, human suffering may be interpreted as the work of witches or sorcerers. As with the spirit agencies of misfortune, some human agencies of evil are basically good and just and others are regarded as fundamentally evil. Thus to Mbiti “Witches and sorcerers are the great enemies of society, performing anti-social deeds which poison its welfare (Mbiti, 1970). This view of Mbiti derives from the fact that witches and

sorcerers are known to bewitch people through the practice of witchcraft, these witches work at all spiritual levels influencing the minds of their human targets. The concept of witchcraft among the Ogoni is the belief that the spirits of living human beings can go out to harm others. These witches either operate in grouse or singly, sometimes they act either invisibly in form of animals chosen at will.

Abeng (Witches and witchcraft) are as old as man and are in many forms in different parts and kingdoms of Ogoni. In particular life witches work at a very low level and make use of malicious beings to harm others. They attacks and inflict any type of pains including death. The Ogoni people also believe that witches have a group of their own with their regular meeting and ceremonies in forests and ancient trees or in open place- *kē-du* (market places), *nyō taa atē dee* (road junction) and *era soṛ* (in the middle of the night). They are thought to shade off their bodies while asleep while their souls or spirits fly off to a meeting place assuming the forms of chosen kinds of birds. Nunyiē (personal communication August 5, 2017) noted that if the particular bird is killed, it is also the belief of the Ogoni that the real witch will die at the same time.

According to Idowu (1975), which is also the view of the Ogoni people, “There main purpose is to work havoc on other human beings; and the operation is the operation of spirits upon spirits... Spirits meet spirits operate upon spirits while the actual human bodies lie “asleep’ in their homes.” Deekor oral interview July 17, 2017) added that;

Witches attack the physical body or their victims at the weakest point and as all the bodies are intermingled and inter-related, the attack is transmitted to the material vehicle, with disastrous consequences for the individual. Post-modern results and examination where the attack suicide, usually show only damaged heart, stomach and other organs. (Deekor, Oral Interview)

One thing that is very fascinating, which still agitates the minds of Ogoni scholars and researchers is the fact that some of the people who practice witchcraft are good people who do not even know that they are

witches. One popular explanation to this phenomenon is that some mothers who are witches turn their children into witches without their consent for protective reasons. Some explains it the other way round, that a witch may turn a good person into a witch simply by putting *abeng* spirit in either a food or a small edible fruit which once eaten is capable of turning the person into a witch unknowingly, (Nanu, oral interview August 19 2017).

Sequel to these, the Ogoni believe that the sorcerer may sometimes render his victim prone to accident by causing him to fall from a palm tree, involving him in an automobile accident, or, if he is a hunter, making him assumed human form. A sorcerer through his evil power may make a man detest life so much so that he can even commit suicide. The system of *bu nū eā sī* (the Ogoni local spiritual television or search light), has a spiritual power network. When conjured is capable of centralizing all physical matters, elements and abstract items to view. They can be seen and interpreted by the native priest of the occult shrine. This native television is made up of water, plain stone, air, mirror and any reflecting objects. It is here that the world of metaphysics is being transformed into the fact that *bu nū eā sī* helps to reveal secretes, sorcerers also used it to attack perceived enemy. They called on the name of whoever they want to attacks; they will invoke his spirit before the magical mirror and then with a sharp object pierces the vital organs and the victim will instantly feel pains in those spots, and may die if spiritual intervention is not sought. If he pierces the heart the victim dies instantly.

Violation of Customs and Traditions of the Land as a Causal Factor

The Ogoni moral code is embodied in their *log le doonu-kenēkē* (Literally traditional rites and customs), which is the based of most of the legal, social, moral and ritual norms of the people. in the various kingdoms of Ogoni, there are sanctions recognized as the approved standard of social and religious conduct on the part of individuals in the society and the community as a whole. A breach of, or failure to adhere to the sanction is sin and wrongdoing can never be neutral. It always has consequences to the perpetrator and very often to the perpetrators

community. It includes any immoral behaviour, ritual mistakes, any offences against God or man (Lawrence- Hart 2013), breach of covenant, breaking of taboos and doing anything regarded as abominable and pollution as well as the disregard to God, the divinities and the ancestral spirit all attracts severe consequences.

The Ogoni distinguishes three types of moral faults, the least among the people is the breach of rules of etiquette and social convention, and other minor faults which are generally condemned but carry no specific sanction. These include such disapproved behaviour as not greeting the elders, laziness, unhygienic habits, gossiping and so on.

The next group of moral faults is the deliberate transgression of serious moral norms of the society, as well as the flout of the laws of the land. This group carries some social or mystical sanctions or both. Such deliberate act includes insulting one's parents or elders may merit the offender a curse believed to bring some misfortune and suffering on him. Theft is a sin, and a situation whereby the offender is not known the victim or the farmer may pronounce curse on anyone who steals from his farmland which is believed to bring sickness, and eventually death on the culprit. Adultery is condemned among the Ogoni people. A husband whose wife is unfaithful to him can lay a curse as well as using mystical means to cause pains; ill-health and suffering on both the wife and the man who has decided to take his happiness among. This often results to death.

The next group is the violation of taboos whose infringement threatens the natural order and the very existence of the society; it is thus referred to as *pia-nu* (abomination). They are mainly ritual or religious offences believed to disrupt relationship with the supernatural forces. Each deity, the spirits and the ancestors have their own taboos the *bari-saā* (the earth deity). These more than others are believed to threaten the stability of society itself as well as that of nature, as the Ogoni people believe that apart from the sky, every other things rest on the earth. Hence, acts like *fenwibu-gāh* (killing a kins man) and *nyoṛ ne wuga makē* (incest) were regarded as abominations and its consequences does not only affect the perpetrators, but the entire

community. This can results to disastrous harvest, famine, thunder, flood disaster fire outbreak and rivers turning blood etc.

Failures to Performs one’s Ancestral Responsibilities as a Causal Factor

Throughout the Ogoni indigenous nation, the *namāte* (Ancestors) are believed to be highest or the topmost in the grading of human spirits. Though dead, they are still part and parcel of their own physically living families and are often invited to family meals. Hence they are referred to as “the living dead.” Arguably, the term ‘living dead’ designates or includes ‘all the departed,’ and thus in appropriate. *Namāte* (Ancestors) constitute a special place in the Ogoni world-view and traditional cults, and must not be confused with other spirits of the departed who are not ancestors. It was in this view that Mbiti (1967) asserts that:

They imply only those spirits whose spirits who were once the ancestors of the living. This is limiting the concept unnecessarily, since there are spirits and living-dead of children, brothers, sisters and barren wives, and other members of the family who are in no way the ancestors. (p. 85)

In Ogoni, the *Namā-te* (ancestor) are believed to wield considerable powers. Being that the ancestors are no longer humans, some elements of powers are attributed to them. Simply put, death has given them more potentialities and has greatly increased their respect. They command a considerable power both for good and evil; they can influence rainfall, and bring good harvest (Obodoegbulam, 2013), as well as famine and disastrous harvest. They can promote prosperity of crops or cause adversity. They equally give protection or a general wellbeing, or calamity of an unpredicted magnitude. Considering the fact that the ancestor are no longer humans, people are more careful dealing with them on matters which affect their interest. Before deciding on which way to go, people make scrupulous effort to ascertain the opinion of the ancestors; thus:

At anytime the forbidden boundaries are infringed upon, oracles are consulted to help in restoring order and sanity. In the light of the above, it is better and safer to keep a good and cordial relationship with the ancestors. (Obodoegbulam, p.63)

According to the Ogoni religion, the ancestors were respected members of their family's lineage, and clan as well as community founders. On this premise, it is not usually all who have departed that become ancestors, only those who led good life, had surviving male children, died good death, and had full funeral rites join the class of ancestors.

In Ogoni, living relatives remember their ancestors regularly in rituals. Offerings of food and drink are made to them very often. This may be daily or seasonally as the case may be. The daily offering is usually made by the lineage head, who makes effort to feed his ancestors on a very regular bases. Every morning, he collects a small quantity of drink and offers it in libation to the ancestors praying for their surveillance throughout the day. At any time food is served, he also collects a little quantity, with invocation and incantation; he throws it out as a way of sharing the meal with the departed. In other words, It is also believed that success and prosperity in this life depend on favour from the ancestor, that is why an Ogoni eats or drinks, he first throws a morsel of food outside and may pour a little quantity of drink to feed his ancestor. In this case, feeding the ancestors is a way of demonstrating that the individual has the capacity to feed his family. It also shows concern for the unity of the living and the departed. Hence, neglecting of filial duties to the ancestors or failure to perform one's ancestral or religious act at the right time could result to sickness, ill-luck untimely death, and disastrous harvest.

Sequel to this, the philosophy behind the Ogoni people's concern about life and death is that all the visible world around them and the invisible world beyond, the divine and the human, the past and the present, the living and the dead-all form a harmonious entity. Hence, to Ilogu (1998),

Death is one of the dissonances of life disturbing this entity all that is necessary is to ensure that the balance of life's harmony is not upset when one member of the group is transformed through death to another level of existence, namely the souls of the dead who constitute the unseen part of the community. (p. 109)

In Ogoni, burial rites and ceremonies therefore are the means by which this transition is effected to ensure that the dead receive secure place in the spirit world which will help the established order of life to go on uninterrupted. Hence it is generally believed among the Ogoni that the souls of dead members of the community cannot rest or find secure place among the dead unless proper burial rites and ceremonies have been performed. It is the death of young people and children that do not call for religious ceremonies of any magnitude. Such deaths are regarded as great calamities and the gods do not merit such consideration on such occasions. It is therefore the death of family old men and women that we now precede to analyses.

Among the Ogoni people, the death of a title man involves many religious observances. For instance, in Luawii (the traditional headquarter of Babbe Kingdom), when a title man died, a cock is killed: its blood is mixed with some leaves; a specially invited man who is also a medicine man washes the hands of the dead man to cleanse him of evils committed with the hands while alive. A white plumed cock is then offered to the ancestral spirit to announce his death. All shrines installed by him are encircled with the *amuē-ijo* (tendrils of palm leaves) whilst another white plumed cock is tied alive head downwards at the point where the dead man is laid in state. All this is done to ensure a peaceful passage of his soul to the land of the dead.

Ledornu (oral interview November 19, 2017) added that before his corpse is buried, a goat and/or a cow, according to his children's or his relation's financial means, is slaughtered and blood poured on the coffee and into the earth where he is to be buried. Prayers and incantations are said to the spirits of dead ancestors to receive the dead man's soul and to punish any human being who, in one form or another, might have caused the death of this titled man.

The second burial is the time that the social importance of a titled man is fully given recognition. This second burial takes place at different times. In some cases it could take place two or three months after the death. In other case it could be up to a year after death. It is believed among the Ogoni people that without performing both the mortuary rituals and the second burial ceremonies in company with its rituals as well, the spirit of the death parents continue to wander. The ghost spirits are malevolent and can kill even when not provoked. Because they have not been accorded due and correct mortuary rites, they have no resting place, as they have been denied admission into the abode of the blessed departed ones. They are therefore doomed to wander incessantly, living an aimless, haunting existence.

It is also observed that those who have not performed such rites for their dead parents do not attend such a burial ceremony where mortuary rites are being performed until they have performed such rites for their dead parents (or relatives). It is believed that such attendance could aroused the anger of the ghost-spirit who is still hovering around and who if he happens to see his immediate relations or children, will ask why?, if they appreciate the importance of mortuary rites or second burial ceremony and are willing to participate, they have not perform such rites for him. In other words, a man would never be accorded mortuary rites if he had not performed them for his parents. If his children are eager to accord him such rites, they must first perform for their ground parents. Where for want of substance the children and relations are unable to perform these financial rites in a year or two, they can take their time and wait even up to seven years. However, neglecting this responsibility could result to ill- luck, sickness like a *ua-bara loo* (stroke), accident, death or disastrous harvest disastrous harvest etc.

Whenever it is performed it is then that the spirit of their dead father/ mother will be able to settle down with the ancestral spirit among the dead. When this is over, all concerned fell relieved and satisfied that proper and fitting burial ceremonies have been accorded to the good old man whose soul they now believe will rest in peace and bring to the them all good fortunes and prosperity.

Solutions to Evil and Human Suffering in Ogoni Religious Practices

Within the Ogoni traditional Philosophy, the study identified the following solutions to the problem of evil and human suffering;

Purification Rites

The Ogoni believe that if a man is aware or made aware by a diviner that s/he has committed an offence which resulted in the disruption of his/her peace, he will have to undergo ritual cleansing. This may include ritual shaving of the hair followed by ritual bathing in a flowing stream. The washing off stains is undertaken by the person suffering one form of evil or the other, under the guidance of a priest on an appointed date, time and place. This purification is followed by such prayers;

Ka-Waa Bari (The Supreme Being) bari-saā, (the earth goodness) Gbene-beka (The Great Mother Deity), bari-aayor (the god that vindicate) pyanamāte (ancestor) we pray and invite you all, for our hands are short to do this cleansing; if you ask a child to wash his self of dirt, he washes only his stomach, we therefore appeal that you join us as we do the washing to save and deliver this soul from all infirmities, Aledoo-wo (Amen).

If it is the entire community that is suffering setback or misfortune, disastrous harvest or premature death etc; the community resort to ritual cleansing. In Luawii (the traditional headquarter of Babbe Kingdom for instance, such a ritual cleansing is made as an annual events.

Confession

Another means of solving or averting one's suffering is through confession and reparation. This implies acknowledging and declaring one's sin to a priest or to someone wronged and, where the need arises, makes amends, (Lawrence-Hart, 2013). For one to refuse to confess and to make necessary restitution is to retain one's sin, and thus continues to suffer the consequences. For instance, among the Ogoni people, a woman who commits adultery, sins against both her husband and the

ancestral spirits of the husband's home. It is therefore believe that a woman, who commits such an offence, either hanged-up with the man during the act, or suffer sickness; the worst of it is that she will not be able to bring forth her child at the time of delivery unless she confesses her immoral deed. This is because the gods and ancestors who are guardians of social morality do not condone such an immoral act. Such confession is not complete without the prayers from *Menē-be* (family head) or *Menē-gāh* or *bua* (lineage head) etc.

Sacrifice

Finally, in Ogoni traditional religion and philosophy, when evil befalls a man, or a community it is quickly interpreted as punishment for the people's misdoings; or as a result of one's preordained destiny thus suffering for the sin she/he committed in the other world. Hence, sacrifice is carried out because it is believed to be a form of communication with the deity for cleansing purposes. Sacrifice offering are given, this include object of value and symbolic significance that are given to the gods to earn their favour and protection, this offering is to make the giver worthy and acceptable to the gods.

Most often West African regarded blood sacrifice as the most powerful way to appease the gods. Hence, it was not unusual of the for the Ogoni pre-modern societies to engage in both animal and human sacrifice. Participant in blood rituals experiences a sense of awe, danger, or exaltation because they are daring to approach the gods who creates, sustain and destroy life. It was in this view that Lawrence-Hart writes;

The building of tension prior to the blood sacrifice gives way to a festive sense of triumph and relief. Moral is strengthened by the ritual killing because the group has itself performed the godlike act of destruction and is now capable of renewing its own existence. The underlying philosophical assumption is that life must pass through death. (p. 2290)

In Ogoni, sacrifice is undertaken to free oneself from molestation and suffering and to win protection and preservation from all spiritual

influences. Using the soft-deterministic lens, it is also believed among the people that through offering the right sacrifice and consultations, destiny becomes positively alterable. Again, prayers and sacrifices are also offered to *bari* (personal god) to better the lot or fate of an ill-fated individual. It is important to note that the sacrificial animal or human must be of very high value else the gods would be offended by a sickly or inferior offering thereby attracting their wrath in course of trying to appease them. This is because misfortune and disaster demand concrete atonement in order to remove evil and restore right order between man and the natural order. Failure of crops, calamities, plagues and disease etc., could also be attributed to ritual defilement that is removable by life-giving substance such as blood and water. Sacrifice then, is the normal means of transferring life and power to mortal deities to keep them vigorous and beneficent (Awolalu, 1968).

Conclusion

From our discussion, efforts have been made to tease out a philosophy from the culture, and socio-religious life of a people – Ogoni; whom the study described as been more practically than theoretically oriented. Unlike the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religious traditions that traced the causes/sources of evil and human suffering to a ‘mono-demonic’ factor, the Ogoni trace the causes of human suffering to a ‘multi-causal factor’—no single entity could be held responsible for the occurrence of evil and human suffering. In other words, in Ogoni thought, evil and human suffering does not emanate from one source, while there are super-natural causations, the causes of human suffering could also be trace to predestination and human destiny, malicious spirit and mystical causation as well as human responsibilities and free-will etc. However, the attributes of *Kawaa-Bari* (The Supreme Being), and other divinities are neither problematic nor contradictory with the reality of evil and human suffering in the world. Thus it would be easy to understand that the theistic problem of evil and human suffering does not exist in Ogoni thought. Apart from the fact that the traditional Ogoni conception of evil and human suffering does not give room for philosophical problem of evil, it also has the advantage of helping to maintain orderliness and moral uprightness in the universe. In the pre-modern Ogoni cosmos, crimes were greatly reduced as everyone was

aware that there is an instant punishment in form of evil and suffering awaiting those who corrupt the society. This is one of the contributions to knowledge, which this paper achieves in expanding our knowledge on the Ogoni indigenous religious philosophy on the sources and causes of evil/human suffering.

References

- Alawa, P. (2016). Evil is more attractive in the society than goodness: A philosophical analysis. *Journal of Religion and Cultural Studies*, 15 (1), 45-54.
- Asuvie, J. D. (2013). Attribute of God. In G. Tasia and R. Olumati (eds.), *West African Religious Heritage*. Ghana: Clear Vision.
- Augustine, A. (1960). *Confession* (trans) John Ryam, New York: Image Books.
- Boer, H. R. (2003). *A short history of the early Church*, Michigan B. Eardmana Publishing Company.
- Deezia, B.S. (2014). Yira-Yii (Traditional Oath-Taking) as instrument of social Stability: The Khana-Ogoni Experience. Unpublished B.A. Ed Long Essay, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Ignition Ajuru University of Education, Port-Harcourt.
- Deezia, B. S. (2018). The Ogoni anti-corruption structure and its relevance to the Nigeria's dilemma: A philosophical appraisal. *London Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 18(2), 11-22.
- Dopamu, P. A. (2000). *Esu the invisible foe of man: a comparative study of Christianity, Islam and Yoruba religion*. Ijebu-Ode Nigeria: Shebiotimo Publications.

- Idowu, B. (1975). *Africa traditional religion: A definition*, New York: Fountain Publications.
- Ilogu, E. (1998). Igbo burial customs. In E. A. A. Adegbola (ed.), *Traditional Religion in West Africa*. Ibadan: Daystar Press.
- Jung, C. (1977). *Dreams of wholeness: a course introduction lectures on religion, psychology and personal growth*. Hong Kong: Philosophers Press.
- Lawrence-Hart, G. (2013). Sin and its removal in West Africa Traditional Religion. In G. Tasié and R. Olumati (eds). *West Africa Religious Heritage*. Ghana: Clear Vision Publication.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1970). *Concepts of God in Africa*. London: Coinelet Press Ltd.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1967). *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann.
- Metuh, E. I. (1987). *Comparative study of African Traditional Religions*. Ibadan: Claverianum Press.
- McCain, D. (2008). *Notes on New Testament introduction*. Nigeria: Africa Christian textbooks (ACTS).
- Obodoegbulam, A. O. (2013). Spirits and the ancestors in West Africa Traditional Religion. In G. Tasié and R. Olumati (eds.), *West Africa Religious Heritage*. Ghana: Clear Vision Publication.
- Omeregbe, J. (1993). *A philosophical look at religion*. Lagos: Joja Research and Educational Publishers.
- Planting, A. (1996). Epistemic probability and evil. In D. Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential argument from evil*. Indiana: Indiana University press.

Plato. (1982). *Republic*, London: Penguin.

Solanke, S.K. (1992). *The suffering of the innocent-A study in the belief of the Yoruba and the Hebrew*. Ibadan: Daystar Press

Tasie, G. (2009). Indigenous interpretations of courses of Death: Isiokpo-Ikwerreexample. In A. Adesina, and G. Tasie (eds.), *Readings in Religion and culture*. Port- Harcourt: Holly Lock Publications.

Warnock, G. J. (1978). *Oxford reading in philosophy: the philosophy of religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wotogbe-Weneka, W. O. (2015). Burial rites and reincarnation in the indigenous tradition of the Ikwerre people of Upper Niger Delta. In D. O. Ogungbile (ed.), *Africa Indigenous Religious Traditions in Local and Global Contexts: Perspective on Nigeria*. Lagos: Malthous Press.