IGWEBUIKE INTEGRATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

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Abstract
African scholars have responded variously to the question of who a person is in African ontology. Some scholars have spoken of the African personality in terms of Africa's geo-numerical identity, some others have spoken of Africa in terms of her civilization and colour-based identities. These perspectives notwithstanding, this piece focused on the relational-based identity of the African personality. While several papers have discussed the relational-based identity of the African personality, the present work distinguishes itself by its specific understanding of the African living person as a dialectically relational organism, with a coherent pluralism or a composite of complex elements within the same self. To achieve the aim and objectives of this paper, the Igwebuike theoretical framework will be utilized. This complementary framework will guide the development of this piece. The hermeneutic and analytical methods of inquiry will also be employed during the course of the development of the paper.
Keywords: Igwebuike, Anthropology, Personhood, Person, Identity, Self.

Introduction

The concept of the human person cultivated by various indigenous African peoples is a core value in each individual socio-cultural context, and more so, a determinant of thought and relationships within the socio-cultural milieu. This is based on the fact that the human person

is at the centre of the African universe. Mbiti (1970), therefore, asserts that "Man is at the very centre of existence and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man… it is as if God exists for the sake of man" (p. 92). Corroborating Mbiti, Metuh (1981), avers that "Everything else in African worldview seems to get its bearing and significance from the position, meaning, and end of man" (p. 109). The idea of God, divinities, ancestors, rituals, sacrifices, etc., are only useful to the extent that they serve the needs of the human person. Contrary to the mechanistic concept of the human person, the human person in the African worldview has a purpose and mission to fulfill; he comes into the world as a force among forces and interacts with forces. Good status, good health, and prosperity are signs of the well-being of a person's life-force, and man struggles to preserve it through an appropriate relationship with the spiritual forces around him. The goal of every human person is to achieve his destiny imprinted on his palm by his creator. He is not just an individual person, but one born into a community whose survival and purpose are linked with others. Thus, the human person is first a member of a clan, a kindred, or a community (Kanu 2015).

This notwithstanding, studies in the area of African personality have been done in the direction of reflections on symbols and patterned behaviours associated with one level of personality or the other, like the *Chi,* which in Igbo is the symbol of a person's guiding spirit; the Ofo, the symbol of a man's individuation, the Ikenga and Odu Enyi, symbols of a person's achievement. Although the exposure of African traditional values to Western culture and influence has brought about a lot of alterations in African perspectives, this piece studies the concept of personhood in traditional African ontology with the purpose of establishing the nexus between ancient African traditional society and the present conceptual package. In studying the traditional African concept of personhood, it would be engaged from the dimensions of African personhood as a coherent pluralism and its dialectically progressive character.

Igwebuike Theoretical Framework

The Igwebuike theological framework is employed in this paper for the understanding and interpretation of the sense of continuity and complementarity of the different dimensions of the human person in African ontology. Igwebuike is an explanatory theory or principle that interprets the puzzle of our complex relationships and underpins the epistemological manifestations of the human person's universe (Kanu, 2015).

Igwebuike is a combination of three Igbo words. It can be understood as a word or a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written as *Igwe bu ike,* with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space (Kanu, 2016). *Igwe* is a noun that means number or multitude, usually a large number of population. The number or population in perspective are entities with ontological identities and significance; however, part of an existential order in which every entity is in relation to the other. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is. Ike* is a noun, which means *strength* or *power*. *Igwe, bu*, and *Ike* put together, means 'number is strength' or 'number is power' (Kanu, 2020).

As a framework, it strives beyond all forms of particularities, peculiarities, paradoxes, and contradictions and espouses the path of complementation, therefore, showing how realities can relate to one another in a mutually harmonized non-absolutistic mode (Kanu, 2017). Thus, it explores methods and principles for the mediation, coalescing, and comprehension of the different units of reality: ideal and real, universal and particular, progressive and conservative,

necessary and contingent, transcendent and immanent, essential and inessential, and other units of reality within the same framework (Kanu, 2016). It treats all units, fragments, or components of reality, no matter how minute, as units and combinations, or missing links that are necessary for the conceptualization of reality as a whole. This idea of mutuality, complementarity, and relationality is the ontological logic that Igwebuike provides for a discourse on personhood in African ontology. Not minding the different dimensions of the human person, the Igwebuike framework sees the human being as a coherent pluralism.

African Personhood as a Coherent Pluralism
In African ontology, the human person is made up of three principal, distinctive but coherent elements: the spirit, the body, and the heart. These constituent elements that make up the person, according to Ejizu (2017), also provide the basis for the relatedness of the total personality. Thomas (1971) describes the African personality in this regard:

> Similar to modern chemistry, it is a veritable epistemological revolution that is in operation if one wishes to comprehend the coherent pluralism of the self, which seems to have characterized the complex structure and dynamism of the Black African Personality. (p. 387).

The focus of this study would be the Igbo-African worldview. And within this context, the three elements include the spirit (Muo), the Heart (Obi), and the Body (Ahu). These elements are in the self, defining the distinctive character of the self. Without all these elements, the self would lose the power of context, and thus the strength of visibility and relevance.

1. The Spirit (Muo)

Muo in Igbo is a name used to describe whatever is immaterial, like God, the deities, ancestors, however, it is also used to describe the immaterial part of the human person. This introduces the idea that the human person is not completely a material reality; he has a spiritual dimension which must be considered in every discussion about him. Okere (2015) avers that: "Muo is therefore conceived as the intangible, invisible element in man, the seat of will and emotions, the principle of life and point of connection, similarity and sharing with the world of the spirit" (p. 164).

This spirit in the human person is the principle of life, such that the absence of the spirit would mean the absence of life. This explains why, for many Africans, the death of a person is seen as the departure of the spirit of the person. Okere posits that the Muo carries out the following activities in the human person:

1. *Uche,* which means thinking, considering, reflecting, etc.
2. *Iru eruru,* which refers to a deep reflection, usually over something sad or tragic.
3. *Ncheta,* which means to fetch out from the past through thinking, that is, to remember, to recall, to think out.
4. *Nghota,* which means to understand, to comprehend, to grasp or to get the full implications of something.
5. *Izu,* deliberation, consensus, or the information that is the result of consensus and deliberation.
6. *Ako,* means prudence, cleverness, wise.
7. *Ngenge,* imagining, surmising.
8. *Atutu* means to plan, to project, and to order the execution of some plan.

This notwithstanding, the spirit of a person, which derives directly from the Supreme Being and the ancestral world, also links him or her ontologically to God and the ancestral spirits. It is the point of connection between the person and the spiritual world.

2. The Heart (Obi)

When the missionaries came, for want of word and due to ignorance of the local language and culture of the Igbo, they foisted the foreign concept of the soul on the native word: Mkpuru Obi (the seed of the heart), to mean the spiritual element that is in man that is destined for eternal life. The obi is the psychological centre of emotions, sensation, and sympathy. It is the seat and centre of virtue and vice, of conscience and morality as well. The quality of a person's heart determines the quality of the person's way of life. The life that a man lives mirrors the kind of heart that the person has. When an Igbo wants to describe a person in relation to his attitude, the heart is used to present a picture of him (Okere 2015). For instance:

a. Obi kara ka: a brave heart
b. Obi mgbawa: heart brake
c. Onye obi miri: weak or sentimental person
d. Obi kporo nku: a wicked person
e. Oni nwayo: a gentle or kind person
f. Obi ike: a strong person
g. Obi ojo: a bad person
h. Obi oma: a kind and happy person
i. Obi ebere: a merciful person

3. The Body (Ahu)

The body in Igbo language is *ahu*. Etymologically, it can be traced to the Igbo word- *hu,* which means 'to see'. Concerning *ahu,* it means that the body is that part of the self which can be seen, it is visible, seeable, and tangible. Thus, Ejizu (2017) refers to the body as the centre of the manifestation of a living person. When a child is born, his *ahu* helps people around him in identifying him. When a person has polio, the sight of him and the nature of his *ahu* help a person to identify him. The *ahu* also expresses the state of the human person. This is why the Igbo would ask the other: *Ahu gi kwanu,* meaning, how is your body? The body is thought of as the indicator of the health of the person. This explains why when the Igbo says *Ahu ojoo* or *ahu njo,* meaning bad body, is used to mean ill health.

When an ancestor reincarnates, sometimes the *ahu* helps the family into which the child has been born to identify the ancestor who has returned. For instance, in cases of an ancestor who lost his five fingers while he lived, and when a child is born after his death and the child is born without five fingers, even before divination, it is believed that it is the ancestor who has returned. And in most cases, the divination confirms it. In a situation of this kind, the child could be named *Ahunna,* that is, the father's body, if it is the father who has reincarnated in him. Thus, the *ahu* helps in identifying a person as an individual who is different from others. While the spirit relates a person to the spiritual world, God, and ancestral spirits, the body relates a person to the parents, the lineage, and the physical-social order, that is, animate, inanimate, and social environment.

It must be noted that, although the *ahu* occupies a very important place in identifying a person, the *ahu* is not the self, but an outward expression of the self. It is through the *ahu* that the self is known and expressed. In relation to the individuality of each person, every *ahu* is unique.

No two ahu are the same. Each person has his or her own *ahu,* which differentiates him or her from the others (Okere 2015).

The Dialectically Progressive Character of African Personhood

The human person is also conceived by the Igbo-African as a lifelong project. Ejizu (2017) refers to this as a progressive and role-oriented affair within one's socio-cultural milieu. The human project is therefore not achieved at once when a person is born, but progressively as the person moves from one stage. The progressiveness of the human personality lies in the fact that the human person, through roles and initiations, recreates their personality from one stage to another. This is evident in the different rites of passage that the African goes through, and their elaborate nature indicates the importance that the African places on them.

Although the pregnancy rites is meant to facilitate the birth of the child and to protect the mother and child from evil powers and malignant persons through offering a sacrifice, Metuh (1985) maintains that it is a rite of separation of the child from the world of the ancestors and incorporation into the world of human beings. It begins as soon as the woman misses her period. Among the Igbo, oracles are consulted as soon as a woman conceives and a sacrifice is offered to *Ala.* The movement from the world of the ancestors to the world of the human beings brings about a shift in the personality of the human person that is involved (Kanu, 2016).

In most African cultures, there are two stages of it: purification rites and a naming ceremony. The purification rites, according to Metuh (1985), begin after the woman gives birth; she and the child are secluded for purification. It is only after purification that she can begin to move around in the community. It is usually a ceremony of days; the number of days depends on the culture. To establish the community ownership of the child, the umbilical cord connecting the mother and the child is cut as a sign of the incorporation of the child into the community. After the purification rite, the naming ceremony begins, which Quarcoopome (1987) opines humanizes and socializes the child, making him a member of the human family. During the birth rites, the child's personality is socialized.

Puberty rites in both boys and girls are an announcement that they have reached adulthood. It introduces the child from the world of dependence to that of independence, and the rights, privileges, and duties of adulthood. It is a sign that they are ready for marriage and have reached the biological maturity necessary for reproduction. The rites for boys and girls differ according to their particular roles in society as husbands and wives. At the end of the rites, the women are beautified and brought to the village square where they would display their beauty and dance as well to the admiration of men. Men who are in search of wives usually find this period very interesting. The boys are also initiated into secret societies and masquerade cults. After this, the boys come to the open and eat with the elders, a sign that they have arrived. Their seclusion and public appearance are symbolic: it symbolizes the death of the child and the birth of the adult, the death of dependency and the birth of independence, it symbolizes a new personality (Kanu, 2016).

In most African traditional societies, marriage is a business between families and not between individuals. Real discussions about marriage between families begin when both families consent. At the point where the man and the woman unite as husband and wife, their personalities change and expand the accommodate the other (Kanu, 2016).

The rites for the dead can be divided into two: burial rites and funeral rites. The nature of a burial is determined by who has died, a child or an adult, and if an adult, an elder or a chief, or a king. During the rites, the dead is ritually washed. The purpose of this rite is to strengthen the diseased as he or she embarks on the journey to the spirit world. Among the Igbo, after washing, a fowl is strangled and the head cut off. The blood is rubbed on the body of the diseased; the blood is sacrificed to the deities to accompany the dead to the spirit world. When the ritual washing is over, the body is taken to the grave for burial. The funeral rites are a continuation of the rites for the dead. It is a rite of incorporation of the diseased into the world of the ancestors- after the rites, the diseased is welcomed into the college of ancestors. This rite helps the deceased to secure his or her rightful place in the world of the living-dead (Kanu, 2016).

Figure 1: Rites of Passage and the Progressive Evolution of the Living Person
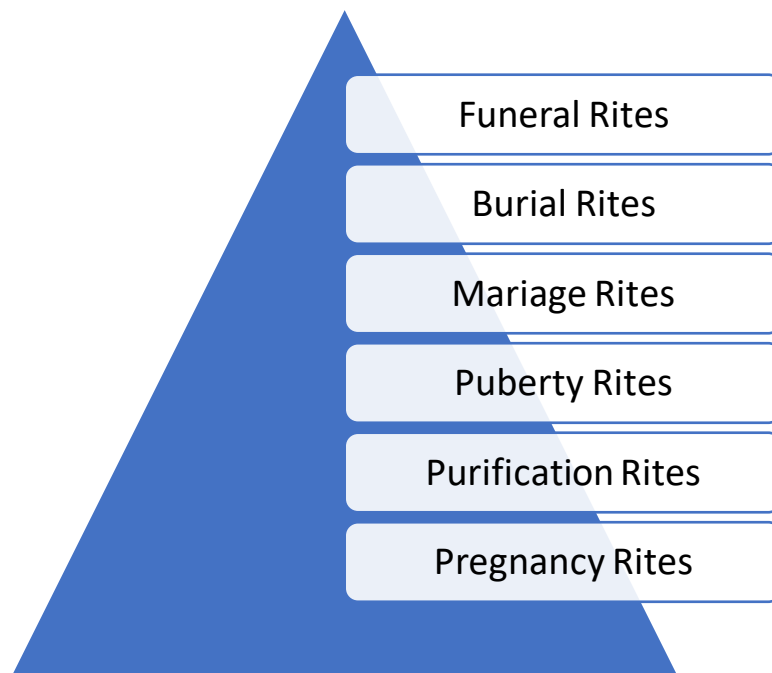
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As a human person moves from one rite to another, he assumes a different level of personality. Writing about the Akamba people's initiation rites as it concerns the progressive development of personhood, Mbiti (1970) avers:

Without being initiated, a person is not a full member of the Akamba people. Furthermore, no matter how old or big he is, so long as he is not initiated, he is despised and considered to be still a boy or girl. (p. 122).

Every stage signifies a progressive evolution of the human person. According to Ray (1999):
People are metaphysically and sociologically remade into new beings with new special roles. Newborn infants are made into human persons, children are made adults, men and women are made into husband and wife… This remaking of man… involves the symbolic destruction of the old and the creation of the new. (p. 91).

These levels of personality are progressively defined by one's standing in the socio-cultural ladder. And to progress from one stage to another requires different kinds of criteria. Within the period that a person lives, one can be said to have achieved full manhood. For men, this might be determined by a person's achievement in the battle field as it is common among war-like communities like among the Cross-River Igbo or how much wealth a person has acquired which enables him to take and foot the bill for the different categories of titles available, like the prestigious Ozo and Ezeji titles, or how successfully, a person has been able to raise a good family. Among the women, fertility is central to full womanhood. For instance, among the Mbaise, Mbano, Owerri, and Ngwa areas, the successful delivery of the tenth child earns a woman the prestigious title: Eghu-Ukwu (Goat for the Wait). These changes are basically external, changed by new learning, new encounters, etc., while the concept, unlimited by time and space remain unchanged.

Conclusion
The exposure of traditional cultural values to the multiple forces of colonialism, Christianity, western education, urbanization, and scientific technology is breaking down the walls that distinguished micro societies and building a macro society. These developments have also led to a tidal wave of change, engendering a significant revolution in the traditional perception of the living person. While this might be true of the accidents of expressing manhood or womanhood as in the case of symbolic objects, institutions, and ritual forms, it might not be true of the substance of personhood. This is to say that while the accidents around manhood or womanhood change with time and experiences, the substance of the human person remains unchanged even amid the changes of life.

In African traditional societies, especially in areas where manhood was measured by how many wars a person had successfully fought, this might not be possible anymore because of a minimal reduction in inter-tribal wars and the decline in the value placed on war, especially with the development of African societies into states. In the case of a woman, womanhood might have been measured on the basis of how many children a woman has given birth to. Even though this might have been used as a symbol of womanhood, it might not hold again for the modern woman and society. The fact that these changes in the parameters for the measurement of manhood or womanhood have occurred does not mean that there will be a corresponding change in the value of manhood or womanhood.

The African concept of a person as a coherent pluralism still remains unchanged by the current changes, also the African concept of the human person as a dialectically progressive reality has not been altered by the current changes. What is perceived as change is nothing but the adaptation of an old reality to new mediums of expression. It is referred to as an Igwebuike

integrated anthropology because of the unity of being that sustains personhood in the midst of the variety of changes in life. The idea of mutuality, complementarity, and relationality is the ontological logic that Igwebuike provides for a discourse on personhood in African ontology as a coherent pluralism.

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