On the Unity of Conceptual Strands of the Self: Perspectives in Igbo Ontology

By

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Abstract

The ontology of the self is one area that Igbo philosophers have differed quite considerably in their views. Hence there are varying perspectives on what constitutes the self in Igbo ontology. On the one hand, there are philosophers who argue that there is no ontology of the self. These advocate for the sociality of the self, with strong ties to the communal and moral conceptions. By this they mean that the reality of the self must be based on extrinsic considerations; i.e. social cum moral relationships in society. Central to this brand of conception is that the self emerges through the process of social and ritual incorporation. On the other hand, there are philosophers who represent the view that the self is first and foremost ontological, but then, for them, the self is imbued with relational capacity. Interestingly, some who uphold the ontological cum relational view of the self-employ a hermeneutical method to address a rather ontological question. While arguing for the freedom of the self, they tend to hinge it on transcendence, i.e. divinity. Thus God or god is considered as an essential constituent of the self, without which the self remains in a limbo of fiction. The problem, however, is that there seems not to be any one particular agreeable conceptual strand among these philosophers. In this

article attempt is made to unify all these varying strands of conceptions into one broad conception.

Keywords: Self, Igbo ontology, Unity, Conceptual Strands

Introduction

By and large, ontology inquiries into the very nature of being incorporates in its study anything that has to do with becoming, existence and reality. Basic categories of being and how they relate to one another also fall under the purview of ontology. The self's ontology sparks an interesting inquiry among Igbo philosophers. Admittedly such an inquiry has given rise to varied standpoints depending, of course, on which side of the pendulum swings the philosopher. The dominant conceptual strand in the self's conception has been the ontological. Those who champion the ontological argue that the reality of the self is intrinsic and fundamental. Their methodology takes them through a hermeneutical route of linguistic approach.

A philosopher who has made a breakthrough in this regard is the African foremost hermeneutic philosopher, T. Okere. His study of the Igbo word for the self 'onwe' reveals that the self is first and foremost an ontological reality, before being in relation. Over and above this is that the self is imbued with freedom and autonomy. We shall say more on Okere's viewpoint later. Further, we have philosophers like C. B. Okolo, I. A. Menkiti and K. Wiredu, among others who vehemently oppose the self's ontology. They defend the social cum communal self. The social and the communal self-have many things in common. One such commonality is that the self-derives from the sum of the relationships amongst people in society. This means that the self is oriented towards the good and wellbeing of the people. If this view is taken seriously, it has the potential of rendering personal identity null and void. The reason for this is that such a view is opposed to the intrinsic nature of personal identity. Another feature underlining both conceptions of the social and the communal is morality. It

is morality that makes any discussion of human freedom and autonomy possible. This is something positive. From this standpoint, the social and the communal conceptions are not entirely opposed to personal identity conceptions. It is easy to see the reason for their incorporation, which focuses on their strengths, or positive elements as may be revealed in our subsequent reflection. The 'self' is a reality in Igbo ontology. But other conceptions as we have earlier noted abound that compete with ontology. Any attempt to unify these strands of conceptions of the self must acknowledge what Leke Adeofe (2004: 80-81) calls the two poles necessary for any credible theory of personal identity or the two forms of stability that are interwoven, namely the metaphysical and the social. The term of 'stability' here has to do with the self's capability to deliver a 'consistent judgment,' while the term 'social' depicts the 'belief systems, social character, and projects of value.'

Unique to Igbo is the question of transcendence in the discussion of ontology of the self. The reality of this is contained in their belief systems. Hence the self has a marriage bond with transcendence. More will be said on this latter. In the main, the self's ontology is constituted of two poles: the ontological and social. In this piece, however, we shall integrate the 'belief systems', which has strong bearing on self's transcendence. However, the two poles are construed as aspects of one reality that make up the self. B. Nwigwe and C. Emedolu enlighten us as follows:

> In Igbo understanding, whatever happens is an aspect of an organic reality, which on account of the limitations of the language we use and the concepts we arbitrarily impose on the world result in our cutting up reality into bits and parts in order to comprehend it. (2004: 153).

The above passage brings it to the fore that for the Igbo 'whatever happens is understood as an 'aspect of organic reality.' This 'organic reality' means that after all said and done, what emerges from these strands of conceptions of the self, is the real self. Therefore the self in Igbo ontology is an ensemble

of all the characterizations of the ontological, social/communal cum moral, and transcendence. Hence our deliberation will take five approaches, 1) Theoretical framework, 2) Ontological insights into the Igbo 'self', 3) Self, social/communal cum moral insights, 4) Self and transcendence, 5) Unity of conceptual strands of the self in Igbo ontology, and then the conclusion. We begin with the first.

Theoretical framework

Situating our reflection in a particular framework will no doubt help our readers to follow our chosen point of view as well as appreciate our efforts to unify the various conceptual strands of the self in Igbo ontology. The history of philosophy is replete with attempts made by philosophers such as Spinoza, Hegel and Bohm, to mention a few, to unify reality. When B. Spinoza came on board, his was an attempt to bring reality under one umbrella in what is known as philosophical monism. The same attempt is captured in the philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel. Hegel is known for his detailed accounts about the various stages of the manifestations of the spirit, spanning the subjective, through the objective to the absolute spirit. His idea became much clearer in a well-known statement ascribed to him that the 'rational is the real and the real is the rational.' By this Hegel means to say that reality is one, but evolves in stages.

All these attempts could not succeed because of their rootedness in dualism and abstraction. It is no surprise that D. Bohm (2002: 69) makes a case with dualism, and sees it as a gravely mistaken thought by those who hold dearly to it. For him reality is one, but manifests itself in dual aspects of the physical and spiritual/immaterial. In the eyes of Bohm wholeness is the real as against the fragmentation of being. To better appreciate reality, his blueprint is that man must adopt an attitude of wholeness and jettison that of fragmentation. It is against this background that M. B. Ramose (2003: 230-238) identifies Ubuntu philosophy as being *rhemodic* in character; this is because it 'preserves being as a wholeness.' To designate reality in African thought as being dynamic invariably refers to sense of duality and not

dualism. Dynamism communicates the sense of a free flow of even contradictory realities as from one unitary source. The biological and cultural realities in Igbo world receive metaphysical explanations. In this framework, every reality has a metaphysical foundation and/or origin.

A theory that captures this thought pattern is holism. Holism establishes the inextricable link between parts and the whole, such that the former cannot exist or be understood without reference to the latter, and where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Online English Dictionary). In this project, reality is one. And there is neither dualism nor fragmentation of being as is the case with the solitary man whose nature was described by the theories of Darwin and Freud in terms of aggression and conquest, destruction and unhealthy rivalry as his ultimate motivating principle. The Igbo does not dismiss polarities in nature. The twin principles of life and death are, for instance, not set in opposition to each other. Rather it acknowledges that life is a creative principle that does not in any way obliterate the death principle, since both are conceived as constituting one reality. Dzobo (1992: 126-128) explains that duality is the operative doctrine whereby every reality is constituted of opposites of male and female; the opposites here embody the sense of creativity, complementarity, tension and balance, and otherness. Holism, therefore, entails a system in which abstraction has no place in human encounter with reality. Alternatively, it is the concreteness of existence in terms of singularity and multiplicity that gives reality the defining feature of wholeness. Thus, the study of the reality of self in Igbo ontology must be carried out with this theoretical framework in view.

Ontological Insights into the Igbo 'Self'

The ontological reality of the self among the Igbo has been identified with the work done by T. Okere (1996: 152-159) in *Identity and Change.* By using the hermeneutical method of inquiry, he etymologized and philosophized on the Igbo equivalent word for the self, namely, *onwe. Onwe* or self means 'self-owner' or 'independent self.' He designates onwe as having dialectical

variations as self-owner, one's portion (ike), and as a trunk (ogwe). Characteristically, the self or *onwe* is a core subject of identity, and with no referential point. It is a substance, a subject of predications, and therefore, not reducible to the fleeting multitudes of experiences. The self is the accounting subject of these multitudes of experiences. Thus, as an intrinsic reality, it cannot be predicated of other things. T. Okere captures the ontological status of the self thus:

> … core subject of identity, perduring and enduring all human experience. It is not describable and has no name and no function except as the ultimate author of all the functions of the individual, the carrier of all experience. It is the link between the experience of yesterday and today, the basis of that proprietorship by which these fleeting multitudes of experience are one and are mine. The Onwe or self is that part of me (in a manner of speaking, because it is not just, and cannot be just, a part of me) of which I cannot speak in the third person: the possessive adjective 'm' in Onwem (mine in myself) is not exactly the same as the m in ahu m (the 'my' in my blood) which latter does convey some distance, some alterity, a subject-object relationship. Self is not an object but the ultimate subject. Myself is myself –Onwe m bu Onwe m. Here we are talking of identity as distinct from mere equivalence. (1996: 52).

The passage establishes unmistakably first, that the self is an ontological subject. And second, that it unites all conscious human experiences. That is, it is that which carries and unifies all human experiences. G. I. Onah (2005: 165-166) is a good exponent of Okere's view. He enlightens us on the best way to understand the ontology of this self. In the first instance, Onah dissociates Okere's thought from Hume's bundles. Hume's bundles lack an accounting subject for the bundle of perceptions. The *onwe* or self is an accounting subject. Further, he explains that to say with Okere that the

onwe has no name is never to deny its existence; but rather, to say that it is a concept, and therefore, cannot be referenced or localized. He equally dissociates *onwe* from the Kantian 'I think,' which communicates only an epistemological sense. Similarly, he holds that *onwe* cannot be identified with Locke's self-consciousness. His contention is that *onwe* or self is first and foremost a 'core subject of identity' and the ultimate subject of attributions. Insofar as it is the irreducible trunk or ogwe, it means that 'it is the basis of unity of being and the basis of ontological identity' before becoming the basis of the unity of consciousness or of epistemological identity.'' Thus, it differs from the Cartesian cogito that Descartes mistakenly located the point of interaction between mind and body in the pineal gland.

There are notable Igbo scholars who have variously identified this ontological reality, onwe or self with other concepts. For instance, it is identified either with the soul or spirit. The soul may stand the chance of losing out as an exotic concept. The reason is that the missionaries falsely identified the Western soul with the Igbo *mkpuruobi*. By so doing, it made the soul contain some kind of material entity or to be materially dependent. This stems from the soul's meaning as the seed of the heart or *Mkpuruobi*. B. Ebo has vehemently opposed this identification of onwe or self with the soul. His argument runs as follows:

> The Igbos do not specifically identify the seat of the human soul in man's body . . . the beating of the heart is one of the palpable signs and so they regard it as a principle of life. It is not however, considered that 'seat of the soul as such, for although the heart is so closely associated with life, it is not believed to leave the body at death. (1985: 74).

Be that as it may, this presents the soul in some dualistic light, to mean that it has both the material and immaterial components. It may be asked at this juncture, 'what is it that leaves the body (that invisible ontological reality) at the instance of the demise of the body?' T. Okere responds that it is the

spirit or *mmuo* and not the soul. His main reason is that the missionaries corrupted the word 'soul' in their zealous attempt to make the Christian message relevant to the people. The corruption came by way of trying to translate or to find an equivalent Igbo word for the soul (in Christianity) that is heavily influenced by the Platonic philosophy.

E. M. P. Edeh (1985: 82) in his *Towards Igbo Metaphysics* throws more light on the concepts of *soul* and *spirit*. He gives reasons for the rejection of the former and declares his preference for the spirit or *mmuo.* The reason is the same; which is that, the missionaries falsely influenced the introduction of the soul. Apart from this, the soul could possibly be thought of as something material with location in some part of the body. Again, the soul could be conceived in terms of being sub-physical, physical and immaterial. Other reasons adduced for his preference for the spirit or mmuo rests on a) the spirit's or mmuo's complete immaterial nature, and b) that the spirit can be prefixed or suffixed to anything to mean the immaterial, spiritual or unseen component of that thing as in *mmuo madu* (a human soul) or *mmuo mu* (my soul) or *aru na mmuo* (body and soul). But if we look at what happens in dream experience, it is evident that the spirit can in the instance of the inactivity of the physical body, assume another body, and operate as if it were experiencing something in ordinary life. In that case, it can be said that the spirit is not separable from matter or body and/or its influence. In the same vein, to separate the spirit completely from matter would be to risk the dualism of Descartes in some way.

Different categories of the soul have existed in the history of Igbo culture; nevertheless, the ultimate identity consists in the soul proper as the principle of life and consciousness. Therefore, every other component of the soul may be seen as fulfilling a functional purpose. It is our submission here that the soul and spirit can interchangeably be substituted. And were they to be any different, it is the difference in usage between *Mkpuruobi* and *Mmuo*. For instance, in contrast to *Mkpuruobi*, *Mmuo* has a wider application according to Egbeke Aja's (2001: 50) contribution. The reason offered for this is that when mmuo is identified with vital force, it (*mmuo*) can either be

enhanced or enfeebled. Thus, mmuo finds practical application in morale and can either be demoralized or killed. In this sense Okoye argues that mmuo can also be conceived along the sub-physical, physical and the metaphysical lines. This can be gleaned from Okoye's actual words that highlight the phenomenal dimension to personal identity:

> We may say that the activities of the mmuo cut across those of Mkpuruobi thus rendering the seeming difference as a problem of dialect in principle. Despite the very important place given to the mmuo in the explanation of the self, the 'Onwe'-self is not limited to merely a spiritual reality. Referring to 'Onwe m – myself, I phenomenally point towards not the mmuo but to another substance – Ahu (body) which is palpable and visible (2011: 59).

However, much premium is placed on the soul or spirit as the ontological aspect in the consideration of the onwe or self in Igbo ontology. The phenomenal dimension points to the intricate relationship the self has with the body or matter according to R. Onwuanuibe (1984: 185). He identifies the soul or spirit (mmuo) as pointing to the transcendence of the human person or self. For him, the expression, ''O meturu m na mmuo'' (it touches my spirit?), means that one is acknowledging that what has happened, or is at stake, touches the deepest part of oneself. He then concludes that Igbo ontology rests on a metaphysical foundation. Continuing, Onwuanuibe (1984: 186) identifies this deepest core as the vehicle of immortality or the undying self. Further in his reflection, he sees human presence as designating the ontology of the self as subject. Presence is displayed in greeting, and stands for the self since it reveals the human person as a self that lacks objectification in the process of introspection. Obviously, the meaning of the self in its ontological designation has helped resolve the mistake of Cartesian dualism by underscoring the fact that though both concepts mean the same in nature, nevertheless, they differ considerably in usage.

The Igbo ontology operates within the umbrella of duality. Reality is taken in its concreteness, i.e. in their singularity and multiplicity. The above exposition reveals that what constitutes the ultimate identity of any human being is not anchored in the material, but in the immaterial. However this immaterial aspect has an intricate relationship with body or matter. What this means is that the two poles (ontological and social) are united in one cooperate 'human self', i.e. in its ultimate dual composition of body and soul or spirit. So far we have identified the soul or spirit, presence and onwe as the variants of the core co-constituent ontological pole of the self. It is an important aspect in Igbo ontology.

Let us enlighten ourselves more on the subject matter of *onwe*. The concept *onwe m* which means 'I own myself,' derives from the verb *nwe, meaning* 'to own.' From this etymology, there emerges an important sense or character of the self. The *onwe* is an independent self or a self-owner. Belonging to it are the ideas of self-assertion and self-determination. As earlier stated, the onwe or self-embodies freedom and autonomy. Pertinent is to address to ourselves the question: In what way should we understand the concepts of freedom and autonomy? Or how can we explain or distinguish them, say, from their Grecian counterparts? According to Oguejiofor (2015: 561), the Greeks understand freedom and autonomy as the ability to give a rule or law that is binding on all, that is, as 'self-lawgiving.' And the Igbo conceive freedom and autonomy in terms of 'self-ownership', and, in which a free person is a 'self-owning person.' The source of this freedom and autonomy has been identified with one's personal god or chi in Igbo cosmology. *Chi* is one's spiritual double or guardian Angel; it (chi) is considered the principle of individuality in Igbo cosmology, as no two persons can share the same chi. Because the destiny of the individual lies principally in the hand of his chi, the expectation is that he must live in accord with the demands of his chi. This says a lot about the reasons people have for leading a moral life.

The idea of freedom and autonomy communicates the sense of a self that can act within respectable moral grounds in society or community of other

selves. For what is the essence of freedom if one does not recognize one's limitations, and the demands to respect the freedom of others? So, the self in Igbo ontology is essentially a moral concept. To be moral is to be responsible both to oneself and to others, and, of course, to the entire creation as a 'cosmic self. This implicates God as well. It is only within the community of other selves that the self's authentication is possible, otherwise not. The self's moral responsibility is extensively replicated in the social and communal insights relative to the self.

Self, social/communal cum moral insights

The self is fundamentally an ontological reality, but is imbued with a relational capacity. What is it like for the self to enter into a relation? Does the self's relationship to the community of other selves determine its selfhood? Or put in another way, does the circle of relationships of the self-determine or delimit the self's freedom and autonomy? We must reiterate once more that the self is a relational concept. How do we understand this in relation to the self as being ontological? Let us briefly take a cursory look at the cosmological world of the Igbo.

Ab initio, the self in Igbo ontology finds itself within the network of interlocking relationships. The human self is at the center of the two major Igbo worlds, namely the world of the spirits and that occupied by human beings. It is from these two major worlds that three gradations emerge: the sky, being the abode of the Supreme Being, the world of the spirits, and the world of human beings. Noteworthy is that the influence of these worlds below and above the self does not in any way determine the reality of the self. In like manner, the community of other selves does not define the self. This pictorial world merely puts the self in a relational context.

Thus, the 'social' category does not represent the ideal search for personal identity in Igbo ontology. The reason is that sociality lacks a conceptual framework; with the result that it reduces the self to the sum of human relationships in society. This cannot be. A further negative effect is that it emasculates the self of its freedom and autonomy. The self's ontology is

intrinsic, which the social category could not establish, since it sees personal identity as something extrinsic. A reflection of this is the interpretation often given to Mbiti's statement: 'I am, because we are, and because we are, therefore I am' to mean that individual's autonomy and freedom are endangered species. Contrary to this, C. S. Nwodo (2004: 13-15) in his *Philosophical Perspective on Chinua Achebe* has argued that it is duality principle that governs reality in Igbo cosmology. To buttress this, he identifies the complementary duality of the male-female principle evidenced in umunna and umuada (the male side and the female side) respectively. Further, he observes yet another principle that makes this complementary relationship possible. He calls this the 'concept of balance,' which is intrinsic. He maintains that the concept of balance extends beyond the male-female category to the ''relationship between the individual and the community, between the living and the dead, the ethical and the religious.''

He observes that to view the clan from the outside would mean to make the individual appear to be oppressed by the community or that the ''individual loses his individuality in the overwhelming dominance of the community.'' He argues in defense of strong personal identity, individual freedom and autonomy:

> … In reality there is a plenty of room, thanks to the element of balance, for individuality, and for individual growth and personal identity. The community and the individual complement each other in a harmonious balance that allows the wise and the not so wise, the warrior and the coward to make their contributions freely in the assembly of the people, where decisions are taken only ''at the end,'' '' after everybody has spoken.'' (2004: 15).

The foregoing passage establishes unmistakably that individual self or personal identity is jealously protected despite 'immersion' within the community. The same goes for the inviolable nature of individual freedom

and autonomy. In essence, what the community does is to see that the individual is helped to actualize his potentials. This responsibility includes the safeguard of the self's rights from abuse. It safeguards also the healthy relationship between the self and other selves in society. In fact, the authentication of the self finds its strongest support within the community. Otherwise the self would become locked up in its shell, and thus, becomes the measure of its authenticity, which is absurd. The self in Igbo ontology is not solipsistic as in the Cartesian designation. Rather, the self is immersed in temporality, in the existentiality of the moment. And because of its relational character, the self is ever conscious of its limitations. This is why the self's freedom is not absolute. However the relative freedom available to the self is good enough to enable it act responsibly. An absolute freedom would breed selfishness, and will only lead to the abuse of the freedom of others. And when this happens, the result would be chaos and breach of societal peace and harmony. The capacity to enter into relationship portrays the human self as both a social and moral being. So, whether it is expressed in sociality or communality, the idea of a moral self is implicated.

Therefore the normative conception promotes a moral selfhood. In a normative conception, a lot depends on the community in the making of the self, so much so that the self must give back to the community or make itself relevant through the performance of its duties. To be moral is to act within limits of what is morally acceptable, and to avoid that which is morally reprehensible. But the term of morality or sociality or communality taken singly and independently, without first establishing the ontology of the self, does not yet define Igbo ontology of the self. This is because personhood or self-precedes sociality and morality. The limitation of the social or communal or moral conception is that it fails to recognize selfhood as ontological. Their emphasis has been on functionality or social responsibility on the part of the individual; and this becomes the *conditio sine qua non* for personhood or selfhood. In this way, it exposes the self to the danger of being stripped of its personal characteristics. Fundamentally, selfhood is ontological and unconditional. It is just like being human. A

human being can never be dehumanized; so it is with selfhood; it can never be stripped from any person. The point is that there are many characteristics in a person that are beyond social or communal or cultural determination. Thus, Kwame Gyekye (1997: 53) argues that man transcends sociality to possess the qualities of rationality, moral sense and capacity for virtue, and can evaluate and make moral judgments, and that these depict that an individual is being capable of choice. These qualities obviously are not culturally determinable. These are serious limitations in relying on either the social or normative conceptions for Igbo ontological search for the self. What stands out in the foregoing is that the self in Igbo ontology is, first and foremost, an ontological reality, but then, it has the capacity to enter into a relation.

Put in another way, the self is fundamentally an ontological being, but with capacities for social integration, and with high sense of moral rectitude. The social or moral self is concerned with respect, social equality, sympathy and solidarity. The relevance of moral dimension to self in Igbo ontology further underscores the self's capacity to enter into relationship with fellow selves in the community, with God as the creator of the universe, and the whole of nature. R. A. Graham (1999: 165-199) has christened the self in Igbo ontology as a 'cosmic relational self.' This means that it exercises the responsibility of harmonizing all the forces in the universe with all the working tools of love, sympathy, understanding, solidarity and cooperation. Summarily put, all these conceptions can come under the one bigger conception called the 'communitarian self' that embraces the social, the moral and the cosmic relational selfhood. The communitarian self speaks the language of reciprocity and mutuality. Kwame Gyekye (1997: 76) in his *Tradition and Modernity* notes that the communitarian self-trades with such terminologies as mutual cooperation, aid and interdependence and considered as 'very rewarding and fulfilling' tools for peaceful co-existence among individual members in a multicultural society. Christian C. Emedolu (2018: 10-14) has in his ''The Death Penalty and the Sacro-Sanctity of Life: Perspectives in Igbo Ethics'' reflected on the centrality of

life in Igbo ontology. He reveals that life, which the kolanut symbol encapsulates in Igbo culture, is supreme. Its supremacy is such that any other thing or value ranks secondary that stands in its way when threatened. This is because in this 'life,' the destiny of the community, its cooperate existence, and being-ness is at stake. The community, therefore, becomes the mirror on which the life of the community is reflected. Invariably, this is another way of saying that the self has its seat in the community. What this reasoning amounts to is that the self will be destroyed if the community that 'houses' it suffers annihilation.

Clearly then, one can see the inextricable link between self and community. This is why Okere's version of the communitarian self is preferred to all others. Why? The reason is that it is first and foremost ontological, before being communitarian (i.e. relational). Put in another way, the self's ontological status comes first, and then followed by the self's relational capacity with all its implications. Thus, the ontology of the self remains inviolable despite being a relational entity. The community qualifies as the *Sitz im Leben* for any meaningful consideration of the onwe or self in Igbo ontology. T. Okere expatiates:

> If we have been looking at the structure of the kernel of the self, one must immediately add that this hard core is surrounded by a thicker layer of enveloping relationships . . . Even though one can be thought of as a unit and in abstraction from anything else, in fact, the self is never alone. The individual is never a pure, isolated individual . . . This is why in this culture, the self is a congenitally communitarian self, incapable of being, existing and really unthinkable except in the complex of relations to the community. (2015: 565-566).

Obviously, the passage underlines the structural nature of the self in Igbo ontology. At the center of this structure is the kernel of the self, surrounded by a thick layer of enveloping relationships. Though, the self may be considered a unit, it is nevertheless not alone; because its nature is a

'congenitally communitarian self' for which reason it cannot do without the intricate web of interlocking relationships. These thick layers may be interpreted as mere tributaries, performing various functions that manifest the activities of the self. In contrast to the Cartesian self that abhors the body or matter, the senses, the external world or nature and God or god, the Igbo self-incorporates all these. This strikes a fundamental mark of differentiation and uniqueness of the self in Igbo ontology. For in this culture, the body can phenomenally stand for the self. It is through the body that the self can insert itself in the community of other selves. The human blood even performs the same function of inserting the self in the community. The blood helps in the identification of a person as belonging to a particular family or tribe or community.

The heart or *obi* brings out clearly the moral capacity of the self. It is pictured as the fulcrum of virtue and vice, of conscience and morality. The human heart has a special relationship to the self as its repository channel of secret information. As a matter of fact, these organs do not constitute the core elements of the self. Reference to them merely underscores their intricate relationship with the self. T. Okere mentions *Mmuo* or spirit, *Uche* or mind, and *Chi* as constituting the core elements among the thick layers surrounding the self or *onwe*. The inclusion of *chi or* personal god is representative of the spiritual being to which the self is related and in whose nature the self shares. He is eloquent on this, when he opines that the *onwe* or self could, in fact, not be understood or explained without reference to one's personal chi. It has already been mentioned that the self's association with the community does not affect its autonomy and freedom. The same goes for God or *Chi* as the source of this freedom and autonomy. In this way, the lapses we notice in the consideration of the self by the use of 'social' or communal or moral categories are covered up.

Interestingly, most of the concepts are captured in their duality. For instance, the soul, which is immaterial, can be conceived as having a material component, namely the seed of the heart as in *mkpuruobi*. Also, body and soul constitute a duality. The heart's dualistic nature is expressed

in *obi oma* (kindness) and *obi ojoo* (wickedness or cruelty). God is equally conceived in dualistic terms as in *Chi-ukwu* and chi (Supreme Being and the lesser chi or god). B. Nwigwe and C. Emedolu in their co-authored book, *Emergent and Contentious Issues in African Philosophy* have maintained that the inclusion of phenomenal realities such as ghosts and all forms of telekinesis in the discussion of personal identity should not be dismissed as fetish and occultic, simply because they lack scientific backing. They observed that it is Aristotle's inclusion of such issues in his deliberation on *Being qua Being* that informed their insistence. (2004: 150). In actual fact, the self in Igbo ontology that is defensible here is strictly neither the bare bone social nor the normative nor moral (though it may integrate some positive elements of these), but is one that is both ontological and immaterially, and that is openness to transcendence.

Self and transcendence

The question of the self's transcendence brings us back to one of Leke Adeofe's two poles that makes for any credible theory of personal identity, namely, the social stability that highlights a people's belief systems. The human being is conceived in Igbo cosmology as being part human and part spirit. Most authors who reflect on personal identity in Igbo ontology insist that the 'chi-component' must be included. The Bantus sounded more categorical by saying that God is the essence of the self. We know also that for these people the transcendent being, God or chi plays a significant role in determining a person's destiny. God is contemplated as highest being or 'force.' The soul or spirit of a human being is also a force. When it is said that God created man in his own 'image', the people substitute the 'spirit' or 'soul' of man for this image. This means that the human being resembles God in spirit, and not in body. Thus, it is this spiritual part that accounts for man's spiritual aspirations. All these constitute good reasons for assenting to self's openness to transcendence. By openness to transcendence, one understands that man should embrace the 'God-project' for himself, by

living in accord with the dictates of God, if he must fulfill his ultimate purpose in life.

This is an important dimension to the ontological as well as the social or communitarian or moral (normative) conception, for it portrays the self as a value oriented being. It equally brings to light an essential aspect of the self as a being that reflects on its activity, that is, on itself. Invariably, this capacity to reflect on itself cannot be anything short of appraising its doings, and redressing its excesses, in the case(s) that it falls below expectation, and which, otherwise would jeopardize the chances of meeting up with the higher values consequent on his acts.

Unity of conceptual strands of the self in Igbo ontology

At this juncture, we subscribe to the structural nature of the self in Igbo ontology. This we tried to elucidate above. Fundamentally, it is a structure with an inviolable ontological selfhood at the base. The self is a subject of predications as well as an ontological subject with a relational capacity. To be relational is to be social or moral or communitarian. And borrowing from the thick layers of enveloping relationships that surround the *onwe*, the self in Igbo ontology is best captured as a 'synthetically communitarian selfhood.' The 'synthetically communitarian self' widens our horizon of understanding of the self. On a positive note, the raw social conception of selfhood has the advantage of reducing the weight of human selfishness in society, as well as the capacity to forestall human temptations to solipsism and self-seeking that naturally rock societal equilibrium. We submit here that selfhood is not a discriminatory concept, in the sense of stripping selfhood from some and affirming it in others. It is a discrimination often championed by bare bone social and moral conceptions. To circumvent this, is to embrace the real communitarian self that is grounded on the self's ontology ascribable to all. The ontological communitarian self is one that advocates for a cooperate morality.

Essentially, cooperate morality maintains a four-dimensional relationship, which includes the living, the dead, the yet to be born, and the eco-system

as a whole. To achieve a perfect selfhood within Igbo ontology presupposes a joint interplay of human and divine as sources of moral law. On the human level, it is a morality that sees the ancestors as custodians of morality. The *ofo* and *ogu* as wooden symbols are particularly noteworthy in Igbo culture. Whereas the *ofo* symbolizes the authority to say the truth on the part of the ancestor, and by extension to all others, the *ogu* stands for personal innocence to which one can appeal for acquittal in case of false accusations. The *chi* in Igbo cosmology is also responsible for morality. In some instances of misfortune, it is the person's chi that is responsible. In some others, the blame is on the individual. To overcome failures in the life of the individual, it is suggested that the self must be committed to righteousness, i.e. to live in accord with the dictates of the Supreme Being. In essence, the self must place all temporal pursuits and goals at the service of spiritual ends. This, then is the very meaning of the self's openness to transcendence. It is a transcendence that creates the divine context that is part and parcel of the essence of selfhood.

Conclusion

Of all the models of selfhood in Igbo ontology, we uphold the self that is first and foremost ontological, and then communitarian. Put differently, the ideal selfhood must be ontological with a 'communo-divine context,' and where the 'communal context' must embrace both the social and moral conceptions, while of course, avoiding the pitfalls inherent in these conceptions. And again, the moral dimension must be 'cooperate' to include the living, the dead, the yet to be born, and the eco-system or nature as a whole. Simply put, selfhood that perfectly suits Igbo ontology is a ''synthetically structured communitarian self,'' but whose ontology is not negotiable.

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