

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY, GLOBALIZATION AND THE PRIORITY OF 'OTHERNESS'

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Abstract

The question of the otherness within the parameters of African philosophy oscillates between the concerns of personal identity and alterity. Personal identity deals with the philosophical questions that arise about ourselves by virtue of our being persons. A cursory glance at the historical evolution of philosophy, reveals that it has been discussed since the origins of Western thought, and most major figures have had something to say about it. It is a quest that embodies the value of the first principle of being, which states that every being is determined in itself, is one with itself and is consistent with itself. This notwithstanding, the question of otherness focuses on the relationship between the self and the other. Since this is a study within the scope of African philosophy, Igwebuike is employed as an African philosophical framework and an indigenous wholistic category to respond to the question of otherness. In the collection and analysis of data, the phenomenological method of inquiry was employed. This research submits that a person, although a separate and separated entity or individual, constitutes part of a complete whole- a diversity of being one with the other, and that the actualization of being is realized in recognizing and relating with the other. The researcher believes that an understanding and appreciation of the African conceptualization of the "I and other" relationship would advance a better human relationship, boost national unity and enhance dialogue between people of diverse religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and thus, reduce violence linked to alterities.

Keyword: Otherness, Igwebuike, African, Personal Identity, Alterity, Globalization, Philosophy.

Introduction

The study of the historical development of Western philosophy and the evolution of African thought, unveils an obvious diversity between the Western conceptualization scheme and the African conception of reality. Onyeocha (1997) avers that “whereas Western philosophy is characterized by the problem of the knowledge of universals involving abstractions on the one hand..., Africans exercise their thinking on the correctness of existence, the problem of living and life itself” (p. 142). The Western pattern of thought is exclusivistic, depersonalized, objectivised and more concerned with analysis; the African scheme of conceptualization is inclusivistic, integrative, non-reductionistic, concrete, personalized and subjectivised in all its manifestations, expressing the interconnectedness of reality- a world of relationship, harmony, continuity and complementarity. Thus, Onyeocha (2006) argues that “the African conceives of reality in terms of a universe of forces that are linked together, and are in constant interplay with one another” (p. 99). This divergence has further structured the African and Western conceptions of the human person in relation to the other. In addressing the issue of ‘otherness’ the dualistic and exclusivistic Western perception of reality understands a person in relation to the other in terms of “*I and Not-I*”. This creates a dichotomy that brings in a strong divide between the “*I and the other*”, which could set groups and individuals against themselves.

The question of the ‘Other’ is a term with a rich and lengthy philosophical history dating at least from the Sophists through Socrates’ dialogues to Hegel’s dialectics, in which the ‘stranger’ participates in a dialogue on the ontological problems of being and non-being, of the ‘one’ and the ‘other’. Otherness points to the state of being different, shifting emphasis from Descartes philosophical concerns with the other which was struck in abstraction to a concrete other that is located in social and cultural institutions. The question of the otherness of reality has continued to emerge in the various epochs of the history of philosophy fascinating philosophy and giving rise to questions such as: What does it mean to be other than the self? How do I and must I relate to the other? This paper attempts to study the conceptualization of the relationship between the *I* and the *Other*, with particular focus on the human other, within the context of African philosophy. That is, how the African conceives the self in relation to the other. In responding to this question, *Igwebuike* would be

employed as an African philosophical theoretical framework for the interpretation of "who am I in relation to the other?"

The 'Otherness' and Western Philosophical Thought

A cursory glance at the historical evolution of the problem of personal identity reveals a couple of perspectives. Conford (1912) and Omoregbe (1991) aver that the Pre-Socratic philosophers (600 BC) were at the base of Western philosophy, which grew out of religion and mythology. These Ionian thinkers agreed that there must be an original stuff of which all things are made. But they disagreed what precisely this primary element of all things was. For Thales (600 BC), it was water. For Anaximander (600-548), it was a neutral element infinite, eternal and indeterminate. For Anaximenes (528-526 BC), it was air. For Empedocles (440 BC), all things are made up of four everlasting elements: earth, air, fire and water. Their coming together and separation is the cause of the changes we experience in the world. According to Russell (1975), the Pre-Socratics were more concerned with the cosmos, and this affected the development of the concept person during this epoch. However, their interest was also targeted at discovering the unity and permanence of the polarities of the 'othernesses' of their time.

With the emergence of the Sophists, there was a shift in the direction of Western philosophy. Stumpf (2000) observes that the human person now occupied a worthwhile place in the western philosophical enterprise. Protagoras (490-420 BC), Gorgias (late 5th century) and Thrasymachus (late 5th century) are three most outstanding sophists who emerged in Athens sometime during the 5th century. Protagoras, the oldest and most influential Sophist is best known for his teaching that, "Man is the measure of all things". Judgments are, therefore, relative. The rise and spread of relativism during this period drew attention to the individual person, and generated a radical approach towards otherness.

In the 5th century B.C., Plato (427-347) argues that the human person is composed of body and soul. The soul is a non-material thing and is capable of existence independent of the body. The soul exists before the body does. Kanu (2014) avers that Plato gave more function to the soul, by emphasizing that the soul is the real person. Since the soul is at the centre of existence, the body, which is the other is treated negatively as an impediment and a prison from which the soul must free itself.

In the 4th century B.C., Aristotle (384-322) in his *De Anima*, taught that every material being is made up of two elements: matter and form. Allan (1970) and Vella (2008) observe that in Aristotle, they are not separate entities as such, but a complex unity. In Aristotle, a more balanced relationship with the other is attained.

Augustine (354-430 AD), in his *De Trinitate*, was the first to take up a deepened examination of the word *person*. His purpose was to find a word that would be applied distinctly to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, without falling into the error of making them three divinities or dissolving their individuality. From the foregoing, Mundi (1985) observes that the person in Augustine is the single individual. Three different divine persons, with three different divine responsibilities exist together.

Boethius (480 AD) in his *De Persona et Duabus Naturis*, held that a person is an 'individual substance of a rational nature' (*persona est rationalis naturae individual substantia*). This later became the classical definition of person. St Thomas Aquinas (1224 AD) after Boethius, in his *Summa Theologica*, defines a person as the *subsistens rationale* (a rational subsistent). According to Okon (2010), Thomas Aquinas' concept of a person implies:

- a. It is subsistent by itself, the person exists in himself and for himself, being the ultimate subject possessor of his nature and all his acts and so is the ultimate subject of predication of all its attributes.
- b. It is separated from others.

This notwithstanding, with Rene Descartes (1596-1650 AD), philosophy started a new way, that of gnoseology. He defines the person in relation to self-consciousness. In the *Second Meditation*, Descartes (1637), through his methodical doubt, discovers that something resists doubt. That is, the fact that it is he who doubts, and who can be deceived. He thus, arrives at *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore, I am). To the question, who am I? Descartes answers simply, a "thinking thing", a thing that essentially has mental experiences. Descartes' transformation of the person from an ontological to a psychological fact, opened the door to a series of either great diminutions or of enormous exaggerations of the concept of person. Since the time of Descartes, individual consciousness has been taken as the privileged centre of identity, while 'the other' is seen as an epistemological problem, or as an inferior, reduced or negated form of the same.

The modern history of personal identity begins with Locke. Njoku (2002) avers that he countered the Cartesian ground for identity- which is thinking, believing that the establishment of identity over time needed a more solid foundation. Against this reasoning, Locke (1964) argues that the identity of a person consists neither in the identity of the immaterial substance, as most dualists are apt to hold, or in the identity of a material substance, as materialists might be expected to hold. John Locke posits that personal identity consists not in the identity of substance, but in the identity of consciousness. His view, according to Shoemaker (1998) is that the persistence of a person through time consists in the fact that certain actions, thoughts, experiences etc., occurring at different times, are united in memory. Consciousness constitutes human identity, hence makes what we call the self. Nimbalkar (2008) posits that, in Locke, we see the first modern conceptualization of consciousness.

Ontological Foundation for the Conception of Otherness in African Philosophy

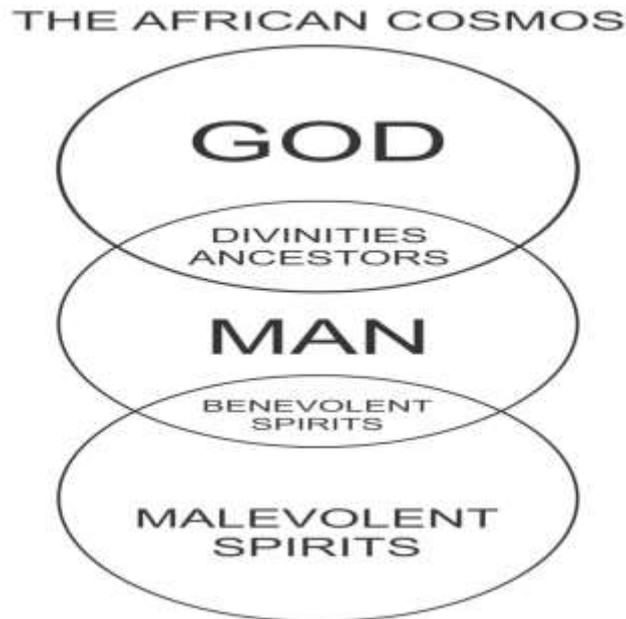
The ontological foundation for otherness in African philosophy is based on the centrality of the human person in the African universe and the principle of complementarity.

1. The Centrality of the Human person in African Cosmology

The concept of a person held by a group of people is fundamental in understanding not only how a person within such framework views himself but also how other matters such as the idea of being, morality, etc., that are essential for the ordering of society are viewed. This is emphasized by the fact that such a concept encapsulates the role the society expects the individual to play for the attainment of an orderly society (Imafidon 2005). This explains why an understanding of the conception of the person in African thought is relevant to this study.

African philosophy is anthropocentric, and this draws from the anthropocentric nature of the African universe. Man is at the centre of the universe, more central than God. Thus, Mbiti (1969) observes 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 with Mbiti, Metuh (1991), 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 man. Below is a diagram that explains the central place of man in African cosmology.



Culled from *African Philosophy: A Hermeneutic Approach to African Traditional Religion, Theology and Philosophy* (Kanu 2015, p. 95)

The centrality of man in African cosmology places him in a matrix of spiritual relationships. There is the unbreakable tie to the Supreme Being, who created the earth and everything therein for man and his progeny. This tie is unbreakable because man's existence is ontologically dependent upon his Creator. Man also has to maintain correct relationship with the lesser entities within the spiritual realm. His day-to-day activities are not only designed to harmonize his relationship with the divinities and the departed ancestors, but they are also motivated by the fear that bad relations with these spiritual beings could certainly endanger the life and safety of his community. That peace may reign between man and the deities, it is also necessary that man lives in harmony with the members of the earthly community.

In this matrix of man's relationships, Good status, good health and prosperity are signs of the wellbeing of a person's life-force, and the human being struggles to preserve it through an appropriate relationship with the spiritual forces around him/her. From the centre of the universe,

the human person relates with the divine in a community of ways: Through *libation*: which are prayers usually said in the morning time or during ceremonies, meetings and gatherings using *oji* (kola nut) and *mmanya-oku* (hot drink), the food and drink of the gods. Ijiomah (2005) avers that in prayer, "the Igbo man tries to normalize the relationship among the three worlds ... libation is made to God through the agency of the ancestors and other deities" (p. 87). Through *divination*: which involves a process of inquiry, people who wish to know why certain things happen, how to solve certain problems and so on, go to diviners. The centrality of man in the African universe and the matrix of his relationships affects his approach towards the other.

1. Inherent Principle of Complementary the African Cosmos

The African cosmos is an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. Thus, 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings. According to Iroegbu (1995), this African manner of being is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. Mbiti (1970) classically proverbializes this relationship thus: "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 108). The African worldview, therefore, is governed by the principle of complementarity, which seeks the conglomeration, the unification, the summation of fragmented thoughts, opinions and other individualized and fragmented thoughts and ideas. It believes essentially that the whole is greater than the corresponding parts. It is also a view that maintains that by the coming together of the individual or parts, a viable and sustainable whole will emerge, and by this, the parts will get to the brim purpose of their existence (Asouzu 2004).

The Principle of Complementarity and the Evolution of African Philosophy

Complementarity is the intricate web of African philosophy. It has remained constant in the midst of the changes in the history of African philosophy. This sense of harmony, community, Complementarity and solidarity among the community of beings finds expression right from the philosophy of Tempels (1959). He argues that in Bantu Ontology:

'Beings forces' of the universe are not a multiple of independent forces placed in juxtaposition from being to being. All creatures are found in relationship according to the law of hierarchy... Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network. (p. 29).

Kagame (1951) agrees with Tempels that reality is force. It is not a force independent of the other, but forces that are in a relationship. He categorized reality into *Muntu* (human beings), *Kintu* (things), *Hantu* (place and time), and *Kuntu* (modality). These categories of being relate with each other, and their relationship is seen when we remove the determinative, after which there remains a stem NTU which is the same in all. He describes NTU thus, "Ntu is being itself, the cosmic universal force... that force in which being and beings coalesce" (p. 101). In Jahn (1958), NTU becomes the rallying point of being, outside which no being can exist.

The nationalistic movements of the 20th century in Africa, now grouped into National Ideological School of African philosophy, was linked by their emphasis on belongingness. For instance, the Social negritude of Senghor (1964 & 1975) which places the family at the centre of the social structure, thus, man as a person realizes his being in the family structure, and the society has meaning from what the family is. It was on this same principle of complementarity that Nyerere (1968a and 1968b) bases his principle of Ujamaa. The choice of socialism over capitalism by Awolowo (1969 & 1979) and the promotion of Pan-Africanism by Nkrumah (1963) were based on the distinctive complementary character of African ontology.

Mbiti (1970) in his work on African religion and philosophy also speaks of African ontology as complementary:

The anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity or solidarity which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or remove one of these categories is to destroy the whole existence including the destruction of the creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another. (p. 16).

The idea of the complementarity of reality in African thought does not ignore the distinctiveness of being. Oguejiofor (2010) observes that:

Among the Igbo of Nigeria, man's life is circumscribed within the world, *uwa*, which is made up of the abode of humans and the abode of spirits. But these are not divided or separated by a chasm. There is interconnectedness between the two enabling contact between the deities and spirits, and human beings. This unitary conception of reality pervades Igbo world view in a very remarkable way. One factor that makes for this unity is that the Igbo view of reality is anthropocentric. (p. 21).

Edeh (1983) reflecting on Igbo Metaphysics furthers the perspective of Mbiti:

Accordingly, the Igbo way of life emphasizes 'closeness' but not closed-ness'. There is a closeness in living because each person 'belongs to' others and in turn, 'is belonged to' by others. By adopting this life of 'closeness' or 'belongingness', an Igbo becomes immersed in the culture's spiritual substance, love; and by love, he acquires a fulfilment as a person beyond mere individuality. (p. 105).

Gyekye (1987) in his work on Akan philosophy avers that the individual depends on the community:

The individual's life depends on identifying oneself with the group.... It is also the ground of the overriding emphasis on the individual's obligation to the members of the group; it enjoins upon him or her the obligation to think and act in terms of the survival of the group as a whole. In fact, one's personal sense of responsibility is measured in terms of responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs and demands of the group. (p. 156).

Iroegbu (1995) describes being in African ontology as belongingness. In response to the questions, 'what makes being, being?', 'what does it mean to be in the Uwa?' Iroegbu argues that it is belongingness, thus *Being* is *Belongingness*. What then is belongingness? Belongingness is a special noun from the verb 'to belong'. It means to be part of, Daisein-with or to be a member of a group. Thus Nkemnkia (1999) write that in African ontology, the self is the other:

The meaning of an individual's life is found in and through his relationship with the Other or Others. In fact, it is meaningless to

ask oneself “who am I” without having a complete knowledge of the Other, from whom, in the final analysis, one expects the answer. When we say ‘I’, in reality one means ‘You’, that is, the Other. By saying ‘We’ one is essentially saying ‘man’. If this is how things stand, then each ‘I’, is always mediated by ‘the Other’, who is none other than ‘oneself’. In this dialectic each one of us contains exclusively the Other. (pp. 111-112).

Asouzu (2004 & 2007a) develops the notion of being within the context of the new ontological horizon of *ibuanyidanda*. Ogbonnaya (2013) avers that *Ibuanyidanda* is an approach to ontology in a way that bridges the artificial chasm, and which aims at overcoming all forms of bifurcation which the human mind imposes on the relationship between substance and accidents. According to Asouzu (2007b), the philosophy of *Ibuanyidanda* “explores a method and principles for coalescing the real and the ideal, the essential and the accidental into system of mutual complementing units” (p. 101). It is, therefore, not surprising that Asouzu would define being as “that on account of which anything that exists serves a missing link of reality” (p. 103). Thus, being is located within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations in the sense of an existent reality.

In the foregoing, the perspectives of different African philosophers have been visited to see how their respective ideas are the ‘other positive’. Contrary to the history of western philosophy, it can be concluded that complementarity is the key to understanding African philosophy.

Globalization and the Increasing Reality of Otherness

Obiefuna and Aniago (2010) and Kanu (2014) trace the development of globalization to Hellenistic times, when Alexander the Great in 334 B C attempted to Greekicize non Greeks, and more fundamentally to Europe, when Portuguese navigators discovered some parts of the world, and through trade, evangelization, exploration and colonialism ruled the world. Since then, there has been an increased movement of people from one part of the world to another, thus, raising more questions about the reality of otherness. This notwithstanding, what is globalization?

Fafowora (1998) refers to globalization as the process of increasing economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries. It deals with increasing the breaking down of trade barriers and the increasing integration of world market. Globalization according to Kanu (2015) is, therefore, systematically reconstructing integrative phases among nations by breaking down barriers in the areas of culture, commerce, communication and other fields of endeavour. Gradually, the world is turned into a global village, and peoples of diverse cultures, religions and traditions transformed into cosmopolitans on a global conference table. There is now a greater human cohesion and solidarity, greater interaction on the global level, mankind coming close together, and relating more and more with one another. Asouzu (2007a) refers to it as "a necessary consequence of our being" (p. 382). Agbo (2010) affirms Asuzu's perspective thus:

Globalization is not only part of nature, it is the mode of being for human beings, it expresses our internal state. In an ontological sense, it is the category of our expressive existentiality! It is the name we give to the invisible force that is propelling reality forward with incredible velocity. (p. 36).

Although each person is an individual substance, globalization brings persons together from different backgrounds- social, cultural, economic, religious, educational, racial etc., to relate with the another. At this point of encounter, the self gets in contact with the other, the different, the dissimilar, the distinct to which the self must relate.

African Philosophy and the Question of the 'Otherness'

The theoretical framework that would be employed in discussing the response of African philosophy to the question of otherness is IGWEBUIKE. Igwebuiké is the new face of African philosophy. It is the modality of being in African philosophy (Kanu 2017a). It is an Igbo word, which is a combination of three words. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuiké*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space (Kanu 2017b). The three words involved: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power* (Kanu 2017c). Thus, put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power', that is, when human

beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force. At this level, no task is beyond their collective capability (Kanu 2017d).

The basic interest there is that *Igwebuike* provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. As an ideology, Kanu (2016a&b) opines that *Igwebuike* rests on the idea that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation (Kanu 2015a). 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings. *Igwebuike* is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of the African philosophical experience (Kanu 2015b).

Igwebuike as understands life as a shared reality. And it is only within the context of complementarity that life makes meaning. Life is a life of *sharedness*; one in which another is part thereof. A relationship, though of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole (Kanu 2015c). A relationship in which case the two or more coming together make each of them a complete whole; it is a diversity of being one with each other. To put the other away removes the balance of being. Kanu (2015d) avers that this presupposes a tailor-made-cloth, measured, cut and sewn to fit into the curves, contours, shape and size, peculiarities and particularities of a being. Thus, every being has a missing part and is at the same time, a missing part. Ewulu (2010), therefore, writes that:

If the other is my part or a piece of me, it means that I need him for me to be complete, for me to be what I really am. The other completes rather than diminishes me. His language and culture make my own stand out and at the same time, they enrich and complement my own. In the presence of his language and culture, the riches and poverty of my language and culture become clear and I see that his own and my own when put together form a richer whole when compared to any of them in isolation.

From the foregoing perspective, the self is not only completed in relating with the other, but that it attains self-realization in the other. Ewulu (2010) writes further that:

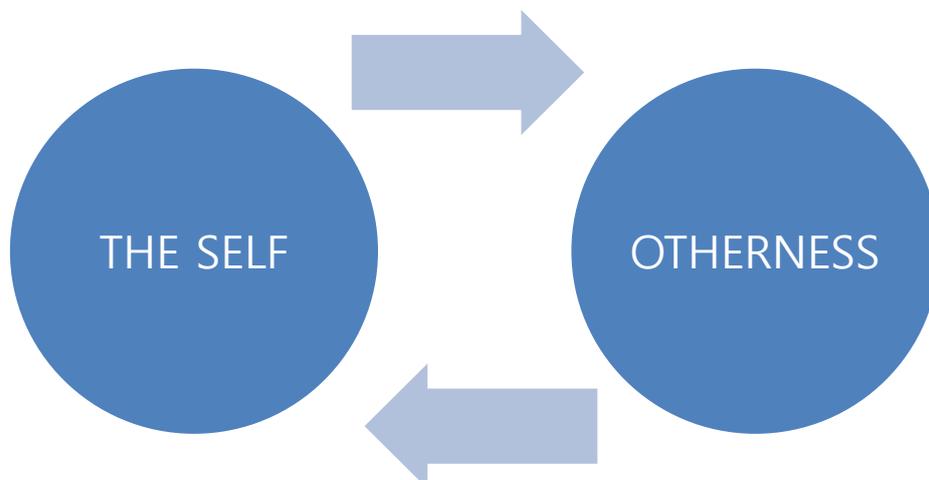
I realize myself in the other because it is in the 'Thou-ness' of the Thou that my 'Is-ness' is realized. I am 'I' because you are 'You'. Without Thou there is no I. We are 'We' because they are 'They',

and without 'They', there is no 'We'. (p. 189).

In the contention of Asouzu (2007): "It is within this ontological context (of life as sharedness) that all questions of meaning can be handled adequately and fully within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations." (p. 252-253).

As a result of the dynamics of the relationship between the *I* and the *thou*, the Igbo would refer to the 'Other' as *Ibe*, which means 'a piece of' or 'a part of', as in *ibe anu* (a piece of meat) or *ibe ede* (a piece of cocoyam). The Igbo would, therefore, refer to the 'other person' as *ibe m* which means 'my piece' or *mmadu ibe m* (my fellow human being). This is the concept also employed in reference to relationships and reciprocity: love one another (*hunu ibe unu n'anya*), help one another (*nyere nu ibe unu aka*), respect one another (*sopuru nu ibe unu*), etc. Since the 'other' refers to my own piece, it would, therefore, mean that to love the other is to love oneself, to help the other is to help oneself and to respect the other is to respect oneself. Put the other way round, to hate the other is to hate oneself, to refuse help to the other is to refuse help to oneself and to disrespect the other is to disrespect oneself. From the African perspective, there is a link between the self and the other. This is because the self carries with it the mark of otherness. If reality is one with itself and consistent with itself, that is, different from others, then its uniqueness is always in reference to the other. In the *I* and *the other* relation, both participants exist as polarities of relation.

A diagram showing how the self and otherness are polarities of relations



It is therefore, difficult to talk about the identity of a thing without

implying its otherness, at least within the same category of being.

However, according to Ewulu (2010), the use of *ibe* in Igbo ontology applies to all forms of relationship with the other. He expresses it as follows:

- a. 1st Person singular: *ibe m* (my piece (s)/my part (s))
- b. 2nd Person singular: *ibe gi* (your piece (s)/your part (s))
- c. 3rd Person singular: *ibe ya* (his/her piece (s)/his/her part (s))
- d. 1st Person plural: *ibe anyi* (our piece (s)/our part (s))
- e. 2nd Person plural: *ibe unu* (your piece (s)/your part (s))
- f. 3rd Person plural: *ibe ha* (their piece (s)/their part (s))

In a paradoxical way Ekwulu writes that:

The term *ibe* brings out the reciprocity tension between the self and the other. The self is always implicated in the other. The self's reference to the other always points back to the self. I am, as it were, in the other and the other is in me. He is my piece as I am his piece. That which is different from me is 'my piece' or 'my other'. That which is different from us is part of us. (p. 188).

From the foregoing, one can argue that the differences among human beings is absolved in identity, for that which is different from me is part of me *ibe m*, and, in turn, the identity is absolved in the otherness, because I am part of the other who is different from me. Identity and otherness are in a sense two related concepts, for the one implies the other.

Conclusion

This research is an African philosophical response to the problem of personal identity and otherness, that is, the *I* and the *Other*. It strongly contends that the future of reality lies in the dialogue between the *I* and *otherness*. In fact, the relationship between otherness and personal identity is understood as a dialogical move, which results to increasing expansion, growth and development. To conceptualize identity free of otherness is only a few steps away from doom- for although every other is truly other, no other is wholly other but a relative and complementary other. To conceptualize the self without the other would be an illusion, as Levinas (1969 & 1981) observes, the other is always irreducibly present as it is implied in the self. The interaction or dialogue between identity and otherness leads to a better self-knowledge and understanding.

The self as metaphysical unity forms a thesis that is negated by the diversity of the other, which stands to the self as an antithesis, however, with dialogue and relationship emerges a synthesis, a complementary whole, a situation where the self sees itself as part of the whole, and sees the other as part of the self. Wenger (1998) sees the dialogue between the self and the other as the beginning of change and growth- for in the process of encounter and dialogue, the other changes my ethical being and I change that of the other. The other facilitates the self and grounds the being of the self. As the self relates with the other, the self is not only taught but it also learns from the other; for in the other, the self sees what it is not. Thus, identity is a mark of incompleteness which requires the other and the active participation in the other's identity structure. The idea of complementarity is not in any way a move towards saying that reality is one, or to undermine the need to make a distinction between the self and the other. The fact that reality is interconnected does not in any way mean that reality is one; interconnectedness is not sameness. Any form of inability to identify distinction, is a conceptual weakness. Distinction does not negate separateness.

If the African philosophy of the human other, which sees the other as a part of me is appreciated, especially in Nigeria, where there seems to be a growing indifference towards the other, it would enhance the promotion of human rights and reduce to the barest minimum, religious and political violence, violence against women, child abuse, terrorism, competition, jealousy, envy, tribalism, among others. Most times, these vices have continued to dominate human relationships as a result of ignorance and a poor perception of who the other is to the perpetrator.

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