

Onyenachiya: A New Perspective on Religion in African Philosophy of Religion

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Abstract

How does one understand the relationship between a person and their objects of belief in the philosophy of Religion? How does the object of belief impact individuals' lives, choices, decisions, and what they become in the future? The character of religion is binding, and the object of belief in a being – transcendent or immanent as the sole determinant of the fate and destiny of individuals leaves room for many questions that border on freedom and responsibility. By introducing *Onyenachiya* to the discussion of the phenomenon of religion from an African philosophical approach to religion, the authors argue that there is a certain threshold of self-evaluation and relationship between a person and their object of belief which is significantly cooperative and collaborative. Although *onyenachiya*, a concept that stems from an African epistemic context (Igbo), has no corresponding English translation, it is a contraction of two independent words, *onye* (person, giver, who) and *chi* (personal god, doppelgänger). The two are joined together by conjunction, 'na' with the suffix 'ya' at the end, emphasizing the chi's personal and unique nature. The authors argue that if chi is connected to a person's destiny, *onyenachiya* demonstrates an agent-centered destiny, which gives room for agency, accountability, and responsibility and gives a new account of religious tolerance.

Keywords: *onyenachiya*, transcendent-immanent, God/god, destiny/fate, personal/communal, agency, Africa, religious philosophy.

Introduction

This paper introduces *onyenachiya* to the discussion of the phenomenon of religion from an African philosophical approach to religion. *Onyenachiya* is a relational concept that expresses complementarity and collaboration. Religion though a global experience is also contextual. *Onyenachiya* originates from Igbo epistemic and existential space and is a contraction of two independent words, *onye* (person, giver, who) and *chi* (personal god, doppelgänger). The two are

joined together by conjunction, 'na' with the suffix 'ya' at the end, emphasizing the chi's personal and unique nature. The religious meaning of *chi* is contained in it and its role in the religious practices of the people to who the language Igbo belongs. African philosophy of religion suggests two things, the African philosophical approach to the idea of religion and the African philosophical approach to religion in Africa. But, unfortunately, famous African scholars such as Wiredu focus on the latter rather than the former.

Religion remains an elusive concept that has defied any definition, but its content is abrasive and can be very annoying. The dominant idea of religion is Eurocentric, and it is enveloped in paradoxes, ambiguities, chronic trajectories, bloody history, contemporary ambivalences, and continuities of controversies. Furthermore, being Eurocentric also means that dealing with the notion of religion from the African philosophical perspective might also run the risk of Eurocentrism. That means, how can an anthropo-existential notion such as *onyenachiya* be discussed in the light of religion, a concept that lacks an equivalent outside European cultural and intellectual space? (see MBITI 1969; WIREDU 2010). Mbiti doubts if any single word or paraphrase can translate the word religion in Africa.

Nevertheless, he went ahead to say that Africans are notoriously religious. What does this imply? The use of the attribute 'traditional religion' to qualify a set of experiences, practices, and cults in Africa in order to bring them under the same European category – religion – might as well justify the power relation between religions of the West and religions of Africa.

That being said, this does not signify that the African philosophy of religion is more of an African philosophical approach to religion and less of an African philosophical approach to African religion. On the contrary, the primary concern in this analysis is that a philosophical approach to African religions should bear a critical look at the general concerns of philosophical investigation into religion and religious issues that are Western, Asian, Indian, etc.

Furthermore, religion generates epistemological and logical problems, which has led to the deconstruction of the concept in European thought. This remark is essential if the new perspective on religion explored in this paper can be understood in its terms and logic. It also implies that, while dealing with a topic such as religion, it may be necessary to separate the meaning of the concept, its origin, and function from those expressions, experiences, practices, and beliefs to which the concept of religion has been used as an umbrella word to categorize. Additionally, some scholars in the study of religion associate it with both the reformation and enlightenment in Europe but fail to accommodate at the same time what it is that made non-theistic religions such as Buddhism and theistic religions such as Christianity belong to the same category – religion. In the present context, the authors are not interested in the definition or meaning of the concept of religion. Instead, it refers to those meta-existential expressions, experiences, practices, and beliefs that bind human beings, individuals, and groups to something transcendent or immanent, as the case may be.

In that line of thought, religion, one can argue, finds its root in the psycho-spiritual composition of the human person, and it intertwines simultaneously with the political and ethnic consciousness of individuals

and groups. So put, but in a complex narrative, religion today, as in the past, plays a significant role in people's identity, even in those who distance themselves from particular religious expressions. The problem becomes more amplified than diffused, more potent than weakened, in a world where the constitution of otherness is becoming more religiously shaped.

Additionally, the atmosphere of religion, religious practices and religious expression across the world, including in Africa, raises much concern over the extent of human responsibility for their lives, fate, and destinies. In other parts of the world, as well as Africa, a common denominator in religious belief is that the object of belief has control over the fate and destiny of the believer; Moreso, where the relationship between the object of belief and the believer encompasses power asymmetry. In religions in Africa, including Christianity and other parts of the world, most people blame external forces for being responsible for the good and the bad that happens to them. Christianity attributes it to grace and heavenly favor, other religions in Africa, Asia and India attribute good fortunes to the favors of the gods and misfortunes as karma or nemesis, respectively. The question is, to what extent is this valid? What is the role of the individual? Or is the individual's life driven about by the vagaries of deities, gods, and spirits?

The authors argue that in the face of the ambivalences and ambiguities associated with the notion and practice of religion and religious belief, *onyenachiya* interrogates the nature of religious belief in which an external force controls an individual, determining his destiny and fate. It argues that the phenomenology and psychology of faith in a God or gods illustrate individual-centeredness in religious belief rather than an organized belief in an absolute monotheist being that exercise total control over the outcome of one's life. The authors claim that *onyenachiya* resolves the dilemma and paradox that pervades human existence and struggles for survival, fate, and destiny. Destiny is seen not as a determined end but as a path to possible futures.

To demonstrate the above claims, the authors will show how the topic relates to the significant issues in philosophy, religion, and religious belief. This first section will take two conceptual approaches, namely, the morphological formation of the concept itself and the analysis of its epistemological content. The second section will be a revisit of the idea of destiny. Given the history of tolerance and religion, the third section will grapple with the relevance of this new perspective to studying religion for religious tolerance. Then we conclude with notes and remarks. The work is both explanatory and expository because it illuminates the theoretical ideas inherent in the concept of *onyenachiya*. Moreover, as a new perspective on the African philosophy of religion, it consists of an African philosophical investigation into religion – the nature of religious belief – and an African philosophical inquiry into the nature of belief in African religion.

Conceptual Framework

Morphological Formation

Morphology is a scientific term used to explain the components and parts of a thing or structure. For example, in linguistic typology, “morphology refers to the mental system involved in word formation or to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed” (ARONOFF & FUDEMAN 2011, 2).

In this context, it is used to describe the parts and structure of the central concept in this paper, namely ‘*onyenachiya*,’ which is its semantic properties. There are two stem words, ‘*onye*’ and ‘*chi*,’ the word ‘*na*’ in between the stem words functions as conjunction and demonstrates a relationship and collaboration or cooperation. The term ‘*ya*’ at the end of the word is a suffix and functions as a third-person pronoun within the linguistic context (Igbo language) where ‘*ya*’ is used. The ‘*ya*’ is a reflexive doubling of ‘*onye*’ because it emphasizes ‘*onye*’ in a reflexive manner. The interest in the concept is more of a philosophical concern than its linguistic meaning. It is more or less a methodological approach to analyzing the epistemological content of the idea inherent in the concept.

Epistemic Content

This section deals with the semantic goal of the concept referred to in this paper, which provides an existential perspective on religion and religious belief. The epistemic content of *onyenachiya* is not reducible to individual scientific use of the concept. Scholars often reduce the use of language in the conceptual development of philosophical ideas to particularism because of the epistemic community from which the concept itself originated. However, thought and words, ideas, and language are intertwined because words are used to express thought, and ideas are born through language. Furthermore, language and words are culturally shaped. Therefore, the epistemic content of *onyenachiya* can apply globally while its linguistic content is born in a cultural context.

Onye

‘*Onye*’ is a demonstrative pronoun (OGBUJA 2006, 32). However, it simultaneously indicates anonymity. Hence, in some ways, it is likened to the Greek *persona*, which, at first, means masked, or something unknown and later extended to social position or roles. Finally, in Roman jurisprudence, it is used as equivalent to a human agent. In African thought (Igbo), unlike in Western philosophy, *onye* as person and a subject cannot be discussed in isolation of a simultaneous understanding of human being. In this category, *onye* refers to person, and, in contrast to the loose Western version of the idea of person or *persona*. *Onye* understood as person implies a human being. The concept of “person” in the Western thought system has been recently extended to machines and computers. The definition of a person relies heavily on rationality and consciousness, which unavoidably excludes some categories of the human species, with dire consequences. In what follows, this paper will look closely at the idea of *onye* in its multiple conceptual dimension.

Onye as Person

In the African (Igbo) linguistic field, the meaning assigned to *onye* will depend on the hyphenation and stress. Consequently, *onye*, and *onyé* have different meanings. In the second *onye*, the vowel *e* goes up, thereby emphasizing *e*. The upward stress gives the sense that Chika J. B. G. Okpalike (2020) articulated in his discussion on '*onye*.' According to him, *onye* can be transliterated as 'giver' generated from its verb '*inye*' to give, following the root word '*nye*.' But he went ahead to discuss *onye* as person, though without emphasizing this relevant distinction. Whereas his semantic analysis cannot be doubted, *onye* as person resides in the positioning of the stress. Hence, *onye*, as person, is the expression with the emphasis on the vowel *e*, pointing downward, which is the concern of this section of the article. Henceforth wherever *onye* is used, it refers to the *onye* with stress on the vowel *e* pointing downwards (that is, *onyè*).

Onye is not used for trees, stones, spirits, or animals. It can only apply in the context of a human being (OGBUJA 2006, 23, 37). A person is someone, and someone refers to a human being, so to say that someone is a person makes the term a predicate (SPAEMANN 2006). *Onye*, understood as person, is used in singular terms. Augustine of Hippo (400 – 415AD) argued that person represents something singular and individual. *Onye* as person, refers necessarily to a human being. In that line of thought, '*onye*' expresses '*mmadu*' as an individual in the universe of other entities (OKPALIKE 2020, 92). Another significant observation before delving into *onye* as person in African philosophy is that person can be descriptive and normative. For instance, *onye no ebe a ahụ* (who is there)? *I bu onye* (who are you)? Whereas *onye* as 'who' will be discussed later, the answers to the two question samples narrow down the descriptive and normative use of the concept of person. It is either the answer starts to describe the physical features or attributes, or it gives personal information, but none of these can be normatively evaluated. But, some answers may require evaluative words, like in the second question about who a person is. Consequently, addressing someone as a person or non-person in the African thought system does not nullify that a person is human. This idea will be extended in the next section on *onye* as who.

The general idea of person in African philosophy narrows personhood to a normatively, ontologically, and communally centered notion (MENKITI 1984, 2006; IROEGBU, 2000; GYEKYE 1992; WIREDU 1992, 2009; CHIMAKONAM AND OGBONNA 2021; ODIMEGWU 2008; MOLEFE 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020; TSHIVHASE 2013; OYOWE 2018; MATOLINO 2014; IKUENOBE 2015 2016; KAPHAGAWANI 2004).

Wiredu (1996, 2009), following the line of thought of Menkiti (1984), portrayed the concept of person as both ontological and normative, with linguistic nuances. The ontological dimension of the idea of person in African thought is related to the previous claim that persons are human beings, which calls to question the nature of human beings (GYEKYE 1995; KAPHAGAWANI 2004; IKUENOBE 2016). The normative concept of person is evaluative of the individual's ethical or moral life, or a life of virtues (MENKITI 1984; GYEKYE 1992; WIREDU 1992). Hence, individuals become persons in the normative sense through a constant effort towards a life of ethical conduct (GYEKYE 1997;

MOLEFE 2020, 196). Consequently, the illustrative question, '*onye*,' with its attending correlates, demonstrates that the term person is normative and descriptive. An aspect that the question opens up for discussion is the notion of 'who.'

Onye as 'who'

The question *I bu onye?* – who are you? is asking for more than a name or identification. The variations of contexts in which *onye* could be used as a 'who question' points also to anonymity. *Onye no ebe ahu?* – (who is there), could be anybody, thus, 'who' is not definite in that sense, it is not determined, until who is there is answered. It could be a cat or a dog generating noise in a house that will create room for a question of that sort. The task in this section is an analysis of *onye* in the context of who, but a who that refers to a human being. *I bu onye* raises the concerns of personal as well social identity. Therefore, in the context of this article, what does *I bu onye* demand as an answer? Hannah Arendt (1998) provided us with a raw material to tackle this, and, according to her, the 'who' can only be known through one's biography (ARENDR 1998, 186). This biography is not about being human or not, it is about answering the question of what you are (IDIKA 2018). Subsequently, 'we can trickle down the who someone is as the story, where the person is the hero. But the story is also about relationships and values that shaped the person's life, actions, and choices that made the person who she is/was. It is about the roles and functions the person exercised, (IDIKA 2021, 92).

Furthermore, according to Charles Taylor (1994), the 'who' a person is, concerns how people understand themselves and what is most important to them. It includes their values and convictions. Hence, he argued that the answer to the question of 'who I am' is beyond giving names or age. It is about what is crucial to people. For him, the 'who' that one is, is where one stands in the scheme of things, a standpoint that provides one with the moral frame and horizon of action in different contexts (TAYLOR 2001, 27). This falls apart from the standard argument in the African philosophy of personhood, which says personhood is earned from or bestowed by the community. Invariably, depending on the context, when A asks B 'who are you,' it does not always follow that B will answer in the way Taylor propounds. Instead, it might mean a question of B's place, status, or position in the community as one who earned or is bestowed with personhood. For our interest here, these landscapes of the signification of the *onye* can be developed elsewhere.

Put together, *Onye* is the *who* one is; the one defined by commitments, one able to take a standpoint in matters of value, including matters concerning one's life, dream, future, etc. *Onye* is a person not simply because of belongingness to the specie of humans but also because of being a member of the human community.

In the articulation of *onyenachiya* within African philosophy of religion, it is imperative to note that in the constitution of *onye* as elaborated in the preceding section, African scholars, philosophers, theologians, social-anthropologist, and ethnologists, among others, have never failed to identify a spiritual, metaphysical, ontological or religious dimension of a person. Therefore,

these argued more or less that there are material and immaterial constituting elements of a person. Additionally, the communal dimension of *onye* is not reducible to social and ethical implications of belongingness. It includes a spiritual dimension since existence is circular in the African worldview, and the world beyond is connected in significant ways with the physical world. It is in the sense that the theme of *onyenachiya* occupies the space between those worlds in that moment of connectedness. This paper will now go ahead to highlight the concept of *chi* in order to introduce *onyenachiya* as a new perspective in the African philosophy of religion.

Chi

The word *chi* has multiple semantic and metaphysical modifications in historical terms, especially with the onset of Christianity, in that social, cultural, and epistemic context (Igbo) where the concept is used. A lot has been said and written about the idea of *chi* and its nuances. This section will present a brief overview and critique of the concept of '*chi*' where necessary. The *chi* with the small letter 'c' will be preferred. The *chi* with the big letter 'C' is a development within the study of Christian and African theologies, and as such, it has been subjected to changes in the course of history. The presupposed changes in history imply the impact of those changes on its definition, meaning, and usage. However, it is unclear to what extent these changes affect the epistemic goals of the term '*chi*'. In the course of the present discussion, the extent to which the changes affected its epistemic property will be exposed.

As some African theologians and religious scholars have argued, *chi* is more of an existential than an ontological concept. The idea itself has been mainly dealt with under the category of religiosity. It has been chiefly studied under African traditional religion since it is presupposed to be religious. However, African Christian theologians have transposed it in their inculturation theology for a long time. Furthermore, the term *chi* is anthropological, and because of the multiple dimension of the human personality and the binding character of *chi* to a person, *chi* as a concept has a multi-layered interpretation.

There is no doubt that the concept of *chi* seems to be elusive or, at most, ambiguous. Ikenga Metuh (1981) observed that the term defies all etymology. It is a point to be emphasized that the distinction made between the *chi* with a big 'C' and the one with a small 'c' is a result of the struggle of some African authors to counteract the European ignorance that the African mind is incapable of conceiving or perceiving the European god (WIREDU 2010, 34, HEGEL 1956). Consequently, they began juxtaposing the idea of 'Chi' (with the big letter 'C') with the concept of Chi Ukwu, supreme being, etc. (ILLOGU 1965; OKAFOR 1992). The idea presented is not a denial or contestation of the existence of God or a supreme being. Instead, it purports that the context of differentiation between 'c' and 'C' leads to a wrong direction, which in some salient ways is a reproduction of religious imperialism, in which *chi* is a sub-set entity to the composited *Chi-Ukwu*, which assumes a single universal deity (CHUKWUKERE 1983, 522). Accordingly, Chukwukere (1983, 523) writes:

In the immense but widely scattered literature on *chi*, confusion still lingers over the exact “meaning” and full religious and sociological significance of the word. The main reason behind this unhappy situation can be traced back to the apparently strong legacy left by early Christian missionary scholars and amateur pioneer ethnographers (e.g., Basden 1921; Talbot 1926; Thomas 1913), from which “modern” students of Igbo religion and epistemology ought to break away.

The concept of *chi* has a religious background because it is often associated with gods, spirits, and other metaphysical entities. Although, as a phenomenal concept, i.e. it has an existential component, *chi* is not reducible to the physical and functional properties of the idea. It is a constituent element of religious belief. The pervading question, one may argue, is to what extent *chi* as sub-scripts of gods, spirits, or metaphysical entities impacts the individuals’ lives, choices, decisions, and future as against the autonomy or freedom of the individual to choose, decide or act otherwise and the responsibility that arises from them. Overview and interrogations of some of the definitions and meanings attributed to *chi* will be laid out for the purpose pursued here.

There is this understanding of *chi* as a personal god (OKERE 1971; ARINZE 1978; EKENNIA 2003; MADU 1995; ACHEBE 1986). Okere and Arinze (1978) added that *chi* is the author of destiny, or *akaraka*. A different section will focus on the idea of destiny. However, it is important to note that destiny cannot be conceived as a determined end to which an individual is condemned. This is because destiny is thought of as synonymous with *akaraka*, and *akaraka* is understood as talents, natural capacities, and skills. If true, then the individual has a level of responsibility to choose different ends by enhancing their natural abilities, talents, and capabilities. Destiny, being the same with *akaraka*, does not imply fate or determinism. Individuality and unrepeatability are distinctive attributes of *chi* in most literature on the concept of *chi* (OJIKE 1985, EKENNIA 2003). OKAFOR C. (2004) said it manifests a ‘phenomenology of pairing,’ and Achebe called *chi* one’s other identity in the spirit world, a *doppelgänger*.

The concept of *chi* contrast with Christian monotheism because every individual has a *chi*, and no two *chi* are the same. It is a convolution to transpose this idea of *chi* to a universal absolute *chi* with a big letter ‘C’. The concept of *chi* derives from its intrinsic individuality. Because no two persons have the same *chi*, a belief in it, which is also intentional, is characterized in this context by its relational content to the one who expresses such a belief. The concept of *chi* illustrates religiosity, which must be seen from the individual’s relation to religious experience, or object of religious belief rather than a collective relation to any of those, except in its plurality, each person relating to its *chi* in a plural context of different *chis*. A look at Jewish religion might seem like an objection to the argument in favour of individual relation to the object of religious belief or

expression, especially if one acknowledges *chi* as an unavoidable concept in understanding religion. It is common knowledge that the object of the Jewish religion is referred to as the *chi* of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Jews as a people, or a collective only share or participate in that *chi* that is identified as the *chi* of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moreover, Isaac and Jacob are the son and grandson of Abraham respectively. *Onyenachiya* exposes this personal relationship to the object of belief.

Onyenachiya

There is no corresponding translation of *onyenachiya* into English. Any translation will lose the epistemic goal of the concept. However, a transliteration suggests ‘a person and their god.’ Borrowing from the previous enunciation of *chi* as individualized and personalized, it means that *onyenachiya* re-emphasized this personal relationship to one’s god. Other nuances are *munachim* (transliteration – I and my god) and *ginachigi* (you and your god). Both transliterations distort the meaning because *chi* is much more than the idea of god but that is the closest meaning in English. It is noteworthy that the word on the left side of the conjunction *na* is repeated in a reflexive form on the right side by using a reflexive personal pronoun *chim*, *chiya*, *chigi*. Thus, *onyenachiya* illustrates a possessive emphasis, as seen in the earlier nuances. The semantic analysis reveals a self-reflexive possessive usage. The semantic difference between the first person and a second person singular possessive expression is the neutrality of the third – *onye*. *Onye* is neutral in the same way that it points to a person, no matter who, and it is anonymous, meaning it can apply to anybody, anywhere, in any context. It demonstrates third-person phenomenal belief, an individual’s beliefs in themselves, or experience of internal dimensional unity, expressed as a continuous relationship rather than a dependent determined hierarchical existential experience.

Onyenachiya accentuates the etymological understanding of religion as a relationship that is binding. Wiredu defined religion (2010, 34) as the entertainment of a “certain ontological and/or cosmological beliefs about the nature of the world and human destiny and to have an attitude of trust, dependency, or unconditional reverence toward that which is taken to be the determiner of that destiny, whether it be an intelligent being or an aspect of reality.”

Given this definition, a pertinent question arises, namely, whether the relationship found in *onyenachiya* is a dependency? There might be an element of dependency; however, in so far as *chi*, as explored here, is mainly seen in the light of capacity, ability, talent, etc., which, in a greater measure, underscore the fate and destiny of the individual in most cases. In the nuances, *chi* is personalized. It reveals a threshold of self-evaluation and relationship that is neither hierarchical nor overly dependent but collaborative.

Onyenachiya is not simply a word or a concept emerging from nowhere to add to a long list of emerging concepts. *Onyenachiya* has an epistemological content because it obliges space for epistemic possibilities. It also projects an internal constitution and external dimensional functionality of a person or an individual in relation to the individual’s choices and actions. This again points to the individual nature of religion. It is important to, at this point, note that the term

'individual' should be separated from the word 'private'. Hence, to say that religion is personal is not the same as thing as the privatization of religion. The expressions *chim*, *chigi*, and *chiya* can only be used within a social-cultural life.

Onyenachiya resolves the paradox and ambivalence in understanding *chi* as something internal and external to the agent, which controls the individual. For instance, we find the paradox in chapters four and fourteen of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In chapter four, he writes, "man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*", and in fourteen, he writes again, "when a man says yes, his *chi* says yes also." The paradox consists of the tension between 'not being able to rise above one's *chi* and compelling the *chi* to do one's bidding.' The paradox in these two instances of the relationship between one and their *chi* re-opens the question: to what extent is *chi* a determinant of what a person becomes? In the first instance, no one can rise above their *chi*. The tension is doused if *chi* is understood as an inner driving force in a person, as a person's capacity, talent, gifts, and natural skill, which, if explored and put into use, offer the person possibilities in the future. Subsequently, not being able to rise above one's *chi* will mean that one's becoming depends on those abilities, strengths, and even weaknesses. In the context of the deficiency, the second expression by Achebe keys in, i.e., if one says yes, the *chi* says yes. Life is a struggle, and individuals are consistently confronted with situations where they want to give up or situations that frighten them, thus dousing their motivations. The person's determination to overcome the obstacles stopping the person is the same as saying yes to the *chi*.

Furthermore, it attunes to the traditional thesis in the epistemology of the mind that an individual's first-person beliefs in a phenomenal state are infallible. Although the epistemic expression that alludes to one's relation to itself cannot be false, the epistemic status expressed is best known to the subject – *onye* and the content of *onye's* belief in *chiya*. Imagine a situation where an agent i. e. a human person acts, and an interlocutor, not being aware of the reason or justification for the action in the first place, addresses the one who acted with the following expression – *ginachigi ma*. Here *ginachigi* as demonstrated earlier is second-person-singular variant of *onyenachiya*. The *ma* at the end illustrates an epistemic state. Put together, only a person is capable of the complete reflective act whereby the nature and source of the act itself are present in the consciousness of the one knowing. (REICHMANN 1985, 205). Thus, *onyenachiya* deals with the content of belief as epistemological rather than metaphysical. Here, *onyenachiya* as a phenomenal belief in oneself as having epistemic status, forms an epistemic nexus between cognition and the external world. The personalization of *chi* in *chim*, *chigi*, and *chiya* is distinctive, affirmative, and demonstrates a personal belief and agent-centered destiny.

The Question of Destiny Revisited

The meaning and nature of destiny constitute one of the perennial problems confronting the study of metaphysics, African philosophy, and philosophy of religion. One often comes across the notion in the philosophy of religion when dealing with the issue of man's relationship with his maker, or, in African

philosophy, when one deals with the question of the place of the ancestors and their relationship with the living. It also confronts one in metaphysics when issues of free will and determinism are entertained. In this part of the article, we shall revisit the question of destiny from the perspective of the African philosophy of religion. In doing this, we shall respond to three important questions that arise in any reflection on the nature of destiny. The first question is what is destiny? The second question is, what is the relationship between an individual's destiny and his /her *chi*? The third question is, who chooses the content of an individual's destiny, the individual or his *chi*?

The concept of destiny lacks a univocal connotation. Its meaning varies based on the perspective. Etymologically believed to have been drawn from the Latin word *destinare*, the notion of destiny refers to that which has been firmly established. It is understood as constituting the power that controls events that happens to a person. Destiny carries the idea that a person might have been pre-determined in an irreversible manner by a superior power (OPATA 1998, 146). Metuh (1985, 24) has described destiny as that which is formed at the moment of an individual's conception, where god assigns an aspect of himself as *chi* to the individual, which goes before the individual and chooses the type of package s/he is to be born with. Chibuikwe O. Ukeh (2007, 224) refers to it as that which brings a person all his good from the Supreme Being, wards off all evils from its bearer, and guides and protects them at all times. For Achebe (1975), destiny can be equated with *chi* in the sense that a person cannot rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*.

For this study and from the perspective of Igbo cosmology and traditional religion, destiny is the totality of who an individual is and what he/she is thrown into the universe to accomplish or actualize. It constitutes an individual's purpose in life. It is that which makes an individual who he/she is. Metaphysically, the idea of destiny is often expressed in the discussion of the nature of free will and determinism. In this case, the following questions constitute questions bordering on the nature of destiny: is man free or determined in his actions, decisions, achievements, or lack thereof? Does a person's success or failure emanate from his/her free will, and is an individual free or determined generally in his life's journey? One might notice that the question of individual autonomy is implied in the above questions on the nature of destiny. There are no easy answers to these questions.

It is essential at this point to underline the relationship between destiny and an individual's *chi* to begin responding to the above questions. But first, one needs to understand what *chi* signifies. In the Igbo worldview, there are two senses of the word *chi*; the first is '*Chi*', which indicates the Igbo metaphysical notion of 'the Supreme God', otherwise known as the creator of the universe. The second sense of '*chi*' signifies 'an individual's personal god or divine, angelic guard' (ACHEBE 1986, 17; ISICHEI 1976, 25; ARINZE 1978, 88-89; UKEH 2007, 224; ONYIBOR 2019, 88).

There is an intrinsic connection between the idea of 'chi' and 'destiny' in Igbo-African cosmology and religious belief. 'chi' represents a person's guardian/personal god, which determines the success or failure of a person's life. Destiny is the purpose or goal of a person in life, which he/she is to fulfil as they sojourn on earth. Destiny represents an individual's predesigned attitudes and accomplishments in life. Destiny is closely related to the idea of 'chi' because it is the custodian of an individual's destiny or fortune. In this sense, the Igbo believe that a person's *chi* determines the destiny with which a person comes into the world.

Many scholars have expressed the above conception of the interrelatedness of destiny and 'chi' in an individual's life. For instance, Madu (1995, 33) is of the opinion that the notion of 'chi' signifies a personal god-divine or spirit that animates human beings. Similarly, Ekennia refers to *chi* as a unique life force each person possesses (2003, 27). This implies that no individual can have the same chi or destiny as another, thus showing each individual's peculiarity. Scholars such as Okere (1971, 142), Ojike (1955, 183), and Achebe (1986, 16; 1975, 94-95), among others, have suggested in their different essays the relationship between destiny and *chi* in Igbo cosmology. These scholars believe that chi is directly involved in an individual's choice of destiny or the type of destiny package with which an individual comes into the world. This raises the question of who chooses the content of an individual's destiny, the individual or his *chi*? There are three responses to this fundamental question of destiny. First, the content of a person's destiny is a collaborative decision of the individual and his *chi* (UKEH 2007, 224). Second, it is the individual's *chi* that chooses the destiny package of an individual and lets him/her out into the world to fulfil it (METUH, 1999, 50; OKERE 1971, 142; OJIKE 1995, 183; ACHEBE 1986, 16; 1975, 94-95). Third, the individual chooses the content of his/her destiny, and his/her *chi* conforms to the choice. This is encapsulated in the Igbo-African belief that *Onye kwe chi ya ekwe* (when an individual chooses/accepts, his/her chi chooses/accepts with him/her). This is another way of saying *onyenachiya* (each individual and his/her god).

It means that destiny and *chi* work hand in hand to determine who an individual is and the task or purpose an individual is assigned to accomplish in life. The question of who chooses the content of destiny, upon which the individual's self-actualization depends, is at once answered when one understands that aspect of 'chi', which connotes the divine-guardian angel of an individual who helps the individual achieve success or failure. Following this, whether one pitch his/her tent with those who argue that the content of a person's destiny is a collaborative decision of both the individual and his *chi* (UKEH 2007, 224) or those who say that it is the individual that chooses the content of his destiny (GBADEGESIN 1983, 175), or even with those who hold that it is the individual's *chi* that chooses the destiny package of an individual and lets them out into the world to fulfil it (METUH 1999, 50); the point being made here is that *chi* is involved in the formation and expression of an individual's destiny. Hence, an understanding of destiny as *chi* or *chi* as an individual's destiny is by no means erroneous. On the contrary, it is an individual that first chooses a package of

destiny, and then his/her *chi* aligns with it. This ensures individual freedom in matters of destiny and the idea of *onyenachiya*.

Implication *Onyenachiya* for Religious Tolerance

Societies in the 21st century are becoming more diverse and complex because of the multiple factors associated with globalization and the global mobility of people. In these increasingly heterogeneous societies, people have different cultural and religious commitments, allegiances, traditions, beliefs; different languages, and ways of expression. Indeed, this diversity can enrich the quality of social life. However, the social and global tension arising from it calls for attention. Within this frame of social experiences, the questions of toleration, recognition, co-existence, secularisation, and the opposing rise of religious voices in the public space arise.

The idea of toleration/tolerance, recognition, co-existence and secularization seems for many to promote the idea of a world for everybody. However, is a world for everybody realizable or an illusion? The second appears to be the case if one looks at everyday life's ideal and painful realities. The evidence speaks for itself. The evidence includes regional wars and conflicts, intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts, terrorism, nuclear competition, and biological and chemical weapons production that make almost every social and political space a potential risk zone. We cannot also overlook the impact of wars and conflict: The mass of refugees, migrants, and displaced persons, the victims of wars and rape, discrimination, destruction of human, material, and natural resources; the loss of faith in humanity; the over-emphasis on individualism or extreme prevalence of the hold on communalism; the transformation of societies from homogeneous to heterogeneous societies, and religious fundamentalism; with other issues like prejudice, stereotypes, complexes of inferiority and superiority, negative patriotism and the dialectics of "US vs. THEM." In the face of all these realities, speaking of a world for everybody is a mirage, an illusion. Our world seems divided into the rich and the poor, the developed and underdeveloped/developing, east and west, and north and south. It is divided into different cultures, religions; different interests, and identity groups. It also seems to be the case that wars and conflicts of the present era are divided along the lines of culture/religion, even when such wars are caused by inequality, political interests, and different conceptions and perceptions of injustice. Why is that the case? What is the place of religion in the wars going on since the last century? The transition from political insurgency, civil disobedience, and ethnic conflict to religious wars raises much concern. It is either that religion has become a tool to be manipulated because of its ambivalence and rootedness in the psycho-spiritual composition of human beings, or religion is intertwined with the political and ethnic consciousness of the individuals. Whichever way one looks at it, it suggests that religion today, as in the past, plays a significant role in people's identity, even in those who distance themselves from particular religious expressions. The problem becomes more complex in a religiously pluralized world – where religious identity is becoming more amplified than diffused, more potent than weakened; in a world where the constitution of otherness is becoming more

religiously 'shaped' than ever. In such a world, how is religious tolerance possible? How is co-existence possible? In what ways can one say that a world for every religion and culture is possible?

The root of religious intolerance in Europe is to be traced to religious controversies and struggles, which resulted from the Reformation and which was the root of religious division in Europe in the 16th and 17th century. There was a need to mediate and "cope with fierce religious difference[,] which were a continuing threat to civil order and personal security" (HORTON & MENDUS 1985, 1 – 2). Therefore, raising the topic of religious tolerance in view of the landscape of global events associated with religious differences is neither a denial that these social realities are not only specific to this era nor a denial that efforts have not been made to deal with such realities to make toleration and co-existence possible. Besides the attempt to secularize the state, religious intolerance in 17th century Britain was the reason for Locke's *Letter on Religious Toleration*. Arendt's (1963, 1970) experience as a Jew in Germany provoked her ideas on toleration. Mill's *Concept of Liberty in the era of Tyranny of public opinion in Victorian Britain* inspired his proposal on toleration (Mendus, 1988). Therefore, the question of the possibility of toleration and co-existence is historical, and the effort to contain the consequences of religious differences has been a concern for humanity for a long while. However, despite these efforts, intolerance perseveres even more than ever experienced in history. Rather than solve the problems for which they are intended, new forms of intolerance continue to emerge (MENDUS 1988, 1), demanding from us a decision and an alternative. To think of any option would also include asking why those ideas did little in promoting tolerance. The problem is with the conceptualization of tolerance, within which either tolerance is synonymous with secularization or refers to policy. Secularization is mostly associated with state neutrality towards religion and the idea of non-interference. Nevertheless, non-interference and neutrality of the state towards religion seem hard to sustain without promoting some other thing that is opposed to religion itself, in the present case – secularization.

However, it does not mean that religious tolerance was absent in other cultures and parts of the world. It also represents Europe's exclusive claim to many other aspects of human achievement, morals, values, and principles. Religious tolerance is not exclusively European.

Moreover, the conditions that gave birth to religious tolerance and its existence in other parts of the world without being a child of circumstance draw a significant difference between the understanding of tolerance in Europe and other parts of the world. Religious differences exist not only in Europe but also in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Adherents lived side by side with others; they interacted and co-existed without the type of religious violence that gave birth to works on religious tolerance in Europe. It is this difference that offers hope that a new account of tolerance that looks at its meaning and reality across the world has the potential to address the question of religious tolerance today.

In the words of Chris Beneke, “toleration came as a great blessing to early modern Europe and America. It brought an end to decades of religious slaughter. It helped bring peace to Germany, prosperity to the Netherlands, and migrants to New York.” (BENEKE & GREYDA 2011, 114).

The effort to secularize the state has resulted in rising religious voices in the public sphere, what an author called global rebellion (JUERGENSEMEYER, 2008) or Apocalyptic Armageddon (MORTENSEN, 2003). There is a desperate need to develop a pragmatic blueprint that would offer a plausible principle for interreligious and intercultural dialogue with practical implications for defusing the tension and confusion inhibiting social cooperation and tolerance. *Onyenachiya* bespeaks tolerance and provides an interreligious paradigm that will accommodate collective identities without undermining the particularities of groups, uniqueness, and inalienable rights of individuals. It inaugurates a new meaning to religious tolerance because *onyenachiya* has a social value. It emphasizes a firm commitment to respecting others’ beliefs as a value concept. It signifies participation, responsibility, and goodwill for social cohesion. Unlike the idea of toleration and its practice that seems to be one-sided, *onyenachiya* calls for mutual respect. *Onyenachiya* is a religious concept, and as a result, it overcomes those challenges to secularization or neutrality of the state with which societies are confronted. Hence it gives hope that co-existence is possible, and we require such a moral paradigm that guarantees the realisability of a world for everybody. *Onyenachiya*, as a new perspective on the African philosophy of religion, offers a recommendable approach where no religion or culture claims supremacy over others. It possesses the power of mediation and carries the principle of a recognitive attitude.

Conclusion

The argument in African philosophy that personhood is something to be achieved is connected to the idea *chi*, which plays a role in the person’s becoming. However, the paper argued that its role is neither super-imposed nor independent of the individual. Instead, if *chi* is a destiny shaper, the individual exercises a relationship that accentuates collaboration and complementarity. The personalization of *onyenachiya* and its other nuances, *munachim*, and *ginachigi*, expose the personal nature of religious belief. This is not only within the social, cultural, and religious context from where the concept of *onyenachiya* originates but also because *onye* is anonymous and always stands for someone in place and time. Further, because *chi* has a landscape of meaning that incorporates metaphysical and existential elements, it provides a neutral context for religious dialogue.

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