

AUTHENTIC PERSONHOOD IN TRADITIONAL IGBO-AFRICAN THOUGHT

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Abstract

The precarious nature of human life and the general social disorder that characterise human society is a human creation. A good human community requisite for human well-being is equally not natural but man-made. This type of community is made possible by the conscious, deliberate and conscientious efforts and activities of good persons or what I have called 'Authentic Personhood' in this discourse. This paper therefore, discusses the notion of authentic personhood in traditional Igbo thought and argues that the qualities and values of authentic personhood create the wholesome human relations and environment necessary for social cohesion and human well-being. The paper further claims that the Igbo traditional notion of authentic personhood is better than the Western conception of personhood in this respect and can therefore serve as a cure to most of the ills of our modern society if well understood, and rightly applied in human interactions and general social engineering.

Keywords: Personhood, Community, Values, Well-Being, Igbo, Authentic

1. Introduction

In this paper, I attempt a conceptualization and analysis of what authentic personhood means in Igbo traditional thought. Part of what I did in this analysis is to discuss the Igbo understanding of community in which the notion of authentic personhood is better situated and understood. I argue that the notion of authentic personhood in Igbo traditional thought is more of a moral consideration than a metaphysical or ontological description of some sort of static qualities, and based on this, I will enumerate and discuss the moral qualities and values that an *ezigbo nwaafọ obodo* (authentic person) should possess and consistently exhibit in his/her daily conducts and behaviours in his/her personal life and interactions with others. I call these moral qualities *The Essential*

Structures of Authentic Personhood. I make this attempt because I believe this is what is lacking in the few works already done on the subject of a good person (*ezigbo mmadu*) in traditional Igbo thought (Ukpokolo, 2010; Agulana, 2011). I consider these works important on the subject of discourse. However, they failed to discuss adequately the various moral qualities that produce a good person of which the person must consistently and conscientiously display in his/her daily activities. My contribution in this discourse, I believe will fill the lacuna.

Since I have earlier stated that authentic personhood in traditional Igbo thought is situated within the community and her ethos which makes the notion of authentic personhood a moral consideration, I argue in the first section of this work that there is a considerable difference between the West and Igbo African understanding of community. The sense of fellowship, bonding and communion that constitutes and describes community in Igbo traditional thought makes possible the ideals of solidarity and cooperative togetherness that is needed for human well-being. This sense of community discourages individualism but enthrones Ubuntu as a way of life among the Igbos and indeed Africans. On the other hand, individualism characterises life in Western communities.

According to Eudamonism, the fundamental intrinsic value in ethics is human good – the *summum bonum*. It is that which everyone and by extension every society by nature desires because the good life (*ezigbo ndu*) is conducive to the nature of the human person after all nobody rejects a good, sweet and comfortable life. The fact of the reality of human ambivalence and depravity does not take away the natural desire for man to live a good life. However, despite the fact that the desire for human good is natural in man, yet human good does not just come naturally. It takes the deliberate, conscious and conscientious efforts and activities of man to bear. Man must consciously and deliberately promote the good side of him over his evil tendencies in order to overcome evil with good. Consistent and conscientious choice to promote good over evil is the feature of an authentic personality. Authentic personhood is therefore the deliberate, consistent and conscientious effort of the human person to promote good over evil, engage in good conducts

and behaviours, lives according to the traditional laws and customs (omenala) of his/her community for his/her own good and the good of the community which is the good of all.

2. Igbo People and Their Understanding of Community

Community in Igbo (African) thought differs from what it is in Western conception. The West sees the community as a mere secular institution established primarily to ensure social order among human beings living in a particular geographical area (Hobbes 1651; Locke 1823; Rawls 1971; Nozick 1974). In the west, man is a social being to the extent that he lives among other social beings like himself, but he is not in sacred communion with them. It is one thing to be thrown-into-existence with other beings like yourself, and yet it is another thing to be-in-communion-with these other beings such that you are in constant mutual fellowship with them (nzuko umunne na umunna). It is this fellowship/communion (nzuko/nriko) that is the essence of community in African thought and it is only within this context that the maxim 'I am because we are' is meaningful and understood. In Igbo conception, the community is seen in terms of communality. It is perceived as a communion of souls or persons linked together by common ancestry, shared values and interpersonal bonds. Corroborating this, Gyekye defines the Akan notion of community as "a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds, biological and/ or non- biological, who consider themselves primarily as members of the group and who have common interests, goals, and values" (Gyekye, 1992:56-78).

In Igbo thought, the community goes beyond the living human beings to include both the ancestors, deities, spirits and the earth goddess. These members of the community both living and invisible play definitive and important roles for the wellbeing of the community. The Igbo people believe that the invisible members of the community assist in guiding, guarding and protecting the living members of the community thus, the idea and practice of paying homage or pouring libations to the ancestors or the guardian spirits during family prayers and social gatherings.

The significance of the community among the Igbo cannot be overemphasized. The community is held up very highly by the Igbo. To this end therefore, the community has a stronghold on the

individual. The kinsmen (umunna) mentality pervades everywhere and resonates strongly Mbiti's maxim that 'I am because we are and since we are therefore, I am'. Such names as *Igwebuike* (community is strength) *mmadu ka eji aka* (we prevail by the people), *umunnabu chi ibeya* (a man's kinsmen are his helpers or rescuers) confirm the belief in communality among the Igbos. This is the idea conveyed by the Yoruba saying that, *enialaso mi; bi mbabojuwehintimoria won enia mi inu mi a dun, ara mi a ya gaga; enialaso mi* (people are my clothes, when I look back of me and see many of my people following me, I am very glad and pleased and I am lively for people are my clothes). Agulana alluded to this significance attached to the community among the Igbo when he states that, 'the Igbo usually attach great importance to community life. He uses some Igbo phrases to drive home his point. The Igbo phrase, *ikwu na ibe* which is translated in English as *person and community* expresses the idea that the individual needs the anodyne of community if he/she hopes to live meaningfully in the world. Again, the Igbo maxim, *otu onye abughi osisi* which means 'no one is an island unto his or herself' expresses the idea that no individual, no matter how strong, is capable of surviving alone in the world (Agulana, 2011:152). Agulana further stresses that this idea about the impossibility of individuals in the world to exist or subsist without human fellowship is captured in the modern existentialist dictum that the individual is a being-in-the-world or that he/she is a being-with-others. However, I must add at this juncture beyond Agulana's submission that although the Igbo idea of community captures the idea of man as a being-in-the-world or as a being-with-others, it goes beyond it. This is so because it is possible for man to be-with-others, yet he or she is not in communion with them, that is, does not have any shared fellowship with the others. He or she may just be an atomistic member of the society without any *bonding, communion and fellowship*.

It is this bonding, communion and fellowship which is the inescapable hallmark of Community in Igbo thought that makes possible Ubuntu philosophy. Thus, it is within the community setting that the individual gets the resources that help him/her lead a minimally meaningful life for certainly there are things the individual cannot provide for him/herself and certainly there are

challenges he/she cannot overcome all by him/herself (Obioha, 2015:208). These and other numerous benefits make the Igbo to place great premium on the community. Nwala (1985:46) corroborates this when he states that among the Igbo, the being of community is prior or more important than that of its individual members. The reason is that it is only within the community that the individuals can realise their goals and aspirations. However, this should not be understood to mean that the community stifles the freedom of her individual members. Although such premium is placed on the community, yet this is not tantamount to community absolutism as is the case in Hobbesian Leviathan of political absolutism in which the opinion of the individual members of the community or political society do not count in policy matters or decision making process. After all, the community does not ‘think’. It is the individuals that think while the community harnesses and adopts the thoughts of the individuals that represent and will realise the best interest of the community which is the good of all.

Although, Hobbes’ reason for proffering such absolutism is to avoid the slipping of the community back into the pre-political society which he called the state of nature. But in Igbo sense of community, such absolutism is not needed for what such absolutism can achieve (in terms of social order and over all community wellbeing), will be better achieved by the Igbo sense of democracy which is called ‘Ohacracy’ – government by the ‘oha’ (people). This is what Wiredu called consensual democracy. The basic principle or rational basis for ‘Ohacracy’ is “Igbo *enwe Eze*”. This does not literally mean that the Igbo do not have a king, what it rather means is that “*ohanweEze*” (the people own the king) and not the other way round, that is, the king owns the people and can therefore do to and with the people whatever he wants. In Igbo sense of community, the *Eze* (king) does not lord it over the people. The Igbo abhors tyranny. The people gather at various levels of political association (family, *umunna*, *obodo*) to *ohacratically*, that is, consensually discuss and advance the welfare and wellbeing of the community. Corroborating this, Okechukwu Izunwa opines that “the democratic spirit is easily discernible in Igbo and through the forms of government which we find within her organization viz: the family (*ezi*), the compound (*obi*), the village (*obodo*) etc. all political thinking transcends

individual domains into these vast conglomerates” (Izunwa, 2006:149). In the words of T.U. Nwala, “Igbo political community is an organic community” (Nwala, 1985:167). As an organic community, its strength lies in unanimity made possible by *igbaizu* (period of consultation) where all sorts of compromises are reached for the betterment of all. These processes are designed to arrive at what can be called “the general will” of the people or community.

There are various categories or groups that make up the Igbo socio-political organization. They are namely the family which is predominantly polygamous, after this is the *umunna* (patrilineage). Igbo people consider *Umunna* as the most basic and the most political unit. Members of a particular *umunna* are bound by the same ancestral ties and each *umunna* is headed by *Okpara*– the first male born who also coordinates the affairs of the *umunna* unit. The *umunna* unit is followed by the village or the clan which is a combination of many *umunna*. After the village is the *obodo* (the town) which is made up of a group of villages. Thus, *obodo* is the largest political unit in Igbo land.

3. Personhood in Igbo Thought

Personhood in Igbo (African) thought is more of a moral consideration than an ontological or metaphysical description. Therefore, the idea of isolating one or two psychological features of an individual as the defining characteristic of the individual and then attempt to define a person based on the possession of such features, as we have it in western conception, does not obtain in African conception of personhood. This habit of isolating one or two psychical features of a lone individual (like, rationality, memory, will, soul,e.t.c) and then defining a person based on that is what Menkiti calls the minimal definition of the person whereas a robust and a more adequate way of describing the human person reaches for a maximal definition. Whereas the latter is definitive of African, the former is a Western conception (Menkiti,1984:173). So whereas in the West, personhood is defined by reference to certain physical or psychological characteristics of the lone individual, in African (Igbo) thought, the human person is defined within the community. His life as lived *hic et nunc* within the context of community ethos

is what defines him/her. Who he/she is or what he/she is cannot be understood outside his/her envioning community.

This is not to say that one's physical or psychological make-up do not matter in Igbo understanding of the human person. For instance, an imbecile or an insane person's actions may be treated with a wave of hand with the saying, "*hapu onyehahu, na oburo mmadu*" (which is literally translated "leave that person, he/she is not a human being"). Rather what I am saying here is that the definition of personhood in Igbo thought is a moral consideration. The judgement as to whether an individual is a person is a moral judgement made on the personality of that individual within the provisions of the community ethos. It is in line with this view that Menkiti states that,

As far as African societies (*including the Igbo – emphasis mine*) are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse. Hence, the African emphasized the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain social self-hood, i.e., become a person with all the inbuilt excellences implied by the term (1984:175).

(Authentic) Personhood, therefore may not apply to the foetuses, infants, imbeciles, the insane, the comatose etc. not on the ground of the non- possession of certain psychological features, but on the ground that there is no imputing of rightness or wrongness to their actions. This is because personhood is more of a moral consideration than an ontological privation. These categories of individuals are fully humans and are entitled to certain community rights and privileges for the fact that they are humans, however, such moral considerations or judgement of being an *ezigbo onye obodo* (authentic person) may not apply to them. Therefore, it is not a question of attaining full personhood (to use the words of Menkiti) but that of being an authentic person. Once the imputing of rightness

or wrongness can be made of one's actions and character, then the person can be judged to be an *ezigbo onye obodo* or not. Bearing in mind that personhood or authentic personhood is what one can fail at, then one's long existence in the community may not matter. Therefore, Menkiti's claim that, "full personhood ... indicates straight away that the older an individual gets the more of a person he becomes" is not completely true. This is because whereas a youth may be judged an *ezigbo onye obodo* due to his/her consistency in moral soundness or rectitude, it may be said of an older adult that *onye a aburo mmadu* or *onye a aburo ezigbo onye obodo* – this is not a(n) (authentic) person or this is not a good community person respectively. These two (moral) statements mean the same. Again, an elderly person may be called, *okenye na aza Beenu*. The Igbo people of Akokwa in Imo State use *Beenu* as a derogatory name for unacceptable character. *Okenye* means an elder. So *Okenye na aza Beenu* is an elder who indulges in unacceptable behaviour, another name is *okenye na agwo ofe, okenye no n'ulo ma ewu muo n'ogbu*. These names show that an elder despite his/her age can be a social misfit. Authentic personhood therefore lies in one's character, that is, what constitutes authentic personhood is one's character, and a person's character is the person's consistent dispositions or behaviours. Thus, one's consistent character embodies and describes his/her personality. This is captured in the Igbo saying that *agwa bu nma* or *agwa bu mmadu* (it is one's character that defines him or her). *Nma nwanyi bu agwa ya* (a woman's beauty is in her character). Beauty as used here speaks of the woman's personality and not necessarily facial or outward appearance.

Be that as it may, it should be noted that while the Igbo use the word *nma* to denote beauty, the word *nma* equally denotes goodness. Thus, the expression can also mean, "the goodness of a woman lies in her character". In this regard, the words; beauty or goodness can be used interchangeably such that the expression, *nwanyi mara nma* or *nwanyi oma* could mean a beautiful woman or a good woman. This analysis is necessary to enable us understand the nuances of beauty and goodness as it applies to the description of authentic personhood. By this analysis, I do not claim to have said all there is to say about the semantic clarification involved in and with such terms as beauty or good. I will not get deeper into this

to avoid joining issues with the philosophers of the analytic tradition. This is not to make light of the importance or relevance of this tradition in the enterprise of philosophy, but I will rather note here that the Igbo are not necessarily interested in abstract and abstruse intellectual razzmatazz as they are interested in issues that bother on concrete human existence. After all, for them *Ndubuisi* – life as lived is the principal thing/ is of supreme importance and according to T.U. Nwala, “the belief in the supremacy of life is reflected both in the cosmological order and in the day to day life and activities of the people” (Nwala, 1985:144). This Igbo penchant for concrete human existence rather than not too-useful abstract theorizing is corroborated by the Popperian caution that, “the surest path to intellectual perdition is the abandonment of real problems for the sake of verbal problems” (Popper, 1976:19).

4. Essential Structures of Authentic Personhood

The essential structures of authentic personhood do not only describe a good person (*ezigbo mmadu*) but also enhances personhood and wholesome human relations and makes possible the realization of a good human community. No community will thrive without these essentialities. Without these essential structures, life (*ndu*) and existence (*obibi ndu*) may slip into the Hobbesian state of nature where life is nasty, brutish, short and poor. In a community where individuals do not exhibit these moral essentialities and responsibilities, *ndu* and *obibi ndu* will become a case of misery, pain and suffering. What then are the essential structures of authentic person (*ezigbo nwaafu obodo*)? Authentic person is,

A Community Person

In Igbo thought, the humanity of an individual is tied to the fact that he/she is a community person. Igbo philosophy of the human person, and indeed most African societies, recognises the fact that it is the community that makes possible one’s humanity. This is the idea which Ubuntu expresses. Ubuntu philosophy places emphasis on being human through other people (Mugunbate&Nyanguru, 2013:82-100). A popular Zulu saying expresses this: *Ubuntu ngumuntungabantu*– I am because we are and I am human because I belong. In Ubuntu, one’s humanity is affirmed when he/she

recognises the humanity of others and on the basis of this establishes respectful human relations with them. So whereas for Descartes, I think, therefore I am, for the Igbo, and indeed Africans, I am because I participate or I belong to my community. This is because life is fully lived within the community. After all, what is human life that lacks the resources and the environment to meet one's basic necessities of life and for the actualization of life dreams. In Igbo notion of personhood, explaining the self just from the individual selfhood is inadequate. Personhood in Igbo cultural milieu entails that we talk about the self as a being-for-others. The human person is a being -of -his -community and a being-for-his-community. As a being-of-his-community, he/she belongs to the community. He/she is not alone and does not live alone. On the other hand, as a being-for-his-community, he/she lives for the success, progress, happiness and wellbeing of his/she community. His/her actions and inactions must not be inimical to the wellbeing of his/her community otherwise, he/she slips into inauthenticity.

The intricate link between the human person and his/her community cannot be over-emphasised. This deep interaction and the consequences arising there from is captured in an Igbo proverb which says, *ofu mkpuruaka ruta mmanu o zuo mkpuru aka ise onu* -When a finger is dipped into oil, it naturally spreads to the five. Thus, the human person cannot exactly and entirely be conceived as an independent entity neither can the human person be so subsistent without the complementing efforts of other selves. The effect and the influence of these forces on each other is so deep and unavoidable in Igbo traditional thought and praxis so much so that it is believed that if a person is guilty of *aru* (abomination) the entire community suffers.

From the foregoing, therefore, authentic person is supposed to be aware of these intricacies and dynamics of individual community relationships and thus act and always act in the interest of the community called the common good which is to a large extent a representative of his/her interests also. Since community in Igbo thought, as earlier stated, is defined by shared cultural values, therefore an authentic person, as a community-person, shares in the community ethos by appreciating and imbibing those normative and metaphysical aspects of the societal ideals inherent in the value

system. In his/her existence expressed in his/her daily activities, he/she lives out these ideals not by coercion but as a way of life. He makes the internalization and the exhibition of these ideals a way of life because he/she knows that his/her actions and inactions do not only affect him alone but the entire community.

A community-person abides by the principle of social justice and respects the rights of others for *egbe bere ugo bere*– live and let live defines a just society. The full expression of this maxim is, *egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwapu ya n'ike ma o bu o gosi ibe ya ebe oga ebe*– ‘let the eagle perch and let the kite perch, the one that says the other should not perch, let its wings fall off suddenly or else he should show the other where to perch’. The sudden falling off of the wings of the one that refuses the other to perch is an expression of the invocation of punishment. Perpetration of injustice is antithetical to authentic personhood and it makes the achievement of a good human community a mirage. Therefore, injustice must be punished – the wings must fall off suddenly. Social justice demands mutual and reciprocal respect of rights and interests.

A Respector of Social Norms and Customs

The Igbo word for social custom is *Omenala* – *ome/na/ala* which literally means as-it-is-done-in-the-land (community). According to Chukwuemeka Ekei, “custom and tradition follow the path of the past generations, providing unquestionable source of practical actions” (Ekei, 2001:16). Speaking of *omenala*, Okorochoa writes that, “the moral code of Iboland commonly spoken of as *omenala* defines various aspects of behaviours and social activities that are approved while at the same time indicating those aspects that are prohibited” (Okorochoa, 1987:101). Social norms and customs are not just observed and obeyed because they are unquestionable but because they are conducive to community wellbeing. They are acceptable and approved social behaviours because obedience to them makes possible wholesome human relations both horizontal and vertical, and the realization of a good human community.

Igbo societies are governed by rules, guides and sanctions. Although these rules and sanctions were very strong in traditional societies, however, most of them still persist even in

present times. While *omenala* is that which should be done, *nso-ala* or taboos is that which is disapproved, forbidden and should not be done. A contravening of *omenala* is *nso-ala* and this is frowned at because it does not only have consequences on the individual but also on the community. It incurs the wrath of invisible powers and malevolent forces and must need rituals to propitiate such offences. So an authentic person in Igbo thought is expected to be aware of these and should always give himself/herself to acts that will uplift the society rather than put the community into serious predicament. To contravene social rules and general customs of the land can earn one all kinds of punishment depending on the nature and severity of the offence or crime. *Ndu ojoo* is bad life and to live a bad life is associated with contravening social rules and customs. It is living a morally reprehensible life and such life earns the person who indulges in it scorn and disparagement. The result of this scorn and disparagement brings about punishment. The punishment can take the form of *ikwu nha* – payment of fine, or extra-judicial measures which may include but not limited to ostracism in the form of isolation from the community or even banishment. Other times and also depending on the nature of the crime or offense, the punishment may involve satirical sanction or shaming. This kind entails public mockery in which the culprit or the offender is taken to a central place in the community mostly the market place and heavily mocked with ridiculing and taunting songs. For instance, if the person has stolen a goat, the goat will be hung on the person while the person is being taken around the community.

A respector of social norms and customs is called for instance, *ezigbo nwa afo* Igbo (a good Igbo citizen), *onye na edebe iwu obodo* (a person who keeps or respects community rules and norms), *onye na edozi obodo* (a person who sets things right in the community). To set things right in the community is to align with community rules and how-things-are-done-in-the-community (*omenala*). Setting things right in the community is a display of fidelity to the community which provides the environment for one to lead a decent life and it attracts commendation and praise and sometimes rewards *maka na ekelee omemma ya nwee ike mee ozo*-when you appreciate someone for what he/she has done, he/she is encouraged to do more. Apart from the praise, commendation and

rewards from the community, overall, it creates the needed environment for wholesome human relations. The societal equilibrium is ever balanced because there are no disruptions, no violation and desecration of the rules and norms. In such a community, life and existence is at peace and the preternatural forces are happy and also at peace with the community and so will do their utmost to continue to guide, guard and protect the community. But where there are constant violations of community ethos (*omenala*), the society equilibrium is disrupted and the attendant result is unwholesome human relations and loss of harmony and peace between the living humans and the preternatural forces which most times brings about calamities and untold consequences in the community.

A Hospitable Person

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines hospitality as a friendly and generous behaviour towards guests or strangers. The question is who is a guest or a stranger? In Igbo philosophy of human relations and interactions, a guest is not necessarily someone or a stranger from a far place on a visit to another person although it may include that. A person's brother or kinsman may be his/her guest at any time in any circumstance. The Igbo say, *ofeke amaghi na nwanne ya bu obia* – a useless person does not realise that his brother is his guest. The word guest means *obia* in Igbo language. Therefore, a show of hospitality, that is, being friendly and generous is not only to be extended to a 'stranger' or 'guest' but also to one's brethren and kinsmen. A hospitable person is called *onye obi ebere/oma* – a person with good heart. Having a good heart here connotes being kind-hearted. Being hospitable bespeaks of *being-with*, that is, co-existing with others. It further means giving others or people around you a sense of belonging. It also means acceptance – *inabata mmadu*. For you cannot truly co-exist with others if you do not accept them and accept their humanity. Once you have accepted the person and the humanity of the other, the natural thing that follows is to care (*nchekwa*) for them. Caring is made manifest when you show concern to the plights of others. Until a practical step is taken to

show concern to the plights of others, then caring ends up as a theoretical and pretentious feeling.

The Igbo saying, *onuru ube nwanne agbala oso*– ‘he who hears the cry of his kinsmen should not run away from him’, captures the show of concern that is expected of *ezigbo nwa afo* Igbo over the plights of others especially the disadvantaged and unfortunate members of the community. Ekei identifies them to include those who are physically and mentally handicapped, the poor (‘ogbe-enye’), the destitute (‘ubiam’), the indigents (‘ogbenyemkpaku’). For him, all these and more belong to the class of concern in the community (2001:179). This class of the members of the community depends on the generosity, and the hospitality of authentic persons to barely sustain their lives. Human life is characterized by adventures, ambitions, dreams, desires and aspirations. This is a truism. But of no less truth is that human life is equally characterized by weaknesses, frustrations, hindrances, limitations and failures. However, these limitation and frustrations are overcome when and if a person receives the necessary motivations, care and helps. Human beings need help: help of fellow humans and the help of his/her community to help him/her overcome challenges of life and set him/her on the right path of progress (Obioha, 2015:213). Authentic person, as a hospitable fellow, provides this care and help as much and /or as little as he/she has the ability and the resources to so do.

Authentic Person Respects the Other

Respect is the fundamental human attitude of given worth or value to somebody or something. It demands valuing what others regard as valuable for them whether we agree with them or not. When we agree with them, the respect is positive and naturally promotes the course of the person, that is, the subject of respect. On the other hand, if we do not agree with them, but are still obliged to have forbearing respectful attitude, it is negative respect which though negative, does not devastate the person but tolerates him/her.

Igbo translation for respect is *nsopuru*. *Nso* means holy or sacred. *Nso-ala* is or are those communal entities or ethos that are considered holy or sacred and therefore must not be violated or desecrated. *Nsopuru* therefore is the attitude that avoids the violation

and the desecration of the human person because *mmadu* is sacred. The sacredness of the human person is premised on the fact that he/she is a creation of God. As the image of God, he/she is the beauty of life – *mma-ndu*(mma -beauty/good, ndu –life). *Mmadu bu onyinye si n'aka Chineke bia*– man is a gift from God. As a gift from God, he/she has worth and need to be respected and treated with dignity. An Authentic Person respects and treats his/her fellow humans with dignity, not on the basis of what they possess (riches, wealth and fame) but on the basis of their humanity. So everyone irrespective of his/her socio-economic status or standing in the society is entitled to respect and must be treated with dignity.

I have argued in another place that respect demands that we (if not welcome) tolerate the being, views and functioning of other people and allow them to operate the way they are convinced provided their convictions do not endanger communal values and ethos. We should not destroy the being or the personalities of other people just because we do not share in their views or ways of life. If their views and ways of life are harmless or do not do anything to jeopardize the shared custom and values of the community, then we should let them be. Respect involves reverencing the being, life and activities of the person. It entails leaving the individual unhindered to realize his/her aspirations. Respect demands tolerance, forbearance and non-obstructive participation (Obioha, 2015:215). An authentic person brings these to bear in his/her relationship with the other. With this being the case, harmonious and peaceful human co-existence will be possible and such would create the necessary environment for human well-being since the well-being of man cannot take place in an atmosphere of rancour and intolerance.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I discussed what constitutes authentic personhood in traditional Igbo African thought. I made the claim that personhood is more of a moral consideration than a metaphysical or ontological description. The moral context within which personhood is considered is because personhood cannot be adequately discussed and understood outside the community that provides the moral matrix for such judgement or consideration. It is the internalization of, fidelity to and observance of the various community ethos in

one's daily life activities that makes one an authentic person. I further enumerated and discussed what I consider to be the essential structures of authentic personhood in traditional Igbo thought. However, a cursory look at the modern Igbo society reveals a social cultural milieu that seems to negate the values and virtues of authentic personhood discussed above. That crime and criminality, kidnapping, cases of rape, gangsterism, corruption, tribal clashes, get-rich-quick syndrome that comes with unhealthy competitions and exploitations of all kinds and what have you, are on the rise in modern Igbo societies is undeniable. What about disunity that seems to have rubbed the Igbo enviable place in the main stream politics in Nigeria? Poverty and hunger is deep seated in Nigeria of which the Igbo society is a part.

The question is, does it mean that there are no authentic persons in modern Igbo society or have they totally as a people lost the values or virtues of authentic personhood that characterised their past traditional societies? I do not claim that traditional Igbo society was a perfect one but certainly better to live in when compared to the modern Igbo communities. I therefore recommend that we do a soul-searching summit to ascertain how much we have missed it and where we got it wrong and find solutions to our problems. One of such solutions could be to immediately start a campaign for socio-cultural re-orientation and possibly get incorporated into our educational curriculum at least at the primary and secondary levels the meaning and the nature of authentic personhood in traditional Igbo thought.

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