RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA IN THE LIGHT OF *UWA BU OGBU* IN THE IGBO METAPHYSICS OF ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This paper explores the idea of eco-humanism in Igbo metaphysics of environment as articulated in the Igbo wise saying Uwa bu Ogbu (reality is whole), and how Uwa bu Ogbu imbued the traditional Igbo worldview with the ecology of care and reverence to nature. Uwa-bu-Ogbu underscores the interconnectedness between man and his environment based on their mutual dependence. It expresses realities in a holistic sense understood as a community of mutually reinforcing natural life forces consisting of humans, spirits, plants, animals, and all the inanimate constituents of the geophysical space, in which, unity is preserved through the mutual interactions amongst these ecological entities. This paper aims to highlight this yet-to-be-fully explored ecological sense in Igbo metaphysics of the environment so as to leverage it to provide fresh insight into the debates on environmental ethics in contemporary Africa. The rationale for this approach adopted in this paper stems from the fact that the metaphysics of a people is at the foundation of their ecological mindset and formation. Hence, the following questions suffice: On what theoretical framework is contemporary African environmental discourses and policies built? What alternative framework could there be in environmental ethics to the dominant Western anthropocentric model, and what prospects are there in developing indigenous-based environmental ethics that takes into account the distinct African environ-mentality based on African ontology and cosmogony? And what could be the possible blend between Western-oriented anthropocentrism and African-oriented eco-humanism?

Keywords: Uwa bu Ogbu, Environ-mentality, Igbo, Ecology of care.

The story from my grandmother!

When I was a teenager, living with my grandmother, in the countryside, of South-Eastern Nigeria, one evening, my granny told me a story as to why most of the neighboring towns to ours have rivers whereas our own town has none. She said that, based on legend, there used to be a river in our town but the river got upset with the villagers due to persistent abuses it suffered at the hands of the villagers who recklessly dumped refuse into it including human waste. So, one night, letting out a terrifying roaring sound, the river left the town to a neighboring town, leaving on its trail a long stretch of gully. When the villagers woke up in the morning and witnessed the bad omen, they were terrified and consulted the gods of the land to inquire about the strange disappearance of the river. It was revealed to them by the gods that the river had left in protest against the abuses it had suffered. Later on, it was reported on multiple occasions that some youth from our town Adazi-Ani, who had ventured to swim in the aggrieved river in its new location, all got drowned in it. Consequently, the river was declared a no-go area for all indigenes of Adazi-Ani. Thenceforth, the river was addressed as "Anya afu Adazi" which trans-literally means "the eyes that abhor seeing Adazi-Ani indigenes".

Introduction

The anecdote above, a legend though, is a didactic story meant to instill in young ones a healthy attitude to the environment. It also speaks to the Igbo belief in the inanimate agency. The story so impacted my environmental sensibility that I grew up detesting any forms of environmental abuse, particularly, the indiscriminate dumping of refuse in water bodies or flood channels. It has also catalyzed my interest in environmental ethics. The concern of this paper, drawing on the anecdote, is to explore the Igbo metaphysics of the environment. Contrary to the Western conception of environment, which is predominantly anthropocentric, the Igbo metaphysics of environment is such that conceives realities as being ontologically inter-connected in mutual dependence.

Environmental ethics has gained traction in recent decades due to emerging environmental problems around the world such as; global warming, climate change, flooding, desertification, and numerous other environmental problems facing the world and the African continent in particular. Mabogunje argued that sub-Saharan Africa is highly irresponsible toward the environment while looking to the international community to solve its environmental problems. According to him, while the region tends to blame all of her environmental problems on rapid population growth and poverty, it suffices to argue that there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that Africans are traditionally

oblivious to the quality of the environment, nor has the international community shown any genuine concern for it until recently.[1] What this means is that, in spite of Africa's current deplorable environmental situation, traditional African society, the Igbo society in this context, had a sense of virtuous interaction with the environment. This is because, based on Africa's inclusivist worldview, man and his environment are closely knit such that an abuse of the environment amounts to an indirect abuse of oneself. Therefore, contemporary African societies do not need to wait on outsiders to solve their environmental problems, especially when those outsiders illicitly benefit from the same problems. Instead, it is high time they looked inwards into their indigenous knowledge system in search of solutions to their problems.

According to Okereke *et al*, contrary to popular belief and claim that the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities of foreign explorative companies in Africa are firmly rooted in respect for the African ethical, cultural, and religious ideals towards the environment, indeed, economic instrumentalism is actually the most significant predictor of corporate environmental behavior among firms in the extractive industries in Nigeria.[2] In other words, Western-owned corporations, especially those into oil and mineral explorations, in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, are not genuinely committed to protecting the environment beyond what is enough to protect their business interests.

Literature abounds on environmental ethics with well-thought-out recommendations on how to address the environmental problems bedeviling the African continent. But there is a paucity of scholarly works on how to tap into indigenous knowledge systems to address those contemporary environmental problems in Africa, and Nigeria in particular. Consequently, this study aims to dig into the Igbo indigenous knowledge system in search of ideas that could be used to frame environmental ethics discourse in contemporary Africa. In what follows, I did an exposition on environmental ethics and the Igbo metaphysics of environment with a focus on the Igbo notion of *Uwa bu Ogbu*. The paper proposed a rethinking of environmental ethics in the light of virtue ethics which best reflects the traditional Igbo environ-mentality based on the metaphysical axiom of *Uwa bu Ogbu*.

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[1] Mabogunje, A.L., (1995). "The Environmental Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa".*Environment*, Volume 37, Number 4. Cf.http://web.mit.edu/africantech/www/articles/EnvChall.htm

[2] Okereke, C, Vincent O, Mordi C. "Determinants of Nigerian Managers' environmental attitude: Africa's *Ubuntu* Ethics versus Global Capitalism". *Thunderbird Int*. Bus. Rev. 2018;1-14. https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.21974.

Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics focuses on the moral status of the environment, the ethical or right sort of relationship that humans should have with the environment as well as the values and worth of the relationship in its expanded spectrum of biotic and a-biotic spheres. Environmental ethics also studies the methods of protecting the integrity and the stability of the ecosystem from actual and potential human abuses.[3] Igboanusi captures the concerns of environmental ethics thus in the form of questions:

> Do we have a moral obligation to restore the landform and surface ecology? Is the humanly restored environment as valuable as the originally natural environment? Who or what has moral weight, i.e., is deserving of direct moral consideration? How much moral weight does each (type) of the entity have? How do we make decisions when there are conflicts among different types of beings, each of which has moral weight? Is it morally wrong to pollute and destroy the natural environment? Is it moral for humans to consume a huge proportion of the planet's natural resources? Is a sustainable environment essential to (present and future) human well-being? How do we balance the need for preservation and the necessity to advance technologically, using natural resources to create better qualities of life? How do we apply traditional ethical theories, including consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics, to support contemporary environmental concerns?[4]

Attempts by environmental theorists and philosophers to respond to the above questions have led to the emergence of different strands of moral persuasions and emphasis[5] in environmental ethics such as anthropocentrism and the expanded circle approach.

Anthropocentrism

The proponents of anthropocentrism argue that "the environment has no intrinsic value, it has only instrumental value and it is at the service of human beings".[6] That is to say, the human person and his needs *ought to* determine the criteria for environmental value propositions. Suffice it to note that anthropocentrism has varied

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[3] Igboanusi, E. (2009). *Applied Ethics*. Owerri: Living Flames Resources. p.137
[4] Igboanusi, E. (2009). *Applied Ethics*. Owerri: Living Flames Resources   p. 138
[5] Eze, M.O. (2017). "Humanitatis-Eco (Eco-Humanism): An African Environmental Theory" In A. Afolayan and T. Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59291-0_40. pp. 621-633.
[6] Igboanusi, E. (2009). *Applied Ethics*. Owerri: Living Flames Resources p.139

nuances. There is 'absolute anthropocentricism', which denies, completely, any intrinsic value to the natural environment while conferring absolute privilege on human beings. This strand of anthropocentrism, arguably, draws its theoretical inspiration from a misinterpreted view of the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation wherein God gave man the mandate to till the earth and subdue it. According to White, Judeo-Christian thinking promoted the abuse of nature by maintaining the superiority of humans over all other forms of life on earth, and by depicting all of nature as valuable only to the extent that it serves the need of man.[7]

Anthropocentrism is also believed to have been influenced by the individualism movement of the Enlightenment project. Note that, in the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation, the domination suggested is not a sort of rivalry between man and nature in which man has been empowered to prevail. Instead, man is meant to be the shepherd of beings, to guide creation to their teleological ends. The second nuance is 'cynical anthropocentricism'.This holds that human beings have higher anthropocentric reasons to be non-anthropocentric in their interaction with the environment. That is, man's concerns for the good of the environment are solely based on his own interest. Therefore, man treats the environment with care if to do otherwise will endanger him and his interests.

Take for instance, a cynical anthropocentric would desist from gas pollution that could lead to an increase in the amount of CO_2 in the atmosphere if doing otherwise will result in severe respiratory disease for him and his loved ones. This means that if there is no such possible health danger, he wouldn't care less about gas pollution. Here, the moral duties that man has towards the environment are essentially derived from his direct duties to the human inhabitants of the environment. That is, in protecting the environment, the intention or focus of the human agent is primarily his well-being and that of his fellow men, and not that of the animals and plants and other members of the ecosystem.

The third strand of anthropocentrism is 'balanced anthropocentrism' or relative anthropocentrism. This recognizes that the environment has an intrinsic value that is worth protecting but still gives priority to human interests, particularly when such interest is with nature.[8] Suffice it to note that, as long as man is at the peak of created realities, it is inconceivable to speak of the environment in an unanthropocentric sense. Nonetheless, anthropocentrism need not degenerate into abuse of; or ethical

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[7]White, L. (1967). "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", *Science*, 55: 1203-1207; reprinted in Schmidtz and Willott 2002.

[8] White, L. (1967). "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", *Science*, 55: 1203-1207 p. 144

indifference to the lives of other beings in the ecosystem besides a man. Instead, the highest aspiration should be to achieve an eco-humanism-based interdependent relationship between man and nature.

Aristotle argued in favour of anthropocentrism. He stated that "after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man, they tame for use and food, the wild, if not all, at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now if nature makes nothing incomplete and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man".[9] Similarly, Thomas Aquinas, in his refutation of what he considered the error of those who hold as sinful that man can kill animals for food, argued that by divine providence, dumb animals are intended for man's use in the natural order. He thus submitted that it is not wrong for a man to use them, either by killing them or in any other way.[10]

This is the prevailing understanding the ecological relation between humans and animals and plants but it needs to be noted that man's pre-eminence over plants and animals is not a license for man to dispense of them with reckless abandon or subject the animals to undue pain. Kant argued that humans are *noumenal* selves; that is, humans are subjects with intrinsic moral value. Humans are ends in themselves. As a kingdom of ends, humans are the ones who give value to things.[11] The views of these three outstanding philosophers of Western extraction, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Kant suggest a pronounced utilitarian conception of the environment as was inherent in the Western metaphysics of the environment. Broadly considered, Western thoughts on the environment are largely anthropocentric. It is also rooted in metaphysical dualism. In Euro-American metaphysics, going by the above exposition, there seems a kind of separation of the self from the non-self (phenomenal world). Based on this separation, the phenomenal world is externalized to become an "other" in contrast and unconnected to the noumenal self. Consequently, the environment is seen as external to the self rather than as affected by one's feelings or reflections.[12] The danger of this kind of metaphysics of environment (i.e., dualism), is that those

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[9] Aristotle, *Politics*, In Torbjörn Tännsjö (2002). *Understanding Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Theory*: Edinburgh University Press Ltd. p. 121

[10] Thomas Aquina *Summa Theologica*, II, II, Q. 64, Art. 6 In TorbjörnTännsjö (2002*). Understanding Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Theory*: Edinburgh University Press Ltd. p. 121

[11] Eze, M.O, (2017). "Humanitatis-Eco (Eco-Humanism): An African Environmental Theory" In A. Afolayan and T. Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59291-0_40. pp. 621-633.

[12] Ikuenobe, P. (2014). "Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy".*International Journal of Philosophy and Theology,* Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 01-21.URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.15640/ijpt.v2n4a1.

beings that cannot "think" inthe Western episteme, do not have the privilege of moral status. But in recent decades, the proponents of animal rights have risen to counter that.

Western metaphysics of the environment hinged on dualism has devastating consequences on non-western cultures and on the environment, in that it fuels the impetus or domination. This is so because when the "other" is defined in opposition to the self, the relationship between the two is likely going to be based on a power tussle that can only be settled by the domination of one by the other. It was this same logic that fueled colonialism which though justified by the colonizers as a benevolent act of civilizing the uncivilized and evangelizing the heathens, in reality, it was an abuse of the humanity of the "other" – the colonized.

Anthropocentrism submits that the environment is at the service of man, and man's duty to the environment is only necessary for human benefit. In fact, maximizing the benefits is considered a moral duty.[13] This raises the question, "Can humans be at the center of moral consideration and still act ethically towards nature"? A leading proponent of anthropocentrism, Passmore, responds that Western philosophy and ethics have the theoretical grounding necessary to act ethically toward the natural world; "we do not need another kind of ethics or a "new" ethic, we simply need to be consistent with the application of those ethical systems we already embrace".[14] That means Passmore does not see anything wrong in the 'self' vs 'nature' supposition inherent in the Western metaphysics of dualism. But Routley holds a contrary view. He criticized anthropocentrism as a form of human chauvinism, emerging from Western traditional ethics that grant moral standing only to humans. He decried moral impoverishment in considering the natural world and non-human species only as resources to be used as humans see fit.[15] Reactions to the inadequacies of anthropocentrism or human-centered approach to environmental ethics gave rise to the expanded circle approach, which attempts to make a case for the interest of the "other" beings in the universe aside from humans.

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[13]Eze, M.O, (2017). "Humanitatis-Eco (Eco-Humanism): An African Environmental Theory" In A. Afolayan and T. Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59291-0_40. pp. 621-633.

[14]Passmore, J. (1974). *Man's responsibility for nature: Ecological problems and Western traditions*. New York: Charles Scribner's In Michael Paul Nelson & Leslie A. Ryan, (2015). "Environmental Ethics", ResearchGate. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199363445-0025

[15]Routley, R. (1973). "Is there a need for a new, an environmental, ethic?" Paper presented at the International Congress of Philosophy in Varna, Bulgaria, 17–22 September 1973. In *Proceedings of the XV World Congress of Philosophy*. Vol. 1.205–210.

Expanded Circle Approach

The expanded circle approach recognizes other interests besides the interest of man in environmental ethical debates.[16] Like anthropocentrism, the expanded approach also has nuances which includes: expanded utilitarianism, Bio-centrism, and Eco-centrism. In expanded utilitarianism, other sentient beings in the ecosystem also have the right to their pleasure as man does. Therefore, with respect to their ecology, for instance, which conduces to their pleasure, those beings deserve to be respected. This is the basis for animal rights advocacy. In the light of that, animal rights advocates consider all manner of violence and suffering against animals as evil to be avoided.[17] Jeremy Bentham, in his defense of animals' rights, described man's anthropocentric attitude toward animals as tyranny. He argued that "the day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been witholden from them but by the hand of tyranny".[18]

Animals have interests to protect, argued Peter Singer. If they can suffer or experience pleasure, then they have interests, and their interests are no less important than corresponding interests held by human beings.[19] I do not agree with Singer that human rights and animal rights can be equated. Human rights derive from human dignity which is the intrinsic worth of a human on account of being human. To lose sight of this distinction is to suggest that there is no *essential* difference between humans and animals and that is ontologically fallacious.

Bio-centrism holds that "value in animate elements is inherent in the fact of their existence and does not depend on conditional causality of humans. All living things have moral rights in themselves, an end ascribed to them by the very fact that they are alive".[20] For Bio-centrism, life, of whatever form, is the basis for right. The proponents of bio-centrism argued that the entire bio-sphere is a living, self-regulating, and self-preserving organism. Eco-centrism on its part would stretch this expanded circle to include beings of the a-biotic sphere; mountains, water bodies, rocks, etc. Nature from the point of view of expanded circles has value in itself and thus ought to be respected based on the intrinsic value it possesses and not based on the instrumental value or utilitarian value that it serves man. Humans are just part of

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[16]Igboanusi, E. (2009). *Applied Ethics*. Owerri: Living Flames Resources. p.139

[17] Igboanusi, E. (2009). *Applied Ethics*.Owerri p. 139.

[18]TorbjörnTännsjö (2002).*Understanding Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Theory*: Edinburgh University Press Ltd. p. 122

[19] Torbjörn Tännsjö (2002).*Understanding Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Theory* ., p.122

[20]Eze, M.O, (2017). "Humanitatis-Eco (Eco-Humanism): An African Environmental Theory" In A. Afolayan and T. Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59291-0_40. pp. 621-633.

a larger ecosystem; "Therefore humans should not arrogate to themselves the primacy of place and the privilege to determine the teleology of nature".[21]

Towards Indigenous Environmental Ethics Framework

Due to the essential difference in the two worldviews underlining the Western and African conceptions of the environment, only an environmental ethical framework that draws on the African worldview, particularly as regards the environment would be most suitable for the framing of environmental debates and policies in contemporary Africa. Suffice it to state the preference for a home-grown theoretical framework as opposed to the adaptation of Western environmental ethical framework is not to suggest a superiority tussle between the two but rather, is to make a case for what is most suitable to the African worldview, experience, and normative categories.

There is no doubt as to the fact that environmental crises are global issues, however, they affect different societies differently. Hence, nations and cultures will naturally respond to the crises in accordance with their worldviews and be open to borrowing ideas from other cultural worldviews to enrich theirs when prudence thus suggests. In other words, it is appropriate that discourses on environmental issues be made to resonate with the cultural worldview of the people involved. Hence, we turn to the Igbo metaphysics of the environment in search of ideas to ground environmental ethics discourse in contemporary Africa.

The Igbos

The Igbos or Ndi Igbo as they call themselves occupy the South-East geographical zone of Nigeria. They can also be found in some parts of the South-South and North-central geo-political zone of Nigeria. Igbos are the third largest tribe in Nigeria whose industrious spirit propels them to sojourn to different parts of the world in search of greener pastures. In fact, there is a saying that "anywhere you find yourself and there is no Igbo person there, it means that such a place is not habitable for humans to live". Simply put, the Igbos are the most mobile tribe in Nigeria.[22]

Their moral orientation is virtue-centered with the virtue of justice at the top of the virtue ladder. According to Nwala, among the Igbos, "their philosophy of nature and life, its general principles and social practices are embodied in the concept of

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[21]Igboanusi, E. (2009). *Applied Ethics*. Owerri: Living Flames Resources.p.140.
[22]Areji, A. C., & Anyaehie, M. C. (2015)."Igbo Traditional Morality as a Panacea to Nigerian Security Crises".*Open Journal of Political Science*, 5, 102-108. http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2015.52012

Omenala. Omenala is the totality of the laws of the land, customs, and tradition, a complex of beliefs and practices which every Igbo person inculcates as a guiding philosophy and code of behavior.[23] All the taboos, totems, and prohibitions hedged around Omenala are designed to ensure that the natural order is not violated and that proper relationship among spirits, between spirits and men, among men, between men and the lower beings, between husband and wife, child and parent, among kinsmen, etc.; are maintained.[24]

The official data on the population of ethnic groups in Nigeria has remained a contentious issue because of the politics of numbers by which each of the three major ethnic groups; Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba tries to position itself as having more population since the figures are indices for sharing political and economic benefits in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the CIA World Factbook puts the Igbo population of Nigeria at 18% of a total population of 230 million, or approximately 42 million people as at the 2023 estimation.[25]

The Igbo Metaphysics of the Environment

In all human societies, there always exists a body of sublime teaching that guide the private and public lives of the people. There is rarely any culture without some wisdom teaching. And those wisdom teachings are not mere patchworks of human thought, rather, they originate from (individual and collective) human experiences, and a culture is incomplete without it.[26] From the sublime teachings are derived fundamental principles and norms that imbue human existence as well as constitute the ingredients for cultural socialization and human formation. Among the Igbos, similar to other African tribes, wisdom teachings are preserved in their proverbs.

Proverbs are symbolic expressions of people. In Nigeria, proverbs are influenced, to a large extent, by the linguistic and socio-geographical experiences and orientations of the diverse peoples that make up the country. The imagery in proverbs, their form and context of use as well as aesthetics reflect the peculiar natural environment of the users.[27] Jegede identified "proverbs as a dynamic mode of discourse with unique

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[23] Nwala, T. U. (2010). *Igbo Philosophy* (2nd ed.). Abuja: Niger Books. p.76.
[24] Areji, A. C., & Anyaehie, M. C. (2015)."Igbo Traditional Morality as a Panacea to Nigerian Security Crises".*Open Journal of Political Science*, 5, 102-108. http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2015.52012
[25] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igbo_people#cite_note-Nigeria_CIA-1
[26] Otakpo, N. (2006). "Introduction: Wisdom Teaching in Igbo Culture", In Otakpo, N. (Ed.) Eziokwu bu Ndu: Truth is Life, *UNIBEN Studies in Philosophy*. Vol. 1. Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd. p. 13.
[27] Omoera, O S. & Obiaozor Inegbeboh, B. (2013). "Context of Usage and Aesthetics of Selected Proverbs from Southern Nigeria".*Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa*, Vol.4 No.1. pp. 16-30.

identity…".[28] He further posits that proverbs form a pool of linguistic and thematic resources from which speakers and writers in rhetoric, politics, economics, jurisprudence, philosophy, history, religion, technology, etc, draw inspiration.[29] These proverbs contain treasures of untapped knowledge that invite contemporary African thinkers to exploitation.

Uwa bu Ogbu in Igbo Metaphysics

In the Igbo cosmology, *Uwa* (the world) exists as the creative expression of goodness by *Chukwu* (God almighty). He is the supreme being and the sustainer of all the created things. He is lso called *Olisebuluwa* (God, the anchor of the world). Even though the Igbo cosmology is anthropocentric, still, it does not elevate man to the detriment of other creatures. Instead, man is more like a caretaker or guardian of the material world. Igbo cosmology stands on a tripod: *Mmuo*, *Mmadu*, and *Ihe* (Spirit, human, and things).

Mmadu (composed of body and soul) is the link between the spiritual/metaphysical and the material/physical. Thus, the human person is grounded on three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with his fellow man, and with the world around him. These categories are essentially different but not in opposition to each other. This is what the Igbos mean by *Uwa bu Ogbu* (reality is whole); that is, it is comprised of the visible and invisible. *Uwa* (unlike its English synonym, earth) is not merely a geographically delineated cosmic entity. It is rather a totality of beings stretching to the bounds of physical, metaphysical, moral, social, and religious spheres. The adjective *bu* means "is". Ogbu speaks of wholeness, oneness, unity, integral or compact.

So, *Uwa bu Ogbu* is the conception of realities as a holistic community of mutually reinforcing natural life forces consisting of human communities (families, villages, nations, and humanity), spirits, gods, deities, stones, sand, mountains, rivers, plants, and animals. Everything, in reality, has a vital force or energy such that the harmonious interactions among them strengthens reality.[30] In Igbo metaphysics, there is no dualism between a perceiving subject and the perceived object much as there is no dichotomy between the material and the immaterial, nor opposition between the

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[28] Jegede, O. (2008). "Reconstructing Social and Cultural Reality: Proverbs and Post Proverbials in Selected Nigerian Literary Works." *Proverbium* 25.pp.179-198.

[29] Jegede, O. (2011). "Proverbs Speak Louder than Words: A Study of Contents and Structure in Niyi Osundare's Village Voices." *ISALA : Ife Studies in African Literature and Arts* 6. pp. 35-46.

[30] Ikuenobe, P. (2014). "Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy", *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology,* Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 01-21.URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.15640/ijpt.v2n4a1.

self and the "other". Instead, there is a duality which means that "the two spheres (material and immaterial, self and 'other', visible and invisible) are two sides of one and the same reality".[31] The concepts of *dualism* and *duality* need not be confused. Both are premised on the idea that there is a "two-ness" involved in the structure of reality.[32] It suffices to note that the distinction between the Western and African conceptions of the "self" and the "Other" is based on the distinct modes of thoughts of the two cultural worldviews with regards to the aforementioned two-ness structure of reality. Ekwuru explains:

> "the universe (for the Igbo) is two-fold – each distinct but similar and interdependent: visible and invisible. This dual-intertwine world is geographically stretched out in space in a two-tier structure; comprising the Sky, and the Earth (as human and spirit world) what the two-ness paradigm, or duality of reality, seems to establish, is a causal explanatory structure. It polarizes and counterpoints the transcendent and the material into reciprocal mystical formation…..the daily interaction between the two dimensions of the world is characterized by a kind of tension-conflict-harmony drama".[33]

What Ekwuru means is that for the Igbo mind, the universe is made of distinct but complementary beings. *Uwa* is conceived beyond the geophysical entity to include the life-force interactions among beings populating it. Unlike the Western mind which sees the self and the world as contentious parties, the Igbo mind sees the world from the standpoint of duality. That is, the self and the world are distinct but inseparably locked in mutual interaction. Western dualism is manifest in the polarization within the Western worldview of many aspects of reality: the one and many, mind and matter, freedom and necessity, nature and man, realism, and idealism, etc.

Environmental Challenges in Nigeria

Nigeria, like other nations in Sub-Sahara Africa is grappling with environmental challenges on several fronts which includes; the impacts of rapid population growth and rural-urban migration, leading to demographic congestion in cities like Lagos, Onitsha, and Kano; increased in waste generation and poor waste management; land use practices leading to deforestation and land degradation which in turn poses

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[31] Onwuatuegwu, I.N. (2011). *The Power of the Spoken Word in Igbo Metaphysics: A Philosophical Investigation*, Nimo, Anambra: Rex Charles and Patrick Ltd. P.93. (emphasis in bracket is mine)
[32] Onyeocha, I.M. (1997). *Africa the Question of Identity: A Philosophical Reflection on Africa*. Washington D.C.: The Council for Researh in Values and Philosophy. p.145.
[33] Ekwuru, G.E. (2009). *Igbo Cosmology: The Ontogeny and Hermeneutics of Igbo Sculpture, Studies in African Ethnoaesthetics*, Owerri; Living Flames Resources. P.43.

significant threat to the ecosystem. Nebiyeleul observed that "the chief source of environmental degradation in Africa is deforestation caused by over-dependence of African livelihoods on agriculture fuelled by population growth. This is reflected in an overgrowing need for cultivable and grazing lands, extensive system of production, and exploitation of mineral resources and hydrocarbons".[34] Sub-Saharan Africa states still depend largely on traditional biomass, such as firewood and agricultural waste.

Low-income countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia rely on traditional biomass for around 90% of their energy, compared with 10% globally. With economic transformation, countries shift from traditional biofuels to modern energy sources – traditionally these were fossil fuels, but there is a growing potential to leapfrog to low-carbon energy sources instead, such as solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, and nuclear.[35]

In Nigeria, in addition to other forms of environmental degradation, a recent study reveals that there has been pervasive environmental pollution by several Multi-National Companies (MNCs) operating in the extractive industry in Nigeria. The Ogoni oil spillage readily comes to mind. Driven by Western capitalization rooted in profit maximization, these MNCs do not have as much regard for culturally based environmental ethics as they have for global capitalist instincts that shape their policies and Corporate Social Responsibility.[36]

This is in addition to the horrendous injustices perpetrated by oil companies in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. As Eze noted, "indigenous communities would constantly be uprooted from their ancestral homes to make room for big corporations like Shell, AGIP, et cetera."[37] It is not the position of this paper to advance some nostalgic sentiments about traditional African society that is obstructive to modernity. It is rather to decry industrialization and urbanization that is championed at the expense of environmental interests.

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[34] *Review Report on Africa Industrial Development for CSD 14* January 2006. p.v.

[35] Brahmbhatt, Milan, Haddaoui, Catlyne and Page, John, (2017). *Green Industrialisation and Entrepreneurship in Africa*, Contributing paper for *African Economic Outlook 2017: Entrepreneurship and Industrialisation*. New Climate Economy, London and Washington, DC. Available at: http://newclimateeconomy.report/misc/working-papers

[36] Okereke, C, Vincent O, Mordi C. "Determinants of Nigerian Managers' environmental attitude: Africa's *Ubuntu* Ethics versus Global Capitalism". *Thunderbird Int.* Bus. Rev. 2018;1-14. https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.21974.

[37] Eze, M.O, (2017). "Humanitatis-Eco (Eco-Humanism): An African Environmental Theory" In A. Afolayan and T. Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59291-0 pp. 621-633.

I agree with Eze's submission in his *Eco-Humanitatis*, that "the sacrifice of the environment at the altar of material acquisition has been the most devastating impetus in environmental degradation. Materialism here also extends to identity commoditization in which access to resources or material things has become a measure of human subjectivity. The emergent implication is that humanity's relationship to nature is no longer defined by way of mutual sustainability and coexistence but is instead dependent on the maximum domination of nature for a practical necessity".[38]

Consequently, scholars and experts have recommended that governments and policymakers in Nigeria must implement broad policies to strengthen the basics, such as macroeconomic management, infrastructure, the private investment climate, and competition in domestic markets. These policies are hoped to set appropriate incentives for environmental sustainability through the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies and other subsidies that encourage excessive environmental damage. Also, building more compact, well-connected cities with good public transit systems that will be more energy efficient and competitive than the current sprawling, poorly planned congested cities with huge waste generation and poor management with heavy reliance on private cars for transportation thus contributing to high volume of CO_2 emission into the atmosphere.[39] Since, it is established that the western approach to environmental ethics is not the best for Africans in terms of the attitudinal change towards the environment as needed, there is a need thus for Africans, Nigeria in particular, to leverage indigenous knowledge system for ideas to reframe environmental ethics and environmental policies. That is the rationale behind the proposition of *Uwa bu Ogbu* in the work. Suffice to restate at this juncture that Western unhealthy capitalism, consumerism, moral relativism, and obsession with technological novelties with little or no ethical restraints, are some of the ideologies numbing humanity's sense of care and concern for the environment.

Conclusion

A peoples' metaphysics orients their ecological sensibility. As Nigeria and Africa at large grapples with mounting environmental problems, arising partly from

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[38] Eze, M.O, (2017). "Humanitatis-Eco (Eco-Humanism): An African Environmental Theory" In A. Afolayan and T. Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59291-0 pp. 621-633.

[39] Brahmbhatt, Milan, Haddaoui, Catlyne and Page, John, (2017).*Green Industrialisation and Entrepreneurship in Africa*, Contributing paper for *African Economic Outlook 2017: Entrepreneurship and Industrialisation*. New Climate Economy, London and Washington, DC. Available at: http://newclimateeconomy.report/misc/working-papers.

industrialization and urbanization albeit unhealthy and unethical environmental practices by individuals and corporations, it is high time African scholars delved into their indigenous knowledge systems to critically distil therefrom, ideas that could help in reframing environmental ethics and pedagogy in contemporary Africa. The attitude of waiting on the Western world for solutions to Africa's problems is irresponsible and irresponsive to Africa's predicament. Indigenous knowledge systems in Africa holds rich reservoir of ideas from which solutions can be harnessed for addressing the myriads of challenges confronting the continent. *Uwa bu Ogbu* metaphysics of environment is walking the talk in that regard.

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