

Philosophy and the Development of Culture: Order, Disorder and the African Experience

JOSEPH AGABAKOBA*

ABSTRACT: This paper explores, generally, the processes, mechanisms and modalities by which philosophical studies and activities transform cultures and are, themselves, transformed by cultures. The paper explores how this transformation has occurred, and should occur, in Africa. I argue that Stephan Korner's notion of 'categorical frameworks' is the most basic cognitive framework of a person and a society subsuming the notions of theoretical frameworks, conceptual frameworks and paradigms; that categorical frameworks are philosophical frameworks and hence the philosophical foundations of societies and cultures. I argue further that the development of a culture is strongly tied to the philosophy of development that underpins such a culture. This requires that we should analyse and evaluate philosophies of development. The paper also deals with the concept of inter-reactivity, one that depicts the social immune system by which a society generates, adapts or deploys ideas, notions and practices to counteract the deleterious invasions and effects that come from societies with which she interacts. The notion of inter-reactivity raises further questions and issues addressed in this paper, namely the composition of inter-reactivity and the etiological processes, mechanisms and channels through which it impacts culture and society. We also discuss the African experience showing the nature of development philosophy and inter-reactivity in Africa and the sort of transformations that are desirable and required in the African culture area.

Introduction

My intention in this paper is to show the centrality of the notion of order (and, disorder) in the generation, organisation, preservation and communication of knowledge, values and skills and techniques; in the nature and outcome of human agency; and, thus in philosophical activities and via philosophical activities culture and development. I shall also explore the specific experience of Africa in respect of the above and the lessons that might be drawn there from.

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* *Madonna University and University of Nigeria* (Nigeria). – This text can be quoted as follows: Joseph Agbakoba, "Philosophy and the Development of Culture: Order, Disorder and the African Experience". In: João J. Vila-Chã (Org.), *Order and Disorder in the Age of Globalization(s): Philosophy and the Development of Cultures*. Fourth World Congress of COMIUCAP (Johannesburg, South Africa), November of 2013.

Let me begin by pointing out that culture, as Edward Tylor says, is the sum of human input in nature, transforming nature after the concepts, ideas and ideals of human beings – nature here includes the raw natural state of human beings all natural givens – for purposes of utility, aesthetics and other forms of physical, mental or spiritual satisfaction.¹ Culture, on this construal provides value, the ends and the means for the realization of individual contentment – that is the self-realization or development of individuals. A people's culture is thus all those ideas, states, and things that they have created, generated or inherited, which serves the purpose of self-realization or development in some way or the other. Let me dilate a little on the notion of self-realization and development, beginning with defining development as self-realization in a social context.² The process of development must necessarily be in a social context – that is the context social of relations, cooperation and competition – in so far as this is not deleterious to human existence, welfare and the transformation of human agency in a social context. Development involves the satisfaction, in a social context, of the universal basic needs: food, clothing, shelter, education, security and health services; and, the satisfaction of the secondary needs: psychological needs such as self-esteem and self-worth, artistic expression and other forms of expression and utilization of talents and natural capacities. Culture is the sum total of those things, states and ideas that we have created, generated or adopted, usually for the purpose of development – the end of culture strictly speaking is human development as understood or conceptualized by a given community. This is the sense deployed by Cicero who first innovatively used the words *cultura anima* – to cultivate the soul – hence to cultivate or culture in its non-agricultural sense.³ Seen in this way, the core element of the culture of any given community bears the theories and practices that would bring about development according to the perceptions of such a community. Such theories and practices constitute the ideology or worldview of societies, one of which is usually dominant.

An ideology or worldview as Leslie Stevenson points out is composed of four basic elements. First, answers about the nature of ultimate reality – questions of ontology and metaphysics. Secondly, answers to questions about the nature of human beings – questions of ontology, philosophical psychology, philosophical anthropology, epistemology, logic, etc. Thirdly, answers to questions about the end of human existence and the good life – this involves the categories above as well as ethics, social and political

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¹ Edward Tylor (1871), *Primitive Culture*, Vol. 1, London: John Murray, p. 1.

² Agbakoba, J. C. A. (2009), "Philosophy, Traditional African Ethical Outlook and the Problems of Economic Development" in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 65, pp. 549-575.

³ Cicero, see 'Culture' in the Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture> and Cicero, 'Theses Ex Tuscalana Secunda', XV, digitized by Google.

philosophy broadly speaking. Fourthly, answers to questions about how to achieve the good life – this involves law and jurisprudence, morality, ethics and etiquettes, spiritual and physical exercises and practices, etc. They are philosophies of action, which provides guides to life, regardless of whether or not they are systematically formulated. Thus, ideologies and worldviews are rightly regarded as philosophies, albeit first order philosophies. First order philosophy constitutes the material interrogated and developed by second order philosophy in many ways. Second order philosophy is usually a critical, reflexive, individual effort that works on first order philosophies as well as other philosophies in order to explain the world and reality better. However, second order philosophy will virtually have no practical value unless it becomes a philosophy of action, an ideology, in some way. The two orders of philosophy are thus complementary and mutually supportive; and are at the heart of culture and development. Philosophy generally, regardless of the order it might belong to, is pre-occupied with, among other things, the dispelling of disorder and the discovery and establishment of order in thought and action.

The word order has many meanings. We are however concerned with the sense of order that refers to the arrangement or organization of something in space or time. In this sense, it refers to a rationally discernable pattern, relating a set of things or the parts of a thing in a more or less consistent manner. Order not only refers to the notion of consistency that underline a given relational state but also to the systematic character (structure) and intelligibility or rational intelligibility that underlies relational states, where this exists. Further, in a related manner, order refers to the establishment or the attempt to establish social and political relations in a social unit (a human association of more than one person) on the basis of consistency, intelligibility and structure as ideals. Order is thus obviously an expression of reason, a function of reason or rather a state of reason. Order in the above senses contrast with disorder, inconsistency, disorganisation, chaos, unintelligibility and irrationality. Needless to say, order is the principal concern of philosophy as a rational science, as a search for knowledge and a theoretical effort; as well as philosophy as a way of life, a practical guide to life. As a rational science, philosophy is concerned with the nature of truth and how it can be discovered or accessed in the different spheres of cognitive concern – issues of veracity – particularly as it concerns the nature of being and reality (ontology and metaphysics generally), logic, methodology; ethics, social and political philosophy – where issues and questions about truth are intertwined with those about right and wrong. As a way of life, philosophy is concerned about authentic living, the practical, faithful, real concretization of given philosophical ideals in an individual and/or society – that is existential authenticity. The philosophical quest is the quest for veracity and authenticity. And, this is the quest for consistency in theory and practice; it is the

effort to discover, generate and establish patterns of consistency (order) in our lives and the physical environment. It is this that gives us the truths and knowledge that we have and the right action that we cherish. Let me now show how the various conceptions of truth (truth as correspondence, coherence and existential authenticity) are underlined by the principle of consistency (the essence of order) and how consistency, which is a relational term, and thus open to the vagaries of the dynamics that pervades reality, can persist in dynamic states only on the basis of beneficence, especially altruism. For, it is only in association with or in the context of beneficence that consistency as a principle can find maximum expression without involving contradictions. Consistency underlies all our cognition. This is so because whatever we perceive, regardless of the means by which it is perceived – the senses, reason or the intuition – can only be perceived if it remains consistently itself for the length of time required for perception to occur. In other words, the law of identity (A is A) ordinarily holds in order for any perception to be recorded. This implies that reality as we have it is underlined by the principle of consistency; whatever other principles might compose it, because our reality is circumscribed by our perceptions by the three means of perception above. Consistency thus not only underlies truth but reality as we can know it.

Consistency, however, has to be located in a dynamic world in which there are many sources of dynamics and which consistency as a principle becomes one of the sources or principles of dynamics. For instance, in the dynamic world of social relations, in history so to say, it is but one of the motivational forces that underlie action and it is not the most powerful apparently – this is why philosophers like Hume say that reason is a slave of the passions. However, if consistency is an underlying principle of reality then a situation in which it is subsumed under other motivational principles cannot represent the true nature of reality. Such a situation or conceptualization represents nothing but a failure to identify or conceptualize the state(s) of its optimum expression, which incidentally would also be states that constitute or represent reality maximally. Now, beneficence, broadly speaking, is most compatible with the principle consistency. It is a set of motivational principle whose expression in association with consistency minimal levels of contradictions; the principle of consistency can be expressed maximally in contexts of beneficence without contradictions. So we can talk of empathic-consistency (if we take empathy to mean beneficence) the fundamental principle of veritable social reality – consistency and empathy are two sides of the same coin; and together they give us the basis of right action.

The perception and affirmation of reason, particularly, the principle of consistency, as the foundation of knowledge (though in a different way from the above) is an enduring achievement of modern philosophy; especially as seen in the philosophy of Kant; in his epistemology and elabo-

ration and application of the universalizability principle. However, the Kantian universalizability principle as many scholars have shown is inadequate as a criterion for determining right thought and action in the entire sphere of ethics. For there are universalizable injunctions, which meet the Kantian criterion but which are nevertheless morally reprehensible. In such situations, beneficence or empathy is usually lacking; indicating that capture right action fully a fusion of beneficence and consistency is required. As indicated above, empathic-consistency is not simply the basic principle of ethics, but a basic principle that governs the world or reality as we know it because it is also the guide and basis of true knowledge. There may be other principles but they are yet to be established; and prudence demands that we work with what has been established so far. We can thus say that the true development of individuals and communities is founded on the principle of empathic-consistency. And, the degree to which individuals and communities have been able to concretize this principle in their culture and lives is the degree to which individuals and communities have experienced true development. The history of the development of societies is the history of the struggle to concretize this principle in cultures, communities and individuals. It is a struggle between empathic-consistency and its opposite set of principles which we may refer to as apathetic-inconsistency, which produces or goes with disorder, chaos, contradictions and non-being or nothingness – because contradicting terms in thought and action negate each other allowing or producing nothing. The one set of principles is rationalistic because of the centrality of reason in-itself in its composition; the other is voluntaristic because of the subordination or absence of reason in-itself in its composition.

The different peoples of the world have from time immemorial struggled with these opposites, seeking to create a culture based on empathic-consistency with more or less success in different epochs. So it is with the African peoples. At this juncture, I would like to focus on African societies and how they have struggled and are still struggling with these opposing sets of principles in order to create a philosophy and culture of proper human development. In this regard, I shall use the Igbo of Nigeria as a case study, making general comments and claims from the Igbo case when such are warranted.

Umunna: the Religious-Philosophy of the Igbo

The religious philosophy of the Igbo can best be understood by first looking at the active worshipping community, the *umunna*, literally, father's children. However, the word is always used in referring to a specific father's children, particularly, an ancestral figure from whom a collection of progeny descend biologically and/or by adoption. *Umunna*

therefore is used in reference to siblings in a polygamous nuclear family, the extended family and the clan or maximal lineage unit. The crucial thing is that the word *umunna* denotes and connotes brotherhood based on blood ties, including both biological and ritual ones, and on being bound by the same ancestral spirit, *mmuo* (expressed in the words, '*ofu mmuo ji anyi*' – we are bound by the same ancestral spirit) and hence common worship which invariably includes some divinities (*alusi*) usually, the earth goddess, Ani and any other divinity the *umunna* may wish to have as their patron(s) and patroness(es).

The *umunna* is a community of persons bound by blood and religion. Members of the same *umunna* are socialized and are expected to behave in a brotherly manner towards one another; act according to the laid down order of the *umunna*, including giving due respects to those in authority – the *okpala*, *ozo*, etc; respect the taboos of the land and uphold the moral standards of the community; be public-spirited and hold the interest of the *umunna* above outside interests. Within the *umunna*, the ideal is 'one for all, all for one'; communalism holds sway. *Umunna* is the Igbo word that is similar to *ujaama* and *ubuntu*; that captures the African notion of brotherhood and familyhood.

The supreme commitment of *umunna* is not to the divinities (*alusi*) for they always cast them off when they are found to be no more useful; rather it is to life. Hence, the Igbo say, '*ndu bu isi*' (life is supreme). By life the Igbo meant human life on earth; its conservation or preservation is the supreme value. This is because the Igbo did not believe that there is any radical difference between life in this world and life in the hereafter. When a person dies his body decays and perishes. However, the procreative vital force in him/her or rather the instance of the procreative force that was him/her (the *mmuo* or spirit of the person) lives on in the spirit world as an ancestor or ancestress or as an evil spirit if he/she was a worthless person – an *akaliogoli*, as such worthless spirits are called in the case of men. This *mmuo* is inextricably bound to the notion of *chi* and *eke* (the spark of the procreative force that brought a given person into existence and the destiny of such a given person, respectively). *Mmuo* is contrasted with *madu*, a human being in its physical sense. It refers to non-materiality generally; its specific manifestation as the spiritual counterpart of a person's physical being gives us a specific *mmuo* which cannot exist without a *chi*. It is this specific *mmuo* and *chi* which transcends to the spirit world and continues its existence as it had lived on earth. If it had been powerful and successful on earth with a lot of wealth, property and titles (an indication that such a specific *mmuo* and *chi* is composed of an abundance of the procreative vital force), so will it continue in the spirit world. This is the reason why African peoples buried their dead with as much pomp and pageantry as their families can muster; and with as much of their wealth

in the grave with them, including human beings (slaves and, in some African communities, though not in Igbo communities, wives and children). It was to tell the spirit world and its gate-keepers that a person of a given earthly status was arriving so that he/she will be accorded the same status in the spirit world as he/she had on earth. This is materiality extended to the spirit world; a form of spiritualized materialism.

One had to guard and promote one's life and that of the *umunna* as a supreme value because it is in doing so that the full vitality and potentials of a specific *chi* and *mmuo* is realised, enabling one to take one's proper place in the cosmic scheme of things. Not to do so amounts to one working against the potentials of himself/herself as a specific procreative force (*mmuo* and *chi*); and this means or results in one being some type of worthless person (*akaliogoli*) deserving of the lowest places in society and in the spirit world, including places of torment.

This supreme value and commitment of the traditional Igbo is derived from a broader pan-psychic conceptualization of reality. Pan-psychism generally is the view that there is a psychic counterpart, soul or mind, underlying all physical reality; running parallel but not interacting with physical reality as in the views of Leibniz and Spinoza; or interacting and directing physical reality and vice-versa as in the views of some Neo-Platonists. On the Igbo view, *Ike* (force) is essentially a spiritual thing, which may manifest materially. Everything that exists has *ike* – force – appropriate to its own being, which make it what it is. *Ike* is living, vital, because everything (both living and non-living things) has life. This is arrived at because anything that changes has the capacity to change in it – the dynamic principle. Change here is conceived in the broadest terms as any alteration in size, shape, location, colour, etc. The dynamic principle underlies all vitality, so everything that can change contains the vital principle; all reality is thus underlined by the vital principle. Reality is composed of dynamic or vital forces and everything on earth manifests this vital force in a unique way or in a set of unique ways, which makes it possible for us to classify beings in terms of genera and specie, very much close to the manner Tempels describes Bantu thought.⁴

However, there is a hierarchy of forces, because some things (manifestations of vital forces) are dependent on the power of other vital forces for their continued existence. Such things therefore assume a subordinate position in relation to the vital force(s) on which they depend or from which they derive. In addition, some things can overpower other things, subordinate them to their power and put them to the service of their own interest by consuming them as food, utilizing their labour and deriving other forms of utility from them. Anything that can be so overpowered

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⁴ Tempels, P. (1959), *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris, pp. 44-69.

takes a relative subordinate position in the hierarchy of beings. Based on this, the Igbo have a hierarchy of beings beginning with *Chukwu*, the supreme vital force which manifests in and through Igwe (the sky, that is, the world above, particularly the sun – *anyawu*); Ani (the earth, including all on and in it, and especially as fertility, *agbala*) and *Chi*, the procreative force.⁵ The conception of *Chukwu* beyond these two basic manifestations of its power was vague and remains a subject of controversy (Nwoga's book is one of the best studies of this controversy).⁶

Igwe and Ani gave birth to the divinities that are attached to each of them, such as thunder and lightning in the case of Igwe; and hills, rivers and their spirits in the case of the earth. The earth gave birth to the ancestors, to human beings, animals and plants generally. Since everything is a specific and characteristic manifestation of vital force, it is possible to appropriate or control the vital force of a given thing and make it serve one's own purposes – this is the thinking behind both sympathetic and other forms of magic. Consequently, the Igbo like many other African communities instituted the various divinities, various forms of worship and rituals, in order to placate, supplicate and control vital forces for the purposes of preserving, elongating and promoting personal lives and the lives of the *umunna*.

A pan-psychist perspective in this regard, and in itself, does not necessarily imply voluntarism, non-rationalism and irrationalism as the pan-psychism of Spinoza shows, for instance. The psychic counterpart of matter as well as matter itself can be conceived as subject to rational behaviour and rationality generally. However, this is only one possibility; another way of looking at the psychic element is voluntaristic and existentialist. Here the psyches as vital forces express their being in the power they display: this is the essential characteristic of their being. Reality is defined and made by the power displayed by vital forces; there is no objective reality or objective order beyond such power on display and the rules they make. This is the direction taken by such philosophers as Schopenhauer, which reached its highest development in such philosophers as Nietzsche. The major stream in the Igbo perception of *Chukwu* (the ultimate being amongst the Igbo) was basically irrationalist in a rather Nietzschean manner as could be seen in the Nri myth.

In this myth Nri, a patriarchal figure and native doctor par excellence, faced with famine, appealed to *Chukwu* for food. In response, *Chukwu* ordered him to kill and bury his first son and first daughter in order to get food. Nri found this hard but then succumbed to the request on account

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⁵ Nwoga, D. (1984), *The Supreme Being as a Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought*, Ahiazu Mbaise-Imo State.

⁶ Nwoga (1984).

of the severity of the famine. After twelve days yams grew over the grave of his son and coco-yams over that of his daughter; and thereafter there was plenty to eat for Nri and his family.⁷

Nri's philosophy marked a definitive turn in Igbo thought towards the supremacy of the will (self-will) over objective reason, and the voluntarism, particularism, and irrationalism that goes with it. However, the Igbo had a proto rationalistic and universalistic strain in their thought. Before the emergence of Nri's religious philosophy, it was possible for the Igbo to develop their pan-psychism along rationalist lines. Succession to the office of *okpala*, for instance, which was based on order of birth (and death), was beyond the powers of anybody to manipulate (except by the extreme step of killing rivals). This succession is associated with *nze* – the notion of avoiding sin and offences – as a reward for *nze*. It is ordinarily within the capacity of the individual to control and manage himself to attain the status of *nze* (used in this sense as avoider of sin) – this status regrettably did not apply to women. Man in this arrangement related directly with an objective and impartial judge; so he really had to live up to the standards that were laid down which included, with respect to the *umunna*, truthfulness, fairness, charity, solidarity and respecting the taboos. In addition, the *ofo* of the *okpala* symbolized rectitude in these matters. We can therefore say that the objective and impartial judge (who stands over and above the will of individuals) validates rectitude within the limitations of the horizon of the *umunna*

This was a foundation for considering reality to be governed by objectivity and the appropriation and application of such objectivity in the lives of the people. This seminal objectivity in some ways was being developed beyond the *umunna* level by the Igbo. For instance, the Igbo say '*nwanne di na mba*' (my mother's child, that is a brother or sister, can be found in foreign lands) in reference to a good friend or associate in foreign nations, that is, outside the collection of maximal lineage groups that constitute an autonomous and sovereign political community – *obodo*. The definitive turn which Nri's philosophy involves, undermined development in this direction. Some of the innovations Nri brought in the voluntaristic, particularistic and irrational direction include the following:

a. The killing of one's own children thereby negating the Igbo sayings: '*maduka*' (the human being is supreme), '*uba maduka*' (having a lot of children is the greatest good), '*nwa bu isi*' (having a child is supreme), '*nwakaego*' (having a child is greater than having money). Nri's murders are justified by the wealth and prosperity that it brought thereby introducing in Igbo thought a strain in which wealth is more important than human life, including the life of one's own children. In addition, perhaps

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⁷ Abanuka, B. (1999), *Myths and the African Universe*, Onitsha, pp. 77-79.

even more importantly, it teaches that there are conditions in which one can use the life of members of the *umunna*, even one's own children, instrumentally – the 'thingification' of the lives of some members of the *umunna* – in favour of others. The argument presented in favour of Nri's action is that the situation he faced was very dire so he had to take steps that broke the rules of normal standards. However, as dire as the circumstances were, Nri could have offered *Chukwu* his own life in return for the products and techniques that would sustain the lives of his children and wives; but he made no such offer let alone *Chukwu* rejecting it – this would have been the more rationalistic path. In the end, Nri got what he wanted but the norms of Igbo society were broken, thus enthroning the sense that power (of whatever type) and the things that went with it such as wealth, food, etc., were more important than ethical standards and the rule of law – the rule of personality was clearly introduced here.

b. Nri set out to develop ideas and institutions that undermined the nascent objectivity in Igbo thought and life as expressed in the institution of the *okpala* and *ofo okpala* mentioned above. Nri, after his sacrifices, claimed special powers and a special relationship with *Chukwu* (the supreme procreative or vital force). This made it possible for him to institute or control new types of *ofo*, namely: a new type *ofo okpala*, *ofo ozo* and *alo ozo* (*ozo* is a title and system of priesthood and political power introduced by Nri) and *ofo didia*; symbols of authority within a new system based on power dominating ethics, which Nri had founded. His new philosophy based on the supremacy of power over reason and the law, was vigorously propagated and it was largely successful because Nri probably introduced new agricultural crops notably yams or introduced new and better species of yams and other crops as well as new ideas and methods (ritual, religious and technical) to enhance productivity. Family priesthood which previously belonged fully to the eldest son (*okpala*) of a deceased man now went effectively to the *ozo* title holder who had bought his title with money. Therefore, priesthood became a thing to be bought with money.

As could be expected, the Nri community went furthest in destroying ideas and institutions based on primogeniture, wisdom and objectivity, and replacing them with those based on wealth and material achievements. For instance, once a person took the *ozo* title before his *okpala* he became senior to his *okpala* not only in ritual matters but also in the ancestral world even if his *okpala* took the title later, thus completely rendering the order of birth powerless and/or meaningless in most circumstances that matter. (It should be noted that this is the situation in Nri town and perhaps in neighbouring places deeply influenced by her, in other places in Igbo land, the situation vary and the *okpala* may not be so replaced by an *ozo* man).⁸

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⁸ Onwuejogwu (1997), *Afa Symbolism and Phenomenology*, Benin City, pp. 34-37.

It is true that a person who takes the *ozo* title should be worthy in character and within the close communities of the agrarian village-clusters in which the Igbo generally lived, it was possible to readily establish the level of integrity of a person, to control the behaviour of community members and punish bad behaviour. Therefore, those who took the *ozo* title lived up to the ethos of the *umunna*. However, the fact remains that the *ozo* title is not conferred on account of manifest levels of rectitude, wisdom and truth-seeking but on account of wealth and minimal levels of the latter. It can be argued that Nri's innovation in this regard should be seen as a replacement of the ascriptive criterion of birth order with the achievement criterion, which in many ways is a positive development in human relations. However, the issue here is not the replacement of an ascriptive criterion with an achievement one, but the consequence of this replacement with respect to the development and sustenance of universal and objective rationality, truth, justice and beneficence – a universal rationalistic and beneficent outlook. Many societies moved the basis of their priesthood from the ascriptive criterion to the achievement criterion based strictly on accomplishments in truth-seeking, knowledge and rectitude, while allowing the achievement criterion in such areas as politics to be based on wealth, military skills and so on. Thus, they tried to ensure that ethics and epistemology remained secure from the standards set by the wheeling and dealing of politics and business. In such situations, ethics and the dominant philosophy or religious philosophy developed according to their own logic in search of truth and objective reality; and both the dominant religious philosophy and the priestly class that developed and maintained it could stand as a corrective to the standards of politics and business. By investing the standards of ethics, politics, business, etc., in the same persons and institutions, undermining the existing countervailing influence on economic power (that is the *okpala*), and providing no other sort of real countervailing influence on the 'big man' that he created, Nri opened the way to the stifling of the nascent rationalistic outlook of the Igbo.

In a similar vein, there was a parallel development of the notion of the unfettered 'big man' among the Western Igbo influenced by the powerful Bini monarchical institution. Propelled by their conflict with Bini Kingdom and its imperial intentions and slave raids in Western Igbo land, the patriarchal figure Eze Chima (or Eze Chime) in collaboration with the people of Obior (the descendants of a 12th/13th century Bini chief who found sanctuary in Igboland) created a monarchical system that derived from the sky god, Igwe, whom the king personified. Igwe is a war god and the king as Igwe was a war god personified. He was meant to conquer militarily all the enemies of the people and bring security to the land. No law including the injunctions of the earth goddess were binding on this divine king. Hence, he was referred to as *Igwe ka Ani Ogo* – the sky (sky-god) that is more generous than the earth (earth-goddess) – and very significantly

he was *eme abu nso* – one bound by no taboos (laws and ethical standards), one that can act as he pleases. The institution and maintenance of this kingship went with a good deal of human sacrifices. There was definitive shift from more rationalistic institutions, which did not seem to provide the needed security in the face of threats and wars of aggression from the Bini Empire, to a more voluntaristic Bini type system. In many ways, the various levels of power in the polity reflected this rule of the ego. The errors and weaknesses in the outlook and institutions of Nri and Eze Chima manifested strongly in the changed economic and political environment of the Igbo beginning with the slave trade.

Nri had no philosophy to disapprove of the slave trade insofar as one was not enslaving or trading in his/her kinsman. Nri community, though not willing to keep slaves, traded in them. Nri philosophy as the only pan-Igbo philosophy did not contain elements that could bind the Igbo together in a brotherhood that would discourage intra-Igbo slave trade, let alone one that would prevent trading in non-Igbo slaves. The Eze Chima clans, notably Onitsha, not only traded in slaves but kept slaves and created a class of ‘untouchables’ out of their slaves. Further, there was nothing wrong in their philosophies using the proceeds from the slave trade to get the ozo title, thus an important section of the priesthood in Igbo land. This weakness is further exposed with the coming of colonisation and the new job opportunities it created in the colonial administration (the public service, including the civil service) and the modern business sector (firms, public and private). Many of the Igbo who took up these opportunities like other Africans saw it as something outside the sphere of the *umunna* and so, as the particularistic and voluntaristic ethics dictate, something to be exploited. These sorts of jobs both in the public and private sectors were called *olu oyibo* or *olu bekee* (the whiteman’s work, as distinct from *olu anyi* – our work). Many of them went on to exploit it corruptly as much as they could in spite of the watchful eyes of the British, laying the foundation of corruption in the public sector. Such ill-gotten wealth was used in taking the ozo title in many cases. It is such things that led to the saying in Onitsha: *Iwu ejiro ozo; ebe’sina bute ego ma si chialu Onitsha ozo* (there is no law – read standard of integrity – preventing one from taking the ozo title; it does not matter how you get your money; all that matters is that you invest it in the ozo title with the attendant feasting of your Onitsha kinsmen).⁹

As early as his 1920 publication, Basden who had observed Igboland for the preceding twenty years had noted how corrupt young men who

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⁹ Obi-in Council (2009), *Regulations on Funerals Rites, Marriages and Other Customary Matters*, Onitsha, p. 56.

made their money in the colonial administration or the modern private sector were filling the ranks of the ozo title in the Onitsha-Awka environs. He wrote:

Unfortunately, the order has degenerated of recent years into little more than a money-making concern. In many cases the holders of the title are mere youths who inspire no feelings of respect and who detract from its dignity rather than add to it. Young men acting as clerks, interpreters, carpenters and so forth, have seized the opportunity of making money which presented itself simultaneously with the opening up of the country by the Government, and earning (or otherwise collecting) money quickly, have immediately offered themselves as candidates for the Awzaw order. The old chiefs always willing to accept fees, have done so in the cases of these young men; they have reaped a monetary benefit; their original investment has turned out more profitable than ever they anticipated, but this greedy procedure led to the degradation of the whole system; with a collection of irresponsible young men as members of the order, all right to exercise any real control over the affairs of the community has been forfeited. The old men, for the sake of temporary gain, have sacrificed the dignity and the privileges of the Awzaw order and are chiefs in the proper meaning of the term no longer.¹⁰

The tendency for native doctors and leaders to leverage ideas and institutions that negate the rule of law in favour of those that encourage voluntarism and the rule of personality can be seen among some of the neighbours of the Igbo. We can see some of this in Osamaro Ibie's documentation of the Ifa system of the Yoruba. The verses below in his compilation relate to upholding ethical principles and by extension the rule of law:

He Made Divination For The Adulterous Woman

Ologbo gigiri, made divination for the mother of Igherekpe when she fell in love with another man. As the husband was about to discover her infidelity, she went to Orunmila for divination. She had lived with the husband for many years without having a child. At divination, Orunmila told her that her present husband was not her destined husband, and that she was only late in coming across the new lover (her rightful husband) because of the sacrifice she failed to make in heaven. He told her that the lover who was an Ifa priest, was the husband she chose from heaven. She was advised to make sacrifice with a he-goat to Esu, snails to Ifa and rabbit to the night to avoid death from the hands of her former husband and to enable her have a child who would be a daughter.

She performed the sacrifices and the husband gave her up without a fight. Subsequently, she became pregnant and later gave birth to a daughter called Igberekpe. When this Odu comes out at divination for a woman, she will be told that she has a secret lover who is her heavenly chosen husband. She should make sacrifice in order to marry and produce children for the new husband.¹¹

In a similar vein, the following verse shows a person how to escape certain consequences associated with seducing a stronger man's wife or girlfriend:

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¹⁰ Basden, G. T. (1982), *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, Abagana, pp. 264-265.

¹¹ Osamaro, C. (1992), *IFISM. Complete Works of Orunmilla Vol. II*, Lagos, p. 100.

The ground which slipped the people in front,
Warns those coming behind them.
The person who lost a relation to a tiger,
Takes to his heels at the sight of a fox.

These are the names of the Awos who made divination for the young man who was proposing to seduce the wife of a stronger man. He was advised not to do it. If he however was too committed to retreat, he was told to make sacrifice with a he-goat and a cock to avoid sudden death.¹²

We see in the above verses that the divinities could help someone to conceal immoral acts, escape punishment for them, and go on to legitimize them and derive benefits from them. It could be argued that the woman with no child above was desperate to get one but this does not justify infidelity. It would appear from the verses that beyond certain circles (especially family circles) perhaps sexual liaison are open and permissible, subject to the strength and power a person has to get away with his/her exploits. The divinities and all sorts of juju may be called in to aid one in this sphere. This is a sphere where the ego and self-interest rule and it reflects much of what happens in the society generally.

The verse below relates to principles that concern complicity and culpability in respect of stealing, the duty we owe our fellow human beings, and our sense of responsibility:

He Made Divination For A Trader:

A cloth trader went to Orunmila to find out what to do to flourish in his business. He was advised to offer he-goat to Esu. He was also told to make a small drum with the skin of the he-goat and to always put the drum within his cloth-wares when going to the market. He made the sacrifice.

As soon as the skin of the he-goat dried up, he used it to prepare a small drum which he kept within the load of clothes he was going to sell in the market. The following day, as he was going to the market, he was accosted by three armed bandits. Asked where he was going, he replied that he was on his way to the market to sell his merchandise of cloths. They requested him to give them one piece of cloth each but he refused. They retorted by seizing the entire merchandise from him and left for the ware-house where they kept the loot of their robberies in the heart of the forest. When they got to the ware-house, they put down the parcel of cloths but to their amazement, something began to sing the following song from within the luggage:

asho tiege tiege tori boo
asho tiege tiege tori boo
Osho geregere tori boo.

Which happened to be the names of the three bandits. Out of fright and curiosity, they opened the parcel of cloth and found the talking drum that had been singing with their names. As soon as they saw the drum, a boa (Oka or Arumwoto) came out of the drum and bit each of them. As they pursued the boa to kill it, each of them dropped dead.

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¹² Osamaro (1992), pp. 89-90.

Meanwhile, the trader went to Orunmila to find out what to do about the three bandits who had robbed him. In fact, he accused Orunmila of cheating him by advising him to make a sacrifice which only manifested in mis-adventure. Orunmila kept his cool and after divination, advised him to return home at once because he would soon recover his stolen wares at a premium. He never knew what Orunmila meant.

The trader returned home with mixed feelings. Not long afterwards, he heard a voice calling on his name at the back of his house. When he went out to verify who was hailing on his name, he found the small drum which he kept within his merchandise, dancing in circles and commanding him to follow him back into the forest. He accordingly followed the direction of the drum which led him first to the corpses of the three dead bandits and later to their forest ware-house.

Not only did he retrieve his cloths, he also inherited the entire loots of the robbers in the ware-house. He packed everything to his house which consisted of all imaginable goods of value and money. The unexpected find made him so rich that he was later given a high chieftaincy title in the town.¹³

In respect of the above verse, proper ethical principles (possibly in some communities, legal principles as well) require that the trader should make all reasonable effort to find the owner(s) of the other goods he found in the ware-house. If, however, after all efforts has been made, the owner(s) are not found, the trader should turn the goods over to the state, or any other public-spirited institution that should use it to serve the public interest, including that of the poor, the needy and the dispossessed. The State may however reward such a citizen with a part of the goods; this will be both ethically and legally justifiable. The appropriation of the goods by the trader without apparently making the necessary efforts to find its owners or involving the State makes the trader to enjoy unethically the “fruits” of stealing/robbery. The trader thus shares in the robbery, and the divinities aided him/her in this. This is unethical and should also be illegal. An ideology that allows the conflict of the ego and self-interest to go unchecked in a wide area of social interaction, one that also features the use of the occult in promoting the ego and furthering self-interest to the detriment of the general public interest/good, will be unable to generate trust amongst its citizens. Trust between people will be limited most likely to narrow family circles. This is a major part of the problem faced in many African societies including the Igbo. Such societies will lack the inter-reactivity necessary for their development; they will find it difficult to resist internal and external influences militating against their organisational sovereignty and integrity or to orient these towards development.

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¹³ Osamaro, C. (c. 1993), *IFISM. Complete Works of Orunmilla Vol. III*, Lagos, pp. 99-101. The particulars of this volume are not readily available in the copy of the volume in my possession; we may assume that it was published around the time of volumes 2 & 3, that is, between 1992 and 1993 by the same publisher. In addition, I think that the seeming difference in the title of this volume should be ignored.

Contemporary Challenges

From the forgoing, it would be clear that African communities have had a rationalistic strand in their thought as well as a voluntaristic one; the historical experience of many African communities have tended to leverage the voluntaristic strand and the voluntaristic 'party'. However, this situation has changed completely with the coming of Christianity, which has rejuvenated and reinforced the rationalistic strand in African thought and philosophy. The great African writer Chinua Achebe captured this well in his *Things Fall Apart* in the character of Nwoye and his response to the sacrificial killing of Ikemefuna. Ikemefuna was given to Umuofia as a part of the compensation of the murder of an Umuofia man by a neighbouring town. Okonkwo of Umuofia was asked to take care of him until the gods decided his faith. Young Ikemefuna grew in Okonkwo's house like any of his children. He was intelligent, hardworking and well loved. Okonkwo even wished that he was his son. Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son, slightly younger than Ikemefuna had come to take Ikemefuna for a senior brother. After many years of this very successful integration of Ikemefuna and his blossoming into a promising young man, the gods decided that he should be killed in retribution for a murder that was more or less forgotten and which he himself did not commit. It was a particularly cruel instance of the retributive maxim, an eye for an eye, which defied rational justification. Nwoye could find no justification for this murder; he was devastated and his rationalistic mind rejected the ideology, institutions and practices that condemned and killed Ikemefuna. His mind was yearning for a better alternative; so when the Christian missionaries came with the doctrine of compassion, the golden rule, respect for persons, etc., he wasted no time in becoming a full Christian; Christianity answered his questions.

Outside the world of fiction, Africans have been making effort to revitalize and expand the rationalistic strand in our traditions. In this regard, I would mention the philosophy of Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Edeh. Edeh builds his philosophy on the notion of *mmadu* (*mmadi*), a concept that translates as the beauty of life or the beauty that is; it is also the Igbo word for the human being. The Igbo word for human being etymologically means the beauty of life or the beauty that is in an exclamatory expression more or less. Edeh argues that this beauty of life or this beauty that is cannot but be a reflection of the beauty of its creator, Chukwu, the Supreme Being. This beauty of life is not a mere physical thing, but a mode of living, according to the highest standards of empathic-consistency; it is this that would make life blossom and flourish to the utmost, bringing about individual self-realization and communal development. Edeh's philosophy is a novel attempt to build on the rationalistic foundations of Igbo thought in the light of Christianity. He does not simply exhume and

propagate traditional Igbo philosophy as it was developed by the ancients. He interprets and expands this thought system in the light of Christianity, such that it can be said to be Christian Igbo philosophy.¹⁴ Apart from this sort of effort, there are elements in the rationalistic thinking of Africans that are universalizable. In this regard one may mention elements of the Igbo conception of justice, particularly distributive and social justice, as well as the relationship between the individual and the collective.

Universalizable African Values

In the search for equity and fairness, the Igbo consider the individual as an instance of vital force, of being, ontologically equal with other human beings, possessing potentials that are ultimately unfathomable. Consequently, unless there is any overriding reason (such as an office which gives higher responsibility and demands more expenditure) things are shared equally among people regardless of age. For instance, in a polygamous family (and the norm was polygamy in the traditional setting), the distribution of a man's wages/earnings amongst his wives, their sustenance and that of their children, is done on the basis of the equality of the wives regardless of the number of children any of the wives may have or the sex of such children or indeed whether a wife is childless. It might appear unjust for a wife with six children to receive the same agricultural products or money for her sustenance and that of her children as a wife with one or no child. But it is calculated that the woman with six children apparently needs resources while her children are growing; she has to work extra hard and possibly depend on relatives for the sustenance of her children; however when her children are grown and are able to help in the farm, she will have more hands working in her farm than the woman with fewer children or no child; at this time she will have many hands contributing towards her upkeep and she can relax and enjoy the fruits of her labour, while a woman with fewer children or no child will have fewer hands contributing towards her upkeep and she will then enter a period of suffering. It is therefore expected that a wise wife with few or no children will use the surplus that she may have in her more youthful years to help in bringing up the children of her co-wife who has many children, so when she gets old and in need of help her stepsons and stepdaughters will look after her. The important thing here is that these women are given their rights; so they can act freely to secure or not secure their future. The interesting idea here is that people are given their due regardless of circumstances. This is interesting because the consideration of what counts in favour of getting more than others and vice versa in respect of

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¹⁴ See, E. M. P. Edeh (2009), *Igbo Metaphysics*, Enugu: Madonna University Publications. C. B. Nze (2011), Ed., *Aspects of Edeh's Philosophy*, Enugu: Madonna University Press.

distributive justice is frequently subjective and arbitrary. Moreover, the application of the wrong principle in distribution can lead to conflict as could be seen in the Niger Delta area in Nigeria where militants are up in arms against the federal government for keeping the bulk of the revenue that comes from oil and petroleum; whereas the oil producing areas should take the bulk of the revenue that comes from their land.

Another area of consideration is the relationship between the individual and the collective – the various social units to which the individual belongs, especially the family (including the extended family) and the state. In traditional Igbo thought, the individual is not fully defined, characterized or considered to be viable, in contradistinction to, or apart from, the collective. However, on the other hand the collective is made up of individuals and the strength of individuals. Every individual represents his/her collective in some way; he/she is in a sense the champion of his/her collective in the contest against external and internal forces. If the individual wins he/she brings glory, power, and honour to the collective; opens doors for the collective, advances the cause of the collective. If he loses the reverse is the case. The individual's power that enables him/her win or lose depends not only on the input of the collective in the making of the individual but also the nature and power of his/her *chi* – the specific, customized and individuated spark of the supreme being that constitutes the idiosyncratic psychic and spiritual force that ultimately governs the individual's character and destiny.

On this construal, the collective makes a good deal of the individual and thus has the power to decide a good deal about the individual's life however the individual who possesses reserves and recesses of pure individuality can mould, uplift (or downgrade as the case may be) the collective. The two terms (the collective and the individual) flow into each other in a manner that prevents any sharp divide, presenting rather a picture of a continuum from one end to the other. On this construal, therefore, the relationship between the two terms is open to negotiation on a more or less case by case basis, on the basis of fairness and the development of the individual and community. Thus, whether or not the collectivist interests and demands, or the individualist interests and demands, are upheld in a given situation will depend on the circumstances and the imperatives of fairness, justice and development. Before I dilate on this with an illustration from Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, let me point out that it should be noted that the above perspective is not the formulation of any specific Igbo or African community but rather my own synthesis and projections based on Igbo thought on the matter. Furthermore, it is also to be noted that in actual practice, one finds the pendulum swinging between strong collectivism and individualism with attempts to strike the sort of balance I have explored above.

The main character in *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo, is a brilliant grandson of Okonkwo, the tragic hero of *Things Fall Apart*; so in him and the novel, the Igbo try to adjust and progress in the modernity that had been imposed on them through the agency of colonization. Umuofia, Obi Okonkwo's community, as a good many actual Igbo communities address the problems and opportunities of colonial modernity with their deep rooted communal values and collectivist approaches. The community had quickly realized that education was the means to learn the White-man's ways and so to gain respectable positions and power in the colonial structure; positions and power that could enable a person leverage the interests of his/her community in employment opportunities, allocation of resources and development projects, land disputes and other law suits, scholarships and bursaries, education and health services, etc. Umuofia, as was the case with many real Igbo communities, decided to levy themselves in order to provide higher education overseas to presumably as many as their brilliant sons as they could afford. Obi Okonkwo turns out to be the first to benefit from this collectivist action, which indeed put some financial burden on the working adults of the community who were etching a living out of the very low income and low yielding traditional economy. Obi returns from England with a degree, not in law, which the community had sent him to study presumably because of its practical value to them, but in English – Obi had changed his course of study to English, in which he found fulfilment. This was an early assertion of his will over that of the community that sponsored him. The community did not mind much about this because any degree at this time was useful. Obi got a good job in the scholarship board and all seemed well; the community would be rewarded for its wise investment and Obi could find contentment in his social importance. Then Obi finds love in Clara, an *osu* (out caste); his family and community do all they can to get him out of this affair. Obi, head strong as his grandfather, presses on with his affair and decision to marry Clara. The community as tradition demands brace up to ostracise him – for one married to an *osu* gains *osu* status by marriage. The whole affair is hard and bitter for all concerned but before Obi could get to the point of a final break with his people, he is arrested for bribery and goes to face the British penal system and an irreversibly blighted life – a lingering tragedy, as Achebe wanted, more penetrating and hopeless than the suicide of Okonkwo, who was supposed to have reincarnated in Obi. In a sense his troubled affair drove him to this end for had he had a socially approved affair, he could have pulled resources with his partner and so he would not have the financial needs that drove him to take bribes. Further, a settled love life most likely would have provided contentment in other ways as to prevent this sort of crooked life, not least by making him less thoughtless and reckless. The story of Obi, of being caught between personal interest (individualism) and community

interest (collectivism) and being cut to pieces by the divergent interests, is common in African communities. Yet such conflicts could be resolved or minimized through negotiation and compensation as indicated above. Umuofia grieved the investment and loss they were about to experience with Obi, an investment which reinforced the idea of communal control over the individual, which ordinarily in their eyes should give them an added stake and right over Obi. Obi should have recognized this legitimate claim over his person; should have tried to compensate the community by paying for the education of some its members, say, among other things, before pursuing the personal interests that would sever him from the community – for if he married an *osu* the community would be in no position to associate with in any way and he would have no opportunity to reciprocate their gesture towards him. Family and communal relations are not readily reducible to mere monetary values, nevertheless his community would most likely have grudgingly accepted this sort of compensation – which means that Obi would pay the community with a good deal of his earnings over a number of years. His family would be tougher to handle on this basis but with greater labour this same principle could bring some understanding and the freedom that Obi sought. The principle here is that harm and loss to the individual and community, given opposing interests and views, could be delineated and either party should be justified to pursue its demands if the damage that would be done to the other is minimal or has been reasonably compensated for. That neither party offered this sort of solution shows that they were working with the extremes of individualism and collectivism.

Yet another aspect of traditional Igbo values that might suggest some enduring universal values could be seen in the traditional welfare system. In the traditional Igbo society, people make demands on their relations, especially relatively wealthy ones, which cannot be found in more individualistic societies. A person may expect, for instance, that his uncle should pay his school fees, not on the grounds of charity, but as a matter of his/her right; similarly people expect that wealthy relations should redistribute some of their wealth to their relations and the community; the more they do so the better. The ideas that justify these include: 1. That the poor could refuse to obey the laws of the system that produced the wealthy person and if such a system collapses as a result the wealthy man will collapse with it; 2. That the community relies to a large extent on the poor for its security in the traditional society. The contributions of the poor in this regard were not monetized or rewarded formally in cash or in kind; their reward came informal via the voluntary redistribution of wealth by the rich. 3. On a more metaphysical basis, the rich were deemed to ancestors that came back to earthly life, so as fathers they had a responsibility to take care of their children so that none will perish on account of

poverty, etc. It is in this sense that the rich is 'owned' by the community, including especially the poor, just as children 'own' their father or mother.

The acceptance of a social order in which they are relatively poor and the performance of invaluable security services, make the compensation of the poor necessary. This is not socialism; but rather social justice; the poor should have some compensation as a matter of right. We may compare this with the social welfare system and the Welfare State of the West, which try to provide for low income earners and the jobless. The justification deployed for these purposes rely more on watered down forms of Marxism – the people who participate in production should be given a larger slice of the proceeds of their effort than they received in the early days of Western Capitalism and Industrialisation. Such economic arguments had little or no place in the traditional African societies. However, their reasons for social redistribution of wealth are very important and applicable to contemporary sophisticated societies.

The practice of the traditional African society above stresses the need to discover and practice reciprocity between individuals, between groups and between individuals and groups on the basis of what one may regard as a holistic-compensatory notion of fairness and social welfare. Some of the ideas here are captured in the traditional Igbo notion of *Ife kwulu, ife a kwudebie* (whenever a thing stands in a place or takes up a position, something else takes up a position close to it or stands in a close relation to it; a thing always stands in relation to something else). This saying stresses the need to look at things holistically and in relation to other things as comprehensively as possible. From this idea one can derive the attitude of valuing all members of a society whether they are rich or poor regardless of their status and potentials, because one cannot occupy the space meant for another. In addition, the Igbo say *Mmaduka* (a human being particularly a member of the family or clan is greater or more important than anything else); consequently the human being who occupies the space, which no one else or nothing else can occupy, is invaluable.

Based on the above notions, the traditional Igbo practiced some notion of social welfare for the poor; indeed the word for poverty, *ogbenye*, means, in English, living on the charity of the community; which comes to the same thing as living on dole.¹⁵ However, the idea of dole is regarded differently in the West and in the traditional Igbo society. In the Igbo society it is loathed, because of its ontological implications, unlike in the west, poverty is associated with displeasing the gods, the activities of evil spirits or a bad personal god; in other words poverty is a result of sin; the work of sorcery; or, a bad destiny. All of these are to be feared, because

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¹⁵ Ekei rightly points this out in his book on African communalism; see, Ekei, J. C. (2001), *Justice in Communalism*, Realm Communications.

poverty threatens the full manifestations of a person's vital force; it even threatens the immortality of a person, because immortality lies in having a progeny, but poverty may prevent a person from having many wives and children, and poverty may prevent a person from having a proper burial ceremony. People then strove to be wealthy and there was a strong work ethics. If, however, in spite of a person's efforts, including sacrifice to the gods and other spiritual efforts, he/she remained poor, he/she could count on the charity of members of the community. What the African notion of social justice and social welfare point to are the universalizable ideas of the invaluable nature of the individual, the intrinsic worth of the diverse social roles that individuals are capable of, the value of striving and the need to consider and look for reciprocity as contextually and comprehensively as possible, embracing the past present and future as much as possible. The drive to work with comprehensive social contexts, at least, partly accounts for the African idea of collective responsibility. The traditional African society, held the collective (the family, extended family, clan et cetera) responsible for the wrongdoings of any of its members; and conversely the collective could take pride in the achievements of any of its members. The collective, consequently, could be punished for the crime of any of its members especially if it is a grave offence such as murder. Collective responsibility has been criticised by individualistic thinkers and legal systems. However, the justification for collective social responsibility lies in the fact that the individual is a product of the social stimuli he/she has received to a large extent. If a person turns out to be a thief for instance, it shows that those who were responsible for raising him/her did not do their work well, and they should, where possible, receive some punishment. Similarly those who might benefit from his/her action such as spouses, siblings and children are punished to the extent they are seen to have benefited or would benefit. Collective social responsibility gives a more accurate reflection of the diversity and extent of our social relations.

A moderate form of collective social responsibility at least appears to be more consistent with the reality of social existence and we can conjecture that if a society is structured in favour of a reasonable level of collective social responsibility, there will be more encouragement for action in favour of public spiritedness and the public good (and the development of beneficence). This, apart from other benefits, will strengthen the ideological and legal basis of the NGO's and international organisations that have been working for the public good on a global as well as local basis.