

# MARX'S ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE IGBO QUESTION OF HUMAN DIGNITY

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## **Abstract**

Man is a free conscious active being, who answers to his needs in order to realize himself in every situation he finds himself. These needs are multi-faceted: spiritual, material, psychological, biological, social, etc. Karl Marx's human excludes the spiritual need and pigeonholes man under materialism. The Igbo society seems to have a deeper understanding that open up to all the options without reserve. Marx's is an ideological school anticipating a re-creation of humanity that will subvert capitalism through a revolution while the Igbo is a lived experience for centuries and had a very developed form of democracy stemming from their balanced view of life.

**Keywords:** Anthropology, Igbo, Human Nature

## **Introduction**

Karl Marx builds an edifice of human nature resting on the base structure of his materialist project of the revolution of the proletariat. He brackets entirely the spiritual dimension of man and trumpets his creative activities which he terms free conscious activity. Marx sees man as a creatively active being, who never ceases to act, otherwise he is a non being. Man's actions are directed towards the other and towards the objective nature. For Marx, human nature is historical; man creates his nature. Man's nature is not fixed but always becoming and different in each epoch of history. Marx also maintains that there is a constant nature in man found in every epoch (trans-epochal nature). The epochal and trans-epochal natures should not be seen as two separate natures because man is not divided neither does Marx posit that he is made up of body and soul. At best they can be viewed as components of a whole, two sides of a reality.

“Creativity”, has an unfailing component or requirement, which is freedom. There is a paradox involved here with regard to Marx's claims that man is creatively active, he is free to create, yet he is not free to choose the circumstances under which he creates his history. This is to say that history is a product of man yet the same history works itself out with an iron necessity. This working out does not mean history itself is a productive being. It means that what will be is already mapped out. The creativity of man comes in here by the fact that the unfolding of this would-be history is through his productive activity. Man creates his nature but he is given a grounding or a base by historical developments. Therefore, as history unfurls, human nature changes. Man's nature can then be said to be super imposed or structured on these developments that go on in epochs or stages. Marx also distinguishes between a synthetic and human need. The human needs drive man on to becoming human and by so doing he returns to his species-essence or actualizes his existence.

An effort will be made to present Karl Marx's human nature project with critical evaluations of his assertions for better understanding. Then a cursory exposition of the Igbo understanding of human dignity will be used to re-evaluate Marx's theories.

### **What Is Human Nature?**

The meaning of "human" in Oxford advanced learner's Dictionary reads: "of or characteristic of man (as contrasted with God, animals or machines)". "Nature" is defined as "typical qualities and characteristics of a person or an animal". I can draw from those that the 'human nature' refers to those characteristics possessed in common or displayed by man and which differentiates him from "God, animal or machines", that is, all other existents. I do not think that there are physical parts of our bodily constitution which are not shared with the other animals. Man's peculiarity lies in the "spiritual" faculties or drives which are translated into some type of actions specific to man. Marx calls this peculiarity a 'free conscious activity'.

The human nature is closely linked to human dignity and can be often be inter referenced. The source of a thing often determines its value. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) defines human dignity as:

The dignity of the human person is rooted in his/her creation in the image and likeness of God. It is fulfilled in his/her vocation to divine beatitude. It is essential to a human being freely to direct him/herself to this fulfilment. By his/her deliberate actions, the human person do, or do not, conform to the good promised by God and attested to by moral conscience. Human beings make their own contribution to their interior growth; they make their whole sentient and spiritual lives into means of this growth. (383).

### **Marx's Concept of Human Nature**

Marx outlines here his empirical study of human nature. The focus of his view is sharpened by his critique of Feuerbach's sixth theses, where the latter understands man's nature in terms of generic traits. He (Feuerbach) conceives the essence of man "only as 'the species', an inner, inarticulate, natural tie, binding many individuals together". (Mandelbaum 1971, 186). He also speaks of an "isolated" human individual. Marx, in contradistinction, proposes a nature that changes through "Productivity". Man's nature, according to Marx, is not just given in man; rather man articulates his potentials to recreate his nature. Thus man has a varying nature and this variation is proportional to the variation in social structures. It (human nature) is a super structure on the social process. Therefore, to understand man is to understand the past social relation which is secretly manifest in and animates the recent relations.

## **Productivity**

Productivity is the character of man which serves as a medium through which he expresses his latent powers, drives and passions. It serves the purpose language serves in communication. It is the function of language to build bridges between subjective entities; in other words, it makes inter-subjectivity possible. Language relates and expresses an entity to another. In the same vein, productivity is a 'revealer'; it expresses one's potentialities or productive powers by actualizing them i.e. by making them available to their respective objects of satisfaction or fulfilment.

The notion of productivity in Karl Marx wells up directly from his dictum that man is a being of praxis. It is the underpinning idea in his humanistic thought. Man is part of nature but he changes nature and creates himself through his species-activity. The prefix "species-" which is used often in Marx's doctrine of human nature is borrowed from Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. He uses the notion in making a distinction between consciousness in man and animals. "Man is conscious not merely of himself as an individual but of the human species or "human essence". (Fromm, 1966,100). Marx uses 'species-' when he refers to the nature of man which he sees as universal to all men not just the individual. For Marx, man is a being, who carries his species with him. He does not work in isolation. He "treats the species as his own being or human himself as a species-being". (Fromm 1966,100) Man is different from animals who also produce in this way. (Animals produce by constructing nests, dwelling, etc.). Animals produce what is strictly necessary for themselves or their young, they are self-minded always. Man produces with plan i.e. not just out of instinct. This is called "projective consciousness". (Fromm, 1966, 102). Animals produce themselves only, while man reproduces the whole of nature, he knows how to produce in accordance with the standards of every species and knows how to apply the appropriate standard of the object.

Man has been inextricably one with other existents in the natural process before his emergence thanks to evolution. At a certain level of this evolutionary development, man became distinct and peculiar by his ability to act, create and produce freely. This view is not just naturalistic; it is a unity of naturalism and humanism. Naturalism is the view that man is a part of nature. He is explained with the categories: space, time and causality, which are used to explain other natural object or events. It also resolves the belief that man is not created by some transcendental spiritual agency but he is a product of long biological evolution. Humanism is the view that man gives meaning to his world; he creates his world and himself, he casts embroidery on nature and controls it. Thus what is placed in view for man is the naturalized humanity and a humanized nature. Two natures are involved: one is the given while the other is the work of man. He is at once the architect and product of his own work. Man is thus his own creator and history is the account of man's self-actualization.

“Free conscious activity” is the species-character of human beings because it is an activity that constitutes the distinguishing factor of humanity in the evolutionary process. This is why Marx declares that -

Inasmuch as man is not productive, inasmuch as he is receptive and passive, he is nothing, he is dead. In this productive process, man realizes his own essence, he returns to his own essence. (Fromm 1966, 30).

A return to one’s essence, as home-coming, presupposes one’s estrangement or alienation which is at the core of Marx’s philosophy. This “return to essence” means the fruition and proper cultivation of human latent powers, drives and passion. ‘Drive’ can mean energy while ‘passion’ “is the essential power of man striving energetically for its object”. (Fromm 1966, 30). Since for Marx, there is nothing like inactive person, man is said to be characterized by the “principle of movement”. This is not a mechanical movement but a creative activity, which fulfils or adds meaning to man’s life. It also means that man is always in motion, i.e. always becoming.

Productivity is not “passive-receptivity” but a productive involvement or relatedness to and appropriation of the objective world; it can be viewed as the translation of the subject “from the night of possibility into the day of actuality”. (Fromm 1966, 29). “Night” symbolizes rest while “possibility” can stand for potentials; a synthesis gives latent potentials. Therefore the statement can be said to mean that productivity is development, the realization of the resting potentialities in man; and this is made possible by continuous action (“day of activity), never by sheer contemplation or receptivity. This is Hegel’s view which Marx borrows. In production, men act on nature as well as on one another; they produce intellectually and as well concretely. Production is corporate activity, it has no value if it cannot satisfy a trans-subjective human need but this is not all, man by this same act of production creates more needs as well as possibilities for their satisfaction. It is not right to infer that needs are completely not natural to man. It is just like the question of primacy between an egg and its chick. This is so because production exists in the bid to satisfy a human need yet it creates more in the process. It can be said however that most needs are not natural to man, but are as a result of human activity or work upon the objective world through which he proves himself as a species-being. By means of this, “nature appears as his work and his reality”. (Fromm 1966,102). Creating and satisfying needs are thus seen by Marx as a continuous dialectics which gives rise to historical development. According to Marx, “By producing their means of subsistence men are actually producing their actual material life...” (Avineri 1968, 73).

As has been mentioned, productivity is a kind of revealer’, a kind of linkage between the human potentialities and the subjective nature, the productive powers in man and their external objects in the world outside of man. Productivity is “a definite form of activity .... a definite form of expressing their life, a definite

mode of life on their part". (Marx & Engels 1965, 31-32). Thus, *man is nothing more than the way he expresses his life*. It is Francis Berkeley that said: "to be is to be perceived". (Mackie, 2020). Applied to this, potentiality without actuality is absurd. One who cannot express his potentials is one who is unproductive and as such, is not a human being. What men are therefore "coincide with their production, both with *what* they produce and *how* they produce". (Mackie, 2020). Production is practical species-life and through it nature appears as man's work and his reality. It follows then that man's nature, as we know it, is not just given, it is worked out in practicality, in communication or transaction with man's external environment, i.e. with things outside of him that answer to his needs and gratify his senses. According to Marx,

A being that does not have its nature outside itself is no natural being... A being that has no object outside itself is no objective being... An unobjective being is an un-being (unwesen). (Tucker 1972, 133).

It is evident therefore, that pure human potentialities cannot suffice to be called human nature. It is enough to refer to or call these multitudes of creative capacities, faculties and drives (*triebe*), which man is endowed with as "productive powers" or "productive forces". They are so because they seek outlet in productive activities. Marx calls them also "essential powers", "vital powers" and "species powers". (Tucker 1972, 130). Essential powers cannot in themselves be the essence. They are just powers to be used towards realizing the species-being or the human essence.

### **A Body of Social Relation**

From the discourse above, it is evident that human nature is not fixed. It is the accumulation or aggregates of men's activities through the ages. Human nature is something historical and history is "nothing other than the becoming of nature for man". (Tucker 1972,131). Men make their nature. This is not just individual men but the society of men. Men do not just make their history and consequently their nature as they please. They are influenced by the past or already made history by men who existed before them. Thus it can be said that history informs the art of reshaping or making history. Marx writes in (Bottomore, 1983):

Men make their own history but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted by the past. (255)

Marx is saying here that men transform their social process or relations through praxis and this praxis is in turn conditioned and made possible by social process. That is to say that through praxis, social process is created and praxis is in turn given birth to by social process. In other words, man creates his history through 'free conscious activity' and this later is in turn conditioned by his history. This should not be seen as getting involved in a vicious circle because Marx is a

dialectical thinker. It should therefore be seen as a dialectics that give rise to historical developments.

Marx sharpens this concept of ‘ensemble of social relations’ from his critique of *apriorism* which has two sides. Firstly, he accepts the Fuerbachian doctrine that ideas are the products of material (finite embodied) minds. This entails giving primacy to matter. That is to say that ideas are based on and explained from material practice. Ideas, therefore, cannot be dissolved by mere mental activity (criticism or philosophizing) nor any other thing except by the overthrow of the actual social relations giving rise to the ‘idealistic humbugs’. Simply put, ideas change with change in social structure. Secondly, Marx adds “such embodied minds are in turn conceived as the products of historically developing ensembles of social relations”. Thus Marx’s thought incorporates two dimensions: the past and present and these inform or develop into the future by human activity. This addendum by Marx is *contra Fuerbachian humanistic* theory of a fixed human nature. This is replaced by a “problematic of historically developing sociality”. In his sixth thesis on Feuerbach, Marx writes “The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of social relations.”

The ensemble of social relations or rather man becomes an embodiment or concatenation of past relations of man to his natural environment and to his fellow men. Marx writes that the “ensemble of social relations” is a “historically created relation of individuals to nature and to one another.” (McLellan 1971, 129). What else do social relations refer to if not the creative activity of a productive man in society? Marx describes society as the product of the reciprocity of men’s actions. He also writes in McLellan (1971):

Assume particular stages of development in production, commerce and consumption and you will have a corresponding social constitution, a corresponding organization of the family, of orders or of classes, in a word, a corresponding civil society... (130).

Society is therefore a process; it is becoming. It is a dialectics between man and his environment, and between man and man. Changes in society thus involve changes in man. All these mean that man is conditioned to act, and think the way he does by the social process. The question this position attracts is: how does man then create himself through a free conscious activity? Is it not sufficient to say that social relations create man? This does not seem to be because as man is conditioned by the past relations, so also it is by men’s activities that man is realized. In other words, history conditions man, it gives him a scope of activity or facticity within which he chooses himself or exerts his conscious activity freely. Thus, despite the situation, man still makes his projects, his choice; and choice cannot be choice except it is free.

Since the essence of man is the ensemble of social relations and since the latter is as a result of historical development, it follows that human natures in different historical epochs can never be the same. Even productivity, which is the way by which man expresses himself as a species-being, is informed by the social relations i.e. the way we produce and the relative drives like needs leading us to production are all functions of social relations. Therefore, man finds his being in practice and he bears his past with him and obtains a kind of intuition, orientation or direction from it in choosing his projects. Here Marx attempts to describe human nature from human activities.

### **The Social Being**

Here Marx emphasizes the belongingness of the individual life to the societal life. Social being entails that man finds himself in a society in which he becomes part and parcel of it because his thought, actions and in fact his whole being is shaped and informed by the society. He is no longer an individual but a social individual and as such a social being. "The social being" is normative. It is not something that is simply found in human actions. "The social being", Marx stresses, "penetrates to the roots of his being, and is by no means simply manifest in those activities which are conducted in direct association with others". (Giddens 1971, 17). Membership of a society is another differentiating factor of the human species from other species like animals. There is no human existence which is not situated into, and shaped by an ongoing society. The concept of isolated individual' is an unfounded assertion. Man belongs to society; his faculties, powers, capacities and tastes are shaped by society. Thus man's membership of society confers his humanity upon him.

As has been discussed, each individual is a recipient of accumulated culture of the generations preceding him; thus there is no human being if he is not situated within a social framework. According to Marx in Giddens, (1971):

Individual human life and species life are not different things...Though a man is unique individual... he is equally the whole, the ideal whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experienced. (13)

This is a kind of an ontological or rather metaphysical assertion: that one is the whole and that one bears the whole. It follows that to study one is to study the whole. This implies the identity of or homologous individuals. However, Marx shows here the relationship between the individual and society. In another text, he argues that "individuals are dealt with here only insofar as they are the personification of economic categories, the bearers (Träger) of particular class relations and interests". (Bottomore 1983, 255). This also explains why Marx does not just want an individual concerned with an individual work in society (or rather an intense specialization on an area that makes one forget or leave other means); he wants an individual insofar as it bears, represents or portrays the community. Marx compares the relation of the individual with the society to that of thought and

being. He accepts that there is a difference between thought and being (thought representing the individual and being the species or society), but they form a unity. Speaking of death as possible contradiction to their unity, he says that a particular individual is only a determinate species-being and as such, he is mortal. Marx deals with man as an interwoven reality with social reality. Oftentimes, he refers to an individual with social attributes; “Species-life”, “species-being”, “species-consciousness” and social or communal activity or mind. (Fromm 1966, 129). What is social is what is human, and for man to be human, he has to be social. His very existence is a social reality. According to Marx,

Even when I carry out scientific work, etc. an activity which I can seldom conduct in direct association with other men, I perform a social, because human, act. (Fromm 1966, 130)

For Marx, man confronts other men when he confronts itself. Therefore “Change in individual is ipso facto also change in society, and change in social circumstances is also change in individuals.” (Avineri 1968, 92).

What kind of reconciliation can be given to those seemingly parallel assertions: that the individual is unique yet he is a social being? Marx wants to avoid egoistic individualism found in the capitalistic structure, i.e. an individual that makes himself the centre of everything, who, out of greed and fantasy wants to possess everything possible. Marx wants a shift from self-centeredness to specie-mindedness. This entails an individual who is concerned with self-affirmation, with the objectification of his humanity and the humanization of his objects. This means that man is one who brings his humanity (human subjective powers) to bear on the external object that answer to his needs and in so doing makes his objects human, i.e. not by alienating oneself from the objects but by appropriating these objects in the bid to self-realization.

Marx does not advocate abstract primitive collectivism by calling man a social being. Man is a social being since all his potentialities or powers are socially moulded and are also actualized in society. This is more appreciated when we take into consideration the famous Latin dictum *Nemo dat quod non habet*, which means that one cannot give what one does not possess. The individual who is bred in the society, who internalizes consciously or unconsciously the norms and values of the society cannot act outside these. Whatever the individual has or does is directly or indirectly obtained from the society. The question of non-conformism should not arise because it presupposes conformism, i.e. acting from the social principles. Though non-conformism is going against the social dimension, it is still based on the social principles. In this sense therefore, man is social. He is the subjectivization of social categories, a miniaturized whole. Thus, since there is no living being that is called a society, society is living in the individuals existing in it. The society is ‘not an abstraction over against the individuals’. One can therefore answer the question of reconciliation by saying that Marx steers a middle course between egoistic individualism and abstract primitive collectivism.



There is difference between the traditional and Marx's conceptions of the social nature of man. In the traditional view, man is social because he lives and interacts with other men in his community. Marx accepts that one's productive powers are moulded and actualized in a social context but he goes further: the society and the individual are one. On the critical lane, since the society gives humans their nature and there is no other system above the society that empowers it, that society becomes a kind of an absolute. Even though man is made part of this absolute, the individual can come in and go out by death or by being an *unwesen*. On another note, this absolute is determined by history through a change in the economic mode of production. If human dignity comes from the society, I wonder how dignified it can be. This entails that man is simply materialistic, considering the principle of causality. Also, strictly speaking, he makes no room for the principle of individuation. He prefers an identical whole to units.

### **Human Freedom (Emancipation)**

What I have been discussing in this write-up borders on the return-to-essence, the actualization of man's productive powers. Once one raises the question of hindrance(s) to this return to species-essence of man, one steps into the area of freedom in Marx's humanistic thought. Can there be hindrances or restrictions to the self-actualization of man? Marx says yes. He sees these restrictions as all forms of alienation or estrangement of man from his species-being. Alienation provides a rift between man and his species-being. Marx enumerates a number of things that engender alienation from both self and objects of experience which are not our concern in this thesis.

For Marx, freedom is the:

... removal of obstacles to human emancipation, that is, to the manifold development of human powers and the bringing into being of a form of association worthy of human nature.(Bottomore 1983, 146).

Freedom is not just being free from obstacles or restraints from anybody or anything but being free from them in order to satisfy human needs. It provides the conducive atmosphere for this satisfaction of human needs. These needs are explained by Marx as those need "whose fulfilment is necessary for the realization of his essence as a human being". (Fromm 1968, 62). Marx draws a line between synthetic (crude) need and human need. The former is engendered by fantasy, caprice and fancy while the latter becomes a "new manifestation of human powers and an enrichment of the human being". (Fromm 1968, 14f). These human (real) needs should well up from one's being and should be enriching.

Man is free when he relates in a human way to the objective world and to the 'other', without obstacles or constraints. Marx does not say if this concept of freedom applies in the face of paternalism which entails forcing one to realize

oneself without one's own choice to do that. To examine this view adequately, let us look at the relation between freedom and productivity.

Marx's concept of freedom and independence is based on the act of self-creation or productivity. Productivity is a free conscious creative activity. I do not think that the idea of force in paternalism nullifies the 'freedom' Marx is talking about because his freedom emphasizes freedom from obstacles on the way to humanization. Whether this is achieved by coercion or not is a different problem. But is one who is forced creative? Is that person conscious of the end of his activity: self-actualization? I think that productivity needs more of conviction than enforcement.

If all I have done in other section concern man's self actualization, then freedom is an underpinning, implicit factor in all, just as productivity is. Freedom qualifies productivity and so applies to wherever productivity is applied. Freedom is emancipation to self-creation. Marx maintains that "freedom is so much the essence of man that even its opponent realizes it". (Fromm 1968, 62). Marx is saying here that since freedom is part of man's essence, it cannot be worn out merely by its obstacle, alienation of different sorts. Therefore it is part of man's nature to emancipate himself no matter the adverse conditions he passes through. Furthermore, Marx writes that man is independent:

... if he affirms his individuality as a total man in each of his relations to the world, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, willing, loving – in short, if he affirms and expresses all organs of his individuality. (Fromm 1968, 138).

This is saying that it is not just enough that our emancipation is in our essence, it has to underlie each and every relation of the person with others and with the objective world. A free being creates himself or his life and does not depend on another for this creation; he is the source and continuance of his life. "A being does not regard himself as independent unless he is his own master, and he is only his own master when he owes his existence to himself". (Fromm 1968, 138). There seems to be a veritable contradiction here. In some pages above, it is said that an individual exists insofar as he belong to the society, he is the determinate social whole; also he is an ensemble of social relation. How can one draw one's being from the society and yet remain one's own master, owing his existence (only) to himself?

However, from the discussion on "social being", it follows that even if an individual strives to be his own master by emancipation, he is performing a social emancipatory act. It is only through social co-operation and organization that the full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, social conditions of production and humanity's own nature are realizable. It is only "within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions". (Fromm 1968, 138). Therefore the individual freedom is an expression of the social freedom. In short, freedom is the removal of obstacles to the manifestation

of other essential powers of man. Freedom exists when one's creative activity is dictated to one by nobody. One is supposed to be one's own master. Likewise, freedom is a corporative enterprise. That an enterprise is corporative does not (necessarily) mean that one is the master of the other in the corporation.

From the foregoing, we have discussed the normative concept of Marx's human nature from "social being" to freedom. Marx, here is writing on what ought to be vis-à-vis what are the practices in the then capitalist structure. He is reacting to that system and trying to establish his own system. Thus his normative concept is ideological. They are logical assertions which are congruous and pointing toward his philosophical desideratum, which is communism. Take "freedom" for example; Marx is simply advocating for a situation whereby the proletariat is freed from the clutches of the bourgeoisie and consequently, the extinction of capitalism.

Taking Marx's concept of productivity seriously, how can the sick (especially the mentally retarded), the aged and infants be said to be creative or possess the projective consciousness? It is a matter of fact that it is not everybody that has the capacity of conscious self-actualization or creativity; and according to Marx, an unproductive person is an 'unbeing' (unwesen), a dead person. This goes to portray that this set of people have no human nature. If this is so, then human nature is a state into which men go in and out, i.e. they become human at one time and dead at another even though they are still physically alive. Men go into this human state of being when they can create and die out when they cease to create owing to old age or sickness. But if productivity is the externalization of the species essence or powers of man, then I will say that the aged, the sick and the infant still possess powers to be borne on their objective nature. They can be hungry or irritated by stimuli and they cry or signal for help. Nevertheless, insofar as they do not possess the distinguishing mark i.e. the projective consciousness or the creative activity, it is hard to accept them as Marx's human.

Marx's concept of human capacities is out-rightly positive. He did not bring in any negative tendencies in man which might help to explain the negative trends of the actions of men in history. These negative tendencies may constitute, in opposition to the ones treated in this thesis, the tendency to act in isolation as against cooperatively; to subvert creative to dominative power; to act greedily and aggressively; etc. Some Marxists say that the presence of the positive and negative tendencies, which should be located in man, constitutes a conflict which is at the base or is the source of the historical dialectics. However, Marx does not account for these, which seems to suggest that these tendencies are outside of man.

### **The Igbo Question of Human Dignity**

The Igbo question of human dignity stems from their understanding that the birth of humans was by the Supreme Goddess, *Ala* and the *Amadiqha*, God of the sky. We shall not delve into the notion of Supreme Deity but suffice it to say that the Igbo worldview favours a dialogical conception, which does not conflict with the other but complement it. According to Aniakor (1973):

When Duru Agwu/Duru Aku, the Chief Diviner at Amauzari in Mbano Division, through whose divination man comes to understand the complicated web of cosmic relationships between him and the gods, looked at the five divination pebbles on his palm, he picked out one, threw it on the ground, picked it up again, examined it and stared into the vacancy in communion with the gods. He said:

<i>ihe di abuo abuo</i>	-	Reality comes in twos
<i>Nwoke na nwanyi</i>	-	Male and Female
<i>Ihe oma na ihe ojoo</i>	-	Good and Evil
<i>Ugbua na Mgbe-Ochie</i>	-	Present and Past
<i>Mmadu na Mmuo</i>	-	People and Spirits
<i>Igwe na Ala</i>	-	Firmament and Earth
<i>Onwu na Ndu</i>	-	Life and Death

In saying this, he penetrated the heart of Igbo ontology (6)

Thus the Supreme Mother Goddess, *Ala*, as posited by Acholonu, (2009) must have had a Supreme God (*Deus Otuosus*) referred to as *Igwe* or *Amadioha*, who receded into the sky as Donovan, (1982) discovered from the Tanganyikans.

There was the myth (Ayika, 2012) of *Amadioha* being married to *Ala* and both lived in water until *Ala* decided to bear children. She spread her body over the waters to create land, on which her children could stand and earn their living. This myth at once announces human dignity as being descended from God and cultivating one's life in accord with the morality laws spelt out by the Supreme Mother Goddess, *Nneka* for a peaceful co-habitation with fellow humans and for a proper use of the entire creation. This is the reason Ayika (2019) in his well-researched work summarizes Igbo idea of human dignity as *Ndu na Afa*. This book provides the template for our understanding of human dignity for the Igbo.

**Ndu:** The unfettered Igbo society (Ayika, 2012) believed that life came from the Supreme Being and as such is sacred. It is a priceless gift that its administration is owed completely to the Supreme Being. It is a taboo to take one's life for any cause whatsoever. When they live, it is on the land, *Ala* and when they die, they go back into the labyrinth womb of *Ala*. All go back to *Ala* but some do not make it to *Ndiichie*. Those who die of one taboo or the other are held on the land until some rituals are performed to give them rest in *Ala*, their home. However, the *Ndiichie* joins *Ala*, the Supreme Mother Goddess in adjudicating over the living humans in order to make sure that life continues. Through reincarnation, they are present in their families to make sure that their generations are not ended. *Ndu bu isi makana onwu egbughi uriom okuko, emesia O ga-abu nnekwu.* (Life is primary. If death does not occur, the young fowl will later become the adult fowl).

**Afa:** Struggling to live and living well is taken for granted since it is the preoccupation of any Igbo person. This precludes living justly in the society but working hardly on the creation in order to come to the limelight of honour. The

Igbo thus take titles to announce their success and dignified ego of closely partnering with the Goddess of the land in the administration of justice. This conception announces the working activity or in the words of Marx, the productivity of the Igbo race. They do not accept NO as an only answer but seek out a way to get to the YES of the NO. This is a life of vibrancy and doggedness, a life of continuous search for utility.

### **The Care for Nature (Ecosystem) in Contradistinction to Marx's Objectification of Human Species Essence**

However, that the earth is a product of the body of the Supreme Goddess, *Ala*, gives the Igbo world a leverage of sanctity in their relationships with the objective world that answer to their needs. Fulfilling their daily needs is a divine task since everything is an emanation from the body of their Mother God, who anticipates not a weakling but a conscious active person, who penetrates her body in order to discover life and life supporting utilities. Marx placed no rudders on the use of natural endowments but the Igbo world has a corpus of conduct, often referred to as *Omenala*, which defines areas that cannot be treaded.

*Agwu-ishi*, *Chukwu's* spirit, life-force or spirit-energy, which is said to have been imparted into every existent, also stands for spirit of divination and knowledge. Thus one needs *agwu-ishi* in order to know the force or *fire* in all things. Achebe in demonstrating *ike di n'awaja n'awaja* (power runs in channels) says in Cole (1984), that the "term *Ike* is the essence of all things human, spiritual, animate and inanimate. Everything has its own unique energy which must be acknowledged and given its due" (ix). This is in line with what Placid (1969), said that "The Africans speak, act and live, as if for them beings were forces ... Force for them is the nature of being, force is being and being is force" (pp. 51-52). The powerful person is therefore the more reserved person – *onye nsọ*.

### **Hierarchy of Personhood**

It is good to note the hierarchy of personhood in Igbo world. The deference to *Omenala* (*agwu-ishi*) by often consulting the *dibia* to know the minds of the gods with a free conscious activity elevates or rather justifies one as an achiever with human and divine accolades. This does not bracket the personhood of the weakling at all as Marx posited above.

### **Dialogue in Igbo World**

The Igbo philosophy is thus studded with dialectical method which was not self-exclusive but all inclusive. It can better be called a dialogical means in order to differentiate it from Marx's dialectical method of historical process. Marx sees a conflict between the *thesis* and *antithesis*, which results to the birth of a *new thesis*. The Igbo dialogical means does not often interest itself with the parts of the whole but the whole energized by the parts. The parts are not considered in staccato but as they are connected with the whole in order to achieve a holism. Little wonder the reason Igbo culture has been referred to as a culture of life since it does not

strain out from a complex what is useful and kill the others; rather they use the complex-in-parts. Mbiti maintains: “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am” (141). The Igbo say: *Nmetuta ka egbe ji ekwu okwu*— the gun sounds through series of contacts. What one has in one develops through interpersonal contacts within the community and with the help of the community.

Nzomiwu (1999) presents some Igbo names that bring out the solidarity evident in communality. *Ifediora* (nothing as good as a united community), *Ubadinma* (It is good to be many), *Igwebuiké* (Community is strength or power), *Ibejiako* (Community has wisdom), etc. This brings Karl Marx above into view, who said that man is a social category and an ensemble of past social relations. Thus power, knowledge, individual works are all social. Marrying, building a new home or houses, politics, etc. are all community projects. For the Igbo, it is not man but the community that has the ensemble of past social relations. The individual gets the categories of experience into his/her person through existing in the community and more so through rites of passages.

The original Igbo person runs with fellow humans and at the same time runs with nature in *mutatis mutandis*. The Igbo is naturally democratic and runs an open society in terms of ascendancy to higher hierarchies. It is known not to have a king but a kind of communality that highlights industry and justice. It is often wrong to pigeonhole the African way of life under European categories like socialism and capitalism, otherwise it could be said that the Igbo finds a middle course between the two. While the European compartmentalizes creation, the African understands the creation as a whole. Nothing is bad and nothing should be annihilated but everything complements every other thing.

### **Conclusion**

In the final analysis, Marx’s concept of human nature is very materialistic and enriching. It is a criticism of the western capitalist man and as such, it is selective (not all embracing) in its approach, while the Igbo enjoy a rich lived tradition with humane principles that encompass all of reality.

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