

A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF 'MAN AND THE
OTHERS' IN THE YORUBA CONTEXTUAL SCHEME

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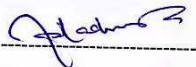
**BEING A LONG ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY, FACULTY OF ARTS, ADEKUNLE AJASIN UNIVERSITY
AKUNGBA AKOKO, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA.**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A.HONS) DEGREE IN PHILOSOPHY.**

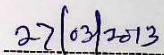
DECEMBER, 2012.

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this long essay was written by **Adaramoye Adesola Oluwatosin**, Matric Number: **080105081** of the Department of Philosophy Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, during 2011/2012 academic session under my supervision.



Mr.S. Layi Oladipupo
Supervisor



Date

Prof. Segun Ogungbemi

HOD

Date

DEDICATION

With great gratitude and joy, I dedicate this project work to God Almighty, who by his sufficient grace and mercy has kept me alive till this present moment.

Also to my irreplaceable parents, Mr. and Mrs. Adaramoye, which symbolizes the mirror of reflection and epitome of success in my life, thank you for your moral and financial supports.

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With deep and great sense of appreciation I say a big thanks to my Siblings. I am incomplete without you. Thank you for all your support.

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional Yoruba cultural set-up depicts a person as a social being bearing intrinsic relationship with others in the community. In other words, a person (*eniyán*) is not just an atomic individual, but a person who co-exist with the others both in the physical and non-physical existence.¹ The implication of this is that, in the Yoruba traditional life, the individual does not, and cannot exist alone except corporately. Man in the Yoruba worldview, owes his existence to the others in the community, including those of the past generations such as the ancestors. Man is simply part of the whole. It is only in the terms of other people, individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people.² Whatever happens to the individual, happens to the whole group in the community, and whatever happens to the whole group in the community happens to the individual.

In the Yoruba contextual scheme, man exists to work towards the general interest of the whole, for it is only when each one realizes his duty and does it that the natural order of the universe is fulfilled.³ As such, the conception of 'man and the other' in the Yoruba contextual scheme does not apply to the physical existence alone but also apply to the spiritual existence. For instance, man lives a communal life with the others in the community, representing the physical co-existence with the 'others' and at the same time, Man lives to consult the gods and ancestors, depicting Man's existence with the 'others' in the spiritual realm.

Above points to the fact that Man partakes both in the physical and spiritual existence. This state of affair whereby Man co-exists with the others both in the physical and spiritual realm has brought unity, love, peace and understanding to the traditional Yoruba community. This explains the Yoruba existential standpoint which depicts that man is not a being alone, but a being who co-exists with others. This could be reflected in the Yoruba proverbial saying that: "*Ajeji owo kan ko gbe eru dori*", (A single hand does not lift a load to the head), and "*Fi otun we osi, fi osi we otun, ni owo fi n mo*" (It is by rubbing both hands together that it gets cleaned).

However, despite the communal life of the Yoruba which gives room for man to co-exist with the others in the society, the individual still suffers neglect when it comes to confrontations with personal problems. For instance, when it comes to determining Man's identity he does it alone. Man bears the responsibility of becoming, when striving he works alone for his fortune. It is a personal responsibility that defines man himself, not collective. This goes contrary to the philosophical saying that a friend in need is a friend indeed.

As a result of the foregoing this essay, intends to shed the philosophical search light on man in order to establish the fact that man is not an atomic individual staying and setting his goals alone, but as an individual who co-exists cooperatively with the 'Others' both in the physical and spiritual realm. The main thrusts of this essay is to show that man is not an atomic individual, but co-exists with both the physical and spiritual entities.

The concept of man is a household issue in and among scholars of various orientation. Scholars of different traditions have their distinct interpretation of what

a man is. Thus, while some conceived of man as a political being, some others sees him as a social being. Beyond this, man is equally conceived from an atomistic posture, while it is equally believed by some that man is a corporate being existing in and among others.

In an attempt to show the political structure of the Yoruba community, Bolaji Idowu argues that:

The key to understanding the Yoruba socio-political structure is the concept of the '*ebi*' social theory, which holds that the family unit is the microcosm for the social and political world. It is a direct manifestation of the Yoruba's need to relate cosmetically to their social and political structure. The state functioned as a larger version of the family with the king regarded as a 'Father' to his people.⁴

From the above arguments, one would realize that there is a cordial relationship between the family, the social and political worldview of the Yoruba. The implication of this, is that man does not exist in isolation. Segun Ogungbemi seems to buttress this claim when he argues:

No human being exists in isolation. Any human existence constitutes itself and realizes its possibilities only in interaction with other human existence. It is not something that gets added on when a number of individuals come together, as was supposed in, For instance, the old social contract theories. The existent emerges as already social being.⁵

Generally, in African culture, especially the Yoruba culture, there is no sharp distinction between the 'ego' and the 'world', 'subject' and 'object'. There is no difference between the world and the self in African culture. Whatever affects the 'world' affects the 'self' and vice versa. This position is captured in the words of Ndubuisi. He states;

The traditional Yoruba social and political society is established on what can be called Participatory democracy as it employed different models on involving citizens in governance which allows for representation of diverse interests.¹⁰

The above argument shows that man does not only take decisions alone in the Yoruba traditional system, but co-exist with the Others to decide on issues concerning the entire society. M.O Adeniyi argues further that:

The basic unit of social structure in Yorubaland is the family, members of which live together under the same roof and the same parental authority (this is nuclear family of course). The life pattern of Yoruba family members necessitates the development of social quality of a very high degree. They are together under all circumstances bound to one another by a common interest.¹¹

It is the fact that the individual constitutes the family membership in the Yoruba traditional society which invariably contributes to the development of social qualities through the help of common interest.

This essay employed both analytic and critical methods of philosophical investigation so as to give critical analysis and conceptual clarification of the terms and ideas adopted in the essay. Our discussion here is limited to the concept of Man and the other in the traditional thought system.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN EXISTENTIAL EXPOSITION OF THE CONCEPT OF 'MAN AND THE OTHERS'

Existentialism is a twentieth century contemporary intellectual movement that has found expressions in philosophy, religion and politics. Though, its root lies in the nineteenth century, in the writings of Soren Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. Existentialism as a philosophy is understood to mean something more than philosophizing about things that are just there, or lying around somewhere. The philosophy of existentialism applies to human beings that strives, chooses, decides and commits himself or herself.¹

The theme of freedom is very germane to existentialism. besides, freedom, there are also other existential themes such as irrationalism, choice and responsibility, commitment, anguish, facticity of human existence, death and the theme of Man and the Others.² Man and the Others. This chapter, however examine the philosophy of existentialism with particular reference to one of its theme, that is, Man and the Others

In existentialism, the word 'existence' means something different from what is ordinarily meant by it. In ordinary usage, we can talk of the existence of a stone, tree or an animal. But in existentialism, existence is restricted to human with all its characteristics features.³ The existentialist philosophers are not concerned with the existence of stones, trees or animals, but only with human existence. In their own peculiar use of the term 'existence', stones, dogs and cats do not exist, all other kinds of beings are, but they do not exist. Existentialism is therefore the philosophy of human existence.⁴

The existential ethics is thought provoking and challenging as its exponents such as Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger and Jasper have so made it. Existentialism is subjectivist metaphysics.⁵ It is employed in the realm of ethics to offer an explanation about moral position of man and the attendant expectation that is expected of him. There are the realities of freedom, uniqueness and responsibility in the light of unbounded opportunities which he must exploit in order to fully make use of innate potentials and to truly realize itself. The existentialist sees man and the world as inseparably linked together. Man is in the words of Heidegger, "a being in the world."⁶

To be conscious of one's own existence involves being conscious of the existence of the world at the same time. The existentialists caution that man should not see himself as no more than a thing in the world, for although, he is linked to the world, he is not a finished product. It is man that gives meaning and value to the world. Man is self-transcending; always aiming at the future.⁷ The existentialist popular dictum is, 'existence precedes essence'⁸ meaning that man must first appear in the scene before man begins to define himself. In the existential outlook, man is an active agent as against being passive agent in phenomenology. For the existentialists, human existence does not simply mean 'being there,'⁹ human existence is a drama in which every individual is an actor. This means that every individual person in the world exists to be personally individual in one way or the other.

In the contingent, the existentialist philosophers believe that the only being that exists and also active is man. Man is conceived as free agent in life whose existence comes first in all things. Man is personally committed to a freely chosen life with the responsibilities attached to it. The existence of man, for the

existentialist is much more than his essence. The concept of freedom forms one of the cardinal pillars of interest among existential philosophers. They are concerned with the plight of man in the world, his power to choose his own causes of action. Freedom for the existential philosophers is a practical problem. Their aim specifically is to demonstrate to man that he is free to open his eyes to something which has always been there but has not been recognized due to ignorance. The 'authentic' man must experience freedom. He must practice it and not merely contemplate it.¹⁰

The existential interest and emphasis is on Man and his concrete existence. This interest and emphasis came as a reaction against the abstraction of Hegelian Idealism. Hegelian Idealism came into existence during the era of the German classical philosophy. Dialectics was a view or vision of reality.¹¹

In Hegelian Ontology, all existents were reduced to the 'Absolute.' That is; only the 'Absolute' existed. In other words, all other things were expressions of the 'absolute'. The absolute manifested in all things. It was in this absolute that reality existed.¹² However, in understanding the 'absolute', Unah argues that:

Reality is to be viewed as an organism. An organism is made up of parts. That is, it is a sort of structure with many parts. These parts are interconnected. Hence, the 'absolute' is the 'whole' which manifests itself in every part. Each part is, then, seen as connected with every part and each part is seen as connected with the whole.¹³

From the above analysis of the Hegelian philosophy, one would agree that it is embedded in abstractionism and transcendentality. Thus, becoming very alien for human understanding. As a result of this, the existentialist philosophers took another dimension that will be devoid of metaphysical and abstractionist assertions.

It is because of this that Kierkegaard made Hegel the object of his attack. Kierkegaard attacked Hegel's abstract idealism in which man and his existential problems are left out.¹⁴ The implication of this, is that Kierkegaard had the notion that Hegel's abstractions were unrelated to the concrete realities of human life. In view of this, Kierkegaard made man; the individual man and his life experience the pivot of his existential philosophy.¹⁵ What was germane to the existentialists was to make philosophy directly concerned with human existence. It should also be observed that the views of these existential philosophers differ in many aspects, they however agree in making man and his existential experience their pivot of discussions.

The Concept of 'Man and the Others'

To the existentialist, man cannot exist without the world. In other words, man is inseparably linked together with the world.¹⁶ The moment man becomes aware of himself he sees himself in the world and confronted by the world. This is the very reason why the existentialist rejects Descartes Dictum, '*Cogito ego sum,*' I think therefore I am.¹⁷ Descartes claim that man can be conscious of himself without being conscious of the world. This is however, not genuine to the existentialists. Rather, to be conscious of one's own existence involves being conscious of the existence of the world at the same time, for one can only be conscious of oneself as existing in the world. Man's inseparable link with the world is through his body. Although, man is not completely part of the world because he must be on his guard against the tendency to be completely drawn into the world. Without the world, there is no selfhood, no person; without selfhood, without the person, there is no world.¹⁸ One would understand that the world is instrumental to man in fulfilling his ambitions.

Despite the fact that existentialism lays emphasis on individual, it however lays emphasis on the existence of the other. The individual cannot exist in isolation. It cannot exist without the world, it implies that man cannot exist without the Others. That is the very reason why Heidegger argues that;

When we see Dasein in its average everydayness, we see that what situates us in a world most fundamentally is not our subjective experiences or mental states, but our externally situated skills and practices.¹⁹

From the above argument, one would observe that it is also different from Descartes' *'Cogito ergo sum'*; which is an isolated subjectivity. Heidegger's existentialism is both at Being- in -the -world and a Being - with - others.²⁰ However, a point should be made clear that despite the fact that the existentialists are of the view that man is a Being -with- others, they still maintain the fact that man will not allow himself to be swallowed up in the anonymous crowd of the 'they'. In other words, man is shouldered with the responsibility of living his own life without any influence. Heidegger argues that; "we are not to see the world simply as a physical object against which we are set as individual thinking subjects. Rather, we are Beings- In- the- world".²¹

From all indications, it could be rightly argued that Dasein both as a Being - in- the-world and a Being-with - the - others are both inseparably linked up with man in the right proportion. Heidegger argues that;

In Being with, as the existential 'for the sake of' the others, these have already been disclosed in their Dasein. With the Being-with, their disclosedness has been constituted beforehand; accordingly this disclosedness also goes to make up significance, that is to say worldhood. And significance, as worldhood is tied up with the existential 'for the sake of which' The structure of the world's worldhood is such that others are not proximally present-at-hand as free- floating subjects along with other things, but show themselves in the world in their special environmental Being, and do so in terms of what is ready-to-hand in that world.²²

From the phenomenological point of view, the world is the condition we engage with and inhabit, it is constitutive of our lives. We are not to see the world simply as physical objects against which we are set as individual thinking subjects; rather, we are 'beings -in- the world' and Dasein, our human reality or mode of being, is the multitude of ways in which we inhabit life; that is, by having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go.²³

The religious interpretation of man with the others is undecided by Dasein as being in the world. That is, there is no decision made so far concerning the possibility or impossibility of gods. So, it will be illogical to conclude that the interpretation of the essence of man from the relation of his essence has nothing to do with gods. It is in view of this that Heidegger argues that:

With the existential determination of the essence of man, therefore, nothing is decided about the 'existence of God' or his 'nonbeing', no more than about the possibility or impossibility of gods. Thus, it is not only rash but also an error in procedure to maintain that the interpretation of the essence of man from the truth of Being is atheism.²⁴

Through the ontological interpretation of Dasein as Being- in the world, no decision, whether positive or negative, is made concerning a possible being towards God. It is however, the case that through an illumination of transcendence first achieve an adequate concept of Dasein, with respect to which it can now be asked how the relationship of Dasein to God is ontologically ordered.²⁵ If we think about this remark too quickly, as is usually the case, we will declare that such a philosophy does not decide either for or against the existence of God.²⁶

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CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPT OF 'MAN AND THE OTHERS' IN YORUBA

TRADITIONAL BELIEF

This chapter examines the communal life of the Yoruba which signifies that man does not exist as an atomic individual in the society, but co-exist with others in the world. However, the Yoruba mythological account has its foundation in spiritio-physical hierarchical order. The implication of this, is that the Yoruba so much believe in co-existing both with the spiritual and physical world. Both the spiritual and physical are inseparably linked up with man in the Yoruba worldview. Thus, the existence of man in the Yoruba worldview will be examined from the spiritual, socio-cultural and political perspectives.

The spiritual perspective will examine man's relationship with the gods; that is, to show that the relationship which exists between the spiritual and physical entities are inseparable aspects of the same reality. The socio-cultural perspective will examines man's communal life in the Yoruba world view. It will show that man co-exists with his other beings in the society. While the political perspective depicts that the Yoruba political system is not of 'one man' affair, but a governmental system that becomes possible through man's co-existence with other beings.

The Concept of 'Man and the Others' In the Yoruba World View: Spiritual Perspective

The Yoruba are to be found largely in the South Western area of present day Nigeria. The Yoruba conception of reality, as it is with most African theories of the Universe, is provided largely by oral traditions.¹ The Yoruba in Nigeria believe that

the human personality has two main elements; the physical and the spiritual, otherwise known in the Western philosophical tradition as body and mind (soul). The physical element of a person is collectively known as 'ara' (body), a creation of *Orisanla* (the Yoruba god of creation) who is charged by *Olodumare* (God in Heaven) with the responsibility of moulding human beings out of clay.²

'World' in the Yoruba philosophy has a spiritio-physical hierarchical order. This means that the world comprises both the physical and spiritual entities, such as persons and gods respectively. We should understand that there is no departmentized view of reality in which there is a spiritual world that has a distant relationship with the physical world in the Yoruba world view.³ Rather, the relationship that exists between the spiritual entities and physical entities are inseparable aspects of the same reality.

When we look at the pyramid of existence in the Yoruba philosophy, we rightly observe that *Olodumare* (The Supreme Being) is at the apex. The Primary place of existence for this supreme Being is *Orun* (Heaven). It could be observed that *Olodumare* (Supreme Being), is that which puts life into the moulded body. It is in view of this that Awolalu argues that:

...to have more people on earth, *Olodumare* instructed *Orisa-nla* to mould human forms. *Orisa-nla* moulded human forms and kept the lifeless things in one place. Occasionally, *Olodumare* would come and put life into them.⁴

From the argument above, one would note that *Olodumare* is the Supreme Being that puts life into the moulded figure. This Supreme Being is also referred to as *Olorun*- He who owns *Orun*.⁵ Apart from *Olodumare* who is at the apex of the pyramid of existence, there are *Orisa* divinities, who are lesser gods brought into

existence by *Olodumare*. They serve as assistants to *Olodumare* in the creation and theocratic government of the world.⁶ These *Orisa* divinities vary ranging from the principal among them namely *Orisanla* (the arch-divinities) shouldered with the responsibility of creativity and executive functions. While *Orunmila* (the Oracle divinity) is charged with issues of omniscience and wisdom. We also have *Esu* (the right-hand divinity to *Orunmila*) as the mediator between the spatio-temporal world and the non-spatio temporal world. The *Oku-Orun* (spirit of the departed aged member of the community) are the next to *Orisa* in the Yoruba metaphysical world view of existence.

In the Yoruba mythological account of the existence of man, it is believed that we have four stages of developmental pattern before the full formation of man in *Ile Aye* (the earth surface).

Firstly, the *Orisa-nla* (god of creation) moulded the *ara* (body). Secondly, *Olodumare* (Supreme Being) gives the moulded *ara, emi* (life force) by breathing this unto him. Thirdly, the now activated *ara* (body) moves to the house of *Ajala* (believed to be a fashioner of destinies) to choose the *ori* (destiny). The literal meaning of *ori* is the physical head but we are concern with *Ori-inu* (inner head).⁷ It is translated as the inner head because it is the spiritual counterpart of the physical head.⁸ Fourthly, the fully fashioned human being makes the journey to *Ile-aye* (the earth surface) for his earthly existence, through *Ibode* (the boundary between *Ile aye* and *Orun*) respectively.⁹

A point to observe concerning the concept of destiny in the Yoruba philosophy, is that the Yoruba so much believe in destiny. In other words, man is determined to be what he finally finds himself to be (determinism), and not what he chooses to be. The third stage of human creation in the Yoruba cosmogony where

the fully activated body moves to the house of *Ajala* (Fashioner of destiny) shows how man could be influenced by destiny. Lawrence Bamikole argues that:

Man as an agent also bears relationship with the environment. This also blurs the distinction between the Greek's physics and Nomos. In Yoruba culture, persons make use of natural objects to give effects to actions. This view can be illustrated by the use of incantations (OFO). The idea behind this, is that there is a close relationship between worlds and things.¹⁰

It is evident that there is a close relationship between the physical and spiritual entities in the Yoruba cosmogony. Man is not alone. Man co-exists with the spiritual entities. Bankole argues further:

Within the Yoruba belief system, human beings are not the only beings that can be regarded as agents. This is in contrast with the predominant western view that an agent must be an identifiable individual whose actions can be said to belong to him in the sense that there actions emanate from such things....In line with the organic philosophy of the Yoruba, ancestors and other gods are also agents. The ancestors act as spiritual bridge between the physical and spiritual world, thus eliminating any kind of separation between the two.¹¹

Man, having fully realized himself in *Ile-Aye* (Earth surface) mingles socially with other spatio-temporal entities like trees, animals and fellow humans. This is an indication that man's existence in the Yoruba ontology is a complementary of both the physical and spiritual. While on earth, the spiritual entities are most often represented by physical objects like Iron (Ogun) among others. Man's spiritual communication with the gods shows that man does not exist alone, but with divinities.

The Socio-Cultural Concept of 'Man and the Others' in the Yoruba World View

There is a problem in traditional philosophy of proving the existence of others. The problem of solipsism. However, Heidegger sees this problem as a pseudo-problem, in the sense that the existence of the individual implies the existence of other people. Heidegger argues that, Beings with others belong to the being of Dasein which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being. Thus, as a Being-with, Dasein 'is' essentially for the sake of others.¹²

The Yoruba existential standpoint would also agree with Heidegger's position that man is not a being alone, but a Being that co-exists with others. Within the traditional Yoruba cultural set up, a person (*Eniyan*) is not an atomic individual, rather, he is a social being, bearing intrinsic relationship with others in the community. This is why the Yoruba refers to a person who does not relate with others in a communal way as '*eniyan lasan*' worthless individual or '*eniyan buruku*' bad person.¹³

The normative conception of a person in Yoruba thought derives from the nature of the family set up of the Yoruba. The Yoruba family is of the extended type where the sons and daughters belong not only to the blood parents but also to other members of the family.¹⁴ In establishing this reality, the education of a child is the responsibility of the whole family. Here, Education is understood not only as the formal kind which involves reading and writing, but also the informal kind which involves moral training of the child in basic etiquette in the act of communal life. This is done to a child by the whole family so as to make the child to be morally responsible. The basic moral word for the Yoruba is *Iwa* (character). A moral person is called *Omoluabi*, literally, this means *Omo ti oluwa bi* which suggests a

connection between one's character and the supernatural- that the supernatural has bestowed upon a person his beauty.¹⁵ A person with a good moral character also possesses beauty. Thus, the Yoruba says that *Iwa lewa*- character is beauty.¹⁶ This Yoruba ideology have a striking Similarity with what John Mbiti argue for in respect of the normative aspect of person in traditional African Society. Mbiti states:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole.¹⁷

In the Yoruba world view, man is not an atomic individual. Apart from the educational aspect of it in terms of morality, one could also observe that the concept of 'Man and the Others' is reflective in the Yoruba proverbial saying as Adegboyega Oragun observes:

Obara ogbon ya bi ona, Ogbon kii se t' omo enikookan Nitoripe omode gbon agba gbon Ni afi da Ile lfe. (wisdom branches in like roads nobody can be the sole custodian of Wisdom. This is why the axiom; Children are wise, adult too are wise, becomes the fundamental principle on which Yoruba primordial society operated.¹⁸

From the above, it is evident that in the Yoruba epistemic system, knowledge is not a repository of an individual. Rather, it is a collective effort of individual knowledge. In a similar manner, Oragun further argues that the Yoruba would establish that:

Eni mo yi ko mo' tohun nobody is the repository of Knowledge. "*Obe kin mu ko gbe eku ara re*". The sharpened knife cannot make handle of itself. No one is an absolute custodian of wisdom.¹⁹

The Yoruba epistemic system has been able to demonstrate the fact that collection in terms of wisdom is very important. There are still other proverbial

sayings such as; *Ajeji owo kan ko gberu de ori* (A single hand does not lift a load to the head), *fi otun we osi; fi osi we otun ni owo fin mo* (it is by robbing both hands together that it gets clean). *Enikan kii je awa de* (an individual does not make a group), and *igi kan kii da gbo se* (A tree does not make a forest).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Yoruba society lays emphasis on community life, but even at that, the community is not a tyrant. There is still the awareness of selfhood individual and circumstances depicted in Yoruba language such as; *Emi ni mo ni ara mi* (I own myself), *mo mo iru eniyan ti mo je* (I know the kind of person I am).²⁰

The Political Concept of 'Man and the Others' in the Yoruba Worldview

Generally, in African traditional thought, there is an inseparable link between the individual and the community, the destiny of the individual cannot be separated from that of the community. The wellbeing of the individual is a function of the well-being of the community. This position hinges on the fact that, every individual is perceived as an entity belonging to a massive whole, the person is understood from the communal and collective existence of his community.²¹

In the sophisticated and well-organized Yoruba system, each person was placed in defined and generally recognized relationship to others. The king enjoyed certain privileges but not to the extent of absolutism, as there were extant taboos to contain his propensity for excesses. In addition, such taboos helped to promote peaceful co-existence, order and harmonious relationship. Another salience feature of the Yoruba Socio-Political Philosophy was the 'Ebi' concept which derived mainly from the wave of disperser that attended the process of state formation.²²

In attempt to show the political structure of the Yoruba community Bolaji Idowu states that:

The key to understanding the Yoruba Socio-political structure is the concept of the 'Ebi' social theory, which holds that the family unit is the microcosm for the social and political world. It is a direct manifestation of the Yoruba's need to relate cosmognically to their social and political structure. The state functioned as a larger version of the family with the king regarded as a 'Father' to his people.²³

In a closely Argument, Olusegun Oladipo argues that, traditional society was founded on a community of shared beliefs in the wisdom and age; the sanctity of chieftaincy and the binding force of the customs and usages of our ancestors.²⁴

The concept of 'man and the others' in the Yoruba community could also be retraced to their way of governance. It is as a result of this, that Y.K Salami argues that:

The traditional Yoruba social and political society is established on what can be called Participatory democracy as it employed different models on involving citizens in governance which allows for representation of diverse interests.²⁵

The above argument shows that man does not only take decisions alone in the Yoruba traditional system, but co-exist with the others to decide on issues concerning the entire society. M.O Adeniyi seems to provide a foundation for this when he obliges that:

The basic unit of social structure in Yoruba land is the Family, members of which live together under the same roof and the same parental authority (this is nuclear family of course). The life pattern of Yoruba family members necessitates the development of social quality of a very high degree. They are together under all circumstances bound to one another by a common Interest.²⁶

It is the fact that the individual constitutes the family membership in the Yoruba traditional society which invariably contributes to the development of social qualities through the help of common interest.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE RELEVANCE OF 'MAN AND THE OTHERS' IN THE YORUBA WORLDVIEW

The relevance of 'Man and the Others' in the Yoruba worldview cannot be over emphasized. The reason for this assertion is not far-fetched having taken a clue from the previous chapters. In the Yoruba traditional society, there is no sharp distinction between the ego and the world, subject and object. There is no difference between the world or the society and the self and vice versa. In the Yoruba worldview, A man is said to be a product of his cultural society, the existence of man as a social being depends on others in the society.

An individual in Yoruba society is intractably linked with culture of his society, this does not mean that such an individual is crushed under the influence of culture but the individual is in a dialectical relationship with culture in the sense that culture makes him what he is and as such he should contribute to the growth and development of the society in which the culture is found. In the Yoruba worldview, there is a cordial relationship between the individual, the family and the socio-political worldview. This might be responsible for the position of Idowu as earlier stated in this essay that:

The key to understanding the Yoruba socio-political structure is the concept of the '*ebi*' social theory, which holds that the family unit is the microcosm for the social and political world. It is a direct manifestation of the Yoruba's used to relate cosmognically to their social and political structure. The state functioned as a larger version of the family with the King regarded as a 'Father' to his people.¹

However, the relevance of 'Man and the Others' cut across all the aspects of the Yoruba traditional system such as their political system, economic system, religious system, social system, educational system. In the Yoruba traditional system, Man is an integral part of his society and as an individual, he cannot exist alone except corporately.

In the Yoruba worldview, one of the relevance of man and the other rests on the belief that man is not the all in all in his own life. This is why Yoruba believe that; "*Igi kan kii dagbo se*" meaning that "A tree does not make a forest". This proverb is accorded a place in the viability of man existence amidst other in African society such that Anyanwu argues that, "in African culture, a normal human being has three levels of existence; First as an individual; Second as a member of a group, and Third as a member of the Community."²

In the above position, one can deduce that man in the African belief and Yoruba in particular is constantly relating, interacting and inter-penetrating one another, a solitary individual does not exist. It is the society that determines and patterns the life of an individual. This is so because everybody being a life-force interacting with other human life forces affects and affects one another in the endless process of inter-correlation. However, this is very germane in the Yoruba social and political worldview. This position is not unconnected with the fact that in Yoruba traditional society, man is not an atomic individual. The concept of Man and the other is so relevant in the social setting of the Yorubas, this is enhanced in their communalistic life style.

Yoruba culture is strengthened by the belief in ancestors, in the living-dead, the future generation and ultimately God, who is the head of the community of believers.³ Every individual contributes to the peace, progress and stability of his

community, but this is not to say that he is not allowed some personified actions to foster his own individual well-being. Anyanwu has this to say that:

It is obvious that the African society lays emphasis on community life but even at that the community is not a tyrant. There is still the awareness of self-hood or what can be described as the awareness of the individual circumstance.⁴

The position of Anyanwu here is that though, men in the Yoruba traditional society lives a communalistic life and that he is indirectly responsible to his immediate community but man can still have some privacy within himself. Although, the general belief of the Yoruba people is that man in the Yoruba traditional society is responsible to the other fellow men in the Society. However, This is inherent in the Yoruba proverb that says "*Agbajo owo la fin soya; ogbon enikan ko to, Imo enikan ko sunwon*, this means that" it is all the fingers that one use to beat his chest, the wisdom of one person is not enough and the knowledge of one person is not good enough."⁵

When looked critically, this proverb explains how relevant and useful men are to one another in the Yoruba traditional system. Man cannot take decision on his own without considering others. Even the head of the Yoruba Community does not take decision without consulting his Chiefs, *Ifa* or his Ancestors.

It is pertinent to clarify that, when we talk of the 'Others' in the Yoruba traditional setting in particular and Africa as a whole, we do not mean only the living human beings but the ancestors, the spirits and the environment. This is the reason why Yoruba people recognise the ancestors and worship them. Reflecting on this, Idowu, writes:

Ancestor worship is a wrong nomenclature for what in fact is no worship but manifestation of an unbroken family relationship, between the parent who has departed from their world and the offspring's who are still here.⁶

Looking critically at the above contribution made by Idowu, one can validly infer that the relevance of ancestor (the other) in the Yoruba worldview is not an understatement. Mbiti writes to show how important the ancestors are in Yoruba worldview by arguing that:

...the living dead are therefore the best group of intermediaries between men and God; they know the needs of men, they have recently been here with men, and at the same time they have full access to the channels of communicating with God directly or indirectly, or according to some societies, indirectly through their own forefathers. Therefore, men approach them more often for minor needs of life than they approach God.⁷

Mbiti position here equally explain the relevance of the ancestors in the Yoruba worldview. It is important to note that, the belief in the ancestors spring from the idea that death does not mean the end of human life among the Africans in general and Yoruba people in particular. As a result of this, there is the general belief that communion and communication are possible between the living and the dead. The Yoruba believe that the deceased are truly members of the family on earth, but they are no longer of the same fleshy order as those who are still actually living in the flesh on earth. In support of this, M.O Adeniyi writes:

Ancestors are factors of obsession in Yoruba society, and are guardians of morality. They protect the good and punish the evil doers. However, it should be noted that not every person that dies becomes an ancestor. Only good people become ancestors after they have received the "well-done" judgement of Deity. Generally, it is those who have children and become old before their departure, died natural death and properly buried that becomes ancestors.⁸

From the foregoing, the ancestors as "other person" in the Yoruba traditional society is very relevant in the Yoruba worldview. The ancestors play a prominent role in the daily activities of the Yoruba people, they served as the intermediaries between Man and God.

As we have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the relevance of man and the other cut across all the Yoruba people's culture such as political system or their system of political administration. In this context of political administration in the Yorubaland, we shall lay emphasis to the leadership choice of the people, checks and balances, kingdom structure, and cultural heritage. The democratic value in the traditional Yoruba social and political society was established on what can be called participatory democracy as it employed different models of involving citizens in governance through representation of diverse interests⁹ Hence, creating governance through representative and participatory democracy feature prominently in all the facets of the traditional Yoruba social, cultural and political organisation.

In the traditional Yoruba Society, the leader of an *Ilu* (town or society) is the *Oba* (king) and the Leaders of smaller Villages are *Baale* (High Chiefs) while the leaders of compounds or family are called *Olori Ile* or *Olori ebi* (head of the house or family head) as the case may be. However, every individual in the Yoruba society cannot live in isolation of his society thereby making his responsibilities to the head of the Community or the Village as well as his family head. Therefore, there is a cordial relationship between the individual, the family and the socio-political worldview. Idowu in view of this posits that, the key to understanding the Yoruba socio-political structure is the concept of the 'ebi' social theory, which holds that the family unit is the microcosm for the social and political world.¹⁰

In the Yoruba traditional society, the choice of who governs at these various levels are done through democratic means. The choice of the *Baale* and *Olori Ile* is mostly based on age and prominence in the ancestral tree of the village compound, and each has a number of royal families among which the one is chosen. This might be responsible for Salami's submission that:

In traditional Yoruba society, the political and administrative organisation of the society was headed by a king and divided into towns and regions with each major towns and settlement headed by a king in council with the other administrators.¹¹

According to the above, there is always slight disintegration of administrative organization in the Yoruba traditional society which enhances the mutual interpersonal relationship among the citizens. The hierarchical order in the administration of the society allows fairness in justice dispensation by the *Olori Ebi's*, *Baales* and the *Obas*. Yoruba people believe in this proverb that "*Agba kii wa loja kori omo titun o wo*" meaning that "the elders cannot be in the market and see that a baby's head is bent".¹² These heads of the towns i.e *Oba Olori ile* or *Olori ebi* and *Baale* are well respected people by their subjects. They are referred to as "*Agba*" (elders), these people are saddled with the responsibility of settling disputes among their subjects through the little knowledge given to them by God and whatever judgment they pass is binding on the people concerned in the society. Therefore, all these cannot be achieved without the collective efforts of all and sundry, hence the relevance of man and the other in the Yoruba worldview.

Furthermore, the traditional Yoruba society could be said to be monarchical, yet the monarch does not enjoy a sole authority of the society, and while the kingdom occupied the highest seat of the society, there existed an elaborate

organization of palace official and chiefs. Hence, the affairs of the society were being controlled by the *Oba* in full consultation with the Chiefs and other palace officials which can conveniently be classified as the council of society. Besides, the selection of new *Oba* is being done in a democratic way. Salami explains the process of enthroning a new Monarch in the following words:

...when there is a vacant stool, candidates for Obaship would emerge from the royal families, and when they emerged, they are all treated as equal candidates to the stool, hence subject to the same rules and treatment, with the final choice of an *Oba* done by the kingmakers in consultation with the *Ifa* Oracle.¹³

Going by the above contribution by the authors, it is obvious that; the political organization of the traditional Yoruba society without a doubt, portrays a participatory democracy. It accommodates the participation of both the ruler and the ruled. Therefore all these could not have been successful if only man lives in isolation in the society.

In another development, the relevance of man and the other cannot be overemphasized in the Yoruba society in the area of child upbringing and education. The Yoruba believes that the training and upbringing of a child is not the responsibility of the parents alone. The preponderance of this belief is fathomable from one of the Yoruba proverb which says; "*oju merin lo bi omo igba oju nii too*" meaning that "it is four eyes that bear a child but it is 200 eyes that train him".¹⁴ All the elders in the family household have the right to contribute their quota. Even if either of the parents or any of the elders feels the punishment given is not justifiable or that it was too harsh, they will not object at the time of punishment but raise their objections later and not in the presence of the child. This is why Yoruba says, "*emu*

kan la fin tomo (we have to correct a child unanimously).¹⁵ Raymond Ogunade captures this properly when he states:

When a child is given an unjustifiable punishment by the elder, no one will raise an objection in the presence of the child but later when the child had left. The belief is that if this is done, the affected child becomes rebellious to the person correcting him or her. The child will think that the fellow correcting him or her does not like him or her.¹⁶

Apart from the child not happy with the punishment meted on him by another fellow or elder in the society, the parents also may not be pleased with such punishment. This is inherent in the Yoruba proverb that says, "*Bami na omo mi ko denu olomo*, (help me to beat my child is not a good intention of the parents). In related development, respect for elders is one of the significance of man and the other in the Yoruba worldview. This is one quality that Yoruba demonstrate so much, that they are sometimes misinterpreted as cowards.¹⁷ The Yoruba children are raised and trained to have respect for people, especially elders. It is very common among the Yoruba people to see children or younger people prostrating (if a boy) or kneeling (if a girl) whenever they greet elders. The Yoruba give respect to everybody-young or old. The prefix 'ẹ' or collective noun 'ẹyin' means they or them literarily denotes respect. The Yoruba use these prefix a lot in social interaction amongst themselves. The belief is that respect for one another engender and promote harmony. For example, it is common to see younger people relieving elders of whatever luggage or load, either on their way from the farm or on their way to the farm. This kind of gesture elicits prayers from such elders. According to Raymond Ogunade, 'when a child, or a young adult run errand for an elder, it draws prayers from the elder. Such prayers come from the depth of the heart.... When such prayer are offered, the youth or whoever is running the errand is or are encouraged

to do more, and everybody is happy. This promotes a healthy and a happy community.¹⁸

When talking of "the others" in the African society, the environment is very crucial, the relationship between Africa and their environment is very relevant in the discussion of man and the others in the Yoruba worldview. The Yoruba people have a lot of respect for the environment. The creation of the universe and all that is there is fundamental to the basis of the belief of the Yoruba. The Yoruba do not usually tamper with nature carelessly. Parrinder shed light on this that, there are quite a lot of places in Yoruba communities that out of respect for nature and for spiritual reasons have become nature reserves.¹⁹ The environment and the people are in close relationship among Yoruba. The Yoruba life is at a critical function where the natural meets the supernatural and where the ancestors and the divine intersect with the human.²⁰ One important truth about Yoruba belief is that divinities are the objective phenomena of the Yoruba belief. Each of the divinities oversees a compartment of the Yoruba life, and this includes nature and the environment. The spiritual presence is there to enhance spiritual strength and stabilize health for communal peace. Ogunade explains this with reference to his childhood experience.

He states:

I remember growing up in the village. In a Yoruba setting, people in that area are admonished not to hit or beat the ground, trees, bushes and grasses anyhow because they might get angry and deal with the offenders in their sleep.²¹

Going by the position of Ogunade, nature and environment such as rivers, streams, even rainwater are treated with some level of respect.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the concept of man and the other is very germane to the Yoruba worldview. Yoruba people believe that "Man" in the society cannot live in isolation from the "Others", man in the Yoruba society lives a communalistic life with the others in the Community and this cuts across all human aspect of life such as educational, cultural , political and social life.

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have attempted to show that the concept of man and other is a very important issue as far as Yoruba people are concerned. We have been able to examine the communal life of the Yoruba which signifies that man does not exist as an atomic individual in the society, but co-exist with others in the society. Also, this work has been able to show the role of the Supreme Being in the Yoruba society, it also shows the relationship between "Man" in the society and *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being). Besides, the divinities, spirits and the ancestors play a prominent role in the communal living of the Yoruba people. For instance, the Yoruba people believe strongly in the existence of their ancestors whom they believe serve as an intermediary between "Man" and gods in the society.

Moreover, we have been able to beam our search light on the socio-cultural concept of man and the others in the Yoruba worldview by objecting the concept of solipsism in the traditional philosophy by taking recourse to Heidegger's objection to solipsism as a pseudo-problem. We have been able to agree with Heidegger's argument that the existence of an individual implies the existence of others, also that man is not a being alone, but a being that co-exists with others.

Moreso, the essay shows the relevance of the concept of Man and the Others in the Yoruba worldview. It points out all the areas where the concept is so relevant in the Yoruba society such as socio-political life, educational life and also the relationship between "Man and his environment." We have been able to argue that when we talk of the "Others" in the Yoruba society, this does not only apply to other human beings in the society but also the gods, spirits, divinities and the environment.

In the final analysis we want to submit that, among the Yoruba, communality is very important because there is an understanding that human beings are collectively oriented. They are connected with strong and unbreakable network of bloodline. Hence, the general health and well- being of an individual or family are connected to the community, and is not something that can be maintained alone or in a vacuum. Therefore the concept of "Man and the Others" is deep rooted in the Yoruba community than in any other community in Africa.

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