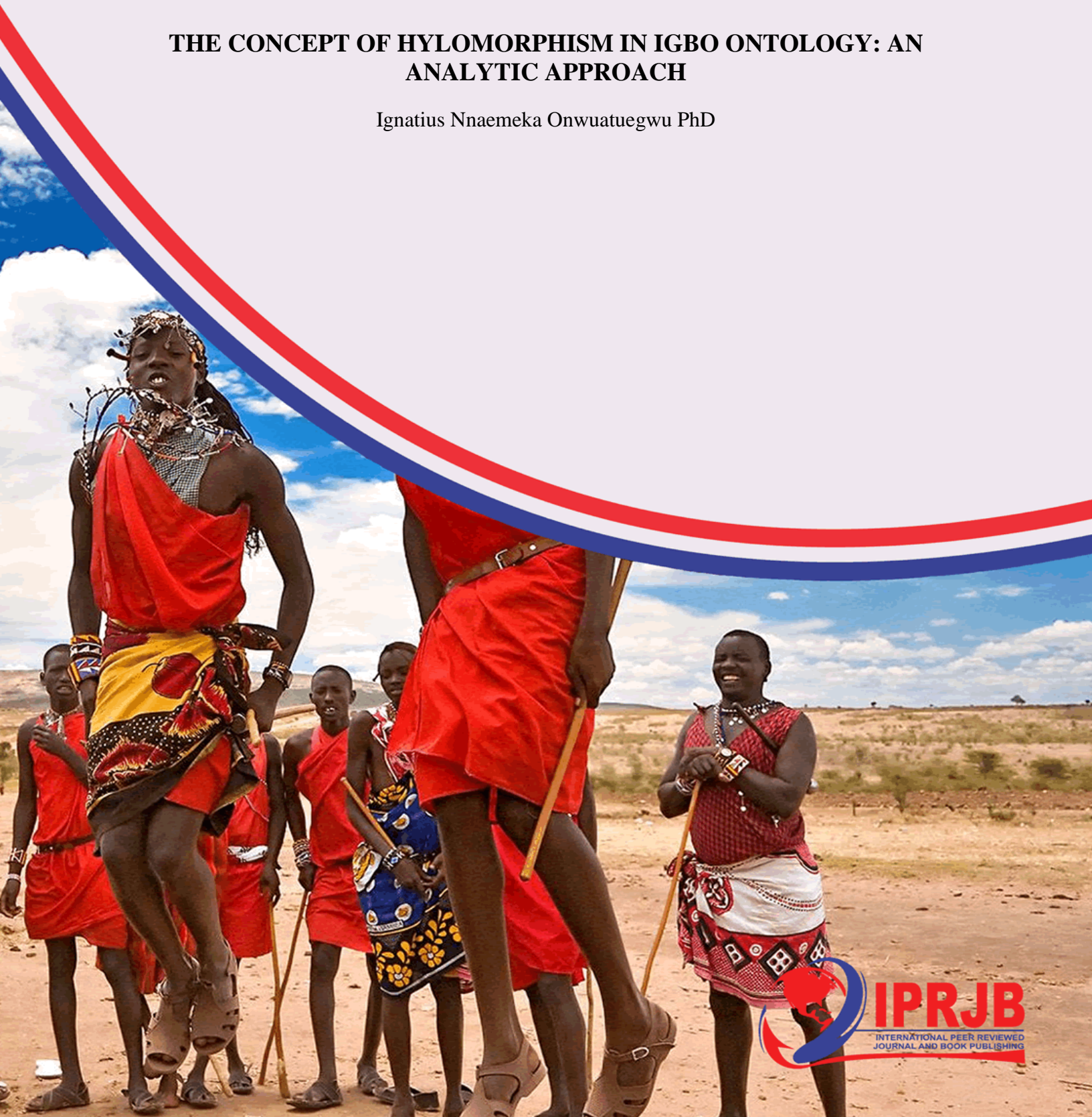


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THE CONCEPT OF HYLOMORPHISM IN IGBO ONTOLOGY: AN ANALYTIC APPROACH

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Abstract

Hylomorphism is a philosophical conception that every substance are in forms of matter and form. Some scholars have interpreted this ideation of matter and form as being relative to body and soul. Aristotle initially introduced hylomorphism, and later it became a fundamental issue of discourse which leads to the contributions of other philosophers like Plato, Leibniz, Kant, Descartes, among others. Each of these philosophers made one or two addition or variation to the Aristotelian conception of hylomorphism. To this end, Hylomorphism has enhanced into a global concept in metaphysics and other natural substances. However, there is bound knowledge of hylomorphism in accordance with the geographical territory, cultural heritage and background. Thus, the main theme of this paper to analyse the concept or idea of hylomorphism in Igbo Ontology. Ontology has to do with the philosophical study which tends to answer questions about things which are in existence and how such things can be categorised, depending on the nature of being, existence and reality. In Igbo Ontology, there are two major categories of things. It is believed that these two categories of things give credence and existence value to all other things that may be idealised to be in existence or that is really in existence. This paper aims to apply an analytical approach to make a discourse on the concept of hylomorphism in the Igbo Ontology. The paper will commence with an introduction, followed by conceptual frameworks and finally, the Igbo ontology of hylomorphism, to be followed by a brief conclusion. This paper, therefore, takes an analytical look on the concept Hylomorphism in Igbo Ontology. It highlights how the concept of Hylomorphism fits into Igbo ontological conceptions.

Keywords: *Hylomorphism, Igbo Ontology, Matter, Form, Body, Soul*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Hylomorphism is a philosophical theory propounded by Aristotle. The theory contends that being is composed of matter and form. Hence, the word is a 19th century coinage that is derived from two Greek words: hyle, "wood, matter", and morphe, "form". In accordance with the theory of Hylomorphism, therefore, every natural body is conceived as consisting of two intrinsic principles: primary matter and substantial form.

Ontology on the other vein refers to discussion or theories of being or of properties of being. However, as a discipline, Ontology is that branch of philosophy, which deals with the nature of existence. Nevertheless, in this paper, ontology is used from the perspective of people's concept of reality. The manner in which a group of people understand or perceive reality influences their thought pattern, their belief system and their general behaviour or attitude to life.

The Igbos generally have the belief that there are two categories of substance existing in the world (Osayi, 1989). Moreover, this belief is also replicated in the Igbo Ontology. In this sense, everything existing in the world, whether realistic or idealistic can be of either of the two categories (Okoye, 2008): the physical and the metaphysical. The categories above could further be classified as visible and invisible. The popular view amongst the Igbo people is that there is a form of interaction between these two categories and that the level of the dichotomy between the two realms of things is not to a significant or large extent. The conceptions of the Igbos about the world are that the two realms of things; which can be real or idealised or material or spiritual, do work in connectivity through the continuous process of life itself (Okoye, 2008).

The world in the view of the IgboWorld is structured in line with the ontology of existence stated above. In this vein, the world is in two broad classes of divisions (Onwubiko, 1991): World of man (Eluuwa) which is inhabited by all created things with the man having dominion over other creatures and Spirit world (AlaMuo).

This shows that the existence of the world in line with Igbo notion is relative to the theory of cosmic balance. The theory of cosmic balance strongly upholds that the world has a double or couple formation. It is to this end that the Igbos has a strong belief that everything in the world has a couple or double in its opposite pole (Okoye, 2008). According to Uchendu (1965); these two worlds are distinguished and are real one in all regards. While the world of man is predominantly occupied by a man and other creatures whether tangible or intangibles, animate or inanimate; the spirit world is occupied by the maker of the world, Chi-okike, Chineke, and other gods (personal chi) and the ancestors who act as dwellers of both worlds.

Hylomorphism is built as a doctrine that captures the metaphysical nature of an entity in the form of matter and form. Hylomorphism tends to understudy and observe the interaction between matter and form, on the basis that everything in existence is composed of the two qualities of matter and form (Fine, 1999). Hylomorphism, as a principle, is coined in a manner that for there to be any form of adequate or effective metaphysical definition or classification of any entity; it must surely be made of the two properties of matter and form. This bipolar classification is to aid in the comprehension of organisation, connectivity, interaction and holistic nature of things (Koons 2014).

Hylomorphism upholds that in order to fully comprehend and garner the nature and structure of any given entity; the concepts of matter and form must be brought to fore. Let us take a step further to understand or be on the same scale of things about the importation of garnering the nature of an entity (Marmodoro 2013). To garner, comprehend or capture the nature of any given entity could be interpreted to mean a situation where one understood wholly what an entity is composed of fundamentally. Contemporarily, it could be likened to comprehending why and how the features and properties of that entity are possessed (Rea, 2011). Let us take an example with a piece of Gold, to capture the nature of the piece of gold would imply understanding why it has the diverse properties which are not limited to the reflective surfaces, malleability, conductivity, among others. It may further be taken to include a survey of how the entity comes to possess the properties and features so observed (Johnston, 2006).

Objective of the study

This paper looks to make a discourse on the concepts of hylomorphism in the Igbo Ontology in an analytic approach. The paper will combine the contributions of ancient philosophers as it relates to the concept and then a crop of philosophers who have attempted to make a relative discourse on the concept of hylomorphism as it is in Igbo ontology. The research will apply the use of analytical discourse to achieve the general objective of this paper. The contents of the paper will be a mixture of western philosophy and African philosophy.

2.0 CONCEPT OF IGBO ONTOLOGY

The concept of Igbo Ontology could be said to be an anthropocentric ontology which tends to make distinct, special and unique. The Igbo Ontology is said to be anthropocentric in a sense it is centred around man. The Igbo ontology is classified into two major forms or classes (Osaye, 1989): Invisible beings/things (Ihe na ndi adighiafuanya) and Visible beings/things (Ihe na ndi anaafuanya).

Some Igbo scholars and philosophers have argued that the Igbo ontology is tripartite, and ought to be classified in that regard. These philosophers opine that Igbo Ontology is classified into three (Okoye, 2008): Madu (Humans); Ihe (Things) and Muo (Spirit). They argue that every being under the Igbo ontology are conceived in any of the three categories, anything in existence in this world or any world is Human, a thing or a spirit. To them, there is nothing in existence which cannot be fixated into any of the three categories. In their views, everything that be is subsumed into one of these categories, and there is nothing that can be conceived except through any of the three categories (Onwubiko, 1991).

However, the researcher is of the view that the initial classification into visible and invisible things is more comprehensive than the classification into humans, things and spirits. To substantiate my points, any of the three categories made by the later sets of philosophers regarding Igbo Ontology could wholly fit in to be a visible or invisible thing. While humans are visible, things could be visible or invisible. The spirits are invisible. One may argue, on the other hand, that anything visible or invisible could either be classified humans, things or spirit; to quantify the arguments that Igbo Ontology should be tripartite (Ney, 2015).

Our human limitations and less comprehension of mystics may prevent us from holding the view that there may be in existence an entity that is not human, spirit nor thing, therefore implying that the tripartite classification would prove not to be useful and one would be left with no option than to classify in accordance with the bipartite classification of visible and invisible things. Whatever dimension one takes, Igbo ontology may be in any of the phases highlighted herein above.

3.0 CONCEPT OF HYLOMORPHISM

The word Hylomorphism was coined, and Aristotle first developed the concept of hylomorphism. Aristotle's development of the concept of hylomorphism was built upon his negation and rejection of the explanation of changes given based on atomistic nature (Peramatzis, 2011). The argument proffered by Aristotle was that instead of seeing the process whereby the particles making up a given entity were replaced with the particles that compose another entity, as a change, it should rather be seen as destruction. In his view, change cannot occur unless there are two practical principles whereby one changes as the other remains constant (Jaworski, 2012). Hylomorphism, in the view of Aristotle, brought the concepts of matter and form; whereas matter is passive and undetermined and able to undergo the change process; form is constant and highly not susceptible to changes. Though generally the idea and concept of matter and form apply to all beings, whether visible or invisible and whether animate or inanimate; Aristotle took up a new dimension where the human soul and body are considered as a special case of form and matter (Robinson 2014).

It is a problem that bewildered Aristotle during his contemplation of what consists and interwoven with the processes of "changing" and "becoming, that led to the conceptualisation of hylomorphism (Sider, and Zimmerman (eds) 2008). While the atomist posited that everything is consist of composed matter and change is the rearrangement of the basis of that made up the matter; Aristotle adopted the view which he conveyed as hylomorphism. Aristotle's views were that for one to comprehend the process of existence, and change of a given entity, the identification of the primordial elements that made up all bodies or properties as well as the intrinsic conditions that made a body to be considered as such (Jaworski 2016).

The manner with which Aristotle handled the co-existence of the human soul and body as a distinguished phenomenon extracted from the overall composition and relationship which exists between matter and form is formally ideal. That relationship is also present between in all animate and inanimate beings or entities, that is notwithstanding whether they are of nature or they are man-made (Shields, 2007). Aristotle asserts that the soul can be seen as the "first actuality of a natural organic body," as a "substance as form of a natural body which has life in potentiality," and, similarly, as "a first actuality of a natural body which has life in potentiality" (Bird, 2007).

The statements as credited to Aristotle above apply to all living beings: plants, animals, and humans. Aristotle likened the form of an entity to the inner components (soul) that makes human, human, without which the human would lose the attributes of being human; and for the body, he relates it with the matter. He further explained that just like the body is meaningless

without the soul informing the body; matter is just a mere potential being; it only becomes an actual being when it has acquired a given form. Thus, between the soul and the body, it is the soul that complete the formation and utility of the body, thereby helping the body to fulfil its features (Klima, Fritz, and Anand; 2007).

4.0 HYLOMORPHISM AND IGBO ONTOLOGY

Under the Igbo ontology, the universe is classified into three categories (Okoye, 2008): The Sky(Eluigwe); the Spirit world; (AlaMmuo) and the land of the living (Alamadu). Under these categories, the Eluigwe is the dwelling of the Supreme Being (Chukwu- CHI UKWU). The Igbos believe that there is no sort of direct interaction or dealings with the Supreme Being. If there should be an interaction; it is often through intermediaries (Ancestors, diviners, native priests, Personal chi (gods); among others). The agents of interaction between the Supreme Being and humans may be called ambassadors (Osoya, 1989).

The Supreme Being does not just dwell in the sky; He also controls the affairs and activities as they occur in the land of the living. The attributes of the Supreme Being to sustain and control the events in the land of the living that brought about the name OlisaBuluwa or Osebuluwa- the sustainer. The Igbos believe that the Supreme Being created the world (Chineke); thus, they acknowledge this through sacrifices and offerings to the Supreme Being through the ambassadors. The same means through which the people reach the Supreme Being is the same means through which He connects back to the people.

Alamu is the second world in this series of Igbo Ontology. The belief is that spirit being which may include the ancestors reside in the Alamu (spirit world). The Igbos believe that the beings existing in the Spirit world are the ones in the process of coming into the human world and the ones leaving the human world. The roles of the inhabitants of the spirit world are believed to be very phenomenal to the existence and survival of human beings in the human world. Just in the same manner, the Igbos reverend the Supreme Being and pays offering or homage, the Igbos also reverend the inhabitants of Alamu, though in lower coverage, by paying homage, rites and rituals. The general belief of the Igbos is that after life in the Alamadu; one would join the ancestors in the Alamu; therefore, in order to enjoy smooth passage into the Alamu, and avoid a situation where one's soul and spirit will be roaming the Alamadu after death; a person is advised to keep up with the ritual demands and rites in supplications to the ancestors (Okoye, 2008).

In this tripartite categorisation of the world, the third is Alamadu. Alamadu is mainly for the occupation of man and other animate and inanimate objects whether made by man or not. Though man predominantly occupies it, it is also a dwelling place for animals, plants, minerals, among others. Just as explained in the preceding paragraph about the journey of the death; the Igbos believes that some spirits may be trapped in the Alamadu and spirits sent on missions on earth can also dwell on the earth (Ezeanya, 1969). However, despite how this categorisation is tuned and turned, one would see that they end up talking about things which may be visible and things which may not be invisible or in the way round; the tripartite dimensions of humans, things and spirit.

The Igbo Ontology advances that a being as an entity self consists of both the physical and the non-physical substances which are intrinsic and extrinsic. In the Igbo ontology, it is believed that it is the combination of both the physical and non-physical substances that are accountable for life, action, inactions, reactions and the existence of a being. A being, in accordance with the Igbo's belief, is structured or classified into three parts which all have a relationship but not a direct co-existence with the three categories of the world already discussed in this paper. A being has three parts in which it is categorised (Eboh, 1985): the Soul – Mkpuruobi; the Spirit- Mmuo; and the Body-Aru.

In the Igbo study, it is the Mkpuruobi that forms and complete the innermost being. It follows that the main essence of a being which aids the being to be a whole being is the 'Mkpuruobi'-soul. No wonder the soul is termed as the unit of the life of a being. This could be the rationale behind the adoption of the concept of soul as a life-holding part of a being by the Christians. The Igbos believe that in order to comprehend the power of Chukwu over life in the land of humans, Mkpuruobi represents that power, as once it is retrieved or recalled from any being, the essence of the being is defeated and its continued existence could be marked as exterminated and futile thenceforth. The Igbos believe that death marks the retrieval of the soul from any being (Eboh, 1985).

The comprehension of Mkpuruobi as it is related to a being in the Igbo ontology can be related to the perspective also upheld by the followers of Christianity and Judaism. According to Okolo (1995), the existence of Mkpuruobi is invented and should be extinguished from the Igbo analogy of a being. In his contention and deposition, he stated that in lieu of Mkpuruobi, Mmuo is the in-thing which the Igbo holds to serve the exact purposes for which Mkpuruobi serves. He argued that Mmuo plays the roles of both the spirit (Mmuo) and Soul (mkpuruobi). The arguments as barraged by Okolo (1995) is quite comprehensible even though it may be argued in opposition that it is the Mkpuruobi that has the linkage with the Supreme Being. However, I may beg to differ with Okolo as regards the above point. Mmuo in Igbo ontology is the whole being of a being, only that it is now stripped of the material clothing(the flesh) with which a being exists in the material world of things.

Eboh (1985) argued that the soul should not be mistaken to be the heart or any parts of a being, which could be seen in the human body. He argues that a soul is an invisible object while the heart is visible even upon death; it could still be located in the human body. The soul is the unseen substance and supplier of life to the being. Its entrance and existence cannot be seen, but its effects are felt. So the soul does not occupy any space in human being, neither is it weighty, it is, therefore, the form under the Aristotelian hylomorphism. The soul like the one understudied under the Aristotelian philosophy does not undergo any change, it is constant, though the Igbo ontology suggests that it transmits from one realm to another; a realm being the three types of the world earlier stated in this paper.

The Okolo's view could be battered on the ground that it falls off from the conceptualisation of the western philosophy, in this regard, the Mmuo which Ogugua posits that it can play both the roles of Mkpuruobi (soul) and Mmuo (spirit) respectively is not endowed with certain features which Mkpuruobi (soul) is endowed with in line with western philosophy. Whereas the western

assign the soul of having the capacity of existence (Shields, 2007), Okolo is opposed to that. However, the capacity of existence given to the soul following western philosophy gives credence to the Igbo belief in the soul as a rarefied matter. Note that the Mkpuruobi is not physical, it rolls back that since it is not physical, it is metaphysical and since it is metaphysical it is within the class of Igbo ontology which could be classed as invisible as it defies the Spatio-temporal laws, which are only operative on physical entities.

Mmuo (spirit) is a term used in reference to any kind mystical being and force. This explanation shows that Mmuo does not have any direct relationship with the physical entities. This definition if upheld may likely keep us in the dilemma in which one of the western philosophers, Rene Descartes found himself, where he ended up using the concept to advance his ideology of the mind and body theory (Ezeanya, 1969).

The Igbo ontology is that every being has a spirit that resides somewhere between the metaphysical and the physical (sub-physical). There are arguments that Mmuo is in the metaphysical category, it is not visible, and thus, there is no need for the sub-physical category. The Igbo believe that it the spirit that aids the communion of humans with the other realms. The spirit builds up man's imagination of things which are not physically present with a given moment. One would often hear an Igbo man makes statement like (Okoye, 2008): "Mmuo m anoghiebe a" - My spirit is not here; "Ejighim muo m aka" - I do not have hold of my spirit; "Mmuo m puburu apu" – My spirit left me; and "Anoghi m ebe ahu, mana mmuo m no ya" - I am not there but my spirit is there.

Any of the statement will directly show the difference between Mmuo and Mkpuruobi, whereas the Igbos believe that one can still be alive without being in tone and tune with his spirit, but one cannot be alive once the soul exit the body. These statements comprehensively explain the spirit as the custodian and bearer of consciousness, sub-consciousness and unconsciousness. It embodies the thoughts and feelings of a being and help in the imaginative prowess of human beings which are lacking in other animate objects.

During dreams, mmuo sojourns and leaves to interact with other things either in the same realm or in another realm. It is the spirit that plays the psychological functions of exporting man to subliminal consciousness and importing him back to human world consciousness. The spirit is the actor of the roles which one experiences during dreams that is why the Igbos believes that one must possess a strong spirit. Possessing strong spirit helps the being to conquer in the spiritual realms as the Igbos believes that dreams even though they occur in the spirit and with the spirit have a way of replicating in the physical world (Okolo, 1995).

The body is in charge of the spirit during consciousness, but during unconsciousness, like in the dream, it the spirit that is in charge of the body. The Igbos can also use Mmuo as an inspiration or motivation- "Mmuo m di ala"- my spirit is so low (My motivation is poor); "Okwu ya wulitere mmuo m"- His words have enhanced my spirit (He has inspired or motivated me). The spirit also acts as an intermediary between the body and the mind. The semblance between Mkpuruobi and Mmuo is that both are not visible and are not located at any spot or location in the being, they are both of more of metaphysical substances than physical (Osoya, 1989).

5.0 CONCLUSION

The Igbos belief in the metaphysical and physical substances are relevant in the sense Igbos like most African often relate any form of misfortunes which have occurred in the physical realm to the spiritual realm. This shows that the existence of the world in line with Igbo ontology is relative to the theory of cosmic balance. The theory of cosmic balance strongly upholds that the world has a double or couple formation. It is to this end that the Igbos has a strong belief that everything in the world has a couple or double fixation in its opposite pole. These two worlds are distinguished and are related in one or more regards. While the world of man is predominantly occupied by man and other creatures whether tangible or intangibles, animate or inanimate; the spirit world is occupied by the maker of the world, Chi-okike, Chineke, and other gods (personal chi) and the ancestors who act as dwellers of both worlds. The hylomorphism in the Igbo ontology is embodied in the concepts of soul (Mkpuruobi), spirit (Mmuo), and other related concepts which have analytically overviewed in this paper.

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