

THE PLACE OF PLACE IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: THE AFRICAN IN THE WORLD TODAY*

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ABSTRACT

The place one finds himself affects the kind of identity one can assume and or manifest. And yet the place for identity construction is itself not absolute but affected by the choices and actions of the person constructing, the persons in the construction and the context of the construction of identity. How to affect the place of one's existence therefore becomes a major issue in the determination of identity construction. The capacity or incapacity to affect the place of one's identity construction implicitly becomes a further fundamental issue in identity construction. This work engages with the issues raised by the place of place in identity construction. The work employs the instruments of poetry and storytelling, conversations and conceptualizations to explore the roles that place plays in personal identity construction. Ultimately, using the dialogic method, the work focuses on the African in the 21st century world, the challenges that his place places on him, and how he may navigate the challenges using the affordances of the same place, recreated, to construct the identity that he desires for himself.

Key Terms: Place; Identity; Construction; African; The World Today

INTRODUCTION

The following abridged version of the poem, *In My Place*, introduces the exploration of the multidimensional relations of place, identity, identity construction and the African in the world today.

In My Place

1

Place, the frame of my being
The categories of my thoughts
The horizons of my imaginations

2

Place, the habitat of my spirit
The fringes of my feelings
The contours of my emotions

3

Place is my family and its heritage
The school, the church, the community
That form my cradle and build my world

4

Place is this my physical space
My given location in time and space
With which by which I form my place

5

My place is this my involvement room
Formed by you and it; by him and her
That I may form myself, in my place

6

Place is this my toddling third world country
That occupies the first position from behind
And makes me who must run from the hind

7

My place the many deposits of my existence
As an African in the 21st century world
Deposits of tradition, culture and customs

8

As of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism
With the battles of modernity and decolonialism
With torrents of globalization and transcolonialism

9

Place is this age in which I exist
Where I connect with hosts of remote climes
While disconnect from the folks by my side

10

Place is this my digital aperture
Where I feel my virtual friends
And delete my physical neighbour

11

Place is the push and pull of my place in the world
That hold me down and challenge me forward
To break the shackles and define myself

12

Against the place of my place in the world
To identify where I feel should be my place
To take myself to where I will, from my place¹

Place as seminary: Some forty-six years ago, the seminary was a primary place of my self-identification for over a decade. And so, finding myself in this seminary today, thirty-three years after my exit from the seminary, reawakens in me some aspects of who I am that are no longer present to the everydayness of my self-conception or obvious to the everydayness of the other's perception of who I am. The arising feeling reminds us of the assertion of Miguel de Unamuno in *The Tragic Sense of Life*:

Philosophy is a product of the humanity of each philosopher, and each philosopher is a man of flesh and bone who addresses himself to other men of flesh and bone like himself. And let him do what he will, he philosophizes not with reason only, but with his will, with his feelings, with the flesh and with the bones, with the whole soul and with the whole body. It is the man that philosophizes.²

It follows from the foregoing statement of Unamuno that the man philosophizes from his place. The man, as physical body occupies physical space which his personhood engages and transforms into his place of being and existence. Such provides us aperture into the aspects of the place of place in the making of personal identities and the challenges that come with both the place and the making.

WHAT IS IDENTITY?

To understand the place of place in identity construction, we should know what identity is and what makes it worthy of our attention. We shall seek an understanding of identity through the means of stories, scenarios and conceptualizations. The ancient Greek mythical story of the ship of Theseus is a good place to start:

Story One: The Ship of Theseus

In ancient Greece there was a famous hero named Theseus, the valiant Athenian prince, son of King Aegeus. Theseus was a great warrior who fought many naval battles, human and mythical; and killed many monsters including the Minotaur. The Minotaur was a half bull, half human creature created by the greed and deceit of Minos, King of Crete. After his great battles and victories, like all mortals, Theseus died. The Athenians sought to immortalize his achievements by anchoring his naval ship at the harbour. This ship was preserved for so many centuries by continuously replacing any parts that damaged or rotted. End of story!³

Now comes the problem of identity. Let us presume that this ship was made of 100 wooden planks and that each year, one plank was replaced such that after 100 years all the old planks had been replaced with new planks. The questions: When the first plank was changed, was it still the same ship of Theseus? What of when half of the planks was replaced? And now all the planks have been replaced, is the ship currently sitting at the Athenian harbour still the ship of Theseus? Many answers have been proffered for this question. It is the ship of Theseus? It is not the ship of Theseus? It is not exactly the ship of Theseus?

Story Two: The Laptop of Obinna

That story is a mythical tale and sounds like one; and so, it may make the problem of identity sound like folktale, remote and even artificial. But now listen to this other story of the ***Laptop of Obinna*** to understand that the problem is real and abides with us today. Recently, at my university, a student came to my office and reported an incident that happened in their hostel.

“One morning,” he said, “we were all woken by a noisy disagreement in our hostel. The noise attracted all of us in the hostel. Arriving at the scene of the misunderstanding, we saw three of our hostel mates, Obinna, Ella and Kelue, quarrelling. When we sought to know the cause of the quarrel, Obinna declared: ‘I simply want her to return my laptop. Period!’ And Ella retorted: ‘I don’t have your laptop. Full stop!’ Well, when we succeeded in stopping the quarrel, we found out that the meat of the problem was that Obinna had given Ella a laptop as a birthday gift some years back when the going was groovy between them. And now that Ella had left him for Kelue, Obinna wanted his laptop returned. And he was pointing at a Laptop on Kelue’s table. Ella explained that actually Obinna gave her a laptop but that the laptop on Kelue’s table was not the laptop Obinna gave her. Surprised, Obinna gave graphic

description of the gift laptop pointing at indices of sameness with the laptop on Kelue's table.

Ella countered that while the current laptop may look externally same with Obinna's laptop, she had changed the hard disk, processor, graphics card, keyboard, screen, and even the frame. And so, this was no longer that Obinna's laptop.

At this point, all of us who had gathered were confused as to what verdict or suggestion to give to settle the quarrel. The Hostel Government constituted a Committee to resolve the matter and made me the Chairman of the Committee. Sir, what do you advise? And so, the identity questions: Is the laptop Obinna's laptop? Is it not Obinna's laptop? If it should be returned to Obinna, what should be returned to Obinna?⁴

Story Three: The Cells of the Human Body

These stories present the problem of identity at the ontological level. There is also the controversy that the cells of the human body all get replaced every 7-10 years. While some literatures support this claim, others assert that the neurons in the cerebral cortex stay with us from birth till death.⁵ If the position that all cells are replaced regularly holds, when all the cells that constitute Obi when he was so named have died and been replaced, is the regenerated Obi the same as the decomposed Obi?

In all these stories, we are asking identity questions and engaging in identity actions. Our life revolves around our identity even as our identity is everyday being constructed by our existence. And the place or places of our existence affect so much the constructs of our identity, and yet, many a time, we are not conscious of that. Let us go from the stories to the concept of identity.

Conceptualizing Identity

The concept of identity underscores the ontological unity of every being in so far as it is in being. It asserts the unity, consistency and stability of being. The concept is captured in the fundamental laws of thought; the principles of identity, contradiction and excluded middle: the principle of identity captures this essential unity of being affirmatively; the principle of contradiction captures it negatively; while the principle of excluded middle draws out the implications of this unity in asserting the impossibility of an intermediate between contradictions.

The problem of ontological identity has two arms: How can a thing remain the same while undergoing change? How can we differentiate things of the same kind from one another? Ontological identity therefore refers to the fact of a thing being what it is and none besides. It is the quality or attribute in beings whereby the principle of identity applies to them invariably: *“Every being is determined in itself, is one with itself, and is consistent in itself.”*⁶ Ontological identity is fundamental to the discourse of identity. It is also foundational to personal identity. One must be before assuming a class, type, or form of being. What happens to ontological identity happens to personal identity in the measure and specificity of its being. Personal identity is the identity of persons. Who is a person?

Severinus Boethius’ *“individua substantia rationalis naturae”* was the first comprehensive definition of the person. The person is progressively identified by the qualities of substantiality, individuality and rationality.⁷ Founded on the being or substantiality of the person, the Boethian definition laid the foundation for the ontological conception of personhood.

St. Thomas Aquinas furthered this ontological conceptualization when he defined the person as “subsistent rationality” thereby

concretizing rationality as the *specifica differentia* of personhood from mere being.⁸ Subsistence defines the quality of identity whereby the person is undivided in itself and is divided from every other being. Personal identity here refers to the identity of the being characterized by interiority of existence and quiddity of rationality. While the substantiality of existence assured the continuity of identity, the rationality of personhood assured our understanding and specificity of identity.

For centuries, philosophers followed the footsteps of Boethius and Thomas and developed the concept of person along ontological lines. However, in his revolutionary questioning and doubt of all received knowledge, Descartes also questioned the ontological understanding of person and posited innate ideas as what assures us of our being and identity. In this position, he shifted the discourse of identity from ontology to psychology. The basis of identity is no longer substance but consciousness.⁹

John Locke built on this new psychological foundation, but argued that identity is given and demonstrated, not by innate ideas, but by memory or self-recollection of past experiences of actions and events: “a person can be addressed as the same person if he is able to remember previous states of consciousness.” A person can “consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, at different times and places if it can recollect itself in past actions and events”.¹⁰ As exciting as the Lockean postulation appears, it raises a number of problems: subjectivity of identity; reduction of identity to fleeting bits of memory; and consequently, loss of memory means loss of identity.

Kant attempted a solution to this problem by creating the metaphysical anthropological category of the transcendental ego for which he argued: “Being aware of ourselves as thinking subjects we know the subject as being a unified and unique whole in all of its different perceptions or thoughts: “The I think must be able to

accompany all my representations.”¹¹ Thus, Kant is short of stating that there must be something, the I, that does the recollection of the past actions and events as its own, and without which these recollections as well as the recollected actions and events will be discrete and isolated bits and pieces of memorial data and not a conscious subject.

However, there is a further problem of the Lockean self-recollection criterion of identity: the problem of spatio-temporal localization; the problem of place. Every material action or event is spatio-temporally specified, localized and circumscribed. Every material action or event takes place in a place. The recollection is therefore of this place or places that will either become atomistic cocoons or require another principle, framework or platform to provide them apertures, to relate and connect them to one another. If such a principle, framework or platform exists, then it becomes the fundamental criterion of identity instead of these discrete objects or spaces of recollection or the self-recollection itself. Where such principle, framework or platform does not exist, the spatio-temporal localization, the place issuing forth from the self-recollections will ossify such recollections into absolutely unique, non-communicating entities or individuals.

The consideration of such principle, framework or platform transits the intentionality of the question “who am I?” from quantitative enumeration of attributes or localized self-recollections to the qualitative meaning of personal existence in the search for answers to such questions as “what kind of person am I or do I want to be or do I want to be perceived by the society?” The qualitative issues in personal identity therefore embrace the social roles, ideals, values and expectations; habits, skills and capacities as well as biographical experiences of a person.¹²

We may therefore conclude that personal identity refers to that owned meeting point of being, existence, perception and valuation of a person.¹³ Being refers to the fact of being what and who a person is; existence refers to the living out of the being of a person with its characteristics, talents and idiosyncrasies as well as the images the person seeks to present of himself/herself to the other; perception refers to both self-perception and other-perception. Valuation refers to the value the person places on himself/herself, the value the society places on the person; the accord or discord of the self-valuation and communal valuation of the person; the recognition or rejection by the community of the value the person has placed on himself/herself. It may be seen that beyond the ontological aspect of “being”, the other aspects of “existence, perception and valuation” are constituted in place. And the place of constitution of each person’s identity is a determinant factor for the identity in question.

UNDERSTANDING PLACE

In the search for an understanding of place, let us look at the entry points of the discourse into philosophy. While the eruption of contemporary African philosophy brought the concept of place to the fore of global philosophy, Edmund Husserl and the existentialists introduced the concept of place into western philosophy.

Place was implicit in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. The significant role of place in the phenomenology may be read in his broader concepts of space, the lived body and the life-world. In *Place and our Lived Body*, Husserl posits that our primary access to the world is through our lived body, which is not just a physical object but the centre of our experience and orientation.¹⁴ In this context, place is fundamentally tied to the “here” of our lived body. Every “there” is experienced and understood in relation to this central “here.” Our bodily movements, sensations, and perspectives actively constitute the places we inhabit. The lived body has a

"kinaesthetic feel" that is crucial for our spatial awareness. We understand and navigate places through our ability to move, touch, and perceive distances and orientations from our bodily standpoint. In Martin Heidegger, place becomes an explicit concern of philosophy and being. Place is deeply intertwined with his fundamental concepts of Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) and dwelling (*Bauen, Wohnen, Denken*). Building on the thoughts of Husserl, Heidegger distinguishes place from abstract, mathematical space, emphasizing its rootedness in human existence and its significance for how we understand ourselves and the world. In *Place as Fundamental to Being-in-the-World*, Heidegger emphasizes the place of place for Dasein (human being) as fundamentally "Being-in-the-world." This isn't just about being physically located somewhere; it is an inherent, constitutive relationship with the world. Place is an essential dimension of this "in-being."¹⁵ We don't exist in a neutral void but are always situated within specific places that shape our experiences, possibilities, and understanding. Our being is always somewhere, and this "where" is not accidental but integral to who we are as beings who care about their Being. In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, place is not a static container but a dynamic and fundamental aspect of our lived experience, deeply intertwined with the lived body (*le corps vécu*) and perception. For Merleau-Ponty, place is not a neutral backdrop but an active and integral dimension of our being-in-the-world. It is experienced through the lived body, shapes our perception, and is imbued with meaning through our habits, emotions, and social interactions. Place is a fundamental aspect of the "flesh" of the world and is prior to any abstract understanding of space. His phenomenology emphasizes the deeply situated nature of human existence and the crucial role that concrete places play in constituting our experience and understanding of the world and ourselves.¹⁶

Bruce Janz introduces the African philosophic dimension of the discourse of place. He projects the argument that African philosophy, in its origin, nature and contents, projects the case for the place of place in philosophy. He opposes the universalist presentation of philosophy arguing that every philosophy derives from a place of culture and human existential involvement and conveys the uniqueness of the place. In this way, the argument against African philosophy as localized by place is transformed into the argument for the true nature of philosophy, every philosophy. In his *Philosophy of Place*, Janz postulates that place is not just a backdrop for human activity but a fundamental aspect of being itself. Our understanding of existence is deeply intertwined with our experiences of place. Emphasizing the subjective nature of place and how it shapes our perception of the world, he argues that places are repositories of collective and personal histories, influencing identity and community. Being that our identities are formed in relation to the environments we inhabit, context is essential in understanding human experiences. Echoing Merleau-Ponty, Janz emphasizes that identity is not static but is shaped by the historical and temporal contexts of specific places. Place-in-time influences our identity construction through historical narratives, cultural changes, temporal experiences and the interconnectedness of place and time.¹⁷

The discussions of place reveal various dimensions of place: physical place, social place, cultural place, psychological place, political place, temporal place, and digital place. Scholars like Cullen and Iyioke have given detailed attention to the discussion on the dimensions of place.¹⁸ Our brief attention to digital place here is to show how place, in its various dimensions, affects construction and reconstruction of personal identities. In digital place we encounter such realities as virtual communities in which online spaces create new forms of identity that overwrite geographical boundaries and cultural specificities. Such identities are

characterized by universality of presence and particularity of absence; an existence that we may describe as the absence of presence and the presence of absence, where someone is physically present with you but personally absent from you. In the digital place, digital platforms shape self-presentation and identity construction through interactions and representations while social media influencers impose self-perception and social recognition.

THE AFRICAN IN THE WORLD TODAY: PLACE AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

From the expositions so far, it is manifest that place is a source of belonging, memory, and meaning. Place is geographic, historical, and cultural in shaping identities. In this section, we explore how the place of the African in the 21st century world affects his self-perception and identity construction. In Tuan's "sense of place" people often define themselves in relation to the places they inhabit, leading to a profound connection between geography and personal identity.¹⁹ In *"Black Skin, White Masks"*, *"The Wretched of the Earth"* and other works, Frantz Fanon explores how colonialism disrupts the relationship between people and place, reshaping identity through physical, psychological, and cultural domination and dislocation. Fanon therefore argues that reclaiming place is central to the process of decolonization.²⁰ **It is by** reclaiming their connection to place that colonized peoples can begin to reconstruct their identities independent of colonial narratives.²¹ Edward Said introduces three vital dimensions to the conceptualization of place in the construction of identity: "place as a construct of power; othering of places and people; and place as a site of resistance."²² The African in the contemporary world is the deposit and construct of indigenous, colonial and postcolonial experiences. Understanding his identity requires involvement with these three streams of experience. A combination of historical, cultural, political, digital, and global influences shapes this identity characterized by extensive diversity and intensive unity. A

meaningful engagement with this identity must therefore take cognizance of its features: heritage and tradition; diversity and plurality; slavery, coloniality and continuing stereotyping; diaspora and transnationality; modernization, urbanization and globalization; youthfulness and innovativeness; religiosity and spirituality; social and political consciousness and struggles. One common belonging of these features is that they all pose challenges to the African in his existence and presence in the world today.

Hence, the African's current place is characterized by internalized oppression, negative self-identification occasioned by socio-political and economic despoliation and a sense of historical dispossession. These stem from both the colonial legacy and the enduring incapacity to overcome the legacy. Whether at home on the continent, or abroad in the diaspora; the African is struggling against a whole lot of odds to explain himself even to himself. This, arguably, is the place of the African in the world today. And this place is a challenge. How shall the African respond to the place and the challenge of his place in the world? A two-step approach is proposed: recreation of his place; and reconstruction of his identity.

Recreation of Place: The first step is the recreation of the African place. The charge of Archimedes, *da mihi loco, et terram movabo* applies verily here and must be taken as a radical platform for constructive action. If place has a definitive influence on identity, the construction of identity must take cognizance of the place in which, from where, and on which this construction will arise and stand. The journey to the reconstruction of the African identity therefore requires the recreation of the current place. Three strategies will be adopted for this recreation: Transcolonial Cultural Revival; Narrative Reclamation; and Economic Empowerment

- Transcolonial Cultural Revival

With the dawn of political independence, many African nationalist leaders realized that without cultural independence, the claim to African independence was hollow, shallow and groundless. The

onset of political independence therefore heralded the struggle for cultural liberation, cultural decolonization. In his seminal work “Decolonising the Mind,” Ngugi wa Thiong’o called for African cultural revival through the restoration of African languages in education, literature and public life.²³ He argued that the dominance of European languages in education, literature and government constitutes a form of linguistic imperialism which perpetuates colonial power structures and reinforces the idea that European cultures are superior. The decolonial project or the revival of African cultures has taken two trajectories. While some have moved towards Afrocentrism, others have moved towards modernism.

In *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, Molefi Asante advocated that the study of African history and culture should be centered on the experiences and perspectives of Africans themselves. He thus availed the methodological foundation of the modern Afrocentric movement which has occupied centre-stage of African decolonization from the cultural and epistemic dimensions.²⁴ However, before Asante’s afro-methodological proposal, Cheikh Anta Diop’s work on the African origins of civilization provided a crucial historical foundation for the Afrocentric movement. In *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, Diop challenged Eurocentric narratives and argued for the significant contributions of ancient Africa to world civilization.²⁵ A major criticism of Afrocentricity has been the replacement of one extreme by another extreme. The replacement of Eurocentrism with Afrocentrism. A number of scholars have argued that Aristotle’s *virtu in medio stat* remains a golden ideal for understanding of human and social realities.²⁶

Another group, African modernism acknowledges the influence of Western culture and aesthetics, but seeks to transform and adapt them to African contexts. A strand of the African modernists

proposes adoption of the Western way of life. They equate development and human progress to westernization or Western modernity. They contend that colonization and westernization have brought permanent and irreversible changes to the world, and particularly to Africa, such that talking of Africanness or returning to African cultural roots will be sounding out of touch with reality.²⁷ From the foregoing, it should be obvious that neither Afrocentricity nor African modernism, taken in isolation, can suffice for African cultural revival. In the circumstance, scholars like JC Agbakoba have proposed a transcolonial approach to the African revival project.²⁸ Transcoloniality adopts the need for cultural rootedness from Afrocentricity while acknowledging the vital contributions of the Euro-African interface over the last couple of centuries whereby there has been significant exchanges both good and bad.

- Narrative Reclamation:

Cultural revival will require conscious reclamation of narratives for sustainability. The dominant narratives about Africa are crafted and broadcast by the western media. These consist mainly of negative stereotypes.

Conscious reclamation of narratives will involve actively challenging these negative stereotypes through media representation. However, positive narratives are not fairy tales. Positive actions inform and reinforce positive narratives. Positive narratives involve countering negative narratives which may be negative in fact or intent or in extent or context. It also involves the creation of the contents whereby the narratives can be practically and effectively positive. It involves constructive critical self-engagement and radical self-truth-telling.

- Economic Empowerment:

Whatever the narratives may be, the truth in the Marxian postulation of the economic substructure as determinant of the social and political superstructure must be taken seriously. The mode of production, the mode of thinking, and the mode of social relations interplay to affect the place of any nation, society or individual in the world.

Economic empowerment involves providing enablers for people to have control over their economic lives and resources, access to opportunities, assets, and decision-making processes and access to power in the economic sphere. Specifically, economic empowerment should include access to education, skills training, employment, entrepreneurship, financial services, land, and other productive resources. Access and freedom are vital factors in economic empowerment. Access to material and immaterial resources and freedom to develop one's potentials without let or hindrance within the provisions and enablement of just laws; laws that liberate, uplift and facilitate rather than laws that inhibit, emasculate and imprison.

Reconstruction of Identity: Dialogic Integrative African Identity

The recreated place is characterized by consciousness, creativity, dynamism, optimism and, ultimately by integrativity. The recreated African place is designed to serve as a foundation for the reconstruction of African identity in the world today. The realities of the African place impose on African identity the need and/or character of integration. It must integrate the precolonial, colonial, postcolonial and globalization deposits with the current digital fallouts for effective self-perception and identification.

In this section, we shall propose a reconstruction of African identity using the theoretic model of dialogic integrativity. We shall

progress in two steps. In the first step, we shall outline the method of the dialogics. And then, we shall conclude by applying this dialogic method to reconstruct an integrative identity of the African using the story of Ikenna.

The Dialogics

The dialogics is the art and science of dialogue, the mode of existence characterized by relatedness and communality of human existence. It is the method of knowing that grows by mutual acceptance and understanding. The dialogic method is developed and presented in its principles, steps and tools:

Principles of the Dialogics: The dialogics operates on the following eight principles:

- i) *Position:* to participate in the dialogue, each dialogist must have a position and consent that the others are also entitled to their positions;
- ii) *Openness:* Having position and knowing that others must also have positions necessitates and orients every dialogist towards openness to considering the positions of others;
- iii) *Inclusiveness:* All stakeholders in a dialogue-event must be included in the dialogue.
- iv) *Involvement:* The right to inclusion warrants that all must be involved in the dialogue with commitment and empathy;
- v) *Reasonableness:* Reasonableness requires that all involved in the dialogue must be considerate in the presentation of their positions, temperate in the language they use, and sensitive to the sensibilities of all the parties.
- vi) *Non-absolutization:* This inevitably invokes the non-absolutization principle that no party may consider their position or conclusion as final and non-negotiable. Non-

absolutization also characterizes the dialogics, in its process and conclusions, as proposals for further dialogue.

- vii) *Expectancy*: Human existence is sustained by hope and looking to the future. This is particularly so when one has embarked on a project or in times of difficulty. Expectancy refers to this elixir that focuses the human gaze on realizing set goals and overcoming difficult moments in life's projects.
- viii) *Integration*: Integration emphasizes that achievement of a common ground that harnesses the strengths of the various positions is cardinal to dialogue.

Steps of the Dialogics: In the framework of the dialogic method, human existence, events, conversations, negotiations, explanations and understanding generally progress in four dialogic steps or stages: thesis, enthesis, prothesis and synthesis.

The thesis refers to the original position that everyone brings to a negotiation or the initial disposition of the self/every self in the approach of selves in relation.

The enthesis is the birth of new event or the projection of every self of its own self or position. *The prothesis* results from the dialogue of selves and the projection towards a common thesis,

The synthesis is the point of agreement or the mutual integration of selves achieved through mutual recognitions.

Tools of the Dialogics: The dialogics employs three principal tools or instruments in its operation namely:

- i) *Dialogical attenuation:* This instrument involves the reduction and diminution of the areas and levels of disagreement among the dialoguing parties;
- ii) *Dialogical Augmentation:* By this tool, the dialogics increases and amplifies the areas and levels of agreement, and uses one step to reinforce another.
- iii) *Dialogical Accumulation:* By this tool, the dialogics collects and adds up the areas and levels of agreement that have been achieved in the process. This instrument involves the bringing together of the instruments as well as the gains of the instruments of dialogical attenuation and dialogical augmentation in order to record the progress made and to employ this record as further instrument for motivating more dialogical progress.²⁹

In the next section, we shall use the *Story of Ikenna* to illustrate the reconstruction of an African identity from the place of an African in the contemporary world by application of the principles, steps and tools of the dialogics.

Integrative Identity Construction: The Story of Ikenna Background:

Ikenna was born in the late 20th Century in a semi-urban setting in South Eastern Nigeria. He grew up in an environment of rich cultural traditions but also exposed to the challenges of being an African in the modern world. His life reflects the struggles of the contemporary African who must first recreate his place for a foundation in the journey of identity construction. Ikenna tells his life story using the framework of the dialogics. He applies the dialogic principles, steps, and tools as he strives to overcome the challenges of the African place in order to construct an identity that will empower him in the global village setting of the contemporary world. The story:

“I am Ikenna, scion of the royal family of Dioha Dike. In this first part of my story, I will show how my life journey manifests the eight principles of the dialogics. Born into the ancient Dioha family of Ihiala, I grew up with a strong sense of pride in my Igbo heritage. My upbringing taught me the importance of community and cultural values, but it also exposed me to the global narrative that often positions Africa as "backward." (Principle of Position) When I travelled to the University of Lagos (UNILAG) for my undergraduate programme in political science, I encountered a diverse array of students with their varied ideas and cultures. Initially, this was intimidating. However, I approached these experiences with openness, eager to learn from these students who came from various backgrounds, both within Africa and beyond. (Principle of Openness) UNILAG was a cosmopolitan place with a policy of inclusiveness. Besides the academic programmes, there were cultural events that celebrate not only the Yoruba traditions of its location but also the cultures of other African nations. And the international students were encouraged to showcase their own cultural heritage also. This policy countered the stereotypes that the various students had brought from their local environments. (Principle of Inclusiveness) In my second year, I became actively involved in student organizations focused on Pan-Africanism. Through discussions and initiatives, I engaged with peers about the shared struggles and triumphs of Africans, fostering a sense of unity and collective identity. (Principle of Involvement) In the unending debates about the portrayal of Africa in the dominant western media, I noted the weakness in the extreme positions of the Afrocentrics and the Pro-westerners. By identifying with the strengths of both sides, I gradually became the rallying voice for a balanced view that highlights Africa's strengths while acknowledging its challenges and the contributions that other cultures have made, and can still make to its growth. (Principle of Reasonableness) Over time, the moderate position started winning over the advocates of monolithic African identity as well as the

foreign students with their preconceived notions of Africa to the understanding that identity is complex and multi-dimensional, shaped by personal experiences, history, and socio-economic factors. This discovery disposed many of us in the Pan-African circles to embrace the complex relations of our own lives. (Principle of Non-Absolutization) This realization enkindled in us the hope for a brighter future, the belief that our actions can contribute to changing the narrative about Africa. And so, we started envisioning a world where African voices are heard and respected, and where young Africans can thrive without stigma. (Principle of Expectancy) The hope in a brighter African future was an elixir that lubricated all the differences, misconceptions and stereotypes still lurking in the mental chambers of the students both African and foreigner. And particularly for me, by the final year of my study, I had grown an image of myself that could easily integrate the Igbo, Nigerian and African as well as the positives that I could glean from the colonial leftovers and hangovers. I could see myself standing tall in every part of the world talking from my Igbo cultural heritage to the global village in the language of the modern world. (Principle of Integration) My new place. My new identity!"

"In what follows, I will show how this reconstruction of my identity has utilized the steps of the dialogic integration: My identity is rooted in Igbo culture. I am proud of this heritage but constrained by the stereotypes surrounding the Igbo and Africa in the world today. (Thesis) When I moved from my village to the University at Lagos, and as I navigated university life, I began to question some of my cultural preconceptions as well as the dominant narratives about Africa as I seek to reconcile my cultural pride with the external perceptions I am encountering. (Enthesis) To achieve reconciliation, I actively engage in dialogues about my cultural heritage and African identity, promoting discussions that highlight Africa's contributions to the world, and, in the process, I challenge all negative stereotypes. (Prothesis) Ultimately, I am able to

synthesize my experiences into a robust identity that honors my Igbo heritage while embracing my role as a modern African who must be cosmopolitan. Consequently, I become a voice for positive change, advocating for the recognition of Africa's potential and contribution to global development. (Synthesis)"

"And finally, I will demonstrate how my story appropriated the tools of the dialogics for the reconstruction my identity: In the course of my associations and interactions at the university, I learnt to reduce some of the absolute edges of my cultural pride, and to diminish the impact of my place as an African in the world today by pursuing my university education to empower myself and by actively engaging negative stereotypes in conversations. (Dialogical attenuation) Through collaborations with fellow students from different parts of Nigeria, other African countries and other foreign countries, particularly the West, I amplified shared experiences and successes. In all this, I learnt to highlight stories of African innovation and resilience while recognizing the contribution of various nationalities to global development. (Dialogical Augmentation) Ultimately, I accumulate materials for my identity construction from the variety of my places as an African in the modern world: my Igbo cultural heritage, the colonial heritage with the continuing negative stereotypes, my university education with the cosmopolitan student population and inclusive cultural policy; the narratives and counter-narratives and vibrant debates among the Pan-Africanists, and the gradual growth of understanding between the Afrocentrics and the Pro-westerners. This wealth of understanding help me build a more nuanced perspective on my African identity. (Dialogical accumulation)"

CONCLUSION

Ikenna's journey illustrates the complexity of identity construction of the African in the world today, the steps that must be taken for the reconstruction of this identity, and the fundamental place of the

place of each individual in the construction and or reconstruction of their identity. By employing the dialogic principles, steps, and tools, he not only redefines his own identity but also contributes to a broader movement that challenges stereotypes and promotes a more authentic representation of African in the world. His story tells the importance of place in identity construction and reflects the resilience and potential of young Africans determined to reshape their narrative and assert their place in the contemporary world.

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