

UNDERSTANDING 'IGWEBUIKE' PHILOSOPHY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE RELIGIO-CULTURAL ACTIVITIES OF THE YORUBA SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

Omojola I. O. SSMA, Ph.D

Department of Business Administration and Management

Villanova Polytechnic

Imesi Ile

Osun State

omojolassma@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

This work examined the Igwebuike' Philosophy in the Religio-Cultural Activities of the Yoruba People of Southwestern Nigeria. The idea of Igwebuike philosophy as communal life was related to living and sharing together of the Yoruba people no matter the age and condition and age of such. Living together in a large number, with a recognised leader give much strength to them in times of good and bad, especially at every celebrations. Also, in bad times like during dispute and mourning. They have time to do things together or in common even to the extent of raising children up or educating them in the community. Igwebuike Philosophy is not distant from Yoruba style of life because, Yoruba life is based on community living.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Philosophy, Yoruba, Religious, Cultural, Southwestern, Nigeria, Africa

Introduction

The aim of this work is to present the Igwebuike Philosophy and the understanding of the philosophy in the religio-cultural life of the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria. The work will point out the richness of the Igwebuike Philosophy and its relevance to the existential realities of human beings.

In presenting a work that relates to a group of people like the Yoruba people, it is good to present knowledge of the people with a view to establishing their geographical location. The geographical location of the Yoruba people could be presented thus:

The Yoruba live in the South-western part of the present day Nigeria and they occupy the states of Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Lagos and Ekiti. They are also found in some parts of Kogi, Kwara and Edo States and

beyond the lower Niger northwards into Nupe land. They could also be found beyond the boundaries of the present day Nigeria in Dahomey (Republic of Benin) and Togoland. Since the result of the last census in Nigeria is controversial, it is difficult to give the accurate total population of the Yoruba people. All that is known about them is that they are regarded as one of the most advanced communities in West African in; religion, agriculture, commerce, education, art, intelligence, government and warfare.⁶

The understanding of the Igwebuiké Philosophy is very necessary in understanding its relevance to the existential realities of human beings. The central knowledge of the philosophy could be presented in the following words:

.... It is taken from the Igbo language, and is a composite word made up of three words. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuiké*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involved: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Thus, put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power', that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful and can constitute an insurmountable force. Its English equivalents are solidarity and complementarity. It is anchored on the African worldview, which is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. Life is a life of *sharedness*⁷.

It is clear from this extract that the Igwebuiké Philosophy is established on the fact that "'number is strength' or 'number is power', that is, when human beings

⁶ L. T. Omojola. 2015. *Catholic Church in Ekitiland: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. Akure: Don Bosco Press, 21

⁷ Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, Igwebuiké Philosophy and the Issue of National Development in *African Journal of Arts and Humanities Vol. 3 No 6, September 2017. ISSN: 2488-9210(Online) 2504-9038, A Publication of Tansian University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, 17*

come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful and can constitute an insurmountable force. “⁸

‘Igwebuike’ philosophy in the religious life of the Yoruba people

The Yoruba people believe in the existence of a supreme being who they call Olodumare, Olorun, etc and they also believe in the existence of the Orisa, the divinities. Among the Yoruba people,

...the annual festivals of the...divinities are usually the concern of the whole community. Here the head of the community is particularly involved. Even though each Orisa has his own high priest, the head of the community is accorded the honour of the *pontifex maximus* and it is he who is ultimately responsible for all that happens during the festival. He also has a special ritual which, personally or by proxy, he must perform during each festival.⁹

The religious life of the Yoruba people is not a private affair of an individual; rather, it involves a joint celebration of the people in the different villages and towns. In the different communities, the devotees of the different Orisa celebrate the different occasions together. For example, the devotee of Ogun celebrates with the devotees of Osun on the feast of Osun etc. It must be pointed out that the celebrations of these feasts involve not only food and drinks which are shared at elaborate gatherings. The Igwebuike Philosophy here could be understood in the sense that the celebration makes meaning when the people come out in their numbers. The number of worshippers at worship gives strength to the event. The Yoruba will say, *ka rin ka po, yiye nii yeni- There is dignity when we come together in numbers for events. Another saying that expressed the philosophy is that: ajoje lo ma ndun-there is joy in eating together.* At the same time, the people in their numbers visit the shrines together which also point to the fact that that there is joy in worshipping together in numbers. The sharing of food and drinks point to the fact that there is strength in coming together in numbers to share meals together festivals..

⁸ Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, *Igwebuike Philosophy and the Issue of National Development in African Journal of Arts and Humanities Vol. 3 No 6, September 2017. ISSN: 2488-9210(Online) 2504-9038, A Publication of Tansian University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies,17*

⁹ B. Idowu. 1970. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, 110

'Igwebuike' Philosophy In The Yoruba Families

In the Socio-Cultural Life Of the People Of Yoruba, the family is a place where the number of people in the 'Akodi' helped to strengthen the bond of relationship in the different families. Hence, among the Yoruba people:

One *Akodi* normally occupies all the members in a family clan. [Akodi could be understood as chain of buildings erected together that give opportunity for effective communication and access to one another] The good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful, the lazy, the hard working, the super lazy drone and the workaholic all live together in the same *Akodi*. Even the mad-insane, lunatic-person is accommodated in the *Akodi*. This possibility explains the existence of the saying in Yoruba: "Tori were ita ni a se ni were ile-translated "It is because of the mad men (or bad man) outside that you keep or have mad man (bad man) inside"

Thus in the *Akodi*, all kinds of people are fully accommodated, known, noted and accepted for whatever the individual is and encouraged to fulfil his/herself as best in the common interest of all within the *Akodi*. The lazy man, while often rebuked is still accommodated in the *Akodi*. The saying "*Igbon inu ole ni ole nje* translated "It is the cleverness or cunningness of the lazy man that he is eating-living on" shows the level of acceptance or at the least toleration given to even the lazy person. The only person that is not tolerated in the *Akodi* is the thief. Stealing is abhorred within the *Akodi*. Within children, pilfering is punished and discouraged in many ways. By the time a young person becomes a full professional thief such a person is either killed or exiled from the *Akodi* for life.

In the *Akodi*, the aged, the just born baby and all in the different age grades and levels of life live together. The organisation is such that there is family clan head-usually a man, and all men in the *Akodi* are responsible to him...within the *Akodi*, there are all sorts of family relationships that include father, mother, children, uncles, cousins, half-brothers, half-sisters and such like. All the relationships in the male domain could be summed up as "*Egbon*" or *Aburo*" meaning "Senior brother" or "Junior brother" as the whole clan is regarded as just one family. In the female domain, it is '*Egbon*' or '*Aburo*' and '*Oko*

mi' or *'Iyawo mi'* meaning 'Senior sister' or 'Junior sister' and 'my husband' or 'my wife'

The religious setting in the *Akodi* is totally absorbed in the entire activity of the *Akodi*...there are periodic religious festive celebrations like *'Idun Ij'su[Odun Ijesu]*-new yam eating festival, "*Ikore*-harvest, and such others. There are also local prescribed religious celebrations or sacrifice given to individuals ...All such festivals and celebrations are done in the spirit of survival for the all and the one in the *Akodi*¹⁰

In the *Akodi*, because of their numbers, the members are able to assist themselves and to do things together as members of the same family. The towns are also made of different '*Akodi*' which ensures that they could come together in the numbers to fight external aggression. This is because, the Yoruba-...society is highly hierarchical; so also is the religious belief system...[Yoruba] society are organized in towns and villages. Each town has an administrative set-up that can be likened to a sort of pyramid [*Akodi*] structure. At the apex of the pyramid is the Oba (king) followed by High Chief: then other chiefs of less importance or honorary chiefs. Then we have the elders before the generality of men and women and finally children."¹¹

'Igwebuike' Philosophy In The Yoruba Social Gatherings

The Yoruba social gatherings are another avenue where we could understand the strength in numbers as proposed by the philosophy under examination. This is because,

The people's sense of solidarity is expressed in their life of sharing. They share many things together. These include ideas, conversations, gifts, meals, drinks, folk-tales and so on. In a typical Ekiti household, a mother in the family would feed her children and share the same food with other children in the same household who are present at the time

¹⁰T. F. Jemiriye, 2009, *21st Inaugural Lecture delivered at University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria "Religion: The Complex Equation of Acceptance Between Man, God-gods and Materials*, 54-56

¹¹ O .E. Alana, *Traditional Religion* in Nike S. Lawal, Matthew N.O. Sadiku and Ade Dopamu, (eds) 2004. *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*,74

of the meal. The male in the same household would not exclude other males present who are of the same household at the time of the meal. Children of a household do the same in imitation of their parents. Kiddies learn to share their joys in playing together.¹²

In the same vein,

...is even extended to other various spheres of life including joint labour or community work. For examples, people offer assistance to one another when such labour is out of proportion for the individual. Such community labour includes setting out of a new farm, laying the foundation of a building and roofing the same and mutual assistance during natural disaster. The community labour ranges from free manual labour, expertise knowledge and the donation of seedlings and financial assistance to the needy neighbour. Monopoly was far from the people's life style in their social interaction.¹³

'Igwebuiké' Philosophy In The Yoruba Dispute Resolution

The philosophy could also be understood in the dispute resolutions which are resolved through the different organs that made up of the hierarchical order of the Yoruba society. This is because,

...the family head called "Baale" (Baba ile) (Father of the household) was virtually everything to his people. He led his house in religion and settled their differences. As the family grew larger, the leadership of the family became the bone of contention. Then next higher grade of leadership emerged. He was called Baale or Oba-(Baba Ile, i.e., Father of the land). He was the court of appeal. The Baale settled his children quarrels with other people and if no satisfaction, an appeal could be made to the Baale who, at the head of the several families, would see that justice was done. Baale's words were final. To disobey his was risky to one's course. He took no bribe...

¹²J.O.Ayeni and O. Olawumi, *A Window to Ekitiland and the Man Fagun*(The mark of a Religious Leader on the Land in Recent Times), Ado-Ekiti: Hope Paper Mills Ltd, 10

¹³ J.O.Ayeni and O. Olawumi, *A Window to Ekitiland and the Man Fagun*(The mark of a Religious Leader on the Land in Recent Times), Ado-Ekiti: Hope Paper Mills Ltd, 10

In criminal cases, the offended party could do whatever he liked with the offender; but if the offender was stronger than the offended, the case may be referred to the village head who in consultation with the elderly people of the village would look into the matter...

In some cases, certain families served as places of refuge. The offender could run to such places to avoid being punished. If in a criminal case, the culprit was found guilty, he was handed over to the hunters who for many years protected their settlements and reported strange phenomena to the elders of the settlement. Later, on, the Elegbes took the place of hunters, and were charged with punishing offenders.¹⁴

'Igwebuiké' Philosophy In The Yoruba Education

Yoruba traditional Education is also effective because there are many individuals from the different families that contribute to the transmission of the traditional knowledge.

In the sphere of education, generally the traditional ways of life is passed on to the youth by their elders through teaching. This form of teaching, usually informal takes different shapes. It entails for instance, moral formation, counselling and general rapport. The practice of moonlight tales is cherished among the people as a medium of formation, and developing social aspects of the people's culture. Also, it is the practice among the people in a particular household for instance, to groom the young ones in their cultural pattern and professions.

'Igwebuiké' Philosophy In The Yoruba Choice Of Leaders

The numbers of people involve in the selection of traditional leaders point to the fact of the strength in numbers. It is thus very difficult in most cases in the past for one to impose a candidate on the village without the consensus of his family members and the entire village in general.

...most [Ekiti] communities have a structure called 'royal lineage' that produces traditional rulers. Under a normal situation, no one outside the lineage is considered eligible for the throne of the king [and chiefs]...there is a group of kingmakers...who occupy an important position, and play such roles as dictated by the given tradition and

¹⁴ A. Oguntuyi, 1979, *History of Ekiti, From the Beginning to 1939*. Ibadan: Caxton Press Ltd,40

historic/mythic origin of their family origin in the community...there are ritual experts or specialists who are involved in the selection and election of the traditional ruler through consultation of Ifa oracle. They are instrumental to the initiation/installation of the traditional ruler through intense ritual including ritual instructions to the initiate.¹⁵

Conclusion

Yoruba people are community people. They believe in each other as it reflects in situations when one is in need, or it is important to "lean" on others. (Rely to some extent) on some people before one can make it in life or to gain independence is another way of expressing our sense of unity. Proverb like "*Tí ò*

¹⁵ D.O. Ogungbile and P.R. Awoniyi, *Indigenous Tradition in Transition: 'Born Again Traditional Rulers, religious change and power contestation* in D. O. Ogungbile (Ed) 2015, *African Indigenous Religious Traditions in Local and Global Contexts, Perspectives on Nigeria. A Festschrift in Honour of Jacob K. Olupona*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd, 71

bá s'igi léyìn ogbà wíwó ní wó" which stresses one's need of others are regularly used to remind the Yoruba that without others, one may not attain independence. Discussion on "Esusu" which is another sign of the communitarian effort is important. That is, co-operative project by which members contribute together an agreed amount of money to be given to a member and this is repeated by for another member till the around is completed. With this a member can have a substantial amount of money at once for a particular project.

Finally, it has been established that the Igwebuiké philosophy could be understood in the religio life of the Yoruba people, families, social gatherings, dispute resolution, education and choice of leaders. The relevance of the philosophy is that it encourages the need to enlist the cooperation of the others in the existential realities of the human beings. It thus not give room for individualism that is becoming the norms in the different regions of life. The fact that there is strength in numbers spurs all to know that we are human beings when we do things with others and not alone.

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