

'IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY': A VEHICLE FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG THE IGBOS OF SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The concept of socialism and communalism has been an age long problem in the history of philosophy. Philosophers over the years have tried to mediate in this age long problem through their various theories. Nyerere's theory of 'Ujamaa' (togetherness as oneness), the collective consciousness of Emile Durkhiem, the Ibuanyindanda ideology of Innocent Asouzu and Kwame Nkrumah's philosophical consciencism, just to mention but a few. In all these socio-political ideologies, none has been properly exhausted to meet the desired result in the reduction and prevention of conflicts and man's cruelties against man in terms of communal clashes, assorted forms of oppression, suppression, domination and discriminations. It is against this background that this research work titled 'Igwebuike philosophy: A vehicle for peace and conflict resolution among the Igbos of South East Nigeria was chosen as a template to contribute to the prevention and reduction of violence and terrorism in the Nigerian State. It is a philosophical inquiry that attempts to interrogate the dynamics of our social environment using igwebuike ideology, which was developed by Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, (strength in unity), depicting the Marcelian theory of intersubjectivity. Despite the fact that our own country is plagued with insecurity, communal violence, and anxiety from various terroristic attacks; this paper is optimistic that the scourge can be reduced to a reasonable limit via "Igwebuike" which is a call and an awakening to mutual complementary relationships. Furthermore, it aims at unraveling how this consciousness can be used as essential tool for lasting peace and reconciliation, with the sole aim at restoring the meaning of life in our meaninglessness situation. Lastly, it recommends certain strategies for peace and conflict resolution and among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The method of this paper is essentially analytical, expository and evaluative.

Key Words: Igbos, Igwebuike and conflict resolution.

Introduction

Igbo names like Somadina (May I never be alone), Chieftaincy titles like Onwa na etiri oha (A moon that shines for all, man of the people), Ochiri Ozuo (A philanthropist). There are also resonances of this philosophy in Igbo Folktales, songs, artifacts, symbols especially the Kolanut. The unitary conception of reality pervades the Igbo worldview in a very remarkable way.¹

The Metaphysical Dimension of *Igwebuiké* Philosophy

The Fundamental principle which describes the core African Spirit is harmony; although reality exists as individuals, they converge at the point of reasonableness.² *Igwebuiké* as an ideology rests on the African Principle of solidarity and complementarity.³ It provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possess a rational character of mutual relation. To live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. "To be" is "to be" with the other in a community of beings.⁴ This is also captured in the philosophical assertion of Panteleon Iroegbu that "To be is to belong and to belong is to be"⁵ and in Mbiti's "I am because we are and because we are, therefore, I am. Kanu quoting Asouzuo opines: "Complementarity is a philosophy that seeks to consider things in the significance of their singularity and not in the exclusiveness of their otherness in view of the joy that gives completion of all missing link of reality."⁶

Socio-Anthropological Analysis of *Igwebuiké* Philosophy

Man is a socio-cultural being that always share a relational affinity with other members of his community; Human beings and societies exist only in relation.⁷ The intercultural philosophy of *Igwebuiké* captures the socio-anthropological nature of man especially the Igbo People. The Igbo People of southern Nigeria exhibit their social characteristics in their interactions with their fellow human

¹Oguejiofor, J. O. "Globalization and the Resilience of Tradition Paradigms: The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria", in *The Humanities and Globalization in the Third Millennium*, Awka: Fab Anieh, 2010, 21

²Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. *Igwebuiké as a Trend in African Philosophy*, 84.

³Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. *Igwebuiké as a Trend in African Philosophy*, 84.

⁴Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. *Igwebuiké as a Trend in African Philosophy*, 84-85.

⁵Panteleon, Iroegbu. *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, 374.

⁶Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. "Igwebuiké and the Logic (Nka) of African Philosophy", in *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 2007, 14.

⁷Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. *Igwebuiké as a Trend in African Philosophy*, 74.

beings both within their ethnic nationality and outside of it.⁸ *Igwebuike* is anchored on Igbo-African world-view which is characterized by a common origin, common worldview, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour, habit, common historical experience and a common destiny.⁹ Thus, *Igwebuike* celebrates in deep cultural and philosophical modality our common humanity, interconnectedness and our common responsibility towards ones another. This is in line with the famous proverbial assertion of Mbiti, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am".¹⁰

In the Igbo-African view, it is the community which defines the person as person.¹¹ Individualism is an alien to Igbo experience of reality; hence, "Reality as a communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories".¹² As a summary of this idea, Nwoko opines:

An African Traditional Society is a society where the individual is always considered a free, integrated member of his community, a communion person. It is a society where individualism is considered a taboo, where each member takes the interest of the community as his own. His pride is community is power. The more united he is to the community, the more he sees the community as a mere extension of the family.¹³

The need to live together in community is seen as part of Igbo-African existential status. The individual has meaning only in the context of the community.¹⁴ The Igbo-African society has been based on an extended family system, which in turn expanded to kinship groups which further extended to Clan system and this is the theoretical basis of African communalism.¹⁵ Therefore, the Igbo community denotes first and foremost ontological quality of human relation. It is ontological

⁸ Christian, O. Ele. *Conflict Resolution Strategies in Igbo Religion: The Oath Taking and Covenant Making Perspective*, 35.

⁹ Panteleon, Iroegbu. *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, 108.

¹⁰ John, Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nairobi: East African Edu. Publishers, 1970, 108.

¹¹ Ifeanyi, A. Menkiti. "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," in *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., (ed.) Richard A. Wright. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984, 172.

¹² Ifeanyi, A. Menkiti. *Person and Community in African Traditional Thought*, 171.

¹³ Nwoko, M. I. *The Rationality of African Socialism*, Rome: 1985,71-72.

¹⁴ Ikegbu, Ephraim. "African Communalism", in *A Colloquium on African Philosophy*, Vol. 1, G.O. Ozumba (ed.). Calabar: Prosper Ventures, 2003, 32.

¹⁵ Uduigwomen, A. F. "African Communalism: Individual Freedom Versus Communal Demands," in *Sophism and African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 4, No. 1. Calabar: Pyramid Publications, 2002, 27.

in so far as all the members of the community are believed to descend from a common ancestor.¹⁶

Causes of Conflicts among the Igbo

There are many causes of conflict within the Igbo societal setting; this can result either from land or boundary disputes, bad leadership etc. Meanwhile, A major pivotal factor in conflicts in the South East Zone of Nigeria is still the ownership of Land¹⁷ and Kingship tussles. This is because land is a serious issue among the Igbos since it touches both the material and the Spiritual essence of Igbo ontology. Thus, land is something worth fighting and dying for.¹⁸ Meanwhile, other sources of conflict in Igboland apart from land disputes are Chieftaincy titles tussles, political differences and search for dominance and hegemony and matrimonial fallouts. On the other hand, social Deviance which contravene norms of the society such as incest, stealing of yam or cattle, murder of fellow kinsman, adultery, insubordination to elders are also causes of social disputes among the Igbos. These Social deviances range from the minor deviant acts that require sanctions for their controls to heinous offences, *Nso-ala*.¹⁹

***Igwebuike* and Conflict Resolution: A Philosophy of Social Inclusion**

The Igbos organized their society to integrate the needs of the individuals, family, village town and clan. Individuals benefit socially and psychologically from the support and protection of the community. Individual survival and safety is protected within the walls of the community. Every member of the community is responsible for the other.²⁰ The success of an individual increases the overall wellbeing of the entire community. The community which adopts communalism as a standard of operation delves into rights and freedom in order to protect the individual from harm and undue molestation.²¹ Central to the idea

¹⁶ Nzomiwu, J. P. C. *The Moral Concept of Justice Among the Igbos*, Rome: AC. Alfonsiana, 1977, 38.

¹⁷ Charles, C. Mezie-Okoye. "Tiv and Igbo Conflict Management Mechanism: A Comparative Study", in *International Research Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 5 (7), 2016, 25.

¹⁸ Oguntola- Laguda, D. "The Role of Traditional Rulers and Religious Leaders in Conflict Management in Nigeria", in *The Practice of Religion in Nigeria*, Ilorin: Decency Press, 25.

¹⁹ Nwankwo, Ignatius Uche. "*Traditional Multiple Level Conflict Resolution and The Appeal System of the Igbo Group of Southeast Nigeria and the Challenges of Social Change*", 36.

²⁰ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. "Igwebuike as a wholistic Response to the Problem of Evil and Human Suffering", in *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 3, No.2, March 2017, 72.

²¹ Ikegbu, Ephraim. *African Communalism*, 32.

of community is unity which is linked to peace and progress in the society²² Harmonious and friendly relationships facilitate progress and overall wellbeing in the human community. ²³ Harmony within the community is a moral obligation ordained by God for the protection and promotion of life. ²⁴ *Igwebuike* philosophy avers that development be holistic and emphasizes the centrality of the human person in such a development. It calls for a collaborate approach in search of better means of livelihood; this means that everyone must play a complementary role. *Igwebuike* is anchored on the thinking that the community has a moral responsibility in the face of human suffering. Everyone must do something to alleviate the suffering of the other. ²⁵ The community spirit is very strong among the Igbos. Almost from the first, the individual is aware of his dependence on his kin group and his community. He also realizes the necessity of making his own contribution to the group to which he owes so much.²⁶

As a principle of Sustainable development, *Igwebuike* Philosophy invites everyone to accept “community involvement”. As committed members of the society, it implies a mutual involvement of individuals and society to the destiny of each other; a common social destiny. Therefore, it makes every member of the society responsible for the welfare of one another.²⁷ The community will definitely become better if everyone plays his/her own part very well. To this, Asouzu asserts:

“The African (Igbo) worldview, therefore is ruled by the spirit of complementarity which seeks the conglomeration, the unification, the summation of fragmented thoughts , opinions and other individualized fragmented thoughts and ideas. It believes essentially that the whole is greater than the corresponding parts, a viable and sustainable whole will emerge and by this, the part will get to the brim purpose of their existence.

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²² Anthony, Kwakporo Nwogu. *The Christian Eucharist and Oriko: A Study in Conflict Resolution*, 14.

²³ Anthony, Kwakporo Nwogu. *The Christian Eucharist and Oriko*, 38.

²⁴ Anthony, Kwakporo Nwogu. *The Christian Eucharist and Oriko*, 40.

²⁵ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. *Igwebuike as a wholistic Response to the Problem*, 72.

²⁶ Uchendu, V. C. *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, London: R and Wiston, 1965, 34.

²⁷ Edmund, Aku. *Solidarity, Subsidiarity and Common Good: Fundamental Principles for Community and Social Cohesion*, USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2011, 15.

²⁸ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. *Igwebuike and the Logic (Nka) of African Philosophy*, 14.

***Igwebuike* Philosophy: A vehicle for Conflict Resolution**

The Igbo race took adequate measures to handle confrontations of social powers in their possibilities and actualities by evolving strategies that would prevent them and at *conflictual* situations, resolve them.²⁹ The conflict resolution among the Igbo society is rooted in their social structures and Religion.³⁰ This is well expressed by Christian Ele as thus:

“In Igbo land, conflict Resolution strategies are embedded in their socio-cultural structures such as the family, kindred, village or clan and the entire town or community. In Igbo society, the family heads (*Ndi Okpara*), *Umunna* (the entire family of patriarchal roots), the council of elders (*ndi ichie*), the eldest in the kindred (*onyishi*), Traditional ruler (*Igwe or Eze*), the women groups (*umuada, umu nwunye Di*), youth groups (the age grade system, the *ogbo oha*), the maternal family (*ndi ikwu nne*), the grand child by a sister (*nwa di ana, oke nwa nwunye*), are all agents of Peace and stakeholders in conflict Resolution.”³¹

Whenever there is an issue within the family or clan, it is often settled in the presence of everyone in an acclaimed open court through mediation and negotiations. The very aim of conflict resolution within the Igbo traditional setting is the reconstruction of social bridges and a reenactment of a supposed broken social order with a huge prospect of peaceful co-existence. It is not about justifying one and condemning the other, it works towards a compromise for the reconciliation of the both parties and the restoration of balance or the harmony of reality. ³² This very idea is simply an enactment of what *Igwebuike* (complementary and solidarity) philosophy stands for. It is thus a method of conflict resolution built upon the culture of the people.

Traditional Means of Conflict Resolution

Before the advent of white men, Igbos have already put into place mechanisms for adjudicating matters and for controlling the suppression of the weaker person by the stronger.³³ The basic unit for ensuring peace and preventing

²⁹ Christian, O. Ele. *Conflict Resolution Strategies in Igbo Religion: The Oath Taking and Covenant Making Perspectives*, 35.

³⁰ Christian, O. Ele. *Conflict Resolution Strategies in Igbo Religion*, 35.

³¹ Christian, O. Ele. *Conflict Resolution Strategies in Igbo Religion*, 38.

³² Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Modality of Peace*, 37.

³³ Charles, C. Mezie-Okoye. “*Tiv and Igbo Conflict Management Mechanism: A Comparative Study*”, 27.

conflict was the family. However, there are many conflict resolution structures in traditional Igbo society. These are in forms of institutions, social groups and extra mundane (metaphysical) beliefs or orientations that resolve matters between disputants, and prevent or counteract individual tendencies to deviance. They negotiate, mediate, and arbitrate in dispute situations. They use tools like fines, banishment, and food commensality, ostracism, oath-taking, to punish or resocialize persons whose behavior violate role expectations to preserve the society from disruption. The *Igwebuike* ideology and communalistic nature of the Igbo people necessitates that there are established groups for socio-cultural and socio-economic affairs. There are numerous religious and social groups for conflict resolution in Igboland.

These conflict resolution structures according to Nwankwo include “Nuclear family structure, extended Family Assembly, age Grades(Otu Ogbo), women Association (Umuada), village Assembly, festivals, Ozo title holders³⁴”. We shall explain only but a few of these structures.

Nuclear Family Structure

The family is the foremost socialization and social control agent to which the individual is exposed. It controls the quality and quantity of new members of the society by educating the child on the rules, norms, mores and folkways that govern the society. In the society under study, the functions of socialization, social control and conflict resolution were executed by the nuclear as well as extended families. Nuclear family attends to disputes within the nuclear family setting between siblings, and spouses. It is usually presided by the father and elders of such families.³⁵

Extended Family Assembly (Izu Umunna)

The extended family is a grouping into one functional unit of three or more generations of people linked by marriage, descent or adoption. They share a putative father and cannot inter-marry. In Igbo society, the training was achieved by educating the child in the code of manners, conventions, customs, morals and laws of his society. At times, stories of heroes or of tragedies that befell disputants or defaulters are used to illustrate the essence of good behavior.

³⁴ Nwankwo, Ignatius Uche. “*Traditional Multiple Level Conflict Resolution and The Appeal System of the Igbo Group of Southeast Nigeria and the Challenges of Social Change*”, 38-42.

³⁵ Nwankwo, Ignatius Uche. “*Traditional Multiple Level Conflict Resolution and The Appeal System of the Igbo Group of Southeast Nigeria and the Challenges of Social Change*”, 38.

The family restrains the child by meting out punishment as need arises. The kindred or members of the extended families form what is known as *Umunna* Assembly in Igbo tradition. They are represented by; the *opara/okpala* – the most elderly male person. By virtue of his age and position, the *opara* acts as spokesman in conflict related matters.³⁶ He performs socio-juridical functions and distributive justice is adjudicated by him. Any case which cannot be resolved by the *opara* is brought to the general assembly of the *Umunna*. Every adult male has the right to contribute to the general deliberations at the assembly. The elders reserve the right to take the final decision after private consultations among themselves *Igba izu*. The disputants or deviant members are customarily expected to comply with whatever punishment or face stiffer measures. In the Igbo society, a person who falls out of line with his extended family is likened to being a bastard. For this reason, individuals carefully avoid violating the norms thus, controlling their social behavior and effectively resolves most conflicts.³⁷

Women Association (Umuada)

The *Umuada* is an association of women married outside their natal home. At birth, every female in the community is an *ada* and qualify as a member of the *Umuada* association. But she plays no practical role in the association until adult age especially after she is married. In traditional Igbo society, the *Umuada* association was a formidable conflict resolution structure and agent for the control of social behavior of their members and of the larger public. Their influence was felt both in their lineage of procreation and in their husband's lineage.³⁸ Since pre-colonial era, Igbo women have imbibed the concept of *Igwebuike* in their diverse means of resolving conflicts and promoting peace. *Umuada* and *Nwunye di* are the foremost women group and organization in Igbo land built on the truism of *Igwebuike* Philosophy. These are organizations of daughters or wives of the clan who meet on several occasions to foster peaceful coexistence within extended family, town or community. The *Umuada* refers to the natal organization of daughters of the clan who are married either within or

³⁶ Anthony, Kwakporo Nwogu. *The Christian Eucharist and Oriko: A Study in Conflict Resolution*, Umuahia: Lumen Press, 2018, 18.

³⁷ Nwankwo, Ignatius Uche. "Traditional Multiple Level Conflict Resolution and The Appeal System of the Igbo Group of Southeast Nigeria and the Challenges of Social Change", 39.

³⁸ Nwankwo, Ignatius Uche. "Traditional Multiple Level Conflict Resolution", 40.

outside the community while the *Nwunye di* (Co-wives) refers to the organization of women married within a family, kindred, Clan or community in their maternal homes. *Umuada* exercises remarkable power in their natal homes due to their status as daughters of the soil. The fundamental background of this very group is that their strength lies in their union and complementarity. No single person makes up the “*umu ada*”. The Prefix “*Umu*” already signifies plurality and *umuada* work with communal strength. In performing the above social control functions, the Umuada often adopt mechanisms like fine, demonstrations, gossip, praise and blame or expulsion of members as a way of expressing disapproval and to secure their demands. In sum, the Umuada association was crucial in conflict resolution and social control in traditional Igbo society. They enjoy profound respect even in contemporary times and their verdict in all matters is taken seriously. Appeals may however be taken to council of elders, and ozo title holders group.³⁹

Evaluation and Conclusion

It must be noted that despite the fact that *Igwebuike* Philosophy has an Igbo semantic and cultural undertone, it is of universal relevance. It is not a philosophy specifically viable for the Igbo People alone despite its uniqueness to the Igbo people. Despite its intrinsic worth, there are also certain areas of consideration which must be critically evaluated so as to make the best use of *Igwebuike* Philosophy. These shortcomings highlight the potential misconceptions, misappropriation or misapplications of *Igwebuike* Philosophy.

It is often assumed by critiques of *Igwebuike* Philosophy that communality kills the autonomy of an individual. This assumption may not necessarily be true but if care is not taken, freedom and rights of individuals might be submerged and possibly suppressed in the strong tides of the community. More so, *Igwebuike* Philosophy runs the risk of collectivism. Most times, in collectivism, the individual disappears.⁴⁰ It is similar to a democratic worldview which considers the opinion of the greater majority since all the members of the community must not necessarily agree. In cases of misjudgment, compromise, bias, prejudice and conspiracy, popular opinion might not correspond to right judgments and decisions. The rich and influential people might also impose their thoughts on others.

³⁹ Nwankwo, Ignatius Uche. “*Traditional Multiple Level Conflict Resolution*”, 41.

⁴⁰ Ozioma, J. Nwachukwu. *Communalism in African Traditional Worldview*, Lagos: Change Pub, 2017, 71.

The *Igwebuike* ideology is also established on the commonalities of interest and socio-political or socio-cultural background. Its emphasis on numerical strength might actually breed an undue hegemony as those with higher numerical strength can intimidate others and issue undue treatments to the less numerically privileged few based on this ideology. The *Igwebuike* philosophy when wrongly conceived will breed a problem of paucity of integration. There is also a tendency to consider those outside ones circle as enemies, strangers and treated as second class citizens. This is because humans can be consigned into believing that reality is genuine only within their individual circles. There will hence be a tendency to trust only those who are closer to us like kinsmen and family members.

Conflict resolution and Sustainable development imply the ability of a society to improve the relational affinity and socio-economic standards of its citizens through various measures. From the *Igwebuike* perspective, the adopted approach must be complementary and balanced – built upon the principle of solidarity. This work thus concludes by affirming that despite the alarming rate of conflicts and violence in our society today, a change of approach and employment of dialogue through *igwebuike* consciousness will help to reduce tension in the society. It will help in building mutual understanding and respect in the society and by so doing, enhancing sustainable development among the Igbo people of Nigeria. This research aims to re-awaken the spirit of participation in the life of others in the Igbo community; a call to a mutual service for common good.

Recommendations

In the face of ever-increasing complexities, the Igbo people have continued to employ Igbo categories in search for a solution to their many problems. This work thus employs the holistic, inclusive and complementary category of *Igwebuike* as a model for both conflict resolution and sustainable development. Peace and progress are the hallmarks of every developing society and they are both realities derived from mutual relational affinities between individuals. Hence, they are products of unity; unity is synonymous to peace and progress. In the Igbo worldview, Peace is not merely an abstract construct; it is a reality which links with the life lived in the human community.⁴¹ This idea is best captured in the complementary philosophy of *Igwebuike* which stresses that solidarity and supplementary relationship built upon common background are

⁴¹ Anthony, Kwakporo Nwogu. *The Christian Eucharist and Oriko*, 40.

very vital for social cohesion and advancement. It does not abrogate the importance of individual autonomy but stress an interdependent relationship whereby everyone assumes a social responsibility for the welfare of one another in the society. Hence, the intercultural philosophy of *Igwebuike* calls for a global action in conflict resolution and a socio-anthropological communal involvement in a bid to create an enabling environment for development. The Igbos should concentrate on the fact that “together in peculiarities, the Igbos can make a formidable whole”.

Hence, as a sort of recommendation, Igbos should appreciate more the philosophical heritage of their founding patrimony since the conventional western courts are now dominated by injustice and nepotism. The high cost of litigation in these courts is quite alarming while the traditional means of conflict resolution do not charge fees for services rendered. Therefore, in issues of dispute resolution, the adoption of the *Igwebuike* Philosophy should be taken with utmost priority.