

IGWEBUIKE, INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN AFRICAN ETHICS

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Abstract

The concept of Igwebuiké as a philosophy of inclusive action in unity still respects the individual person in the African world view. Igwebuiké is possible when the individuals congregate, defined by a common interest as a goal. The individuals, therefore, make up the Igwe (populace, unison, people) that exercises or has the enormous Ike (Strength). Hence, Igwe is Ike. By and large, the morality or the ethical demand of the individual is not lost amidst the population or in the Igwe, with regard to the exercise of Ike; rather, the individual is responsible for every action within the Igwe, and the Igwe, via individual actions, has a cooperate responsibility to bear and as such there is an individual responsibility in Igwebuiké as regards African ethics. The act of belonging within the African community entails a duty within the limits of the communal ethics. Applying the method of critical analysis, this paper explores and finds out that the communalistic relationship between Igwebuiké and the individual person is within the bounds of African Ethics.

Keywords: Igwebuiké, individual person, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, freedom, responsibility, African ethics

Introduction

This work proposes *Igwebuiké* as the key in understanding African philosophy and, by implication, African Ethics as its main branch. *Igwebuiké* is a relational concept that defines a communal action in the African world view. Man, the individual human person, is always, to a great extent, the product of his

environment, that is, the community known for communion and other forms of human interactions. The community must be understood as being one and the same with the society, environment or group of people, though with differential nuances. However, Maritain (1951:2) maintains that “a community is more of a work of nature and more nearly related to the biological; a society is more of a work of reason, and more nearly related to the intellectual and spiritual properties of a man”. In both senses, however, community is synonymously interchanged with the state. The human person interplays out his life within the community as an individual within a group. In this sense, it is applicable to say that, *no individual, no community*; that is, if there is no individual person, there is no group formation as a result of the aggregate of individual persons. This is the hallmark of *Igwebuike*.

Igwebuike, as an African relational concept, is the modality of being in African metaphysics. It is an Igbo concept, which is a combination of three words. Therefore, as Kanu (2017:23) explains, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some form of spatial independence. According to Kanu, *Igwebuike* is anchored on the African world view. Kanu (2017:23), the apostle of *Igwebuike*, defines it as “the expressive modality of being in Igbo Ontology”. For him, *Igwebuike*, which, according to Asouzu (2007:11) is literally *strength in togetherness*, is the locus of meeting of beings in Igbo communalist metaphysics, with special reference to existentialism and leadership. Onebunne (2020), in a paper titled *Belongingness as Igwebuike and African Philosophy: A Critical Relationship* (Unpublished), sees a crucial but necessary relationship between *Igwebuike* and belongingness. In developing the fundamental character of *Being as Belongingness*, however, Iroegbu (1996:45) initially defines belongingness as *a definitive principle in African communalism*. He used belongingness as a principle of membership applied to a given community. This membership is not a mere identification, but a kind of belonging that is security-assured. In this understanding, belongingness implies the basic commonness that makes a community a community, and in our context, it is what makes a given African community as such. This feeling of belonging is a basic need and a unique term in the dynamics of living and existence. Hence, Iroegbu (1995:19) asserts that “belongingness makes sure that all belong and none is marginalized, both contributively (duties and responsibilities) and distributively (sharing of communal cake)”. This is the locus of *Igwebuike* at play.

One does not necessarily belong. One is ever conscious of where one is putting up or belonging. Continuing, one can therefore appreciate *Belongingness as Igwebuike*; hence, they are being characterized by a common origin, common worldview, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. The communal-individuality of the African life is expressed in the Igbo-African proverb: *Ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akparaya* (If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught); *Otu osisi anaghi emebe ohia* (A tree does not make a forest); *Gidigidi bu ugwueze* (The dignity of a king is the number of his supportive followers); *Mmetuko ahu bu utondu* (The beauty of life is in mixing up with others). Mbiti (1970:108) has classically proverbialized the community by determining role of the individual when he wrote, *I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am*. This would mean that the confidence of being is because others are in being. The existence of others assures me of their solidarity and complementarity without which I cannot be. Achebe (1958:133) brings the essential nature of the Igbo-African communal relationship to a higher and more fundamental focus when he wrote:

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlight village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyman can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so.

The community in question is ever guided by principles which, of course, are the hallmark of personal actions of the individual persons. Hence, the individual person in *Igwebuike* has a defined responsibility within a defined group that opts for it. Such is the thrust of African ethics, guiding the operations of *Igwebuike* in a *communal state*. The full understanding of this kind of relationship is properly expressed in the meaning of community and or a state, as already referred to above as *communal state*. Maritain (1951:2), however, maintains that “both community and society are ethico-social and truly human, not mere biological realities”. As a consequence, therefore, if they are truly human and more real Africans, they need a moral principle and should be under moral obligation as well as have a practice of African value system as the cardinal points of African ethics.

These cardinal practices are regarded as African way of life, at least, in pristine and still in modern African societies and groups. Such cardinal acts are more of

communalistic in nature. This understanding underlines the key characteristics of a human *communal state*, namely: mutual participation, social relationship, fellowship and equal sharing of certain fundamental rights, origin (root), good or orientation in the community. It entails sharing a defined locality and communality, which are often expressed in the concept of a nation as people from the same root, *natus*. Many will refer to this form of communal nature as mere communalism as such. According to Ekennia (1998: 348), the idea of communalism expressed in a *communal state* "refers to social relationship, fellowship, socialites, organized society. It invokes obligingness". In our popular parlance and understanding, it invokes belongingness. Belongingness has been identified as an ontological abstract term that specifies that a human person is because he belongs within the *communal state*. A human person, as the primary subject of African ethics, displays and defines himself more in belongingness. Belongingness, in this understanding, is the propulsive move of a human person to perfect himself so as to operate within an environment, a kind of *communal state*. Onebunne (2019a:2) expatiates on this idea of belongingness, thus:

Belongingness is a fundamental quality in understanding being. No being can be understood in terms of its completeness but in its relation to other beings, defining itself through other beings. Every being is defined by a relation, that is, a being is in relation to something, or with an attribute of engaging in something. And this fact of *beingness*, which is a form of relation, is a form of belonging to, belonging with, and belonging in. Relation, therefore, becomes a kind of state by which being realizes itself among others and others within it.

Belongingness, to this extent, concretizes one in existence in relation to others within the spatial temporality like the *communal state*. The *communal state* in question is understood as a nexus of inter-relational relationship for human actions and interactions, that is, existence in the broadest perception. *Igwebuike*, nevertheless, becomes a practical expression of communal interaction and responsibility in this *communal state*, since it is the basis for a communal life that demands a just ordered and well-organized society as African ethics demands and opines.

Concept of *Igwebuike*

Sacred Scripture was apt to acknowledge that *Man*, a living thing, is a creature of God with body and soul, made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1^{26ff}). Man was created by the immediate hand of God, and is generically different from all other creatures. His complex nature is composed of two elements, two distinct substances, viz: body and soul. The Scriptures, nevertheless, appreciate man based on the Hebrew word '*Adam*', used as the proper name of the first man. Hence, the first man was called Adam because he was formed from the red earth (cf. Gen.1-8). The name is derived from a word meaning *to be red*. It is also the generic name of the human race. Its equivalents are the Latin *homo* and the Greek *anthropos*. The Hebrew '*ish*' denotes also man in opposition to *woman*, *h'isha*. Equally, human evolution has it that human beings have common *ancestralship* with the apes, the chimpanzees, as characterized by a number of morphological, developmental, physiological constituents and behavioural changes unto the moment of *homo erectus*, irrespective of the discovery of the much-lauded missing link of man's ancestry. It was Charles Darwin's 1958 publication on *The Origin of Species* which, according to Bowden (1991: x), "provided evidence to show how the very diverse animals now existing had evolved from earlier primitive life over a long period of time". This is the beginning of the great controversial theory of human evolution, which is the evolutionary process that led to the emergence of anatomically modern humans, beginning with the evolutionary history of primates – in particular, *genus Homo* – and leading to the emergence of *Homo sapiens* as a distinct species of the hominid family, the great apes. Amidst these theories of human evolution, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *Hominization*, in line with *the becoming of man*, along with *the crossing the threshold of reflection*, culminating in his *omega point*, is against the mere physical science that man is not uniquely man but *ape-man*. According to Lewis (1969:3), "scientists generally accept the fact that human beings evolved from ape-like ancestors". Scientific human evolution based on evidence from comparative anatomy, paleontology and embryology and as a result of mutation, adaptation and natural selection acknowledges man as human person, that is *homo sapiens*, *homo faber*, *homo loquens*, and a *homo cogitans*. All these definitional concepts differentially define the human person as a rational animal than an animal with instinctual nature.

In the words of Mondin (1985:243), "historically the word *person* marks the line of demarcation between pagan and Christian culture...until the advent of Christianity, there did not exist, either in Greek or in Latin, a word to express the concept of a person, because in pagan culture such a concept did not exist, these

Igwebuike is the action of human beings as an entity. It is the modality of human beings. In our context, and as a concept, *Igwebuike* is the African mode of human beings' style of belonging in African communalistic metaphysics and socio-political philosophy. Therefore, it is the *actus humanus* of a being to belong within a communal setting. It is the mode of any and every reality as such in African philosophy. Kanu (2017:1) was clear in placing *Igwebuike* at the hub of African philosophical enterprise on which many African institutions and societal interactions are built. It is, therefore, the background to meaningful communal interaction and significant existence. Hence, there are values of *Igwebuike*, for Kanu, A. They are in its complementary character, solidarity form, unitary nature and concordance style. *Igwebuike* is an Igbo word, which is a combination of three words. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuike*, 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'. It was employed by Igbo traditional philosophers as a theory based on an illustrative statement to teach that when human beings come together in solidarity and complementary relationship, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force to express their world of relationship, harmony, continuity and balance. At this level, no task is beyond their collective capability. This provides an ontological horizon that presents human beings as that which possess relational character of mutual interest. As an ideology, *Igwebuike* argues that to *be* is to live in solidarity and harmony, and to live outside the parameters of complementary solidarity is to suffer alienation. To *be* is to be with the other, in a community of human beings. This is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of African philosophy. *Igwebuike* philosophy is, therefore, sourced from the proper and professional but critical interpretation of the African world view and praxis, with regard to their thoughts and culture mostly embedded in the African orature. This, to a large extent, has to do with the African myths, folklore, symbols, proverb and songs.

Person

The concept of person, with its root in Latin as *persona* and in Greek as *prosopon* meaning *mask* or *disguising*, explains concretely the human being, often the man.

cultures did not recognize the absolute value of the individual as such, and made their absolute value depend essentially on class rank, wealth and race.” Mondin (1985: 256) continuing, gave an authoritative definition of a person, thus, “the person can be defined as a subsistent gifted with self-consciousness, communication and self transcendence.” Isaka Seme was one of the first western-educated Africans to challenge the European colonialism and malevolent explorations then sweeping across the continental Africa. In 1906, however, he addressed the Royal African Society in London. Below is the excerpt from his speech titled *Regeneration of Africa*:

Man, the crowning achievement of nature, defies analysis. He is a mystery through all ages and for all time. The races of mankind are composed of free and unique individuals. An attempt to compare them on the basis of equality can never be finally satisfactory. Each is self.

The speech was an epoch-making event that woke up the Europeans to the fact that Africans are human beings as a result of their human personhood. Their personality gives them the title of a human person with defined rights and responsibility. He reminded them that the years of slavery, yokes of dehumanization of Africans as mere object and plundering of Africa are over. Africa, therefore, must be *regenerated* as they have *degenerated* it. The starting of course is the recognition that *the races of mankind are composed of free and unique individuals* as African persons as such.

African Person

African persons are people who are native to Africa, descendants of natives of Africa, or individuals who trace their ancestry to indigenous inhabitants of Africa. This person in question enjoys the quality of a human person and, added to that, the singular privilege of being culture-bound. Africanity, therefore, becomes another defining character and peculiar value amidst other continents and comity of nations in the new world order. An African person is a human person with African *weltanschauung* as a basic background.

Continental Africa has lot of possibilities, in spite of the rare privilege of Africa being the cradle of ancient civilization and mother of civilization of all civilizations. As Oguejiofor (2001:24) puts it : “the African continent was also host to ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Kush, Napata and Meroe, Nubia and

dynamic and exceedingly unique, in line with the Shakespearean (Hamlet, Act II, Scene II) descriptive exaltation of man, thus:

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an Angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!

The African person, therefore, is fundamentally culture-bound and communally understood and appreciated. This is the background knowledge of a person through the sense of extended family system and super hunger for human interaction. The African person of the 21st century unfortunately must once again be liberated from the shackles of structural imperialism, racial discrimination and white supremacy. Back then in 1906, Isaka Seme daringly spoke boldly fearless, thus:

By this term regeneration I wish to be understood to mean the entrance into a new life, embracing the diverse phases of a higher, complex existence. The basic factor which assures their regeneration resides in the awakened race consciousness. This gives them a clear perception of their elemental needs and of their underdeveloped powers. It therefore must lead them to the attainment of that higher and advanced standard of life.

Concluding, Isaka Seme was vehement in addressing the issue of reviving Africa from all forms of mis-educated and misguided ideas imported into Africa. He was blunt against the carting away of what they branded *blackishly evil* and *despicably demonized*. A civilization they *wickedly denounced*, yet they cherished to covertly import and appropriate them. Seme, however, concluded thus:

The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilization is soon to be added to the world. The African is not a proletarian in the world of science and art: he has precious creations of his own—of ivory; of copper and of gold; of fine, plaited willow-ware; and weapons of superior workmanship. Civilization resembles an organic being in its development—it is born, it perishes, and it can propagate itself. More particularly, it resembles a plant; it takes root in the teeming earth, and when the

Axum. When these had had their days, the continent kept pace with the rest of the world". The contemporary and renewed continuation of the scramble for Africa, after the much-lauded *independence* and *end to open slavery*, leaves every good-thinking man with a lot of questions, with regard to Africa's coming of age *to be* (amidst the inherent racism and resurgence of white supremacy). The beauty of Africa, as PLO Mulumba would alert, makes Africa still attractive to the *West* and the rest of the world. This attractiveness is very much seen and exceptionally dependent both on the human and natural resources within the African continent. Explaining further, PLO Mulumba said:

When I look at Africa and see how attractive she is, one word comes to mind globalization. When they talk about globalization, they talk about it as if it were new. Africans were once globalized as a commodity in the slave market, we were sold everywhere in the world, that was globalization. Then we were globalized again through colonization. Then, again, through neo-colonization. Now we are being globalised again in the context of opening our markets: It was Julius Nyerere who in many of his enlightened moments said, "We should open our markets in the name of globalization and they say that the rules are the same." "I laugh," he said. Then he went on to say, "it's like a boxing match, the rules are the same but you don't put a heavyweight boxer with a lightweight boxer in the same ring and say the rules are the same, it's murder.

The African person, therefore, is appreciated more from the context that human beings are the centre of all reality, based on the fact that human life, from the ethical point of view, is of primary value. Mondin (1985:25) puts it thus: "of all the forms of human action, the most elementary and fundamental one, and the one which at the same time emerges as the most complex and rich with content, is life." Human life, not animal life, nor plant life, therefore, places the human person as the locus of creation and created things. This is why human life is a primary value. It is the value of all values, and without it, no other value is valuable. Human life, therefore, vivifies the human person and as a consequence the African person. As Iroegbu (1994:136) rightly puts it, "there is in African anthropology an anthropocentrism that is nonetheless a humanism and an integralism." An African person, therefore, has a holistic personality that is very

seeds fall in other soils, new varieties sprout up. The most essential departure of this new civilization is that it shall be thoroughly spiritual and humanistic-indeed, a regeneration moral and eternal.

Freedom and Responsibility

Rousseau's renowned phrase, in his *Social Contract*, is that *man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains*. With this form of *chained freedom*, he asserts his exalted idea of the contemporary nature of humanity. This chained freedom, nevertheless, suppresses the basic expression of freedom that is our birthright and is absolute against every natural instinct that is mere animalistic, and for this reason, man enters into civil society with every duty and responsibility. It is, therefore, freedom in *responsibility*. It is freedom that is accounted for and such is a responsible freedom. It has to do with the ability to respond as need be in the cause of exercising free actions. You are free to the extent you can account for it. This is responsibility. It is freedom in responsibility. Freedom to this extent is duty-bound. In this is basic understanding that *man is free but everywhere in chains*, according to J. P. Sartre. Man is free as long as his freedom respects others' free acts. Man is free within boundaries. This is a limited freedom. This is the fundamental idea behind *freedom to* and *freedom from*.

The concept of freedom is from the Latin word, *libertas*, and the Greek word, *eleutheria*, both of which indicate a condition of independence, a kind of autonomy, a form of self-determination. Freedom is the liberty, license or ability to do something. It is a rational concept reflecting an inalienable human right to realize one's human will in form of freedom to and freedom from. Freedom, according to online Webster's Dictionary, is the quality or state of being free: such as (a) : the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action, (b) : liberation from slavery or restraint or from the power of another : independence, (c) : the quality or state of being exempt or released usually from something onerous.

The word, *freedom*, therefore, stands for something greater than just the right to act in whichever way one wishes to act. It also stands for securing to everyone an equal opportunity to life, emancipation, and the pursuit of happiness. Freedom is a term which is synonymous with liberty. It has been a point of deliberation among various epochs of philosophy in both ethical and political circles. A man

is said to be free to the extent that he can choose his goals or the course of his conduct, without being compelled to act as he would not himself choose to act. It is the absence of the imposition of one's will by any other authority or power. Karl Jasper is reputed for his philosophy of freedom which he considers not free but gained. According to Jasper (1959: 32), "freedom is not absolute; it is always bound at the same time. I do not have it, I gain it." The exercise of freedom in real practice, at the long, necessitates a kind of limit to what an individual does in a community. The whole idea is about the place of African ethics in a community.

African Ethics

Ethics, western ethics to be precise, deals with the moral value of human actions and decency of human behaviour against all forms of animality. The human actions and behaviour, by this understanding, must be accounted for as long as one confronts confusing but decisive moments in living out his daily experience on what is right or bad and what ought to be done or not. From this ethical appreciation, one moves unto traditional African ethics. Traditional ethics has to do with norms, precepts, doctrines, principles and moral codes, which regulate the conduct and actions of individuals in African societies. Kanu (2015:166) confirms that "traditional African Societies had had their traditional ethics". Traditional, however, informs African ethics as it tries to maintain and ensure social order and stability in conventional African societies. African ethics is a realistic and pragmatic philosophy that involves and engages the African person with regard to limits of freedom and, as a result, his responsibility in a communal engagement. African ethics is a main branch of African philosophy. It is a practical philosophy which, according to Maritain (2005:177), "is for the good man". Iroegbu (1994: 136), defines African ethics, thus:

This is a horizontal aspect of metaphysics and the consequence of epistemology. Ethics in African Philosophy has been argued to be independent of religion. To this we say *Yes and No*. While God does not directly determine all moral norms, the fear of God makes the realization of those norms effective.

Ethics, as a branch of practical philosophy, deals directly with human actions in relation to others. However, philosophers today usually divide ethical theories into three general subject areas: meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics.

Stanford Online dictionary, however, gave a general descriptive definition of Ethics thus:

The ethics of a society is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right or wrong, what is a good or bad character; it is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society; it is embedded, furthermore, in the forms or patterns of behavior that are considered by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice, and fairness. The ideas and beliefs about moral conduct are articulated, analyzed, and interpreted by the moral thinkers of the society.

Here, we see the difference between morality (that is value) and religious innuendoes (nuances of belief), as regards the fear of God. It is all about the question of the defining differential nuances between moral instruction and religious education. Onebunne and Alike (2017) reiterate that “religion and morality are not synonymous. Religion and morality are concepts whose conceptual relationships are expressed between religious views and informed conduct of morals...Morality does not necessarily depend upon religion”. However, African ethics is all about value, rather than religious belief. Over the years, Stanford Online Dictionary offers that “African societies, as organized and functioning human communities, have undoubtedly evolved ethical systems – ethical values, principles, rules – intended to guide social and moral behaviour”. Hence, there are outstanding African values which are the thrust of African ethics; they include: respect for the sacredness of human life, extended family system, large family system, industry, hard work, respect for senior members of the society, religion, value for private property, language, to mention but a few. African ethics, therefore, has to do with the conduct and action of the human person within a specified community. Maritain (2005:173) maintains that, “Ethics is as practical to any true science in the strict sense can be, for it teaches not only the most general rules of remote applications but also the particular rules applicable to the particular action to be performed.” It has the good of man in every explicit term by defining what is right and determining what is wrong.

In spite of the progress already made in science and technology amidst *transvaluation* of values and disparagement of the fundamentals of African culture and the threat of monoculture via globalization, an African man is still

very conscious of his root and identity as an African. An African man by nature is morally conscious of his attitude, especially within the community. Hence, he lives on the pretext of what community identity offers, approves or disapproves. The communal life often determines the African man with the spirit of extended family system already in practice.

African ethics is African morality. It is the African value. It has to do with African value system, with regard to the norms and morality of the African human person's right or bad conduct within the community of persons. It is the *modus operandi* as well as the *modus vivendum* of an African man as an African. African ethics is operational within the African world view which is holistic and encompassing. Hence, African ethics starts with the individual in the community and extends beyond that. Kanu (2015:170), explains it, thus, "the community in Africa survives on the contributions of individual endowments." According to Bujo (2003:20), African ethics is "realized primarily by means of a relational network that is equally anthropocentric, cosmic and theocentric". From this, one discovers that African ethics is a kind of relationship with man at the centre in relation to *uwa* as a generic term that englobes all that is. *Uwa*, however, is the locus of operation for human living and necessary interaction. However, against other philosophers who have delved into philosophical excursus, Iroegbu was very rigorous in adopting from Okere the uses of the concept of *uwa*, which is an Igbo word meaning *world*. For Iroegbu, *uwa* is the totality and fullness of being in its self expression. It is the theatre of activity for *being as belongingness*. To this view, Asouzu (2007:204) appreciates thus, that. "this ethnocentric flavour notwithstanding, what I find very positive in Iroegbu's use of the concept *Uwa*, is that this concept gives us some feelings concerning the comprehensiveness, totality and wholeness of reality itself; an understanding of reality quite in consonance with the teaching of traditional philosophers of the complementary system of thought". Through different mutual dynamics of relationship, the term, *uwa*, remains a universalising concept, respecting the boundaries of African ethics in any community living and interaction. Bujo (2003:20) further reiterates that "the main goal of African Ethics is fundamentally life itself. The community must guarantee the promotion and protection of life by specifying or ordaining ethics and morality."

Igwebuike Expressing African Ethics of Living

Igwebuike is a *lived out* principle of participation. The concept of *Igwebuike* expresses concretely the African ethics of living. Something, of course, is holding and binding them so as to form and be referred to as *Igwebuike*. There is an underlying fact or rightly put, a guiding principle of operation. *Igwebuike* is a practical expression of communal attitude with underlying guidance, based on the value system of the people, and in our context, African value system. *Igwebuike* specifically spells out the communal strength that is exerted in moments of communal need in order to execute or achieve a feat. Such communal enterprise, nevertheless, is within specified principles as African ethics.

It is the individuals that actually make up the population that is identified and empowered as such as *Igwebuike*. These individual persons are very conscious of their individuality and responsibility towards the other and the community in general as a result of their free will to associate and relate as such. Bujo (:114) explains that "it must be recalled that African Ethics does not define the person as self-realization or as ontological act; rather, it describes the person as a process of coming into existence in the reciprocal relatedness of individual and community...." There is a collective responsibility that is rightly translated as *Igwebuike* in this context.

Personal responsibility succinctly defines a response-able person. That is, an individual who is capable of giving a response, albeit in every situation that demands so. Such idea of responsibility defines a permissible person, with regard to age and the expected accountability. This has to do with the idea that a human being is ever the architect of his ideas, with a status within the bounds of moral obligation. This is the border line of an African person as an individual in the *Igwebuike* crusade. Hence, the attended personal responsibility attunes one into the level of individual commitment which all congregating individuals are willing to make or sacrifice in setting clear goals needed for full responsibility in their achievement of the *Igwebuike* mandate. Bujo (2003:112) affirms accordingly that "the position of the individual and the community in ethical behaviour is very important". There must be a morally bottom line of action. The individual responsibility in question is as a result of the aggregates of acceptable single individual behaviour that is of course bordered on choice. However, Bujo (2003:115) explains further that:

The individual becomes a person only through active participation in the life of the community. It is not membership in a community as such that constitutes the identity: only common action makes the human person a human person and keeps him from becoming an unfettered ego.

The community becomes a veritable ground for the true meaning and expression of the individual participation in and for the community based on *Igwebuike*. This is solidarity in the form of concrete expression of *Igwebuike*. Therefore, every form of interaction of the individual in the community is based on the needed solidarity. Bujo (2003:117) continues to buttress that “life in a community demands alertness and the maintenance of one’s own individuality”. *Igwebuike*, therefore, respects and recognizes the individual amidst other persons. Though *Igwebuike* thrives on the strength of the *Igwe* (number, population), yet it appreciates the *minor* individual, as well, the concrete contributions of each in strengthening the other are recognized.

A good understanding of the individual persons’ response-ability, as well as the responsible freedom in a community, while expressing their appreciable solidarity in their best interest too, is what *Igwebuike* is all about. Part of the African value system is a well-defined relationship that is well spelt out on mutual interest and common good of all. *Igwebuike* is for the common good. *Igwebuike* is a unification of communal talents and possibilities harnessed for the general interest. By and large, such interest and communal expression must be under some guiding principles. This is what African ethics is all about.

Conclusion

Life is of primary value. According to Iroegbu (2000:179), “life is the highest, foundation and end-point of all values”. The life in question, especially human life, is the locus of operation for the concepts like *Igwebuike* and African ethics in the exercise of freedom and practice of responsibility. However, Iroegbu (2000:182) buttresses this enduring fact, thus “every life has meaning. The highest meaning of life is to live for somebody, for something, for others, for society...making others alive”. *Igwebuike* is possible as a result of the individual persons acting as a group within the bounds of peculiar moral guidance for the good of all in a communal setting. African ethics, however, is that value parameter that vivifies *Igwebuike* as the modality of human beings in the African community. Contemporary African philosophers have tried to give sustained

reflective attention to the implementation of African ethics as it contributes to the understanding of the African human person. Through the African human person and African language of morality expressed as such in the practise of *Igwebuike*, African ethics is given a prominent place through the individual's responsible freedom and responsibility. In the exercise of the communal effort, informed most probably by the spirit of *Igwebuike*, African ethics becomes the yardstick for the involved individuals.

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