IGWEBUIKE: TOWARDS AN AFRICAN METAPHYSICS OF COMMUNAL STRENGTH

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Abstract
African Metaphysics remains a major branch of African Philosophy. The concept of Igwebuike within African communalist metaphysics has shown the influence of communal strength or a kind of sharedness power. Igwebuike expressing the heart of Igbo thought and communalistic existence remains the instrument for better interpretation of reality as such. The researcher, using the methods of conceptual appraisal and critical analysis finds out that though Igwebuike can be referred as a complementary Igbo-African Philosophy of inclusive leadership but is more acceptable as the expressive modality of being and belongingness in African Ontology. Therefore, Igwebuike philosophy should be most appreciated as the African metaphysics of communal strength.
Keywords: Igwebuike, Philosophy, Metaphysics, Communalism

Introduction

The theory and term Communalism as used from the back-cloth of African ideology which is community identity, is traceable to Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere. However, as an ideal pertinent cultural value, it has been a practice among Black Africans from the moment they are grouped into communities. Various etymologies all point to connotation and denotation of communalism as indicating mutual participation and equal sharing of a variety of values and goods evaluated as fundamental in the community. African is founded on the assumption and belief that all human beings are members of one human family. African communalism is time-oriented since it transcends those that practice it and it is man-oriented based on its place in the culture of the people. Iroegbu (1995), therefore, joins in this appreciation of African Communalism. He, however, went further by showing that there are principles that determine this African Communalism of which Belongingness is definitive.

African communalism is a moral doctrine that also values human dignity, rights and responsibilities. Ikuenobe (2018), argues that "African communalism does not see a conflict between individuals and community; they are mutually supportive, and people are required to have the moral attitude of contributing to

the community for their own well-being. This attitude creates the priority of duty which is for the fundamental goal of creating a community; in order to provide the material conditions for actualizing individuals' substantive right and well being".

Communalism properly and generally expresses an intense community spirit and communal interrelationship that exist among groups of people or an entire people. Communalism embodies ties of close relationship interactions through commune origin, language, culture, customs, religions and socio- economic life. In a large sense, it is an expression through nationality, that is, people from the same root. Hence, people commune easily, freely and more intensely with their members in contrast to social give and take and this make their community the central focus of their lives.

Communalism is opposed to individualism where people think and act on the basis of the wishes of the individuals, as opposed to community good and values. It is as well opposed to pluralism where there are dualistic tendencies of opposing forces to every issue. Fundamentally, communalism grids the social aspect of human nature. It is so pronounced in African societies that is regarded as an African way of life at least, in pristine and still in modern African societies and groups. Communalism remains an African theory, especially, of a well-ordered society.

The understanding underlines the key characteristics of a human community, namely mutual participation, social relationship, fellowship and equal sharing of certain fundamental rights, value, origin (root), good or orientation in the community. It entails sharing a defined locality and communality, which are often expressed in a nation as people from the same root (natus). The full understanding of communalism is expressed in the meaning of community. According to Ekennia (2001), communalism expressed in a community, ''Refers to social relationship, fellowship, socialites, organized society. It invokes obligingness''. In our popular parlance and understanding, it invokes belongingness. The community is understood as a nexus of inter-relational relationship for human action and interaction. And communalism is practical in this community since it is a basis for a communal life that demands a just ordered and well organized society.

Conceptual Clarifications

Concept of Igwebuike

This work proposes Igwebuike as the key to understanding African philosophy. While being in Igbo philosophy is 'Idi', that is, to be, Igwebuike is the modality of being. It 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 complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force, and more so, to express their world of relationship, harmony, continuality and complementarity. At this level, no task is beyond collective capability. This provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. As an ideology, Igwebuike argues that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and 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. This is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of African philosophy (Igwebuikepedia).

Concept of African Metaphysics

It is one of the main branches of African Philosophy. African philosophy pre-supposes and strongly assumes the existence of a metaphysics that is distinctly and peculiarly African; that reflects that African weltanschuug (Universe of experience) and African reality of existence. This is in contra-distinction to the Western, Eastern or Jewish metaphysics which have their uniqueness and characteristics.

African metaphysics briefly is a study of the African world and world-view. As a study, it takes a deep and wide look into the nature of ultimate reality for Africans. It looks into the nature of forces or beings in the African Universe, the relationship between the seen and the unseen. African metaphysics is the key to the understanding and interpretation of life, existence, being, in fact reality as a whole as observed in the African Universe. The African sees his universe as essentially a religious one; a unified whole of visible and invisible and this organic whole of the visible world 'spiritually' blends with the divine invisible world to give the African the ultimate whole of life. The African further

recognizes that the forces in the universe are in constant motion and each force tends to affect another by its motion. This text brings to light the essentials of the African belief system, and also with a visible and comprehensive review of the phenomenon of the forces in his environment and how he manipulates or interacts with his nature.

Concept of Communal Strength

Communal relationships are relationships in which benefits are given in response to needs or to demonstrate a general concern for the other person (Clark & Mills 1979). In African Metaphysics, it is a selfless form of relationship where one is not identified in the self but 'We'. The courage, level of confidence, support and solidarity gotten from this type of relationship is referred to as communal strength. Communal strength refers to the degree of responsibility a person feels for communal partners' welfare (Mills, Clark, Ford & Johnson, 2004 p. 213). The stronger the communal strength, the more responsibility felt for the other's welfare. The stronger the communal strength, the more cost a person will incur to provide for the needs of the other.

A person will feel more distressed or guilty for not responding to the other's needs when communal strength is stronger.

Igwebuike and Communalism

According to Kanu, Igwebuike is anchored on the African worldview, which Iroegbu (1995) describes as being characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. The communal-individuality of the African is expressed in the Igbo-African proverb: Ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akpara ya (If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught by man); ntugwa bu uto ndu (variety is the spice of life); otu osisi anaghi eme ohia (a tree does not make a forest); gidigidi bu ugwu eze (the dignity of a king is the number of his followers); mmetuko ahu bu uto ndu (the beauty of life is in mixing up with others). Mbiti (1970, p. 108), has classically proverbializes the community 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,p. 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".

With the style of existential expression, he writes further: "We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him" (Achebe, 1958, p. 132).

The idea of a human person asking a fellow human person to scratch the back speaks of the fundamental complementary role which a fellow being plays in the life of another. While the above analysis focuses on the world of human beings, Igwebuike goes beyond the human world to speak of the modality of the being of the entirety of reality, including the inanimate and spiritual worlds (Igwebuikepedia).

According to Senghor, ''We see this that the Negro-African is a collective society, more precisely communal…''. The term communalism, associated with African society and life, has a political origin. It became famous in the 1960s during period of the struggle for independence from the western colonizers and for the decolonization of African continent. To some it is a political weapon for the independence and a developmental weapon for Africans. And Ekennia summed it up thus,

If communalism was regarded as one of the guesses made on the African Social System by Westerners in the eyes of Mbonu Ojike, it turns out to be the Foundation of African Theories of Political and Economic Liberations, in the work of authors like Kwame Nkurumah, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Julius, Nyerere and many other politicians of Africa.

Nyerere, however, defines African communalism as African brotherhood. This is an Ujamma project in a practical concretization of a task of a command breakthrough for Africa. These African thinkers and writers reiterate the original existence of the communal way of soul, one mind one spirit, as opposed to aggregation of individual in a society among Africans. In Iroegbu's (1996) word,

Thus the life of sharing, communal togetherness distinguishes African societies from the western ones where there is pronounced individualism.

With regard to the status of communalism, Iroegbu (1995) believes that, ''Communalism is not an abstract theory, it is rather a realizable model designed for a particular society, an African one''. Communalism, therefore, addresses the foundational and distributive structures of any society that is the institution of any society, which are so justly arranged for the good of all the members. Communalism remains a theory of justice for a well-ordered society where everyone belongs for the wellbeing of all. In such communal belonging, there is a kind of shared personality or sharing with otherself.

Igbo communalism is expressed in living together and sharing responsibilities. The traditional Igbo society has a great asset in this practice of a mode of life called communalism. This is the bedrock and the result of a wonderful relationship prevalent in the Igbo-African community as well as the purpose of the existence of the Igbo community in particular and Africa in general.

Igwebuike and Belongingness

The concept of Belongingness, from the verb 'to belong,' is the synthesis of the reality and experience of belonging. It is a part of, a member of and a substantive that summarizes all the things that are posed. Belongingness is one of the principles of Igwebuike.

The individual is not self sufficient but has many needs which he cannot supply to himself. Hence, human beings agreed to submit voluntarily to a system and were bound to live in unison and solidarity. Through deep experiences as creatures, human beings realized their insufficiency and dependency. They discovered that they need each other to live a contented life. These experiences of life gave recourse to the idea of complementarity as a measure to survive the challenges posed by other vicissitudes of life. Inter-dependency, inter-relationship, collectivism and mutual co-existence form the basis for Igbo life pattern as expressed in Igwebuike and Belongingness: the metaphysics of effective communal relationship.

Being means the existence of a thing. Anything that exists has being. Anything that partakes in being is also a being. Being is a concept encompassing objective and subjective features of reality and existence (Wikipedia). Before these individual persons can come together to form a community as in "Igwe", they must exist, which is 'to be'. They must exist possibly in a nuclear family, which automatically make them the members of an extended family, kindred, a clan and a community. The being therefore, form the basis of Igwe.

They existed because they are beings, because they cannot exist alone except in the whole, they must belong to a group forming the 'Igwe'. The existence of a relationship among the Igwe, thus strengthens their bond, giving them the courage and solidarity that stems from a communal relationship.

Belongingness is the arrangement of the fundamental structures of any society such that it incarnates and manifests the commonness of origin of history, and of general destiny of all the members of the community. Belongingness concretizes in reality a group of people. Belongingness is therefore, ''*Umunna* concretized''. Belongingness pursues in a large sense the social justice of the people. According to Iroegbu: it (belongingness) makes sure that all belong and that none is marginalized: both in contributively and distributively. Belongingness will be understood as a defining principle in the theory of African communalism. The fundamental structure of communal existence is definitively pillared on belongingness (Onebunne,2009).

Igwebuike and Ubuntu

I am because we are, and you are because I am aptly defines communalism which studies have shown is the underlining principle of African communalism. This South African word – Ubuntu – is a synonym of the Igbo expression Igwebuike – in unity lays our strength. It is often translated as "I am because we are" or humanity towards others. It is often used in a philosophical sense to mean "The belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity". According to Michael Onyebuchi Eze, the core of Ubuntu can best be summarised as follows:

'A person is a person through other people' strikes an affirmation of one's humanity through recognition of an 'other' in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the 'other' becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The 'I am' is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance.

An "Extroverted communities" aspect is the most visible part of this ideology. There is sincere warmth with which people treat both strangers and members of

the community. This overt display of warmth is not merely aesthetic but enables formation of spontaneous communities. The resultant collaborative work within these spontaneous communities transcends the aesthetic and gives functional significance to the value of warmth. How else are you to ask for sugar from your neighbour? Warmth is not the sine qua non of community formation but guards against instrumentalist relationships. Unfortunately, sincere warmth may leave one vulnerable to those with ulterior motives.

"Ubuntu" as a political philosophy encourages community equality, propagating the distribution of wealth. This socialisation is a vestige of agrarian peoples as a hedge against the crop failures of individuals. Socialisation presupposes a community population with which individuals empathise and concomitantly, have a vested interest in its collective prosperity. Urbanisation and the aggregation of people into an abstract and bureaucratic state undermines this empathy. African Intellectual historians have argued however that this ideal of "Collective responsibility" must not be understood as absolute in which the community's good is prior to the individual's good. On this view, Ubuntu is argued, is a communitarian philosophy that is widely differentiated from the Western notion of communitarian socialism. In fact, Ubuntu induces an ideal of shared human subjectivity that promotes a community's good through an unconditional recognition and appreciation of individual uniqueness and difference. Audrey Tang has suggested that Ubuntu "Implies that everyone has different skills and strengths; people are not isolated, and through mutual support they can help each other to complete themselves."

"Redemption" relates to how people deal with errant, deviant and dissident members of the community. The belief is that man is born formless like a lump of clay. It is up to the community, as a whole, to use the fire of experience and the wheel of social control to mould him into a pot that may contribute to society. Any imperfections should be borne by the community and the community should always seek to redeem man. An example of this is the statement by the African National Congress (in South Africa) that it does not throw out its own but rather redeems.

Ubuntu: "I am what I am because of who we all are." Archbishop Desmond Tutu, (1999) offered a definition;

A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, based from a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole

and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed. Ubuntu does not mean that people should not enrich themselves. The question therefore is: Are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you to be able to improve?

Tim Jackson refers to Ubuntu as a philosophy that supports the changes he says are necessary to create a future that is economically and environmentally sustainable. At Nelson Mandela's memorial, United States President Barack Obama spoke about Ubuntu, saying,

> There is a word in South Africa – Ubuntu – a word that captures Mandela's greatest gift: his recognition that we are all bond together in ways that are invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, and caring for those around us.

We can never know how much of this sense was innate in him, or how much was shaped in a dark and solitary cell. But we remember the gestures, large and small – introducing his jailers as honored guests at his inauguration; taking a pitch in a Springbok uniform; turning his family's heartbreak into a call to confront HIV/AIDS – that revealed the depth of his empathy and his understanding. He not only embodied Ubuntu, he taught millions to find that truth within themselves.

Igwebuike and Njikoka

Njikoka is the African-Igbo philosophy of integrative humanism. Integrative humanism is the philosophical orientation that sees reality as having both physical and spiritual dimensions, past and present; as well as harmonized framework in which seemingly opposed variables unite without contradiction to achieve progress and epistemic wholeness. Being part of a community affects our daily life, attitude and character and greatly increases our power to act. Njikoka is the act of coming together and integrating ourselves into a whole. It is having a place in one's heart where every other persons dwell, for when you are in that place in me, and I am in that place in you, we are knitted by a strong bond into a whole. In like manner you share my pain and I share yours. Igwebuike and Njikoka conform to the philosophy of "Ubuntu" (I am because we are). The Igbos express it by seeing yourself in me and I seeing myself in you. Because I see myself in you, In Njikoka, the community is placed first before the self and the

interest of others before one's personal interest. In Igwebuike, all the communal actions are participatory actions. The essence of integrative humanism is to show that through insights we can provide answers to most of the questions that confront us in our daily lives by means of collective responsibility (Chimakonam, 2011).

Integrative humanism is grounded on the Igbo cultural injunction "Njikokamma" which translates "To integrate is better than to disintegrate". It is a human centered theory which derives its insights from the Igbo culture. This is expressed in the Igbo axiom of "Anyuko nwamiri onu ogboo ufufu" which is translated as "Unity is strength" bearing in mind that a tree cannot make a forest (Otu osisi adighi emebe ofia). We need other human beings in order to be human. An Igbo man will always convey by his words and actions the philosophy of "Somadina" translated as "May I never be alone" approving that loneliness is undesirable, but collectivity is the greatest (chimakonam, 2011).

Igwebuike and Ibuanyidanda

The permanent feature or behaviour pattern of Igbo social life is based on a logical system of thought and a complete positive philosophy expressed in Ibuanyidanda. The fact that the world is incomplete (Uwa ezu-oke) and nobody is complete (Onweghi onye ozuru) necessitates collectivism in action. Igwebuike and Ibuanyidanda are Igbo philosophies which express collectivity. Collectively, we can surmount any obstacle, no matter how big or strong. Asouzu (2004, p 105), describes Igbo social life as *complementarity* which is a concretely lived experience of everyday's life. According to him;

> This idea derives from the general and fundamental human feeling of insufficiency and experience of relativity and fragmentation of historical process. From here arise the human fundamental inclination to solidarity, togetherness and community. In the same way arises all tendencies guiding such ideas as mutual co-existence, co-dependability, co-responsibility … etc

There are factors which tie or bond the people incomplementarity, such as blood relation. In fact, a community in Igbo land means "People of one blood" kinsmen, or brethren (Umunna). Other factors that favour complementarity include territorial location (habitation) and physical proximity of members of the community which bring them into personal face-to-face relation. These factors

that favour complementarity illustrate vividly the Igbo belief that (Agbata-obi onye bụ nwanne ya) one's neighbor is his relation.

The essential nature of traditional Igbo social life is conveniently expressed in the above quote. It emerged as a result of the realization that the community is better able to rest on themselves, and it is a means of developing, sustaining and re-producing themselves. Ibuanyidanda in this context is fundamentally a social relation of execution. It is the act of doing things together; the spirit of corporate existence, mutual assistance in work by all and the spirit of collective effort found among traditional Igbo people. The life of the Igbo is group participation in which each individual participates according to his natural ability. This explains the complementarity. For the traditional Igbo, Asouzu (1999) cited in Egwutuora (2013) says:

> Without complementarity, human life would be unbearable isolated struggles that easily lead to self abandonment. We can now understand why the traditional Igbo never cease to sound the clarion call to complementarity and solidarity in times of crisis

Resume

Igwebuike Philosophy as a model for contemporary philosophical discourse is a communalistic metaphysics that *number is power* or *unity is strength*. Igwebuike philosophy however complements other communalistic metaphysical concepts like Belongingness, Ibuanyidanda, Njikoka, Ubuntu, and Brotherhood to mention but a few. Since African Philosophy is a movement and a discipline, most of the African Metaphysical concepts are like movements to deconstruct one problem or the other as well as construct or sustain another philosophical movement towards establishment of proper African Philosophical tradition.

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