



6. “IGWEBUIKE”: The Underlying Principle of African Philosophy

Igwebuike is the intricate web of African philosophy. It has remained constant in the midst of the changes in the history of African philosophy, and has continued to persist through changes. Its sense of harmony, community, complementarity and solidarity has been expressed right from the philosophy of Tempels (1959). He argues that in Bantu Ontology:

'Beings forces' of the universe are not a multiple of independent forces placed in juxtaposition from being to being. All creatures are found in relationship according to the law of hierarchy... Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement (p. 29).

Kagame (1951) and Jahn (1958) did establish the harmonious character of reality. They agree with Tempels that reality is force. It is not a force independent of other forces.

The nationalistic movements of the 20th century in Africa were linked by their emphasis on belongingness, familyhood, which was the basis for their socialisms. Thus, the Social negritude of Senghor (1959, 1964 & 1975) places the family at the centre of the social structure. Nyerere (1968) bases his principle of Ujamaa on familyhood. The choice of socialism over capitalism by Awolowo (1969&1979), the welfarism of Azikiwe and the promotion of Pan-Africanism by Nkrumah (1963) were based on the distinctive complementary character of African ontology.

Edeh (1983) in his work on *Igbo Metaphysics* continues with the perspective of Mbiti:

Accordingly the Igbo way of life emphasizes 'closeness' but not closed-ness'. There is a closeness in living because each person 'belongs to' others and in turn, 'is belonged to' by others. By adopting this life of 'closeness' or 'belongingness', an Igbo becomes immersed in the culture's spiritual substance, love; and by love, he acquires a fulfillment as a person beyond mere individuality. (p. 105).

Gyekye (1987), writing on Akan philosophy avers that the individual depends on the community:

The individual's life depends on identifying oneself with the group. This identification is the basis of the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the group. It is also the ground of the overriding emphasis on the individual's obligation to the members of the group. (p. 156).

Iroegbu (1995) describes being in African ontology as belongingness. In response to the questions, 'what makes being, being?' Iroegbu argues that it is belongingness, thus *Being* is *Belongingness*. What then is belongingness? He defines it as 'the synthesis of the reality

and experience of belongingness' (p. 374).

In the contention of Okonkwo (2020), reality is understood within the context of Uwa-ndu, the true and valid *universum* along the possibilities of thinkables, experientials, perceivables and their commonness to all human beings. That is, the *worldhood* or universal *datum* that provides the “hood” for the perceivers and experiencing thinkers of this inescapable phenomenon)?

Nkemnkia (1999) writes that in African ontology, the self is the other:

The meaning of an individual's life is found in and through his relationship with the Other or Others. In fact it is meaningless to ask oneself “who am I” without having a complete knowledge of the Other, from whom, in the final analysis, one expects the answer. (pp. 111-112).

Wiredu (1995), focusing on the political dimension of the African life, sees complementarity and belongingness as characterizing political decision-making in Africa.

Asouzu (2004, 2007) and Njoku (2018) developed the notion of being within the new ontological horizon of *Ibuanyidanda*. Thus, Asouzu (2007) defines being as “that on account of which anything that exists serves a missing link of reality” (p. 103). Being is, therefore, located within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations in the sense of an existent reality (Kanu 2016a&b).

From Tempels to Asouzu, the *Igwebuike* principle of harmony, community, solidarity and complementarity have never been lacking, therefore, positioning *Igwebuike* as the underlying principle of African philosophy.