



## 7. Religio-cultural Expressions of “IGWEBUIKE”

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As a result of the centrality of *Igwebuiké* to African thought, it finds expression in virtually every religio-cultural dimension of the African people.

### **i. Appellative Expressions of *Igwebuiké***

The basic concern here is to see how African names express *Igwebuiké* or echo the spirit of harmony and complementarity. Thus, three categories of names would be studied from the Igbo perspective: the names given to human beings, titles given to people and the names given to God.

#### **a. Human Names**

These names speak of human relationships towards the other, a constant reminder that the human person is not alone.

1. *Obinwanne*: The heart of a brother
2. *Ekwutosinammadibegi*: Don't condemn your fellow human being
3. *Chisom*: God is with me
4. *Kesandu*: Increase and multiply life
5. *Chinanurumogu*: God fights my battle
6. *Somadina*: May I not live alone
7. *Lotanna*: Remember the father
8. *Adaeze*: Daughter of a king
9. *Nnamdi*: My father lives
10. *Adaora*: Daughter of the people.

#### **b. Titles given to Human Beings**

These titles are given in relation to what the title holder has done for others. No one becomes great in African ontology as a result of what he or she has done for himself or herself.

1. *Uba zuo oke*: Let wealth go round
2. *Onwa na etiri ora*: Man of the people, a philanthropist
3. *Ochiri ozuo*: A helper, especially to the less privileged
4. *Ada oha*: The community's famous daughter
5. *Aka ji mba*: The people's life-wire

6. *Ome Udo*: The peacemaker
7. *Okwaruzo*: The road maker
8. *Omeruora*: One who does good things for people
9. *Ebube Dike*: Glorious Hero of the community
10. *Ikemba*: The power (strength) of a nation (place)

### c. *African Names for God*

These are names given to God based on what He has done for human beings or what is expected from Him.

1. *Okosisi na eche ndu*: The mighty tree that gives protection
2. *Echeta obi esike*: The giver of confidence
3. *Agbataobi nwa ogbenye*: The friend of the poor
4. *Agbataobi onye ajuru aju*: The friend of the rejected
5. *Olilianya nde ogbenye*: The hope of the poor
6. *Obata obie*: He whose presence ends every pain/misfortune
7. *Onye nzoputa*: The savior
8. *Chukwu na'kpu nwa*: The God that creates children
9. *Okwere nkwa meya*: The one that fulfills His promise
10. *Odi mma na eme mma*: The good God that does good

### ii. *Proverbial Expressions of Igwebuike*

African proverbs contain the wisdom and experience of the African people, usually of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression. They spring from the people and represent the voice of the people and express the interpretation of their beliefs, principles of life and conduct, moral attitudes, and reflect the hopes, achievements and failings of a people (Kanu 2014a & 2018). Examples are:

1. A person is a person because of other people
2. Sticks in a bundle cannot be broken
3. Cross the river in a crowd and crocodile will not eat you
4. Two ants do not fail to pull a grasshopper
5. A single stick may smoke but it will not burn
6. When spiders unite they can tie up a lion
7. If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together
8. If two or more people urinate in the same place at the same time, it would produce more foam

9. When a bird builds its nest, it uses the feathers of other birds
10. Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch

### iii. Folkloric Expression of *Igwebuiké*

Africans are parable and story telling people, (Zani 1972) and their stories according to Rattray (1930) mirror more or less accurately the African idea of life, conduct and morals. Apart from the African system of education which is tied to roles such as farming, hunting, firewood gathering, dancing, storytelling, naming ceremony, etc., the African got much more instruction through tales (Brosnan 1976). This was in the main moral instruction given at night after the evening meal, on the way to farm or the stream, in the village square or at moonlight nights (Shorter 1973 & Kanu 2015b). They are told in such a way that people are able to pick up their meanings without any explanation (Kanu 2016b). An example of an African folktale that beautifully expresses *Igwebuiké* is that of the Choosy Princess.

There was once a choosy princess who turned down the requests of those who asked for her hand in marriage. Her father was disturbed because of her choosy attitude and, made public that any man who would win the love of his daughter would have half of his kingdom given to him. This was heard by a python that lived in the river and immediately it went about borrowing the parts of the human body and when it looked fully human, it stormed the palace of the king in a grand style. Immediately the princess saw the human python, she was attracted to him, fell in love and decided to marry him. The human python departed with her and owned half of the wealth of the kingdom as the king had promised. When the python was returning with her to his home, just before the river, it turned into a python and went into the river with the princess. Those who witnessed this brought word back to the king that his son-in-law is not a human being but a python.

This bordered the king who assembled the wise men in his kingdom for a way forward towards rescuing the princess. They came to the decision that to rescue her, extraordinary talents would be required for the mission. This included professionals like: a boat rider, a thief, a carpenter, a diviner, a hunter and a swimmer. When they got to the river, and did not know where to begin to find her, the diviner did some incantations and found out where the princess was hidden by the python. Having discovered her, the thief went into the river and stole the princess from where she was. He handed her over to the skillful swimmer who immediately moved with her behind him. At this point, the python woke up from its slumber and angrily went after the swimmer. This was when the hunter came in and fired at

the python. While the boat rider was heading to the shore with her, the anger of the python was stirred and it hit hard on the boat damaging a good part of it; and to save the boat from sinking the carpenter came in and mended the damaged part of the boat that they may continue on their journey. With a combined effort, the team was able to take the princess back to the king. This was realized through the complementary effort of the different members of the rescue team (Kanu 2017k). One person wouldn't have been able to withstand the python, let alone rescue the princess.

#### iv. Musical Expression of Igwebuiké

Africans are a people of songs. They sing in their farms during work, in their shrines during worship, at home while cooking, during storytelling, at war fronts, on a journey, etc., (Kanu 2016a). African songs point to the relatedness of reality. One among many is the songs titled *Nwankelu*:

*Onye Kugbulu Nwankelu?*: who killed the rabin?

*Kerere Nwankelu* (reframe)

*Ukwa dagbulu Nwankelu*: the bread fruit killed nwankelu

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Gini mere ukwa ahu?*: What happened to the bread fruit?

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Obi mara ukwa ahu*: a digger pierced the breadfruit

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Gini mere obi ahu?*: What happened to the digger?

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Akika kporo obi ahu.*: The digger was infested by termites.

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Gini mere akika ahu?*: What happened to the termites?

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Okuko tuga akika ahu*: A cock was eating the termite.

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Gini mere okuko ahu?*: What happened to the cock?

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Ufu chuga okuko ahu.*: a fox was pursuing the cock

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Gini mere ufu ahu?*: what happened to the fox?

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Mmadu chuga ufu ahu.:* a man was pursuing the fox.

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Gini mere mmadu ahu?:* what happened to the man?

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Chukwu kere mmadu ahu.:* God created the man.

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Gini kere Chukwu ahu?:* what made God?

*Kerere Nwankelu*

*Anyi amaghi ihe kpuru Chukwu, Chukwu kpuru mmadu, mmadu chuga ufu, ufu chuga okuko, okuko chuga akika, akika taru obi, obi mara ukwa, ukwa dagbulu nwankelu- Kerere Nwankelu.:* (we do not know what made God, God made man, man was pursuing the fox, the fox was going after the cock, the cock was after the termite, the termite infested the digger, the digger pierced the bread fruit, the bread fruit fell and killed wankelu- Kerere Nwankelu) (Kanu 2013). In this song, the relationship between reality is expressed.

#### v. Symbolic Expression of Igwebuiké

Of the many cultural symbols in Igboland, none has received attention like the kola nut. It is very important and central to the life and ceremonies of the Igbo. For the Igbo, it goes beyond the red and yellow seed that you find in trays sold on the street and in kiosks. It is not just the biannual crop grown and stored in sacks and baskets. It is a food that must be eaten with relish; it commands adoration and many accolades and must be attended to with deserving feast. It unites the living and dead, and symbolizes a feast of togetherness, love and trust. The Kola nut is a symbol of Life *ndu*, this is why the Igbo say: “He that brings kola brings life” (Kanu 2019).



**Plate 1: The Igbo Kola Nuts**

Every Kola can be broken into lobes, and these lobes signify numbers. And number is very important for the African. Some have 1 lobe, some 2 lobes, some 3, some 4, some 5, some 6 and some 7. Kola nut with one lobe is a dumb kola (*Oji Ogbi*); it is not eaten because it is the Kola of the Spirits. It belongs to *Chukwu*, because *Chukwu bu mmuo*. When it has two lobes, it is called *Oji gwororo*, symbolizing male and female. It is an elliptical gender shadow of *Oji Ogbi*. Three lobed kola nut is called *Oji Ikenga* (Ike eji aga) or *Oji Dike*. It is the masculine kola and thus the *Kola of the Valiant*. As a matter of principle it is eaten only by warriors, brave men, the consecrated or ordained. It is not eaten by women. The Kola with four lobes is the Kola of Peace and Blessings, *Oji Udo*, *Oji Ngozi*, *Oji Aka ano*, *Oji ahia na ano ubosi na ano*: *Afor*, *Nkwor*, *Eke* and *Orie*. It is the Kola nut for both male and female genders, and thus considered the most gender sensitive kola. The Kola with five lobes is the Kola of Procreation, Protection, Industry, Achievement, Wealth, Progress and Good luck. The Kola with six lobes called *Oji Ikenga abuo* and, therefore, *Oji Ogbugbandu*. It is the Kola of blood and spirit, and thus, indicative of communion with the ancestors. No wonder the smallest part of it is not eaten but given to the ancestors. The last is the seven lobed Kola, which is known as the kola nut of consummations, wisdom, power, fulfillment, celebration, festivities, *ezumezu*. The Igbo would say: *Uwam uwa asaa; asaa ndu na anwuanwu; ikpa naasaa mmiri naasaa*- pointing to the kola of endlessness or eternity (Kanu 2019).

This notwithstanding, among the lobes, there is always a female and male lobe. When these lobes stay together they remain alive, but when they separate they die and dry off. Their togetherness is a symbol of life, and their separation, death. It's a symbiotic relationship in the sense that they need each other to remain alive.

#### **a. Mythological Expression of *Igwebuiké***

Myths are the outcome of the human attempts to explain historical institutions and developments by appeal to non-historical factors and forces. African myths are, therefore, veritable mine of materials on African Traditional Religion, philosophy and culture. Esposito, Easching and Lewis (2006), explain that “myth” comes from the Greek word “mythos”, which means “story”. According to Marshall (1988), myths are “invented stories about the gods in which they behave like human beings with superhuman powers” (p. 449). Gunkel (1901), corroborating Marshall, defines myth as “Stories of the gods in contradistinction with legends in which the actors are men” (p. 14).

The Nri hegemony and its influence on Igbo history cannot be over emphasized. It is in

this regard that Madubuko (1994) observes that the story of the Igbo people, no matter how briefly considered, would be incomplete if one omits the Eri-Nri myth. Eri clan originated from the region of Anambra River, at Aguleri; from there they fanned eastward and established various communities. According to Uzukwu (1988), Eri is the father of all Nri; and tradition says that he came from *Chukwu*. It is reported that the earth was not firm when he came to the world. To solve the problem of flood, he employed blacksmiths from Awka to use their bellows to dry the flooded land. There was no food as well for the people. To provide food, he prayed to God and He demanded that he should sacrifice his first son and daughter to him. After the sacrifice and burial of his son and daughter, as though all were lost, yam and palm tree began to grow out of the place where he buried his first son while vegetables and cocoyam grew out of the place where he buried his daughter. If yam germinated from where Eri's first son was buried, it means that yam is the resurrected son of Eri, and since it was given to man to sustain life, it is regarded as life itself.

Madu (2004) observes a cosmological drama between god and man, land and crops. Eri, the civilization hero enjoys a special relationship with *Chukwu*, and through Eri's sacrifice, humanity now enjoys a special relationship with the land which offers food for his sustenance. The ritual performed by Eri established a covenant between Eri, his descendants and *Chukwu*. From the sacrifice of Eri, we discover why yam is very prominent in Igbo sacrifice and life, a situation which warrants its annual elaborate festival throughout Igbo land. The growing of yam from the spot where Eri's first son was buried accounts for the respect given to *okpara* (first son) in Igbo life. He is considered to be closer to the ancestors.

This notwithstanding, significant to our consideration is the collaboration between Eri and Awka blacksmiths. Eri, even though he enjoyed a special place in the divine plan still had to collaborate with others for the meaningfulness of his existence.