IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY, STRATEGIC RELIGIOUS ACTION AND THE THEORY OF CHANGE

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Abstract

*This paper examines the root causes of the problems of religious tensions, violent conflicts and killings, using the North Central Region of Nigeria as a case study. Consequently, the paper develops a Strategic Religious Action to tackle the menace. The research uses the tools of an indigenous African philosophy called Igwebuike, which is a substratum of African traditional values, philosophy and religion. It embodies an integral principle of African philosophical experience which enhances the unity of all Africans. Igwebuike philosophy is an accepted tactics of soft power, i.e. the ability to attract and co-opt people, expose problems about Human Rights on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), and then proffer a strategic religious action. The submission quickly addresses all the contentious issues that facilitate agitations from different sections and players in the region under focus, and submits that traditional African values, in relation to the Igwebuike philosophy, strategic religious action and the theory of change (collectively speaking), are **sine qua non** for prosecuting the problems in question. To achieve the goal of this study, historical and phenomenological methods of enquiry are deployed in the collection and analysis of data, while the 'indigenous holistic theory' and the 'theory of change' were adopted for the interpretation and understanding of the problems at hand. Furthermore, it concludes by stating the ultimate aim of the study, which is basically to examine the root causes of the aforementioned problems in the middle belt of Nigeria, namely: religious tensions, violent conflicts and killings and proffer a strategic religious action within the context and framework of the Theory of Change (ToC).*

Keywords: Igwebuike, Philosophy, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, Human Rights, Freedom of Religion, African traditional values, Theory of Change

Introduction

Professor Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu developed the concept of 'Igwebuike' to describe the unity of the African philosophical experience, which profoundly relates to a perspective-driven ideology and epitomizes the manner of being in

African ontology. This, according to him, includes African cherished traditional values such as complementarity, harmony, communality, etc. Thus, *Igwebuike,* being the inner or underlying principle of African philosophy, has successfully been used as a holistic response to the problem of evil, and sometimes it has been applied to define the logic of African philosophy, inclusive leadership and even the issue of national development. For the purpose of this discourse, *Igwebuike* philosophy is adopted as a solution to the problems about Human Rights on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) which, on the long run, encompasses a strategic religious action.

Strategic religious action promotes and builds on its extensive experience and best practices, which specifically focus on women and youth as contained in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).[1] While admitting that FoRB is a fundamental human right enshrined in international treaties and constitutional provisions in most countries, the actual practice of FoRB encounters many challenges, particularly in the sphere of religious tensions, violent conflicts and killings.[2] Our ultimate aim in this paper is to examine the root causes of the aforementioned problems in the north central region, i.e., the middle belt of Nigeria and proffer a strategic religious action within the context and framework of the theory of change (ToC).[3]

The Presentation
In presenting the *Igwebuike* philosophy as an accepted tactics of soft power about Human Rights on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), we will like to explore the Kanu school of thought as a remedy for almost every human problem. Doing so will enable us to appreciate immensely the apt and scholarly interpretation of *Igwebuike* from this perspective. According to this school of thought, *Igwebuike* is from an Igbo composite word and metaphor: Igwebuike, 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.[4] The three words involved are explained thus: 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'; that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force or strength, and at this level, no task is beyond their collective capability.[5] *Igwebuike* is, therefore, a philosophy of harmonization and complementation. It understands the world immanent

realities to be related to one another in the most natural, mutual, harmonious and compatible ways possible.[6]

Tackling the Root Causes of Religious Tensions, Violent Conflicts and Killings by Applying the Pprinciple of Igwebuike Philosophy

The root causes of the above-listed problems in the north central region (Middle Belt) of Nigeria can be understood by using a 'causal factor' approach. Using this approach, the root causes of the problems can be classified into factors which include: economic, political and socio-cultural factors.

Economically, the root causes of the identified problems in the north central region of Nigeria include the scramble for economic opportunities and resources. The economic opportunities in the north central region are scarce. These opportunities include employment and trade. As a result of the scarcity, the ethno-religious backgrounds are resorted to, in order to get access to these opportunities, on the one hand. On the other hand, the inability of some people to have access to these opportunities is interpreted along ethno-religious lines. With this situation, a "**we** versus **them**" construct is created among the people of various backgrounds in the region, thereby deepening the differences among the people and raising conflictive tendencies, which eventually manifest in the problems within the region.[7]

The dominant and most important economic resource in the region is land. Acquiring portions of land in the region is tantamount to wealth acquisition, as the land can be used for farming or grazing livestock. Accordingly, farmers-herders dimension of the identified problems in the region is basically as a result of clashes over land.

Politically, the identified problems in the north central region of Nigeria are as a result of the weak government institutions, lack of political will by the government agencies and political leaders, the quest for territorial expansion by migrating stock of people into the region, the struggle for the control and domination of the region among the diverse ethnic groups found therein,[8] et cetera.

Government institutions which are supposed to control human behaviours in the society and ensure social order have not been performing their duties. The police, courts, military, have even been accused of partiality, partisanship, and even connivance as perpetrators of the problems within the region.

Weakness of the institutions has eventually ossified into a lack of political will by the institutions and political leaders to finding lasting solutions to the problems. Hence, the problems have become a daily reoccurrence in the region.[9] As a matter of fact, many political leaders have been associated with all the identified conflicts in the states within the region, but of course, because "this is Nigeria," nothing has been done to bring them to book.

Constitutional weakness has also been one of the root causes of the identified problems in the region. The Nigerian constitution makes provisions for citizenship and indigenity. Constitutional provisions, by virtue of their ambiguity over the terms "indigene" and "residency" for accessing citizenship rights, have not been satisfactorily clarified. It appears that the indigene principle promoted in Section 147 (3)[10] is not in line with the citizenship provisions of Section 15 (3) (b),[11] which stipulate that "for the purpose of promoting national integration, it shall be the role of the State to secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation."[12] This provision becomes difficult in being implemented in various states of the region. Consequently, indigenes of the states in the region and other citizens of Nigeria residing within the region are constantly struggling for citizen rights and privileges, where the indigenes believe the rights and privileges are reserved for them within their domains.[13]This sets a fertile ground for the endless myriad of problems in the region.

There has been a wave of north-south migration from the northernmost part of the country into the north central region. This migration is basically a movement of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic nationalities. These immigrants into the region not only seek means of livelihood, but seek to assert themselves (in the context of one Nigeria) on the indigenes of the region. Hence, there has been a perception of extra-territoriality which must be confronted by irredentism, leading to reoccurring bloodshed and damage of property in the region.

Socio-culturally, the north central region is made up of diverse ethnic groups which have not been able to harness their diversity for progress. Rather, these groups found themselves in constant competition, which is problematic for the society. Equally, the social conditions within the region provide a fertile ground for the preponderance of problems. These conditions include: high level of poverty, high population density, religious antagonisms, inadequate social and infrastructural facilities, high level of illiteracy and unemployment, et cetera. The failure of government and religious and traditional institutions to properly

manage these social conditions of the region has become a recipe for the identified problems to persist.

Igwebuike Philosophy, Strategic Religious Action and the Theory of Change

After defining *Igwebuike* as a philosophy of harmonization and complementation that understands the world immanent realities to be related to one another in the most natural, mutual, harmonious and compatible ways possible,[14] we will now focus our attention on the strategic religious action that is incumbent towards contextualizing the theory of change. We begin our discourse by asking: What is the theory of change?

The theory of change as the name suggests, is a hypothesis of how we think **change** occurs. So essentially, it is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.[15] Therefore, in the context of this study, the theory of change can be said to be a paradigm which promotes social change in the society, albeit positive. The theory explains the linkages in an initiative by explaining the processes of change. This link shows why an outcome, step or action is a prerequisite for another.[16] In other words, the theory suggests why a particular action is necessary for a particular result to be achieved.

Using the theory of change, the strategic religious action I will humbly suggest is **inter-religious dialogue,** using the tool of *Igwebuike*. Inter-religious dialogue is necessary for social order and human and societal development. The role religion plays in the society cannot be overemphasized. Religion has become the way of life for many people. Religion appeals to their consciences and determines who they relate with, how they interact with their environment and what awaits them in the world and beyond. The connection people have with their religion is as strong as glue, that anything which seeks to undermine their belief or relationship with their religion, whether perceived or real, is considered an affront that must be confronted immediately. Hence, religion has become a tool for conflict, progress and propaganda.[17]

With the place religion has taken in the society, a strategy of inter-religious dialogue is *sine qua non* for finding solutions to the problems bedeviling the human society. Without regard to extremists' perspectives on some religions, all religions seek a good society (put in other word, life) for their respective followers. When inter-religious dialogue is adopted, a better understanding of various religions and the complementary roles they play in the development of

the society and enhancement of human existence will be put in place. This is necessary for the prevention of religious extremism, violence and intolerance, which have often resulted in religious tensions, violent conflicts and killings.[18]

Through inter-religious dialogue, religious leaders will be given additional roles to their primary role of evangelism. They will be able to play mediatory roles in issues of human society and not just that of the religious realm. With that, religious institutions and leaders will play complementary roles to the efforts of government, civil society organizations and traditional institutions as they seek to develop the society and enhance peaceful co-existence.

Evidence-Based Outcome

Essentially, inter-religious dialogue will enable inter-religious relationship. This will bring the various people in the society into a common front for peaceful co-existence.

Inter-religious dialogue has played vital roles in conflict resolution and sustaining peace, even in the north central region of Nigeria. This was the case in the Yelwa-Shendam religious conflict of the early 2000s in Plateau State.[19] In the June, 2018 violent ethno-religious conflict in Riyom, Barkin Ladi and Jos South Local Government Areas,[20] where some victims of armed attack were saved by an Imam, due to the relationship that had existed between him and the people of the community.

Conclusion

In the context of this study, we have employed the use of the word, *Igwebuike*, as a philosophy of harmonization and complementation, because when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful and can constitute an insurmountable force or strength, and at this level, no task (even the complexity of inter-religious dialogue) is beyond their collective capability. Although inter-religious dialogue has empirically played cogent roles in addressing human problems, it has not been given a proper place to flourish as it has not been formerly adopted as a strategic action. The government of the United States, through its Embassies, has been making efforts to encourage the adoption of inter-religious dialogue, with the commemoration of World Religions Day. When inter-religious dialogue is adopted as a strategic action, many problems bedeviling the society can be solved and future ones prevented. Once again, my humble submission in this study is that traditional African values, in relation to *Igwebuike* philosophy, strategic religious action and the

theory of change (collectively speaking) are ***sine qua non*** for prosecuting the problems in question. In addition, it is important to note that inter-religious dialogue is very necessary for social order, human and societal development, and *Igwebuike* philosophy is the right tool to achieve this onerous task.

Endnotes
1. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) specifically focuses on women and youth.
2. *Ibid*
3. In the context of this study, the theory of change can be said to be a paradigm which promotes social change in the society, albeit positive. The theory further explains the processes of change.
4. Kanu, I. A., Igwebuike as the consummate foundation of African bioethical principles. A paper presented at the International Conference on Law, Education and Humanities. 25th -26th November 2015 University of Paris, France, 2015a.
5. Kanu, I. A., Igwebuike as an ontological precondition for African ethics. International Conference of the Society for Research and Academic Excellence. University of Nigeria, Nsukka. 14th -16th September, 2015b.
6. *Ibid*.
7. Bazza, M. B., A special submission made to: *The Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action* (JISRA) as a member of the Nigeria Input Team on 24th July, 2020.
8. *Ibid*.
9. *Ibid*.
10. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), Section 147 (2).
11. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), Section 15 (3b).
12. *Ibid*.
13. This is the author's interpretation of Section 15 (3b) of the 1999 Constitution as amended.
14. Kanu, I. A., Igwebuike as the consummate foundation of African bioethical principles. A paper presented at the International Conference on Law, Education and Humanities. 25th -26th November 2015 University of Paris, France, 2015a.

15. *The Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action* (JISRA) Theory of Change (both Narrative and Visual), 2020.

16. Bazza, M. B., A special submission made to: *The Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action* (JISRA) as a member of the Nigeria Input Team on 24th July, 2020.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. A Research Interview on the Berom-Fulani Ethnic Conflicts, 2001-2018, with H. Salleh, Kurra Falls, Gashish, Plateau State. Salleh expressed how Imam Abubakar saved Christians by hiding them in his house when Muslim Gun men stormed the communities in Gashish District on 23rd June 2018. The report was captured by many Media outlets and the Imam was given an award and subsequently honoured by the United States of America Embassy here in Nigeria in the year 2019.

20. Emmanuel Innocent, "Imam Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye: Bringing Peace to Warring Nigerian Communities". Premium Times, April 9th 2020, Retrieved July 24th, 2020. https://crcc.usc.edu/imam-ashafa-and-pastor-james-wuye-bringing-peace-to-warring-nigerian-communities/

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