IGWEBUIKE: A KEY PRINCIPLE IN AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

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Abstract

The ripples caused by the invasion and partition of African nations by the Europeans many years ago have caused and are still causing havoc to African countries. It has led Africans into bad leadership, migration and human trafficking. The economy of African nations is in constant meltdown . With crisis and political instability, Africa remains undeveloped marginally, when compared to other continents of the world. There have been many advocates of African liberation, each with its own strategy towards the liberation of African nations. We are going to use Igwebuike principles to navigate towards the liberation of African nations. The reflective and theological approach is employed in this research.

Keywords: Igwebuike, African Liberation Theology, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, Philosophy, Principle

Introduction

There are many factors constituting the past and present ugly situation of things found in Africa today. These crises or factors that shaped the situation of African people the way it is today came from internal and external spheres. Hence, we have a lot of challenges that need to be tackled for the development and stability of the African countries. Unfortunately, these crises in Africa touch or spread all through the cultural, religious, political and social aspects of the African people. This accounts for non-development or slow pace of development in almost all the sectors of their lives in different countries of Africa.

It is believed that most of the African countries have gotten their independence, yet they are ruled indirectly by the different strong countries of the world that colonized them initially. This makes Africans to be marginalized in most parts of the world, because they are seen as slaves, undeveloped, and uncultured. Even the colour of their skin (black) segregates them from the white people and makes them third class citizens; hence, today, Africa is regarded as a continent of third world countries.

In the religious sphere, Africans, their God and their worship are regarded as nothing, and they were regarded as incapable of conceiving and worshipping the real Almighty God as the rest of the world. Hence, African traditional religion was called all sorts of names by Europeans and arm-chair researchers. Talbot (1926), Mbiti (1969), Quarcoopome (1987) and Kanu (2015) all affirmed that names like idolatry, fetishism, animism, paganism, primitive were given to African traditional religion, because they fail to understand the culture and language of African people. Achebe (1958) confirms the above:

> Does the white man understand our custom about land, asked Okonkwo, "How can he when he does not even speak our tongue", responded Obierika, and then he continued, but he says our customs are bad, and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. (p. 124)

 This confirms the level of degradation Africans were subjected to, even in terms of religion. This level of degradation or subjugation meted out to them is seen through other aspects of their lives. Sequel to the above , many African scholars, including sociologists and theologians, have offered many ways to alleviate the oppressive or ugly state of African situation. Many have advocated many options through which Africa can be developed and sustained, just like other strong continents of the world.

Igwebuike, as a concept or key, will be used as a tool to seek ways to alleviate the condition of the African people. The cry by the advocates of African liberation theology cannot be complete without the Igwebuike principles. This will help in developing African countries when the principles of *Igwebuike* are fully applied. African continent will find real independence, not pseudo independence, as we are having it today. *Igwebuike*, as concept or principle, is advocated for by an African scholar, Professor Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, just like other advocates of African liberation theology. In this write up, we are going to use the principles of *Igwebuike* to advance further the development, stability and independence of African nations.

African Situation: An Overview

There are fifty four countries in Africa today, according to the United Nations, with other territories which are dependent on stronger countries of the world or being colonized by other countries of the world, territories like Reunion, which is

dependent on or being colonized by France; Mayotte, being colonized by France; Saint Helena, which depended on the United Kingdom and Western Sahara, which is still under dispute. But Wikipedia (2020) listed fifty six sovereign states (fifty four of which are member-states of the United Nations), two non-sovereign (dependent) territories of non-African sovereign states, and nine sub-national regions of non-African sovereign states. The African continent is being surrounded by water from all directions, with clearly defined borders. In the north, it is separated from Europe by the Mediterranean Sea; in the north-east, it is separated from Asia by the Suez Canal and farther by the Red Sea. From the east and southeast, it is surrounded by the Indian Ocean, and from the West by the Atlantic Ocean.

The work of liberating African nations, which is a continent of immense diversity, according to Oborji (2005), is not only on the level of geographical areas, but also includes cultural, sociological, political, religious and economic levels. Though Africa is a diversified whole, its unity can be seen in their tenets of African world view, life principles and unity of spirit. According to Kanu (2015), its unity can be seen in their belief in worship of Supreme Being, just like other people, but with a profound sense of sacredness and mystery. Hence, for Africans, it is difficult to separate their day-to-day activities of life from their personal inclination to the divine. No wonder, Mbiti (1969) argued that:

> Wherever the African is, there is his religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting new crop, he takes it with him to the beer parlour or to attend a funeral ceremony, and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university, if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament. (p. 2)

Paris (1995) also echoed that "the ubiquity of religious consciousness among African people constitutes their single most important common characteristics" (p. 27).

Comparing African continent in terms of development from all sectors of life with other continents of the world, one will feel a great shock, because it is being ravaged internally and externally by many factors. They stretch from social crisis, political crisis, economic crisis, religious crisis, racism, human trafficking which is new form of slavery, and so on. These crises can be traced to have originated

from when the African continent was divided by the strong powers, without the consent of Africans. According to Mbefo (1996):

> It was in Berlin that the master plan and implicit agreement about European intentions in Africa were decided and given active assistance. The result of the conference was that the on-going "scramble for Africa" was organized systematically, according to agreed principles. While it is wrong to claim, as some have done, that Africa was carved out by European powers at this conference, it is right to affirm that it was there the European powers agreed on maintaining colonies in Africa. European powers agreed not to interfere but to respect the "areas of influence" acquired by any given power. It is remarkable that no African was invited to a conference that decided the fate of Africa. (pp. 28-29)

With the invasion by the super powers into Africa, Africa was subjugated, dominated, and the development of Africa was stalled. There are many instances to show that Africans were developed people before even the Europeans came in contact with them. They have their own institutions with their own idea of government. But sadly, Africa has been exploited and dominated over the years by stronger powers. Rodney (2009) showed that using comparative standards, Africa today is underdeveloped in relation to Western Europe and a few other parts of the world, and that the present position has been arrived at, not by separate evolution of Africa, on the one hand, and Europe, on the other, but by exploitation.

In terms of social situation, Africa has continued to deteriorate. This is evidenced by the pressure of urbanization and rural emigration. The decay in educational sector and health infrastructure, growing malnutrition and poverty, the worsening plight of refugees and displaced persons, and wide spread unemployment are signs of decay in African society. Recently the ravage of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) killed many African people. Ebola disease was contained, but many Africans died. As of today, the Corona Virus pandemic (COVID-19) is ravaging the world. Though it is not much in Africa, but it is known that African countries lack the health facilities, quite unlike the other countries of the world, to stop its spread.

Economically, the African situation, according to Drimmelen (cited by Igboamalu, 2003), can be summarized thus:

> Africa as a whole includes 33 of world's 50 poorest countries. The combined Gross National Product (GNP) of the entire continent south of the Sahara is less than that of the Netherlands; the Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world likely to experience an increase in absolute poverty over the next decade. (p. 48)

African counrties are nowhere to be found in the global market economy. The globalization of economy today puts the African countries in the slow lane track. Hence, they remain beggars among the continents of the world. The institutions that are developing economy are not developed, rather they are been looted out, and most African countries keep borrowing for consumption. World economic policies do not favour the African trade. This has contributed enormously to the impoverishment and underdevelopment of Africa. Africa is exploited by their colonizers who take most of their crude oil and agricultural products at a giveaway price only to sell them back to Africa at a high price. Oborji (2005) rightly observed that the present world economy manipulates prices of the raw materials from the African countries and, through the protectionist policies of the industrialized countries, blocks the inflow of manufactured goods from the developing countries. Due to serious crises in African economies, African countries are variously referred to as underdeveloped, developing or less-developed countries. The above reality means that African economy is caged and in bondage, and this is expressed by Adedeji (1984), that the African economy has meaning only to the extent it is allowed to be controlled by the former colonial masters. With this economic system, Africa can never develop fully like other great countries of the world.

Politically, African countries have not found their feet, though they have gotten their independence. Most of the African countries are still being ruled indirectly by strong powers that colonized them. According to Igboamalu (2003), one of the major problems or crises of the African countries and other developing countries, with regard to the issue of global governance, is the tendency of the West and America or the colonizers to impose their socio-cultural and political standards and values, which they want, on the rest of the world. Hence, Africa is always suppressed politically, without these super powers remembering that we have our own ideas of government before their advent. This led to the enthronement of puppet leaders and presidents who would always obey the strong powers that put them put them in office. m. Hence, Achebe (1983) rightly observed that leadership remains the problem of African countries. This

continues to make African countries to be political slaves to most nations in the world. This affirms Oborji(2005) claim that "the newly independent African states were modeled politically and economically on the nations which had colonized them" (p. 34). Again, Dudley (1984) pointed out that the constitution handed over to the new nations was not founded on African cultural environment or atmosphere. By implication, the independence lacked the ingredients of its new nations; this accounts for political instability in most of the African nations. This political instability led to several military coups d' etat in Africa. This well-known military rule in Africa helped in reducing Africa to abject poverty.

Slavery and colonization were great blows to the African continent, judging from all aspects of African lives. This in particular perpetuated poverty in Africa today. African countries gradually became poor with the conquest of African nations. African states were divided at the Berlin conference, for self interest and exploitation. Offiong (2001) asserted that:

> The conference produced the Berlin act, an instrument to which the major European powers were signatories. It had as its aims those of fostering the development of trade and civilization… the moral and material wellbeing of the native populations. This was non-sensical because in all their undertakings, their interests came first and all was designed to enhance the exploitation of the people. (p. 9)

It is well known that the conquest and occupation of the continent of Africa by Europeans spanned four centuries . During these centuries, Africans were dominated, exploited. This led to the formulation of colonial policies and disorganization of the traditional pattern of societal organization in Africa. This makes African countries to be stooges to the stronger countries of the world. These situations above, in a nut shell, show the image of bondage in Africa which has held the African people hostage for centuries. The African continent has been promised liberation (even by our colonizers), through many ways, out of their poverty, political instability and underdevelopment, yet things keep on becoming worse and backward when compared to this age of globalization.

Igwebuike as a Principle of Liberation

With the critical situation of the African continent, which is being ravaged by constant wars because of forceful divisions or partition of African borders by the

world powers, poverty now takes place in a continent known to be full of agricultural raw materials and crude oil. World powers rose to a greater height of industrial growth by impoverishing Africa through slave trade and other exploitations. Mbefo (1996) lamented that as of today, African nations are still undergoing new forms of slavery through our youths going back freely, and on their own, to Europe, because of bad state of the economy and the political instability in Africa. Mbefo called it slavery in reverse gear. With the above situation, many scholars have advocated for many solutions to the African state of crisis. We apply the principles of *Igwebuike* in seeking to control and redirect or restructure the African continent.

According to Kanu (2015), *Igwebuike* is the modality of being, and *being* in Igbo ontology is '*idi*', that is 'to be'. *Igwebuike* is an Igbo word which is a combination of three words. According to him:

> It can be understood as a word and as a sentence: as a word, it is written thus *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written thus, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space [and meaning]. (p. 67)

He went further to explain the three words that make up the word *Igwebuike*. *Igwe* is a noun, which means number or population, usually a large number or population; *Bu* is a verb which means 'is'; *Ike* is a noun, which means strength or power. When these words are put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power.' This, in effect, means when a good number, group or society of human beings come together in solidarity, they are powerful. Again, solidarity combines with complementarity, because everybody needs each other to make a complete whole; it constitutes a powerful group and an insurmountable force. At this level, Kanu asserted that no task is beyond their collective capability. Again, this analysis provides or proves an African ontology that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. Mbiti (1960) also asserted that "man is at the very centre of existence, and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man... it is as if God exists for the sake of man" (p. 92). Metuh (1991) affirmed that "everything else in African worldview seems to get its bearing and significance from the position, meaning and end of man" (p. 109).

The above analysis shows that for man to achieve his aims or objectives in this world, he has to be in relational character with the other people around him. This

will ensure a formidable force. The human person, following the African worldview, is understood in his relation with God and his fellow human beings. Ideologically, Kanu (2015) argued 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 being. Onwubiko (1991) expressed this sense of community rightly with Lozi proverb which says: "Go the way that many people go; if you go alone you will have reason to lament" (p. 13).

Anchoring or explaining *Igwebuike* on the basis of the African world view, Iroegbu (1994) described it as being characterized by a common origin, common worldview, common language, common historical experiences and common destiny. Determining the role of community to the individual or human beings, Mbiti (1969) asserted that "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 108). The sense of community here portrays family-hood or brotherhood, which means collaboration in existence. Achebe (cited by Kanu, 2015) in order to bring out the essential nature of the Igbo African communal relationship, related that:

> 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 kinsmen to scratch him. (p. 68)

The quotation above shows that life is shared in the African worldview which makes life meaningful. So it is in relationship or coming together that each completes a whole. Thus, according to Kanu (2015), every being has a missing part and is at the same time a missing part. Ekwulu (cited by Kanu, 2015) confirmed the above view by saying that "if the other is my part or a piece of me, it means that I need him for me to be complete, for me to be what I really am. The other completes rather than diminishes me" (p. 68).

This rightly explains why Igbo-African worldview would refer to the other as *'ibe'*, which means a piece of or a part of, as in *'ibe ji'* (a piece of yam), or *'ibe ede'* (a piece of cocoyam). Kanu (2015) asserted that the Igbo-African refers to the other person as *'ibe,'* which means 'my piece', or *'mmadu ibe m'* (my fellow human being). This concept is also employed in relation to relationships and reciprocity: love one another *(hunu ibe unu n'anya)*, help one another *(nyere nu ibe*

unu aka), respect one another *(sopuru nu ibe unu)* etc. From the above, we see that *Igwebuike* portrays the African sense of commonality, solidarity, brotherhood, familyhood and complementality as the root of the African world view, thought and the ontological quality of real African, which is needed to liberate the African people from the state of anarchy seen in all aspects of their lives.

Igwebuike as a Tool in African Liberation Theology

The theology of liberation or liberation of Africa has gone through many phases. And it arises out of the concern of African scholars or African theologians to address the people's experience of exploitation, oppression and injustice that are going on through different means. In June 2020, there was a protest in all the states of America because of a black man killed by an officer of the law who is meant to protect life. Though not African, the blacks protested against such oppression and injustice.

African scholars continued to seek solutions to the current situation of exploitation, poverty, oppression and injustice in a continent which for a long time has suffered from subjugation, according to Oborji (2005), in the forms of imperialism: slave trade, colonialism, multinational corporations, the activities of the national bourgeoisie, despotic regimes and racism. Okolo (1994) asserted that the theology of liberation emerged as a response to experiences of negation, grinding poverty caused by greed, exploitation and oppression from world leaders and African leaders. Though this critical reflection by Okolo was in the light of the gospel, it was with the aim of inspiring in African people and their leaders the confidence to stop the horrors of oppression in Africa and to build a more just and human African society.

Liberation has been a major theme or emergent theological thought in Africa, in a bid to liberate Africa from its current state of anarchy. Oborji (2005) linked or related theology of liberation in Africa with inculturation. According to him:

> The aim of inculturation is to facilitate an in-depth evangelization of a particular socio-cultural context or milieu. On the other hand, liberation theology seek, through the gospel, to address the oppressive elements in a traditional culture, and focus on political and economic situation of the particular cultural context so as to liberate people from the forces of sin and death, reinforce their identity, and give a new orientation to their advancement. (p. 154)

This implies that for any liberation to be real or authentic, it must be inculturated, in the sense that the social and cultural milieu of the particular people must be involved. This will make it easy and meaningful. It must not be transported or forced into people, so that their initial world view would be abandoned, rather it would start with their world view. This is exactly the aim of *Igwebuike* as a tool of liberation in Africa. *Igwebuike* liberation constitutes majorly of using African world view, which is based on solidarity and complementarity, to seek freedom for African people in their state of anarchy that is still ongoing in this age of globalization.

There have been many advocates of African liberation through their philosophical and theological critical reflections. Many of the African scholars or advocates of African liberation hammered so much on the poverty of the African nations. Many remarked that it is as if Africans got political independence in order to enjoy poverty. Ezeanya (1992) remarked that today in Africa wherever anyone goes, he sees or notices poverty and suffering starring in the face of African people. Surely, Christ is suffering terribly among the African people. Many African countries have gotten their independence yet under colonial yoke. Going further, Morrow (cited by Oborji, 2005) described African poverty situation thus:

> Africa-Sub Saharan Africa, at least has begun to look like an immense illustration of chaos theory, although some hope is forming at the margins. Much of the continent has turned into a battleground of contending dooms: AIDS and overpopulation, poverty, starvation, illiteracy, corruption, social breakdown, vanishing resources, overcrowded cities, drought, war, and the homelessness of war refugees. Africa has become the basket case of the planet, the "third world of the third world", a vast continent in free fall, a sort of pre-colonial breakdown. (p. 158)

This is the reason why most advocates of African liberation (or African writers) conducted their critical reflection for a better socio-political cultural-cum-religious, and economic order in the nations of Africa. At this time of the Corona Virus pandemic, world leaders in other continents of the world are projecting that it will later spread more in Africa because health facilities are not in place, or are not found in most health centers in African countries. With their prediction, the world powers are evacuating their citizens from African countries back to

their countries. One of the advocates, Uzukwu (1996) traced the poverty of African nations to dependency status of African nations, seeing it as the major cause of poverty in the continent. This is because dependency is a system problem which is destroying the African nations from inside and makes the African countries to be beggar countries, and a beggar has no respect. Hence, Uzukwu advocated for an end to foreign aid to Africa. In its stead, Africa needs committed leadership at all levels of government who are not influenced by the world powers.

Igwebuike, as a tool for African liberation, hinges on the solidarity and complementarity of African people based on African world view, which is quite different from other principles of African liberation theology or black liberation theology. Cone and Wilmore (1979) described Black theology or Black liberation theology thus:

> Black theology is that theology which arises out of the need to articulate the religious significance of black presence in a hostile white world. It is black people reflecting on Black experience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, attempting to redefine the relevance of the Christian gospel for their lives…-Black subjugation under white oppression. (p. 468)

Here, liberation from white oppression is based on the Christian world view as a basis which is different from *Igwebuike* as a tool for liberation, which is based on purely African world view. Theology of black liberation was seen again, as we have noted before, with the protest of all Blacks in America recently in June 2020, when a police man killed a black man for no reason. Again Cone and Wilmore (1979) described African liberation theology as a theology which is based on the biblical faith and speaks to the African soul:

> To speak of African theology involves formulating clearly a Christian attitude to other religions. It must be pointed out that the emphasis is on Christian theology, which could be expressed through African thinking and culture. (p. 473)

Mbiti (1979) also echoed the same when he described Black theology as emerging from the pains of oppression of the Negro's experience in America in the social, economic, political, cultural and educational spheres of their lives, while African

liberation theology grew out of joy in the experience of the Christian faith preached to Africans.

All we are trying to establish above is that it is *Igwebuike* as a tool that would touch fundamentally the African world view which needed liberation, than implanting another world view on the African soil, and then using it for liberation. The complementary role of *Igwebuike* from its point of ideology will be used in solving the problems of African continent and advancing the quality of life in Africa (Kanu 2018). From the analysis done before, the ideology of complementarity in the African world view reaches to individual basis, ontological basis and social basis. The embracing of these entire bases will give a whole solution in which all the units when put together will give a formidable and dynamic force to achieve freedom and development. In Africa today, what is needed is a formidable and dynamic force in pursuing a goal, like wiping away hunger or poverty in Africa. When the efforts of our governments or leaders are combined as a unit whole with that of the masses, great achievements will be made in the economic and political lives of the Africans. This automatically will ensure security and the employment of our youths. The communal life which is already in the African world view will help in great advancement of the African continent for which *Igwebuike,* as a tool for liberation, is seriously advocating. This is also echoed by Asiegbu (2010), in expressing the African world view as a fundamental constituent for an authentic dimension of thoroughgoing complementarism.

The collective efforts seen in the *Igwebuike* ideology relates again to the social dimension of action in any African society. Here, the role of sharing life in a community makes life meaningful (Kanu 2016). When conceived in terms of complementarity, a community life is full of relation and relationships. This brings in vividly teamwork which is against the choice of isolation. Teamwork or team spirit is going on in the African continent to see how the Corona Virus pandemic can be contained, which is against the choice of the world powers, each are trying to work out something to be the first country to contain the pandemic.

Igwebuike again advocates complementary attitudinal change of all Africans. Africans from unit to the whole should liberate their psyche and undergo a total transformation that starts from the African world view than from other world views. This type of re-education ensures an authentic new understanding

towards life as an independent being, not as a dependent being (Kanu 2017). This again is in line with Asouzu's (2004) line of thought that the liberation of African nations constitutes a complementary attitudinal change of psyche which comprises their whole being, attitude and vision.

The *Igwebuike* ideology consists also of solidarity that, in the words of Nnoruka (2009), means people coming together. In Igbo expression*: Ayili n'igwe n'aga egwu a naghi atu* (when people are marching together, there is no fear). People coming together stand for a reasonable number of people who have come together to achieve a common purpose, a common objective. No one loses his identity in a group. The solidarity of the African Union (AU) needs to be revamped. African solidarity is needed continually to fight insecurity and wars prevalent in African nations. With this solidarity, African countries will engage in more introverted economies which have some built-in protectionism and some trade barriers argued (Offiong, 2001).

Religiously, Africa has, to some extent, achieved religion indigenous to Africa, seen in the emergence of African Independence Churches (A. I. C.). According to Ndiokwere (2019):

> As African saw it, it was not only the Europeans who had the divine mandate to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19). Discipleship was the universal vocation of every Christian, but Africans are not stopping at founding churches and religious movements… African prophets and self-acclaimed religious leaders found and run "churches" of their grass root tastes. (pp. 9-10)

The above originated after the partition of Africa by the colonial Masters of Europe, in which Christian missionary organizations followed the flags of their respective nations to the shores of African nations. This supports the view that *Igwebuike* as an ideology has a common origin, common shared culture, common historical experience and common destiny. Today many African people are introducing new religious movements which bear features of the African traditional religion. This is possible because the common historical experience and cultures shared by Africans necessitate this. This necessitates also the common trend today about the need for dialogue between the African traditional religion and Christianity. From the dialogue so far, the question of how to merge the two religions (African traditional religion and Christianity) become a problem. Many theologians and African scholars have proposed inculturation,

adaptation, hybridization, indigenization, translation and contextualization. Muonwe (2014) argued that before the emergence of inculturation, a plethora of terms, as we see above, had been employed over the years in an attempt to fashion out the best model or approach to be adopted in relating the Christian faith with the African traditional religion or culture. As a tool for liberation in Africa, *Igwebuike* is firmly grounded in the African sense of solidarity and complementarity and on the ontological quality of the African.

Conclusion

The principle of *Igwebuike*, when understood and properly applied towards the critical situation of Africa, will go a long way in helping African nations to salvage themselves from all crises. Its ideology is all embracing; hence, it is oriented towards the coming together of all people of Africa. This will start from African leaders looking inwards than outside for the solution to the critical situation of the African continent. Though there are internal and external factors constituting the deplorable state of African nations, it is true that many scholars have advocated for solutions *Igwebuike*, as a key, ushers in a new ideology and combines with all other possible solutions for the liberation of African people. The *Igwebuike* ideology comes from African world views; hence, it can trace and deal properly with the problems of Africans themselves.

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