

# OGBA RELIGION, POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES: AN INCLUSIVISTS APPROACH

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## Abstract

*In Ogba culture, the demarcation between religious and political life is so thin that only a careful observer can separate the two. The same applies to social and economic. Among the Ogba, cultural life is so intertwined, that where one may think he is merely engaging in a political activity, he would not know when such becomes religious. This paper identifies some political activities which leans heavily on religious under pinnars. The paper explores to what extent politics and religion in Ogba derive strength from each. It examines the possibility of separating religion from politics and how each can operate without the other. The research examines the role of religion and politics in national development and various ingredients which religion and politics in Ogbaland lends to politics which fosters national development. The purpose of the paper is to consider the integrative role of religion in the political space of the country and how this has engendered development. The study adopts the institutional analysis model in the discussion. It concludes that religion contributes immensely in the strengthening the political institutions in any society vis a vis Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Ogba, Politics, Religion, Democracy, Inclusiveness

## Introduction

Ogba is one of the ethnic groups of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. It is a minority ethnic nationality among the minority ethnic groups of southern Nigeria. However, nature invariably placed Ogbaland in world map as a leading oil and gas producing ethnic nationality in the country. Ogba hosts two major oil and gas exploration and production companies TOTALE & P. (Nig.) Ltd. And Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC). Ogba is situated in the Orashiforest region of Niger Delta, Nigeria. It is one of the amalgamating units of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local Government area of Rivers state. According to Ohia (2017:2) At the northern end is Egbema clan which has two parts: one comprising four major towns of Okwuizi, Mgbede, Aggah and Ebocha with several farm settlements in Rivers state and another with the majority of towns and villages in Imo state. In the North-west is Ndoni while in the South is Ekpeye. Ogba is a typical African society with a rich religious heritage imbedded in their culture. Ogba religion presents an Inclusivists world view. Here, the demarcation between Religious and political is so thin that only a careful observer can separate the two. The same applies to social and economic. This integrative approach to life and living is underpinned by the belief that the community is greater than any individual. This is expressed in a proverb that 'the community can finish the cook from one individual but no one individual can finish the leal served by the community (Idu, 1978:7).

Without mincing words, Communalism or collective engagements dominates Ogba cultural life. This is referred to in Ogba as 'Ibu-Wani' in Egi, or 'Ibu-Nhuna' in Igburu-usomini. What this principle entails is that unity of purpose or action serves the people better.

The above supposition explains the practice that In Ogba culture, tangible and intangible properties are held as commonestate. For instance, land and landed property are held as common estate. Similarly, opinions and decisions on public matters are often expressed as collective decision.

Among the Ogba, Politics and religion are people oriented. All the child birth rituals are intended to announce his arrival as a member of the society. The transition rituals usher him into a higher lather. Marriage confers adulthood status on him and death ensures he transits to the great beyond. When the community members gather, they deliberate on matters of importance to their wellbeing as social phenomena, the function using some social principles such as freedom of speech, right to one's opinion, freedom to participate and the understanding that no one knows it all. Emmanuel Kant defines religion as the recognition of all duties as divine command. Politics on the other hand is defined by political scholars in various ways. For instance, Aristotle (1958) as quoted by Sabine and Thorson (1973:95-110) holds that the activities of politics and ruling are not equivalent. While ruling typically involves the hierarchical relation of domination and subordination, politics was possibly on as a relation among equals. In contrast to endeavours related to subsistence, production and reproduction that occurred in a sphere governed by necessity. Politics existed only in the realms of freedom. Lindblom (1958:1) sees politics as a process of bargaining, negotiating conciliation and compromise through which an individual seeks markedly different objectives and arrive at a decision with which all are parties to.

This paper identifies some political activities which leans heavily on religious under pinnars. The paper explores to what extent politics and religion in Ogba derive strength from each. It examines the possibility of separating religion from politics and how each can operate without the other. The research examines the role of religion and politics in national development and various ingredients which religion and politics in Ogbaland lends to politics which fosters national development. The purpose of the paper is to consider the integrative role of religion in the political space of the country and how this has engendered development. The study adopts the institutional analysis model in the discussion. It concludes that religion contributes immensely in the strengthening the political institutions in any society vis a vis Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Overview**

Aristotle's theory of democracy forms the lens of this study. According to Aristotle, the constituents of democracy differs based on their structure and style, or what he termed Political constitution. The above assertion is premised on the inclusiveness of the concept. Another contending argument about democracy follows in the use or fail to use the property qualification of in approach. In all democratic dispensation which involves voting or in the assembly or holding offices or the qualification, may be lower or higher. Similarly, it may apply to some offices and not to others. Viewed from another perspective, a democracy may not only impose qualifications but may pay its citizens as it happens in Athens, where the

Juries were remunerated for their service, or rewarding the disadvantaged for participating in community meetings.

In another respect, Aristotle posits that the economic activities prevalent in any culture, may most likely influence their style of democracy, he gives an instance that a farmer or farming community may impose no qualification yet, the management of affairs may be left in the hands of the gentry (Sabine and Thorson, 1973:109-110).

### **Fundamentals Of Ogba Religion**

Ogba religion predisposes the belief in a Supreme being amidst the Ogbapantheon (Ohia, 2018:2). This titular deity is symbolised by Ali (earth goddess). At the earliest times, this was conceived to be andro-genius, having both male and female attributes within itself.

Ogba like other Africans, have a dualistic view of the cosmos, heaven and earth, visible and invisible, temporal and spiritual, good and bad, male and female as well as mortality and immortality. (Obodoegbulam, 2019:30).

The above suggests that Ogba religion recognises the principle of binary opposite which governs the universe. This opposite ensures that there is regeneration in Ogba world in particular and the universe in general. It is this regeneration that sustains continuity.

Ogba religion rests on the understanding that man dangles between the binary opposites. There is the belief that their activity in this visible tangible world, serves as prelude to what happens to the individual in the great beyond. Among the Ogba, an individual is usually responsible for his actions.

Every action in Ogba good or bad, whether it is a bountiful harvest or crop yield or prolific production of animals, increases or decrease in the number of children or individual households, life span or longevity of individuals, Natural phenomena like droughts, flood, or epidemic do not just happen (Obodoegbulam (2019:30)). The people have a general notion about the Supreme being but never agrees concerning his nature or attributes. Ellah (1995:3) writes that Ogba's have a notion about supreme being but they also recognise the existence of subordinate deities. He goes on to quote Talboth who writes that "throughout the countries of eastern Nigeria, they recognise the Supreme being but they pay more attention to the subordinate deities." some of these numerous deities are Ali, Ihiegroku, Ordu, Erishi mini, Ahua, Mmorjor, Ndekran, Ikega, Odigiri, Egbo. (Obodoegbulam 2019:32).

Ogba religion is anthropocentric. This implies that man is at the centre of whatever religious observance as he interacts with supernatural. This position is epitomised in the ritual text below:

1. *Ori Ebluuka-bukaenyeozorma'enyee-ozoranwu-ba; NkwonwuyeIgburu-eze; odi-ijeahia, onwehashi; olor-alorhashijuavor. Ye di yaetezhigii.*

(*Ori Eblu!* Who intercedes for other people; *Nkwo* the wife of *Igburu-eze*; one who goes to the market with empty hands but comes back with a basket full of presence. We are in your shrine).

2. *NwaOrduEleba, IzeogunwaAsammru,.OkukunwaUreahnwa Ogbuehi, Okarike, Ordu, Nwokoma.*

(*OrduEleba*, Izeogu son of Asammru, Okuku son of Urear son of Ogbuehi, Okarike, Ordu and Nwokoma).

3. *NwaOrdukuenyewe-unama, Egbonwaorduku, Ezikerenwaojinwa Anya, Ellahnwaosa, nwaIgwwe, Umahnwaordu Ahu, Aji-Ordu, enhi nwa Ewhedi "ornuadebenkpe, kaka maye, jijimaye". Nkpedididebekaduganwawokun, kabuarioyediyaorio.*

(*Oduku* the advocate), *Egbo* son of *Oduku*, *Ezikere* son of *Anyaa*, *Ellah* son of *Igwe*. *Umah* son of *Ordu*, son of *Ahu*. *Aji-Ordu*, *Enhason* of *Ewhedi*. This is your inheritance. May it last long in our hands).

4. *Oresenwa obi, Anama-mgbuAkurike, Nwerruru, Eraobe, Ornubia! Ogbele, Onariwe, Ebrika-ohaornubia! OwhokuUmuakpa, AkorhiaEzziErishi-ngu, ornubia! Mkpukpa, Onyiuku, ornubia! Ozuka-teyatawn, bunkwokaIgburu-eze ye kusaornubia.*

(*Orese Obi*, *AnamaAkurike*, *Nwerruru*, *Eraobe*, you are invited. *Ogbele*, *OnariweEbrika-ouha*, deities you are invited. *Owho-ukuumu-akpa*, *Akorhia Ezzi*, *Erishi-ngu* deities, you are expected. Today is *Igburu-eze* worship day. You are all expected to come).

5. *UzaklagukaAkabuka, Oriokpa, Ogloglo, ornubia! TawnbunkwokaIgburue z e e ; U t u nde'yemraenuayandemmuammraenhua, ornubia. Akran, Udelaornubia. Osa utu ndewor'yaIgburu-ezemekatagahien, ornubia! Uwho-OblekaObagi, AvraObigbor, Ntiteornubia, OdoomkaObugbor, UkputokaIdu, Oziminibuegbho (ori-umuoma), Utu-okpor, ornubia.*

(*Uzaklagu* of *Akabuka*, *Oriokpa*, *Ogloglo* deities, you are invited. Today is for *Igburu-eze*. Other deities not mentioned, you are as well expected. *Akran*, *Udela*, I bid you come. Other deities who act together with *Igburu-eze*, you are also expected to come. *Uwho-Oble* of *Obagi*, *Avra* of *Obi-gbor*, *Ntite*, you are welcomed *Odoom* of *Obigbor*, *Ukputoof* *Idu*, *Ozimini*, *Utu-okpo*, all of you are invited. All the play grounds (big and small) are equally invited to this gathering. This is *Igburu-eze* day).

6. *Enye je uzor, kaorlorya udo, ekelekaezebuganwen' nor. Agbaliulor, agbaliornu. Enye je ijenkaorlorya udo. Kaka maye, jijimaye. Mea kaekaoblawordi, korbuwor nwa - e z e . Njordiyaihinkawordiyaeakazu; odiyaaazu, kawordiyaih.*

(May farmers and other travellers come back safely. Greetings for a king is always four times. It is only those who work hard that feeds fine. May our sons outside come back safely. May they be princes wherever they are. May danger not see our parts).

(We pray for a vibrant youth. May we be blessed with children. We ask for a population like that in the market but may we not dispass like people in the market. Bless us with wealth; wealth is might).

7. *Hein chorbuenukukirikiri. Mekaormufiyaniwor ye nwa. Nwa-wokoyanwa-anwuya. Me ka imogbazuu sa ahia; ma orlaye sa ahia. Wuyani ye ego; ego buhoma.*

(Our prayers for protection does not extend to thieves and sorcerers. May they not return from their journeys. May all innocent citizens return safely).

8 *Yechormadu, ma okorbueneoshi ma obuenyengbashi. Enyee ka di yaoshiyangbashi, ojeuzor, olor-yeh. Om'maenyeekadi'gbai, onwushiye-yauzorije. Olorru-olor.*

(Our relationship is like the white chalk or the calm wood; it is visible everywhere. May this relationship continue with us as was the case with our fore-fathers. We pray for the life of Ogba as a whole).

9 *Ijekaye'yiibuuroryauhie. Odiyesaede. Kayeyiibuodonn; kayeyiibuuhie, ohire-ahire. Odu-odiniiyandeibuzor, ka'odini-yeyii. Ndukaogbayaikpo.*

(Bless our compound to be crowded like the market. May it not end like the market. *Ebor okute, Ebor Odoon*; we pray for the life of Oboburu as a whole. We pray for all. Those who pray for our downfall, should be the first to fall. *Nkwo*, the wife of *Igburu-eze*, you go to the market with empty hands but return with a basket filled with goods. May peace be with us).

10 *Mekaeteziku sa ahia, ma orlaye sa ahia. Kaenukukirikirifiya. Ebor okute; eborodoon. NdukaOboburuyaikpo. Nde ye gornindumaworagorni ye onwu, oweriworonwu. NkwonwuyeIgburu-eze; oje-ahia owe hashi; allaorlor, hashijuavoka udo dinienyehin, dinienye azu.*<sup>22</sup>

**(Prayer from Mark Ordu-Eleba, adapted from (Obodoegbulam, 2019:108).**

### **Ogba socio-political structure:**

At the socio-political level, Ogba culture recognises the household as the smallest unit of association. Next in this hierarchy is the compound family (Imogba), the minor lineage (Onu-Ukpu), the major lineage (Onu-umga) and the kindred (Obdo) and the community, (Oha). In this regard, child birth signifies continuity while Oha stands for existence. Each of these, wields a sphere of religious, economic, social and political authority.

In Ogba culture, Political sovereignty resides with the community (Oha). Every community in Ogba exercises a degree of sovereignty. This implies that no community in Ogba is administered by another, irrespective of size, population, geographical location(Obodoegbulam, in Ohia and Onyedibia 2003:1).

Religious specialists occupy important position in Ogbaculture. This class of persons perform both political and religious function. Priests, compound heads, lineage heads, kindred and community heads in Ogba play both religious and political roles.

### **Politics And Democratic Principles**

Political interactions and the desire to deliver democratic dividends to Ogba People lean

heavily on religious precepts. First, that there is a supreme authority who authorises all actions before such can go ahead. That such action must be in the interest of the generality of the people. That in every action, the wellbeing of the community must not be compromised. Whoever that is presiding on behalf of the people, is a representative of the supernatural. That there is demarcation of acceptable behaviours. That the interest of one person is less than that of the society. That life (especially that of a freeborn) is sacrosanct. That the ancestors' police the society. That decisions must be collective to be binding, that the ritual staff when called into action legitimises decisions and that all binding decisions must be taken either at the residence of the home of the various unit heads or at the community square for such to be binding. That individuals or groups are free to express their opinions, pursue their rights and given fair hearing.

Owing to the republican nature of Ogba society, the community square serves as the hallowed chamber. This community square is usually an open space sometimes at the centre of the community. The fact is that; this is the venue where matters that require legislation are tabled. Here, the presiding officer is usually the community head. Newington (1930/31:19) puts it thus: "the real judges were the elders of the villages".

In another respect, the community square also serves as the Supreme court, with the highest judicial authority. At the community square, issues no matter their intensity is dispensed. Like the modern supreme court, cases considered not to have been properly handled, are referred back for a closer scrutiny. For instance, if a complainant comes to the entire community assembly to report an unfair hearing, the matter may be referred back to the particular body who handled it, for a second consideration, believing that they will correct their error.

Throughout Ogba, the community square of each community is the centre of development. There is the belief that no single building can accommodate the entire community assembly. Perhaps this informs the gathering at the community arena which is considered spacious enough to take each and every one.

Decisions to retire any age grade from community service is usually taken at the community meeting. This also applies to promoting younger age grade to participate in such service. No individual takes such decisions alone, no matter who, or how powerful. In fact, no individual in Ogba is so strong to override his community. Where any attempts, members of his age grade will check mate him.

In fact, the age grade is an important organ of community administration. In Ogba, community service is administered on age grade strata. The different age grades serve as the enforcement arms of each community administration. Apart from supervising community services, they apprehend any individual or group that violates the rules of acceptable behaviour as prescribed by society.

Other bodies that enforce community decisions include 'Ukufrima' and 'UkuOdugudu'. These according to Standfield (1935:48-61) unlike the age grades, are secret societies. Their part in enforcing community decisions are stricter and more decisive. In most instances, those

who fall into their hands pay the supreme price. Those are mostly sorcerers and witches. Since their activities is to kill, when convicted, they too, face the death penalty.

Public administration in Ogba is segmented into layers of authority. The highest decision-making body in Ogba is the council of elders 'Amala'. This is made up of all kindred heads and very senior elders from about the age of seventy-five and above. Their function is usually to put a seal on the decision reached by the community. Once they affirm any decision, only the super natural can reverse it. (Newington 1930/31:20) writes that the Amala meet at the residence of the eldest male in the community, anytime the need arises.

Next are those between the ages of forty and seventy-four. 'Egbeetiti' This group is the strength of the community. They offer the various services needed in the community, including environmental services, and developmental projects. Then the third group is the youth from the age of eighteen to forty. These group clean the community square and the entry route to the community.

Ogba religion has a strong bearing on the political sphere of the Ogba people. (Obowo 1972:87, Oji, 1986:27). At birth, male children are inaugurated as potential heads of their respective units (Obodoegbulam 2019:179) as soon as a male child is born, his father performs a ritual of registering his name in the family tree of the lineage. As the boy matures, he has that belief that the family responsibility will at a point in life, rest on his shoulders. Unfortunately, this is not the case with the girls. Female children are celebrated when they are ready for marriage. Thus, those of them who are not married are not considered.

Every male child in Ogba is a potential priest. (Idu, 1978:8) holds that priests in Ogba perform both religious and political function. This function is most prominent where a kindred head is to introduce a nominee to represent particular kindred at the community level. Here, the kindred head will hold the hand of such a nominee and symbolically raise the hand up as affirming such nomination. Where this happens, no individual can overrule him.

In Ogba culture where there is any issue which demands representation, these nominees will stand in for their respective kindred's and their decision will be binding on all. Whatever is their decision, will be taken back to their respective kin-groups as a way of feedback. This system ensures free flow of interaction between the representatives and their various units. Coronation of natural rulers is another area where religion exacts a reasonable influence on the political system of Ogba people. Every coronation in Ogba takes place at the community square. This is also the abode of the community deity. In Omoku, this is usually at Ahiaorie. In Oboburu, it is at AnamaIsiabueze. Coronation at Erema takes place at Anama Oji while at Akabuka, it is at AnamaMgbu-oriokpa. Any coronation at the residence of any private residence of any individual is usually null and void and cannot be binding on the public.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the significant influence of Ogba on politics and democratic principles in Ogba, the research wishes to recommend as follows.

1. Women should be allowed a greater access to politics in Ogba culture.

2. The secret societies should not be part of law enforcement.
3. The council of elders in each community should incorporate some young minds in their council to add value in their deliberation.
4. A standing committee of averaged aged men should be elected on a permanent basis to attend to matters of importance unbehalf of the community which can be ratified by the general assembly.
5. Every community should develop a written by-law to guide their administration rather than depend on oral tradition as precedence for actions.

### Conclusion

Ogba religion without doubt is a cultural phenomenon. The social is not distinct from the religious. To engage in a socio-political cum economic exercise, a devotee is by and large showcasing his religious and vice versa. All cultural institutions in Ogba whether it is social, economic or political draw their strength from religion. Here, religion help to legitimate such activity. On this premise, to divest the supernatural from such observance, makes such worthless, null and void and therefore, of no social significance. The requirement that all matters of public interest must be discussed at the community arena is a validation of any decision arrived at such meeting. To do otherwise renders such decision null and void and of no effect. Where a matter of public interest is not addressed at the community square, individuals and groups can disobey such decision or contest its outcome.

In the final analysis therefore, Ogba religion operates in tandem with democratic principles. What belongs to the public must be shared by all. No individual can rise above the community and no community in Ogba irrespective of size and population is under the subjugation of another. And no deity is under another.

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