SOURCES OF IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY: TOWARDS A SOCIO-CULTURAL FOUNDATION

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Abstract

Igwebuike is at the heart of African philosophy, and in fact, the inner or underlying principle of African philosophy. It is the manner of being in African ontology. Its nearest equivalents in English include complementarity, harmony, communality, etc., however, the preferred concept is complementarity. This paper responds to the question of the sources of Igwebuike philosophy, that is, the raw materials from which Igwebuike philosophy is gotten. Being an African philosophy, there would be no better place to look for its sources except from the African socio-cultural background. It discovered that the sources of Igwebuike philosophy include the works of professional African philosophers, African proverbs, African folktales, African myths, African symbols, African songs, African names. This piece, therefore, studied these sources to see how much they uniquely contribute towards the development of Igwebuike philosophy. In the course of this research, the phenomenological and hermeneutical methods of inquiry were employed. The paper submits that Igwebuike philosophy is based on the Igbo socio-cultural foundation.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Philosophy, African, Socio-Cultural, Foundation.

Introduction

Igwebuike philosophy is based on the Igbo-African worldview of complementarity, that is, the manner of being in African ontology. It is a worldview in which individuating differences must work towards a corporate existence where the 'I' does not stand as the 'I'

this kind, difference does not divide neither does it constitute a threat, but rather unites and gives hope that future existence would have meaning. In a cosmogony of this kind, while the ontology of the person is founded on the particularity of the individual, implying that it is the metaphysics of the particular that founds identity, it is the community that gives meaning to such an existence and grounds such an identity.

This notwithstanding, the basic question looming at the horizon of this paper is: "What are the sources of Igwebuike Philosophy?" It focuses on the raw materials from which Igwebuike philosophy is gotten. A cursory glance at the African socio-cultural background reveals that the sources of Igwebuike philosophy include the works of professional African philosophers, African proverbs, African folk tales, African myths, African symbols, African names and African songs.
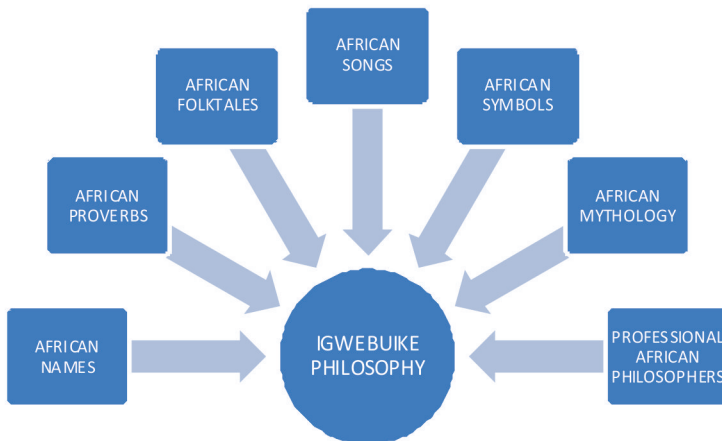
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This piece would, therefore, study these sources of Igwebuike philosophy to see how much they uniquely contribute towards the development of philosophy. However, since some of these sources concern culture, it would be appropriate to do a study first on the relationship between philosophy and culture. This would help explain how they transit from culture, non-philosophy to philosophy.

African Philosophy and African Culture

Africans like other people in the world, are shaped by their culture and they contribute in the shaping and transmission of this culture. The African,s therefore, is a *homo culturalis.* By African culture, it is meant those things which go to the refining and developing of the African's diverse mental and psychological endowments (Gaudium et Spes, 1965). The African culture would consist of the patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired by the African and transmitted by symbols. It includes the embodiments in African artifacts, the historically derived and selected traditional ideas and values. It is a way of life that is particularly African. The word culture is so rich and all encompassing that both sociologists and anthropologists have defined it in multifarious ways. Adamson (1972) describes cultures as the integral system of learned behavior patterns which are the characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance. In other words, culture does not come from human genes, but rather it is learnt and taught. This bears with the etymology of the word culture as *colere,* which means "to cultivate" or "to practice". It was first employed by

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Samuel Von Pufendorf in contradistinction to nature; while nature existed of its own and is innate, culture is that which man of his own freewill and competence has created. The human person is, therefore, the author and architect of culture. He does not participate passively in the shaping and transmitting of culture, it is an active participation (Kanu 2010).

The major concern here is the relationship between African philosophy and culture as it concerns Igwebuike philosophy. This is very significant as Igwebuike is the underlining principle of African philosophy, which is based on the African worldview. A very important part of our African culture include: proverbs, folktales, myths, rites, songs, ceremonies, festivals, symbols, etc. While these are part of our African culture they do not qualify to be referred to as African philosophy simply because they belong to a world that was taken for granted, a world of dogmatism and conservatism. They have rarely received the light of reason and thus, their inner meanings or philosophical underpinnings are yet to be interpreted or grasped. However, although they are not philosophies, they qualify as spring boards from which philosophy can emerge, through a hermeneutical interpretation of these cultural elements can bring about the emergence of African philosophy. It is within this understanding, that this work studies African names, African proverbs, folktales, songs, myths, symbols as sources of Igwebuike philosophy; not as philosophy in themselves, but as sources of Igwebuike philosophy.

1. African Names

Names among the African people is not just an identification tag for differentiating 'A' from 'B' but carries with it meanings that are rich and profound. There are times when such names are monumental, in the sense that they tell a history of an event that has occurred. For instance, the Igbo name *Onwudinjo* which means "death is bad" is usually given to a child to tell the story of, may be, the death of the mother at the birth of the child or the death of an important relation at the time of the birth of the child. There are times when such names are prophetic, like *Ogadinma,* which means, "it would be good", could be given to a child to speak of the anticipation of a bright future. This notwithstanding, the basic concern here is to see how African names are a source of Igwebuike philosophy. Igwebuike being a complementary philosophy that echoes the spirit of harmony and community, the concern is to see how African names echo this philosophy of complementarity. In this study, three categories of names would be studied from the Igbo perspective: the names given to human beings, titles given to people, which qualify as names, and the names given to God.

a. Names for Human Beings

The list below encompasses names given to human beings at birth. These fifteen names are only a few among others.

NO	NAMES	MEANINGS [1]
1	**Obinwanne**	The heart of a brother
2	**Ekwutosinammadibegi**	Don't condemn your neigbour

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NO	NAMES	MEANINGS
3	**Ifunanya**	Love
4	**Kesandu**	Increase and multiply
5	**Chinuanumogu**	May God fight my battle
6	**Somadina**	May I never be alone
7	**Lotanna**	Remember the father
8	**Adaeze**	Daughter of a king
9	**Nnamdi**	My father lives
10	**Obiageli**	A visitor must partake in its goodness
11	**Adaobi**	Daughter of the Obi
12	**Adaora**	Daughter of the people
13	**Nneka**	Mother is great
14	**Nnedinma**	Mother is good
15	**Nneoma**	Good mother

TABLE 1

a. Titles Given to Human beings

These names are titles given to people who have achieved some heights in the society. It is given in commemoration or to express what the title holder is capable of. These fifteen titles are only a few among others.

NO	NAMES	MEANINGS
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 the less privileged
4	**Ada oha**	The community's famous daughter
5	**Nneoha**	The community's mother of substance
6	**Aka ji mba**	The people's livewire
7	**Udo ka mma**	Peace is supreme

NO	NAMES	MEANINGS
8	Ome Udo	The peacemaker
9	Okwaruzo	The road maker
10	Omeru ora	One who does good things for people
11	Ebube Dike	Glorious Hero for the community
12	Ikemba	The power (strength) of a nation (place)
13	Uba zuo oke	A wealthy person who is philanthropic
14	Ochi agha	War leader
15	Omego	A wealthy person who is philanthropic

TABLE 2

a. African Names for God

These are the names that the Igbo give to God based on what He has done for him or her or on the basis of what is expected from God. These fifteen names are only a few among others,

NO	NAMES	MEANINGS
1	Onwa na etiri ora	The moon that shines for all
2	Okosisi na eche ndu	The mighty tree that gives protection
3	Echeta obi esike	The giver of confidence
4	Agbataobi nwa ogbenye	The friend of the poor
5	Agbataobi onye ajuru aju	The friend of the rejected
6	Olilianya nde ogbenye	The hope of the poor
7	Udunmiri na okochi	Raining season during dry season
8	Obata obie	It ends whenever he comes

9	Onye na aza ekpere	He that answers prayer
10	Onye nzoputa	The savior
11	Chukwu na'kpu nwa	The God that moulds children
12	Okwere nkwa meya	He that fulfills his promise
13	Ochiri ozuo	Helper
14	Odi mma na eme mma	He that is good that shows goodness
15	Dike nji eje ogu	The warrior with whom I go for battle

TABLE 3

The names listed in the three tables are names that relate the individual to the other or others, signifying what an individual accomplishes or can accomplish in the life of the other. These names indicate that life is a relationship.

2. African Proverbs

Proverbs occupy a very important place in Africa's economy of communication. They have been described variously, by the Igbo as vegetables for eating speech; the palm oil with which words are eaten; it is so important that the Zulu of South Africa would say that without proverbs, language would be but a skeleton without flesh, a body without a soul. The Yoruba of Western Nigeria would say that proverbs are horses for chasing missing words (Kanu 2013a). It carries within it, 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 belief, principles of life and conduct. It also expresses the moral attitudes of a given culture, and reflects the hopes, achievements and failings of a people (Kanu 2015a). Thus, Mbiti (1970) avers that "It is in proverbs that we find

the remains of the oldest forms of African religious and philosophical wisdom" (p. 86). The major concern for reflecting on African proverbs is to see how it is the source of Igwebuike philosophy, that is, how it reveals the elements of complementarity and community.

1. **Aka nri kwo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwo aka nri:** If the right hand washes the left hand, the left ahnd would wash the right hand

2. **A nyuko mamiri onu ogba ofufu:** If people urinate in the same spot it foams

3. **Ngwere gharu ukwu osisi aka akparu ya:** When a lizard goes far from the tree, it would be caught

4. **Ugo beru egbe eberu:** Let the kite peck and let the eagle peck

5. **Gidi gidi bu ugwu eze:** Unity is strength

6. **Onye ayana nwanne ya:** No one should leave his brother behind

7. **Otu onye tuo izu, o gbue ochu:** Knowledge is never complete: two heads are better than one

8. **Ihere adịghị eme onye ara ka ọ na-eme ụmụ-nna ya:** Relations are concerned most with a person's behaviour.

9. **Otu nkpụrụ aka rụta mmanụ o zue ọha ọnụ:** No one is an Island

10. **Ehi enweghi odu, chi ya na churu ya ijiji:** A cow

without tail, its god chases flies away for it.

11. **Eze mbe si na olu oha di mma:** The tortoise said that many hands at work is enjoyable

12. *Onye bi n'ulo ugegbe anaghi atu okwute:* He who lives in a glass house doesn't throw stone

13. *Ezigbo oyi kariri ezi nwanne:* A good friend is better than a brother/sister

14. *Onye ndi iro gbara gburugburu n'eche ndu ya nche mgbe nile:* He who is surrounded by enemies, guards his life always

15. **ọha na azụ nwa:** childrearing is an affair of the community

These Igbo proverbs express the Igbo philosophy of complementary and the part which the other plays in the life of the other for the realization of the self. Thus, from them, one gets the echo of Igwebuike philosophy.

3. African Folktales

Africans are parable and story telling people, (Zani 1972) and their stories according to Rattray (1930) mirror more or less accurately the African idea life, conduct and morals. Apart from the African system of education which is tied to roles such as farming, hunting, firewood gathering 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 farms or the stream, in the village square or at moonlight nights. These traditional tales were preserved orally, and are characteristically anonymous, timeless and placeless. There were times that Elders employed folktales in judging cases in village courts (Shorter 1973). They tell them in such a way that people are able to pick up their meanings without any explanation (Kanu 2015b). An example of an African folktale that beautifully expresses Igwebuike philosophy 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 thus 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, physically, 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 hidden. 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 hid 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.

In the new dispensation, the question of who was to marry the princess came up. Every member of the team insisted that the part he played at the rescue of the princess was indispensable. When what looked like a quarrel was beginning to erupt among the members of the team who all laid claim to playing an important role, the king declared that his daughter would not be married again.

From this story, it is obvious that when they worked together as a group they were able to get the princess, but now that they lay claim to her privately, they all lost her. From the foregoing, we learn that

the differences in us attract the other person as a complement. My difference enriches the uniqueness of the other.

4. African Songs

Africans are a people of songs. They sing in their farms during work, in their shrines during worship, at home while cooking, in the evening during storytelling, at war fronts to give themselves courage, on their way while on a journey, etc., thus, Quarcoopome (1987) avers that among Africans:

> Singing generates the avenue for expressing certain sentiments or truths, and in the context of rituals they demonstrate the faith of the worshipper from the heart- faith in God, belief in and about divinities, assurance and hope about the present and with reference to the hearafter. (p. 37).

How are these songs a source of Igwebuike philosophy? So many African songs point to the relatedness of reality. One among many of such songs is:

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

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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, who made man, man who was pursuing of the hyena, the fox that was going after a cock, the cock that was eating termite, the termite that infested the digger, the digger that

pierced the bread fruit, the bread fruit that eventually fell and killed *wankelu- Kerere Nwankelu*). In this song, the relationship between realities in the world is not just traced, but traced back to God.

5. African Symbols

The use of symbols in Africa is a very common phenomenon. It has become more useful due to the African's strong believe in metaphysical realities. Thus, symbols help the Africa to represent the unseen realities that are all around him or her. Fairchild (1965), defines a symbol as:

> That which stands for something else particularly a relatively concrete explicit representation of a more generalized, diffuse, intangible object or group of objects. A very large part of social processes is caused on by use of symbols such as words, money, certificates and pictures. A true symbol excites reactions similar to, though perhaps not quite as intense as those created by the original object. (p. 314).

It is from the above perspective that Madu (2011) maintains that symbolism implies the practice of using acts, sounds, objects or other means which are not of importance in themselves for directing attention to something that is considered important.

A strong example of a symbol in the African world is the Kola nut. It is a caffeine-containing nut of evergreen trees of the genus Cola,

primarily of the species Cola acuminata. Cola acuminata, an evergreen tree about 20 meters in height, has long, ovoid leaves pointed at both the ends with a leathery texture. The trees have yellow flowers with purple spots, and star-shaped fruit. Inside the fruit, about a dozen round or square seeds develop in a white seed-shell. The nut's aroma is sweet and rose-like. Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, it symbolizes life, and that is why during the formal introduction of the Kola nut ritual, it is said: *onye wetara oji wetara ndu* (he that brings kola nut brings life). The kola nut is also a symbol of peace and goodwill. This is why the first thing an Igbo person offers a guest is Kola nut to indicate that the guest is welcome. It is sometimes an indispensable element when sacrifices are offered to the gods. Very important is that it is a symbol of communion, not just among the living, but also between the living and the dead. It could be referred to, in a traditional sense as the Igbo sacramental communion, specially presented, broken, shared and partaken of. During the breaking of the kola, heaven and earth come together. When the different parts of Kola nut is together, the nut remains fresh and succulent, however, when the different parts are separated from each other, they die off by drying off. This brings out the African philosophy of complementarity: I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am; together we stand, separated we fall.

6. Professional Philosophers

A glance at the works of contemporary African philosophers,

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reveals that the web that holds their perspectives together is the philosophy of complementarity. Although perspectives continue to change and differ, they continue to be united by the idea of harmony. This dates back to Tempels (1959) who argues that: "'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". (p. 29). This sense of complementarity echoes in Kagame (1951) and Jahn (1958) who employed NTU as the rallying point of being, outside of which no being can exist. During the nationalistic movements of the 20th century, complementarity was grounded in political ideologies: while Senghor (1964 and 1975) places the family at the centre of the social structure, Nyerere (1968a and 1968b) bases his political thought on Ujamaa, familyhood. While Awolowo (1969 and 1979) makes a choice of socialism over capitalism, Nkrumah (1963) gave Pan-Africanism the publicity it deserved. In Mbiti (1970) the African personality is represented in the "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am". While speaking from the Igbo perspective, Oguejiofor (2010) maintains that "the unitary conception of reality pervades Igbo world view in a very remarkable way" (p. 21). Edeh (1983) in his work on Igbo Metaphysics avers that: "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" (p. 105). From the Akan perspective, Gyekye (1987) asserts that: "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" (p. 156). Iroegbu (1995) describes being in African ontology as belongingness. According to Nkemnkia (1999) "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). Asouzu (2004 and 2013) locates within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations in the sense of an existent reality.

7. African Mythology

Esposito, Easching and Lewis (2006), explain that the word "myth" comes from the Greek "mythos", which means "story". Myths are symbolic stories about the origins and destiny of human beings and their world. They relate human beings to whatever powers they believe ultimately govern their destiny, and explains to them what those powers expect of them. According Marshall (1988): "The word 'myth' is used to refer to stories that are fictional, and hence, it has come to have a pejorative sense" (p. 449). In African ontology, myths are the outcome of the human attempts to explain historical institutions and developments by appeal to non-historical factors and forces. While discussing the Yoruba myth, Idowu (1962) speaks of capacity common to all myths, "... Odu myths enshrine the theological and philosophical thoughts of the Yoruba" (p. 45). African myths therefore, according to Kanu (2013b) are a veritable mine of materials on African philosophy. Gyekye (1995) describes

them as "vehicles for abstract thought" (p. 14), and further advises that "To get at the full philosophical import of myths, however, requires detailed examination" (p. 15).

After creation, human beings had no house, making them to sleep wherever they found temporal shelter. One day they went out to look for food through hunting. While they were out they saw two beautiful birds on a tree working hard. While one of the birds always flew out and came in with weeds and sticks, the other one remained on the branch of the tree weaving a nest with the weeds and sticks. When the man and woman saw how the two birds were building their nest where they lived in, they located a place, gathered sticks and weeds together in imitation of the birds. With these materials they were able to build a house for themselves, a house that was better than the one that the birds built. From this first house, they improved on the future houses that they built.

Conclusion

The present paper has been geared towards the structuralization of Igwebuike philosophy, with the aim of developing a socio-cultural foundation. This is very important as Igwebuike philosophy is an indigenous philosophy that has emerged from a unique socio-cultural context. The foregoing has studied the sources of Igwebuike philosophy. The sources of Igwebuike philosophy that were studied include the works of professional African philosophers, African proverbs, African folktales, African myths, African symbols, African songs and African names. At this level,

these elements, except for the works of professional African philosophers, are only part of culture and not philosophy itself- this is because they have not yet received the light of reasoning. However, through their hermeneutical interpretation, we move from culture to philosophy.

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