Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Modality of Peace and Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

A cursory glance at the African continent reveals that she has been and continues to be the scene of multiple conflicts at local, national and regional levels. These conflicts have led to the breakdown of African countries. Human lives have been lost, infrastructure destroyed, education and health services have suffered, and the environment damaged. Over the years, the international community has been involved in supporting African countries in the resolution of conflicts, however, only very little have changed. It is from this background that this piece asserts that circumstances have arisen that calls for the study of the African worldview to see how indigenous categories could contribute to or complement the resolution of conflicts in Africa. Igwebuike, an Igbo-African philosophy is, therefore, employed as a system of conflict resolution which would help Africans to incorporate African traditional categories in the resolution of conflicts, promotion of peace, justice, freedom, human dignity, sustainable development and better quality of life. Igwebuike as an indigenous wholistic Igbo philosophy is generated to emphasize that indigenous peoples have worldviews and means of relating to the world. This worldview is rooted within indigenous epistemologies, cultures and traditions with the understanding that we are all related- each aspect relates with the whole: the dynamics of realty are based on the relationships and experiences of interrelationships and interconnections. The findings of this research would assist policy makers, Non-Governmental organizations and development agencies to locate the appropriate conflict resolution strategy for the promotion of peace and development in African local communities. The Indigenous wholistic method of enquiry would be employed for the purpose of this research.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Igbo-African, Philosophy, Peace, Conflict, Resolution.

Introduction

The issue of peace and conflict resolution is within the parameters of human relationship. And the way people relate with one another is to a great extent determined by their

worldview. For instance, while the Western worldview is exclusivistic, depersonalized, objectivised and more concerned with analysis; the African scheme of conceptualization is inclusivistic, integrative, non-reductionistic, concrete, personalized and subjectivised in all its manifestations, expressing the interconnectedness of reality- a world of relationship, harmony, continuality and complementarity. Thus, Onyeocha (2006) argues that "the African conceives of reality in terms of a universe of forces that are linked together, and are in constant interplay with one another" (p. 99). The differences in worldview would thus imply that there might be the need for the application of different methods of peace and conflict resolution, that is, if true peace must be attained. Applying a method of peace and conflict resolution that is depersonalized among a people who are personalized would definitely look like putting a square peg in a round hole.

Like every other people in the world, indigenous communties have unique and peculiar worldviews and means of relating to the world which are embedded in their different cultures from time immemorial. Thus, Nwolise (2005) avers that:

> It is my firm belief that long before Aristotle propounded his theory on sociology and metaphysics, the African race … had not only understood these theories, but have reduced them into practice. These are embedded in their various proverbs, parables and wise sayings. (p. 155).

The African worldview is rooted in an indigenous epistemology, culture and tradition with the understanding that we are all related- each aspect relates with the whole: the dynamics of realty based on the relationships and experiences of interrelationships and interconnections. It is wholistic in the sense that it encompasses the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical elements of being (Absolom 2010). It forms a framework to indigenize our thoughts and actions into active healing processes that simultaneously decolonize and indigenize. As a theory, it is whole, ecological, cyclical and relational.

This paper focuses on Igwebuike as an Igbo-African peace and conflict resolution technique which is based on the Igbo-African worldview expressed within categories that the African can understand and appreciate. Having studied the development of peace and conflict resolution in Africa, and the impact made in this direction from the colonial era, this paper asserts that with colonialism there has been an imposition of the colonial system of justice administration that is endogamous and foreign to Africa. This accounts for the ineffectiveness of conflict resolution measures or procedures over time. It thus, calls for a renewal of the African method of peace and conflict resolution. This renewal is envisioned in Igwebuike philosophy of peace and conflict resolution.

Conflict, Its Ontological Cause and the Need for Resolution

Conflict is from the Latin word *confligere*, which means to *strike together*. It is the product of differences in the interpretation of reality, data, issues, values, interests, relationships

and unsatisfied human needs (Bisong 2006). It is always the result of differences in a family, community, village, a tribe, religion occasioned by incompatible desires and aims (Nader, 1986). At the heart of it are self-assertiveness and the absence of empathy; and its key words are hostility, disagreement, incompatibility, competition and misunderstanding. The result is collision, disagreement, struggle, clash, opposition, etc. In relation to resolution, it first appeared in the mid-1950s with theories coming in mainly from North America. According to Bakut (2013), the University of Michigan made huge contribution towards the development of the concept through her Journal of Conflict Resolution founded in 1957 and the Centre for Research on Conflict Resolution which started in 1959.

The human person naturally is a social and political being created to be with the other. The inherent cause of conflict is egocentrism which bifurcates reality. And this is very alien to African ontology that has a complementary perspective of reality. The bifurcation of reality is evident in Descartes who defines the person in relation to self-consciousness. In the *Second Meditation*, Descartes (1637), through his methodical doubt, discovers that something resists doubt. That is, the fact that it is he who doubts, and who can be deceived. He thus, arrives at *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore, I am). To the question, who am I? Descartes answers simply, a "thinking thing", a thing that essentially has mental experiences. Descartes' transformation of the person from an ontological to a psychological fact, opened the door to a series of either great diminutions or of enormous exaggerations of the concept of person. Since the time of Descartes, individual consciousness has been taken as the privileged centre of identity, while 'the other' is seen as an epistemological problem, or as an inferior, reduced or negated form of the same.

Egocentrism occurs when someone has an overblown opinion of himself. It is the inability to differentiate between self and other. More specifically, it is the inability to untangle subjective schemas from objective reality; an inability to understand or assume any perspective other than their own. The moment a person begins to see the other person, his interests, wants, values, needs, etc., as incompatible with one's own, with no ground for negotiation or compromise, then conflict has begun. The next step that follows is the expression of negative emotions like fear, jealousy, bitterness, sadness, anger, hopelessness. If this is not controlled, it navigates from perception, through emotion to action, a point where a person takes action so as to express his or her feelings. With this understanding of conflict and it ontological cause, the basic question now is, how can such conflicts be resolved from an African perspective? It is in this regard that we turn to Igwebuike philosophy for a means of resolution.

The Gap in Non-Indigenous Methods of Conflict Resolution

The Seventh Chapter of the United Nations Charter, Articles 39-50 makes a provision for the United Nations to maintain peace and security in any part of the world. Further provisions have been made in Chapter Seven, Article 52-52 for regional arrangements as in the case of African Union to mobilize troops for peace keeping. Unfortunately, Jiya (2-13) observes that a cursory glance at the historical evolution of conflict resolution in different parts of Africa by the United Nations Peace Keeping Forces and the regional bodies interventions, reveals that both bodies have recorded more abysmal failures than successes as is in the cases of Somalia, Rwanda, Angola, Centra African Republic. In Nigeria, the settlement of the cases between Ife/Modakeke, Aguleri/Umuleri and the Tiv/Fulani crisis are important cases in point. Although the cases are judged in the court and closed, the conflict still continues to raise its heads with gruesome implications in various ways, indicating that it has not been settled after all. The failure has always been as a result of the lack of understanding and undermining of the political, military and sociological realities of peculiar peoples.

In most cases, the Western methods, contradict cultural values and priorities and are not geared towards reconciliation but the condemnation of one and the justification of the other. This is usually achieved through force, use of the military or the police to enforce the judgment. Einstein (cited by Bogoro 2013) said that "Peace cannot be kept by force" (p. 44). This is at the heart of the problem with non-indigenous methods of conflict resolution, making it difficult to effectively address the cases of conflict in Africa. Bakut (2013) observes that Western approaches towards peace and conflict resolution do not focus on emotion and relationship of actors and factors in conflict, the African approaches, methods and styles are anchored on emotion and relationship of actors, deeply rooted in the spirituality of the African people. The western approach sees emotion as something to be passed by; its methods are analytical, result oriented, linear, and based on reaching an agreement between individual parties rather than building relationships (Quinney 2002, Walker 2004). The end result of the western methods of conflict resolution is that many of the cases or conflicts in Africa that they have tried to resolve have remained unresolved as crisis still looms in many parts of Africa where the United Nations Peace Keeping Forces have tried to intervene. This, according to Kriesberg (2003) emphasizes that cultural systems have a great role to play in styles of resolving conflicts, and in the contention of Avruch (2002), a people's culture determines their action in the subconscious level; thus, the need to be open to indigenous methods in every sincere relationship with indigenous people.

An Overview of Igwebuike Philosophy

Igwebuike is an Igbo word; one of the major dialects in Africa. It is a principle that is at the heart of African thought, and in fact, the modality of being in African ontology. It is taken from the Igbo language. It is a composite word made up of three dimensions (Kanu 2015). 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. The three words involved: 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* (Kanu 2016). 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 (Kanu, 2017). Its English equivalents are 'complementarity', 'solidarity' and 'harmony'. The preferred concept, however, is 'complementarity'.

As an indigenous African philosophy, *Igwebuike* gives an understanding of the human person as a being who is in relation with the other in the world. It establishes that there exists a common link between human persons and that it is through this relationship that every other human person realizes himself or herself. Igwebuike is the capacity in Igbo-African ontology for the expression of complementarity, solidarity, compassion, reciprocity, dignity and harmony for the purpose of building and maintaining community. It celebrates in a deep cultural and philosophical modality our relatedness, our interconnectedness, our common humanity, our common responsibility towards each other and for each other.
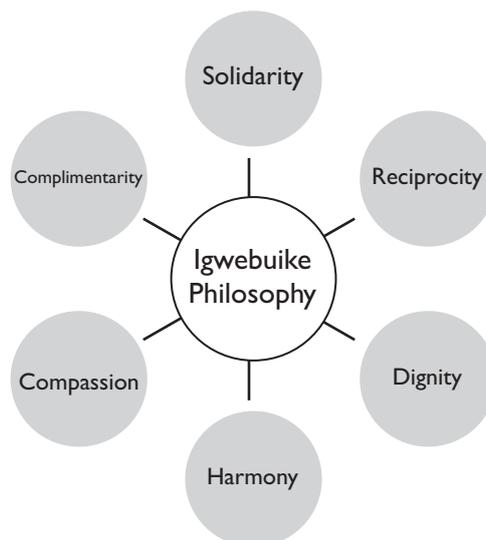

Figure1*: Igwebuike in concrete expression*

Igwebuike is the essence of being human. It understands that a person's humanity is inextricably caught up and bound in the other person's humanity: "I am because I am a part of the other". It appreciates reality only within the context of its wholeness. To be grounded in Igwebuike philosophy is to be speak and relate with compassion, welcoming, hospitable, warm, generous an willing to share. It is the foundation of openness, availability, affirmation of the other, freedom from threat based on the ability or good in others. This is because, it comes with the understanding that oneself is diminished with the humiliation and oppression of the other. This helps one to celebrate the greatness and achievements of the other, because the greatness and achievements of others is my own greatness when properly understood. It is a very practical philosophy that is lived out in daily historical circumstances.

Igwebuike is an innate human quality. For deep in the recesses of the heart of everyone are found the qualities of and hunger for complementarity, solidarity, compassion, reciprocity, dignity and harmony. No one is born with hatred, spirit of division, tribalism or racism in his or her heart. All these negative qualities are learnt as the human person progresses on the historical path. And if the human person learns all these negative qualities contrary to his essence of being human, it means that the person can also be igwebuikelized- a process of the discovery of the real essence of a person's humanity. To learn these negative qualities contrary to Igwebuike, that is, the essence of your humanity, is to be dehumanized. And only a dehumanized person can dehumanize the other. It is in this regard that Nelson Mandela writes that:

> *A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred; he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not truly free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity… For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of other. (p. 544).*

There is, therefore, a strong nexus between the freedom of the oppressed and the freedom of the oppressor. At the time when the oppressor, the hater, the racist, the sectionalist, etc., thinks that he or she has achieved victory, the oppressor is as much the looser as the oppressed. There is a proportionate loss of humanness in the oppressor and the oppressed, for both are dehumanized. In the dehumanization of the oppressed, the humanity of the oppressor is also dehumanized. This perspective underpins Igwebuike's perception of the self in relation to the other which is guided by an inner principle of equity, inter-social 'collaboration, caring for the other's wellbeing, mutual support and a recognition of the other's humanity. Principally, in Igwebuike, a person becomes a person through the other person or persons.

Igwebuike Philosophy of Peace and Conflict Resolution

Igwebuike as an indigenous method of peace and conflict resolution has a community-based approach. It is an outcome of the wisdom of traditional African conflict management practices drawn from the values of host communities, and founded on the custom and tradition of the African people which has been developed over a long period of time- it is entirely based on culture and emphasizes the fundamental part which culture plays in the lives and actions of people. It is more of a healing process in which individuals contribute positive energy with the sole aim of re-establishing the energy flow within individuals, families and communities for the purpose of rebuilding social harmony. Thus, by finding a balance between the self and other, the destructive and the creative, the good and the bad, etc.

What is peace? Igwebuike understands peace within the context of good health, well-being, order and freshness. From this understanding, poverty, insecurity, unemployment, waywardness, communal clashes, religious crisis, and other mysterious and human-made misfortunes are considered to be the opposite or negation of peace. In relation to conflict, Igwebuike philosophy does not understand conflict merely as a fracas between two persons, or two groups, it rather understands conflict as a fracas touching on the harmony of reality. This explains why the African approach always entails a spiritual dimension, for creating and restoring damaged relationship with God, the deities, the ancestors, family, neighbours, etc. This is done in a way, sometimes through rituals that link the people with their past, the present and their future- it is a holistic approach. Thus, it is not just about justifying the one and condemning the other, it works towards a compromise for the reconciliation of the both parties and the restoration of balance or the harmony of reality. It is relatively informal and thus, less intimidating as those involved are at ease, and are in familiar environment. These are the basic features of Igwebuike philosophy of peace and conflict resolution:

1. Conflict is not viewed as a problem between the disputants but as a problem of the entire community. This, therefore, attracts the attention of the community.
2. The emphasis is on reconciliation and restoring social harmony. It purpose is, therefore, aimed at rebuilding broken relationships and restoring the community.
3. Igwebuike works towards a situation that acknowledges a mutually beneficial condition rather just condemning one and exalting the other. This is because the emphasis is on co-operation with one another for the common good as opposed to competition that could lead to grave instability within the community.
4. Traditional arbitrators are appointed from within the community on the basis of status and lineage. They are never strange faces sitting on judgment seats- their personal knowledge of the disputants, the case and the community places them in a position of advantage.

5. There is a high degree of public participation. There are no secret trails in African traditional legal system. Since the problem between the disputants is seen as a community problem, in restoring harmony, there must be a general satisfaction among the public regarding the procedure and outcome of the case.

6. There is an emphasis on restorative penalty.

7. Decisions are reached through agreement rather than force.

8. The enforcement of a decision is reached through social pressure rather than the police or military.

9. A crime is viewed as a wrong that has its dangers, and, thus, must be addressed as soon as possible to make things right again.

10. Judgments are seen as teachable moments when the offender must learn new ways of acting in the community.

11. There is an emphasis on religious institutions in aiding justice among people and to promote moral and ethical values within communities.

It is from this perspective that Golwa (2013) avers that African traditional methods of conflict resolution are aimed at ensuring the full integration of the parties involved into the society. The objective is to move away from accusation and counter-accusation method to settle hurt feelings and to reach a compromise that would help improve future relationships. And since the family is at the heart of the African society, the family is the basic school where peace must be taught through proverbs, parables, myths, etc. When a child is born into a peaceful family, he or she stands the chance of being an ambassador of peace.

Conclusion

Conflicts have always been with the human society right from the very begining of the existence of differences in identities, competing definitions of what is right, fair and just. This paper has studied the issue of peace and conflict resolution from an African perspective relying on Igwebuike as an African method of reconciliation. It argues that the persisting issues of conflicts in Africa are a consequence of the relegation of the African traditional model of conflict resolution to the background. It acknowledges that the African approach to conflict resolution is aimed at removing the root causes of the conflict, to reconcile the conflict parties and to ensure peace in society. While the means to peace and conflict resolution are taught in schools, the traditional African emphasis on peace and the resolution of conflict is taught right from the home. Through proverbs, stories, etc., the African is taught the need for peace and the consequences of discord and its resounding effect on the entire universe. Therefore, the western model of conflict resolution has created confusion and occasioned haphazard measures in addressing interpersonal and

intergroup discords in Africa. Igwebuike as a means for peace and conflict resolution is an attempt to reconsider the traditional model of conflict resolution. This model understands conflict as encompassing a parameter that is beyond the physical to involve the spiritual and emotional dimensions. It submits that, for true peace to be realized in African communities, there is a need for the incorporation of African traditional peace processes, that does not only declare a person right and the other wrong, but that heals the wounds or hurts that have emanated from the conflict in question.

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