

IGWEBUIKE SOCIO-POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: TOWARDS AN INDIGENOUS POLITICAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

African socio-political philosophy, unlike other areas of inquiry within the parameters of African studies, has received less attention in comparison to other areas of study. This paper represents an attempt to contribute to the discourse on African indigenous democracy by building its foundation on the African ontology, particularly Igwebuike. The concept of Igwebuike captures the essence of traditional African socio-political thought, which sought to establish a balance between autocratic dictatorship and popular democracy, thereby creating a participatory democracy. However, the colonial political infrastructure disrupted, undermined, and devastated traditional African socio-political structures, with far-reaching implications for various aspects of African life. The religious-social formations which underpinned the democratic ethos were disrupted, disorganized and divested of their political functions. In light of these developments, the present study employs the Igwebuike theoretical framework, which emphasizes complementarity and interrelatedness, as a means of exploring African socio-political philosophy. The study also draws on thematic, systematic, and hermeneutic methods of inquiry to present and analyze the relevant ideas. The paper holds that there is a distinctive African socio-political system, and the development of African socio-political philosophy is vital to our understanding of African democracy and governance.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Social, Political, Igbo, African, Democracy, Indigenous

Introduction

The present paper is a further development of a previous paper written on *Igwebuikocracy*, with the aim of establishing the existence of an African indigenous

democracy. This inquiry challenges the external perception that democracy is a foreign import to Africa, and expands upon this thesis by presenting a multifaceted exploration of African political philosophy rooted in the Igwebuiké spirit, which is considered the essential condition of African philosophy. It is pertinent to note that African socio-political philosophy has not received equitable attention in the broader discourse on African studies compared to other areas of inquiry.

The present inquiry endeavors to develop a socio-political philosophy that aligns with the complementary nature of the African life world. It accomplishes this objective by centering its analysis around the Igwebuiké philosophy, which accentuates the ideals of community, interrelationship, and harmony as the animating principles of the African socio-political system. The paper commences by explicating the concept of Igwebuiké socio-political philosophy and elucidating its distinctive components. Moreover, it examines how this philosophy fosters national, regional, and cosmopolitical integration. A notable contribution of this inquiry is its development of an African democracy that is distinct from Western democratic systems, with a particular focus on the traditional political structures of the Igbo and the Yoruba.

Igwebuiké Socio-political Philosophy

Igwebuiké socio-political philosophy derives its root from the Igbo-African concept: Igwebuiké, which is the underlying principle and unity of the African philosophical experience. It is hinged on the African worldview, which, according to Iroegbu (1995) is characterized by a common origin, common worldview, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. Igwebuiké understands life as complementary and shared reality. Life is a life of *sharedness*; one in which the other is part thereof. Igwebuiké socio-political philosophy is, therefore, a description of the rationally framed distinctive African social and political organization, which borders on the African people's *polis*, weaved around their everyday life, everyday experience of alliances and collective actions to build together a humanized and humanizing community through pursuing the well-being of the members of the political community, the acquisition, use and justification of power and suited paradigms for the socio-political organization.

Its anthropological assumption is that every individual has the potential of interacting with others and ensuring that human dignity is at the core of their actions and thoughts. It provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. According to Kanu (2016), Igwebuiké represents the perspective that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity. 'To be' is 'to be with

the other', in a community of beings. It is not an innate value of the African person, explaining why, as soon as a child is born, it is transmitted through education.

The Igwebuiké socio-political philosophy is rooted in the pre-existing socio-political life of African people, and as such, it can be characterized as a living philosophy that is intimately connected to the lived experiences of the African community. It is not a product of abstract or metaphysical speculation, but rather a rational articulation of the ideal social organization of African society.

The fundamental underpinnings of this philosophy are rooted in the basic human conditions that we encounter in our world. We confront a plethora of needs, but there are only limited resources available to satisfy these needs. Therefore, the mobilization of other forces outside of the self, a social fellowship, is required for the fulfillment of specific needs. This natural inclination towards fellowship is based on the fact that we were created in the image and likeness of God, and we possess an inherent likeness that draws us towards collaboration with others.

This collaboration is crucial, as each individual possesses unique gifts and abilities that complement those of others. Thus, our relationships with others complete what may be lacking in us and form the foundation for our continued growth and transformation. It is through collaboration with others that we become, as everything in our world takes a bit of another to make itself. This collaboration is not only necessary for our individual survival but also for the transformation of the universe itself (Njoku, 2015).

Human fellowship and cooperation are realities rooted in human nature and to keep away from relating is to limit our being. It is, therefore, a unit of order inscribed in human nature for survival. The more a person relates, the more he or she lives out his or her being to its fullness. Cooperation and fellowship in society increase protection, assistance, etc. Being in the company of others reduces the burden that nature imposes on a person as an individual.

Socio-Political Integration

There is a need for a philosophy of unity for the promotion of integration at the global, regional and national levels. The African Union over the years has developed candid philosophical principles and arrived at firm resolutions regarding African integration over the years; but even this has not been able to promote the desired integration, unity and peace between and within African countries. Rather, ours is a history of genocides, massacres, conflicts, wars, displacements of peoples from their traditional homes, xenophobia, and poor economic infrastructure, among other cohorts of miseries experienced by many African peoples. Within this state of disintegration, Igwebuiké

philosophy of complementarity, solidarity and harmony, is here presented as possessing the requisite framework for the development of a warm system that will bring about political integration for the promotion of peace, unity, human dignity, development, and, therefore, a better life in Africa and beyond.

The Igwebuiké philosophical enterprise presents a promising avenue for promoting the diversity that characterizes the African continent. This philosophy recognizes diversity as the foundation for achieving equilibrium or equality in terms of rights and dignity, as well as for realizing common interests that can enhance the efficiency and credibility of political governance. Moreover, the Igwebuiké spirit has the potential to foster renewed efforts towards socio-political integration at the global, regional, and national levels of human society.

Achieving such integration requires a shift beyond intuitive motivations based on similarities and towards recognizing the ontological sameness of human beings. This epistemological qualitative leap must be grounded in rationality and verified beyond natural communities such as family, tribe, ethnicity, and race. It is in the political community where the Igwebuiké spirit must be tested as a responsibility and duty owed to oneself and the human community. This spirit operates at different intuitive levels and varies from person to person, but regardless of its level, it represents a commitment to the shared humanity of all and the creation of a collective base with minimized unintentional inequalities.

In this paper, we will explore how the Igwebuiké sense of integration can be applied to national, regional, and global contexts. By situating this discussion within the broader philosophical framework of Igwebuiké, we will demonstrate the potential for this philosophy to contribute to the ongoing discourse on socio-political integration in Africa and beyond.

a. Igwebuiké and National Integration

Azikiwe (1981; 1978; 1961) expounds on the evolution of the Nigerian state from tribes to a nation-state. A tribe refers to an endogamous group that shares a common ancestor, occupies a particular territory, and possesses cultural, religious, and linguistic homogeneity. This evolutionary trajectory is not peculiar to Nigeria, but common to several African states, wherein several tribes have united and formed a political federation. However, this transformation can be a double-edged sword, as it could pose a threat to national unity if the differences among peoples are not well managed and if the people are not convinced of the leadership's project of forging a sense of shared humanity.

The Igwebuiké perspective posits that effective national integration requires the leadership to identify the circumstances that can override the natural chains of language and culture, which have bound the inhabitants of specific states together. Such a discovery is critical to developing a sense of personal security and group preservation. This will entail establishing a system of government that accords coexistence to all linguistic groups on an equal basis, within a framework of political and constitutional guarantees. This approach promotes freedom, respect, and equality within the state, thereby replacing loyalty to the tribe with loyalty to the nation.

However, where ethnic groups are excluded from enjoying the benefits of common citizenship on an equal basis with favored groups, the crises of the state emerge. Such crises manifest in the form of ethnopolitical conflicts, with the victims assuming the force of micro-nationalist ideology, as evidenced in various African countries, including Chad, Ethiopia, Sudan, Niger, and Nigeria. Thus, while the leadership has a responsibility to foster national integration, Igwebuiké demands that citizens are equally committed to a shared process of freeing themselves from the contingencies of nature, which are linked to the mutual origins and ideologies of humans born of history.

b. Igwebuiké and Regional Integration

The socio-political philosophy of Igwebuiké advocates for regional integration as a countermeasure to the extremist demands of some nationalist and identity movements, which are essentially born from the innate human desire for affiliation with a cohesive group that forms a people or nation. In the African context, this integration can commence at the regional level, such as the West African, South African, North African, and East African states. Subsequently, continental integration can be pursued. The transcendence of natural units and homelands, which are divided by diverse historical backgrounds, necessitates the formation of alliances among people of the same region, beyond their distinct ethnic and tribal boundaries, for the purpose of fostering cooperation and achieving a more prosperous and benevolent humanity. Ultimately, the future and prosperity of African nations hinge upon their willingness to collaborate and complement each other in the pursuit of developmental progress.

c. Igwebuiké and Cosmo-political Integration

Cosmo-political integration is an Igwebuiké spirit. It sees the need for the political organizations of the world to allow people to move freely and to feel at home at any point of the globe. This is achieved when the borders between states are opened for the free movement of people and goods. This must be done in such a manner that is not discriminatory to the being of others; a kind of selective, discriminatory and arbitrary

recognition of people who should be allowed to move in and out of a state, as in the case of western nations selecting the particular people that they want into their country, eg. Medical doctors, teachers, etc.; or allowing only people from a particular nation, usually of developed countries to come into the country; or those who are wealthy enough to pay for the citizenship of the country. Cosmopolitical migration is in fact, a trans-natural, trans-instinctual and rational project of making humanity together for the promotion of the common good.

Igwebuike philosophy of cosmopolitical integration has the capacity of transforming the world into a politically organized space that will peacefully accommodate the diversity of instinctual groups of peoples and nations, and make it a homeland that transcends local commitments. At this level of integration where one understands his or herself as possessing a transnational identity and belonging to the human community. This understanding is engineered by openness and tolerance towards the diversity of values in the public space.

Africa in a Global World

Globalization is a phenomenon that permeates various historical events and occurrences, yet it cannot be attributed to any single historical event. Rather, it is an ontological force that arises from the complementary reality of the human person. The term "globalization" derives from the words "*globe*," "*global*," and "*globally*," and can be succinctly defined as a pursuit of universality.

According to Ohiorhenuan (1998), globalization is currently exerting a physiological impact on African society by constraining the policymaking autonomy and independence of African nations in matters concerning the allocation of scarce societal values and resources, among other functions.

Globalization entails the increasing economic, political, social, and cultural interdependence of nations across international borders. This involves the progressive dismantling of trade barriers and the growing integration of the world market (Fafowora, 1998). The phenomenon systematically reconfigures integrative relationships among nations by eroding barriers in the realms of culture, commerce, communication, and other fields of human endeavor. It promotes universal values such as free-market economics, liberal democracy, good governance, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

Some scholars have described globalization as a product manufactured in the West and to the Third World to explode and cause damage. For McEwan (1990), it is the spread of capitalism, and an imperial policy and the final conquest of capital over the rest of the world. Akinde, Gidado, and Olaopa (2002) avers that it is a one-arm banditry and

exploitative antecedents of capitalism which, by its nature cannot exist without parasitic expansion, its immutable and primary focus is to exploit African resources, disintegrate its economies and incorporate it into the international capitalist economy. Madunaga (1999), opines that globalization was created by the dominant social forces in the world today to serve their specific interests. Simultaneously, these social forces gave themselves a new ideological name the “international community”- to go with the idea of globalisation.

The inquiry into whether globalization is a product or a process is a complex one. Agbo (2010) has criticized the portrayal of globalization as a product, which is exported to Africa with insidious motives, as an irrational moralization of an amoral concept. In agreement with Agbo, Omoregbe (2007) asserts that globalization is not a planned or decided phenomenon by a select group of individuals or states; rather, it is a natural process of socialization and a phase in the course of world history. Similarly, Asouzu (2007) maintains that globalization is not a creation of any particular culture, but rather a necessary outcome of the relative subjectivity of beings striving for full actualization.

From the Igwebuikwe perspective, globalization is a process that is generated by and for all individuals. It is not a product originating from Europe or America but rather a process in which Africans must become actively involved to avoid being marginalized. Africa's participation in the process of globalization is imperative; it cannot afford to remain isolated.

Blaming globalization as though it were a moral agent is a futile exercise. No nation can be held accountable for globalizing, as globalization is the inherent form of matter seeking convergence. It is the modality of being, and thus, it cannot be boycotted as one cannot boycott one's being.

Teilhard de Chardin (cited by Agbo 2010) writes that “Life is moving towards a unification; our hope can only be operative if it is expressed in greater human cohesion and solidarity, greater interaction on the global level, mankind coming close together, and relating more and more with one another” (p. 26). According to Omoregbe (2007) “... man by nature is a social being with an irresistible urge to associate with his fellow human being, globalisation is a manifestation of this natural urge in man” (p. 148). Asouzu (2007) refers to it as “a necessary consequence of our being” (p. 382). Agreeing with Asouzu, Agbo (2010) wrote that “Globalisation is not only part of nature, it is the mode of being for human beings, it expresses our internal state. In an ontological sense, it is the category of our expressive existentiality! It is the name we give to the invisible force that is propelling reality forward with incredible velocity” (p. 36).

African Indigenous Democracy

Democracy comes from two Greek words: *demos* which means people and *kratein* which means to rule. Put together in Greek, it means the power of the people. It is in this regard that Lincoln (cited by Salami 2004) described democracy as “the government of the people, by the people and for the people under the rule of law” (p. 316). In the contention of Gyekye (1997) and Busia (1975), the concept of “the people” points to the power of the people to choose whom to rule them following the general good of the society and that they set up, by themselves, the constitutional rules, principles and procedures of governance. Carter (1978) describes democracy as a system that is altered by time and experience, always changing, infinite in its variety, sometimes it is turbulent, however, still valuable since it has been tested by adversity. As a political structure, Salami (2006) avers that democracy emphasizes the sharing of power among people of various categories. For Brecht (1959), it emphasizes that values should not be forced upon any people against their will, and stipulates liberty, separation of power and the sovereignty of the people. Thus, Sabine (1973) avers that it must involve mutual concession and compromise as a way of arriving at decisions. From these perspectives, Chidili (2012) holds that three salient points are noticeable from the definition of democracy: that democratic government is not monotypic but diverse in nature; that even in its diversity, it is changing; it is strictly based on the rule of law.

From these noticeable points, Chidili (2012) concludes that the mutability of the capacity of democracy provides elbowroom for it to be an adaptable system of governance that can exist anywhere in the world, including Africa.

However, when African traditional political systems are discussed, they are often described as monarchical or aristocratic. This is a perspective that is evident in Arogbofa (2007) who argues that the traditional political systems in Africa had no place for democracy. Some European and African political thinkers view democracy as a system of government that began in Greece and was imported from Europe to Africa. Contrary to this opinion, this work argues that democracy is a cherished African value, which existed in pre-colonial Africa as a pattern of African administration. It was already in Africa before the encounter of Africa with the West, and thus, Africa cannot be understood as a passive recipient of democracy. Before the advent of the west to Africa, the Igbo-Africans of eastern Nigeria practised *Igwebuikocracy*, an indigenous democratic government designed by the people for the people or themselves. It puts into consideration their peculiarities and particularities.

Igwebuikocracy is from the Igbo-African word *Igwebuike*, which is a combination of three words and the Greek word *kratein*. 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*; the Greek *kratein* means to rule or the system of ruling or governance that governs a particular set of people elsewhere. Thus, put together, Igwebuikocracy means a government of the people or rulership by the people or the community. As a societal order and governance, the community determines the praxis of the socio-political life of the people while putting into consideration the particularities and peculiarities of individuals. In Igwebuikocracy, followership is as important as leadership since leadership is not a one-man show or a hierarchical or aristocratic system. Members are fully involved in decision-making and implementation of such decisions in issues that affect them. Here, the people are the focus (Kanu 2014; 2015).

Igbo Traditional Participatory Democracy

According to Ajaegbo (2014), communal living among the Igbo led to the emergence of economic, social and political institutions. As they migrated and settled as a people, leaders emerged from these settlements who became centres of authority, as social groups developed, effective administrative systems emerged to regulate social relations. This was founded on egalitarian and democratic structures. The political organization was constituted by different levels of autonomous democratic governments which exercised political, social and economic control over the lives of the people. These autonomous democratic governments include the Nuclear Family, the Patrilineage (Umunna), the Maximal Lineage and the Village-Group Assembly (Kanu 2015).

a. **The Nuclear Family** was the bedrock of social and political organization, referred to as *ezi na uno*. It consisted of a man, his wives, his married and unmarried sons, unmarried daughters and the servants or slaves if any. The Father was the leader of the household and had the family *of*, which is the symbol of authority, justice, law and uprightness. The Father was responsible for directing the affairs of the family, however, it was done in consultation with his senior sons and wives.

b. **The Patrilineage or Extended Family** is the next unit of the political organization after the nuclear family, which is referred to as the *Umunna*. It is composed of several families that have a common eponymous father. Uchendu (1965) defines the *Umunna* as “a territorial kin-based unit which subdivides into compounds (*ezi obi*)” (p. 40). The head of this political unit was the oldest male member of the extended family also known as the *di-okpara* and had the *of* of the extended family in his possession. This according to Ogbukagu (1997) is based on the gerontocratic nature of the Igbo system of governance, even though Isichei (1976) avers that the important place given to elders does not mean that all elders have equal rights to speak. According to Opone (2012), the leader is usually

a grandfather or great-grandfather. In the contention of Olisa (2002) and Nwosu (2002), the *di-okpara* presided over meetings, sacrifices, issues of inheritance, settlement of disputes among members of the extended family, marriage, allocation of lands and the representation of the family with other extended families. In decision-making, the *di-okpara* worked in consultation with the other heads of the extended family who constituted the extended family assembly. Decisions were arrived at through dialogue, consensus (*nkwokolita*), compromise, cooperation and consultation (*Igba Izu*).

c. **The Maximal Lineage** is the next biggest socio-political organization after the extended family. This is referred to as *Idumu* in Igbo, which means quarter. It is made up of several extended families who are linked by a common putative ancestor. This major lineage is headed by the oldest male among them. He holds the *ofo* of the major lineage and presided at functions concerning the major lineage and was considered a sacred person with taboos and rituals accompanying the violation of his authority. In his exercise of authority over the major lineage, Ajaegbo (2014) avers that he worked in consultation with a large assembly comprising of senior household men, titled men, priests, men of honour, intelligence and wealth etc.

d. **The Village-Group Assembly** was the biggest socio-political group referred to as *ogbe* (village). Ajaegbo (2014) observed that it was composed of several major lineages that are descended from a common ancestor or different putative ancestors. Onwuejeogwu (1972; 1987) refers to the *ogbe* as a federation of autonomous settlements, and Ozimiro (1972) as wards. The assembly was the highest authority with its members being senior males of households, professional hunters, priests, honourable and wealthy men, warriors, titled men, medicine men, etc. The leader of this assembly varied from one village to another, in some it was headed by the council of elders: a group of wise, knowledgeable, courageous and transparent men, Maquet (1972) refers to their authority as “a collegial authority exercised by the chiefs of the various lineages living in the village” (p. 57). In some, the oldest member of the council of elders is referred to as the *diokpa*, and in this case, he becomes the custodian of the *ofo*. The supreme head of the assembly took decisions in consultation with the constituent members of the village assembly. Consultation, consensus and compromise were necessary elements in resolving issues and decision-making. The village square (*ama nzuko ora*), usually a commonplace, was the arena of assembly.

Yoruba Traditional Participatory Democracy

This section shall examine the Yoruba traditional political organization of the Oyo Empire. Established in the 14th century, circa 1300 BC, by Oduduwa, who settled in Ille Ife, the kingdom reached its zenith in the 18th century. According to Smith (1969), Ife

was regarded as the religious hub of the world and the site where human beings were first created. Ayittey (2006 and 2012) asserts that prior to Oduduwa's arrival, there were approximately 13 semi-autonomous settlements in Ille Ife that had coalesced into a loose confederation. Oduduwa, upon his arrival, subdued them and imposed his authority over them. This resulted in the largest empire in Yoruba land and the most important and authoritative of all the early Yoruba principalities. The military prowess of the Oyo Empire was such that its influence extended beyond the Yoruba states to as far as the Fon of the then Dahomey Kingdom. However, administrative disagreements among leaders in the 19th century precipitated the gradual collapse of the Oyo Empire. The provinces began to revolt as the center lost its capacity to govern, and by 1888 it had collapsed and became a Protectorate of Great Britain (Kanu 2015). The structure of the kingdom was as follows:

a. **The Alaafin:** In the Oyo Empire, the *Alaafin* was the sole voice of authority, however, with limitations. Before *Alaafin* can take any valid decision, he must consult with *Oyomesi*. He had a large number of ritual restrictions which limited his authority. For instance, he was not allowed to leave the palace except during important festivals. This made it easy for those who were vying for his position to take over power. The *Alaafin* was also a spiritual leader who was regarded as a representative of the spirit world. He was, therefore, required to devote himself to the worship of *Orisa*. Within the place, he worked together with the *Ona Efa*, the Empire's Chief Justice, the *Otun Efa*, the Priest of *Shango* Shrine, and *Osi Efa*, the minister of Finance.

b. **The Oyomesi:** The *Oyomesi* consists of a council of the heads of the seven non-royal wards of the city of Oyo, though sometimes six in number. They guided the king's decisions on many issues, such as military action, religious festivals etc., and had the responsibility of checking the excessive exercise of powers of the *Alaafin*. The leader of the *Oyomesi* was called *Bashorun*, and the authority he controlled rivalled that of the *Alaafin*. He was the Commander-in-Chief of the army of the Empire and presided at religious festivals, thus giving him a religious and militaristic edge over the *Alaafin*. One of the most important religious celebrations of the Empire was the *Orun*, and during this ceremony, the *Bashorun* had the power to depose the *Alaafin* by causing him to commit suicide. Usually, the *Bashorun* would present the *Alaafin* with a calabash which signifies that the *Oyomesi* and the ancestors have lost confidence in him. During battles, the position of the *Bashorun* became higher and more important than that of the *Alaafin*; he sat on a stool that stood higher than that of the *Alaafin*.

c. **The Ogboni:** the *Ogboni* is another important political structure in the then Oyo Empire, and the second council in the Oyo Empire that helped in checks and balances of authority. The council was composed of representatives of the various lineages and was

headed by the *Olowu*. They had the primary responsibility of checking the excessive powers of the *Bashorun*. Before a person can be appointed as *Bashorun*, the *Ogboni* must issue their approval.

d. *Are-Ona-Kakanfo*: This was the military commander of the Empire who was never expected to lose any war. If he loses a war, he had the option of either committing suicide or going into exile. He was responsible for the *Alaafin* and *Bashorun*. He was appointed by the *Alaafin*, however, promoted by the *Oyomesi*.

e. *The Aremo*: The *Aremo* was the crown prince. While the *Alaafin* remained in the palace as the king of the palace, the *Aremo*, who is the first son of the king was for the general public. The *Aremo* could move out of the palace as he had no ritual restrictions on his movements. During the early stages of the empire, when an *Alaafin* died, the *Aremo* took over, however, it was later discovered that some *Aremo* killed their father to ascend the throne. A law was, therefore, made that when an *Alaafin* dies, the *Aremo* should commit suicide.

f. *The Babalawo*: The *Babalawo* was the spiritual guide of the *Alaafin*. Although he was not required to be part of the council, he was very often consulted to provide spiritual advice. His relevance is based on the belief that he was in direct communication with the spirits, and thus, his advice is considered divine knowledge.

The Oyo Empire survived this indigenous political system until the advent of colonial power and its eventual collapse.

In the political administrations of the Yoruba and Igbo traditional political systems, there were strong systems of checks and balances, and this is consistent with most socio-political structures of ancient Africa. Although the *Alaafins* and the Igbo heads wielded much power, they were not absolute leaders. There was an elaborate organization of palace officials or chiefs, especially among the Yorubas. For instance, while the *Alaafins* had the *Oyomesis* to regulate their power, the *Oyomesis* were regulated by the *Ogboni* council and were backed by the authority of religion.

In the Igbo political system, particularly, during decision-making, it is not the eldest man that imposes his will upon the people, but decisions are reached through discussions, consultations, dialogue and compromise, which might take the shape of imposing the will of the majority on the minority and this reveals the democratic value that does not see the community as a constellation of impersonal forces but rather a complex of human beings and human interests that upholds the ethos of resolving human antagonistic interests through negotiation. According to Wirendu (1995):

This should not be confused with decision-making on the principle of the supreme right of the majority. In the case under discussion the majority prevails not over, but upon, the minority- they prevail upon them to accept the proposal in question, not just to live with it, which latter is the basic plight of minorities under majoritarian democracy. In a consensus system, the voluntary acquiescence of the minority concerning a given issue would normally be necessary for the adoption of a decision. (p. 62).

During decision makings, the perspective of every lineage in the village is represented in the presence and contributions of their representatives. It can be compared to the House of Representatives, a structure that provides the space for the genuine meeting of minds for the interchanging of opinions and understanding. Decisions arrived at this council are not enforced through policing, but what Maquet (1992) called 'collective pressure'. At the centre of these African traditional political structures was the rule of law.

The choice of the king or leader in both the Yoruba and Igbo traditional societies, or access to the throne was based on equal opportunities, the aspirants were treated as equal candidates and were subjected to the same rules and treatment. For instance, among the Yorubas, Osaе and Nwabara (1980) aver that the candidates for the position of *Alaafin* came from different royal families already marked from which contestants can emerge for the stool for the final choice by the *Oyomesi* and the *Ifa* oracle. This is done according to a laid down rule agreed upon by the people. Even when contestation arises at the end of the choice, Al-Yasha (2003) observes that the choice is not imposed on the people; there were ritual checks and balances to resolve issues of contestation of succession to the throne.

Traditional democracies in Africa were characterized by a participatory democracy that balanced autocratic dictatorship and popular democracy. These democratic traditions, however, were disrupted and undermined by the colonial political infrastructure. The colonial impact affected all aspects of African life, including religious and social formations that ensured democracy, such as the ozo title holders, elders, deities, and masquerades, which were disregarded, disorganized, and divested of their political roles. Colonial authorities appointed traditional leaders as warrant chiefs and subjected them to British political officers, thereby making them unaccountable to their people but to their British appointees. Consequently, traditional leaders betrayed their people, leading to the gradual disintegration of African political institutions.

Igwebuіke and Nationhood

The establishment of a nation finds its foundation in the Igwebuіke ideology, which posits that when individuals come together in solidarity and complementarity, a potent force is

created that minimizes the magnitude of tasks beyond their capabilities. Without these fundamental principles, the efficacy of a nation is rendered null. It is essential that the political community in question be one in which every member participates in its construction and reconstruction.

Prior to the establishment of organized political societies, lawlessness reigned supreme with no discernible authority, morality, or sense of justice. This state of affairs is akin to the Hobbesian state of nature, wherein personal interests dictated human behavior, leading to perpetual quarrels, conflicts, and struggles. Such a state was characterized by war and insecurity, creating a perpetual sense of danger and fear. Furthermore, progress and development in agriculture, navigation, and industry were impossible, as permanent ownership of anything was unattainable due to the fear of it being taken away by a stronger individual.

In such a condition, individuals utilized all available means at their disposal to safeguard their own lives. Hobbes (1946) describes the depredation of this state thus: “No knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society; and, the worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”(p. 32).

The emergence of igwebuikecracy as a political system of governance is a result of dissatisfaction with the state of affairs- a state where man became a wolf to his fellow man- *homo homini lupus*. It represents a concerted effort to circumvent the inconveniences of the state of nature. As a consequence, igwebuikecracy did not arise contemporaneously with the advent of human civilization; rather, it is a manifestation of development and refinement - an evolutionary process of learning and progress.

Igwebuikecracy is a political framework that has been organically cultivated over time by the populace. It is a regime that is founded on the principle of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. It reflects the idiosyncratic experiences of a given society and yields an overarching authority that intervenes in the relationships between its members. It should be noted that membership within an igwebuikecratic polity does not entail a forfeiture of individual rights or liberties, but rather a consolidation of them, for these rights and liberties are safeguarded through communal participation. The struggle for liberty and rights no longer remains a solitary endeavor, but becomes a communal undertaking, as the loss of the rights and liberties of one member impacts the community as a whole. Consequently, the struggle for rights and liberties is more efficacious, potent, and realizable. In an igwebuikecratic society, individuals are compelled to submit to the will of the majority, and to do otherwise would be tantamount to waging war against the

will of the community. It is for this reason that it is said that there is power in numbers (*igwe bu ike*).

Conclusion

The Igwebuike socio-political philosophy embodies a participatory democracy that achieves a balance between autocratic dictatorship and popular democracy, with deep roots in the traditional political system of African society. It is a political system that:

- a. Is based on the structure of the African reality or ontology, which is complementary and interrelated; this makes a connection between African metaphysics and African socio-political philosophy;
- b. It is socio-political philosophy of unity that promotes global, regional and national integration, and thus provides the requisite framework for the development of a warm political system that can bring about peace, unity, human dignity, etc.
- c. It strengthens the new hermeneutic of globalization as a process and a manner of being, and not as a product imported from Europe as a weapon against the African people. This understanding politically positions the African people to reap from the dividends of the globalizing process rather than be spectators.

The present scholarly contribution serves as an important addition to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the decolonization of political systems in Africa. It affords African individuals the opportunity to reflect upon their rich history and identify valuable systems that remain pertinent to contemporary development of the continent.

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