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**IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY AND HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATION IN AFRICA**

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Abstract

Human rights are moral principles which describe certain standards of human behaviour, and are regularly protected as legal rights in municipal and international law. They are commonly understood as inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being, and which are inherent in all human beings regardless of their nation, location, language, religion, ethnic origin or any other status. They are applicable everywhere and at every time in the sense of being universal, and they are egalitarian in the sense of being the same for everyone. This piece studies the anthropological consequences of the violation of human rights from an African perspective. This study is based on the Igbo-African philosophy of identity and alterity captured by Igwebuike philosophy, which sees the other, not in terms of the 'I and the Not I' but in terms of the 'I and Thou'. This philosophy understands the other as a complement of the self, and to violate the human rights of the other who is a complement to you is to violate your own fundamental human rights. For the purpose of this research, the hermeneutic method of inquiry and Indigenous Wholistic Theory would be employed. This research anticipates to re-awaken the need for a more sympathetic approach towards the human rights of the other.

Keywords: Human Rights, Igwebuike, Violation, Fundamental, Complementary, Alterity

Introduction

Human rights are moral principles¹ which describe certain standards of human behaviour, and are supposed to be protected as legal rights in law, both nationally, regionally and internationally. They are commonly understood as inalienable² fundamental rights “to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being.”³ These rights are inherent in all human beings⁴ regardless of their nation, location, language, religion, ethnic origin or any other status. They are applicable everywhere and are the same for everyone⁵. The doctrine of human rights has been highly influential within international and regional institutions. However, as a result of a community of events happening all over the globe, a chain of debates has been provoked, questioning the content, nature and universality of fundamental human rights. Such events include the many involvements of the developed nations in Africa, especially as regards biomedical research- “Is human rights the prerogative of Africans too or only of the West?”; the religious practices of some religious like Islam, precisely the Islamic Law which allows for practices such as stoning to death, beheading a person, cutting a person’s member, etc.; there is also the issue of the dehumanizing activities of the military among civilians. These issues, among others, raise questions as regards the authenticity of the universality of fundamental human rights: “Are there people with more human rights than the others?”

Events of this kind are an indication that circumstances have arisen for an interpretation of the ‘universality of Fundamental human rights’. This is precisely what Igwebuike philosophy undertakes in this piece: an attempt to give an interpretation of the consequences of the violation of fundamental human rights. Igwebuike philosophy springs from the African socio-cultural background which understands life as a participation in the life of the other or the community.

For Africans, to be human is to participate in life and respect the conditions that make life possible. To participate in life means ultimately to participate in the fellowship of the community. African community-based society does not designate a communal or collectivist society, but rather one reminiscent of an organism. The collectivist society inevitably places the emphasis on the individual and his or her needs. African society emphasizes solidarity rather than activity, and the communion of persons rather than their autonomy ... That personhood is identified by an individual's interaction with other persons does not eliminate personal identity ... It simply says that my personal identity comes to the fore in my interaction with, and place in, my community⁶.

It is from this perspective, therefore, that this work attempts at understanding the violation of the rights of the other as carrying resounding consequences on the humanity of all. This is because the being of one is ontologically linked to the being of the other. It is from this ontological relation that this piece, using the hermeneutic method of inquiry and Indigenous Wholistic Theory, establishes the need for a more sympathetic approach towards the human rights of the other, since the other's human rights is my own human rights, thus, the violation of the human rights of the other is the violation of my human rights.

The Linguistic Formation of the Concept “Igwebuike”

Igwebuike is the heart of African thought, and in fact, the modality of being in African philosophy⁷. It is taken from the Igbo language, which is a composite word made up of three dimensions⁸. 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 space⁹. 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 noun which means *strength* or *power*¹⁰. 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 force¹¹. Its English equivalent is ‘complementarity’. At this level, no task is beyond their collective capability. It is a concept that was employed by African traditional philosophers of the complementary school of thought to discuss the nature of the observed African reality¹².

Igwebuike is anchored on the African worldview, which, according to Iroegbu is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny^{13s}. It is a complementary philosophy which understands life as a shared reality. Life is a life of *sharedness*; one in which another is part thereof. It is a relationship, though of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole¹⁴. It is a relationship in which case the two or more coming together makes each of them a complete whole; it is a diversity of being one with each other. Thus, Mbiti classically proverbializes the community determining role of the individual when he writes, “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am”¹⁵. This notwithstanding, *Igwebuike* is an African philosophy of Complementarity.

The Underlying Principle of Igwebuike Philosophy

The underlying principle of *Igwebuike* philosophy is the principle of Complementarity. To complement means to bring together or to sum up distinct or similar things or words to make a new meaning or to form or produce a new outlook or phenomenon. According to Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, complementary is all about “combining well to form a balance or attractive group or whole,”¹⁶ while to complement is simply “to add new or contrasting feature which show the

best qualities of something or which improve¹⁷it . What this means is that complementarily is simply the act of summing up fragments to make up a whole which become more attracting and meaningful than its former fragments¹⁸.It understands reality as being interrelated in all its segments, which works in mutual complementation and eventually lead to general well being of common good. Igwebuike is a school of thought that argues that a whole is greater, than any it's corresponding parts. It is also a view that maintains that by the coming together of the individual or parts, a viable and sustainable whole will emerge, and by this, the parts will get to the brim purpose of their existence. Finally, it is the view that holds that individualized views and individualized goals and desires will be attained fully if there is a mutual collectivity existing amongst them. Thus, to be is to be in mutual complementary relationship.

As the modality of being, complementary relations to the other, therefore, becomes the point of fulfillment for being, for it is in relation to the other that a being realizes itself. Every being needs the other for self realization- the self is not realized in isolation. It is said that "all fingers are not equal", however, when they different fingers come together, they can achieve a lot. Some fingers are shorter, but they have their use; some fingers are taller, they have their use; some fingers are slimmer, they also have their use; the importance of each emerges when the time for application arrives. The other is needed others to complement our efforts and works. There is an African saying that says: "one finger does not carry a load on the head", which means that we need others. Some work great jobs while some small, otherwise how do we exist?

The idea of corporate existence was communicated in Plato's political/ethical theory in relation to the realization of justice. Plato argues that for justice to reign in the state, the three parts that makes up the state, that is, the rulers (the philosophers) the guardians (the soldiers) and the artisans (the labourers) must work together in one accord with each person doing his or her work efficiently to ensure a peaceful co-existence in the state.

This is also evident in Hegel's philosophy which sees the conflict between thesis and anti-thesis as fundamental for the emergence of a thesis. Thus, everything that exists whether good or bad, positive or negative is in one way or the other part of an ultimate end. The concept also connotes that a whole will never be possible without its relative parts and on the other hand parts can only be known to exist if viewed in relation to its whole. Asouzu speaking on this note said that "all existent realities relates to each other in the manner of mutual service"¹⁹.

Indices of the Violation of Fundamental Human Rights

Three indices of the violation of human rights have been chosen for the purpose of this work. This is not to say that these are the only or the major violations of human rights in Africa. They are chosen at the researcher's discretion. These areas include: the violation of human rights by the state, the violation of human rights in religious practices and the violation of human rights during biomedical research in Africa. However, while the main theme points to the violation of human rights in Africa, the indices dealt with here are major Nigerian situations, with little reference to other African experiences; this is done on the basis that to collect the whole experiences in Africa would be tedious and nearly impossible; more so, experiences in Africa are strongly related, and thus an experience could be discussed as an African problem.

1. State Violations of Human Rights

It can be rightly asserted that one of the greatest objectives of the post independence Nigerian Constitutions is the protection and promotion of human rights. The preamble to the 1999 Constitution unmistakably set the tone²⁰ by dedicating itself to promote "good government and welfare of all persons on the principles of freedom, equality and Justice"²¹. Apart from the preamble, chapters two and four of the Constitution extensively deal with human rights issues. While chapter two is captioned, Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy,

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chapter four is entitled, “Fundamental rights”. In writing, these rights are well detailed in the Nigerian Constitution:

1. Right to life²²,
2. Right to dignity of the human person²³,
3. Right to personal liberty²⁴
4. Right to fair hearing²⁵;
5. Right to private and family life²⁶;
6. Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion²⁷;
7. Right to freedom of expression and the press²⁸;
8. Right to peaceful assembly and association²⁹
9. Right to freedom of movement³⁰
10. Right to freedom from discrimination³¹
11. Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria³²
12. Right to receive prompt compensation for compulsory acquisition of property³³.

These rights enshrined in the Nigerian constitution notwithstanding, events in the history of Nigeria, as is in many African countries are worrisome. Presidents leave the country without constitutionally informing their people, a right that they possess. The court grants bail to people and the government sits on the bail. The president sends troops to wipe out a whole village³⁴. In 2001, the President of Nigeria invoked the emergency powers of the military against the town of Odi. Within forty-eight hours, the rural town of Odi was levelled. Only a church and a bank building survived the operation. Over 300 were reported killed in the most widely condemned military action since the General Sani Abacha pacifist troops overran Ogoniland. The action of the military as genocidal, brutish, reckless and a gross violation of the rights of the victims to life and to property. Describing the condition of Odi after the military invasion, the National Daily Newspaper reported that:

The destruction of Odi was comprehensive and complete; no aspect of the community was spared by what I saw in the pictures showed here. The respondents violated the fundamental human rights of the people of Odi, by the massacre. The people are entitled to fundamental rights to life, dignity and fair play, the destruction of Odi was not as a result of gun battle but clear bombardment, the destruction was malicious,” Justice Akanbi declared. The judge also quoted President Goodluck Jonathan as saying in a media chat on the National Television Authority (NTA), on November 18, 2010, that “only innocent people, including women, children and the very weak that could not run to escape were killed in Odi³⁵.

In 2001, the Federal government also ordered a military invasion of Zaki-Biam. The military operation began on Monday, October 22, when soldiers from the 23rd armored brigade of the 3rd armored division of the Nigerian army rounded up residents in Gbeji village for a “meeting,” made them sit on the ground, separated the men from the others, and then opened fire upon the men indiscriminately. Witnesses reported that some of the victims’ bodies were then set ablaze. Further killings took place as soldiers invaded the villages of Vasae, Anyiin Iorja, Ugba, Sankera and Zaki-Biam, all located in the two local government areas of Logo and Zaki-Biam. In the following two days, there was widespread destruction of property and buildings in these villages, after terrified residents had abandoned their homes. While the total number of victims has not yet been established, survivors and eyewitnesses have reported that at least 100 and possibly more than 200 people died at the hands of the soldiers³⁶. These raises questions as regards the universality of fundamental human rights: are there people who have it more than others? Are there times when it should be respected and at others disrespected?

2. Religion and the Violation of Human Rights

Religion, especially the Islamic religion has been accused of standing for class society and patriarchy, and thus undermining the fundamental human rights of women . Thus, religion has been accused of being an instrument of oppression rather than redemption. The introduction of the Sharia law in Northern Nigeria in the perspective of Titi Salaam does not in any way advance the rights of women³⁸. In the contention of Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi,

The implementation of Sharia Penal Codes in northern Nigeria is flawed in several respects. Firstly, it does not adequately protect the rights of women. Therefore abuse, violence and discrimination against women go unpunished as they are wrongly considered to be socially acceptable. In addition, the testimony of women is devalued and treated as that of a minor or person without necessary legal capacity. Often, these biases and attitudes also affect judges and therefore the judgment of the Sharia Courts. As a result the implementation of Sharia in Nigeria has placed some restrictions on the rights of women in Northern Nigeria.³⁹

The Sharia law considers sex out of wedlock a crime punishable by death, and under this law, pregnancy is a sufficient evidence to convict an unmarried woman of the crime. However, if a man takes an oath denying of having had sex with a woman out of wedlock, is often considered sufficient proof of “innocence” unless four independent and reputable witnesses testify to seeing him take part in the act. Unfortunately, most of the culprits of the Sharia law have been women⁴⁰. It is from this perspective that Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi further observes that,

These ... suggest that the thinking of the court and supporters of Sharia is that only women can be guilty of

the ‘offences’ of adultery or fornication. What happens then, in the case of seduction of minors, or rape? This suggests that men living under Sharia have been given a license to rape women and seduce or assault minors, or even impregnate them in the course of a relationship and then deny responsibility and watch them face a death sentence⁴¹.

In October 2001, court in Sokoto state convicted Safiya Hussaini of adultery, she was sentenced to death by stoning, because she became pregnant out of wedlock, even though the 35-year-old mother cried out that her daughter was raped by a neighbor. In the case of Safiya, Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi, raises questions of gender bias on the following grounds: “Her pregnancy constituted the main evidence against her, but no scientific efforts were made to establish or disprove the paternity of the child. The onus of adultery was just pregnancy. The man named in the case was allowed to go free after denying responsibility for the pregnancy”⁴².

In Katsina, during the month of March, in 2002, Amina Lawal Kurami was sentenced to death by stoning for bearing a child out of wedlock. The man she identified as the child’s father denied the accusation and was acquitted for lack of evidence. However, she was later set free.

In Zamfara, there was a time women were for a period prevented from travelling in public transport, the reason being that women are not supposed to be seen in the public spheres of life, it is worst when found in the company of a man not related to them. This led to a protest from women, and the law was amended, however in practice it is evident that women are still discriminated against⁴³.

In an attempt to express the fact of women oppression under the Sharia law, Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi, cites an instance in Tarata Mafara local government, where single women were given a three month ultimatum to get married or face being

sacked from jobs in the civil service. Some financial inducements were provided to encourage women to become married. These example, argues Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi, constitute rights violations under Nigerian law. The criminalization of women and their rights diverts attention from the real causes of crime, lack of adequate transport and housing and so forth⁴⁴.

In December 2008, Thisday Newspaper reported that the Kwara State Sharia Council faulted the purported plan by some members of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the state to present a woman as the 2011 governorship candidate. It said that such a plan was contrary to the Sharia Law which forbids leadership by women. According to the statement signed by the vice chairman of the council in the state, Sheikh Moshood Ibrahim, "We therefore vehemently oppose this plan in Kwara State where over 80% are muslims come 2011 as being contemplated and bandied about by some members of the ruling party in the state"⁴⁵. Events of this kind, once again raises questions as regards the universality of fundamental human rights: do men have more human rights than women? Or are men more human than women?

3. Biomedical Research and the Violation of Human Rights

The challenges of underdevelopment, poverty, disease, inadequate health infrastructure, etc., have made Africa to become a vulnerable group for the conduct of biomedical research⁴⁶. There is an increased migration of research companies (unethical researchers) to developing countries where there is a loosed regulatory framework, where inhabitants have no knowledge of their rights to compensation, etc⁴⁷. In 1996, United States Physicians and the University of Zimbabwe, funded by the Centre for disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO) and the National Institute of Health (NIH), made AZT trials on HIV-Positive African patients in Zimbabwe. The trial was done on about 1700 women for a medication that prevents mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. The subjects were not duly informed about the procedures and consequences of the

trial, and in fact were told about the trial under duress. The result was an estimated 1000 babies contracting HIV/AIDS⁴⁸.

During an outbreak of cerebro-spinal meningitis in 1996 in Tudun Wada in Kano State, Nigeria, where Children were predominantly the victims. At this point, Pfizer brought in a team to conduct a research on its test drug TROVAFLOXACIN (TROVAN) - a quinolone antibiotic. Pfizer recruited a total of 200 children into the study in two arms- one arm had the test drug Trovan orally and the control arm was given Ceftriaxone or Chloramphenicol. Pfizer did obtain ethical clearance before recruiting participants and administering the drugs conducting the study. Pfizer capitalised on the poor, illiterate and desperate situation of the people⁴⁹ and administered an unregistered drug; a clear case of the exploitation of the ignorant⁵⁰. During the research, about five children died⁵¹. There was the case of clinical trials in Uganda between 1997 and 2003, when women taking the anti-transmission drug Nevirapine experienced thousands of serious adverse effects (SAEs). These symptoms went unreported and testing was allowed to continue, resulting in the (also unreported) deaths of 14 women. In Hyderabad, India in 2003, eight test subjects died during the testing of the anti-clotting drug Streptokinase. The worst part, though, was that the subjects did not even know that they were part of a trial⁵². One would have expected that researchers from the West would have known that local people in Africa have fundamental human rights which needs to be respected. This also raises the question as to the fundamentality and universality of human rights.

Igwebuike and the Hermeneutic of Human Rights

The question that Igwebuike philosophy intends to attend to in this section of this research is on the interpretation of the violation of fundamental human rights is: how does the violation of another person's fundamental human rights affect me as a separate individual? When the issue of the violation of fundamental human rights arose at the heat of the Boko-Haram insurgency in the Northern part of Nigeria, some of those from

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the South were quiet, or simply thought, it's a Northern issue, let them sort themselves out. During the military invasion of the Eastern part of Nigeria, predominantly Igbo, opinions were widely different, while those from the South condemned it, most of those from the North saw it as the most appropriate thing to be done, and only a one-sided attention was paid to the tale of terror, bloodshed and tears as the helpless and armless IPOB members were crushed by the Nigerian military. Much has been said about the need to defend people's fundamental human rights in the United Nations, but these voices seem quiet and less aggressive when it comes to biomedical research in Africa which violates local people's fundamental human rights. If the west keeps quiet at the violation of the fundamental human rights of the African people, the Northern part of Nigeria keeps quiet at the violation of the human rights of the people from the South and the South keeps quiet at the violation of the fundamental rights of Northerners, how does this affect or affect the humanity of the one who is quiet?

Igwebuike philosophy sees the other as a part of me, and together, in our peculiarities, we make up the whole. If together we make up the whole, it then means that the other is a part of me and what affects the other affects me. To alienate the other is to alienate myself. Ekwulu, therefore, writes that:

If the other is my part or a piece of me, it means that I need him for me to be complete, for me to be what I really am. The other completes rather than diminishes me. His language and culture make my own stand out and at the same time, they enrich and complement my own. In the presence of his language and culture, the riches and poverty of my language and culture become clear and I see that his own and my own when put together form a richer whole when compared to any of them in isolation⁵³.

Ekwulu (2010) further opines that the self is not only

completed in relating with the other, but that it attains self-realization in the other: "I realize myself in the other because it is in the 'Thou-ness' of the Thou that my 'Is-ness' is realized. I am 'I' because you are 'You'. Without Thou there is no I. We are 'We' because they are 'They', and without 'They', there is no 'We'""⁵⁴. Thus, the Igbo would refer to the 'Other' as *Ibe*, which means 'a piece of' or 'a part of', as in *ibe anu* (a piece of meat) or *ibe ede* (a piece of cocoyam). The Igbo would, therefore, refer to the 'other person' as *ibe m* which means 'my piece' or *mmadu ibe m* (my fellow human being). This is the concept also employed in reference to relationships and reciprocity: love one another (*hunu ibe unu n'anya*), help one another (*nyere nu ibe unu aka*), respect one another (*sopuru nu ibe unu*), etc. Since the 'other' refers to my own piece, it would, therefore, mean that to love the other is to love oneself, to help the other is to help oneself and to respect the other is to respect oneself. Put the other way round, to hate the other is to hate oneself, to refuse help to the other is to refuse help to oneself and to disrespect the other is to disrespect oneself⁵⁵

Relating the principle of Igwebuike philosophy to the interpretation of the violation of human rights shows that silence at the face of the violation of human rights is the greatest disservice to humanity and yourself. To be quiet, is to be quiet about what affects you indirectly- fundamental human rights. If a person keeps quiet at the violation of another's human rights, instead of being the voice of the oppressed, he is quiet at the violation of his own human rights. In Igwebuike philosophy, the person who speaks for the other, speaks for humanity of which he is a part; for if humanity is destroyed, the individual is also destroyed. Since every part plays a fundamental role in the universal human scheme, it then means that every part, no matter the colour or tribe, needs to be protected for the preservation of the whole.

Conclusion

The foregoing has studied the consequences of the violation of the fundamental human rights of the other from the perspective of Igwebuiké philosophy. It first established the linguistic formation of Igwebuiké as a concept and underpinned complementarity and solidarity as the underlying principles of Igwebuiké philosophy. It also studied the indices of violation of human rights in Africa, with more focus on the Nigerian nation of Africa. This initial study created the background for an interpretation of the violation of human rights with the principles of Igwebuiké philosophy. In Igwebuiké philosophy, the dynamics between identity and alterity is different and unique. The other is understood, not in terms of the 'I and the Not I' but in terms of the 'I and Thou'. The other is seen as a complement of the self, and to violate the human rights of the other who is a complement to you is to violate your own fundamental human rights. This work traces the ontological link between and among humanity, which makes human rights universal, whether rich or poor, developed or developing, poor or rich, etc., and within the context of the same ontological cord, establishes that the violation of the human rights of the other is a violation of your own human rights and thus, sees the fight for the preservation of human rights as a responsibility for all.

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