

A Discourse on the Concept of Human Person in Igala Thought

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Abstract

There are various conceptions of the human person which has made it difficult to comprehensively pin a universal understand to the concept. This paper, however, examines Igala concept of the human person. It holds that the Igala people see human beings as the primary foundation of the human person. It is only a human being that has the potency of human person. In other words, human beings can become (or not become) a human person. Human person is seen in diverse ways and meanings by the Igala people such as Onee as human being, human person, offspring, young able human being, as responsible person and a host of others. The paper goes further to examine the various ways by which the Igala people conceive of human person and analyse the various discourse by Igala scholars on human person. In line with the Igala thought, this paper concludes that the concept of the human person entails much more than being human, it includes certain values that authenticate our humanness.

Introduction

All through the ages, scholars of different epochs, races and schools of thought have attempted to define human person from diverse angles such as features, characteristics, activities, status, environment, and so forth. However, such definitions are not entirely exhaustive. I am therefore persuaded that an enquiry into what personhood entails in a typical African setting such as in Igala, would no doubt, be a rewarding intellectual exercise. This is even more so, considering the fact that personhood is a very controversial topic in both Philosophy and the Arts or the Humanities. A perusal of certain facts of history in Ancient, Medieval, Modern and contemporary times shows that it has remained at the front burner of societal discourse. For instance, the peculiar problems of Africa and Africans pertaining to

their political crises, leadership ineptitude, instability in government and socio-economic underdevelopment, etc can be seen as negations of personhood. These problems have been attributed to the twin problems of slavery and colonialism which, according to Odimegwu have hitherto reduced human beings “from human to commodity, from personhood to property”.¹ Asiegbu called this “the tragic triad of modern Africa”² (while including racial oppression). More often than not, at the global level, lack of respect for human as a “person” has reared its ugly head in relation to euthanasia, cloning/genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, gay-marriage, female circumcision, forced marriage, caste system, single-parenting, poverty, mob-action, ritual murder, thuggery, political assassination, terminal illness, ethno-religious violence, unemployment, ostracization, terrorism, war, racism and the likes, in our time. These various issues call for a proper understanding of 'person', since only persons have rights. Such rights are inalienably offshoots of their being a person.

This paper attempts to discuss an Igala thought on human person. It is analytical and hermeneutic in nature and is organized as follows: introduction, clarifications of concept, dimensions of Igala thought on human person, some critical discourse on human person from an Igala perspective, evaluation and conclusion.

Person: A Conceptual Clarification

The concept, “Person”, is a word used for only human beings and never for plants and the animals.³ It is a comprehensive term which refers to human being, a term expressing his entire reality in a precise and unequivocal way.

Etymologically, it is a term rooted in the word “*persona*” (in Latin) and its Greek

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1. Ike Odimegwu, “The Human Person in African Thought: Existential Crises and Conceptual Resolutions” *Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies* 2, no. 3 (2019), 123
 2. Martins Asiegbu, and Jeremiah Chukwuokolo, *Personhood and Personal Identity: A Philosophical Study* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2010), 19
 3. B. Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 2007), 243

equivalent “*prosopon*”, which means “actor's mask or disguise”.⁴ This word (person) marks the dividing line between Greek and Christian culture. In other words, historically, before the advent of Christianity, there was no “decisive notion of person” because, according to Mondin:

These cultures did not recognize the absolute value of the individual as such, and made their absolute value depend essentially on class, rank, wealth, and race. The ancient man is absorbed by the city and the family, subjected to a blind destiny which is without name... The singularity of the person, unique and unrepeatable (and consequently, the substantial equality in dignity of every member of the species), is a truth carried, affirmed and diffused by Christianity, and was a truth with a “subversive power” (peacefully subversive).⁵

At a stage, “person” came to mean not only humans but also the Divine Trinity (God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit) – three persons in one God with all the distinctiveness and individuality attributed to each person of the Godhead. And from the foregoing, it is glaringly evident that there is an improvement on that era when personhood was merely seen from the point of view of the theatre which means “mask” or “way of being”. In modern terms, it indicates the state of “a distinct, autonomous individual, an independent being who has his own intellect, will, and moral responsibility”.⁶ Personhood is seen as an ultimate fact. It is not only in opposition to the naturalist reduction of the person to physical processes, but also to the idealist account of the person as merely a transitory less-than-real manifestation of the Absolute.⁷

Closely related to this term is 'Personalism' which is a view that emphasizes the

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4. Dagobert Runes, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New Jersey: Little Field, Adams and Co. 1997), 229
 5. Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 224
 6. T. Michael, *What Muslims should Know about Christianity* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2003), 68
 7. T. Mautner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 418

importance of personhood. It is a philosophy and doctrine which considers personality – the supreme value and the key to the meaning of reality.⁸ The different layers of this term shall also be sieved in relation to other related concepts in the course of this study.

Idoko and Turman⁹ hold that the word, *person* is derived from the Greek word-*prosopon* which translates to the masks worn by actors to designate their various characters. The Latin variant is known as *Persona* which means “fundamental entity” and is traditionally indicative of someone who enjoys Legal Status in the Roman Empire. However, it has now come to be used as a term to substantiate the essential nature and characteristics of man and how this translates to the moral, social, political and other aspects of man. In the words of Kazeem Fayemi, “Personhood, broadly construed, is the qualitative status, attributes, and capabilities of being a person; it is the recognition of a being as a person”.¹⁰

What the prevailing understanding of person is among the Igala people would be an impetus to our universalistic conception. Put differently, a true and concrete development of the African solidaristic or communalistic perspective, would impact positively on our globalized society. Personhood in Igala understanding entails much more than the physical qualities or endowments of an individual human being; it embraces the intellectual, psychological, social, cultural, moral, religious and spiritual dimensions.

The simple philosophy which states that “an unexamined life is not worth living”, or put in another way, “man know thyself” of Socrates, remains ever valid here. The Igala person as an individual ought to know and be able to identify who he really is in relation to the world around him. This will enable him to comport himself better in order to harness the available resources creditably for the common good of the entire

8. Runes, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, 220

9. V.E. Idoko and B.B. Turman, “The Implications of the Relational Concept of Person,” *APPON Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (2022): 3

10. Idoko and Turman, “The Implications of the Relational Concept of Person,” 3

society.

It is generally thought among the Igala people that so many ingredients go into the pot at different times to make the soup delicious. Similarly, they hold that to become a man is not a day's job; so many things have to happen to actualize the potentialities that determine human personhood in Igala thought. It is popularly held among the Igala people that the primary ground for human personhood is being a human being but what determines human person goes beyond being a human being. It has several other dimensions such as the genetic factor, potentiality, social and cultural factors.

Human Person in Igala Thought

The concept of a “person” (*one*) in Igala mind-set has different layers of meaning. First, “*one*” literally translated in Igala means person or human being. That is, anybody identified as a human being in contradistinction with animate or inanimate objects. Second, is “*one*” as one who has come of age. This is in relation to physical maturity or psychological well-being. Third, is “*one*” in relation to some traditions whereby certain individuals in the society are considered “free-born” (*amoma one*) i.e. literally offsprings of “persons”) in relation to other sets or groups of people termed descendant of slaves (*amoma-adu*) in specific areas of Igala land. Fourth, is the description of “*one*” as a fellow possessing many virtuous or forward-looking qualities.¹¹ It denotes the exhibition of a couple of such positive or promising characteristics which his relatives, friends, acquaintances or neighbors would be generally proud of. Qualities such as ability to live amicably with others, being amiable, harmonious living, peaceableness, tolerance, patience, gentleness, loveability, trustworthiness, transparency, truthfulness, courage, temperance, modesty, intelligence, kindness, generosity, compassion, dynamism, resourcefulness, progressiveness and a generally attractive and magnetic life are

11. Fidelis Egbunu, “Personhood (*One*) in Igala Worldview: A Philosophical Appraisal” *Cross Cultural Communication* 9, no. 3 (2013): 1-9

considered as the yardsticks.

This very last category of personhood in Igala understanding which entails virtuous living in all its ramifications is largely our point of reference in this paper. As it were, the aforementioned characteristics readily bring to mind the need for unity, cooperation, togetherness, etc.

The varying layers or degrees of Igala conception of “*one*” simply implies why a typical Igala would exclaim, “*efone li ib'ema*” (knowing somebody goes deeper than ordinary sighting). In other words, “it is not all that glitters that is gold” or better put, “you cannot judge a book by its cover.” It is in this respect that even though one's physical stature or status or name may contribute to defining who one is, one may not judge the quality of a person just by such mere considerations. In Igala worldview, for instance, it is believed that “*odu ch'ajamu one*” (name is the bridle and bit for controlling a person), a name can make or mar a person's entire life. It is in this sense that a typical Igala would hold that “*odu nyọ tokọ le*” (good name is to be preferred to money).

It is of utmost significance that it is the society or community that gives name (*odu*) to a child before that particular human person assumes his God-given space in the community. Obi¹² in his *Philosophy of Names* harped on the fact that even though a name “moulds” and “cuts” one's “separate identity” the person may not necessarily be reduced to the name since, reducing a person to the status of a name appears degrading as names are not conscious of themselves. In a nutshell, the human person is not confined to behaving in line with his name. He has the capability of choosing to have his behaviour at variance with his name. However, as it is often stressed, “without it, a child remains a nonentity since his name defines his personality in a community”¹³; “names are part and parcel of those elements of African culture that

12. Augustine Obi, “Philosophy of Names”, *Ujah: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 10, no.2 (2009): 199

13. Anthony Ekwunife, “What is in a name? A Philosophy of Naming in Igbo Culture” *Bigard Theological Studies* 16, no.2 (2019): 37

go to make African personhood unique”, they are capable of fashioning out his unique identity.¹⁴

This carries with it a lot of social implications. In the course of searching for a marriage partner or business partner, for instance, it is not just the mere appellation that matters in considering his or her suitability, the person as such (in totality) is brought into focus. The family background, the person's social habits or traits, economic status, religious tenets, political leaning, emotional maturity, educational background, and much even much more, form part of the yardsticks. There is a sense in which whoever is considered as not being a person in the above light is denied marriage-partner, land or some business connections.

Igala Literary Discourse on the Human Person

Igala literary heritage on issues which relate to our subject of discourse directly are so rare. A very careful perusal of extant literature leads us into noticing what tacitly conceptualizes personhood. Every attempt to achieve our aim brings us face to face with the challenge of tackling concepts which might not be readily available in the Igala worldview. The western notion of concepts such as man, human being, person, personality, character, individuals and related terms such as progress, development, recognition, solidarity, status, community, hero, nationalism, patriotism, etc are used as launch-pads to sieve certain elements of Igala idea of personhood. These and many other ideas are brought into sharp focus in the course of this aspect of our literature review, and are systematized and blended to fit into our mode of investigation.

Miachi's *Becoming an Agabaidu*¹⁵ is a procedural account of the coronation of Idakwo Ameh Oboni as the Ata Igala in 2013. The core value of this book lies in

14. George Ehusani, *An Afro-Christian Vision "Ozovehe"* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 131

15. T.A. Miachi, "The Igala in Historical, Cultural and Socio-Political Perspective" in *Brochure for Igala Traditional Chieftaincy Investiture Ceremony of Mr. Moses Abu Braimah*, Dec. 26-27, 1992, 19-56

the step-by-step documentation of the traditional process of becoming an Igala paramount ruler. The contest that qualifies him from among his peers in the royal family lineage, the Ugwolawo connection, the significance of the Jukun representation, the long trek, tutorials, womanization rite, beading rites, presentation of the traditional staff of office, the Ojaina rites, rebirth and the general coronation ceremonies, etc. all go to show that in Igala tradition, becoming a person does not just happen in a twinkling of an eye. Persons are identified in stages and a particular experience, ceremony or rite can transform an individual's status from one particular level to a higher one. This, most times involves, not just the change of appellations or philosophy of life but also assuming of new responsibilities. By the discovery of himself, he is able to discover those “others” he would lead. And by taking good care of the people, the people would take the best care of him.

In Miachi's masterpiece, *The Incarnate Being Phenomenon in African Culture*¹⁶ which is sort of compendium of Igala cultural thoughts, he takes up the issues of man, especially from the anthropological perspective. The various forms of festivals celebrated in the land with their appurtenances are seen as creating healthy links in the community of the living and the dead. Whether such festivals are still being celebrated in the present dispensation with the right sense of understanding, is yet another question altogether. It is posited that many of such festivals are great sources of social cohesion and spiritual harmony. And in *Introducing the Igala People*, Miachi¹⁷ traces who the people are, who their neighbours are and their relationship with such neighbours. He lays stress on the significance of good neighbourliness far and above the sheer interest in ethnogenesis. To him, what should preoccupy the Igala mind in the present era is the

16. Tom Miachi, *The Incarnate Being Phenomenon in African Culture* (Kraft Books Limited, 2012)

17. Tom Miachi, “Introducing the Igala People” in *The Program of Events for the 54th Anniversary of the Ascension of His Royal Majesty Alh. (Dr) Aliyu O. Obaje to the Exalted Throne of his fore-Fathers, November 2, 2012*, 12

type of person he/she is and the ability to forge peace not only vertically with God and the divinities but most importantly in relation to one's immediate environment. This is especially significant in this age of lawlessness, chaos, anarchy and war. Igala social organization which is essentially kin-based is leveraged upon as the springboard¹⁸ with its nuclear and extended, lineage and clan units. All members are said to regard one another as “brothers” or “sisters”. And rights, like freedom, equality and property are inalienable. As it were, in this traditional setting, a number of agnatic families combine to form a clan and a number of them may constitute a hamlet or even a village, who trace their origin to a common apical ancestor. This social arrangement is itself seen as a factor which promotes unity, peace and progress among the people.

Boston relates, in his groundbreaking work *The Igala Kingdom*, how kinship and local community ties are arranged in an orderly fashion to allow room for healthy human interrelationship between the living and the dead. The reception house (*Atakpa*), for instance, is presented as an important symbol of the group's spatial and social identity.¹⁹ Here visitors are received and major disputes or other issues affecting all members of the group are discussed and settled. And its site which is central symbolizes ritual identity and the welfare of the entire community. Justice in this traditional atmosphere means that each person acts and is treated accordingly. The socio-political space of Igala in Nigerian nation as the ninth largest tribe is also brought into focus. However, whether Igala is still occupying same or better spaces in the turn of events is a matter reserved for critical enquiry in another study.

Okwoli, in his *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion* avers that Igala tradition places great premium on man.²⁰ That man is placed at the center of the universe in Igala ontology is incontrovertible. To him, man is made up of seven basic parts,

18. Miachi, “Introducing the Igala People” 13

19. J. Boston, *The Igala Kingdom: The History of the 9th Largest Tribe in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1968), 130.

20. P.E. Okwoli, *A Short History of Igala* (Ilorin: Matanmi and Sons, 1973), 3

namely the body, blood, shadow, heart, brain, breath and personality soul. One wonders, however, whether the shadow plays any significant role in the life of the individual aside from its thaumaturgical effects. In this same work, Okwoli underscores how Ata and his prominent chiefs played prominent roles and how the elders represent divine authority.²¹ Egbunu, in his *Igala Traditional Values Versus Modernity*, made an attempt at exposing modernity and traditionalism so as to find a harmonious equilibrium and located the life of Igala people as revolving around their highly esteemed cultural values.²² Such values as familial solidarity, hospitality, greeting or salutation, respect for elders, filial piety, integrity, truthfulness, courage, sense of the sacred, sense of ritual and festivity, primacy of the personal, etc. are seen as being central to the life of a typical Igala. These, according to him, are principally expressed in myths, folktales, rituals, proverbs, floksongs, dances, pithy sayings, social institutions and works of art of the people. Egbunu's *Guideline for Celebrating Egwume Egbe Festival* is a brief exposé on the sort of individuals that are honoured and/or considered as heroes in a typical Igala setting. It also brings to the fore the social and spiritual aspirations of the people and how such needs are met at the traditional level.

That the Igala person is a lover of peace, human dignity and life is not in doubt here as Akogwu-Omagu, the apical ancestor of Egume-Ome is depicted as the indefatigable, the invincible fighter and the mysterious. Yet, he is a lover of peace, human dignity and life who never wanted continuous bloodshed. Egbunu's *Chieftaincy Titles Among Igala* is an endeavor at differentiating between the status of Igala citizens who have chieftaincy titles and leadership conferred on them owing to inheritance or belongingness to the royal lineage and those to whom honorific titles are given as a result of their astuteness, industry or heroism. Thus, in the former instance, it is a matter of natural heritage, while in the latter, it is more of an

21. Okwoli, *A Short History of Igala*, iv, 3

22. Fidelis Egbunu, *Igala Traditional Values Versus Modernity* (Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publishing Company, 2009), 76-80

achievement. In either case, however, the dignity and influence of the person involved is enhanced within the society. As it were, the various traditional rulers are graded accordingly with the Ata-Igala at the peak of the hierarchy of authority and power. Ata is first without any equal in the land. And the other chiefs and traditional rulers have stipulated functions.²³ It is also important to note that women are not left out. They are also recognized and given their own titles and roles. Herein, Aristotle's view that some are born naturally so and suited for certain roles in the society and that they would be ineffective if left otherwise, holds a lot of import.

Etu's *Igala History in Questions and Answers* puts bits and pieces of both oral and written information before the Igala person so as to get him/her educated on the history and traditions of the people. This is basically aimed at disposing them for a more dogged commitment to the course of the land in order to breed more patriotic citizens. Again, as it is often said, "those who refuse to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat its mistakes". His list of nine festivals in Igalaland (*Ocho, Ogaganyi, Ogbadu, Egwu-Ata, Egwu-Igala, Ogani (Idah and Ankpa), Egbe-ona, Egbe*) when juxtaposed with those of other authors (Ukwede, Adegbe, Miachi, Egbunu) gives a systematic array of these cultural ceremonies which portray human life, health, liberty and possession as sacrosanct. And Etu's *Ame Oboni – His Life, His Reign* offers yet another detailed work on the character of an Ata who was a father *par excellence*. That he was greatly feared but well-respected by both his people and colonial masters was not in dispute. It is popularly believed that he distinguished himself as an extra-ordinary achiever owing to his forthrightness and foresightedness. His legendary feats, especially his drive for western education, ultra-modern government offices, aerodrome, etc are so well documented here again for posterity. Both Aristotle and Plato's views that the abilities, achievements of different people entitle them to different statuses find a solid example here in Ameh

23. Fidelis Egbunu, *Chieftaincy Titles among Igala: Problems and Prospects* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2001), 16

Oboni.

That is why Idakwo's piece on *Ameh the Great* emerges not just as a thorough insider account but a clear testimony of the life and times of an extraordinary custodian of Igala Kingdom. This book puts forth the almost magical and unimaginable feats of this royal icon as a singular story of one who, when faced with challenges of gargantuan proportion, had to be decisive and courageous in self-determination for the common good. Making of certain responsible decisions in crucial stages of life is simply what makes life tick. The central role of the Atakpa (reception house) is also well-articulated to show the interconnectedness and/or symbiotic relationship which is required of a typical Igala setting.

Idegwu's *Legendary Inikpi* is a historical showcasing of a quintessential Igala royal princess of high repute who remains a perfect example of vicarious person whose action culminated in the making of the supreme sacrifice so as to save the fatherland. Such self-sacrifice is considered quite heroic and is recognized as the highest form of patriotism among the Igala people. Historically, this puts this heroine on the same footing with Queen Amina of Zaria and Moremi of Yorubaland. Edimeh's *Legacies of Ata Ayegba Om'Idoko* reiterates the fact of Ayegba's central and inalienable role among Igala royal ancestors. That the history of the political development of Igalaland is traced to Ayegba and not to the so-called proto-dynastic ancestors and that he is venerated and invoked in the daily affairs and prayers of a typical Igala man is an attestation to how the people value his achievements. The fact that the entire Igala people refer to themselves as Ayegba's grandchildren (*Aju Ayegba*) and the entire Igalaland as Ayegba's land (*anẹ Ayegba*) alone is enough testimony. That apart, the singular act of the daughter (Inikpi) who willingly offered to die for the sake of the survival of Igala kingdom has remained an indelible mark of patriotism. This alludes to the fact that one's achievements and ability to contribute to the enhancement of humanity speaks millions in improving one's reputation and credibility as a person among Igala people. And Edimeh's *Aj'ocholi Provenance in*

Igala History also showcases the tactical stratagems of a particular royal figure (Ata Ame Oboni) who was simply larger than life. He is known to have exhibited so much spirit of courage and self-sacrifice to such a degree that his methods in relieving his people of their afflictions could only be said to be legendary. He could be said to be a near-perfect example of how the Igala king owned the people as well as they the subjects also own him. This reminds one of John Locke's perspective on the power of the sovereign that political authority actually rests on the consent of the governed. Ameh Oboni accomplished this even to the point of death. And through his actions and inactions in life and death, he is said to have saved the Ata institution from shame and disgrace. It is believed that Ata Ame sacrificed his life for the integrity of the Igala nation.

Ukwede's *History of the Igala Kingdom (c.1534 – 1854)* is a watershed in comprehensively tracing the history of Igala to its ancient links with the Yoruba, Benin, Jukun, Idoma, Egbira, Igbo, Nupe in the remote past.²⁴ The origin of the present ruling dynasty is specifically connected to the Jukuns. However, the Igala people are said to have made some unimaginable impact on their immediate neighbours religiously, socially, culturally and politically in varying degrees and at different levels. A similar point is made in Hussaini's *Culture of the Egbura/Ebira/Igara Etuno* to reaffirm the Igala-Ebira connections from antiquity. This is also glaring especially in their greeting forms and masquerade culture which explains why Okwoli in his monumental *Short History of Igala* traces the cultural home of the Igala, Idoma, Igbirra to Idah.²⁵ Meanwhile, he agrees with the submission of some scholars that Igalaland remains a cultural melting pot and possesses a political structure to be reckoned with in the Nigerian socio-political landscape. Great premium is also placed on the ability of an individual or group to

24. J.N. Ukwede, *History of the Igala Kingdom C. 1534-1854: A Study of Political and Cultural Integration in the Niger-Benue Confluence Area of Nigeria* (Kaduna: Arewa House, 2003), 193-194

25. Okwoli, *A Short History of Igala*, 15

successfully harness the resources of the society.²⁶ Men, according to Plato, pool their resources together and because of this live together as farmers, weavers, musicians, craftsmen, etc. And the level of a people's respect for women shows, to a very reasonable extent, the degree of their respect for humanity. Ukwede also brought into solid focus the role of women chiefs.²⁷ The place of the queen mother “*Akuma Ata*” the most political and influential woman (akin to *Iye-oba* in Benin Kingdom), *Iye-ogbaga* and other women chiefs is well delineated. This same point was brought home graphically by Isah-Usman in relation to Ochoniya Ape as to how Ata Ayegba established titles for women especially some of Ata's sisters and wives.

Egwuda-Ugbeda's article on *Oloja Masquerade Performace of Igala as Theatre of Transition* and *The Abule and Atawakeji Masquerade Performance in Igala as Machinery for Social Control* lay much emphasis on how the comfortability of life-after-death is believed to depend on the life preceding death. Thus, even the hereafter (immortality) is said to depend on the life one leads in the mortal world, especially in relation to the ancestors and also the role played by other living members of the family in preparing the deceased for the world of the ancestors. The facticity of human existence, the need for constant focus on the teleological and awareness of finality of death is implied. It is instructive here that nobody lives for himself alone and when one dies, no one reaches the abode of the ancestors on his own.

Ijoma in *The Igala and their Neighbours: Historical Glimpses*, brings to the fore the divine kingship status of the Igala Monarchy. He, especially locates the imputed status of the Ata-Igala, not only in relation to how it embodies in his person, god-head or a deity, a divine principle such that a gulf exists between him and his subjects, but explicates the belief that he was represented as a being free from human needs²⁸ and therefore larger than life or mysterious. He further stresses that the Ata is

26. Okwoli, *A Short History of Igala*, 103

27. Ukwede, *History of the Igala Kingdom*, 120.

28. Ijeoma J. Okoro, *The Igala and their Neighbors: Historical Glimpses* (Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers, 2010), 32

also entrusted with the welfare of the community. The office and person of the Ata is thus set apart from the ordinary. As a person, he occupies the most exalted position among the living and is considered as a divine King owing principally to his spiritual functions. Adegbe's *Unique Igala Cultural Festivals* explains the most popular festivals celebrated by the Igala people, the rituals involved, their sacred sites and salient points on their origin, nature and relevance. It is noteworthy that the *Inikpi*, *Aboko Regatta* and *Italo* among others are also mentioned as part of the most important festivals in the land. It is profoundly manifest through such festivals that those celebrations, among other things, are great sources of pride to the Igala person and a veritable link with the world of the living and the living-dead. The import of such a work lies in its ability to portray the people's life as having gradually evolved from the Hobessian state of nature where life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short to a more humane and rational level. Adegbe's work on *Insight into the Religions* also makes an honest effort at explaining the advent of Islamic religion in Igalaland and especially among the ruling class. Most significant for our relish is the emphasis on freedom of worship and interreligious harmony which could be said to be somewhat the soul-anchor of Igala unity. He rightly attributes this to God who is said to be the inspiration behind such an atmosphere. It is in this spirit of peaceful and harmonious relationship that the Igala person is expected to sustain the culture of "live and let live".

Odiniya's *History and Traditions of Okenyi*, while outlining the people's specific cultural heritage, displays vividly what the Igala people generally consider as Taboos especially as it relates to insolence, sitting positions, totem animals and omens.²⁹ Any breach of these taboos carried with it consequences which might include isolation, fining, ritual sacrifices or other forms of punishment from the living or the spirit world. No doubt, these taboos carry with them some merits. But parents and guardians would need to consult reason rather than rely solely on old

30. Francis Odiniya, *The History and Traditions of Okenyi* (Ankpa: Cuca, 2008), 44-51

customs. Cultural practices in view of chieftaincy, death and burial, marriage ceremony, etc are also brought into sharp cognizance.

Ameh, in *The People of Akpanya*, while making a historical survey of Achadu in Igalaland, gives a special focus to their Onyerima Deity and Ancestral Veneration in this part of Igalaland and beyond. Here, he articulates in a very graphic manner, how the adherents of traditional or indigenous religion relate cordially with the spirit world and especially the ancestors. It is worthy of note that even the yet-to-be-born are included in the circle of those to be accorded respect in the Igala tradition. This is why Ebeh's study on "African Concept of Life, Person and Community – Contribution to Global Bioethical Discourse" is very apt. Here indeed lies the kernel of a thought that the African can export to the global ethical community with regards to their attitude to human life and personhood. The question of whether the embryo (foetus), infants and even those in palliative states are really persons can perhaps find a ready answer here. The western society is therefore called upon to learn from the African conception of personhood and struggle to evolve a more humane society.

Abdullahi's *First Nigerian People* is considerably a humble attempt of an Igala scholar to behold his fatherland as the center of the universe, or at best, as the cradle of "civilization" in the Nigerian socio-cultural space. The first Nigerians were identified with Bassa, Igala, Egbirra, Kakanda, Oworo, Idoma, Agatu and those under the direct control of Ata-Igala proper.³⁰ A few benign but yet largely unsubstantiated statements burst forth here. Nonetheless, the Igala person is necessarily motivated to assert himself positively in a world where many people are unjustifiably being relegated to the backwaters because they have not projected themselves well enough or blown their own trumpets. Abdullahi's point is not unrelated to Nwaezeigwe's notion in *The Igbo and their Nri Neighbours* that the *kwa* language family to which Igala obviously belongs possess common affinity because

30. J. Abdullahi, *The First Nigerian People* (Anyigba: Winners Publishers, 2018), 10, 13-15

of common vocabularies. It is further agreed that they spoke one common language in the remote past, were one people and lived in a common area identified around the present confluence town of Lokoja. This somehow confirms Jeffreys' guess that the *Nris* probably originated from the Igala; while the ruling dynasty of Igala originated from Jukun, and Jukun from Egypt. The origin of a language and the origin of people are said to be the same. This idea needs not be taken wholesale however, because there are also indications that the Igala people have an autochthonous origin

Omale's *Igala Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* chronicles the developmental strides thus far in the land. The Igala man's/woman's assets are set forth to be worked upon for sustainable development. The people are also being sensitized to stand against indolence, if they must make progress. In this instance, concrete existence as opposed to essence is being proposed. It is not just what is of benefit to the entire society. Rather, it is that which touches one's very existence by which one's life could be based. Proper harnessing of human and natural resources is seen as the remedy to the ailing economy and political backwardness.

Apeh's *Social Structure* is an effort at delineating the different categories of persons in the social relations among the Igala. The classification may not necessarily be in line with Plato's *Republic* (whereby you have the ruling class – Philosophers, the auxiliaries – Soldiers, etc. in charge of security, and the artisans in charge of different menial jobs/functions) or capitalist society which is simply split into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Two basic categories are clearly identified, namely; the *abogijo* (elders) which he terms Patrons and the *oma efowo* (ward) and also identified as clients. Under the first category (*abogijo*), he lists *Enelile* (as big person), *Anana* (as rich person), *Anokpo* (as wealthy person) and *Enojima* (as respectable person).³¹ And under the latter (*oma efowo*) which is translated as “client identities” he mentions *Enekekele* (as a small person), *Enale* (as empty-handed person), *Enobata* (as poor person) and *Oguchekwo* (as ordinary person). Herein, one

31. J.E. Apeh, *Social Structure and Church planting* (Shippensburg: Companion Press, 1992)

discovers a whole array of mix-up in the translation of certain concepts. First and foremost, this raises a number of questions as to whether if one does not belong to the so-called group of “Patrons” (*abogijo*) then one automatically falls into the other category of the “Clients” (*Ọma-efowo?*). One wonders how an *Ọma-efowo*, which means servant or ward could be translated solely as clients in this work. No wonder then, our author inexorably ran into the difficulty as to where to classify the “middle” class.³² Besides, one cannot but notice the problem of nomenclatures as the terms used for the big, rich, wealthy or respectable persons could also apply to either of those other groups. This is probably owing to the fact that a particular vocabulary could have a couple of layers of meaning and so could mean one or more things, depending on the context.

Furthermore, the points outlined by Apeh as “symbols of identity” of a person in the Igala social setting (quality of food, cloths, house, property, friends, relationships, sociability, utterances and geographical location, etc)³³ appear somewhat lopsided, simplistic, universalistic or over-generalized for a typical understanding of Igala personhood.

Onucheyo's *Igala Man's Burden* observes a general spirit of lawlessness in the current dispensation is akin to the Hobessian concept of man as blindly irrational, utterly brutish and grossly selfish. This sense of indiscipline, lack of self-restraint, wrong moral judgment and apparent decline in educational quality is attributed to a weakening cultural foundation.³⁴ The imbibing of cherished Igala cultural values is presented as a *sine qua non* to not only socio-cultural development of the individual but is presented as an added impetus to the general welfare and development of the entire society. As a matter of fact, the German Philosopher, Heidegger's popular axiom that “culture and tradition is not just what lies behind but

32. Apeh, *Social Structure and Church planting*, 81

33. Apeh, *Social Structure and Church planting*, 81-82

34. A.N. Onuchenyio, *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion* (Anyigba: Pastoral Center, 1996), 12-13

what lies before us which destines us for the future” comes readily to mind. This would lead us to Plato's point on the need to control the appetitive soul (desires) which is the lowest part of the soul with the aid of the will aided by reason (intellect) that harmony may prevail. In line with Locke, it is believed that the human person is basically decent, orderly, socially-minded, morally disposed and capable of relating well with his fellow men. Though the human person, as observed by Sartre, is condemned to freedom like an artist before a *tabula rasa* to be free, *ipso facto* entails being compelled to take a responsibility of making some rational choice.³⁵ My freedom finds its limit in the freedom of others.³⁶

In a nutshell, the above extant Literature form the main materials from which salient or relevant points are being discussed within the Igala cultural space. Thus, they serve to bring to the fore not only the role of God in human life but also the creative process in the life of a person, including the processes of initiation at various stages of life, the physical, spiritual, social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of human life and man's relation with others as a communal being, and the final destiny of human life are also being considered. Understandably, at the universal level, for instance, a person is person without greeting or salutation, but among the Igala people, the accidental (i.e. greeting) which arises from the customs or culture of the people becomes substantial and of course a necessity. Understanding the relation between necessity and accident in a people's philosophy is therefore very crucial to grasping the key to their metaphysics.

Evaluation and Conclusion

It is obvious from the foregoing that Igala discourse on the human person is varied for the reason that the people conceive of a human person (*One*) to be primarily a human being. Such conception makes it obvious that a person must be human being

35. Joseph Omoregbe, *Metaphysics Without Tears: A Systematic and Historical Study* (Lagos: Joja Educational, 1999), 47

36. Omoregbe, *Metaphysics Without Tears*, 47, 51

before he can ascend to other levels of human person. Human person at this level delineates human being from other beings. It is also thought that human person is thought to be a grown-up human being. This is thought of by the Igala people in terms of behaviour of a grown-up human being in distinction from children. At this stage of perception, it is thought that a grown-up human being will reason properly and behave like someone of that age and as such would be responsible. If he can reason properly and appears responsible, he would be termed a human person by the Igala people. They will describe him as one who has come of age, differentiate between his left and right, can be assigned responsibility. Such a human being is termed a person. It is obvious from the foregoing that to become a person is not a day's job.

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