

**BELONGINGNESS AS *IGWEBUIKE* AND AFRICAN  
PHILOSOPHY  
A CRITICAL RELATIONSHIP**

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**Executive Summary**

*To be is to belong. That is to say being fundamentally belongs. Being is belonging. Belonging is being. To be, therefore, is to belong in one way or the other. By being and consequently belonging, human beings and realities are identified as such. Being foundationally relates to belongingness and belongingness to being. Belongingness, therefore, is an essential and indispensable character and intrinsic way of being. Hence, belongingness defines and describes a being, thereby justifying the conclusion thus: to be is to belong; not to be is not to belong. Until a being belongs, there is no identifying possibility with regard to what it can become or do amidst other realities. So, there is unity in strength by and in belonging. This is belongingness as Igwebuike. Belongingness guarantees the expression of relational unity as Igwebuike, which literally translates to unity is strength and guarantees pragmatic relationship that is symbiotic. These concepts, belongingness and Igwebuike, nevertheless are critically examined and philosophically contemplated within the paradigm of African philosophy amidst doubts of possibility and questions of existence with regard to nature, method, scholarship and history, which are genuinely part of world philosophical heritage.*

**Keywords:** Belongingness, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, Igwebuike, African Philosophy

## Introduction

Philosophy, *philosophia*, is love (philos) of wisdom (sophia). At the dawn of philosophy in the chequered history of man as rational animal, *being question* is very prominent and at the centre of philosophical discourse. Different philosophical traditions as well as philosophical epochs and periods had different problems to tackle philosophically. Contemporary period engaged more the reality as it confronts individual philosophy, demanding proper explanation and response. At this point, many Western philosophico-traditional concepts are being replaced with complementary African philosophic-traditional concepts like *Igwebuike*, among others. These are individual philosophers' attempt at articulating reality as it relates to them, solving their problems and explaining their immediate environment.

## Belongingness

Belongingness is a definitive principle in African communalism. It is a kind of societal bonding and genuine relationship within a community that stipulates that a thing belongs as it identifies with the environmental realities. Onebunne (2019a:) reiterates that, "belongingness is nevertheless expressed in few meta-theoretical concepts as: *Ibuanyidanda*, *Ubuntu* and *Ohazurume* " as well as in *Njikoka*, *Ezumezu* and more in *Igwebuike*. Belongingness, therefore, is the conceptual African metaphysics of being.

Belongingness has been identified as an ontological abstract term that specifies that a thing is because it belongs to one reality or the other. The idea of being as belongingness is nevertheless articulated on this understanding. Being, therefore, expresses itself in belongingness. Nothing actually is inactive or in its own unidentified with the other. It is only by implication that something can be thought to be inactive. Belongingness is the propulsive move of being to perfect itself and

operates within an environment. Belongingness, as the African metaphysics of *To Be*, tries to locate by concretely defining and determining a being. Belongingness concretizes a being in existence. Hence, whatever is, as a being, must belong to something and/or somewhere. This is why being fundamentally belongs within the locus of spatial temporality. Onebunne (2018:429) notes that the typological interconnectedness of belongingness is that it connects to every being and every reality is networked. Being realizes its potentialities in belongingness. This is so because being fundamentally belongs within the spatial reality of *space-time*.

### ***Igwebuiké* Philosophy**

*Igwebuiké* is a modal action of a being in African worldview and understanding. It is an Igbo word, which is a combination of three Igbo words. Kanu (2017:23) in systematizing *Igwe-bu-ike* writes thus.

‘To be’ in Igbo ontology is *idi*. However, the modality of being is *Igwebuiké*. It is an Igbo word, which is a combination of three words. Thus, it can be understood as a word and as a sentence: as a word, it is written thus, *Igwebuiké*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. Let us try to understand the three words involved: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a large number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means is. *Ike* is a noun, which means strength or power. Put together, it means ‘number is strength’ or ‘number is power’, that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force. At this level, no task is beyond their collective capability.

The three words involved are: *Igwe* is a noun which means ‘number’ or ‘population,’ usually a huge number or population. It nevertheless means ‘sky’ or ‘king,’ depending on the pronunciation and the syllable stressed. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is* or *that which is*. *Ike* is

another noun, which means ‘strength’ or ‘power,’ and as a noun it means ‘buttocks,’ or even as a verb, it means ‘to create’ or ‘to share’ (Kanu, 2014). Thus, put together, *Igwebuiké* literally means *number is power* or *strength is power*. Put it the other way round, it means ‘number is strength’. Number here refers to a group of beings, population of persons or people or reality. It refers to a congregation or multitude of human beings, animals or any reality that is capable of activity. You cannot gather for nothing. The *igwe* (in the sense of masses or assemblage) gathers for action to be replicated or exerted (Kanu, 2016). It is presupposed that the crowd or cluster of persons or any reality will exert enough might or vigour as well as force and supremacy or control for an end or activity to be achieved. Onebunne (2018:65) explains that *Igwebuiké* “as employed by Igbo traditional philosophers as a theory based on an illustrative statement to teach that when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force, and more so, to express their world of relationship, harmony, continuity and complementarity.” At this level, no task is beyond collective capability. This provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. As an ideology, *Igwebuiké* argues that ‘to be’ is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. ‘*To be*’ is ‘to be with the other’ in a community of beings. This is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of African philosophy (Kanu, 2019).

This work suggests that *Igwebuiké* is the key to understanding African philosophy. While being in Igbo philosophy is ‘*Idi*’, that is, to be, *Igwebuiké* is the modality of being. It is an Igbo word, which is a combination of three words. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuiké*, and as a sentence, it is written as *Igwebuiké*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. As an ideology, *Igwebuiké* postulates that ‘to be’ is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and

complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings (Kanu, 2018). Such being with others is guaranteed by such others. That means one belongs with others, strengthening their existence. This is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of African philosophy

### **Belongingness as *Igwebuike***

*Igwebuike* literally means *number is power or strength is power*. Kanu (2017), the apostle of *Igwebuike*, defines it as "the expressive modality of being in Igbo Ontology." For him, *Igwebuike*, which, according to Asouzu (2007:11), is literally *strength in togetherness*, is the locus of meeting of beings in Igbo communalist metaphysic, with special reference to existentialism and leadership. Kanu (2017:34), however, opines strongly on the concept of *Igwebuike* thus:

*Igwebuike* provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. As an ideology, *Igwebuike* rests on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. It argues that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings. This is based on the African philosophy of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of African Traditional Religious and philosophical experience.

In developing this fundamental character of being as belongingness, Iroegbu (1998:45) initially defines belongingness as *a definitive principle in African communalism*. He uses belongingness in a technical sense. It is, thus, for him, a principle of membership applied to a given community. This membership is not mere identification but a kind of belonging that is security-assured. This belongingness implies the basic commonness that makes a community a community,

in our context, what makes a given African community as such. Iroegbu shows that communalism makes belongingness an indispensable conceptual starting point for communal existence. Accordingly, Iroegbu explains thus: one native expression of belongingness is the term, *umunna*. In this sense, *umunna*, a basic community, transcends the nuclear family to mean, by extension, people of common lineage as well as commonness of origin. Belonging, however, is the human need to be an accepted member of a group. Abraham Maslow suggested that the need to belong was a major source of human motivation. And since *no man is an island*, the need to belong to and with one another becomes a basic demand for man's existence and co-existence. In belonging, people form a community of togetherness, and strengthened by such togetherness, many activities are possible. Some theories in life have also focused on the need to belong as a fundamental psychological motivation. We belong to a group with which we have commonalities. This feeling of belonging is a basic need and a unique term in the dynamics of living and existence.

Hence, Iroegbu (1995:19) asserts that "belongingness makes sure that all belong and none is marginalized, both contributively (duties and responsibilities) and distributively (sharing of communal cake)." This is the locus of *Igwebuike* at play. One does not necessarily belong. One is ever conscious of where one is putting oneself or belonging. The importance of communal existence is a rational provision aimed at a better understanding and appreciation of man, not as a discrete individual but as a being - properly expressed in belongingness as *Igwebuike*. This understanding has provided an enduring manner of attending to man as being with an inalienable interconnectivity with the rest of men. And so, the idea of coexistence as bedrock of caring and concern (sympathy) is highly significant in Africa as a whole. Hence, the Igbo people normally talk of power as belong to the multitude (*Igwe-bu-Ike*), especially when they cohabit or live together as in extended family system, a form of *onyeaghana nwanneya!*. In fact, the very concept of the multitude is in itself understood as a source of power and authority.

## **Understanding of African Philosophy**

African philosophy is philosophy as it is done in and for Africa and others. It is a philosophical tradition that is African within the mainstream of philosophy as a systematic study. African philosophy is the critical and universalizing interpretation of the culture and worldview of African people by philosophers within and outside the African continent. It is philosophy done within African philosophical tradition, designating the corpus of African philosophical writings. However, African philosophy, like other philosophical traditions, has a historical development along the path of human consciousness, critically encountering their realities (Kanu, 2015). This is against some philosophers' views and philosophical currents trying to demean and oppose the existence of African philosophy. African philosophy, therefore, is a systematic study within the limits of the *Africanity* of philosophy and *philosophicality* of African realities and heritage.

## **The *Philosophicality* and *Africanity* of African Philosophy**

Osugwu (1999:28), in his criteria for the scientific philosophicality and scientific Africanity of African Philosophy, was apt to note thus:

African philosophy is at the same time African and philosophical. In and by these terms, we are searching, on the one hand, for the genuine philosophicality, i.e., formal scientific philosophy, of the said African enterprise, and on the other hand, for the authentic scientific Africanity of that scientific philosophy. These two basic scientific criteria make African philosophy to bear the characteristics marks of its particularity and universality.

Philosophicality simply places African philosophy at par with *philosophia*, which is love of wisdom. To this extent, African

philosophy remains part of the *world philosophical heritage*, with one philosophical monoculture, though from African *weltannchaunng*. Philosophicality, nevertheless, prunes African philosophy of the old socio-cultural bias of existence, and mere skeptical influence with pseudo-philosophical orientation. However, by this singular application of philosophicality, African philosophy is philosophy *qua* philosophy, irrespective of the philosophical traditions and/or philosophers' postulations, as long as it expresses the needed *love for wisdom* and maintains the search for knowledge with an unaided reason as the most basic instrument. African philosophy, in this perspective, is philosophy *per excellence*, considering its contribution to world philosophical heritage and even to Western ancient philosophers, like Socrates and other known philosophical figures, periodisation and traditions. If Socrates was regarded as a philosopher *per se* alongside Western philosophical tradition, then the tradition that produced him, which is the Egyptian African philosophical tradition, must have elements of such uncompromising philosophical innuendoes. Onebunne (2019d:3) summarily opines thus:

*Philosophicality* is another principal criterion for determining African metaphysics. African philosophy is at the same time African, philosophical and metaphysical. By these terms, we are searching for the genuine understanding of philosophy. *Philosophicality*, as a basic scientific criterion makes African philosophy to bear the characteristic mark of its universality. Hence, echoing Osuagwu, I.M., therefore, in line with this understanding, African philosophy is, therefore, a universalization, a universal vocation, ordination, destination and determination of and in the African particular. To this extent African philosophy or metaphysics is carried on at the same time according to philosophy's general scientific norms, exigencies and African particular, traditional and natural factors. In this co-operation and mutual integration.



African philosophy has been very much neglected, rejected and denied on the purported grounds of its lack of genuine *scientificity*, authentic *Africanity* and systematic *philosophicality*. Through continued studies and sustained researches, African philosophy finds stability with its *Africanity* and more by its *philosophicality*. It is no more a question of, *Is there an African philosophy? Can there be African metaphysics?* Today, the emphasis of the question shifts rather from *can there be African philosophy?* to the issues of the *possibility* and how contemporaneously African philosophy is dealing with facts of historicity and method in African philosophy, principles, issues and special areas in African philosophy and her branches.

Equally, the *Africanity* of African philosophy is worth the salt. Scientific *Africanity* is a complementary principle in the definition of African philosophy. *Africanity* is a criterion that defines African philosophy properly with some parameters. According to Osuagwu (2001:24), “by its *africanity*, it is a particular, that is to say, a particular reflection, concentration, concretization, contextualization, experience, identification and differentiation of the philosophic, scientific universal.” *Africanity* tries to solve the controversy and the project of African philosophy by going beyond the boundaries of the geographical Africa. Within the geographical context, *Africanity* expresses what it takes for any philosophy to be qualified, identified and differentiated as specifically and typically African. It contextualizes African experiences, life and reality within the realm of philosophy. For Osuagwu (2001:26). therefore:

Scientific *Africanity* refers to a set of African parameters or factors which include nature and culture, persons, places, times, events, doctrine, text and methods involved in philosophic enterprises so designated. These factors and many more constitute the common requirements by which a given subject matter is said to be African.

Borrowing an impressive idea from Kinyongo, Osuagwu (1999: 28) writes that “African philosophy is carried on at the same time according to philosophy’s general scientific exigencies and Africa’s particular natural and cultural factors. In this cooperation, and mutual integration, philosophy and *Africanity* look into each other to detect, engage and determine the scientifically valid and available in themselves.”

### **Belongingness and *Igwebuiké* as Products of African Philosophy**

African philosophy, having come to stay, gave room for philosophical concepts that ordinarily would not attract any serious attention. But as long as philosophers of African origin and background are concerned, many of our concepts, having received the needed critical attention, can be projected naturally to the realm of rigorous discourse. It is no more: can there be African philosophy? Instead, it is dealing with African philosophy in a very sublime way, amidst given possibilities. The debate is over. What we are in now is *doing* African philosophy. Oblivious of Hegel’s doubts on the possibility of the existence of African continent and the known facts with regard to Black Pharaohs of the Ancient Egypt, contemporary history is saddened with facts that Western philosophy is African philosophy in display as one doubts the authenticity of the burnt Alexandria Library.

African philosophy has made it possible for the emergence of African concepts that can comfortably challenge her contemporaries. Whatever it is like, Placid Tempels was bold enough to initiate then the debate on the possible existence of African philosophy with his publication of *Bantu Philosophy*. Amidst every known criticism, one must note that African philosophy is a viable philosophical option. This is because, philosophy, like African philosophy, has been rooted in the culture and worldview of the people. These socio-cultural data and worldviews of people’s realities remain *the given* for critical appraisal in the quest or search for knowledge or wisdom which is philosophy. This is philosophizing *per se*. Okere (1983:15) opines strongly for the possibility of African philosophy based on this opinion, thus: “It is

only within the context of hermeneutics that African culture can give birth to African philosophy.” Why then do some philosophers refuse to accept and acknowledge that African culture has been reflected on and interpreted as such over the century amidst great scholarship and authorship, even as its methodological moments and scientific historicity are readily available? To this extent, any reference to African philosophy as mere derogatory ethno-philosophy than its foundation or fundamental root is a mark of great lack of scholarly ingenuity and serious disfavour to knowledge. Instead, one is inclined to accept that African philosophy is part and parcel of world philosophical inheritance.

### **Definitional Universality of African Philosophy in Relation to Raw Materials for Philosophical Reflection**

The definition and universality of African philosophy, against oddities of credibility and doubts of existence per chance, is resolved in the *philosophicality* and *Africanity* of African philosophy. African philosophy, therefore, has a share in the mainstream of philosophical traditions growing as a human enterprise as a result of critical interpretation of tradition and cultural realities. Okere (1983:38) asserts that “all philosophy is essentially an historical and time bound interpretation of being.” In this line of thought, however, there are ethno-philosophical foundations to philosophy as critical engagement and philosophical traditions of which African philosophy or Chinese philosophy is no exception. This is far beyond referring to African philosophy as *Sage* or mere *Cultural* philosophy. Amidst all sorts of bizarre and false ideas on the capability of African man to philosophize, questioning the depth of his philosophy, one can boast of African philosophical scholarship as well as African authorship. However, Iroegbu (1994:116), an optimistic contemporary philosopher, was very apt in defining African philosophy as:

The reflective inquiry into the marvels and problematics that confront one in African world, in view of producing systematic explanation and

sustained responses to them. It is an inquiry with two aspects: *philosophical* and *African*.

Iroegbu was very *premier* in giving this succinct definition. In this definition, one can read a *kind* defense of African philosophy against being labeled mere folk, cultural or *ethno*-philosophy. The background at the time of this definition has to do with questioning and giving the possibility of African philosophy with regard to historicity and methodology. This is why for Iroegbu, African philosophy *is a philo-sophia, a quest for African wisdom*. However, Iroegbu was academically astute enough to reiterate that “African philosophy is philosophy done in an African context...the different aspects and complexities of existence that challenge him as an African person. In this respect, every philosophy is contextual philosophy.” By this very act, I strongly add that every philosophy worth the salt is ethno-philosophical, relatively cultural and appropriately traditional to the philosopher. Alluding to this, Iroegbu (1994: 122) was vehemently bent on this general understanding of philosophy as: the global participation of all realities and entities in the general fact and understanding of being as being whether in African, Asian or Western philosophy. Summarily, Iroegbu (1994:122) gave ten areas of any contextual or ethno-philosophical basic foundation for genuine philosophical enterprise thus: *Geo-environmental, Socio-cultural, Episteme, Mythico-religious, political-moral, Historic, Ethnic – linguistic, Existential, Phenomenologico-pragmatical and ontological*. For Iroegbu, therefore, these philosophical concepts alone “are what we generally call the African philosophical *philosophemes*: raw materials for philosophical reflection, questioning, responses, analysis and eventual synthesis.” In this statement of fact, Iroegbu, continued to echo his teacher Okere Theophilus, who had earlier conceived the idea of *philosophemes* as deposit of conceptual data or realities for philosophical enterprise.

## **Conclusion**

A definitive thoughtful interpretation and critical analysis of the symbols of African cultures would be African philosophy *qua tale*. That is to say, Igbo philosophy would, nevertheless, consist in the interpretation at a certain level of the various symbols and institutions or traditions of Igbo culture. The concept: belongingness or *Igwebuiké*, for instance, stands for a kind of relationship or unity in strength respectively in Igbo philosophy. However, all those institutions, concepts and symbols in Igbo world that are ever-pregnant with sense and meaning are critically meaningful. Therefore, a reflection with profound application of criticality, analyticity and originality on most African thoughts, concepts and culture gives credence to philosophy and, rightly put, African philosophy. Such profundity in the critical appreciation of African or Igbo worldview makes of them veritable moments for African or even Igbo philosophy based on categories that are native to Igbo culture and worldview. Based on proper hermeneutics, one can dependably and realistically infer that African philosophy is a philosophy within the limits of African source and is nourished from African culture, as its cultural reservoir and primary critical nourishment as belongingness and *Igwebuiké* have done in African philosophy.

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