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# Appraising Igbo Philosophy “*Egbe Bere Ugo Bere*” in the Light of Insecurity in Nigeria

**Ogoke, Jordan C.**

Department of Educational Foundations<sup>1</sup>  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.  
Jordanchuks85@gmail.com  
08064506886

**Yare, Matthew D.**

Department of Mass Communications<sup>2</sup>  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

**Ali, Emmanuel E.<sup>1</sup>**

&

**Sali, Ibrahim Bali<sup>1</sup>**

## Abstract

This paper has made an attempt to explore the security situation in Nigeria with the view to setting the stage for the discussion of the topic. The study first of all established that Nigeria is immersed in a serious situation of insecurity. The security situation is believed to call for serious attention and action as it appears to currently be at its lowest ebb. In the light of the above, the paper utilized the instrumentality of Igbo philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere* to unravel and explicate the security situation in Nigeria. It as well articulated possible ways that respect and how tolerance for differences in ethnicity, religion, political affiliations as well as other ideals inherent in the philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere* can help to ensure stable relationship among Nigerians in order to improve the current security situation in the country. Consequently, conclusions were made and various recommendations were as well put forward.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Insecurity, Egbe Bere Ugo Bere.

## Introduction

Every society operates on certain established philosophies otherwise regarded as guiding principles. One of such principles is “live and let’s live” which is believed to be derived from the *egbe bere ugo bere* philosophy and other similar philosophies inherent in the traditional thought system of the Nigerian people. No wonder various constituted authorities are now saddled with the responsibility of ensuring security of lives and property of citizens. The aim for the above is not far-fetched, as security of lives and property of citizens is regarded as a *conditio sine-qua-non* (an essential condition) for socio-economic and political prosperity. In most cases, as it is in Nigeria, security of lives and welfare of citizens is enshrined in section

14(2b) of the 1999 constitution to be among the constitutional responsibilities of any elected government (FGN, 1999).

It is however sad to note that over the years, successive administrations at various levels of government in Nigeria seem to be battling with discharging the above constitutional responsibility. This position appears to be true especially in the light of the endemic problem of insecurity ever present all over the country. For this, the fight against insecurity in Nigeria as a whole has remained enduring, taking different dimensions as well. This of course is because, insecurity is believed to be an ill-wind that blows no any good as it no doubt holds various negative implications for the socio-economic and political prosperity of the Nigerian state. Thus, must be decisively tackled.

However, in Nigeria currently, the security situation is believed to have so degenerated that it now appears to be at its lowest ebb. There is now an unprecedented level of insecurity in Nigeria. Insecurity in the country manifests in the forms of inter-communal and inter-ethnic clashes; religious intolerance and violence; armed robbery; militancy, assassination, kidnapping, “boko haram” insurgency, marauding killer herdsmen, unknown gunmen among others (Abubakar, 2011). This situation of insecurity is believed to have displaced a lot of people. It has also significantly seen to the grounding in many parts of the country, various businesses and many other sources of livelihood such as farming and the likes. Consequently, problems such as low agricultural and industrial output, high cost of living, inadequate physical and social infrastructure, withdrawal of some local and foreign investors from many parts of the country, widespread poverty and criminality now characterize the country (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). These problems no doubt have now more than ever, posed a severe threat to the unity, socio-economic development and well-being of the entire country.

In a bid to tackle these problems over the years, the Federal Government of Nigeria and other levels of government in the country are providing financial support as much as they can to the security personnel to fight insecurity (Ewetan, 2013). In addition, King (2016) reported that fundamental surveillance, investigation of criminal related offences and heightening of physical security measures around the country aimed at deterring or disrupting potential attacks, strengthening of security agencies through the provision of security facilities, development and broadcast of security tips in mass media have been carried out by relevant authorities. Also, there are review of extant laws, introduction of new laws as well as formulation of policies. In fact, in some parts of the country, various governors have placed a ban on open grazing to curtail and avert such security problems arising from herders-farmers clashes. Special forces and/or vigilante groups are also instituted in most parts of the country to check all forms of criminality that endanger the lives and welfare of citizens.

The above measures notwithstanding, the end to the problem of insecurity in Nigeria appears not to be in sight as Nigerians wake up daily to dreadful news of insecurity. In fact, many Nigerians as captured by Yabagi (2021), believe that government at all levels have failed or are not doing enough in ensuring security of lives and property. The above seem to be validated by such statements as “every citizen should defend himself”, which is now common among most government officials. Given this ugly trend and the accompanying problems of hardships, the fight against insecurity is so much on. The need to unravel the situation and proffer possible

roadmap in improving and ensuring security in order to reduce to the barest minimum, the menace of insecurity becomes urgent now than ever. This is because, if nothing is done soonest to arrest the escalating trend of insecurity, then the misery of Nigerians will continue to degenerate to even greater unbearable magnitude. Thus, this paper seeks to appraise Igbo philosophy of *egbe bere, ugo bere* in the light of insecurity in Nigeria. However, it is worthwhile before proceeding further, that the major thrusts of the topic be elucidated at this point in order to ensure intelligibility and flow of thought.

### **Conceptual clarifications**

#### **Brief Meaning of Philosophy**

The term philosophy is one that has no universally accepted definition. Thus, it has been variously defined by several philosophers. It is for this reason that philosophers in their bid to understand the world, have over time taken different approaches. To start with, philosophy is etymologically derived from two Latin words, Philo and Sophia meaning love for wisdom. But in a technical sense, Balbian (2019) while reporting the view of Dewey, regarded philosophy as that which emerges out of the methods employed by men to unravel realities and solve their problems as well as achieve prosperity. Methods here suggest that philosophy is a rigorous, disciplined, guarded analysis of some of man's problems. Thus, through philosophy, certain principles are advanced to demystify and tackle problems of man such as insecurity, for the betterment of the society in which man lives.

#### **Insecurity: Meaning, Sources and Challenges**

Insecurity is a social menace and to properly understand it, the term security needs to be first explained. Security means freedom from threats to core values of an individual or group of individuals (Brown, 2014). This definition suggests that when the core value system of a given people is eroded, then security of the people can no longer be guaranteed. This points to the fact that principles upon which security is founded or built are believed to be embedded in a people's value system. In a similar but holistic view, Ighomereho (2013) defined security as the protection against all forms of harm whether physical, economic or psychological. In this regard according to the above author, security suggests stability and continuity of livelihood, predictability of daily life, protection from crime and freedom from psychological harm.

Notably, it is generally argued however that security is not only the absence of threats but the ability to rise to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency and expertise. From the definitions above, it is deducible that the concept of security has always been associated with rising to the tasks involved in ensuring safety and survival of the state and its citizens from harm or destruction or from dangerous threats to their very own existence. Also, the state is seen as the institution with the primary responsibility and power for the safety of its territory and its people. Unfortunately, the idea of security often appears to be an enduring yet elusive quest. This may as well account for the lingering presence of serious threats to the very core values of the Nigerian state otherwise regarded as insecurity.

Insecurity of course is the opposite of security. It is a situation believed to affect different various aspects of human life and existence. Thus, the concept of insecurity has usually been variously interpreted bearing in mind the various ways in which it affects individuals. Beland (2005), regards insecurity to be the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged

lack of protection which means lack or inadequate freedom from danger. In another view, Ighomereho (2013) sees insecurity as being ignorant of, a lack of control and inability to take defensive action against forces that portend harm or danger to an individual or group of individuals or what makes them vulnerable. The definitions presuppose that insecurity is the state of being unaware, open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury and the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. In this regard, a major point that can be implied about insecurity as defined above is that those affected by insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware of what would happen but they are also not able to stop it or protect themselves when it happens. Thus, in this study, insecurity is regarded as a situation of danger or threat to the peace and/or overall wellbeing of individuals in a particular society over which those affected are not able to prevent it or to protect themselves.

Insecurity in Nigeria is believed to breed and thrive on various factors such as ethnicity, religion and nepotism which in turn result to attrition of the political, socio-cultural and communal thought/value systems. Nigeria being a multi-ethnic and religious state is sharply divided along religious and ethnic lines. Arising over the years from the divisions are different cases of ethno-religious based crises amounting to destruction of lives and property. In this regard, Ogoke, Njoku and Momoh (2019) submitted that divergent religious orientations and ethnicity are major sources of crises and insecurity in Nigeria. This may not be surprising because as the most populous African country with about 250 ethnic nationalities as well as different religious faith, Nigeria shares very little in common with regards to convergence and harmony which are necessary to reduce the centrifugal forces that rip them apart (Odeyemi, 2014). Also, divergent religious orientations embedded in ethnicity is also believed to result to nepotism which has become more evident in the current regime.

High level nepotism which characterize the Nigerian state is among the serious problems that worsen insecurity in Nigeria. Nepotism is clearly made manifest in appropriation of state resources. This in turn makes poverty and bitter anger inevitable aspects of daily socio-economic and political routine of many Nigerians. Poverty and social injustice occasioned by nepotism now weaken any sense of mutual tolerance, social solidarity or coexistence, while reawakening social hatred, radicalism and violence which are all fertile grounds for insecurity. Consequent upon such factors like ethno-religious differences as well as nepotism are the gross erosion of various socio-cultural and communal thought/value systems.

The level of attrition to the socio-cultural and communal thought/value systems in Nigeria is believed to be a direct result of the high-level of ethno-religious intolerance and nepotism that are present in Nigeria. Negative consequences of the above factors tend to force people to throw to the wind, the very salient recipes of tolerance and harmony embedded in and derived from the socio-cultural and communal thought/value system of the people that promote and ensure the security of lives and property of individuals. The traditional value and thought system of the Nigerian people (especially the Igbo people) is characterized by such endearing features or is rather based on certain guiding principles such as live and let's live which in the Igbo parlance is reflected in the philosophy of “*egbe ebere, ugo bere*” (Clifford, 2009). *Egbe ebere*,

*ugo bere* is among such guiding principles rooted and advanced over the years by the traditional thought system of the Igbo people. Notably, such principle may not be attributed only to the Igbo people as it could as well be present in one form or the other in many other cultures within and outside Nigeria.

### **Igbo Philosophy of *Egbe Bere Ugo Bere*: An Insight**

The traditional thought/value system of the Igbo people is one that operates on many principles among which is *egbe bere ugo bere*. For a clearer understanding of the principle of *egbe bere ugo bere*, it is usually better to state it in its complete form - “*egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibeya ebela, nku kwaa ya*”. This is translated to mean; “let the kite perch and let the eagle perch, any one that resents the other from perching, let its wings break”. This in the Igbo traditional thought system infers that, the world or society we live in is a large place that can accommodate everyone irrespective of inherent differences. Therefore, no person or group should deny the other the right to existence. The eagle and the kite are two distinct birds. Ordinarily, they would not cohabit because of their different natures. But because they depend on the same habitat (nature or location) for their livelihood, none should resent the other from inhabiting the location in which they both find themselves. Rather, both are to cohabit in order to benefit from the gifts made available by nature.

Again, *egbe bere ugo bere* supposes that, since all beings are to cohabit, they are now by virtue of their cohabitation in a mutual complementary service to each other such that any being that affirms the being or existence of the other through its actions, at the same time affirms its own being and existence (Enyimba, 2019). As a result, one is to give, that others may also give in such a way that none would refrain from giving (Ozumba & Chimakonam, 2014). What is it that could be given here? Well, it could be tolerance, peace, understanding, exchange of resources which in turn will help propagate harmonious coexistence between and among existent entities, groups, people of different tongue, language, tribe, religion and so on. In other words, philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere* encourages the character of moral goodness or togetherness in others by the complementary actions and words of every individual.

It is this inherent idea in the philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere* that inspires hospitality, friendship and good neighborliness in the Igbo people as well. For Ozumba and Chimakonam, the *egbe bere ugo bere* philosophy advocates a predisposition to relate to other individuals in a network in a way that sustains and promotes the mutual interdependence of realities. When an individual negates the being of other individuals by depriving them the right of cohabitation and by extension mutual complimentary service, it is believed to also indirectly boomerang on this individual who remains unserved to his own detriment (Asouzu, 2007). It is in this sense of ricochet effect in the relationship between the eagle and the kite as expressed in the Igbo philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere*, that very significant implication for the relationship among humans of diverse ethnicity, political or religious inclinations in relation to security of lives and property is conceived.

As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, Nigeria is no doubt a hotspot for insecurity. The prevalent ethno-religious crisis, banditry, insurgency, militancy, kidnapping among others, validate the above assertion. However, in a bid to understand the problem of insecurity in Nigeria, the Igbo philosophy “*egbe bere ugo bere*” is considered very significant. This is for

the fact that the philosophy is believed to embody some underlying recipes that can be espoused to truly understand and explain the insecurity situation in the country. It can as well help to remedy the insecurity situation in Nigeria.

### **Igbo Philosophy of *Egbe Bere Ugo Bere*: A roadmap to unravelling the Insecurity situation in Nigeria**

The eagle and the kite as captured in the philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere* represent Nigerians from different ethnic origins, religious beliefs, political or social class. Though different, Nigerians just like the *egbe* (kite) and the *ugo* (eagle) are by virtue of occupying same environment (Nigeria) expected to live together. Living together in this regard is expected or becomes inevitable given that Nigerians occupy the same socio-political enclave (Nigeria) over which they all have equal rights as citizens. For the fact that they are to live together, they are now bound in a mutual-complementary relationship as in the case of *egbe* (kite) and the *ugo* (eagle). As a result, each person or group of persons are expected to play different roles. Everyone must as a matter of duty carryout these roles for their collective survival and wellbeing. Such roles expected of Nigerians for collective survival and wellbeing as captured in the *egbe bere ugo bere* philosophy include: recognition of their inimitable nature and consequent respect, tolerance, love, accommodating one another irrespective of differences in ethnicity, religion, political affiliations among many others. The question that comes to mind at this point is, are Nigerians performing the above roles?

The answer to the above question is obviously evident in the very many ethno-religious and political crisis witnessed in great proportions all over the country in recent times. There appears to be lack of love and tolerance among Nigerians of different tribes, religion and political divide. In the light of the philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere*, the above crises are seen to emanate from intolerance as a result of lack of love and respect for difference among people who are bound to live together. This failure to recognize and respect differences as well as accommodate one another to cohabit and serve in a mutually complimentary manner comes with consequences. Such consequences appear in the form of political and ethno-religious crises, banditry, insurgency, militancy, kidnapping which put together amount to the insecurity situation ravaging the country today. Given the explanation above, the present insecurity in Nigeria could be traceable to the negative predispositions of many Nigerians to accommodate, live and relate with other Nigerians in ways that sustain and promote mutual interdependence as embedded in the Igbo philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere*.

In fact, one could submit that looking at the Nigerian state in the light of the philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere*, the nature of insecurity in the country is one that emanates from failure or inability of Nigerians to respect and tolerate their differences in ethnicity, political and religious affiliations. Many Nigerians appear to so much cling to their ethnic origins, political as well as religious affiliations so much that they resent or deny other individuals the opportunity to live and thrive as citizens of the country. Appropriation of state resources in the current dispensation is largely seen to be carried out in such manners that favour particular set of people more than others and in turn makes poverty and bitter anger inevitable aspects of daily socio-economic and political routine. Thus, the adequate predisposition to relate to other individuals in a way that sustains and promotes mutual interdependence is not ensured. Also, activities of killer

herdsmen, unknown gunmen, boko haram and other ethno-religious based insurgencies have shown total disregard to the need to recognize, respect and accommodate differences in ethnicity, religion among others. They do not work to inspire hospitality, friendship and good neighborliness. Rather, they seem to obliterate the needed opportunity for peaceful coexistence, collective survival and group solidarity as reflected in the Igbo philosophy of *egbe bere, ugo bere*. In other words, the *egbe* (kite) after perching is resenting the *ugo* (eagle) from perching as well. This situation has no doubt served as a major source of insecurity in Nigeria.

As a way forward, there is need for reawakening and reorientation among Nigerians. Nigerians, starting from the leaders to the entire citizenry must do well to recognize, accept and respect their inimitable nature. They should as well make up their minds to accept the fact that though different, they are bound by common factors such as nature, environment and citizenship to live and relate peacefully with one another. With this, it will become easy to look beyond differences in religion, ethnicity, class, to find common grounds upon which they can live (perch) together and flourish. Such policies and practices that otherwise work to resent some Nigerians from cohabiting should be discarded and deemphasized in order to give way for ones that encourage mutual understanding, tolerance, peace, love, unity among others. Families, educational, religious and political institutions should do more to mediate in individuals the ideals of respect, tolerance, love and friendliness. These ideals as embedded in the *egbe bere ugo bere* philosophy are no doubt recipes for promoting peace and security in any society.

### Conclusion

This study has been able to review insecurity situation in Nigeria which is believed to be currently at its worst state. The insecurity situation in Nigeria has been variously explained and attributed to lots of factors. But in the light of the Igbo philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere*, insecurity in Nigeria is believed to be deeply rooted in and emanates from such factors like intolerance for ethno-religious and political differences. Nigerians have over the years and especially in the recent times failed to respect, tolerate their ethno-religious differences as well as find common grounds to coexist peacefully. Many activities in the current dispensation have shown lack of commitment to the ideals of mutual tolerance, hospitality and brotherliness as embedded in the Igbo philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere*. Thus, this paper concludes that the ideals inherent in the Igbo philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere* when put to action can be of great help in ensuring a stable relationship among Nigerians who are divided along ethnic, religious and political lines. This will as well help to reduce to the barest minimum, such resentments from which insecurity emanates.

### Recommendations

This study has shown that lack of love and intolerance for political and ethno-religious differences are the most potent factors fueling insecurity in Nigeria, thus it is important that;

- Nigerians at every level be socialized into the value system of tolerance, love and care for one another.
- different educational institutions, families and religious bodies should continually preach tolerance to individuals.
- activities of the government should be one that demonstrate commitment to promoting welfare of Nigerians irrespective of tribe, religion or political affiliations.



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