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AZIZA ASA CONCEPT AND PRINCIPLE: A BASIS FOR A FORMIDABLE AFRICAN SOCIETY

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Introduction

In African context, *Aziza* as a concept is seen as a very common item, but it is very crucial to every household and community. It is attached to women as one of the property a woman must possess. It is pivotal to stress here that African society traditionally discriminated women from accessing certain responsibilities probably because of the assumed weak natural strength they possess as the weak sex or gender. It is pertinent to recognize here that without broom in any home it becomes uncomfortable for even the pigs to live in. There could be outbreak of any disease within an unhygienic environment. For the Igbo, most communities during the first visit marriage rite of a proposed wife, the first assignment she is expected to undertake or embark on is to sweep every household within the immediate kindred settlement of her suitor. *Aziza* itself is easily accessible in various African communities. They used those sticks gotten from selected plants that grow in their environments to produce *Aziza*. Miss Titi Caroline (personal communication, 2 March 2011) states that for the Camerounians, brooms can be made from some selected plants in their villages that have slim and strong branches. There are brooms for different purposes. They include: brooms for sweeping the house, for processing palm oil, for worshipping, for medicine-men.

Aziza as a principle in Africa runs a whole gamut of the world-view of oneness, togetherness, communalism, patriotism, and synergy. *Aziza* is always used to symbolize this principle. The physical structure of the *Aziza* is that it is made up of individual palm frond sticks. These sticks can stand individually, but each individual stick cannot function on its own. Nevertheless, when they are tied together, they serve the purposes for which they are made or more. This had been the principle that had held African fore-bears together, and had aided their ability to achieve the much they could achieve before the advent of western and Arabian cultures and religions respectively. In the words of Akukwe (1996:46) he shows concern to this when he states thus:

Cooperation is not new to Nigeria. It was in fact the way of life in a typical traditional community before the intermingling with western culture. To some extent, it is still our way of life as expressed in the concept of African communalism. People organize themselves for the purpose of performing public or general functions...

African communalism is the fundamental of *Aziza* being presented in this paper as a principle. This communal principle of oneness, togetherness etc. has made most of African communities or villages to come home at least once in year, so that one could meet and dine with his brothers and sisters he had not seen for some months. Anigbo (1987:89) agrees to this fact in this ethnographic study of Ibagwa aka in Igboeze south local government area of Enugu state thus:

Ibagwa Aka is mainly an agricultural community, traditional feasts are being held at the conclusion of the farming cycle or to mark an important development in the process of this cycle. On these occasions farmers scattered in different farm settlements within and outside Igboland must come home for the feast, because a significant part of the festivity includes religious worship. Such worship cannot be held except in association with other members of the descent group, and must take place in the people's land. This was the original life principle among Africans. But today, it is no longer as usual. The contrary is the case. Achebe (1958) laments that, things have fallen apart. There is mere anarchy. The central can no longer hold, the fulcun cannot hear the fulcuner. The white man has used a sharp knife to cut the things that held us together, and things started falling apart. It was communalism as a principle which *Aziza* symbolizes that held us together. The principle of communalism is concretized by African religion and culture. The white man came and destabilized the continent with his religion and culture. While we were suffering the heat from the western world, Mohammed and his own converts came in with their religion and culture to sweep up the remnants left by the western intruders.

The research discovers that African society is suffering a problem that developed from the negligence on her traditional religion, culture, material and human resources. Therefore, it aims at re-addressing the issue of negligence on African local resources (both human and material) to earnestly build our zeal towards making higher advances for a more united and formidable African society. Among other things the paper recommends for a world class and standard syndicate of African nations. The study employs historical and phenomenological method of research, while data were analyzed with descriptive style. Data used were generated from both primary and secondary sources.

The Idea of *Aziza* as a Concept and Principle, and Formidable African Society

Concept according to Summers (2001:275) is "someone's idea of how something is, or should be". The *Aziza* is viewed by Africans as something that must be readily available for domestic, religious and other social purposes. It is deemed as a domestic product. African make it from there raw materials. It does not demand for importation of any foreign skill or raw material. Summers (2001:1120) also defines principle as, "a moral rule or set of ideas which makes

you behave in a particular way... a belief that is accepted as a reason for an action, way of thinking..." The African people had existed wholistically on the principle of communalism. There had been the belief system or ideas surrounding this principle. People never took decisions, actions, plans and ventures especially those that can affect others independently. In marriage, it is a family group decisions or plans, in farming, it could be a rotational team business, or group assistance to the sick or weak, elderly, in the provision of social amenities, it was completely a communal task, in the early decades of the 20th century, brilliant pupils were sponsored by the entire village or community's coffers and so on.

Aziza as a concept and principle revolves around converting natural, human, and material resources around African environment to products of higher values. It could be achieved better and faster when Africans at home and in diaspora begin to think home, with communal and patriotic spirit because it is said that two heads are better than one. It will enable them to look into resources a particular country, ethnic group or zone has comparative advantage over others. When few reasonable brains come together they create wealth, and other survival measures which make the society formidable against all odds. Mr. Ejiofor Anichebe (personal communication, 20 May 2017) said that if Christianity and other things brought by Europeans did not come and distracted the people of the hinterland, numerous Igbo communities would have produced wrestlers and boxers of international repute, and make sports domicile in Africa so that African clubs will be buying foreigners to their sports teams. African wrestlers can be transformed with more advanced training and provisions, the herbs around African setting can be developed to greater pharmaceutical industries, African traditional medicine needs more hands to develop and standardize it.

Food items with their great nutritional values, African masquerading exercise and other cultural outfit can offer African countries great tourist attraction. Mineral deposits can also be exploited indigenously for local and foreign consumption. Indigenous talents can also be trained to trace resources that are convertible for use. All these will reduce our dependence on foreigners, thereby making the people's society formidable.

Import of the Concept and Principle on the People Religious Life

On the religious realms, Ezeaku, (1999: 35) has stresses that:

Religion sometimes causes large social and political crisis in our society. Yet it is only religion that can lead mankind to appreciate the purpose of life and value of man and society. It is the most immediate living force for our interpretation of the world around us and for our building of the society. Religion has been a source of crises.

reconciliation and peace in the society. Before the advent of Christianity and Islam there had been a lasting peace in Africa.

On the arrival of these two foreign religions crises arose from virtually every corner. Though the colonial attitude towards religion was not either to uproot or discourage existence of any religion, but they maintained neutrality in matters affecting religion. Onyeidu (2001:41-42) avers that: "... the colonial attitude was to emphasise the integrative functions of religion rather than its divisive roles. While fostering and protecting the development of Islam and Christianity, the colonial master discouraged the uprooting of the African traditional religion with all its good and bad elements". The colonial master was neutral but African converts and their international allies discouraged and devoted to uproot African traditional religion.

The point here is that African traditional religion should not be fought for any reason. Asian countries like Japan, Korea, and China etc never played with their traditional religions and they are progressing to enviable global recognition. African traditional religion is African property. She should encourage it. If it had succeeded in providing peace and harmony for the ancestors, nothing will stop it from rendering the same service to the contemporary generation. There might be bad elements in it, but Africans can also restructure the religion by themselves. The reconciliatory efficacy of African traditional religion is noted by Okwueze and Kalu (2003:97-98) thus:

..."IkoMme" which means traditional reconciliation. It is a sort of cleaning to appease the gods. Ven E.E Meoba, the Archdeacon of Obosi archdeaconry of the Anglican Diocese in the Niger from Aguleri described "*IkoMmee*" as "a ceremony performed to appease the gods in order to assuage them for the blood shed during a crisis". It involves a very simple ceremony of eating, drinking together and embracing each other. It is believed that the gods would go after anybody that goes against the letters of the covenant... at a meeting of the warring communities... President Olusegun Obasanjo expressed surprise that peace had quickly returned to the communities...

Whatever agreement reached in any traditional religious setting, is always binding. Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:111) have observed another relevance of traditional religion when they posit that:

"Culture is relevant only when it is progressive and contains those characteristic elements that will help its members grow. Traditional religion possesses these qualities. Some of these qualities include seeing all human beings as the same under the same fatherhood of one God and practical concern for the welfare of one another in the society.

In African traditional religion a brother's problem is everybody's problem no matter one's religious affiliation. African traditional religion is a reliable source of morality, corrupt-free society etc. Gbenda (2002:202) in the same vein points that: "The indigenous religious system of the Africans often described as African traditional religion is rich in institutions that provide honest leadership, good governance and accountability where corrupt practices were not..." Today, the invention of computer is perceived as a mysterious achievement. For Hick in Adibe (2008:19), "Mysticism is the most important aspect of the total phenomena of religion." People try to grab some knowledge about God but sometimes to understand God's activities and ways by man has been proved abortive. African traditional religion is mysteriously used to achieve both good and evil, though the religion punishes sorcerers. In many African communities for example, some experts control rain. If this gift is not misconceived especially by the African Christians would have gained attention for a fast development just like the development of computer and internet inventions.

Aziza as a concept and principle is needed in the religious life of Africa. African traditional religion is the only indigenous religion of African origin, and readily available in African villages and communities. The people should come together and identify those good and wonderful properties of the religion and develop them. The places of worship can be given attractive new look. The priestly ordination can be celebrated and traditional priest given befitting ordination ceremonies and gifts. The refined local materials can be used to build magnificent altars, standard sitting arrangement etc. The religious will become immensely regarded by Africans and foreigners if adequate attention is given to it. At this feat, religions life of the people and society will be exclusively fortified, with all its good religious qualities acknowledged nationally, locally and internationally.

Relevance of the Concept and Principle to Africans Health System

On the health sphere, Ekeopara (2005:53) emphasizes thus:

It is generally believed that magic and religious rites play a leading role in the traditional healing of African administrations of herbs are accompanied by incantations, dancing, grimaces and the tricks known to the medicine men or traditional healers. Apart from the treatment of broken bones and wounds, traditional healing is probably the most rudimentary and ancient aspect of the 'art' of healing. Traditional physicians showed their knowledge and wisdom by treating the man, soul and body. This implies that the patient received both physical and spiritual cure from the traditional healer.

Every business has its tricks modern /orthodox medicine has its own tricks done by the modern physicians, pharmacist etc. Traditional medicine is important because the herbs, roots, practitioners use are within reach. Everything applied to administer treatment are found in the same environment. Some illnesses might have spiritual connections. Modern medicine has not shown its capacities to manouver spiritual ailments. Certain orthopedic issues can be well treated with traditional medicine. The traditional spring water, caves etc are pure and very good for man's health. Traditional foods are always natural and healthy.

African health care system was not sophisticated, but Africans can develop it. The so called modern medicine itself is rooted in the traditional medicine of the white man. According to Okoro in Okafor (2014:2):

Ethnomedicine has been the bed rock of all medicare from prehistoric times. Medicine in Egyptian and the oriental cradles of civilization, traditional Chinese medicine, ancient Greek, Indian Ayurveda, Moslem-Asia Unani, African and new world (American) medicine have all been ethnomedical. Even modern medicine is firmly rooted in ethnomedicine.

As far as man, from generations past, had responded to finding medical solutions to his health, and other life challenges, traditional health care system cannot be expunged in the list of medical and health care delivery systems because of the emergence of orthodox medicine/health care delivery system (Okafor, 2014:3). The people ought to look around the environment for proper utilization of these abundant medical and medicinal natural resources. Some modern hospitals recommend some of these African medicare. According to Mr. Bennedict Owusu (Personal communication, 7th May, 2015), he stated that universities in Ghana have introduced the study of herbal medicine as a professional course. A development of this nature should spread round Africa, by Africans.

The Relevance on Social and Cultural Life

A lot of social vices are the order of the day in the contemporary African society. The traditional behavioural conducts have been seriously interrupted. The norms and values that differentiated a typical African have been down trodden by adverse civilization. The traditional and prestigious titles, recreational exercises, festivals have been affected, marital care, the order of premoginator, political order to mention only but a few are all in shambles. Akulue (2013:60) has emphasized on value system when she says:

The system of rewards and punishments employed by a society has its ultimate basis in the value system. If there were no values in a society, and if these values were not known to differ in degree of importance, the society would lose its strongest instrument of societal control. The system of values is the result of the accumulated wisdom of human

experiences. They determine what is required of people and what is forbidden, what is praised and rewarded, and what is censured and praised.

African society was endowed with numerous values worthy of emulation. There are behaviours or actions that are abominable, and others that are blessed. People no longer consider age in certain circumstances. Dressing code has changed, marriage contract can be held without the consent of the *umunna* (patrilineage), traditional titles are frowned at, people are losing interest in traditional festivals, and organized system of political system has been robbed. All the social control systems are affordable and within our domain. Children are hardly seen playing on the arrival of the moonlight; masquerading and traditional wrestling exercises have been condemned in every ramification by many Christian faithful, and fanatic adherents of western civilization.

In the words of Ilogu (1985:63) he uses Igbo people's experience to discuss this catastrophic experience in Africa thus:

Social and cultural identification and the principles of socialization from the older to the younger generation were clearly understood. With the arrival of missionaries and traders from 1857 onwards the neat pattern became disturbed. Plurality of religious beliefs and values concepts appeared for the first time to start the rapid social change that has been going on in the Igbo land ever since then, although more rapid at some periods than others.

The rapid disturbance Ilogu discovered in 1857 is still lingering. Mr. Thierry John (personal communication, 14 August, 2010) said that in the Republic of Benin, Christianity, colonialism and traders brought such social change and increased population concentration in urban cities, where people with and without formal education or skills meet to contaminate one another with strange behaviours and deadly diseases. African environment never faced these challenges until these foreign visitors arrived. That notwithstanding the aboriginals can gradually and progressively return its lost dignity built on the value system of the continent and improve on it.

The Importance on Economic Life

Agriculture had been the major source of economic livelihood in Africa. In the early 1900s, Nigeria for example produced cash crops like cotton, rubber, cocoa, cashew etc in large quantities. Other crops like maize, rice, plantain, cocoyam, yam etc were produced sufficiently by almost every rural community. The drinking water and cooking pots were locally manufactured. Other kitchen utensils were also produced with the available resources. Many African countries are now dependent on imported goods. They even buy those goods they can produce better. Whoever depends on the domestic products

appears odd. The animals, crops, and other mineral resources in Africa can form raw materials for fantastic output. African traditional ways of roasting fishes, meat etc are healthier and more nutritious than the use of refrigerator and canning. Wine tapping and palm/raffia wine that come out of them can never be compared with the modern alcoholic and soft-drinks. In fact, Africans are not encouraging Africa. Onuigbo (2009:161) stresses thus:

... unfortunately, the rate of farming is vastly reduced in Igbo land due to cultural inter-mingling that brought about serious changes in the life-style of the Igbo, especially the youths. The cultural changes made their land mark in this area through western system of education and mentality which affected the youth greatly and their standard of living. In other words, the coming of the Europeans into Africa brought a lot of changes in the entire and the style of life.

The education Europeans brought should not be misunderstood. Western education is excellently crucial to man; nevertheless, it is most valuable when it is used to transform resources in one's immediate environment. Education becomes less important when it could not reinforce resource base independence of the educated. Education is certitude rather than certificate. African soil is blessed with uncountable solid minerals. These minerals can be converted or used to mechanize agriculture.

Other local industries can also be enhanced. The textile, pottery, and other allied industries can be alleviated. It is a matter of all hands being on desk. The resources are readily available. Mr. Felix Umch (personal communication, 19 April, 2019) stated that there was a time Aguobu-Owa Community in Enugu State was known as a renowned pottery making community. But after the death of the old women that were serious with the industry, the younger ones could not continue in the business. On a similar realm, Nwokike (2006:61) elaborates that: "The backbone of pottery art is clay. Clay has an excellent workability when mixed with water". Clay suitable for pottery industry is everywhere around Africa. In the markets, people cherish to buy imported breakable plates, textile materials etc. Those plates are produced in Asia, Europe etc with resources within their reach. The pottery products that are imported into African countries are very expensive, and highly regarded. The local pottery industry can be improved. The ancient people grinded the locally kilned pottery to produce new ones. African communities can shift from the use of open fire kilned pottery, to the use of surplus bones in various abatours on streets and corners. The local open fire kiln or oven can be interchanged with a more modern mechanized oven or kiln. This will provide employment, and projects the people respectfully in the international market.

Recommendations

- It is recommended in this paper that Africans should form a joint ethnic forum for cordial interaction.
- African government should provide material/mineral resource sourcing bodies for exploitation of resources in African environment.
- The existing social bodies or forums in Africa should constitute action in fetching young talents in Africa.
- African traditional institutions should be taken serious in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary institutions by taking pupils and students on field trips to see and learn the practicability of Africa religion, traditions and culture.
- Festivals should continue to form part of social cultural campaigns in radio, television stations etc.
- Ministries related to the affairs of tradition and culture should help to restructure traditional places of worship, village squares and other economic settings in African soil.
- Archives, museums and monuments should be given a brand new face throughout the continent.

Conclusion

It has been discovered in this paper, that *aziza* is a proverbial and idiomatic term. These terms are used to discourage African people's neglect of the resources they have as God's gifts. The paper sees Africa as blessed continent, which foreigners are using deceit and trick strategies to exploit at the African people's detriment.

Synergy as the *aziza* sticks are synergized together to achieve cleanliness in the environment and from the environment would assist in making the continent formidable in all the ramifications of human existence. It will consolidate the people's religious life, economy, health system, social order etc. The advent of foreign religions and civilization are presented in this paper to as things Africa can use to convert what they have to meaningful realities. Africans should not allow foreign religions to be sources of crises. Education and civilization on the other hand, should not make Africans dependent on the conveyers of the education and civilization. In fact, there is a reliable hope for a better and formidable African society if Africans collectively dedicate time, interest and energy on resources owned by Africans

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