

# Logic in African Philosophy: Examples from two Niger Delta Societies

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## **Abstract**

*There have been questions as to whether African Philosophy exists or not. European scholars and some African scholars are at the opposite end of this scholarly debate. The result is the production of various works by Odera Oruka, Omoregbe, Bordunrin, Wright, Maurier and others espousing their views for or against the existence of African Philosophy. This paper attempts to show the existence of a unique Philosophy that deserves to be recognized and rightly known as African Philosophy. It shows the existence of African Logic using examples from two Niger-Delta societies. The paper begins with the concept of Logic in African thought system, the natural nature of it and it's applicability to these communities especially as it permeates every aspect of the African way of life. The Ibani and Ogoni societies in the Niger-Delta were used as case studies.*

## **Introduction**

African philosophy is a critical thinking on the African and his experience of reality. "It is a systematic coherent discovery and disclosure of the African as a being in the African environment. It is this knowledge and disclosure of himself and his world by critical reflection epistemic and logical processes that the African grasps reality and affirms the truth about man and the cosmos. Anyanwu (1998) defines African philosophy.

*"As that which concerns itself with the way in which African people of the past and the present make sense of their existence, of their destiny and of the world in which they live"?*

The concern in African philosophy is not the existence of African philosophy or its nature, but with the trends and topical issues of philosophical interest, bearing on African realities, worldviews and the way and manner they make sense of their existence.

Topical issues have engaged the interests of African philosophers in their bid to reconstruct African philosophy: The problem of method in African philosophy, the problem of identity in African philosophy, metaphysical, ethical, epistemological and logical issues in African philosophy etc. This explains the investigation into such areas as; "Ibani Traditional

Religion and Social Morality” (Jaja, 2012), “Time in Yoruba Thought”, “Human person and immortality in Ibo Metaphysics”, (Wright; 1984:183) etc.

This paper attempts to address the problem of reasoning and logic in African philosophy. It attempts an examination of the nature, features and role of African logic in African philosophy using examples from the Ibani and Ogoni. What is logic? How is African logic different? What role does it play in the whole gamut of African philosophy? These questions we will attempt to address.

African logic is the application of the thinking process on the African world, language, culture and objects, although a distinction exist between natural and artificial logic. African logic though natural, allows the artificial symbolic logic of the west to influence it. Western scholars have argued that “African culture is prelogical... because Aristotle’s laws of thought are not formulated and do not appear to be observed in African Languages” (Tomassi, 1999).

### **Nature of African Logic**

Corpi (1994) maintains that logic is the study of the methods and principles used to distinguish good (correct) from bad (incorrect) reasoning. Echukwube (1999) says, “Logic... is concerned with the processes of thinking and reasoning as well as the symbolic expression of such process in verbal or written form”. This definition is very instructive as it depicts logic as the science of reasoning by which problems are solved and conclusion drawn from premises. Ucheaga (2001) avers that one is said to be engaged in logic if he “reflects on the nature of his essence which is thinking itself and when he... examines the rules and principles in terms of which understanding must be judged”.

It is that science which “helps us to weigh the merits and demerits of an action or decision before we venture into it, and hence enables us to take a balanced action or decision. Instead of engaging in endless controversies of trivial matters, it enables us to sift the evidence before us” (Uduigwomen, 2003:19).

Logic is that branch of philosophy concerned with correct reasoning or argumentation. Logic is derived from the Greek word “logos” which means “speech, thought or language”. This implies that there is a relationship between logic and language or speech. Hence, the logic of a people is also discernible in their language and mode of thought. It is in this sense that African logic is seen as interwoven with religious, socio-cultural and metaphysical worldview.

The relationship between logic and language explain why logicians critically examine statements used in arguments to see if conclusions follow from the premise or premises. Therefore logic can be defined as that science concerned with the clarification of language, and the elimination of ambiguity inherent in language.

*Logic can be defined as that pattern of thought found in everyday discourse of a people. It is in this sense that one can conveniently talk about logic in the African context. One’s behavior or attitude can be described as logical or illogical, reasonable or unreasonable, rational or irrational. This goes to show that behaviour play a part in logic... since the way one thinks largely determines the way he behaves (Enyimba, 2003: 19).*

Momoh argues that logic is concerned with the clarity of expression, the avoidance of fallacies, vagueness, ambiguity and contradiction in natural language. According to him;

*In everyday usage of natural language we talk of a person as being logical if he is reasonable, sensible and intelligent; if he can unemotionally and critically evaluate evidence or a situation; if he can avoid contradiction, inconsistency and incoherence, or if he can hold a point of view argue for and from it, summon counter-examples and answer objections (Momoh, 1989:174).*

Momoh thus concludes that there are individuals in every culture who are logical in this sense and African culture is no exception.

Momoh's distinction between natural logic and artificial logic. Artificial logic is the setting up of constants, variables, sentence connectives and deduction and transformation rules, for deriving the formal validity of arguments and symbolic logic. Whereas natural logic is the critical, discriminating rational and reasonable discussion and discourse in natural language.

Indeed, when this distinction is properly understood and when it is also understood that artificial symbolic logic has its proper application in ordinary/natural language, then the arguments of scholars, "that Africans are pre-logical, primitive and lacking in logic" becomes unfounded (Hellen, 1977:85).

Fortes and Dieterlen (1972) argued that the mental processes of the Africans are not different from ours. The implication of this assertion is that if such blanket statements could also apply to the west, then thinking is not peculiar to any particular culture. Kwame Gyekye was therefore right when he stated that "logic of some kind is behind the thought and action of every people. It constitutes the intellectual anchor of their life.

Rene Descartes also observes that:

*...The power of judging aright and of distinguishing truth from error, which is properly what is called good sense or reason, is by nature equal in all men; and that the diversity of our opinions consequently does not arise from some being endowed with a larger share of reason than others, but solely from this, that we conduct our thoughts along different ways and do not fix our attention on the same objects (Quoted in Momoh 1989).*

Logic in African philosophy deals with the application of logic to the world and culture of the African, to his language and objects of his reference. Every language has its inner logic and all races think logically. African logic deals with thinking, language or inference and these are usually with reference to one's world and culture. Since language is the tool of the philosopher, African language (myth, proverbs, idioms, etc) becomes the vehicle of African thought.

This explains why Ijiomah defined logic as the science of the relationship among levels of realities and since realities differ from one culture to another, it follows that logic differs from one culture to another. This is why African logic is natural, encompassing the entire worldview of the African peoples and culture.

Logic is a reflective study of how well we can all naturally reason at our very best". The principles of logic are evident in African mode of thought and help solve practical problems.

Thus, logic in African philosophical thought is found in the way we use or present our language when trying to proffer reasons or evidences for our claims or positions. We are careful not to let ambiguity and vagueness becloud our arguments or reasoning; and such reasoning process is carefully scrutinized to see that they follow consistently from the other. Logic is organic to human culture as it helps society to attain higher goals. And since every age has its special problems, the logic of culture helps solve problems thereby being of service to the culture and to humanity in general.

### **Logic in Ibani Culture**

The Ibani people were that group of people that took the outward journey from central Niger Delta, that was devastated by civil war, moved into and settled in a rend town called Okoloama. Here they developed a thriving institutions and culture which remained unique up till this day.

The migration into the Eastern Delta coincided with the period two other major groups settled in the area. These were the Kalabari and Okrika (Alagoa 1972:5). The Ibani traditions of origin points to two areas in the central Delta – “their homeland Okoloba (Ijaw) and their homeland Tubaratoro in Ekaw (Ijaw) (Fombo, 1972).

The Ibani traditions claim that the Ndoki – an Ibo speaking group had originally come with them from the Ijo central Delta to settle in Okoloama, Azuogu or Oruama and Osobie. These names are Ijo. The reference to migration through the Ibo hinterland and to relationship with the Ibo – speaking Ndoki has led to suggestions that the Ibani were themselves of Ibo origin. Moreover, the fact that some elements in Bonny town speak Ibo seems to lend credence to the Ibo origin theory.

Linguistic evidence show that the Ibani are Ijo in language and culture and that the linguistic situation can be explained on the large influx of Ibo slaved into Bonny especially in the nineteenth century. However, the basic Ijo culture of the Ibani remain in their traditions and customs, and the Ibani Ijo dialect continues to be spoken by the majority of the people in the outlying settlements into the twentieth century.

The Ibani developed thriving socio-political institutions in their present location to effectively exploit the palm oil and kernel trade during the Atlantic trade. It was the strategic location of Bonny and the deft political maneuvering of King Jaja that led to the founding of Opobo – the off-shoot of the Ibani located close to the Atlantic bar. The Ibani culture continued to exist in the two kingdoms.

African logic aids the African to be precise and consistent in his thought pattern and behaviour. This he does by conforming to the three laws of thought as found in traditional logic at any given moment, especially when he faced with a situation where he must adduce reasons, arguments or evidences for his actions or claims. The Ibani (African) thus recognize the axiomatic status of these laws or principles of thought.

For instance, in “Ibani society as in other African societies, “what is evil is evil”. Something cannot be evil and yet not evil at the same time. This is unacceptable in our thought system. To accept such will mean a breach of the law of contradiction.

The Ibani (Niger Delta) being aware of such inconsistency does not allow it to creep into its thought system. Similarly what is seen as virtue in Ibani thought cannot be virtue and not virtue. A man for instance cannot be both virtuous and not virtuous at the same time in the eyes of the African.

In like manner, the principles of identity and excluded middle bears upon the thought pattern of the Ibani and help in settling problems or disputes that may arise as a result of ambiguity and vagueness of speech. Thus, a law that declares a given act as taboo is simply saying that such act is a taboo and must be seen and understood as just that, by the members of the community. The adherence to these laws of thought ensures orderly society devoid of rancour, confusion and verbal disagreements.

The Ibani give a thing some particular attribute or its opposite. There is no room for middle or third position, for instance, in a situation where a man is accused of theft in Ibani community, it is either he actually stole or he did not. There is no middle way. The laws of excluded middle guide the Ibani and indeed the Africans in their thoughtful analysis and investigation of what the case maybe. Thus, Ibani (African) logic adds a measure of consistency to the peoples behaviour, namely character, speech, feeling and action. Our choices, decisions, and habits are made good when supported by reasons. In making decisions and solving problems in the African situation, it is the appeal to reason (logic) that helps us in choosing the solutions we choose. Even our beliefs are rooted in some sort of reasons and we consciously provide evidence that justifies our belief since unexamined beliefs are often mischievous and sometimes dangerous.

For instance, in Kalama (Opobo), a land dispute ensued between Dede Israel and Dede Ezekiel and was brought to the Wari Seniapu to settle. To support his claim to the said land, Dede Ezekiel recounted that his father's wife had been farming on that land. Therefore, the land belongs to him. Dede Israel on the other hand, argued that his own father told him that the land was given to him by Ezekiel's father in exchange for his own (Dede Israel's) which was close to Ezekiel's father's present house, he wanted to expand. It was this exchange that made the land his own.

On a closer examination and after listening to witnesses, the Seniapu observed as follows; that because one has worked on a particular piece of land does not necessarily confirm legitimacy or ownership, since it was possible for the father to have borrowed the land. Therefore it is less probable that the land in question belongs to Dede Ezekiel.

Apart from being highly probable, it has also been corroborated by elderly men in the community who knew the disputants' parents Ezekiel's father gave away the land to Israel's father in exchange for another piece of land. Based on this, the Seniapu came to the conclusion that Dede Israel is the rightful owner of the land. This is a clear case of "judicial and applied logic" in operation. The judgment was accepted by both parties and the land dispute settled.

It must be noted that it was logic – natural and practical logic that equipped the council of elders with such a scientific ability to discern between truth and falsehood and as such to settle a most serious human relation problem in the community. Thus, maintaining peace and harmony.

Infact, it is not the case that the African always explain things by supernatural causation, in most cases things are explained by their place and function in the environment. Thus, "the African reasons not with abstract premises but with difficulties he encounters in real life, in

otherwords, his reasoning is a reaction, the result of coming face to face with the facts of life. This is thought, therefore thinking is social, it occurs in a given cultural milieu" (Okolo, 1993). Hence, logic is culture bound and African logic begins from African culture and then transcends.

Moreover, the Ibani language is rich in idioms, proverbs and sarcasms. It is flexible and possesses an enormous descriptive power, through which Ibani logic is expressed. The unity between language and logic is not only conceptual but real... without logic, language would be impossible and without language, logic would be formless and unintelligible" (Francis, 1992:5).

Thus, the Ibani language is a major avenue through which the Ibani logic is expressed. Proverbs, folklore, wise-saying are part and parcel of everyday discourse. The Ibani logic can also be expressed through human action. Actions are always in consonance with certain precepts of rationality.

"The average Ibani thinks and acts in the concrete realities and not abstraction. His thinking is person-centred rather than discovery of general laws of correct reasoning. But this does not in anyway imply that they are incapable of conceptualization". The Ibani logic and indeed African logic is found in social discourse, interaction, disputes where speech and arguments reveals their logic.

### **Logic among the Ogoni**

The Ogoni communities are made up of Khana Gokana, Tai and Eleme. Traditions of origin claim that the Ogoni migrated from "across the Imo River" (Alagoa and Tamuno 1989), the second account states that the Ogoni "came in the ships which often visited Bonny". Although a third account argue that they came from West Africa – Ghana. This account seems to be based on the similarity in the sound between Ghana and Khana (Kana).

The Ogoni language are related to Ibibio of the Akwa Ibom State and Efik of the Cross Rivers State. Evidence of contacts between the Ogoni and the Ijo is seen in the name Ogoni which is derived from the word-Igoni meaning "stranger" in Ibani. Archaeological evidence from Nama and Kugba sites in inconclusive on the chronology of settlement in the area. They are predominantly an agricultural community.

The Ogoni as a result of migration, from they mixed and settled among different culture groups and people. By means of this long journey and interaction, they borrowed from others and omitted some aspects of their culture. They settled long among the Ibibios more than other tribes. Hence, the linguistic similarities among the two tribes.

The logic of the Ogoni culture can be found in their language which is rich in idioms, proverbs large working vocabulary and a powerful descriptive power. In discussing the nature of Ogoni logic, a proverb identifies and analyzes some logical fallacies. According to the Ogoni, some short formulae for abusive ad-hominum; meaning this shit (excreta/waste matter) really resembles the person that produced it".

Thus, if someone is known to be a liar, everything he says is a lie. This is ad-hominum fallacy. Argumentum ad-vericundiam is another fallacy prevalent in Ogoni logic. It is the fallacy of appeal to authority (e.g.):

*"Tion memebon lobe nieva dede ve ebera adike" meaning the king's voice is the final appeal.*



In other words, a king is never wrong. The major characteristics of Ogoni logic is that it is co-existence, put differently the subject – object distinction which characterizes Western thought is foreign to Ogoni thought.

It is worthy of note here that the African mind does not distinguish between the subject and the object. The Ogoni thought for instance is centred on the self, every experience and reality itself are personal. In other words, whatever reality may be it must have reference to personal experience. Anyanwu (1998) held that “personal experience refers to the totality of man and his faculties”. Such experience for the African involves not only imagination, feeling, intuition or reason but every aspect of experiential existence. Ogoni logic therefore is a harmonious reality.

## **Conclusion**

The point being made here, is that there is no doubt that there is in existence African logic, which dates from the origin of African philosophy. The question of the nature and essence of African logic is what we have attempted here. We have clearly shown that African logic is understood to mean the practical science or pattern of thinking or thought found in language and everyday discourse and life of a people.

African language is flexible, rich in its proverbs, idioms and vocabulary used to help discern African logic. African logic is that natural logic that applies, to juridical, pragmatic and concrete problems in the African existential reality.

Logic in Africa is organic to African culture and performs the task of helping such culture to attain higher levels, as the Ibani and Ogoni case have shown. And since every age has its special problems, it is therefore the business of logic to help solve such problems, thereby being of immense service to humanity. African logic enables African societies verify evidence and apply the laws of inductive and deductive reasoning.

In investigating the validity of an argument – deductive argument to be precise, the African put greater emphasis on premises and conclusion and on factual contents of statements in the argument. Emphasis is laid on the truthfulness of each claim. The African logic considers the rules guiding formal and informal logic in any argument geared towards solving a given problem. The reason being that an argument may have false premises and conclusion, yet is valid on the basis of its form.

When we recall the case of a land dispute we cited in our explanation of the nature of Ibani logic and how the council of elders were able to resolve the matter, we will discover that the elders did not only scrutinize the form of the argument of each of the disputants but also the content, in terms of its relationship with reality, in order to arrive at the truth of the matter. Thus, the arguments of both disputants were logically assessed. It is therefore obvious that logic in African philosophy exist and the people effectively utilize this in their everyday existence.

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