

TRADITIONAL BELIEF SYSTEM AND ESOTERIC SCIENCE OF OGWU: AN IGBO EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The law of transmutation of energy is based on the premise that everything is energy. Man's thoughts, emotions and actions are all forms of energy that can be transformed to create the reality we desire. By understanding this law one can learn how to harness the power of energy transmutation and use it to succeed in every aspect of life. Energy in the universe consists of all the knowledge that ever existed and that will ever exist. As energies, man has the power to manipulate the natural phenomenon to suite the ego. This means that man can change the energies in life by understanding the universal laws and applying the principles that will produce effect. The Igbo adepts (Dibia) are esoteric scientists as they manipulate the nature for a desired effect. Some of them are adepts in rain making, some are into *ogwu*, and some divination. The adepts in etheric energies can employ the power to change any condition in life. According to the study, the esoteric aspect of *ogwu* is evaluated here. Several esoteric artistes existed, the sorcerer, the clairvoyance, diviner, enchanter, medium, seer, soothsayer, shaman and a lot more. These Igbo esoteric adepts are experts in manipulating nature, conjuring and invoking forces into an object that is believed to have magical powers to either protect, harm, avert evil, danger or disease. The Igbo refer to this esoteric science as *ogwu* (charm, spell, talisman) which often involves sleight of hand. For data analysis, the study used a phenomenological research approach and descriptive approach. Personal interviews were carried out as part of the sources of data collection; library and unpublished materials were the secondary sources. *Ogwu*, no matter how you view it is something beyond man's comprehension and it is the adepts that know the format and technicalities involved therein.

Introduction

The master of energy (esoteric adept) can turn matters into energy for his own manipulation. Users can create, shape, absorb or manipulate matters into magical phenomenon which forms a mystical actuality. Through this energy, adepts can transform objects into magical realities for a variety of effects and purposes, including transposing etheric powers from external and internal sources, yielding upstanding results in the users' esoteric practices. Users can even invoke other forms of energies for specific forms of magic that require necessary energies to empower their spells. They are able to manipulate sacred objects and relics that are connected to magical entities or powers and turn them into objects of torment and ruin. With this the adept can achieve feats that are impossible to be reached by normal senses. The masters of energy are able to harness energy drawn from other dimensions of the multiverse to cast spells, to conjure shields and weapons, for a variety of purposes.

Esoteric Knowledge and Aspects of Ogwu

Overtly, the term esotericism is used to describe knowledge and ideas that are not widely known. It is a hidden and deep knowledge. Hidden knowledge cut across every religion as a belief that human spirits or souls have forgotten their state as divine beings and are ignorant of the means of escape. The goal is to acquire the knowledge and expected tools needed in order

to be free of the body and return to their purely spiritual state. Those involved in this, or the practitioners, are considered as occult because of the air of secrecy around them and might be considered wicked and dubious by people considering the level of spiritual knowledge about the idea of hidden phenomena (*ogwu*). *Ogwu* constitutes both the malignant and benevolent actuality. Malignant aspects of *ogwu* entails evil effect. It could also be considered as malevolent which is also having a wish to do evil to others. The benevolent aspect of *ogwu* is further divided into two, the healing and the protecting aspect. The healing aspect intends to cure particular ailments while the protecting aspect aims to repel or create a barrier against negative energies, entities or evil projection. Examples include cleansing baths with special sacred herbs, essential local oils to remove negative energies or thoughts from the body. Protective *ogwu* creates an impenetrable barrier that will prevent an intrinsic force from entering, as well refract harm away from the body. Protective charm could be in mirror form, amulet, talisman, etc. Lesly-Anne Brewster (1974) a high priestess distinguished this form of *ogwu*:

A charm is worn to attract good luck; an amulet provides protection from danger, and a talisman is used to attract a particular benefit to the one for whom it was made. Amulets are aka "lucky charm", particularly the more traditional ones, the amulet worn by people on the waist and on children believed to be disturbed by evil forces. A talisman is created specifically for its owner or carrier employing the forces of a particular area, with contagion of something of the intended wearer woven into it: hair, nail, date of birth, name inscribed in a magical alphabet etc. (<https://pagan.world>; March 20,2024)

Belief in the *ogwu* is endemic in the traditional Igbo culture and is manifested in this incident, in which a layman is using *ogwu* to protect himself. Some have employed the use of certain religious symbols, relics and signs as part of their protective esoteric energy.

Arazu (2016) narrated an esoteric incident that involved his elder brother who is a traditionist and a police officer in Enugu. The story had it that his brother, Chukwukadibia set out from their hometown Ihemposi to visit him in Abakpa-Nike, Enugu in 1986. On getting to Abakpa-Nike around 11am, he was asked by the police to get off the bus he was traveling in. The police sergeant took him to a corner and did a thorough search of his clothing. Chukwukadibia was stripped of his clothes except the inner wear. There was a leather belt spotted around his waist. The police officer assumed the belt to be one of those "criminal Charms". After the harassment and embarrassment, he was eventually asked to go after much delay since he was not disposed to comply with any form of bribe. (p.87). Chukwukadibia left the scene and out of anger decided to discontinue his journey and travelled back home without bothering to get to his destination. The scene had attracted many onlookers. To the spectators' surprise, the sergeant in question took off his uniform and other clothing and jumped naked into the nearby bush. His colleagues went after him and caught him in the forest near Nike Lake in Enugu. His colleagues bound him in chains inside their pickup van and headed to Fr Arazu's residence in Enugu. They urged him to produce his brother, but he told them that his brother was at Ihemposi their hometown and not in Enugu. The police then narrated their encounter with him and how they saw him at Abakpa-Nike in the morning and were told by a bystander that he was your brother. Arazu told them to return the following day as it was already late to travel to Ihemposi that evening. The following morning, they reported with the sergeant in civilian clothing, his hands and feet were chained to the metal bar in the police van. They set out to Ihemposi and got to the village, Arazu sent someone to fetch his brother where he was attending to patients because he was adept in the art of manipulating energy to produce effect. He was a well-known (*Dibia*

ogwu) and herbalist in the town and beyond. When Chukwukadibia arrived, seeing the police and the victim chained to the van, he smiled. The Inspector that led the team approached him and pleaded on behalf of the patient, tendering apologies. Chukwukadibia brought out a small container out from his bag, poured something like oil out on his palm and rubbed it on the face, back and chest of the victim in chains. The patient sneezed and opened his eyes which were shot intermittently all the time. There and then he recognized his colleagues and smiled. Everyone was happy at the turn of the event. Chukwukadibia directed them to unchain the patients' hands and feet. The Inspector presented an envelope to him which he rejected with a wave of hand as he uttered words of admonition, "stop harassing innocent people at your check point" (Arazu, 2016).

The power of *Ogwu* is made manifest in this episode. An oppressed person who has no one to defend him tends to resort to esoteric science of *ogwu* to protect himself. They find this power at their disposal and potent enough to deploy its services.

The song by Ibealoke Chukwukezili (Apama boy) (2014) projected the esoteric prowess of *ogwu* by a traditional musician and songwriter Chief Damian Azubike Nwankwo Okoye popularly known as Pericom and his encounter with the miscreants supposed to be tax collectors at Upper-Iweka, Onitsha, Anambra State sometime in 2014; He was intimidatingly harassed by these tax collectors way back without a knowledge of who he was. He was forced into deploying esoteric powers to defend himself and equally teach the miscreants the lesson of their life. He cast a spell that could not allow the miscreants who jacked him up to lower him down for a satisfactory number of hours. He manipulated the men that jacked him as they struggled in vain to bring him down until they all worn out and pleaded for leniency and never to dare embarrass innocent people. The two scenarios show that energy from the esoteric works perfectly for the innocent individuals or group.

The art of *ogwu* is very clear in these episodes. The abuse of power might meet its Waterloo as those who command this esoteric aspect of *ogwu* might in turn use it as corrective spell.

The Esoteric Features and Initiation into *Ogwu*

Culticism, spirit and matter are two sides of the same coin of reality accepted by the Igbo tradition. What Western occultism calls magic could be rendered in Igbo language as *ogwu*. It is the term *ogwu* that gives the clue to an Igbo occult tradition. Comparing *ogwu* and magic, Butler (1959) in his book *Magician: His Training and Works* states: "the trouble is that magic has lain so long under a cloud of superstition, ignorance and fear on the one hand and on the other, been obscured by a smoke screen of secrecy engineered by those who feared loss of power and prestige if the subject was brought into the light, that is very difficult for the average writer to do than give a general outline of the subject" (p.15). Jesus understood very well the significance of secrecy. Even among his twelve apostles, there was an inner circle of three. A major occult adage is from the master himself Jesus the Christ who counselled his followers not to cast their pearls at swine and who insisted so much about secrecy in the gospel of Mark. The members deliberately employ terms that frighten and scare the lay person simply to maintain that sacredness.

In Africa, an Igbo esoterism like the *oje-na-muo dibia* (one who travels to the spirit), observe the law of secrecy, so do the members of the masquerade group. The apostles at the beginning of time were called occult members because of their modes of operation.

Ogwu is not medicine in the real interpretation of the concept as portrayed by some lay people. It goes beyond medicine; even the herbal or alternative aspect of *ogwu* cannot be translated as medicine as it also involves elements of esotericism. It is not only the physical combination of chemical and drugs like what the Bantu call "*Uchawi*". *Uchawi* is a mysterious power present in all beings: God as the source.

The esoteric features of *Ogwu* are neutral but highly charged energies which are used for both good and bad purposes. *Ogwu* can be interpreted to mean charm, amulet, talisman, spell, potion, incantation and any superhuman power or manifestation that only the occult adept knows how to call up and destroy. The esoteric energy intuited in a person is projected and conjured into objects for its potency.

Ogwu as the magical element was acquired through initiation (*ida ogwu*). *Ida-ogwu* is the esoteric terminology for the acquisition of *ogwu* by interested person (Arazu, 2016). It is not like the exoteric practice of apprenticeship (*imu*) - to learn. *Ogwu* cannot be acquired by the process of learning (*imu*), rather by way of (*ida*) which is a process of initiation/ adepthood. The occult adept *dibias* acquire magic faculties and initiation such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, sorcery etc. Such adepts were quite rare, but they did exist. Achebe (1986) in her book *The World of Ogbanje*, documented the methods used by a female diviner to conjure *ogwu*.

Ogwu is but a generic term for the branches of Igbo esoteric forces used to perform superhuman ordeals. One who is initiated into *ogwu* is said to be (*o dalu ogwu*): "*odida*" is a cultic ritual terminology. The initiation into ritual sacralization (*Igbunye/Ikanye ogwu na ahu*) is done in several formats. Some use sharp tools like local blades to make marks on some parts of the body for direct inoculation and suffusion of concoction in the body. Some employ the use of some sacred leaves to infuse or discharge *ogwu* in or from the body (*ijucha or igbuchi ahu*), and the ancestral practice of fortification of the body against malignant forces. some of the ritual initiations involve ordeals like going through some crucibles, fire, or walking on thorns. under expert guidance, the candidate remains unhurt. The adept is the man, who through initiations, the observance of taboos and the practice of the wisdom of the ancients has rendered his physical body apt to be used by his higher self as an instrument of *ogwu*. In him is the saying verified, "i said you are gods" (Jn. 10:34) (Arazu, 2016). At this point, the initiate now visits the spirit land in his occult meditation and rituals. When he touches people in the process of healing, he knows that power goes out from him to save or destroy. His physical body becomes the principal instrument of *ogwu* and like an athlete, he must avoid all the don'ts of his profession to sustain his power/*ogwu*.

Modern Trend in Ogwu (Neo Fetishism / Paganism)

The sudden turn of event for African traditional renaissance away from the vital process of reclaiming the lost African/Igbo pride that will set him on the world map of globalization is something to be concerned about. Perhaps, the influence of social media may have been part of the prime factor for this exodus into tradition.

The Halloween festivals practiced in America has a large impact on the teeming youths of today. After the online view of the Halloween practices, the new generation of Igbo youth would believe that it is a revival of their old forgone traditional practices and hence, have been deceived into accepting the religion of the white man. This aspect alone has influenced most Igbo people into thinking of going back to tradition. Again, the frustration caused by hardship

and their unanswered prayers did not help matters; they needed a prompt answer to their prayers (*akpo aza*), a swift god that will hearken to their plea. *Ogwu* is believed to be a miniature aspect of the traditional religion of the Igbo people. This aspect has contributed a lot to the growth, protection and preservation of the Igbo socio economic and moral values. *Ogwu* is a traditional heritage. Its value is determined by the character of the partitioners. A responsible practitioner will always produce a responsible *ogwu*, it all depends on the practitioner. The deployment of the existing energies by the adepts to resolve man's imminent problems must be noble; both the subject and object of the ritual must be sacred. It comes about by way of activating the amoral beings in the form of elementals to solve superhuman problems. Evidently, it is only the noble people that can handle this aspect legitimately and harmlessly. Nowadays, bad people have gone into practice. Having been able to acquire the art, they use it wrongly and in a manner against the ethics of the practice. This affirms the Igbo adage which says, *ofeke malu ogwu, madu agwu* - if the uninitiate, the ignorant, the *akaloghi* should know the art of *ogwu*, humanity will go into extinction.

Then, going back to the traditional syndrome; for them, implies only the religious aspect and connotes the art and practice of *ogwu*. What about the social aspect, economic aspect, moral, political and religious aspects that gave rise to the Igbo cosmological value system? They seem to claim ignorance of these aspects. All they are interested in is the aspect that will provide quick money. The craze for the material has led our new generation of youth into venturing into this dangerous and destructive path of "*Ogwu*" tradition. The vital Igbo values are being neglected and compromised in the name of return to Igbo tradition. Questions have been raised about the clamour for the return to tradition and the reason for the sudden outcry for this particular *ogwu* practice? Some of the responses are that Christianity is a deception; that the whites are no longer following the path of the religion they brought down to Africa. Our elders used to say, *onye nwanne ya kpakariri na nku, o si na obalu na ajo ofia* (when someone fetches more firewood than the other, they assume that he intrudes into the evil forest).

Those condemning Westerners for being responsible for the African problem and under development should be made to know that as salvation from evil and sin were preached on one hand by one set of Europeans, the exploitation of human and material resources to the peoples' disadvantage was carried on by another set (Obinna, 2010).

Social media has contributed to this yearn for the return to Igbo tradition. People are exposed to all manner of filthy practices on social media in the name of Igbo tradition and the world are believing it as the true Igbo practices, but the custodians and adepts are aware that such practices are aberration and absurd. Most of them are lured into this practice after watching some of those fellows' flirt with exotic cars and missions without asking questions about the real source of their wealth or the genuineness of such practice from the adept elders. The results are evident. One who goes to equity must have his hands washed clean. Again, one cannot give what he does not possess. The practice or engagement with the deities or divinities requires clean hands and righteousness. The tradition they embarked upon ends up in "*okite*", "*awele*" and the like. the study would want to know, is *okite* a tradition?

Igbo Pantheon of gods

It is established that there are large population of gods/spirits/deities in Igbo pantheon of gods. These spirits are identified with their peculiar names, character and functions. According to Ogbukagu (2008), these gods are known to have no reality in themselves since they constitute ordinary ways of conceiving and articulating ideas regarding the absolute reality or existence

of the Supreme Deity. In Igbo world, the Spirits apart from the dis-embodied humans (ancestors), others are dreaded to be very powerful to the extent that they can preserve or terminate life (p.373).

The Igbo world believe that chi at the time of creation of the world was specifically charged with the role as man's guardian angel. In like manner, *Ifejioku/Ahiajioku* was committed with the responsibility of farm work especially staple food like yam. Good and bad harvest are attributed to the handwork of the *ifejioku* deity. Likewise, the other deities are apportioned with the role of wealth, health, morality etc (Ogbukagu, 2008). Why embrace only the deity that is charged with wealth in dubious coercive manner? The new generation insists on cutting corners, thereby avoiding the genuine spirits in favour of *akaloghi* spirits whose stock in trade is deceit, pranks and other forms of illusive practices. Ogbukagu (2008) also observes that the divinities that are personifications of natural forces and phenomena constitute myriads of spirits (elementals) that are ubiquitous in the Igbo world and even elsewhere. Elementals are amoral forces in the lower arm of the spirit world charged with services to man and occasionally manifest in various forms in the world of man. They are classified into nature spirits which are worshipped through natural forces and phenomenon like the sun, moon, the rivers, lakes, mountains, rocks, caves, trees, thick forests and other such features; like nymph believed to be responsible for diseases like convulsions in children; Salamanders are the spirits (elementals) through which diviners (*dibia afa*) activate their physical concoctions of roots, leaves and other items (p.367).

Following the article by Herbert Eze on "Repackaging of Old Paganism: A Return of the Gods" edited by Obiefuna, Nmah, Umeanolue (2018) in the Return of the Gods: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Jude Emeka Madu, it captures the new trend in modern traditional worship which in due course will lure the new generation of youths into occult cynicism and negativism. Modernization through social online exposure have spawned new forms of "paganism" or return to tradition.

The present generation of the Igbo will be inclined to the cynicism due to the current wave of proselytization of the youth into negative aspect of esoteric science of "*okite*", "*awele*" assumed serial traditional practices. These are major doorways for trapping children into satanism (p.65). This is a dangerous part which notable Igbo adept (*dibia*) stood against and hid away from the uninitiated for a very long time, knowing how hazardous and repercussive that part could be to life. *Ogwu* has no morality. It accomplishes what it was set out to do good or bad. The Igbo adage has it that one may not do what he sees a *dibia* doing.

Dibia Ogwu (Priest)

Agwunsi is believed to be the god of *ogwu* and the adept celebrate in a special way the feast of this powerful god annually (Raymond Arazu, 2008). The *dibia* who are the priest of the deities assembles for the celebrations and the adepts perform feats for the public admiration. Through contacts with the inner plane within man and matter the *dibia* gets in touch with the *agwunsi* spirit and begin to know the inner qualities of herbs, roots, barks, insects, birds, reptiles, fish; of sounds (auricular), and of symbols (Arazu, 2008). Through such knowledge from the master, by means of trance induced by ritual or initiation or both, the expert *dibia* knows what to bring together or what to do to produce a desired effect. The expert *dibia ogwu* or *dibia oje-na-muo* could intuit that an illness has root causes beyond the dense physical plane. With the consultation of *agwunsi*, he could be informed of the type of herbs, roots, bark or animal to use and the procedure to get the illness healed. The enchantment, gesture of the *dibia* would re-

adjust the position of the astral forces within the physical body for the *ogwu* to be potent (*ogwu di ile*).

Conclusion

The mention or sight of *ogwu* keeps the onlookers startled and alarmed. *Ogwu* is believed to be an esoteric potent phenomenon prepared by an expert referred to as *dibia ogwu*. It is a transmutation and transpose of energy, substances or bases with a direct intention to command a reality that falls outside the natural principles. It is the transmutation properties of energies within herbs, roots and other natural and unnatural substances that give it a consciousness to carry out a command. It has malignant and benevolent functions. The functions of *ogwu* cannot be physically ascertained by the natural senses.

Esotericism is about secret knowledge for a group of people. It also describes mystical, spiritual, or occult points of view. Esotericism studies Gnosticism, yoga, alchemy, magic, spiritualism, hypnosis, astrology, meditation, mysticism and occultism. These designate the teachings reserved for a small number of initiates, within the mysteries. Proponents and practitioners of various esoteric forms of spirituality and alternative medicine refers to a variety of claimed experiences and phenomena as being due to energy or force that defy measurement or experimentation, and thus are distinguished from the scientific form of energy. Spiritual energy is the most subtle type of all energy and has a close affiliation with emotions.

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