

CRITIQUE OF IGBO AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF EXPEDIENCY

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Abstract

Having been preponderantly incarcerated by the empirical immediacy and influence by the philosophy of expediency orchestrated by the colonialist empiricism and utilitarianism, Igbo African feels satisfied in anchoring his fate on the result-oriented principles, denigrating the erstwhile conviction that God's time is the best. Today the contemporary Igbo African is meant to live in the now and its peculiarities, he has lost the patience and the value attached to longanimity in waiting for a best turn of events tomorrow. So for him, it is now or never, unjust or unprincipled, the best happens when he gains access, with urgency. The moribundity that is attached to the plan of getting the best, provided it takes some time, has precipitated to his acceptance of the mundane philosophy of *ebeano*, *egwueji* and *akanchawa* which are *trado-Igbo* African theories on which he targets his justifications. On this backdrop this paper intends to x-ray the new, dominant and all pervading Igbo African Philosophy of expediency (speed, haste and urgency) using the hermeneutical method to explain the neologisms which are '*ab ovo*' mentioned as systems of thought that will help him philosophize soberly and accurately. As new theories in Igbo linguistic philosophy, this paper intends to critique the new Igbo African approach to Philosophy of expediency and provide an interpretative scheme which will chart a new map for further development in these areas.

Key words: Expediency, *Ebeano*, *Egwueji*, *Akanchawa*, Materialism, Empiricism, Utilitarianism

Introduction

The principle of pragmatism, especially that of Charles Sanders Peirce determines the value of something by its practical utility. By practical utility, Pragmatism understands criterion of practice by what meets the subjective interests of the individual (Frolov 1984:197). This explanation reflects strictly practical approach to issues these days by the average Igbo African. The Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism (Frolov 1984:439), which considers the usefulness of an action as a criterion for its morality, brings about the greatest happiness of the greatest number principle also as a support to this position. Both American pragmatism and utilitarianism have enormous influence on Igbo Africans which precipitate to their interpretation of life in the same way, now using novel neologisms for their equivalent interpretation. *Ebeano* and *egwueji* variedly interpret practical utility and usefulness of an action in Igbo African context, thereby creating an emerging philosophy of expediency, a holocaust of a change of value from the pristine attachment to enduring values, to the vogue calculus of worthiness based on the matrix of the available, the much talked about, the vogue practices and the most accessible. Intelligibility is denigrated by the culture of empirical immediacy which has become the emerging trend in the new cultural, political and religious organization.

With *ebeano* (that which is in vogue) and *egwueji* (that which is reigning) mentality, the language of a modern Igbo African as for other Africans is *akanchawa* (success). For him now success determines value of an action, to wit, whether values are acceptable or not depends on whether such values lead to success

or not. It is necessary to determine the answers to the following research questions: first, whether success (*akanchawa*) is correctly interpreted by *ebeano* and *egwueji* as conditions for its acceptability; is the interpretation of success by the Igbo pejorative to the extent it departs from the conventional interpretation? Is there any generally accepted interpretation of success so that we take that of the Igbo as a paradigm shift? These and other unasked questions will be answered in the course of developing this work.

In this work we blame and at the same time regret the enormous influence of American pragmatism and utilitarianism on our values due to cultural contacts, educational colonialism and domination, empiricism of consciousness and their inherent misinterpretation of civilization. It is equally my intention to critique the African acceptance of the new interpretation of reality on the bases of its usefulness and practical consequences. First and foremost we make a hermeneutical interpretation of the twilight of the new current of Igbo linguistic philosophy – *ebeano*, *egwueji* and *akanchawa*. In section two, we try to relate the neologism's effect on the society especially in the areas of religion, morality and social life generally. In three, we try to trace the cause of expediency to the materialistic tendencies of Igbo Africans occasioned by the poverty of the mind. In part four, we provide an interpretative scheme, critique and the way forward for an Igbo man. In part five we evaluate and conclude.

Expediency: Whence and Whither?

The modern contemporary Igbo man is enmeshed in the web of quantitative physical things, holding on to them as if they were his ultimate. This change of value from the pristine attachment to enduring values to the vogue calculus of worthiness based on the matrix of the available, acceptable and vogue crept in with the urbane culture, the resultant effect of socialization, industrialization and technological development. These eroded our native civilization and therefore made us to choose new implements. This change of tools necessitated a corresponding change in our gods. This is anchored on the belief that: "*whenever a modern man changes his tools, he changes his gods*". These new gods of modern civilization are very expedient whose values are attached to empirical immediacy, hence the emergence of new political and religious organizations which hurriedly progressed from barbarism to civilization.

Yes Igbo Africans were called barbaric because the imperialists did not understand African traditional civilization, their new civilization which was anchored in empiricism of consciousness, quantification, empirical immediacy and instant satisfaction gained acceptance and indeed influenced Africans. Industrialization massified everything and created the culture of availability which ultimately replaced that of hope, despondency or waiting for God's time. Mass consumption, mass communication, mass entertainment, mass transportation, mass education mass information, mass misinformation, etc., consequently are noticed as indices of utilitarianism, pragmatism which are the background of instrumentalism. Now our actions and values are measured by their successes (Frolov 1984:197).

Every other thing continues in this conviction that success determines the value of our actions, to wit, whether values are acceptable or not depend on whether such values lead or do not lead to success. In this vain, Obiajulu M.I added that: "*mass harlotry, mass robbery, mass friendship, mass kidnapping are now accepted as a norm because they lead the agents to easy success, hence the society accepts them*" (2002:14). Success in this regard implies possession of quantity of money, accumulation of material wealth, possessing nice cars, big homes, growing bank account, healthy profit margins. These define success for an average Igbo African hence the rush to be like the rest in this area. According to Dine, G.U. Igbo, people like money and wealth to such an extent that they would give up everything to be wealthy (1983:69). Today, being a leader among Igbo Africans is identical with being wealthy hence the proverb "*emee onye uwa Eze, oregbuo mmadu n'utu*", - when a poor folk is crowned a king, he will excessively impose tax on his subjects, whereas a wealthy leader will do otherwise. Massification of everything inherent in mass culture at the expense of quality is a serious yoke for modern-contemporary Igbo Africa. Now an Igbo African feels incarcerated but cannot explain how and by what. This pragmatic approach to

reality seems to instrumentalize everything, or a thing is measured or valued by its expediency or efficiency as an instrument. No wonder he toes this line.

Ebeano, Egwueji and Akanchawa

The twilight of the three hermeneutical current of Igbo linguistic philosophy makes their visibility inevitable in explaining Igbo African adhoc understanding of reality. Any value that transcends here and now usefulness, utility and gain are regarded as a mere cipher. The cipher is naught and precisely so, is lost in secrecy. It is believed to be a mere groping in the dark which amounts to uncertainty. *Status quo ante* the aforementioned aphorisms, we mean neologisms, were unknown to Igbo philosophers even though their concepts were inherently attached to certain Igbo words or proverbs expressed differently. Ebeano is stuffed with meanings which conveyances qualify as a philosophy that stands in itself.

The ébeano' philosophy is the Igbo African version of American pragmatism with erstwhile variant aspect as '*nkem o ga-adi iche*' (shall my own be different) which Igbo African generally believed to be an evil name with its attendant rejection of indifferentism. In order to avoid this apathy which the vernacular jargon suggests, the Igbo African is cornered to subscribe to the majoritarian philosophy, most often foolish majority stuff which makes the invention of **ebeano** inevitable. Obiajulu, M .I said in the light of the above that: "*this new interpretation of pragmatism is essentially tied to expediency, empirical immediacy mentality, utility, all representing vogue philosophy of things that are most current*" (2004:1). This philosophy tends to place more value on things that are the most talked-about, with less emphasis on the most relevant or the most valuable. This seeks for the satisfaction of instinct and tends to mortgage reason for the desires of the moment.

The quest for easy life of this age creates an unimaginable vulnerability of the young people to subscribe to this philosophy at the acute discomfiture of the bearers of the consequences – the proponents and adherent themselves and society at large. The unmitigated rate at which *ebeano* philosophy gains currency and cogency "*justifies credence to foolish majority, judgment based on shallow emotions of the people – argumentum ad populum*" (2004a:1). It makes man the author of values which are not in line with objective interpretation of phenomena, rather it seeks to interpret everything within the context of subjective evaluation.

The standard measure of value for *ebeano* is the establishment of a thing to conform to the vogue. This prevailing fashion or style, the current craze for things that beat the drum of acceptance, is reflected in vogue entertainment which is dominated with nudity; vogue propaganda which is fraught with lies and selling the unwary short; vogue advertisement replete with over bloated and exaggerated conformity and compliance compelling; vogue music full of emotional sexy lyrics, etc. These and others are contemporary yardstick for measuring Igbo African's pattern of life. The spate of using acceptability as a yardstick, a standard for measuring the level of quality attached to Igbo African things, evoked the comment of Obiajulu thus:

Conformity to modern style of dressing, talking, walking... has become the central issue in the *Lebenswelt* of the modern Igbo African man. This conformity creates an unfortunate dilemma which is caused by the desire to maintain the status quo to be abreast of the things of the moment, to keep pace with the things in vogue....(2004b:24).

Ebeano and egwueji are diffused into akanchawa. Akanchawa now becomes the index of ebeano and egwueji. Thus whatever brings about akanchawa automatically becomes acceptable. The need for moral

question, value judgement on the exercise, be it means, object, e.t.c that brings about akanchawa is no longer relevant. Now let me ask: is acceptability criterion enough to determine such? What is the basis for this acceptability? Is pleasure the determinant of acceptability? Apart from this, is there any other criterion for accepting a thing besides the consideration of its value? Who determines value? Who determines criterion? These epistemological questions bastardize our critique of empirical immediacy, utility as a criterion for accepting Igbo Philosophy of expediency. However our critique can be sustained by the fact that expediency involves speed, haste, and urgency, and, that anything that is realizable and acceptable must involve the triadic debuttante forces which we consider unnecessary. The trado-Igbo theories of egwueji, ebeano and akanchawa turn reality topsy-turvy and lead us to shallow interpretation of values which can only be makeshift, cavalier, and ultimately specie-specific. The enduring quality of value is mortgaged and moribund by this interpretation.

For Adibe, Igbo politicians can do anything bizarre to gain economic power (2009:41). Expediency has gripped Africans, to gain with empirical immediacy has become the bane of public and civil servants. He further added that Nigerian politicians and civil servants are always desperate for economic prosperity hence they engage in any voo-doo act to apparently succeed (2009:41), to wit, to possess money, increase wealth even to the detriment or acute discomfiture of some people. Even in the religious life the philosophy of expediency is carried through into it. About this Oguejiofor had to lament: *“the Igbo expect their divinities to protect them, enrich them, or at least take charge of a particular sphere for which each is cultivated. It is not uncommon that the divinities fail in the duties, When they do so, the Igbo feel to qualms in inviting sanctions on them....They can go to the extreme of destroying their symbols”* (1996:78).

The Igbo man’s pragmatic conception of the world extends to his religion. His not subscribing to cringing servility and of course lack of patience and waiting for God’s time explain why he would easily destroy human persons in his pragmatic quest for success or existence. Both ebeano and egwueji can diffuse into one and bring about akanchawa which is interpreted as success that literally means *“bright hand”* which connotes bright destiny. This interpretation denigrates from Jesus interpretation of success (Lk. 10, 25 – 28) which is defined in terms of relationship with God (Matt.5:1 – 11). Jesus told a story about a man who gave his life to the accumulation of wealth. When the man’s farm produced a lot of extra food his only thought was for himself. We do not hear him talk about giving any of his abundance to God, or about helping other people who were less prosperous. Instead, his thoughts were focused solely in his own pleasure, which is defined as taking it easy and enjoying himself. He was called a fool because success is not found in money or possession, but in having *‘a rich relationship with God’* (Lk.10:25 – 28).

There is this saying that Igbo so love money that the final test of whether the Igbo man is really dead is when there is no active wakefulness in the face of money. To wit, if a quantity of money cannot remonstrate and restore to life an alleged dead Igbo man, then that is necessary and sufficient reason to conclude he is dead indeed. Another jest expresses that the expression on the face of an average Igbo man is *“I go before others”*, meaning that he must always scramble to grab first the grabbable. These references portend an unhealthy and undisciplined lifestyle that is capable of stampeding a man to death. For him, he is most successful a man who has more penchant than others in grabbing these things mindless of the cost for their procurement.

Ebeano and the Society

The philosophy of ‘ebeano’ or egwueji’ as it is also referred to in a more recent translogism, has also penetrated our religious attitude and affected our gestures and gesticulations in religious worship. Now when we sing, it is for our entertainment and satisfaction of our emotional selves. Our church dancing has become a substitute for erstwhile bore-room dance. Our prayers are mere pretence that we are inspired by the Holy Spirit, the pretext in the context of modern prayer method that satisfies only the merely

instinctive. Our preaching has become self projection to impress the audience, our clapping is done as though we are in amphitheatre, our dressing has become avenue for ostentatious advertisement. Ebeano mentality, egwueji consciousness, projects our celebrations in the Church as more meaningful when they are characterized by much material preparations in their favor. In the context of the above, pastors of soul count their progress in terms of number of gigantic buildings they have been able to erect within the space of their pastoral assignment. The faithful dress in gorgeous and outrageous attires thereby provoking indignation as if our Churches have become political rendez-vous. Today ‘*pro tempore et pro re*’, virtually there is nearly no abominable offences in Igbo African society – taboos formally hedged around sex, harlotry, indecency, nudity, etc., have become the norm. It seems, unless a young girl exposes her sexual contours, for the public to behold, she cannot get a suitor easily. The belief in, or practice of, going nude is hurriedly becoming acceptable even among the married women. All these are done in the name of vogue practices or ebeano. Obiajulu, observes in line with the above, that:

In the same spirit of ébeano’ and with the ardent desires to keep abreast of time in the spirit of time, the nudity of our bridesmaids and assistants during solemnization of wedding presents the picture of our church building as a meeting point for gay youth (2003c:39).

The sagging of trouser which characterized the prisoners, the glamorization of sexual promiscuity which was the culture of biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, the negative activities of the chaperons in connecting young girls and boys to their intending amorous partners, etc, are gaining cogency among the Igbo Africans. The talk on modesty is obsolete and does not withstand the test of time. It is like a lone voice in the wilderness trying to condemn the sex saturated culture, the culture soaked with immorality that bedevils our present Igbo African Society.

Materialism: The Cause of Expediency

Grabbing mentality that characterizes materialism is the foundation of one dimensional living at the expense of the other dimension. According to Eboh, O. “*One dimensional living is the increasing mental habit of the modern man that this world with all its materialistic values and satisfactions is all there is and all that really matter....*” (1994:6).

This one sided-approach truncates reality and constitutes an act of violence against existential totality and completeness. In ‘*simile modo*’, the passivity of the masses in appreciating values, the core values that are **native** to the citizens, the Igbo Africans, is as a result of poverty of the mind and spirit, Hence Eboh, O, Observes: “*...the spirit is the nobler half of us. The spirit that means enduring virtues of the mind and soul. It means the power of critique and reflection...and discrimination in values*” (1994:6).

The Igbo African spirit has been dampened by materialistic tendencies and these have consistently depersonalized and dehumanized the personhood and humanity of a typical Igbo African. Igbo Africans have lost a lot to materialism and consequently allows secularism to control their affair. Over subscription to the vogue thought of contemporary period is a serious indictment offence against the collective beingness of Igbo Africans.

Materialism now becomes ‘ebeano’ and ‘egwueji’. The Egwueji is used here not in the sense of Chimakonam’s usage wherein he depicts working rhythm which “stands figuratively for the means” (2012:82), but in the cause of currency of style and fashion prevalent in the Western world. This kind of Igbo African secular humanism bastardizes standards of behavior predating the over celebrated vogue life style. The secular humanism denigrates the triadic value platforms in African ethics “...Iheoma (good), ihe ojoo (bad) or evil and ihe-be nóke (both good and evil in the middle course) as propounded by Ozumba, G,O and Chimakonam, J.O (2014:55). The practice of ebeano (vogue philosophy) has become

too excessive that the practitioners disparage the golden mean which is the index of guided rationality. Now it becomes worrisome as the breeze of senseless philosophical emotions in the wake of modernity besiege the Igbo Africans.

This situation is now intractable. In the wake of this intractability, it is germane that we re-define, re-structure and re-direct this senseless passion or craze for things that sooner or later will put the Igbo African into the dustbin of history.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Evaluation

In the context of our discussion, Igbo Africans are called to face serious challenge to imitate a project of delivering an average Igbo African from the incarceration of mass existence, mass philosophy and foolish majority. They should be preoccupied with criticizing the pressure of the mass society that through the press, advertising, television and so on, moulds the lives of people in stereotyped ways and produces a world of conformism. In such world like ours the possibility of choice and decision, is almost in limbo, as we find ourselves in the quagmire of stretch-jacketed life.

With this situation that is characteristic of Igbo Africa, with this massist majoritarian philosophy of ebeano or egwueji, this paper clamours for a radical awakening and a conspicuous u-turn, the one that will debar Africans from being swayed by senseless passion, and allows them to be dominated by reason so as to avoid quixotic frivolities, unchilvaristic tendencies that seem to leave Igbo Africans empty of content.

Conclusion

Expediency characterizes the pagan gods. Result orientedness and empirical immediacy are indices of mundane philosophy which castigates the 'means' question as irrelevant African can suspend the "dies irrae" and 'requiem' already prepared for her and begins a movement of 'revival' and decolonization of African mentality towards the orientation that seems to reposition her for what she is in her *fons et origo*. Africans do not need to be like the British or Europeans in order to be human. Ebeano can be a better philosophy of the new order if it is situated within the 'lebenswelt' of Igbo Africans. Africans have superfluous ingredients for philosophizing soberly and accurately, the product of such intellectual 'mumbo-jumbo' as they were indicted by the foreigners may eventually garner recognition of foreigners, especially the British and Americans. Africans can be original, and export their inventions to the world. We are Igbo Africans and that we shall continue to be. We have no apology to render neither shall we regret being Igbo.

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