

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH: RANDOM THOUGHTS ON HUMANITIES EDUCATION IN A POSTCOLONY.

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...most African universities continue to cling to the structural models and curricula of Western universities on which they were founded during the colonial era, whereas they operate in new sociohistorical, sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts (Dimomfu Lapika, 2008).

Introduction.

Academic research is one of the most important aspects of formal education anywhere in the world. In most cases when education is mentioned in Nigeria as in any part of Africa, what comes to the mind of most people is the education ushered into the continent through the combined forces of Islam, Christianity, and Westernization processes. In Nigeria particularly, it is often forgotten that there were immense educational resources and practices that gave rise to local industries and technologies before ever she (Nigeria) had contact with imperial, colonizing, and evangelizing forces. These imperial forces, as is well known, at one time or the other fell under some influences which dominated and changed their way of thinking and pattern of living. They too suffered colonization at one time or the other in their history. They succeeded in overcoming the influence of their colonization. American English evolved in the effort by Americans to have an English language different from that of their British homeland. American education was designed to be practical, local task-oriented, robust, and pragmatic in outlook. The establishment of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which was designed after the American university system, witnessed immense derision from all manner of critics who decried it as engaging in all sorts of curriculum. Indeed, the university was derided for not taking after the British format, and was laughed at for teaching such courses as Home Economics, Business Education, etc. What is important is that the founding fathers had the vision to choose an alternative path to University education and curriculum. It is supposed that the founding fathers were not in a position to found the University on insights drawn from indigenous knowledge systems of thought, and they were really not in a position to do that. Nigeria at that time was seen as being made up primitive tribes (of Africa) who had no history and no educational systems.

In this paper, I am concerned with humanities education, although I may be making general comments about other areas of academic research, in Nigeria. Early patterns of research suggest that the first crop of indigenous scholars in Africa were concerned with fitting what they found as obtaining in Africa into the moulds of British and American scholarship. More than fifty years after the first University was established in Nigeria, what is the prevailing situation? The insight to this research began to show when I took over the teaching of Research Method and Bibliography in the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. I began to worry that all the approaches we adopt in the study of literary theory and criticism are drawn from either Europe or America. I began to worry that after so many years of African

contact with European and American literature the tools of our study were still the tools designed and used in those climes. I began to worry that all the theoretical frameworks used to analyse both African and non-African materials were derived either from Europe or America. I felt concerned about the high level of the poverty of theory building among African scholars. This poverty of theory was also the case in other disciplines in the humanities. But it was during the 48th Founders Day Celebration of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 2008 that the problem manifested itself in a very graphic and insistent manner. I was appointed Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee to evaluate the research of different faculties by way of published materials, exhibition of art works and manufactured products, patented works, etc.

The first task which confronted the Committee was to work out acceptable criteria across disciplines for the evaluation of submitted works. We isolated such features as originality, innovativeness, creativity, national relevance, etc as indices upon which the exhibited works were to be judged. But we were shocked when we went to judge the works on exhibition to discover that there was hardly anything original in the works. Yes, we saw red wine made from yam, drugs made from local herbs, designs captured in local materials, and all that, but these were merely adaptations of their foreign models. We thereby cancelled the idea of originality and substituted it with that of innovativeness. That singular experience has become implanted on my mind ever since, and even though I had always been worried about our apparent inability to evolve theoretical paradigms that are indigenous to our ways of thinking in Nigeria, the problem became very acute. What were the grounding reasons for this worrisome situation?

First, it became clear to me that the colonized, no matter the long days and years of independence, carry along with them the history of their colonization. But were there no limits to this? What was colonization? What was imperialism? What is globalization? There is hardly any doubt that colonial education educates the colonized away from their cultures, but what does postcolonial education do? How does an education clothed in imperialism manifest itself? What are the ideological insistences of globalization? What should be the reaction of our postcolonial selves towards these questions? And why reactions only? Had our sense of initiatives taken flight? What is this amnesia out of an invaded past? How does one celebrate castration? And what would happen to the fertile garden, our fertile gardens, witnesses to sustained onslaughts and great plundering? The critical questions addressed in this essay are therefore: how does an African postcolonial subject-scholar approach knowledge construction and assimilation? Is it possible to rethink and re-categorise the disciplines called the humanities based on what the term "humanities" could mean in an indigenous Nigerian / African setting? Is it possible to evolve indigenous ways of studying and appreciating whatever identified subjects or branches of learning there are? And what could constitute the curricula content and methodological approaches to such subjects as may be identified? Before attempts are made to answer these questions, it must be observed that we live in an interconnected world of universals and relativisms. Consequently, terminological differences may not obscure same content materials, in which case the only problem would be that of adequacy of translation. Then of course, there would be the concluding moot point about the ambivalent sites of struggle in postcolonial settings.

On Locking Aristotle.

Let me begin this section with an Igbo folktale that has become anecdotal. It is a story that took place in the land of animals in far faraway time. They were visited with a devastating famine beyond their imagination. They sought for solutions. They sought the reasons for their predicament. After endless reasoning and rationalizations, they settled on the point that their mothers were responsible for their predicament. After all, why did their mothers chide them when they were playing, and why did they not ask them to play when they were working? And they found an ingenious solution. Their mothers would have to be exterminated. Only the wise dog refused to kill his mother. He decided to hide her up in the Sky. Out of maternal benevolence and gratitude the dog's mother told her child what to do each time he was hungry. And so while the famine grew in intensity, and the animals faced worsening conditions, the dog was healthy and robust. It is the tortoise that discovers and betrays the dog's secret. The dog ran away from the land of animals and became a friend of man.

Did the great Nigeria not evolve a policy of one woman not more than four children, and in the very recent past? To eliminate the source of children, or to reduce the number of children, which one is more effective in population control and adequate provision of food and other amenities? Escapist thinking is a pleasurable way of indulging one's psychology. But it is not the path of redemption. It is not any form of foundational reasoning. It offers no deep clues to existential problems. And it does not point to the way of progress. We cannot blame everything on colonialism. We cannot kill globalization even if we are so minded. But we could go back to documented beginnings. We could start with Aristotle the realist scholar. Being already dead, no person can recommend that he be killed. But we must cage his murky ghost that has prowled for too long on our messed up shores. This is important because to a very large extent, the subjects that constitute the discipline of arts and humanities even in contemporary times are due to Aristotle.

Central to his classificatory schema as we understand it now is the distinction between practical –solving and non-practical solving forms of knowledge. Iron smelting, cultivation and planting, rearing of domestic animals, hunting and trapping, fishing, pottery making, building houses, healing the sick, keeping the calendar, making rain to fall or preventing it from falling, divination, cooking, collecting water from rainfall, management and processing of crop products, etc., are some of the areas of life whose mastery are the objects of knowledge that rest on the acquisition of specific practical skills. On the other hand, narrating the story and history of communities, the telling of stories and tales, the painting of houses, objects, and bodies, ministering to the deities of the land, the observance of certain festivals, wrestling, running the home, the practices associated with music and dance, the eating habits of people, the organization of discourses among individuals and communities, etc, are some other ways of knowing that require certain other kinds of specific skills and abilities. On what theoretical grounds would our indigenous African / Nigerian peoples have attempted to study these things had they not come in contact with the North Atlantic forms of knowing and validation? Would they have adopted the same approaches to the study of these various areas of life as their colonizers passed onto them? Would they have embraced the legacy of Aristotle through imposition, and not through personal choice? This requires some careful and cautious articulations, especially as the medium with which we are engaging this discourse is the English language.

One possible way in which the indigenous people could have classified these areas of living into general learning categories is to have made a distinction between those skills which were acquired through participation and interventional guidance and those that needed some tutoring and apprenticeship. In a simplified way, these could be classified into the natural and specialized skills. The natural ones would include farming, pottery making, house building, hunting, tracking of animals, cooking, etc. The specialized skills would include divination, traditional medicare, rain-making, divergent herbal practices, music making and dance, smelting, etc. It is within these specialized areas that we find people who have vocations, that is, people who are called upon by supernatural forces to engage in some of these activities. Some of these specialized areas require different lengths of periods of learning and apprenticeship. Some apprenticeships in some of these areas even last up to seven years or more. Some last for very short periods, as short as three to six months. For example, a group learning a new dance would engage the services of experts for a very short period. One common feature of all these specialized areas of learning is that at completion, the participants require some formal graduation activities or ceremonies which both testified that the applicants were free to practice on their own, having successfully learnt their trade. As for others practices identified above, one usually learnt them through participation in them at family or peer group levels. One learns them by observation, participation, and occasional guidance from those who know.

It is important to note that it is within these specialized areas that indigenous African peoples achieved a lot of advancement. On the other hand, it is in the natural areas of knowledge acquisition through observation and participation that they have remained as they were. It is also interesting to note that the areas colonialism and Christianity decried and branded all manner of evil names are to be found in the specialized practices. Colonialists and evangelizers did not attack and decry indigenous farming practices, indigenous ways of building houses, indigenous political systems, etc. Paradoxically, the practices they attacked and decried are the areas that have not only survived colonialism, but also areas which even in the twenty-first century compete effectively with western forms of knowledge practices. Food and shelter are the basic necessities of man. Why were these invaders not concerned with the food they would eat and the shelters they would stay in? Why is it that these special practices retain their strength and allure? And why are there sustained onslaughts to vitiate their effectiveness? However, and gratuitously, various areas in these categories are recognized as the alternative, i.e., second best, to western knowledge practices. We now have alternative medicine as a recognized field of study in western oriented schools. Sometimes, it is called ethno-medicine. What is significant about these areas of study is that they address the human condition: human health, human futures, human spirituality, human aesthetics and happiness, human pleasure, etc. It would then appear that medicine would, for the indigenous peoples of Nigeria and Africa, form the core of studies in humanities. In contemporary times, medicine is studied as a science, but because it addresses the human health condition, people do not rest all their faith about their health in it alone. This is probably why psychology and spirituality still play central functions in health delivery. But who could guess how medical research could have progressed without Nigeria taking imposed contact with the West?

Pottery is yielding way to ceramics. As this is happening, people are losing consciousness of the immense significance and symbolism of the pot. Pots that used to grace traditional shrines have

virtually been destroyed by people acting on supposed Christian influences. Such people have never wondered why it is not hoes, clubs, knives, machets, clothes, etc., that were used to adorn shrines. Traditional pots represent many things for the indigenous Igbo: permanence enshrined in fragility, the completeness of the hearth, food, water, wealth, fertility, art etc. These are enduring values of the human condition. Traditional pots neither decay nor rot. Although they may easily break, the shards remain. They retain a sense of history. There are aluminum pots everywhere now, but these are not taken to shrines. Refrigerators, water tanks, and metal pots have all displaced certain symbolisms of the traditional pot. However, they are ideologically poor when compared with the traditional pots. Pottery emanating from modern day ceramics is geared towards aesthetics, rather than functionality, and that is why its future may not be very promising. As it is, ceramics is studied under arts faculties.

Smelting is no longer about producing iron, but about producing hoes and knives and many ritual implements. With its gradual passage is also the passage of the indigenous art of transmutation. The supposed sacredness and spirituality which went with the practice are now things of the past, gladly perhaps. Smelting is now part of engineering studies. Endogenous herbal technology among the Igbo led to the emergence of flying medicine men. The mystery that surrounded it has tragically gone away, and western science and engineering technology have far surpassed its practices. It would have been insightful to know the science behind this art. It could even have been possible that it could offer alternative knowledge about flights. As for smelting, the important thing however, is how far and in what directions it could have gone without forceful encounter with colonial education and technology. It is evident from archaeological studies that it was undergoing changes within itself before encountering western science and technology.

Security has constituted humanity's perennial threat. The concern against the threat to human life and prosperity has been one of the defining features of the human condition. Herbalists, oracles, and deities were the foremost instruments employed in the quest to secure human prosperity. I do not know how security studies are classified, but it does appear to me that they belong to both social sciences, communication technology, and all manner of engineering sciences. There were herbal preparations that secured invisibility for people passing through formidable enemy territories in the past. Whether it was an art or a science is no longer the issue, but some of it is now lost. Many people made themselves immune to dane gun shots, but the art was rendered ineffectual by the introduction of double barreled guns and rifles. Attacks by witches were common, but there were technologies that prevented such attacks. Now, such things are regarded as superstitious or when accorded recognition handed over to Jesus to deal with. However, even Christians still believe in the efficacy of indigenous preventive practice. The *oda-eshi* phenomenon which gives immunity to many against some types of modern bullet shots and knife cuts is still enjoying a heyday in some parts of Igboland. It was once reported that a student in the Enugu State University of Science and Technology was carrying out his PhD research on this, but unfortunately, I have not been able to find out who he is, except that he is from Udi in Enugu State, and I cannot say how far he has gone with the research. While it is not being recommended here that we go back to these practices, I am strongly of the opinion that parallel research could be going on about it while we move with the modern world.

Divination is thriving well, but it has not really developed very much beyond what it used to be. It is not receiving the attention of any formal institutionalized system in Nigeria now, unless the

Yoruba School for Divination has taken off. All the same, it has been observed by Philip Meek that, “First among the concerns that shaped this volume is that, given the pivotal role of divination in African cultures, the study of divination systems must assume a central position in our attempts to better understand African peoples today.” (books.google.com.ng/books?id) It is heart-warming that some academics like Professor John Anenechukwu Umeh are into this, even as a hobby and a commitment to preserving indigenous Igbo ways of thinking and being in the world. Luckily too, Umeh has done excellent work on divination in his two-volume *After God is Dibia*. Why are some people afraid of divination? Why do some faiths condemn it even when they practice it? First and foremost, divination is about discovering what human beings cannot unfold using their normal knowledge states. It is an interpretative science based on symbols, readings, and correct interpretation. It is based on some sort of probability reasoning that leads to understanding and possibly prediction if need be. It is an ancient science. But it is so intricate, and very prone to interpretative abuse; a fact which made the ancient Igbo to insist that after one has been divined for, one needed to divine for oneself. But at the same time, it is like all arts and knowledge which may not be learnt well. After all, the school system is filled with all manner of teachers who hardly know what they teach. Whatever may be the case, it still has to be determined whether it is a humanities or science course, and this cannot be achieved unless its study is given serious attention.

The implication of what has so far been said is that indigenous peoples could have classified knowledge in ways different from the manner they are now classified. Thinking, thought, and technologies have origins no matter that they ultimately transcend their origins. These origins are territorially and temporally linked. Existential conditions in an environment seem to generate the thought process, even as a reflective exercise. But it does appear that the thought process could generate its own dynamism, propelling the thinking being into the road of perfection, or remaining static, or even degenerating, but carrying along the thinking being as a victim. This must be the initial condition of the mind in any environment. Once the thought process is on the road to perfection, propelled by the desire to overcome challenges, for rewards, for curious self satisfaction, etc, it seems to drive the thinking being beyond unimagined ends, From this perspective, it becomes obvious that perfectionist thinking is commensurable with the type of advances achievable in particular societies. The nature of these advances cannot be extricated from the nature of problems regnant in particular societies. The Igbo have a proverb to the fact that *nku di be ndi na –eyera ha nri*; i.e., the firewood that obtains in particular cultural communities serves their cooking needs. So is the case with other societies. This, however, does not diminish Herder’s observation, thus:

Were every nation, enclosed within its borders
and bound to the soil of its own country, to
enjoy the gifts of nature from the womb of the
earth, without illicitly demanding a tribute of wealth
from other peoples, perhaps no one would find
himself exchanging patrimony of his fatherland for
foreign allures. I would not need to ape the gallant
speech and equivocal civilities of others, and no
city would become a hodgepodge of ten languages of
commerce.¹

Aristotle's era was not an enclosed one. After all, Egypt was there as an overarching influence. Aristotle faced a set of challenges different from the ones faced by Adam. Adam's naming task was spontaneous, arbitrary, intuitive, random, and perhaps, divinely influenced or driven. Adam named only the beasts and plants he saw. He had no palm trees to name, no palm wine to name. Eden was not complete. And no garden is ever complete, in a universal sense. But there was completeness in Adam's naming, completeness that is not tantamount to perfection. Aristotle's classification enterprise was very studied, methodical, analytical, comprehensive, and tending towards perfection. This is probably why it was able to drive classification systems for millennia, and many of his knowledge schemes have survived to date. But what has the National Endowment for the Humanities done to Aristotle, or should it be said, with him? The National Endowment of Humanities, (<http://www.neh.gov>) lists the following as comprising the humanities: History, Literature, Political Science, Law, Sociology, Philosophy, Multicultural Studies, Women's Studies, Psychology, Art, Music, Drama, Film, Linguistics, Archeology, Anthropology, Communication Studies. The insight we take out of this is that while different universities may have arrangements for studying different courses under different faculty affiliations, the courses may be epistemologically related. In the main, all these courses are in the domain of cultural interpretation. So, Aristotle is not sacrosanct. Aristotle has been useful to the world, and therefore to Africa, but maybe he needs a bit of locking up in Africa. This is no attempt to reinvent the revered wheel, but let us undertake a search for a new frame of looking at this old wheel.

Of method, of Feyerabend.

Michael Maier (1989: 24) says that "he who attempts to penetrate into the Rose Garden of Philosophers without the key resembles a man who would work without feet." (24). The key is symbolic of both locking and unlocking as well as it is of method, the way to get into something, the way to have access into what must first be unlocked. For post-colonials to invent new frames of looking at the North Atlantic's old wheels there is need for fresh and original robust thinking against colonial frames or away from them. There is no end to which method can be celebrated in academic research. Yet, method does not perfect all miracles. The term 'paradigm shift' is very often touted in various public discourses in Nigeria now, but how many people have bothered to find out its origins, not to talk of its immense ambivalences? Thomas Kuhn who raised the term to its celebratory status wanted to demonstrate in his epochal book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, that normal science as we know it proceeds along the familiar and established routine of scientific method, but that revolutions occurred in science only when individual scientists, consciously or by accident, abandoned routine. Feyerabend, on the other hand, sought to demonstrate that the ultimate norm in scientific research is the anarchistic method which he defines as "anything goes." "Anything goes," that is as far as it works, is obviously an elevated and privileged icon in the pantheon of expediency and pragmatism. According to Feyerabend,

The idea of a method that contains firm, unchanging, and absolutely binding principles for conducting the business of science meets with considerable difficulty when confronted with the results of historical research. We find then, that there is not a single rule, however plausible, and however firmly grounded in epistemology, that is not violated at some time or the other. It becomes evident that such violations are not accidental events; they are not results of insufficient

knowledge or of inattention which might have been avoided. On the contrary, we see that they are necessary for progress. Indeed, one of the most striking features of recent discussions in the history and philosophy of science is the realization that events and developments, such as the invention of atomism in antiquity, the Copernican Revolution, the rise of modern atomism (kinetic theory, dispersion theory, stereochemistry, quantum theory), the gradual emergence of the wave theory of light, occurred only because some thinkers either decided not to be bound by certain 'obvious' methodological rules, or because they *unwittingly* broke them (1978:23).

This suggests that for African scholarship to evolve itself on its own terms and grounds, it must free itself from all methodological rules regnant in its interrogative procedures. It must free itself from its current entanglement with other frames of classification and learning. No matter, African scholars must make attempts to tackle this situation. Some prerequisite steps must then be taken. Some of these would definitely include the following:

1. Through adequate translation, establish a true understanding of the different meanings of the various disciplines that are said to constitute the humanities in Africa now.
2. In the light of this understanding, attempt to reclassify these disciplines, removing some or adding some as the case may be.
3. Establish "anything goes" method of studying these disciplines as true African humanities.

Let us illustrate with a few examples. The arts and the humanities are said to have "culture" as their predominant preoccupation. Yet, Anthropology and Sociology which are also critically and crucially concerned with the study of culture are said to be social sciences. Taking specifically the Igbo example, "culture" has been translated as *omenani* i.e, "that which is positively accepted as practices obtainable in the world." This would mean nothing more than a people's heritage. A people's heritage would naturally include their leisure, sports, eating habits, farm practices, etc. Indeed, it would include everything carried forward from a people's past and understood as normative and point of reference for the people's present actions. One sure way of reclassifying would be to categorise a people's heritage into two broad areas: those that require intellectual and practical skills to carry out, and those that would demand intellectual skills only. This approach would still leave a lot of grey areas. Let us take music and dance, for example. These definitely require a lot of practical skills; yet we currently study them under the humanities. The same would go for Fine and Applied Arts which, fortunately has been sub-divided into "pure" and "applied", a subdivision which has not yet removed the discipline from the humanities, although some universities place Applied Arts under Environmental Studies. But this would appear to offer no safe epistemological safety valve. Why environmental studies?

A second approach would be to consider the primary end to which various human practices are directed. We farm to produce food, and we produce primarily to feed ourselves. We produce farm implements because they are the sure means to cultivate the soil. We cook to process food and make it ready for eating. Without food, we shall not survive. We build to provide shelter, and we provide shelter to save ourselves from some natural forces that may be inimical to our survival. We practice herbal medicine to either prevent disease or to heal ourselves when ravaged by disease. We learn the art of producing drugs because without this, we would not be able to give ourselves medical services. We also in the process ensure that the drugs or herbs we take are well processed so as not to have the opposite effect of the reason for their production.

We do that to survive. Without any form of medication, survival would be difficult. We sing and dance to express ourselves, our emotions. We can survive without doing them. We draw to express some feelings, to represent or capture these feelings, these imaginings. We can survive without doing them. We tell folktales to entertain ourselves, and probably to teach morals to our children. We can survive without doing this. We worship God to define our relationship with the supernatural, to secure the protection and blessing of unseen forces. We can survive without practicing any religion. We tell the stories of our past to remind us of where we are coming from, and of how far we have gone in that journey. We can survive without doing this. We engage in divination to avert unfavourable conditions. We can survive without engaging in divination.

There could still be a third way of classifying the various activities that are to be studied in life. Broadly, there are those areas of life which we cannot study and practice without the aid of material instruments. We can sing without the aid of any instruments, but we cannot produce music without instruments; flute, drum, gong, etc. We do not need any instruments to tell folktales, philosophise, talk about our past and our identity, etc. We need instruments to draw, to paint our bodies or our houses, or to carve and sculpt objects. We need instruments to engage in divination. We need farm implements just as we need instruments for the production of herbs and drugs. We need instruments to build our houses, to cook our food, to make rain or prevent rainfall. Ordinarily, we do not need instruments to study our languages, but we need instruments to measure and study our speech sounds. The instruments we use to study various human activities could be further classified into two: instruments that need supernatural intervention for the practice to be realized, and instruments that need no supernatural intervention either for production or for utilization.

It is still possible to have a fourth way of classifying human activities and studies. We could undertake a classification based on our object of study. How do the practices we intend to study manifest themselves in the world? What type of entities are they? Are they material or non-material entities? Are they visible or invisible entities? Are they things we can touch or not? Do their objective way of being in the world matter in the attempt to comprehend what they are? These are some of the questions that concern us in adopting this approach at classifying our practices and studies. We can see the drawings and paintings that we produce, but we cannot touch them except via touching the medium in which they are expressed or represented. We can neither see nor touch the folktales or stories we tell ourselves. We see the herbs we use, the farm implements we use, the materials we use to build our homes, the instruments we use to produce music, etc. Then of course, we got to ask ourselves whether we could effectively study these practices without being able to see these objects, describe them, and relate them to the practical ends of our study.

There are possibly some other ways of classifying our objects of study. We could do something with the four possible approaches we have so far identified. We could take these approaches and find out how the various activities we have identified could fit into these approaches. For ease of reference, let us call these four approaches, primacy of skills, survivability ends, instrumentation content, and material objectivity.

Practices	Primacy of skills	Survivability	Instrumentation	Material objectivity
Farming	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Medication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Building	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Divination	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Music & dance	Yes	No	Yes	No
Folktales	No	No	No	No
Stories of the land	No	No	No	No
Song	No	No	No	No

What to make of these classifications is a different thing. However, it offers us possible standpoints from which to rethink our current practices in the study of humanities in Africa in general, and in Nigeria in particular.

The issue of translation.

So far, we have called our objects of study human practices. The disciplines that constitute the humanities are captured in the English language. How do we translate these disciplines into the African vernacular languages? Take the Igbo case, for example. How do we translate archaeology into the Igbo language? How do we translate literature? How do we translate Fine and Applied Arts? How do we translate philosophy or religion? These questions are fundamental in the sense that unless we can translate these concepts into our indigenous knowledge system, we cannot do much about reclassifying them. We need to really come to terms with what they are in our indigenous thought systems before we can proceed with any meaningful translational act.

The problem of translation struck me in general terms when many years ago I heard over Radio Nigeria, Enugu, the term “science” translated to Igbo as *ogbara Igbo yari*, meaning “what the Igbo cannot fathom.” It was just so unbelievable that a whole nation would be visited with such an insult. It also showed that the translators there did not know the meaning of the word “science.” Unable to translate it into the Igbo language, linguistic scholars of Igbo Language have settled for its Igbonised form *sayence*. The word “technology” was first translated as *teknuzu* before scholars settled for *nka n’uzu*, i.e., craft and smithing as the norm. How far these capture the English notions of technology is far from certain. And there is the issue of HIV/AIDS which has been translated to *obiri na aja ocha* i.e., something that ends in the grave. Now, take the translations of technology and HIV/AIDS the way they have been translated into the Igbo language and attempt to classify them into current existing faculty terminologies. *Nka n’uzu* would fall into both arts and technology. *Obiri na aja ocha* would probably fall into religion or psychology, or into mortuary studies.

A glaring example of monumental translation error came to me when I did my essay on *Ekwensu in the Igbo Imagination A Heroic deity or a Christian Devil?* Missionary and biblical scholars had translated the Christian Devil as the conceptual equivalent of the Igbo heroic deity known as *Ekwensu*. I found out that the Igbo do not have in their indigenous thought system the idea of an evil deity who is the leader of all other evil deities in Igboland. Furthermore, the Igbo do not have in their indigenous thought system the idea of any deity, good or evil, that has the audacity

to challenge God. Even *Ala*, the mighty deity in charge of the earth does not challenge God. Indeed, the Igbo do not know any deity in their pantheon whose job is to go about looking for idle people to deceive or to tempt away from God. Most importantly, *Ekwensu* is a heroic Igbo deity which has a lot to do with truth. Many Igbo communities and families answer to its name, and in some Igbo communities there are festivals instituted in its honour. In spite of these obvious facts, many people still regard the Christian devil as the conceptual equivalent of the Igbo heroic *Ekwensu*. What this led me to believe is that people could accept many categorical translations which are false, and operate with them as if they were the truth.

The translation of oral literature into the Igbo language is a glaring example of uncritical acceptance of many translations that are wrong. Poetry is translated as *abu*. Consequently, scholars of Igbo oral poetry have what they call divination chants and kola invocation chants. They go further to assert that these are oral literary categories. Earlier in this essay, I addressed the issue of divination and its importance. It is causing epistemological havoc for any scholar to take out of the divination practice only the words and sentences spoken, and go ahead ashamedly to regard them as aspects of oral poetry in Igboland. Such a habit violates serious epistemic and categorical practices. It tells us then that we could study divination as a form of oral poetry, a standpoint that can never be intellectually sustained, given that divination has to do with solving human problems which are beyond the perception and capabilities of ordinary human beings. A different conundrum arises in the translation of prayers said during the breaking of kola nuts as kola chants, and subsequently classifying them as aspects of Igbo oral literature. Just as no scholar can justifiably go to a diviner and tell him that what he is producing is poetry, no scholar could go to a chief priest or head of family offering morning prayers with the kola and tell the person that he is producing poetry. It is really a dumb thing to do.

In the same vein, all manner of traditional songs: birth songs, child naming ceremony songs, work songs, funeral songs, etc are considered aspects of oral poetry. None of the scholars who belong to this school of thought have called contemporary church songs sung at funerals or other occasions aspects of oral poetry. There is even no attempt to justify the study of these forms under the banner of literary studies; yet those in music study these songs in the so-called ethnomusicology. Undoubtedly, some of these songs or lyrics are very poetic in nature, but being poetic does not necessarily make something poetry. It can only establish an order of resemblance, of similarity, but not of sameness. I think that it is important to draw a distinction, subtle and thin as it is, between a creative person sitting down to compose a poem in remembrance of a dead person and the brother or sister of a person giving vent to his or her grief over the death of one close to him or her. The genres dirges and elegies must be considered in the true contexts of their origination in classical times.

What the foregoing section has achieved is to remind us that we who are postcolonial scholars and subjects can hardly understand the academic categories we go by in our own terms unless we first grapple with their translation into indigenous thought forms and practices. Adequate translations will not be enough for effective reclassification of our academic practices to reflect indigenous thought forms, but it is definitely one sure step towards achieving that. Methodological considerations, content delineation, epistemic marking of boundaries, ideological orientations, aligning the tasks with current world-wide academic practices, etc would all be needed in this enormous task. Even if we will fail as postcolonial subjects and

scholars to achieve this task, it would still be necessary for us to make serious sustained attempts at this task. For one thing, we would have a lot to learn even from our failures, the cost notwithstanding.

Towards a conclusion: The tortoise and sites of struggle.

A popular folktale which doubles as an anecdote in Igbo lore is the story of the tortoise and the lion. According to this story, the lion had an outstanding issue with the tortoise, and was waiting for an opportune time to kill the tortoise. Such occasion offered itself when one day the lion chanced upon the tortoise on a lonely road. It then told the tortoise that the day provided an opportunity for him to kill the tortoise. As the story goes, the tortoise had no objection, but wanted the lion to grant him only one request. The lion had no reservations in granting Tortoise this one last request. Thereupon the tortoise started to go round and round in circles, making strange and meaningless markings on the ground. The baffled lion asked the tortoise the meaning of what it was doing. There and then the tortoise replied: "I have made these marks so that those who come to witness the scene of my killing will know that there was a struggle."

The story does not go to show whether the lion eventually killed the tortoise or not. This story has no conclusion even though it has an end. Can we really arrive at a conclusion in an essay as this? One salvaging thing is that Tortoise was not overcome by surprise. He had a keen essence of enactment that goes back to his roots. The might of the lion did not take away the sense of identity from Tortoise. "Let me do what the members of tortoise clan are known for". This was his answer to the lion. In such a state of powerlessness and absence of immediate help from anywhere, Tortoise took strength in his past, in his roots. And the very important second point. There must be struggle. In an Indian mythology where a battle became too critical for Krishna, the encouragement from Arjuna was for him to fare forward, not fare well. The struggle must always continue. And the lion? He is most likely to have walked away, not wanting it known to history that the mighty lion struggled with the weak tortoise before eating him up. But this is mere speculation.

The North Atlantic intellectual paradigms eat up their victims without announcement, without dramatization. They are not as benevolent as the lion. Their strength is not merely physical. They are progressively imperial. They liberalise and globalise in order to eat up the encountered. And what does appropriation after many years of denigration mean? How does one discover the principle of subtle resurrection? Emmaus is a promise. But it is for apostles, not for apostates. What does one do at point zero except to begin from nowhere. But African scholars still have somewhere, a tainted place. What they do with the remnants requires ingenuity. The elephants have plundered the garden, but we must pick up the pieces and take care of what remains. The Ghanaian proverb that inscribed this proverb is apt for us the postcolonial subject scholars. We do not want our blood to flow into no New York, at least not after 20 / 11. We want back our minds. We could still attempt to recover *the stolen legacy*. But where are the minds that created that legacy in the first instance? History is full of hidden passages. The only open and recurrent passage of history is that civilizations rise and fall. Here in Africa, it is in the academia, and specifically in the humanities that the search for a new wave of African civilization must begin.

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