

**“Against Errantic Exaggeration of Contexts in Africa”:
When a Burglar Sues for Assault- Saving Philosophy
from Stereotypes**

[A Counter Response]

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Introduction

That competent and distinguished colleagues have taken time to respond to my papers in recent times, as I know only too well, is at best stimulating. While some come with stings of embarrassment, others have come with great intellectual delight. However, Dr. Ajah's critique of my paper comes with strong sentiments of concern and intellectual delight. Sentiments of concern because, in my response, I have a responsibility to awake a giant who is pretending to be asleep; and intellectual delight because Ajah is a young scholar, capable of conjuring the spirit of his opponent to thread on new grounds. More so, resonances of this kind, often bring me to the painful awareness that I have apparently been unable to present my theoretical approach in a comprehensible manner or, perhaps, to awaken the hermeneutic willingness requisite for its reception. My critic's paper gives me more pleasure because his is only a co-operative effort to advance Igwebuiké philosophy, and an engagement in Igwebuiké pedagogy, a community of inquiry. I could not have wished for a fairer and more productive partner in dialogue than Dr Ajah. The emerging well-informed interest of African scholars in Igwebuiké Philosophy in recent times is to the credit of reasonable objections to penetrating analysis and criticism of such philosophy. This notwithstanding, I would begin my counter response to Dr Ajah's response from his errantic understanding of my paper.

An Errantic Understanding of “The Essay”

Under the heading **The Essay**, Dr Ajah tried to demonstrate that he understood what the author of the paper set out to achieve. He wrote: “What would have been considered an interesting part of this attempt is the idea that inclusive leadership is necessary for social development. But, the author of this paper chose not to explore this option”. As I read through his review, I had no doubt that he had totally misunderstood the work he set out to review. I had clearly indicated that inclusive leadership is necessary for social

development. Thus, I wrote: “If nations and organizations must succeed, there is the need for leaders who would redraw the political map of their nations and organizations. The world needs a paradigm shift from an exclusive culture of governance, to an inclusive, transparent and accountable leadership style”.¹ Ajah obviously adopted an unscholarly pedagogy of review which imposes a flaw on an author so that the reviewer might gain some undeserved relevance.

Every researcher chooses the scope of his research based on the problem he intends to solve. Dr Ajah writes as though he gave the author the topic and outline and the author refused to follow an agreed pattern. Every researcher has a particular area of concern that moulds the research in question. Thus, right from the abstract of the paper, the intention of the author was made clear: “*This paper makes an attempt to articulate an Igbo-African concept of leadership within the context of Igwebuiké philosophy, to serve as a model for the essential elements of effective leadership*”.² An understanding of the fundamentals of research methodology should have settled this problem. You don't impose on a researcher what he did not hitherto set out to achieve. If Dr. Ajah wants to see in a paper what was not intended by the author, the author's work becomes a stepping stone for further research. This explains why the objective that Ajah intends to impose on the author has already been settled in a separate work on “Igwebuiké Philosophy and national development”.³ Ajah wrote that “one is justified to wonder what in the world is specially Igbo about 'Inclusive Leadership'?” Actually one is justified to think of so many other things also, like: “How could a scholar have gone through all

¹A. I. Kanu, “Igwebuiké As An Igbo-African Philosophy Of Inclusive Leadership”, p. 2

²Kanu, I. A. “Igwebuiké As An Igbo-African Philosophy Of Inclusive Leadership” A paper presented later at the Second African Philosophy World Conference held at the University of Calabar, Cross Rivers State, Department of Philosophy, Conversational School of Philosophy, from October 12th to 14th 2017, pp. 1-7.

³Anthony I Kanu, “Igwebuiké Philosophy and The Issue Of National Development.” A Paper presented later at the National Conference on Peace and National Development organized by the Centre for Peace Development, Veritas University, Abuja, 20-22 November, 2017, pp. 1-31.

egalitarian system of governance which is inclusive and inclusive leadership?” I cannot but wonder how Ajah intends to review a work that right from the beginning he did not understand its content, objective, scope and methodology.

When Mental Pain and Sadness Take the Centre Stage in Philosophy

I have never been embarrassed this much as I read of a philosopher's reaction to alterity of perspective as causing him a lot of mental pain and sadness. Dr Ajah wrote that: “Reading through this essay caused me a lot of mental pain and sadness”. Dr. Ajah's utterance here only bespeaks of emotional feelings rather than a search for what is rationally engaging. This also goes a long way to tell us how much the philosophical enterprise has degenerated in Africa. It causes him mental pain and sadness because it goes against everything he has ever known of philosophy. His utterance here gives me the impression that philosophy must be constructed on only what he and his mentor, Prof. Agbakoba know philosophy to be. If philosophy were to be locked up in Dr Ajah's stereotype, how possible would it to have been for us to have different schools of philosophy? Those schools have provided the dialogical ladder on which philosophy has progressed over the years. On the one hand, what Ajah proposes is the death of philosophy by suffocating it in a sack of stereotype. On the other hand, Igwebuiké philosophy, an alternative perspective, symbolizes the survival and future of African philosophy. Such a mental pain and sadness suffered by Ajah and his cohorts requires the healing touch of an attitude of openness and inclusiveness of thought. Moreover, if my article causes mental pain and sadness, the aim is achieved. This is because “Igwebuiké philosophy” is revolutionary, conjuring every dormant and stereotyped spirit to thread on new grounds.

Dr. Ajah also noted that my researched article represents a class of “authors who are seeking (cheap) popularity as 'academics' on Africa”. It is only at the emotional level that research is understood in terms of looking for cheap popularity; research is not even a competition but the search for the truth. Scholars are not competitors but a community of inquirers.

The unimaginable idea of popularity relegates philosophy to the

parameters of “Nollywood”. To insist that the kind of research I am involved into is all about popularity, then my critic has certainly reduced the enormous works of scholars like Prof. Theophilus Okere (Hermeneutics), Prof. Pantaleon Iroegbu (Uwantology), Prof. Innocent Asouzu (Ibuanyidanda), Prof. Francis Njoku (Ana Atutu Ona-Adapu), among others to a mere search for popularity. Ajah seems to undermine the link between philosophy and language. There is some kind of reality antecedent to language that language is developed to express or depict. Language or linguistic structure reflects a deep lying structure of reality or being.⁴ This understanding is still far from Ajah's world of philosophy. I read with dismay as he wrote that “these authors parade themselves as engaging in hermeneutic assessment of cultures in Africa, whereas all they do is to exaggerate contexts in Africa as they engage in what has been described by Joseph Agbakoba as erraticism”. If these scholars: Prof. Theophilus Okere (Hermeneutics), Prof. Pantaleon Iroegbu (Uwantology), Prof. Innocent Asouzu (Ibuanyidanda), Prof. Francis Njoku (Ana Atutu Ona-Adapu) are erraticists, then it may be recommended that you add some bit of erraticism in your works in order to be relevant to your readers.

Ajah has failed to understand that every culture makes a contribution from its house of experience to the universal themes of philosophy, and this makes philosophy relevant to the reality of life. Each culture traces the unity of these themes, synthesizes and organizes them into a totality, based on each culture's concept of life, namely, the relationships between objects and persons and between persons and persons themselves. This cultural contribution to philosophizing is what particularizes philosophy as European, Indian, Chinese or African. This is what defines the particularity and universality of philosophy. Thus, when scholars of my school do philosophy, Ajah, among others, need to understand that they are not trying to show that Africans are different by being context-specific. Moreover, if any scholar wants to show that Africans are different, there is nothing wrong with that, after all Ajah called them 'Africans' which means that they are a unique people. When scholars become context-

⁴Anthony I Kanu, *African Philosophy: An Ontologico-Existential Hermeneutic Approach to Classic and Contemporary Issues*. (Jos, Augustinian publications 2015), p. 158.

specific and employ African languages, they are trying, among others, to communicate philosophy in Africa within the categories that the African understands and to make philosophy feel at home in Africa.

Ajah was right when he wrote: "An honest assessment of the societies that are grouped under the African continent reveals that there are different peoples, with different ways of life", but was wrong when he reduced the idea of a collective worldview as a practice in errantism. To speak of an African worldview does not in any way undermine the differences obtainable in Africa. While there are differences in worldviews, there are many similarities and points of convergences. And because of these similarities and points of convergences, a scholar can make limited generalisations from Africa because of felt similarities which exist among the races in Africa. It is possible to consider Africa in terms of a centre and a periphery theory.⁵ This is the reason for the interplay of the universalist, particularist and culture-area approaches in research.⁶

If all that Ajah knows of Igbo society in terms of the value it places on women, is that: "only the 'sons' and the 'oldest male members' have positions of authority"; "Only them ('sons' and 'oldest male members') take decisions", it is obvious that there is more to be known. Your response also shows a less admirable understanding of the concept of democracy; democracy has a mutable capacity, and thus, provides elbowroom for it to be an adaptable system of governance that can exist anywhere in the world, including Igbo-land.⁷ There is no part of the world where there is a perfect democracy, not even in the United States of America, where women are still not paid like men, where blacks and other ethnic minorities are segregated. The fact that these things exist does not mean that it

ceases to be democracy. This is only an indication that democracy is a process that keeps evolving and developing. Dr. Ajah was also wrong to have hastily generalized that "every adult of Igbo extract is aware that officially, the woman is *always* disregarded/relegated". This is an imposition of ignorance on and an expression of disregard for every adult Igbo. This is rather a popular opinion among the immature and less educated in Igbo traditional social structure. Among the Igbo, the woman is respected, and differences in roles do not mean differences in dignity.

Conclusion

I checked up the dictionary for the meaning of the word 'Errant' and it says: 'erring or straying from the accepted course or standards'. Philosophy is distinguished by rationality and openness to new ideas and methodologies. But from Ajah's review, I think that he has strayed by emotionalizing the rational, and being emotionally antagonistic to alterity. My reading of his critique is like the case of a burglar suing for assault. If philosophy must survive in Africa, it must be kept away from stereotype perspectives. I recognize that the last word has not been said on this debate and I shall be willing to engage anyone on the subject matter any time.

⁵Anthony I Kanu., *Towards an Igbo Christology: A Cultural Christological Construct in Post-Missionary Africa*. (Germany: Lambert Publications. 2016), 22.

⁶Anthony I Kanu, "A Hermeneutic Approach to African Traditional Religion, Theology and Philosophy" (Nigeria: Augustinian publications, 2015.) pp. 43-54.

⁷Anthony I Kanu, "African Traditional Democracy with Particular References to the Yoruba and Igbo Political Systems", *International Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vols. 2 & 3. (Abuja-Enugu: Claretian Communications, 2014-2015), 148-149.