

IGBOLOGY AND THE ZEITGEIST OF AKONAUCHE IN THE 21ST CENTURY AFRICA

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Abstract

Igbo people are one of the dominant ethnic groups within the Nigerian space. They have been characterised with responsive ingenuity in arts and crafts, business, industry, technology, academic, travel and dominance in strange spaces. These features have positioned the group as among the global socio-cultural groups with self-sufficiency, expansion, wealth and creativity. This has been conceptualised as Igbology. However, this study was aimed at investigating how the cosmology of Akonauche has responded to the success storey of Igbology and how the concept of Igbology can help to make Africans more responsive in the 21st Century with eliminated dominance from the west. This study has implications for repositioning Africa in the 21st Century for better socio-economic opportunities and responsive competition in the global space.

Keyword: *Igbology; Zeitgeist; Akonauche; 21st Century Africa; Igbos*

Introduction

I am delighted to be called upon as the Inaugural Guest Lecturer of the impactful ***Igbokacha*** Lecture Series of the University of Nigeria. I hope to do justice to the inspiring topic ***Igbology and the Zeitgeist of Akonauche in the 21st Century Africa***. Igbology is the ideology that metamorphosed into a political sphere called Biafra. It is a postcolonial conceptualisation of Igbo world view for socio-political and economic advancement of the region within their African neighbourhood. Apart from the occasional historical reference to the Bight of Biafra, the concept of Biafra gained international recognition on 30th May, 1967. This was the date that a conflation of both real and perceived threats to the lives and properties of the people from the then Eastern region of Nigeria, made Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the then Military Governor of the region, to declare the region an independent and sovereign state with the name and title of the Republic of Biafra. Outstanding among the real threats were the counter-coup of 1966 and the rest is history. Part of the perceived threat was the fear among the Igbo-eastern elites that the circumstances surrounding the death of Major-General Aguiyi- Ironsi, the Military Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces as well as the emergence of Gowon as the new Military Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, was such that smacked off ethnic crises in Nigeria.

The civil war and carnage that followed after the declaration of Biafra only got to show the extent to which the then Military Government of Gowon was determined to keep Nigeria one at all cost, on the one hand and the extent of the determination of the Biafrans under Ojukwu to assert their total dissatisfaction and rejection of the regime. The war which dragged on for 30 months to the chagrin of both the Nigerian government and her international allies, eventually ended on 15th January 1970, following the submission of the Article of Surrender by Ojukwu's Second-in-Command, Philip Uko Effiong, on 12 January 1970. Although Gowon immediately declared that there was "No Victor and No Vanquished"

and subsequently introduced the 3Rs policy (Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation) with which he intended, at least in principle, to revive the war-wacked parts of the country. However, the punitive 20 pound monetary policy, confiscation of property belonging to Easterners in the North and the continued marginalization of the region cast doubt on the genuineness of the 3 Rs policy and the “No Victor and No Vanquished” mantra.

Igbo nationalism that started immediately after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970 was dominated by the conservative bourgeoisie and favoured the *Ako-na-Uche* (wisdom and tact) through which they seek increased participation of the Igbos in mainstream Nigerian politics. *Ako-na-Uche* is founded on 'the application of wisdom, common sense, sound judgment and restraint in dealing with all issues and situations to achieve desired results' (Irukwu, 2007). This philosophy largely guided the actions of elitist organizations like *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* (*Ohanaeze for short*), *Aka Ikenga*, and Alaigbo Development Foundation (ADF). They provide the platforms for the protection and promotion of the interests of the Igbo bourgeoisie and largely disconnected from the grassroots. Contrary to the philosophy of *Ako-na-uche is Nzogbu-nzogbu* which is a well-known traditional war song in Igboland that evokes the idiom of the presumed bravery and fighting prowess of the male folk likened to the bulldozing power of elephants, which rely on their extraordinary body mass to trample and crush their adversary' (Omeje, 2018; Nwangwu et al. 2020). It promotes confrontational or radical Igbology.

Although confrontational or radical Igbology dates back to the pre civil war era in Nigeria, the *disconnection between the conservative Igbo petty bourgeoisie and the masses after the civil war largely accounts for* the reinvention of confrontational or radical Igbology, especially since the return to civil rule in 1999 (Nwangwu et al. 2020). However, the long chains of military interregnum that lingered till 1999 did not offer the 'vanquished' people of the defunct eastern region (now existing in 11 separate states of both the South-east and South- south geo-political zones of the country) the requisite democratic atmosphere to vocalize their hitherto suppressed grievances and bottled up disenchantment with the post-war socio- economic and political scenario in the country. It was therefore that relative sense of freedom of expression and of association which came with the return of civilian rule with taints of democracy that offered Chief Ralph Uwazurike the atmosphere for the call for self determination via the formation of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). The activities of the group which were mostly sensitization and protests brought it face to face with the security operatives, occasionally led to arrest of Uwazurike and his members. However, the agitation remained at the fringe of Nigerian politics (Aham, 2004; Dike 2006) until the entrance of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Radio Biafra which together reinvigorated the agitation and widened its dimension through galvanization of the diasporic relations (Duruji, 2017).

Suffice it to say that the agitation for Biafra under Kanu got to its apotheosis with his arrest in Lagos on 14th October, 2015 and the intransigence to court orders granting him bail. As expected, the arrest was greeted with tumultuous protests with unprecedented turnout of people resulting in the disruption of socio-economic activities and often pitching the protesters with security operatives that culminated in the arrests and loss of lives (Opejobi, 2015). After several attempts and interventions, Nnamdi Kanu was released on bail. However, with the surreptitious return of Kanu to his base in the United Kingdom and through his evocative and inciting broadcasts via Radio Biafra, the agitation and struggle have acquired a far more threatening dimension with even greater bewildering verve and intensity. Gradually, a struggle that was initially founded on the moral principles of Non-violence has begun preaching violence in a self-defence fashion. The Biafran agitation under Nnamdi Kanu has become a metaphor not just for self-determination, but also socioeconomic, political, religious and cultural emancipation against false sense of ethno-regional superiority and right of dominance. The perceived expression of IPOB through the emergence of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) led to the re-arrest of Mr. Kanu in June 2021. Although the re-arrest has dealt a serious blow to the IPOB, it has helped to propel Mr. Kanu the more to the global space (Orjinma, 2021). This paper however, was aimed at expressing the concept of Igbology as a metaphor

for *Akonauche* and an option in the repositioning of the African space for more economic opportunities. It further argued that the concept of Igbology which is expressed in idea of Biafra is not a geographical location but an ideology that can drive a space for better opportunities.

Biafra: From a cartographical convention to the internationalization of an ideological Zeitgeist

It is instructive to remark at this juncture that the concept of Biafra, between 1967 and 1970, was by reason of origin a geographical location with all of its cartographical expressions like topography, population, and natural resources, and whose existential relevance was limited to the defunct Eastern region of Nigeria. It was indeed a struggle associated and identified only with the people of the region whose geographical location falls within the cartographical convention of Eastern region. However, the people of eastern region would still have reacted the way they did and currently do if they had been or were to be found in any other geographical location in the world. The agitations and struggle are not deterministically tied to the specificities of location. In other words, the Biafran agitation is neither a product nor a consequence, or even an expression of geographical space, as we had earlier learnt from Mazrui (1979), “north and south (to which, I will add 'east and west') are mere accidents of cartographical convention”. Put differently, the geographical locations of a people on the map and the corresponding description or labelling attached to these (i.e, North, South, East and West), are just for analytic and categorization convenience that could have been otherwise. It raises the questions of: 'what if we call the north south and the south north? What if we rewrite nomenclatural designates of the cardinal points as to rename the East West and the West East? How would this hypothetical scenario, if substantiated, change the obvious fact that, for instance, murder is a criminal offence just as it is iniquitous as the location of the victim is not an important factor?

The truest position is that from Africa to Europe to Asia and to America, and by implication, in all societies found among the four cardinal points of the global geography, one common spirit has come to characterize the reactions of the oppressed, of the marginalized, of the subjugated, of the dominated and suppressed. This common generational spirit (the zeitgeist) is the spirit of opposition and agitation by the oppressed people across the globe for justice, equity and fairness that defy spatio-temporality (time and space). Among other concepts and philosophies in which this spirit has found one of its finest expressions is the idea and concept of BIAFRA! A zeitgeist is said to be the spirit of the time; general trend of thought or feeling characteristic of a particular period of time (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2010).

Epistemological foundations of the Igbology

The concept of *Ideology* is a personal brainchild of a French philosopher, Antoine Destutt de Tracy who used it to refer to the scientific study of ideas. Prior to the distortion and corruption of the term, ideology, by Napoleon who invested it with abusive and pejorative meanings following the defeat of the French Army in 1812, ideology was, *ab initio*, an emotive and emancipatory concept with a laudatory character. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels followed suit by conceiving of ideology as the absence of true consciousness substituted with illusory creations of the mind. That being the case, ideology to them becomes another of the dangerous creations/instruments of the ruling class with which it deceives, oppresses and establishes its dominance over the hapless majority. To Marx and Engel, ideology is repressive and must be eradicated through scientific socialism. Suffice it to contend that it took the intervention of Karl Mannheim in 1936 for the very concept of ideology to undergo once again a fresh epistemological rebirth. Mannheim (1936) proffered ideology as a normal feature of socio-political thinking, and Marxism was itself unmasked as ideological and dogmatic.

This paper adopts the Tracyian conception of ideology as a science and system of ideas which aspires both to explain and to change the world. It tries to unravel the weaknesses and shortcomings of the status quo with a view to replacing the status quo and overcoming these weaknesses associated with it. For Tracy, an ideology embodies the following characteristics:

- it contains an explanatory theory of a more or less comprehensive kind about human experience and the external world;

- it sets out a program, in generalized and abstract terms, of social and political organization;
- it conceives the realization of this program as entailing a struggle;
- it seeks not merely to persuade but to recruit loyal adherents, demanding what is sometimes called commitment;
- it addresses a wide public but may tend to confer some special role of leadership on intellectuals.

Placed side by side with the first principle above, the Igbology zeitgeist offers an *explanatory theory* founded on the experience of a group of people in their struggle to free themselves from the dehumanizing treatment of yet another group, who having perpetuated themselves in power, is in control of both the ideological and coercive apparatuses of the state. The agitation by the different groups like the MASSOB, IPOB, Biafra Independent Movement (BIM), and Biafran Zionist Movement (BZM) find expression in Group Theory. The theory acknowledges the existence of many groups, most times with diverse interests, in a given political system or society. A good feature and an assumption of the theory is that a group shares behaviours and desires on the ground of which demands are made on the government and other groups present in society towards putting in place, taking care of and improving the values of their desires (Onah, 2010). Needless to posit that Igbo is a group of like-minded individuals, who in addition to having shared ancestry and common history past, are also united by a common desire. Political stability, according to the group theory is a function and reflection of the degree to which the state addresses the questions of the groups within the political sphere. Igbology sees both individual and group struggle as an unavoidable part of human and social development, and as a result has remained undaunted by the repressive disposition of the public expressions in the 21st Century. The only thing geographical about Igbology is its locale of origin. In terms of outlook, philosophical underpinnings, and goals, Igbology is an ideology. An ideology is a political and/or epistemological disenchantment with the status quo that aspires to transcend it with a set of considered interrelated steps, goal and moves. The transmogrification of Igbology from a localized agitation to an ideology with global appeal came as a result of its metaphorical poise as a movement that identifies with a universal principle. It aligns with the notion that an injury to one is an injury to all. It acknowledges the sameness and universality of mankind, and asserts that mankind, irrespective of race, religion, culture, history and geographical location are averse to injustices, maltreatments, inequitable resource distribution, ethnic marginalization and all forms of intimidations. If there is any race which is on the precipice of organized extermination from the face of the world, and which has continued to resist it, such a race is the Igbos. If there is a community of people anywhere in the world that strives to remain self-sustaining even in the light of artificial barriers frustrating such plans, such a community of people— whether found in Europe, America, Asia or Africa is, ideologically speaking, an Igbo community. Igbology, in essence, stands for opposition to cruelty and survival amidst frustrations. In the light of the foregoing, therefore, it becomes rather very refreshing to conclude with the suggestive remarks of Odoh (2019, p.1):

Biafra is not about a people living in a geographical location, it is an ideology for economic development....Biafra is about survival, growth, development. The Igbos were able to manufacture their own weapons and survived for three years without external help. They made bombs, cars, tanks, among other things. They had their own communication equipment....The Hausa man who is suffering from bad governance and rose above that to become relevant is an Igbo; same for the Yoruba man. Biafra is not a people living in a geographical location; it is an ideology of discovering who you are; your ability to survive, to grow and shine.

I would also see Igbology as the spirit of a people that abhors injustice, (Egbeberegobere), failure of all types, subjugation and marginalization of any form, authoritarianism, and discrimination of any type than an agitation for sovereignty of a geographical location called South east Nigeria. Even if an Igbo man were to be president of Nigeria and Igbos feel choked and victimized, the spirit will not allow them to keep quiet. This is the spirit of resilience, the spirit of all things are possible, the spirit of never say die, the spirit of survival against all odds, the spirit of creativity and industry, the spirit of fairness, (Onyeemegbulanwanneya), and spirit of tolerance, (Egbeberegobere) and excellence.

I prefer to recommend for the Igbologisation of Africa with the *Ako-a-uche* concepts to remodel the individual and group ideologies of Africans for better opportunities in the 21st Century. Igbology would help Africa to overcome the impact of centuries of slavery and colonization. For me instead of the Igbos limiting themselves to the geographical location called Southeast Nigeria, they should push for the adoption of the Igbology spirit in the entire country and this will lead to the total development and advancement of the nation. If through the process of social osmosis, or geographical hypnosis we allow the Igbology spirit to permeate the entire fabric of our existence, the country would easily become a great country for everybody and there would be no need for agitations. This is because Igbology as a phenomenon is the exceptional ability of an Igbo man to turn nothing to something. The entire black race needs this phenomenon to overcome the ravages of deliberate underdevelopment of Africa by the West. We need the Igbology spirit to rebuild Africa and bring it back to its place of pride. Nigeria desperately needs this spirit to join the committee of developed nations and take up its leading place in Africa. I will wish the agitation to be shifted from the movement for the actualization of a geographical space called Biafra to the deliberate campaign for the indigenization of the Igbology spirit and adoption of same for the entire Nigerian nation to create our creed.

Conclusion

The Igbology is also applicable in the academia. It has been manifested in *some impactful roles of intellectuals* of Igbo extraction played in different capacities at both national and global space. Notable among these intellectuals are Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okadigbo, Kenneth Dike, Cyprian Ekwensi, Eni Njoku, among others. These intellectuals were incorruptible visionary leaders endowed with admirable ideological positions. The Igbos have continued to make exceptional impacts that are motivated by Igbology, in their various domains. However, the application of the Igbology with salient features such as creativity, ingenuity, resilience, republicanism, hard work and healthy competition, present opportunities for spiritual balancing, social regeneration, economic determinism, mental emancipation and political resurgence in Africa and other developing regions of the world. The diversity of challenges in the 21st Century has exposed the entire African continent to special alternatives to solving felt- needs. Igbology and *Akonauche* is the answer.

Appreciation

I specially appreciate the 16th and First Indigenous Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nigeria, Professor Charles Igwe, for this opportunity. We first met in 2017 when you were the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Administration, and you gave me and my team a warm reception at the Vice Chancellor's Conference Room. Your passionate, encouraging and thought-provoking speech has kept me coming back to my Alma Mater for collaborative partnership and other engagements. In your words, you quoted "Oliver wants some more". Thank you Professor. I am also grateful to the Dean of Arts, Professor Boniface Mbah, and the Head of Department, Archaeology and Tourism, Dr Emeka Okonkwo, for finding me worthy to feature as the Inaugural Lecturer of the Maiden *Igbokacha* Lecture Series. Writing a lecture note especially one that will be presented and digested in the ivory tower of knowledge like University of Nigeria, is harder than I thought and more rewarding than I could ever imagine. To God be the glory it was

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Words cannot be enough to express my gratitude to God almighty, maker, keeper and executor of my destiny. Thank you Jesus. Having appreciated all the efforts towards the success of this programme, as a sign of my overwhelming gratitude for being chosen as the Inaugural Lecturer for the maiden *Igbokacha* Lecture Series, I hereby donate my present regalia as one of the historical relics in this all important museum of Igbos of Southeast Nigeria.

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