



Itibbeism African Ontology: A Prolegomenon to the Philosophy of Social Re-Engineering

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Abstract: This work with the title, “Itibbeism African Ontology: a Prolegomenon to the Philosophy of Social Re-engineering,” sets out to demonstrate the idea of being conceived from the excavation and reinterpretation of the raw data from the recesses of the opulent Annang cultural milieu. It is predicated on the axiom that the ontology of a people embeds the potent dynamics for the configuration of social being. Hence this work attempts an original excavatory reflection on the Ontology of the Annang people as a prolegomenon for subsequent re-engineering of the society. The vision of this research is to articulate and present a new ontological worldview to the world pool of ontologies as a mechanism for social reconstruction.

Keywords: *Itibbeism, Annang, Itibbe neologisms, Ontology, Re-engineering.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Concepts and Principles of Itibbeism

‘Itibbe’ is an Annang word that is commonly employed by the Annang people of Nigeria when making reference to reality in relation to its origin, beginning and occurrence. Its closest synonym in Annang is ‘ntòòngò’, meaning; the beginning or origination in respect of any reality. In Annang, when something happens, occurs, originates or begins, it is generally conceived as having ‘tibbe’. There is nothing that exists which did not ontically ‘tibbe’ before it can be said to exist. Therefore, in Annang ontology, the coming to be of reality is synonymous with the idea of *Itibbe*.

In the Annang ontological framework as expressed in the *Itibbe* conceptual milieu, being or whatever is capable of ‘itibbe’ (occurring) is thought to originate or begin at a melting pot where all the moments; positive and negative, ambiances; physical and spiritual, forces; natural and supernatural, conflux. These different dimensions of being constitute what we call the modal possibilities that must necessarily conflux for the occurrence of reality. These modalities do not possess isolatory existence but always exist in concurrence with other possibilities. This idea of being as a confluence or conflux of all things is what is couch as the philosophy of *Itibbeism*. Some of the cardinal ontological principles that evince from the *Itibbe* conception of being can be axiomatically captured using some *Itibbe* neologisms, thus: the principle of **confluxiality**, which holds that reality is realizable at the point of confluence of all the modal possibilities; the principle of **omnibosity**, which avers that being is

multiple; the principle **omniaultimacy**, which states that being is inherent in the totality of reality; the principle of **interpermeability**, which relays the idea of the dynamic and the coalescing nature of being; the principle of **integral reflexivity** or **mirrority** which refers to the idea that there is an integral nature of every being reflected in each being; the principle of **universal trans-manence** or what can also be called the principle of universal-trans-mediacy, which conveys the idea that being in its ultimacy is universal and it transcends the immanent and the immediate; the principle of **pluri-centric-teleology**, which says that being in its goal-oriented nature is not only homocentric, nor theocentric but is geared towards multiple nuanced goals and the principle of **equisymmetry**, which says that the ontological equalness of being brings harmony. The condensed formula for the intuitive assimilation and mnemonic for the comprehension of these principles can be rendered as: **CO²I²UPE**. These principles are mutually reinforcing of each other and jointly make for a holistic concept of being in the *Itibbe* framework.

2. ITIBBEISM: ITS CONSONANCE AND DISSONANCE WITH OTHER AFRICAN WORLD-VIEWS

Fundamentally, it has to be highlighted that though the *Itibbe* world-view, in its ontology is widely in concert with the various African conceptions of being enunciated by various African philosophers, there are areas of divergence that exist between the *Itibbe* ontology and the ontologies professed by some African philosophers. The *Itibbe* Annang ontology draws its character from the rapprochement that exists

between it and allied African ontologies on the one hand, and it possesses its peculiar identity from its divergence with the latter. Regarding its characteristic convergence with similar African ontologies, one may question the rationale of the generalized character of African ontology across entire Africa. As a rejoinder to this inquiry, we agree partially with Ijiomah (*Harmonious Monism* 95) that there are root paradigms or touch stone propositions which are unconsciously assumed and they cut across all Africa. Such basic paradigms, according to Ijiomah, include, the hierarchical conception of being, the contrariety or complementarity rather than the contradictoriness of being, the duality rather than the dualism of matter and spirit, the homocentric focus of reality and the humanistic conception of the goodness or badness of reality.

In this research, we partially appeal to Ijiomah's articulation of Logic in African science of relation as a tool of reasoning in the justification of the idea of *Itibbe* conception of being. According to Ijiomah's African logic of harmonious monism, the relation between realities is captured well in the proverb, "wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it". In consonance with the proverb, Ijiomah explains that "nothing can realize itself without what it is not. Instead it suggests that everything actualizes itself only when it absorbs what it is not" ("An Excavation" 32). Explaining further, Ijiomah notes that unlike the Western law of contradiction which cannot combine x , $(-x)$ to produce truth, in African Science of relation, everything has a missing link of reality, and for x this missing link is something other than x , that is, $-x$. It is only at the interface of complement with the $(-x)$ that x realizes itself. In this wise, going by the African science of relation espoused by Ijiomah, x can never be itself except in combining with what is not. Ijiomah ("An Excavation" 33) submits that contradiction as conceived by the West, where opposites like Matter (M) and Spirit (S) cannot be upheld to arrive at a single truth or Reality (R), $(M+S) \neq R$, implies complementarity in Africa, a situation where truth of being is arrived at only through complementarity of opposites. Thus far, this work agrees with Ijiomah but it disagrees with him at the point where he reduces the complementarity of opposites referred to above to the complementarity of contraries as will be seen below.

Generally, Ijiomah in his idea of harmonious monism, conceives ultimate reality as basically a singular (monism) being having a dual but harmoniously interrelated dimensions. This monistic conception of reality is reminiscent of the Western idea of being as 'Unum' (one) which is regarded as one of the six transcendental qualities of being aside *Res* (Thing), *Aliquid* (Something), *Verum* (Truth), *Bonum* (Good) and *Pulchrum* (Beauty). This oneness quality of being seamlessly reinforces the law of non-contradiction which is congenial with the Western polarizing dualism, where opposing dimensions of reality cannot unite to constitute reality. The oneness and the indivisibility quality of being entailed in the monistic conception of being revolt against the idea of the

multiple existence of contradictory dimensions of reality. The position of this work is that if Ijiomah subscribes to monism he also subtly subscribes to the law of non-contradiction and to its metaphysical import that contradictions cannot harmonize into a reality. The supposition that Ijiomah's harmonious monism abhors the coming together of contradictories in the constitution of being is even substantiated by Ijiomah thus, "The African science of relationship accepts that everything in the world including 'X' has a missing link and the missing link is the contrary. When the missing links come together they form unity" (*Harmonious* 130).

As exposed in the context of the quote above, the unification of missing links is limited to the unification of contrary realities. Glaringly, therefore, the logic of metaphysical relation which Ijiomah utilizes to substantiate his concept of African word view is not different from the Western logic of non-contradiction since this Western logic, like Ijiomah's logic, also upholds the possible unification of contraries and disavows the unification of contradictories.

Similarly, Asouzu (*The Method* 302) holds that Complementary reflection is based on the logical principle of non-contradiction. For Asouzu:

Even if complementarity admits of co-existence of opposites and contraries, it insists on their non-contradiction. That is to say, complementarity does not entail the idea of self-negation, and compatibility of contradictory opposites. These are instances where the principles of non-contradiction are negated. (*The Method*, 302-303)

This principle of contradiction is usually expressed as "nothing can both be A and not A" (Alozie, "Logic" 18) "if there is an 'x', that 'x' cannot combine with $(-x)$ to produce truth" (Ijiomah, "An Excavation" 32). Elucidating this principle of Logic, Udoidem ("Opposites as Complements", 300-301) avers that in Western Logic, "to be" or "is" and "is not" cannot be at the same place at the same time. Exposing the truth and falsity relationship between contradictory propositions in the Traditional Square of opposition, Uduigwomen ("inference" 351) affirms that a relationship of contradictories exists between "A" and "O" propositions and "E" and "I" propositions. In this relationship, if "A" is true, "O" is false. If "E" is true, "I" is false.

Worthy of note, however, is the fact underscored by Korner that "Aristotle's metaphysics corresponds to a logic in which the metaphysical principles of identity, contradiction and excluded middle have their logical counterpart in corresponding laws of reasoning" (415). Hence it is very clear that even the principle of contradiction which is the foundation of Asouzu's *Ibanyidanda* complementary Logic is a bequeathal of Aristotle's Metaphysical reasoning which Asouzu repudiates as polarizing. One would have supposed that as Asouzu repudiates the principle of excluded middle or disjunctive logical reasoning which emanated from Aristotle's Metaphysics of Essence (*The Method*, 348, "*Ibanyidanda*" and the Philosophy 16) he would have also abhorred the principle of non-contradiction which, according to Asouzu (*The Method*, 303) entails the incompatibility of

contradictory opposites. Our point of emphasis and variance with Asouzu is that should the principle of contradiction be considered in the strict sense which abhors the existence of contradictions (i.e. the possibility of compatibility of opposites), then the germ of the idea of complementarity which conceives of reality as missing links, has been refuted.

Asouzu pursues the logical principle of non-contradiction at the peril of his cherished philosophy of complementarity. He avers that for realities to be complementary, they must primarily be themselves first. "To be themselves is an affirmation of their existence and this entails that they should not contradict themselves" (*The Method* 303). The idea of being themselves first is quite consistent with the logical principle of contradiction and hence even with disjunctive reasoning which Asouzu abhors, but it is not coherent nor consistent with the *Ibuanyidanda* notion of being as "anything that exists serves a missing link of reality", nor with the complementarity ideal that "to be is to be in mutual complementary relationship" (*ka so mu adina*), since beings that are contradictory to each other or negate each other also exist.

The position that the idea of *Itibbe* allows for the conflux of the totality of reality avows also the idea that being is conceivable at the point of unification of contraries and contradictories. Thus beyond Ijiomah's and Asouzu's idea of the complementation of contraries, the *Itibbe* ontology allows for the unification of even contradictory opposites in its conception of reality. This is encapsulated in what this work calls the *Itibbe* Zen Logical Model of unification of contraries and contradictories

3. THE ITIBBE ZEN LOGICAL MODEL OF UNIFICATION OF CONTRARIES AND CONTRADICTIONARIES

The idea behind this system of logical thought receives wide collaboration in Udoidem's idea of "Opposites as Complements: The Significance of Zen Logic" (300-306). Exposing his position, Udoidem avers that in Zen Logic, "A" cannot be itself unless it stands against what is not -A. This is so because "not -A" is needed to make "A" be "A" which implies that "not -A" is in "A". In this sense, "A" is "A" because of the contradiction.

Udoidem (301-302) registers that in Zen Logic (Buddhist Logic) there is no categorical distinction between affirmation and negation because in Zen's reasoning, positive and negative expressions go beyond affirmation and negation. In this context, Udoidem remarks that attainment of knowledge for Zen does not connote a continuous flow from error to truth, but rather (as he cites Suzuki), is: "A leap, logical and psychological, in the Buddhist experience. The logical leap is that ordinary process of reasoning stops short, and what has been considered irrational is perceived to be perfectly natural" (302).

Comparing Zen's logical assumptions above with the logical assumptions in Western Logic, specifically as it

relates to the Aristotelian Laws of Thought, Udoidem opines that "to be" and "not to be" or "is" and "is not" cannot be posited simultaneously in Western Logic because "freedom from contradiction is a necessary condition of truth and rationality" (302). He explains that in the Western framework, the truth of a proposition p entails the falsity of $\neg p$, and vice versa. Thus one cannot accept the validity of both p and $\neg p$ as this will lead to irrationality.

In Buddhist Zen Logic of complementarity of opposites or contradictories, the doctrine is that truth is attained at the unity of both affirmation and negation. According to this doctrine, therefore, truth is not unidirectional but a complementarity of contradictory opposites, a position which Asouzu (*The Method* 303) denies at the peril of defeating the idea of complementarity as a framework that abhors bifurcation, disjunctive reasoning, polarization and all forms of exclusivism.

The *Itibbe* conception of being from its confluxuality principle makes it to characteristically contrarise with Ijiomah's and Asouzu's conceptions. For the former, reality is a duality of matter and spirit in that for an African "there are two kinds of realities, material and spiritual. The material is quantitative while the spiritual is qualitative hence the (sic) are contraries. Each contrary yearns (sic) for the other. When they come together they yield a qualitative quantity, it is at this stage that reality expresses an indomitable strength" (*Harmonious* 122). The point of agreement between Ijiomah's conception of reality and the *Itibbe* ontology is in his conception of realities as having the material and the spiritual form. *Itibbeism*, however, disagrees with the dualism implied in Ijiomah's conception because in the *Itibbe* ontology, being is conceived at the point of conflux of all the modal possibilities and not necessarily at the point of unification of the material and the spiritual moments. It is also on the account of this confluxial conception of being that the *Itibbe* ontology disaligns with the latter's (Asouzu) complementary ontology which conceives being as "that on account of which anything that exists serves a missing link of reality" ("*Ibuanyidanda*" and the Philosophy...41) Asouzu's conception of being as a missing link implies the idea that a thing cannot be said to be a being if it is not incomplete and therefore yielding for complementation.

Enshrined in this conception of reality as missing links is the idea that there is a necessary lacuna inherent in every being on account of which it yearns for complementation. The *Itibbe* ontology, contrary to Asouzu's complementary ontology, conceives being as a conflux plenum that is devoid of any gap or lacuna which will necessitate its existence as a missing link to any other reality. The confluxuality of being connotes the idea that being in the *Itibbe* framework is a plenum, thus no being needs to exist as a missing link. This confluxial plenum existence of being does not connote atomistic isolatory existence nor does it inhibit mutuality and harmony because being in the *Itibbe* framework operates also under the principles of interpermeability and integral reflexivity which allow for conjugation among realities. Such conjugation is not necessarily to bridge lacunas, not to complement missing links but necessarily for the purpose of individual beings consummation of the ontological

principles of their being, that of interpermeability, integral reflexivity, etc.

The idea that beings in the *Itibbe* ontology do not need to exist as missing links seeking for complementation is not far-fetched since this ontology holds that there is the being of everything in each thing (integral reflexivity), therefore, beings must necessarily interpermeate or co-mingle to fulfill their nature and principles. Asymmetrical relations, disharmony and conflicts are aberrational to the concept of being in the *Itibbe* ontology, thus the reason that immediate rectification is sought for in the event of the occurrence of such aberrations so as to revert to the true path of being.

Thus far, caution has been exercised in refraining from the assertion that the *Itibbe* ontology of the Annang people is diametrically opposed to other African ontologies, hence our employment of the term, contrary, in exploring the areas that the *Itibbe* ontology departs from, consolidates or disaligns with such similar ontologies. In the same vein, the *Itibbe* ontology consents to the existence of a kind of force *vitale*, as conceived by Placid Tempels, in his conception of being in the Bantu ontology, where he observes that “(In Bantu ontology), the concept of “force” is bound to the concept of “being”.... being is that which possesses force. Force is the nature of being, force is being and being is force” (*Bantu philosophy* 51). The extraordinary primacy Tempels places on the spiritual moment of being in the Bantu ontology is consecutively replicated in the philosophical renditions of many African philosophers. Ala mode Tempels, D. E. Idoniboye says that “the ontology of any distinctively African world-view is replete with spirit. Spirit is the animating, sustaining creative life force of the universe. Spirit is real. It is as real as matter. Its reality is primordial and it is if not superior at least as primitive as that of matter” (“The Idea of African Philosophy: The Concept of Spirit in African Metaphysics” 83).

The primordially predicated of spirit in Idoniboye’s outlook on African ontology accords the spiritual mode of being a pervasive flavor synonymous with the idea Aristotelian ontology. This tenor of spiritual essencism as the peculiar character of African ontology is visible in Godfrey Ozumba’s Integrative Humanism which adopts “a ratio-spirito-centric approach in understanding.... Reality” (*Philosophy and Method of Integrative Humanism* 22). Aside the work of Placid Tempels who was a Belgian monk who engaged in missionary work in the Congo since 1933 and utilized his training in Western philosophy to appreciate the world-view of the Bantu, the work of Alexis Kagame, himself a Bantu, presents a systematic account of the philosophy of the Bantu of Rwanda. Janheinz Jahn in his *Muntu: An Outline of Neo-African Culture* presents an exposition of Kagame’s Bantu philosophy via the concept of the four categories of African philosophy namely *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu*. In Jahn’s (100) exposition everything there is, whatever form it is and all being and essence can be subsumed under one of this categories and must be

conceived basically as force. In these four categories, *Ntu* is the determinative stem which manifests itself in all the categories. It is conceived (101) variously as a cosmic universal force that inheres in all the categories but lacks independence, in that it cannot be conceived alone without others as the coalescing factor of beings.

This idea of the existence of an ultimate force as the uniting element in African ontology is echoed with increasing crescendo by most African philosophers. Kenneth Anyanwu in his “The African Word-view and Theory of Knowledge” (90) avers that the totality of reality is reducible to a vital-force in the African world-view, in a way that this force synthesizes the whole of nature to the point that the African denies isolatory existence and only affirms ontological relationship as the ultimate magical nature of reality. In the hermeneutical exposition of the Annang concept of *Itibbe* as an ontological philosophy, it aligns with the view that there is a kind of fusion of the totality of reality in an undifferentiated synthetical manner which generates symphony among realities.

The *Itibbe* ontology does not however subscribe to the idea of spiritual essencism and the dualistic conception of reality suggested by the majority of the renditions of African ontology from the perspectives of most African philosophers under purview. The work maintains the thesis that in the *Itibbe* framework; as elaborately discussed above, reality is multiple and hence cannot be reduced to any of its modal possibilities as essential or prime among other possibilities.

4. CONCLUSION

It remains to be said as a caveat, that in this discourse on the idea of *Itibbe* from the Annang worldview, the exercise remains largely a perspectival hermeneutic which attempts to scienticize and make philosophical a datum from Annang cosmology. It will be uncritical for one to anticipate any unequivocal popular assent to our hermeneutic on this datum since our perspective on the idea of *Itibbe* is not a folk perception. Thus, though the word *Itibbe* remains a common conceptual heritage of Annang people, our philosophical hermeneutic on the concept is a novel approach. Furthermore, Being in its amorphousness is susceptible to multiple interpretations among Annang people depending on the perception of the individual involved. It is in this vein that Ephraim Essien (*Annang Philosophy, History and Culture* 176-177) a philosopher of Annang extraction analyses the concept of ‘Being’ in Annang thought into the dual notions of ‘being’ as God and ‘being’ as existence and further observes that reality in the Annang *weltanschauung* is synthesis of idealism and materialism whereby harmony in the form of non-antagonism and fusion exist between the physical and the spiritual worlds. Our present effort in the exposition of *Itibbeism* supplements Essien’s laudable work by deducing and enunciating the axiomatic principles that the concept of being in Annang ontology evinces. Our supplementation of Essien does not however imply that we subscribe to the dualism in his rendition of the idea of being. Obviously, the *Itibbe* ontological principles as discussed above, abhor the quadruplets of monism, dualism, duality and essencism.

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