

Imagination, reason and traditional African poetry

Obiora **Anichebe**¹ *Emmanuel **Ibuot**^{1,2} & Nnamdi **Nwankwo**¹

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

¹Department of Philosophy,

²Humanities Unit, School of General Studies,

* Corresponding author: emmanuel.ibuot@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

One phantasm of the colonial experience in Africa is the spirited search for an African identity, which Eurocentrism tried to blot out through different ways, ranging from the denial of its existence to an outright replacement of it with accounts that revert to the occidental for validation. As a contribution to this identity-crisis management project, Afrocentric scholarship, from ethnophilosophy to present-day decolonial discourses, has tried to challenge that dominant narrative based on suppressed facts and logical reasoning. Studies of these kinds generally swing between oppositional scholarship and equalization schemes, without investigating Africa per se from a non-oppositional stance. Thus, this study, which is qualitatively descriptive and logically analytical, in addition to being deductive and synthetical in design, investigates the imaginative in a typical African poem. Aided by Derridean deconstructive strategy, the study reconstitutes an image of the African as more than rational, thereby implicating the imaginative functioning as a possible condition for cultural re-engineering and engagement of reality beyond reason.

Keywords: Imagination, reason, intuition, truth, Africa, poetry, creativity, human.

Introduction

The question of defining African identity has been a rallying point for scholars of African descent, at home and in diaspora, even for sympathetic non-Africans. This has become increasingly significant given the ever-growing awareness that history, particularly African history, is a repertoire of identities (Uchendu, 2012, pp. 9-38; Falola, 2014; Oliver & Fage, 1962, pp. 104, 106), conjectures (Agbakoba, 2019), failures and successes (Agbakoba, 2021; Lajul, 2013, pp. 16-78). The African is even more interested in making sure that he can showcase evidence, marks and formative traits that may be distinctly and dignifiedly referred to as African (Eze, 2014, pp. 234-247; Eze, 2021; Otas, 2012, pp. 38-41). This way of defining African identity, apparently influenced by a substance view (Titus, 1964, pp. 143-177; Miller & Jensen, 2009, pp. 108-126), to the effect that human dignity and its corollary, identity (Opata, 1992, pp. 61-80), whether of an individual or a group of individuals, arose from something substantial, concrete – not necessarily materialist even though persisting, reliable and referenceable – across time and space. This is the case because no signifier of irregularity and inconsistency could guarantee identity, heritage and dignity (Agbakoba, 2005, pp. 37-39;

Nwaogaidu, 2019). Interest in the pursuit of African identity was born out of the unpleasant impacts of colonialism and the slave trade (Arabic and European). These historical lexicons are imaged by unfair relational enterprises of rich, former colonizing European powers with former colonies (Fröhlich, 2020; Princewill & Busari, 2022; Dekker, 2022), and her troubling economic and political developments (Akinyemi, 2005, pp. 39-41; Akinjide, 2006, pp. 20-22; Tomolaju, 2007, p. 5).

Eurocentrism, considered to have blighted "Africa's glorious past" (Harding, 2012; Apaak&Gbedze, 2021, Ade-Ajayi, 2001, p. 3), was resisted by different voices like Senghor, for whom "emotion is black, reason is Greek" (Iwuchukwu, 1998, pp. 72-74), which denied Africa of rationality. Consciencism was Nkrumah's resistance to, and resolution of the intense conflict at the heart of the African, a conflict occasioned by Eurocentric and Arabic invasions of Africa with Euro-Christian, Islamic and occidental ideologies (Nkrumah, 1964; 1966, cited in Okadigbo, 1985, pp. 1-29; Lajul, 2013). Nyerere's Ujamaa Socialism (or familyhood) was an attitude of the mind that was preoccupied with proportionate wealth distribution amongst members of society;

it championed communal ownership of means such as skill, land and resources while eschewing private individual ownership (Lajul, 2013, pp. 184-187). One problem with *Ujamaa* was that it encouraged mediocrity, with an attendant compromise of standards. However, these inputs were unique because (i) they were the first of their kind in their generations in Africa, and (ii) they proposed new positions for understanding Africa, and for asserting the African worldview as distinct and valid, even though different from the colonist outlooks ploughed into Africa through the cultures of politics, economics, and education. But the efforts at fostering African identity have persisted to date in terms of the "Great Debate of African Philosophy" (Nwala, 1992), and the schools of thought it engendered (Lajul, 2013, pp. 16-78), with new contributors building on the shoulders of African identity forbears mentioned above. These efforts at the articulate assertion of African identity have come across as reactionary and oppositional discourses on African identity. But a consensus seems to have emerged amongst African scholars about the "anachronistic" status of this approach to the study of African identity (Eze, 2014, pp. 234-247). Other concepts

and models for examining African culture, particularly identity, include contamination, cultural hybridity, cultural mutt, conviviality, and *Afropolitanism* – encapsulating cultural hybridity and contamination, and other postmodern conceptual frames that oppose an essentialist view of African identity and oppositional posturing assumed in the definition of the African, for it seeks to move away from the rigid, fixed, non-dynamic, unilateral, "single-story" kind of identity narrative; and more recently, decoloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni&Zondi, 2016) and its Achilles' heel, trans-coloniality (Agbakoba, 2021), establishes its simmering "pathos".

Some of the theoretical outlooks above, which have served to set the tone for imagining new ideological and indigenous outlooks, have been examined, modified, or surpassed by newer theoretical considerations that encapsulate elements of the older. So, self-rule as a metaphor for identity and dignity, generally thought to have galvanized Africans to take responsibility for their cultural lives, particularly their economics, education and politics, was, in many ways, an exercise in the imaginative; for there exists no cultural template whether scientific,

technological, economic, religious, political or otherwise unless it is something that implicates human imagination. This claim seems contestable by reference to human rationality. But human rationality, properly accounted for, may not be a function independent of human imagination since reason is only one of the powers of a human being (Popper, 1980; Popper & Eccles, 1977; Popper, 1972; Akwanya, 2005). In other words, this work, by way of the critical engagement of philosophy, seeks to reconsider the idea of African identity, by using Derrida's deconstructive strategy through which a poem will be analysed to reflect human imagination standing on a par with reason. In this work, we think that African identity, nearly stifled by earlier studies conducted under the shadow of "rational man" theory, can find holistic articulation and manifestation when we consider African imagination in a typical Igbo poem. Based on this, it is argued that trans-colonial thinking, surpassing the oppositional mode usually adopted in the framing of African identity (decoloniality being an instance), finds a grounding in African imagination.

Rationality and the Expulsion of the Imaginative

Expressions like "objective knowledge," "objectivity," "pure reason," "dispassionate thinking," "clear thought," "logical thinking," and "logical consistency," are commonplace in philosophical discourses. They are reflections or significations of a form of epistemic processing and belief that humans can and ought to aim at realizing this form of knowledge or reason in their cultural practices. It states that humans are capable of a form of knowledge—distancing devoid of emotional bias, distortions, compromises, and prejudices. Indeed, it is a search for dispassionate thinking.

In "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," Jaggar (1989) states that dispassionate scholarship reminisces the product of modern science, which is the supposition that "dispassionate investigation" is possible (pp. 151, 162–163, 169, 174). She argued that western epistemology generally recognized reason as the only instrument of knowledge acquisition, placing emotion as antithetical to, or as potentially disabling of, the power of reason. This tradition of thought, coming from the 17th century scientific outlook, definitive of empiricism and positivism, specifically dismisses emotion as a

legitimate participant in the determination of knowledge (Jaggar, 1989, p. 152).

By this outlook, knowledge per se had to be objective, "dispassionate," that is to say uninvolved, impersonal, apathetic, unbiased, compelling only by the force of persuasiveness attended by better argumentation, which is indeed value-free (Risman, 2001; Lacey, 1999; Gouldner, 1962). Jaggar (1989) views this dream as an impossibility (p. 163), an impossible imagination (also see Lloyd, 2000, pp. 165-172). Jaggar (1989) dismissed three arguments against the positive relevance of emotions relative to knowledge acquisition and construction: that emotions are experientially intentional in nature as against their characterization as aimless and directionless, that they are socially constructed notwithstanding their personal angle, and that emotions are not involuntary, reason-suffocating experiences but symptomatically active and engaging, in other words, requiring choice-making that cannot be dissociated from reason and human will (pp. 154-159). She asserts that three human faculties, "emotion and reason, evaluation and perception, observation and action," generally separated by

society are indeed interdependent and that emotion is neither subservient to reason nor dominant over reason (Jaggar, 1989, pp. 171-172). From these considerations, the claims of empirical science that its investigations are free of values and any value-aiding element such as imagination and its partners (emotions, divine inspiration, sex, power, and ambiguity in reasoning) are indefensible (Ibuot, 2010, p. 135; Mere, 1973), for reason, emotion and imagination are intertwined. Is value-free research a possibility? Risman (2001), Lacey (1999) and Gouldner (1962) seem to argue in the negative. While this outlook on objectivity is rife in the field of experimental sciences, it also resonates in the social sciences, particularly in philosophy. It may be noted that this sense of unbiased and impartial standard in the acquisition of knowledge had an earlier existence in philosophical studies than in modern science. Aristotelian logic is a case in point.

Animal rationale, rational animal (Rorty & Nussbaum, 1995/2003, pp. 289, 307-348), as a classic definition of human beings, dates back to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, with the latter known as its most vivid exponent. With Aristotle, who

postulated reason as human essence in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 1984, 1102b13-1102b28; 1102b29-1103a3), and precisely as logical thinking, to reason was to do logic (to think by the rulership of logical principles). Though he acknowledged human beings as possessing a soul that has an irrational element, he noted the rational as definitive of man; the rational principle being for him a divine marker, connecting humans with the world of the gods, and thus setting him up above other existents in the universe, particularly animals. Reason was the highest point of achievement for humans (Aristotle, 1984, 1094a1-1094a17, 1095b13-1096a5, 1097a36-1098a16, 1101b27-1102a25; 1178b32-1863; 1184b8-1184b17, 1184b23-1185a1, 1185a14-1185a36; "Animal Cognition," 2021). In other words, it behoves humans to exploit that capacity to its fullest since it was the only plane of operation for him to organize and flourish individually and communally, and thus be guaranteed happiness. Social organizations and creative productions were recommended for human beings to be fulfilled. To reason was to be happy, to be fulfilled, and to be in the context of the good sought after by all humans (Aristotle, 1984). To operate below reason was to

recede into the region of entities that were below humans in dignity. The logic was the essence of the divine capacity in the human being. Through a long discourse, Aristotle narrowed reason to logic, controlled by a set of rules as guarantors of reliable knowledge.

Surmise it to say that, for Aristotle, philosophizing or reasoning was the science of truth, principles and causes. Truth was at the heart of logic; he arrived at the nature of truth by way of logic. But truth is warranted by the three principles of identity, excluded middle and non-contradiction. These principles point to the inevitability of logical consistency in the definition of truth. If truth is established, it connotes logical consistency (Aristotle, 1984, 993b20-993b30, 1011b13-1011b22, 1005b9-1005b33, 1221b28-1222a6, 993b20-993b30). What is rational is therefore what is true. It is true because the rational is something that is true and its cause is not in doubt (Aristotle, 1984, 1011b13-1011b22, 1005b9-1005b33, 1221b28-1222a6). In other words, that without a known cause (first, formal, material, final) is suspect and may not be admitted as rational. So, causes are therefore not exempt from the demand of the logically consistent. The requirement

of consistency at the level of thought inspired the furtherance of logic, its development in terms of symbolic logic, requiring pure formalization and suspending the ontological universe in the belief that natural (ordinary) language as an example of the ontological inhibits pure, clear analyses. This arises from the fact that imagination, emotion, and will belong to the ontological. To assert logical consistency requires clarity, not equivocalness, which founders of symbolic logic considered to be problematic and at home in natural language. In natural language, ambiguity or ambivalence is unavoidable. The idea of eliminating ambiguity or any signifier of more than one meaning – such as imagination and emotion – in any statement is traceable to the Aristotelian sense of ambiguity (equivocation, amphiboly) as erroneous and misleading (Edlow, 1977, pp. 17-31).

Aristotle held human imagination suspect just like emotions; for him, it threatens the progress of human knowledge and society. From Plato up to the present, rationality has been considered, in the main, to be the defining and indispensable standard for knowledgeproduction and acquisition.

This rationality involves discriminatory elements: the rational mind versus non-rational human capabilities like imagination, divine inspiration and passion (Selden, 1988, p. 22). But this discrimination, pre-eminently advanced by Aristotelian logic and science, fails to balance up with the findings of Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP). NLP and other studies in neuroscience hold that the brain has two sides, the left and the right hemispheres. The left hemisphere of the brain handles mental data quite differently from the right hemisphere of the brain; the former is analytical, logical, digital, rational, sequential, verbal, linear, abstract, and temporal in its operations whereas the latter is intuitive, imaginary, complex, non-verbal, slow, spatial, synthetic, analogic, non-temporal, nonrational, holistic and concrete in its *modus operandi* (Gonzalez, 1993, p. 13; Edwards, 1979, pp. 26-43, 203; Cassirer, 1944, pp. 25-26, 33, 43-45).

The preceding data demonstrates that human beings are a compendium of the right and left hemispheres of the brain that are identified with two different kinds of mental activities. To rely on or give emphasis to one of the hemispheres of the brain more than the other half of

the brain is to encourage a partial development of humans as well as a partial account of human beings. Since humans are an ensemble of the two hemispheres of the brain that support unique modes of operations, then the search for unbiased rationality does not encourage the holistic development of humans by its insistence on the activities of the left brain, which is like supporting humans to function below optimal. The human must train both sides of the brain by engaging in activities that aid integral personality development, a personality that is at once "logical" – not used in the traditional philosophical sense where the non-logical (signifying realities different from, though not contradictory to thought) is excluded (Miller & Jensen, 2009, pp. 12-13, 176, 297) – emotional, verbal, imaginative, symbolic, non-symbolic, analytic, and synthetic. Human beings may not be found without the interplay of both dimensions. But formal education enabled the training of partially developed humans who rely on or specialize in logic (excluding human imagination, for instance) – a function found in artificial intelligence, machines and calibrating systems (Campbell, 1989, p. 25) – thereby forcing inverted war, a human being warring against himself. The paper, "Functional Imagination in Chinua

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" (Ibuot & Onwuama, 2017, pp. 290-291), argued that human nature was organic, meant to function as a cohesive unit; that prodding a human being to focus on (the privileges and advantages of) a part less than his/her entire constitutive substances and the implications of their faculties was to determine the rejection and resistance of one's nature instead of harnessing it to the fullest. Attempting to function by the dictates of epistemology or an ontology that accepts just a part of human nature is to embark on self-annihilation, whose result is likely to manifest in the form of *madness*, and ultimately, *death* (Ibuot & Onwuama, 2017, pp. 286-292). Possibly, this could help us explain the 21st century increase in mental health deterioration, rise in the number of violent deaths, the slaughter of innocent persons, and even the rate of suicide worldwide (Alabi & Kanabe, 2021; The Johns Hopkins, 2022; British Medical Journal, 2021; Yip, Zheng & Wong, 2021; IASP, n.d.). Was G. K. Chesterton, who asserted that "the main, and from the beginning of time, mysticism has kept men sane. The thing that has driven men mad is logic" (Campbell, 1989, p. 149), right?

Human imagination has been highly suspected of threatening deep-seated yearnings in the human heart for the pursuit of truth, of certain and indubitable knowledge. The tradition dates back to Plato and Aristotle but the search for true knowledge is an existential "angst" that humans have been incapable of surpassing. It seems to be conterminous with the daily existence of humans whether in the private sphere or public domain such as politics, economics, health and wellness science. Again, we witness its manifestation in human attempts at explaining the foundation of existence, the sense of wonder (in children), and the rationale of human life; in the numerous theoretical enterprises from ancient Greece to present-day philosophical systems in occidental societies, repackaged and exported to other continents in the form of tertiary education, and in the traditional or indigenous religious systems and other religious enterprises not averse to magic or occult arts (for instance, Buddhism, Hinduism, Eckankar, and the Rosicrucian Order). The role of imagination in these occasions has been staggering though generally under-popularized. Epistemological theories and their organisations into instruments and systems for driving societies and their

development have prized reason above imagination for most of their history. Background to this prioritization of reason is the need for indubitability and reliability which includes the understanding that being or reality is rational, graspable by reason, for its nature reveals definition by and in sync with reason; supplementing this understanding was the need to resist or suppress the imaginative since it testifies to inconsistency, being a system of apparently fleeting pictures or images (Selden, 1988, p. 22; Agbakoba, 2001, p. 10; Russell, 1912, p. 84, 100; Russell, 1945, pp. 548-549). Plato (1945), in the *Republic* (pp. 179-181, 221-223), designates the fourth and lowest rung of his epistemic ladder as the world of uncertainty, of appearances or shadows, constituted of sophistries, prejudices and passions – a position squarely rejected by Timothy Williamson (2016). It was assumed that since human imagination is capable of fleeting images, it was unacceptable as a basis for explaining life, for generating a generalizable outlook about reality and knowledge. Thus far, imagination is metaphorized as epistemic jeopardy on account of its fleeting character. But this characterization may find itself in reverse jeopardy. For if it can be shown that

imagination is not outright irregular and unpredictable, then it may be justified to validly speak to epistemic processes just like reason. As Agbakoba (2005) argues, if at the level of thought we can identify a thing, then we cannot deny it of being because the law of non-contradiction makes possible the affirmation of being at the level of thought – contradiction denies being at the level of thought (p. 37). Imagination, in the forms of visual, auditory, gustatory, kinaesthetic and tactile images are recognizable because they last long enough in the human thought to be so recognized and identified as a "this" or "that". That is to say that valid knowledge is not just external or historical in nature.

But consideration of imagination as an unreliable part of human experience in the generation of knowledge is challenged by Ruth Byrne's arguments in *The Rational Imagination: How People Create Alternatives to Reality*. She argues that reason and imagination have more in common than cognitive scientists tend to think. Human beings engage (in) life, not just by facing what is before them (present), but by what would or could be (future) and in terms of what could have been if some indices involved in a situation were either present or absent

(possibilities). Byrne (2005) argues that these counterfactual considerations are equally rational just like considerations of historically confirmed events, present-day moments or future ones, which pertain to speculative philosophy. In principle, human life would be different in the absence of the "if only" kind of thinking, the "counterfactual thinking" (Byrne, 2005, pp. 119, 122). In many ways, it will be limited to facts and inhibited by its lacking of abilities which make for the possibility of reflecting on a known failed enterprise, for instance, and designing a possible workable alternative for facing up to any similar challenge in the future, which in itself serves as the basis for hope and excitement. She further argues that just as human rationality is functionally imaginative, human imagination is driven by rational principles, making both reason and imagination co-dependants. Reason is imaginative, just as imagination is rational. Her argument regarding the rational status of imagination capable of the counterfactual "rests on three steps: human reasoning is rational, human reasoning depends on the imagination of possibilities, and the set of principles that guide the possibilities people think about when they reason also guide their imaginative thoughts" (Byrne, 2005, p.

215). Studying the human capacity for creating counterfactual alternatives to reality, she noted that fault lines exist in human conceptions of reality; for humans to thus create counterfactually, they tend to zero in on the fault lines they observe in their conceptual frames of reference (Byrne, 2005, p. 202). These fault lines, discovered during her investigations into reasoning, are controlled by seven kernel principles (Byrne, 2005, pp. 200–215). These principles of non-factual, counterfactual intellection concern different shades of possibility thinking peculiar to humans. These possibilities include: thinking of possibilities that are true (true possibilities principle); thinking in terms of two or limited possibilities (few possibilities principle); some ideas necessarily require two possibilities (dual

possibilities principle), counterfactual possibilities – some ideas with dual possibilities are constituted of one possibility that has lost its former true status (the counterfactual possibilities principle); humans are capable of imagining an alternative possibility that runs contrary to fact if a second possibility is mentally represented (dual possibilities mutability principle); human nature is prone to consider forbidden alternatives or possibilities when they grasp an obligation (forbidden possibility principle); human mental possibilities are reflective of the order of events in time (temporal possibilities principle) (Byrne, 2005, pp. 197–200). Thus reason and imagination are interactive.

Traditional African Poetry and the Imaginative

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|----|--|---|
| i. | <p>Okuko no na ngige
Ngige na egwu
Okuko na egwu</p> | <p>The cock perching on the line
The line dances
The cock as well dances.</p> |
| ii | <p>Mpoto ede ejiri kwe abia
O ji ntu ata atu
Ube amara n'aja
Ojighi eji, Oro o aru</p> | <p>The cocoyam-leaf for a snare-drum.
The user of a nail for a chewingstick.
The spear thrown at the wall
If it does not break, it must bend.</p> |

iii.	Isi mmiri igwè Orulu gbago Orulu gbadaa Gaa n'ogwu	The source of iron-water The water rushes up The water rushes down A difficult move on the thorn.
iv.	Anụ kpọrọ nku n'ejuonu Okwute rogoro elu Egwu atụ o itemmiri	A tiny dry meat that fills the mouth If a stone flies up Fear grips the water-claypots around.
v.	Aka biri onugbu Onugbu llu Aka ilu	The hand that touches the bitter-leaf The bitter-leaf is bitter The hand is bitter as well.
vi.	Asika akpọle Akpole gbuo eke Asika awu o Awujie awo ukwu Anyi a laa!	If there is a decision to roll The Python will be rolled over If we agree to jump The waist of the toad must be broken. Here we go!

(Chuka Okoye, Personal Communication, June 02, 2012)

This is an Igbo poem, typically African. Even though rendered literally, it finds resonance amongst upholders of the traditional religious belief system during festive occasions and seasons like the New Yam Festival, the coronation of a king, and wrestling competition. This style of poetry is popular with the priests of some ancestral shrines and altars in the forms of incantations, and

announcements (see Uzochukwu, 1981; Nwoga, 1984). Although these chants are found in religious contexts, they are not necessarily all-religious. A close reading will bring out things that are universal to humanity and that are, traditionally, religious by association. In other words, we can isolate some elements from the chants and show that they are, basically, properties of humanity than of the

religious rituals within which they take place. For example, the language (*id' est*, Igbo language) used in the above poem is not the exclusive property of any particular religious system in Igboland. Different religions like Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Pentecostalism use the same language. The same language is used in business and trade, the entertainment industry and education.

The chants usually obey the syntactic and semantic rules of the language, not a set of separate rules specific to the religion. Again, we find the chants to be full of metaphors, similes, allegories and ironies. Indeed, this poem is rich in figures of speech. We may then assume that traditional African (Igbo) poems deploy natural languages for religious purposes. Yet the functional option does not dictate nor alter the operation of the semantic and syntactic formations peculiar to the language.

The above chant is full of concepts that cannot be formed without the involvement of the human capacity for fabricating images and pictures about realities that possibly have extra-mental existence. This image-making or imaginative power of humans is a regular constitution of their creative exercise.

Some of the concepts in the poems like "cock," "dance" "cocoyam," "arrow," "bitter-leaf," et cetera cannot be developed without human imaginative powers. While these expressions occur in the thinking context of African poetry, it may be impossible to identify them as having their origin in reasoning defined as logic. Apart from Plato's lack of appreciation of the imaginative, Aristotelian logic would reject it so far as it is tied to aiding ambiguity – a state where a propositional signifier gives more than one meaning. It is this state of imagination that Aristotle identifies as ambiguous (Aristotle, 1984, 165b23-166a31, 175b28-175b39). Expressions like "the user of a nail for a chewingstick," "the cocoyam-leaf for a snare-drum" and "fear grips the water-claypots around" are realities taken for granted on the imaginative plane whereas the rules of logical consistency may not consider accepting such construction. Rationalism (to the extent it presupposes the biases of logic) would expect linguistic expressions to reflect realities (mental and non-mental/extra-mental) in a straitjacket way, in a plastic form. When language is used in ways akin to these expressions displayed or perceived by the community of users, it has the possibility of giving off more than

one meaning, which means to be ironic. The irony is one of the elements that rationalists like Jurgen Habermas claim ought not to be accepted in "communicative action" (Habermas, 1984, pp. 11-12, 94-101). An irony represents a propositional movement that gives birth to ambiguous meanings, which Aristotelian logic regards as fallacious. His theory of communicative reason instantiates an understanding of rational operations in occidental thinking. One of the four conditions that must be met for true consensus to take place is sincerity in that it calls to question the sincerity of the speaker whether he is lying, teasing or being ironic? (Edgar, 2001) This production of a singular sense by every statement, for Habermas, is the proper function of actual dialogue via language. It is "agrammatical" for words to suggest more than one meaning (Habermas, 1985, pp. 318-319n14). Seeing that a statement connotes grammaticality to generate one meaning just like Aristotle's logical rules demand any true proposition to be devoid of more than one meaning, we may conclude that "agrammaticality" is suggestive of illogicality. Habermas only ingeniously produced a synonym for logicity while perpetuating Aristotelian presupposition.

The poem quoted above simply supports the argument that traditional African poetry is awash with imagery that is not counter to reason but supportive. It is the assumptive thinking of the African that an accurate mental reflection and account of the human world and the non-human world (physical, intuitive or otherwise) is epistemologically constituted by the presence of the power to imagine and image. And, without imagination, the human mind cannot be said to generate knowledge that is comprehensive intensively and extensively. It is by way of this sort of formative production that traditional African poetry evokes its pedagogical rights and invites epistemology to expand its understanding of humans to include the capacity for imagining (Palmer, 1983, pp. 31-32; Popper & Eccles, 1977, p. 455; Uzochukwu, 1981), creating and deploying images in the production and acquisition of knowledge. It is this understanding that underpinned the initiation of philosophical discourse as a sense of wonder, the inauguration of the poetic. For Derrida (1978), philosophy has come to be known as "the reflection of poetic inauguration," which is "the twilight of forces, that is, the sun-

splashed morning in which images, forms, and phenomena speak"; but philosophy as criticism suffers hitches by the identification of literary criticism with the philosophy of literature (p. 28). Thus, in the face of the poetic, reason is not a standalone epistemological agential factor but one agential factor standing interdependent on the imaginative, making the human agency, particularly the African, a melting pot of agential factors at once active, creative and harmonious.

Imagination as Counterfactual Thinking

Man as a rational animal has experienced a near interminable period of dictatorship in the intellectual circle. This dictatorship may have persisted, even within African Studies, because of the assumption that reason is definitive of humans and that it accounts for the difference between humans and lower realities inclusive of brutes (Abanuka, 2007, pp. 124-125; Darwin, 1871/2000). Cassirer, for instance, critiquing the rational animal idea of man, notes that *animal rationale* was inadequate as a description of humans since there was more to humans individually and culturally (corporately). For this reason, he prefers *animal symbolicum*, not *animal rationale*. This, for him, is because the human being is

constituted not just substantially (reason by way of mind instantiates substance), which he does not focus on, but culturally, and, in the cultural productions of humans we find these symbols, namely myth, religion, language, art and science. These symbols encapsulate more than logic and its ideals and abstractions; they capture human imagination and emotions in terms of emotional language, poetic imagination, conceptual language, and scientific language (Cassirer, 1944, pp. 25-26).

So far, with the descriptive signification of the *homo sapiens* as an "imagining" being (Agbakoba, 2001, p. 3), we have seen that humans are not simply rational beings (in the sense of thinking) but also imaginative beings – beings whose thinking involves imagining. In fact, humans are beings whose rationality cannot be properly accounted for without the "emplotment" (Atkins, n.d.) of the human capacity for formulating images (Collingwood, 1938, pp. 136-137). To do that would be to uphold a myth, which is here understood as a representation without foundation *in rei*. Traditional African poetry evidences the play of the human imagination in the thoughts of humans about life. Humans are beings

with several sides, some of which logic does not capture and so needs the partnership of the imagination if it must come close to giving a holistic account of how human beings function and engage the concrete universe. Logic qua logic does not function in humans without the play of other constitutive elements viz. imagination, emotion, belief, and will (Ibuot, 2010, p. 138). The only place where pure, abstract logic operates is outside man, on paper, in machines and in Artificial Intelligence. Traditional African poetry, alongside findings in Neurolinguistic Programming, has awakened a realization: that life is a complexity; that it is more than the data of logical assessment and scientific calibration. To our minds, it does include a plane of existential operations not captured by the "taxonomy" of the academic courses in formalized schools, "nonrational" (Miller & Jensen, 2009, pp. 12-13, 176, 297). From the foregoing, the writer opines that such operations and objects as intuitions, imaginations, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, and subatomic particles are captured as non-rational realities.

Although the existence of such a sphere seems unacceptable within the dominant rationalistic tradition, it is not uncommon

that there is a growing interest in things occult, mystical and mysterious in the modern, science-cultured West (Asprem, 2020; Goodrick-Clarke, 2008; O'Brien, 2001, pp. 52-61). If nothing constitutes an object of interest, there should be no increase in interest. Traditional African imagination would not, from its earliest ancestry to date, one generation to another, persist in acknowledging the existence of spiritual realities if it was believed to be empty. Neuroscience and psychobiology have confirmed that man, via the right and left hemispheres of the brain, can examine temporal and non-temporal realities (Edwards, 1979, p. 40). A direct implication of this finding is that the temporal and non-temporal order does not necessarily exclude themselves as the experimental sciences suggest.

By the idea of possibility thinking, of capacity for examining possibilities to desire the most appealing situation, even if not factual, which Byrne has shown to be rational, it seems valid to assert that the above poem, *Okuko no - na ngige*, is an exercise not just in the imaginative but in the rational. The poem, by its demonstration of thinking by the imaginative amongst the Igbo, clearly functions in the counterfactual, which Byrne (2005) notes as thinking in terms

of possibilities. She observed, as noted earlier, that "counterfactual thinking," or "counterfactual imagination" (pp. 208–209, 211, 215), is not an exercise in opposition to reason in that it demonstrably obeys seven rational laws; thus, the poem here considered does not contradict nor divert from these seven principles. As shown above, the nuancing of the poem are considerations that are not factual but imaginatively counterfactual (alternative) reasoning.

But the status of possibility thinking, which this poem reveals about the mindset of the Igbo, must be understood as space or capacity for activation of African inventive genius, and its preference to think in terms of a broader scope as it engages human conditionalities. For, unlike symbolic logic, possibilities thinking or possibilities imagination, what Byrne (2005) calls "counterfactual thinking" (pp. 1–14), is an attempt to fully engage the human epistemic framework, not excluding any part, even the non-rational(istic). This form of mental operation that allows for different possibilities, for Byrne, is rational in that it obeys seven principles characteristic of counterfactual thinking. It permits the examination of alternatives, jettisoning of unwarranted

possibilities and the adoption of appealing possibilities. The identification of alternatives is discriminatory in nature; in other words, to be discriminatory by exercising oneself in choice-making is to be rational (Agbakoba, 2001). The possibilities imagination of *Okuko no – na ngige* is rational because the counterfactual intellection of the poem does not rescind its status as human reasoning or rational status; for it obeys the three laws of thought: identity, excluded middle and non-contradiction. Furthermore, being in tandem with Byrne's ascription that counterfactual thoughts are expressions of human reasoning, the images embedded in *Okuko no – na ngige* are "rational"; they depend on "the imagination of possibilities" and are guided by "the set of principles that guide the possibilities people think about when they reason" (Byrne, 2005, p. 215).

The poem thus far examined as an exercise in African imagining attests to the humanity of Africans, that "we, too, are humans" (Eze, 2021). It shows that unlike Senghor's identification of emotion with Africa while setting up reason (or, rationality) as occidental identity, effectively denying Africa reason, which reminisces the traditions of Hegel, Jaspers

and Kant on the absence of civilization in Africa, this paper by way of *Okukono – na ngige* notes that to be imaginative is to be human beyond the peculiar and narrow contours of reason and its logic just as humanity is wider than the confines of ethnicity and geography. It observes that the imaginative is the exercising of human intelligence, of capacity for "rational responsiveness" (Williamson, 2016, p. 116), which is "counterfactual imagination" (Byrne, 2005, pp. 1-14), or "symbolic imagination" (Cassirer, 1944) – where the symbolic subsumes the rational (Cassirer, 1944, pp. 25-26), making symbols, which are communal grounds, embodiments and custodians of rationality, that are irreducible to rationality since existence is more than the *rationale* in humans.

To be imaginative as rationale invokes a concern, typically Aristotelian for whom rationality pertains to inquiry into truth and reality: in what sense does the imagination function as the domain of truth and reality? African imagination as shown in this work functions relative to the real or actual, to which truth-value may be ascribed; it is not fictional in the sense of something bearing no relational value to existence (Williamson, 2016, p. 123). Indeed, fiction is not the essence of

imagination (Williamson, 2016, p. 122), a view that immediately requires determining the essence of imagination. For that which is fictional, possessing no root in existence is an illusion or a "make-believe" (Collingwood, 1938, pp. 79, 137). Some referential in the poem suggestive of the impossibility to exist within a materialist framework does not suggest illusoriness. Instead, it suggests that such a referential is inapplicable to a supernatural (or, more-than-human, more-than-matter) frame of thought or ideological network; for within an indigenous religious African worldview and practice, the belief system makes room not for the contradictory but for that impossible for the human capacity for reasoning to comprehend, to have a grip of. Within that field of thought, a chief priest, such as Ezeulu of *Arrow of God*, half-human and half-divine signified the possibility of actions impossible for unaided human nature. Within that universe of reference, the divine ultimately guaranteed such possibilities, including the idea that a "nail" could, for instance, serve as a "chewingstick." Within the popular mind-body tradition where the existence of two substances is taken for granted, the reality is defined or affirmed by the law of non-contradiction. Within that system

of thought, the mind can impose itself upon the matter as evidenced by interactionism (Agbakoba, 2001; 2005, pp. 37-38), and by intuition. Collingwood's idea of make-believe would apply to a world where reality, and all that may be said to exist, must have positions external to the human mind. That whatever exists must persist long enough to be identified as a "this" or a "that" at the level of thought is a rational stance that encapsulates the complexity of different conceptual universes of differently natured and hierarchically structured realities (Agbakoba, 2005, pp. 37-38). There is the need to examine the relation of imagination to truth and reality, but not before clarifying what make-believe and illusion mean relative to imagination.

Collingwood (1938) notes that what is imagined could be either real or unreal because the imagination is indifferent to such distinctions. The human capacity for imagination is not a faculty primed for conceptual distinction, clarification and discrimination. Instead, it is the human capacity for generating and absorbing different situations whether real or unreal. But the fact that the imagination can involve real and unreal imaginings does not deny the reality of the human

faculty of imagination; it is at the level of its operations that real and unreal situations may be represented as images. An unreal situation is a make-believe and vice versa; both real and unreal situations are mutually exclusive in nature (Collingwood, 1938, pp. 135, 137-138). What Collingwood (1938) considers unreal or make-believe is but a synonym of illusion (pp. 78-79); it is a mental state defined by an error in judgement; a situation whereby what someone believed or assumed to be the case was actually not so; what happens within it is not expected to have the sort of consequence it would have in real life. An illusion, therefore, is neither something in the mind that lacks any corresponding confirmation at the mental or nonmental (tangible or non-tangible) level nor something possible (including the whole array of intentionally created mental designs whose nature requires no extramental confirmation as in the case of literary works) (Abanuka, 1994, 2003; Akwanya, 2005; Agbakoba, 2021). It may be asked if literary texts function in the possible and have no corresponding confirmation in anything extramental, how does this not qualify it as an execution in the illusory? First, a literary text as an intentional human creation is sometimes considered to be something

real in the sense that it is an object that arose from an actual human author whose author dies after its creation because their life has no bearing on the direction of the meanings and interplays that the text may command (Barthes, 1977; Akwanya, 2005, p. 143). This is not a historical work for it does not reference anything traceable to a specific point(s) in time and space – any such connection is purely speculative and happens within the purview of the possible. But this viewpoint is rejected by Stallknecht (1934). Second, a literary work is also thought of as something whose existence is simply literary (Foucault, as cited in Akwanya, 2005, pp. 128–129, 150–154), alluding to reality as a possibility. Though the world of a literary text may be unexaminable in terms of correspondence since it does not deal with something verifiable, say scientific truth or practical life (Aristotle, cited in Akwanya, 2005, p. 129; Frye, cited in Akwanya, 2005, p. 174; Collingwood, 1938, p. 79), its coherency is assessable. Thus, it is in sync with the law of non-contradiction, the grounding of any discourse on being. That literary art deals with possible reality seemingly sets it on an equal footing with Mathematics and Logic and other specialist intelligibility operations. Neither Akwanya nor Collingwood

disagrees with the use of literary works as a basis for simulating real life; they rather insist only on this: that its essence is devoid of practical or lived experience. By truth, one of the transcendental properties of being, a literary text is interconnected with the objective reality, even with the intersubjective type of reality in terms of its participation in being such that its degree of coherency (consistency) serves as a basis for approximating it to the real and the truth (Agbakoba, 2019). How then may we explain stage acts that specialize in illusions? Recalling that illusion has been defined as an error in judgement, we need to explain how this applies to illusions as staged events. There are two dimensions to a performed illusion: the observer's and the illusionist's dimensions. To the observer, the illusory act is a state of affairs they assume to be the case even though it is not so in reality. If the onlooker comes to realize the error of assuming the illusion as real or true, it is a later event. But this is not the case for the illusionist; for, like the human originator of a literary work, the illusion is their brainchild (not an orphan), an intentional imaginative construct notwithstanding its purpose to mislead their clients into believing that the illusory act is the case.

To address the relation of imagination, particularly poetic imagination to truth and reality, we may note that poetry is arguably a domain of truth and reality – where existents inclusive of the body (materiality), soul (nonmaterial) and spirit (nonmaterial) domains operate; for it can be shown that *Okukọ nọ – na ngige* has four causes or reasons (formal/plot, material, efficient/proximate/triggering, final/telos/design/purpose) in the Aristotelian sense of causes (reasons) as shown under “Rationality and the Expulsion of the Imaginative” above. Stallknecht (1934), in “Arts and the Four Causes,” while defending poetry as essentially about world representation – unlike Akwanya (2005), who argues that only the formal cause is relevant to the definition of literature (pp. 157, 160) – observes that though Aristotle began from mimesis (imitation), a proper human characteristic in the imaginative, for him, poetry in its best expression was not lacking in, nor did it recoil from, logic and morality (pp. 711, 713-715); morality implies logic, which implicates causes. This affirms a point initiated in the paragraph above that the imaginative or poetic is rooted in logical consistency in terms of the law of non-contradiction, situating it within the precincts of reality.

In *Poetics*, our encounter with imitation pertains to something intricately bound with and definitive of human reality, both as mental internalization and as the expression on the outside (Aristotle, 1984, 1148b5-1148b23). Human imagination has the capacity for giving birth to possibilities, thereby enabling discoveries and the delivery of statements to human consciousness. It actively functions in justification, seeking out the truth or falsity of propositions within its purview. By imagination, human beings almost intuitively gauge challenges and make assessments, deductions and inductions, informed by past experiences to attain goals and the best possible choices (Williamson, 2016, pp. 115-123).

Conclusion

By counterfactual imagination, the discourse on African identity needs not to continue in the oppositional nor as mere translational discourses that resort to reasoning from distant pasts whose legitimization is identical to referencing unknown African forbears (Mere, 1973; Ilogu, 1975). As their progenies, possessing capacities akin to our ancestors' and belonging to the same class called humans, the possibility of imagination is indicative of the capacity for limitless responses to challenges. But

decoloniality (as a synthesis, and its ontological equivalent, Africanization) strives along with an old habit of thought, its known preoccupation being the dual acts of criticizing and deconstructing African colonial past or coloniality (thesis) and anti-coloniality (antithesis). Although it promises a great deal, it does not purge Africa of its colonial remnants – a measure (especially the positive deposits) of which may be unavoidable for African development – neither does it construct a replacement *other* in that it seeks to retrieve pre-colonial African life-sites or heritages without qualifications. But decolonial

weakness, attendant on its "negative creativity" and freedom, is antithetically remedied by "trans-coloniality," signalling the capacity for a "positive freedom and development" (Agbakoba, 2021, pp. 20-31; 2019), value-adding creativity, creative survivability, futuristic projection and perpetuation in being. This transcending of coloniality and the limitations of decoloniality imply openness to interculturality and hybridization in the reconstitution of African identity because it ingeniously factors in beneficial local and nonlocal resources.

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