J.O.J. NWACHUKWU-AGBADA

THE AFRICAN PROVERB AND THE LIVING PRESENT: A PARADIGM FROM RECENT IGBO PAREMIOLOGY

Abstract: Modernity, the triptych upon which a corpus of Igbo sayings has been created, arose *pari passu* with the larger incidence of post-colonialism. As a phenomenon with a pervasive grip on the life and imagination of the African, post-colonialism has had its imprint on Igbo paremiology. Thus where the events out of which the Igbo paremiographer forged his/her sayings had taken place in the colonial era, it is safe to state that the coinage proper was likely to have been a post-colonial engagement since proverb formulation takes place long after the experience(s). It is then easy to observe a set of emergent saws which evidently show they are recent, and therefore 'modernist.' Such sayings are the outcome of the contact between Africa and the West as well as the power of the prevailing air of modern globalization sweeping across the continents. In this paper, we identify two subgenres of the Igbo proverb tradition, each of which evokes newness. The first category bears proverb terms which are unambiguously alien to the Igbo language vocabulary while the second is couched in a code-switch of Igbo and English, and which again readily flaunts its modernist credentials. Ordinarily, the proverb is associated with ancientness, with established custom and tradition, but the aphorisms in question are new, vibrant and audacious in rendition, and prove rather decisively that in Africa proverb-minting and usage remain an ongoing folkloric agenda.

Keywords: modernity, triptych, post-colonialism, imprint, paremiology, paremiographer, coinage, modernist, globalization, subgenres, formulation, code-switch, sayings, proverbs, newness, ancientness, aphorisms, proverb-minting

Preamble

Post-colonialism is a concept which is associated with events in colonized regions of the world post-dating colonialism. Yet as well it is part of the larger incidence of a modern movement, at least from the point of view of the colonizer. Oftentimes, to call up the proverb evokes the product of the dim past, of ancientness and of tradition rooted in a time not always linked to both modernity and

post-colonialism. Thus almost always an engagement in post-colonial discourse is an acknowledgement of the centrality of a certain level of power relations in the context of a lopsided cultural exchange out of "which the colonizer imposes a language, a culture and a set of attitudes, and the degree to which the colonized peoples are able to resist, adapt to or subvert that imposition" (Innes 2).

As it is easy to observe, there has emerged in the Igbo gnomic category a set of new proverbial constructions which are evidently the products of the introduction of the English language and the 'modern' culture it inaugurated in Igboland. The proverbial utterances emanating from the contact with English as well as those derived from Western cultural items, beliefs and institutions spring from the desire to 'adopt' and 'adapt' while being 'adept' at presenting the African viewpoint without a sense of inferiority (Barry 196). Rather than appear inferiorized, the user of the new sayings exhibits an air of discovery, an interiority of his/her African stance by appropriating a mode of foreign cultural power and making it serve his/her aims. From the formulation of the more recent Igbo sayings, one observes in the antics of their coiners an awareness of what is in vogue, what is modern, an exhibition of "a form of knowledge that circumscribes and delimits" (Castle 157) between that which is familiar and that which is new, even if strange on some occasions. An effort is made by the user of these new sayings, in preference to the older forms, to show that he/she thinks *à la mode* and knows what suits the social climate. He/she may derive humor, regaling self and others who hear these saws since the latter are for the most part jocular in texture.

Modernity and the African Proverb

As has been the recent experience of the African in all the spheres of life to which he has been exposed or which has affected or concerned him, 'modernity' resulting from the unequal contact with the West has also reached the doorsteps of African folklore. Not only are many of our folklore forms propagated by the modern media like the radio and the television, there are now, for example, ostensibly African folktales narrated on radio in which 'television', 'telephone', 'motor car' or even 'airplane' are mentioned! As in the other areas of life, what is now regarded as modern in those spheres is no more than the European and American way of doing things,

while modernization is nearly always taken to mean Europeanization. Thus even the so-called African episteme is almost always justified *a priori* either on Western precepts, canvassed as equivalents or converted as saleable ideas in their interbred or deodorized formulations. Femi Shaka observes that "these hybridized modern African philosophic and artistic expressions are often reflected in the ambivalent relationship, which is continually constructed out of the colonial experience, between the desire for African authenticity and traditions and the demands of European modernity" (39). What Shaka has had to say about the nature of the African ideas in the African cinematic tradition is easily reflected in a genre of African proverb which we have qualified in this paper with the adjective 'modern'.

Otherwise the proverb as a gnomic form ought not to have had anything to do with modernity since all known definitions of the proverb seem to associate it with the past, with traditionality, with antiquity. Almost all the definitions of the proverb noted by Wolfgang Mieder in his 1985 essay are either associated with 'folksy' wisdom, condensed version of basic opinions, aspects of life universally familiar to mankind, generally accepted thought, a piece of folklore (111-116) etc. While some of the definitions seem to recognize the place of currency, none gives the hint that the production of proverbs is an on-going event. It is probably because of the difficulty of reconciling the various contradictions in and about the proverb that led Archer Taylor to say early in his classic book on the proverb that "the definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking" and for him as well to insist that "should we fortunately combine in a single definition all the essential elements and give each the proper emphasis, we should not even then have a touchstone." Sounding reconciliatory, Taylor could only say: "Let us be content with recognizing that a proverb is a saying current among the folk" (3). Although Taylor's stance is unhelpful, we are fortunate that in this paper proverb definition is not an emphasis. Moreover, we all are endowed with that "incommunicable quality" which warns us in advance that "this sentence is proverbial and that one is not" (Taylor 3). Thus all 'modern' sayings of the Igbo we shall refer to in this presentation are either outright proverbs or proverbial utterances which would one day assume the toga of proverbs.

The 'modern' Igbo proverb seems to have taken life out of what could be considered as 'proverb-sloughing' or what Raji-Oyelade calls 'postproverbials' ("Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture" 74-82).By this one means that the forms of these Igbo sayings exist in the Igbo corpus even if their content may have changed as a result of the introduction of Western ideas, artifacts, institutions, ways of life etc. It refers to the recent phenomenon by which the Igbo proverb tradition probably in its desire to keep afloat adopts a modernist content while performing the additional function of humor, particularly uttered before audiences to which such a saying is probably being rendered for the first time. We describe the new Igbo proverbial corpus as 'modernist' since the content borne by this proverb genre is often related to Africa's new existential paradigms. Although this proverb type is new in ideational character, its form, as already noted, is recognizably African and indigenous, which is why it is acceptable. It is to be equally observed that the human contexts which require their use in speech and discourse may not have drastically changed since basic human needs have remained quite immutable and importunate all through the ages.

It needs to be mentioned that the sloughing survival strategy of the African proverb already touched upon is quite extensive. Because of their extensive use in very many spheres of life, it seems to me that the African proverb is not in any danger of annihilation, considering the onslaught modernity has unleashed on many original African thoughts and ideas, cultural institutions, skills, folklore, traditions, norms, mores and customs (see also Raji-Oyelade, "Posting the African Proverb" 299-314). In recent times the African proverb has sought residency in advertisements, in the literary works of African writers, Highlife and traditional music, essays by notable African newspaper and magazine columnists, video films, political rhetoric and religious preachments.

Code-mixes in 'Engligbo': One Source of New Igbo Sayings

Many but not all Igbo proverbs described as 'modern' are couched in the bizarre linguistic intermedium of *Engligbo*, proverbs formulated in it are quite ample, and can no longer be ignored. Engligbo is a recent linguistic composition involving the code-mixing of Igbo and English. It is a speech phenomenon which may have started with illiterate Igbo folks in their desire to prove that

they too know some English words. However, these days, both the not-so learned and the learned are engaged in its use. A popular Igbo musician – Oliver de Coque – has lashed out at his fellow Igbo men and women who speak *Engligbo*, insisting that "onye cho isu Igbo ya suru gaba; onye cho isu oyibo ya suru gaba" (he who wants to speak Igbo let him do so; he who wants to speak English let him go ahead). De Coque goes on to say that "asukota Igbo na oyibo o buru ogbara Igbo gharii" (when Igbo and English are code-mixed, it leaves the Igbo further confused).

P.A. Anyanwu, writing on the dynamics of the English-Igbo contact situation which often results in the production of 'Engligbo', renders an analogy of this linguistic phenomenon as "the proverbial leper who wants an embrace from the condescending person who vouchsafes him a handshake." According to him, *Engligbo* may have "attracted unsavoury criticism even among the Igbo," yet it has not stopped becoming "a persistent feature of language use among the people" (38). He further states that "a mixture of English and Igbo derogatorily referred to as Engligbo by the Igbo themselves, has ceased to be a language of the uneducated and has almost completely become the exclusive preserve of the educated elite" (39).

Thus it is safe to say that a prominent feature of the so-called modern Igbo proverb is its straddling of the two worlds of Igbo and English. Oftentimes in its morphological composition, this proverb type has within it the component Igbo words and one or two English lexical items. Although in most cases the English words which inhabit the proverb utterance may not easily be replaced by Igbo equivalents, in some others rendering the English words in Igbo will deny the saying its shock, drama and excitement. In some cases, *Igbonizing* such English words, may rob the ensuing proverb of its potential humor and piquancy.

Recent Igbo Paremiography

The word 'paremiography' means the coining and formulating of proverbs or the art of collecting them or indeed both. In this paper, we are interested in the formulation of proverbs rather than who collects them. It should be pointed out that the paremiographer or proverb-coiner need not be a sophisticated fellow who flaunts a deep knowledge of the socio-cultural environment in which these proverbs are being produced. Rather it is the product of a fertile mind which may have contemplated the world and its antics from

its small spot in the universe. Because of the convolutions of time and time-distance it is tempting to agree with Bartlett Jere Whiting who although he makes a strong case for the theory of individual coinage, still insists that "none of the sayings we call proverbs can be proved to be the work of a conscious literary artist" (55). Whiting's position here sounds absolute. Yet there are people in Igbo settings who revel in producing proverbial utterances, and are in fact known for that. For such people proverb formulation cannot be a happenstance. We shall say a little more about this shortly. For now, it is pertinent to state that Alexander H. Krappe who wrote a little before Whiting, had insisted that "a proverb can no more than a tale be considered a mass product. On the contrary, each proverb was coined just once, in a given locality, at a given time, by one mind with some gnomic talent" (143).

The fact remains that in Igbo life, "one mind with some gnomic talent" need not be an educated person or even a sane person (see Ezenwa-Ohaeto, "Poetic Eloquence" 209). It is in fact common to hear proverb users begin their introduction of the proverb into their speech act with such rhetorical matrixes as 'Was it not Jadum, the madman who said that…?" Or "Was it not the madman at Afo Ogbe market who once remarked that…?" Although madness is as old as the Igbo society, the madman whose utterances become proverbs or proverbial expressions uses currency, uses latest and recent events and sociopolitical phenomena which is why these proverbial formulations by him tend to stick quite easily. For instance, it was said that a madman who had passed a building site on a number of occasions had seen only storey-building blocks and bricks heaped all over the place and had had to tell the workers to advise the owner of the building project to mould some blocks and also go find out the price of iron rods in the market ("Gwanu onye a si ya kputu kwani block, ya kwetukwani rod onu"). This was of course a way of saying that to construct a storey-building is much more than assembling just blocks when iron rods are yet to be reckoned with.

Having said this, although we are aware that no madman consciously sets out to make proverbs, he being destined to "want to say one thing and another entering his mouth", there exist in the Igbo world conscious formulators of proverbs. However, these coiners of the proverb are only known in a restricted area of Igboland where the paremiographer knows the audience and the audi-

ences know him. As N.F. Inyama's study of Nwachukwu Nweke shows, his subject was known only in a small clan of Igboland – Ezinihitte Central – while his sayings "are mostly used in a small part of Igboland" (48). Nweke who lived in the first half of the 20th century was a conscious coiner of Igbo sayings. He had not been insane; rather he was insolvent. According to Inyama, he "did not live a materially successful life. The only wife he ever had was an inheritance, for he could not generate enough money on his own to marry for himself" (49). Inyama equally refers to Awuja, a one-time warrant chief and customary court judge. Awuja was said to have had an outsize pair of coarse lips over which his age-mates, and or those whose bitterness he may have incurred as a result of his varied judgments, made a jest of. At one point he was quick to remind his antagonists that "otu-na-otu onu m n'adila, o wu m gana aragbu ya" (However my lips are, it is I who will continue to lick them).

Even if proverb-coinage in the Igbo past may have been 'unconsciously' done as Whiting seems to suggest, in recent times, specific proverbs or proverbial utterances are attributable to certain people. These people are today known beyond their clans because of the impact of the mass media. There is, for instance, Stephen Osita Osadebe, a Highlife maestro (now late) who is well-known for using his music to make very profound statements which are now used in proverbial contexts. Such popular sayings as Proverb 1. "Oso ndi o we ndi" (It pleases some, it offends some); 2. "Agbaraka na-azo ani, onye ji ji anaakonye" (If one who struggles over a piece of land is empty-handed, he who has yams continues to sow them); 3. "A gbacha oso aguo milee" (After racing, the distance covered in miles is evaluated); and 4. "O diri nwalogbo mma pussy, o laba tea" (If things go in favor of the pussy cat, it drinks tea) etc. are some of his original formulations. There are other Igbo musicians too. We have Celestine Okwu (now late), Celestine Obiako, Helen Nkume, Mike Ejiagha, Nelly Uchendu (now late), Doctor Sir Warrior (now late), Aloy Anyanwu (now late), Paulson Kalu, Godwin Ezike, and more recently, Sir Foreigner, Sunny Bobo, Saro-Wiwa and a long line of their inheritors and imitators too numerous to mention. Their musical hits are recorded in albums and cassettes and marketed around the country, and even beyond. There are also in the video film medium Igbo entertainers, actors and comedians such as Zebrudaya, and Gringory, Lomaji Ugorji (now late), Nze Orji Imo (now late), Osuofia, Chidebelu Agu, Patience Ozorkwo, Ngozi

Nwosu, Nnamdi Olebara, Donald Ekenta, Godspower Nwagbara, Uche Ogbuagu etc. These men and women have through the media of the radio, television and phonodisc and the home videos made enduring remarks that are full of wisdom and proverbiality, whose remarks are now widely referred to in the context of modern Igbo social communication ethos.

New Igbo Sayings and the Sources of their Content
The White man ('bekee', 'oyibo' or 'onye-ocha')

The high point of modernity and civilization in Igbo estimation is the white man (see Nwachukwu-Agbada 137-8). When one is haughty, another may ask if the arrogant fellow is a white man! It was after the white man's arrival in Igbo land that new items of culture, some glittering, hitherto unknown to the Igbo, began to be noticed or their impact felt. What baffled the Igbo about the white man was that he came not only with a new administration but also with a new religion, manned by white priests and pastors. Although he sounded benign, innocuous and calm, he had with him as well lethal weapons and destructive tools. He preached a new God, but his methods of securing acquiescence were occasionally ungodly. His skin color was not only strange, his language was spoken through the nose while his reaction to things, even when they were unfavorable events to them was stately, unhurried and deliberate.

5. Ozu nwabekee, e bulie ya elu 'no no no'; e buda ya ala 'no no no' (The white man's corpse if it is raised, 'no no no', if it is lowered 'no no no').

> This saying may have been coined to emphasize the white man's bizarreness; he is someone difficult to please, he being a perfectionist. When one cannot be easily pleased, this proverb is cited to depict just that scenario. His 'corpse' refers to his body which able-bodied Igbo men were compelled to convey from one place to another in a hammock.

6. Anyali: e so kwu buru bekee? (The albino: are you also a white man?)

> It is akin to the Biblical line: 'Is Saul also among the prophets?" The proverb is used to question the authenticity of someone who claims arbitrary superiority. A new saying

close to the one under focus is: (7) "Ndi anyali ekwero anyi malu ndi bu bekee" (Albinos hardly allow us know those who are white men).

8. *Father* ghara nwa bekee, ya na onye awuru kwani nwanne? (If the white{Catholic} priest avoids the white man, who then becomes his brother?)

This saying is instructive: it is the recognition by the Igbo of the link between colonialism and Christianity. The Igbo also say: (9) "Akalanti akuru Father, o wu nwa bekee ka-akuu ya" (A slap given to the white {Catholic} priest is as good as having been given to the white man). They also say: (10) "Father awughi nwata na bekee" (The white {Catholic} priest is not a small boy in the things of the white man).

11. A kuo kotima nwa bekee akalanti, ya kwuo ebe o si (If the white man's court messenger is given a slap, he quickly announces the name of his village).

The 'kotima' (the Igbo corruption of 'court messenger') was a very dreaded agent of the white man. He was usually a fellow Igbo who enjoyed easy proximity to the white man and could complicate things for the local people. He was usually proud and stand-offish, but a direct confrontation with him usually made him sober. The proverb is cited when a task which appears difficult is confronted headlong; it may then be discovered that it is not as difficult as it seems.

12. Onye golu inyinya-igwe akpaazi oyibo amu (Awka saying) (One who has bought a bicycle can no longer be looked down upon by the white man).

The bicycle (inyinya-igwe) is one of those Western items brought into Igboland by the colonizer. The saying propounds that if there is a task to be accomplished, and one quickly descends on it, one is then likely to be taken seriously as being desirous of getting it done.

13. Ihe o soro gi meere onye igwe, tupu o na-ala o ga ekpere gi ike. (However kind you are to a bicycle-riding visitor, he must turn his buttocks at you as he wants to go)

> The bicycle-rider will necessarily turn his back at his host as he mounts his vehicle. This is what the proverb-coiner regards as turning of the buttocks. As a saying, it is used to underline the fact that an ingrate remains one no matter the amount of kindness shown to him or her.

14. Wetuo aka n'oru oleala; nwa-oleala awughi oru (Stay off the job of the sanitary inspector; sanitary inspection is no job)

> The saying may be quaint to someone who may not have known what the prevalent social climate then was among the Igbo in the 1940s and 1950s when sanitary inspection was introduced to check unhygienic behavior in the area. These sanitary inspectors could inspect anywhere, including communal latrines! For the Igbo of the time, it was demeaning for a man to be paid because he was looking into filthy places.

The Church

The church is a recent and modern institution, now very much embraced by the Igbo. It has been responsible for many 'modern' Igbo proverbs because of the pervasive grip of Christianity on the Igbo people's consciousness in recent times.

15. Onye biara uka ka Father na-abara mba (It is the one who attends a church service that the Rev. Father scolds).

> Here the notion is that the priest's stern remarks about God's wrath and such things amount to scolding those who are listening to him in the church whereas those who are absent hardly hear those stentorian admonitions. The proverb is used to underscore the irony of the unpleasant fate which may face those who strive to be of assistance in daring circumstances. Sometimes a person may be blamed for a situation that he is in fact trying to ameliorate; rather than be praised for making some effort he/she is wrongly castigated.

16. Ikuku kuo a mara na *Father* na-eyi kwa *trousers* (When the wind blows, we know that a white (Catholic) priest also wears trousers).

> When one faces hardship one gets to know one's real friends. Oftentimes people cannot know all the behavior of those who claim to love them until an event takes place which becomes quite revelatory.

17. Ala enyere *Church*, mkpabiri-mkpabiri (Give a piece of land to a church, it expands by eating slowly into adjoining lands).

> The saying is used to condemn the expansionist and colonizing tendencies of certain people or when beneficiaries of the goodwill of others abuse it by going out to take or demand more on their own.

18. Onye *Faith* gburu, o nwekwere azu-ulo? (Doesn't the Faith Tabernacle member who allows himself to die from obeying the injunctions of the sect have a backyard?)

> The church in, Faith Tabernacle -shortened here as *Faith* - is known for asking its members to shun the use of drugs during ailments. The 'backyard' enables one to take medications without being noticed by fellow members of the sect. The saying is used when one is being urged to devise an escape route for short-circuiting an established procedure or custom which may not be convenient to keep. At this point, a grunt, a postponement or a feigning of ailment may be required to avert an impending explosive or incriminating moment.

19. Onye yiiri *slippers* gaa *church*, e kwele Chineke nkwa *shoe* (A person who wears a pair of slippers to church has promised God that he will one day wear a pair of shoes).

> From one doing little things, a big thing is expected. All big ventures started from small attempts. A little done or realized today evinces that more could be achieved in the future.

20. Otutu okwu adighi n'uka mgbede (Too much talking is not necessary in benediction).

The Catholic benediction is not for sermonizing or preaching. It is usually short and precise. The Igbo use this saying when what needs to be done does not require a long discourse. What is to be done has to be done quickly rather than delays action with too much dialogue.

21. 'Kwuru oto, ka-anyi kelee Jesus,' agbasaghi onye ngworo' ('Stand up, let us thank Jesus' does not concern a cripple)

This is certainly a proverb of the last fifty years or thereabout. Although Christianity is more than a century old in Igboland, the remark of 'Stand up, let us thank Jesus' is associated with penticostalism which is quite recent in African Christianity. The next proverb, Proverb 21, is quite close to this one.

22. Ana-ekwe '*It shall be permanent'*, onye ngworo o ga e so ekwe? (If the hymn 'It shall be permanent' is being sung, will the lame person join?)

One participates in a project which promises to be beneficial to one. Most of the time life is about utility. No cripple or rather a physically challenged person will sing a song which appears to be endorsing his/her state of disability.

23. Okokporo na-abamba na umuaka abiaghi *church*, umu ya biaranu ha di ole? (A bachelor who loses his temper because too few children have arrived for church service, how many of his are there?)

The context of use is when people are being urged to limit what they have to say or do to their own means; they should not rely on what others could do.

24. Ano m na-ekele Maria, ibe m ejufutachaa na graciaya (I have all the time been here hailing Maria while others are already full of grace).

The saying is drawn "Hail Mary", a Catholic prayer whose first line reads: 'Hail Mary, full of grace…' The English words in the proverb are 'Maria' and 'grace'. People use this 'modern' saying to upbraid themselves for not being as smart as others to realize when an advantage presents itself

or when their insistence on the correct thing being done denies them of benefiting from an opportunity, even if an immoral one.

25. Onye ogbu agala *church*, o gawu anyi nu olu abu ya (A deaf man has gone to church, what is left is for us to hear him sing)

With this saying, people are urged not to try the impossible or to rush into doing things they are least prepared for. A deaf person that goes to church can only observe what is going on, he/she is not in a position to enjoy any song or prayer being rendered as the worship service progresses.

Prostitution

While the act of prostitution and concubinage may not be said to be new in Igbo social life, prostitution as a money-making venture is quite recent. In the past, Igbo prostitutes who largely operated within the locality, often times from their matrimonial homes broke off from their trade from time to time to give birth to the pregnancy occasioned by their sexual escapades. However, these days, modern prostitutes hardly get caught by unwanted pregnancies as a result of the introduction of safety methods. As a consequence, often times they end up in old age without children of their own, almost always visited by such age-old mishaps as disease, lack of care and penury.

26. Akwuna kawa nka akpataghi aku, ya si na owumiri kuru ya (When a prostitute is ageing without much to fall back on materially, she claims the sea goddess [mammy-water] had taken control of her).

The saying is used when people give false reasons for not doing well in life or for not doing what they ought to have done at an earlier stage in life. By referring to the sea goddess such people now want to heap the blames for their poor performance in life on the powerful grip of the supernatural whereas they had gone into prostitution with their eyes wide open.

27. Akwunakwuna ga ama ihe o mere onweya mgbe nka biara (The prostitute will realize what she has done to herself when old age sets in).

Like the proverb before this one, this saying is used to remind someone to 'seize the day' and do what he/she ought to do today while he/she is still healthy or else face an uncertain future.

28. Nwoke na-aga n'akwuna anaghi acho nwa (A man who patronizes prostitutes is not looking for a child).

People should search for the solution to an identified problem where it ought to be. Thus a man who visits a prostitute must have known that she is not the best person to give him a child.

29. Akowachaa ihe akwuna riara nwuo agaghi e li ya e li (If the entire story of all the diseases a prostitute suffered from before she died is told, she will not be buried).

The context of the use of this saying is when one is urging others seeking where to lay blames for a fault to go for the substance and leave out the shadow.

30. Nwa akwuna hu karia ndi nwoke na-eche nne ya, ya e bunye ha oche (If a prostitute's child continuously sees men looking for his/her mother, he/she offers them seats).

When a situation overwhelms one, one succumbs to it or accepts the circumstance without challenging it.

31. Akwuna anaghi aza 'Virginia' (A prostitute does not go by the name 'Virginia')

'Virginia' suggests that one is a virgin! A prostitute has already lost her virginity and could not answer Virginia again which, as we have said, gives the impression that one is a virgin. One cannot claim proficiency in an area of life one has no training or skill.

Madness

The question of madness and proverbial constructs arising from it are quite substantial in Igbo discourse. However, the 'modern' proverbial sayings attributable to the madman are rather few since madness is not one of those phenomena traceable to the arrival of colonialism or Western modernization. However, there are few outstanding ones worthy of mention, particularly attributed to specific madmen like Jadum of Awka and environ or a madman or woman of a specific market place.

32. Ndi *mechanic* ekweghi anyi mara ndi ara (Motor mechanics have not allowed us to know those who are really mad).

> The context of use of this new saying is when it is becoming apparent that many people are claiming what they are not or when it is becoming difficult to know what is genuine and what is faked. In Nigeria, roadside auto mechanics dress just as shabbily as market square madmen such that it is not often easy to distinguish between the two.

33. Jadum onye-ara no n'Awka si na egbubie nne ya abuo, ya e buru ebe elu ya (Jadum, the madman at Awka said that if his mother was cut into two, he would carry the upper part).

> The saying is used to indicate that there is still sense and reasoning in madness, that a mad person could be thoughtful sometimes. Rather than go for the lower part as one would have expected a mentally deranged person to do, Jadum chose the upper part, where according to him he would suckle his mother's breasts. It is probably for this reason that the Igbo say that a madman - not Jadum this time – had been quoted as saying: 34."Amamihe na-abia na *hour* na *hour*" (Sense comes hour by hour).

35. Onye ara mere 'n'afa nna' n'ihu si umu ya mee ya n'azu maka-na onweghi onye maa ebe chukwu muonso ga-esi abia (The mad fellow made the sign of the cross on his forehead and asked his children to do the same at his back because no one knows the direction from which the Holy Spirit may be coming).

> The two concepts of 'sign of the cross' and 'Holy Spirit' are Christian. This recent saw is used to admonish self or

someone else to take all possible measure to ensure that a project is realized by plugging up all loopholes.

36. Onye ara no n'ahia Afo Ogbe si na ya rie otu udele nwughi, ndi-ozo gaa *transfer* (The madman at Afo Ogbe market says that if he eats one vulture and survives it, others should proceed on transfer).

Notice the use of 'transfer.' This is a modern existential term used in civil service circles. It is well known that a vulture's meat is not edible because of a suspicion that it is poisonous. Hence the madman's warning to the scavenging birds that should he survive after the consumption of one of them, he would then finish the rest.

Igbo Code-switch and Very Recent Miscellaneous Events

Proverbs in this segment have no single pigeon-hole into which they could be put. They are products of very recent events, occasioned by currency in the Igbo social environment. As I have tried to argue, even if some of the proverbs do not involve a mixing of codes, the proverb terms are recent because they are composed of some items which are new in the culture. For instance, the idiom, 'Ndi oru uzo agbagharala ibe ha!' (Road menders have left their mates behind!) which may not be more than forty years old is made up of entirely Igbo words. Road-mending by paid men was introduced during the colonial era in the old Eastern Nigeria, probably in the early 20th century. However, the saying emanating from that event in the life of the Igbo was popularized by an Owerri musician, Ederi Olariche, in the 1970s at a time when road-mending activities by salaried public servants had in fact stopped. The saying is an exclamation used to indicate that there is a breakdown of order or procedure or when things have fallen apart. *Ndi oru uzo* (road menders) being paid equally for that particular work of road-mending were supposed to work together in unison. However, occasionally one or two of them could break off and work quite ahead of the others to the consternation of the local observers. It was thought to be strange by the local people who had always seen road menders work and progress together.

37. Ma *is* agaghi, *was* a gaa! (If 'is' does not fit, 'was' will).

The above saying means that in many circumstances, if a particular expected outcome does not come to pass, another will. Thus one is encouraging oneself to venture out since one way or the other, the attempt would yield one benefit or the other. Proverb 38 is a variant of the above.

38. Ma *eleven* akughi, *twelve* akuo (If eleven does not strike, twelve will).

The saying considers life events in clockwork terms. If what should happen at a particular fails to happen, another would result. Ordinarily, in a sibling order of males, they are supposed to marry according to their ages. However, a younger person can marry over an older brother if the latter is financially ready to take a wife. This is because 'If eleven fails to strike, twelve will.'

39. Kedu nke gbasara udele na *Barber*? (What connects the vulture and a barber?)

The vulture (udele) has no hair on its head. A barber cuts the hair. What then could connect the two of them? The proverb is applied to a context when one wants to emphasize that nothing connects two unrelated phenomena, persons, events or objects. In the case of human beings, they could belong to different social classes or educational strata or professions. In other words, both of them have no meeting point.

40. Udele emeena *late* n'odu anu! (The vulture is late to the butcher's shed!).

The vulture is easily a butcher's 'customer' any day! It is thus an anomaly if the former arrives late to the meat-seller's stall. Thus one is not expected to arrive late to the spot of one's known interest or even not to be seen at all at such a place. Should such a fellow arrive late, one knows him/her well enough and may then exclaim: 'Udele emeena late n'odu anu!'

41. Nkita gbunere onye nwee ya n'odu, asi na o na ekwu-okwu, o gaakwara asi ya *Goodmorning, Sir* (Were the dog that wagged its

tail for the owner to be a speaking animal, it would have greeted him,'Goodmornig, Sir!')

> This is no doubt a saying influenced by the Igbo contact with Europe, particularly with the reference to 'Goodmorning, Sir'. For sure, a proverb like this one is marked by humor. It is a saying which often accompanies the donation of one's widow's mite or one given according to one's extent of material possession. In other words, the donor would have given more if he/she had more.

42. 'Ojukwu-nwe-mmeri', o wu n'ime *bunker*? ('Ojukwu-will-win', is it inside the bunker?)

> Gen. Ojukwu led the Biafrans who attempted to pull out of Nigeria in the late 1960s. The saying is a mockery of some prominent Igbo men and women who voiced loudly the rightness of the Biafran cause only to pay lip-service to the idea of an independent Biafra. It is a call to action rather than long talk or the wearing of a façade. During that war, some Igbo elite would shout their support for Ojukwu's effort but avoid joining the army where their support was most needed. Instead they dug bunkers behind their houses in order to protect themselves from air raids.

43. Nwanyi chei *Chief*, di ya aburula lolo (If a woman is conferred with a chieftaincy title, her husband becomes a *lolo*)

> Until a few years ago, only men could be made chief in Igboland while their wives are conferred with the *lolo* title. But today all that has changed, a development which gave rise to the above innocuous but satirical dart. The saying is now used to indicate an abnormality or the upturning of events. Recently, I have heard an *abigbo* song in which the lead singer asks if women can be made traditional rulers since they now take chieftaincy titles (Nwanyi echiri *chief*, a ga echikwa ya eze?). The question is appropriate since there is as of this moment no known community in Igboland in which a woman is an *eze*.

44. Ngwere were *speed* baanye n'onu agwo di, ya were *reverse* futa (If a lizard enters a hole in which a snake resides with speed, it comes out in reverse gear)

> The two English words in the saying are automobile registers. The lizard now wears the toga of a motor vehicle. The saying evokes a quick humor since it is quite imagistic and appeals to the imagination. The point the proverb is making is that every living creature avoids harm. This is because life is sweet as it is said in popular parlance. No one senses danger without doing anything to scamper off from it.

45. *Let us go* awughi ije otu onye ('Let us go' entails that it is a journey of more than one person)

> 'Let us go' means that at least two people are involved in the movement. The saying means that what concerns a group must be decided by the group; it is not to be decided by one person alone. By the same token, if a responsibility falls on a group, the financial burden must be borne by all.

46. Onye zara *Abel,* o beele? (He who answers 'Abel', are the hard times now over for him?)

> The Igbo expression, *o beele* is close in meaning to the English 'It is well' or the worst is over. Thus *o beele* in the saw is placed side by side with 'Abel', not only in recognition of the closeness in the articulation of *o beele* and *Abel*, but also because in the Christian Bible, Abel had a rough experience in the hands of Cain, his elder brother.

47. E mee onye ara *conductor*, ya efegbua onwe ya n'aka (Make a madman a bus conductor, he exhausts himself waving at people)

> The Igbo now use the proverb to warn against the imposition of half-witted individuals in serious businesses. These days, the saying is called up when the Igbo discuss some of their half-performing sons and daughters occupying political offices. In most cases, such fellows got into such elevated positions through election-rigging. Unfortunately, such impostors make the loudest noise in political circles, and will at a price easily do the bidding of those who may not wish his electors well.

48. Ogologo *chaplet* abughi ogologo okwukwe (The possession of a long chaplet is not the possession of a deep faith)

The point the proverb-coiner is making is that appearance could be deceitful. A rosary implies a life of piety but it is not always so. Those who talk loudest over an issue may not act most when the time for action comes.

49. *Monkey* gaachakwa Alabeke, o kawukwa *monkey* (If a monkey goes to England and comes back, it is still a monkey)

If one is a fool, one remains a fool. Going to England is thought by the Igbo to be an opportunity to brush up one-self in knowledge, manners and comportment since it is the land of the civilized. But because a monkey remains a monkey, the English environment will not likely change it for the better. The Igbo use it for their fellows who alt-hough they were not polished but having found themselves in positions of fame or authority, they still could not seize on that opportunity to get refined.

50. Anaghi ano oteanya agwa onye-ozo *Get away*! (One does not stay far away to tell another 'Get away!')

The Igbo also say 'Anaghi ano oteanya ata aru' (You don't stay far off and hope to bite at another). There are certain actions or decisions which require coming together, coming nearer or some level of close consultation before one could fully appreciate what is at stake or what the matter actually is. For instance, these days unlike in the past, no matter how busy or far away a mature man is from home, if he has the desire to marry from home, he cannot do so except he comes home to make his choice or see the choice made for him.

51. 'Who goes there?' ya na-eje na-ewe ndi nche iwe (Asked 'Who goes there?' and the beckoned fails to halt angers security men)

This is a coinage of the late 'Sir Doctor Warrior', a popular Highlife musician. All security people like to be obeyed when they give orders. One is an authority in the area of knowledge or activity for which he/she is well known. The

saying advocates appropriate respect for the appropriate authority.

52. *Headmaster* kugbue naelu, a juwa 'o wu umu *school* anoghi ya?' Nwa *school* akugbe naelu a juwa '*Headmaster*, o meghe gini nwa *school* etegoro naelu?' (If a Headmaster falls down from a tree, the question is asked if school children were not there to do the climbing; if a school child falls down from a tree, the headmaster is asked why he had allowed his pupil to climb a tree)

The saying paints the picture of one who is faced with a dilemma. In a world in which blames are the order of the day, one could not be careful enough.

53. N'ezi onye uba, nde wu ami, nde wu soja (In the household of a wealthy person, some members husband the resources, some others dissipate them)

The two modernist terms in the proverb are *ami*(army) and *soja*(soldier). Although a soldier is a member of an army, the Igbo virtually use the two words as diametrically opposed. This is because in the Igbo language, *ami* could mean sucking or drawing in while *soja* suggests wastage, a frivolous dissipation of resources. The proverb is used to advance the view that in the compound of the materially-blessed, both good and bad reside in it.

54. Mkpi si na itu-ahia adighi mma: oyokoyo ya turu-atu na-atunyere ya ukwu, ma ahuonu ya jiri aka ya zuru mere ya ya dika 'Bobo' (The he-goat says that asking another to buy a commodity for oneself in the market is not a good idea: the large scrotum which was bought for him interrupts his movement while the goatee which he bought for himself makes him look dandy.

The term 'Bobo' in recent times in Nigeria means fit and trendy. The word may have come from 'Bob', a fond abbreviation of 'Robert'. The sound of Bob/Bobo may have suggested trendiness to the Igbo coiner of the new saying. The saying is deployed in a speech to show that to rely on oneself rather than on others is always better.

55. Onwere ihe di iche na B na ukwu ehi zoro n'ala (There is a difference between the letter B and the one made on the ground by a cow's foot)

> The Igbo also say that what is learnt (by a scrupulous education) is better than that learnt by the art of magic or by occult practice (Ihe amuru-amu ka ihe agworo-agwo mma). Try to apply yourself to diligence rather than hope for short-cuts.

56. Onye rere ala nna ya zuo *motor*, o ga-agba ya n'ala nna onye? (He who sells his father's land in order to purchase a car, on whose father's land will he ride it?

> The saying targets selfishness or insularity which some people practice in the community even when a part of their interest is as well involved. The kin group, village, town, clan and the entire society can only develop and progress if all hands are on deck.

Conclusion

No effort exerted in a paper like this can really exhaust *all* the Igbo 'modern' sayings because daily they leave the forge of their coinage. Nor could we boast of having captured all their character and significance in just an essay. Nor had we set out to achieve such a feat. But what we have said, utilizing over fifty of the new sayings of the Igbo – and by extension Africa – is that the proverb in Africa is a living project. Some other folklore forms may have exhausted their life-cycles, but not the proverb. The truth is that as we talk or write, new ones are being churned out, not by great philosophers or philosopher-kings, but by common people who are endowed with "some gnomic talent", to quote A.H. Krappe.

It may have been noticed that not all proverbs fit into the *Engligbo* schema, by which we mean the code-mixed sayings whose contents are a combination of Igbo expressions and English linguistic items. It is easy to observe that in each of these sayings, a word or an idea in it would suggest that they are new; they are not like some proverbs whose origin would usually reside in antiquity. For instance, a proverb like Proverb 57 – 'Onye liiri onye ekpenta nwee akpukpo ukwu ya' (He who buries a leper is entitled to his

shoes) is – surely recent, every term in the saying being Igbo. The fact is that the Igbo wore no shoes until Westernization caught up with them.

It needs to be underscored that virtually every one of these 'modern' proverbs has a counterpart or two in some older Igbo proverb corpus. A few examples will help drive home the point.

58. Ofeke muta igwo-ogwu, umunna ya agwula (If a fool learns the art of medical practice, his kinsmen are finished)

> For sure this is an older proverb than Proverb 47, namely 'Make a madman a bus conductor, he exhausts himself waving to people.' Both of them harp on sudden fortune visiting someone who does not deserve it, and the risk of such new power residing with him. It is likely that the coiner of the newer saying knew about the older one before he/she set to work. Proverb 58 is not as attractive to use as Proverb 47 which is laden with an imagery that is both clear and imaginatively reachable.

59. Ma nwa dibia akpataghi aku, ya nwee odobara afo (If a medicine man cannot be materially wealthy, let him have a bulging tummy).

> The preceding saying evokes Proverb 37 (Ma 'is' agaghi, 'was' a gaa). The Igbo also say, 'Ihe abuo anaghi ako dimkpa' (Two things never miss a man). Osita Osadebe, a Highlife musician based in Onitsha (now late), used to ask in Igbo: 'if you are taller than me, are you also shorter than me?' The one in which 'is' and 'was' are used is funnier, and could be handier. The *dibia* (medicine men) of old were itinerant, and were all over the place marching bare foot, bearing their bulging bellies, while they solicited for patients. Now they are no longer seen visiting patients; patients who are interested in their type of medicare now look for them. Proverb 58 which talks about learning the art of herbal medicine – whether by a fool or a sensible fellow - is not likely to strike the current imagination quite easily since the idea of the 'travelling doctor' in herbal medical practice is no longer in vogue in Igboland.

60. Ikuku kuo, a hu ike okuko (When the wind blows, the romp of a chicken is observed)

The proverb enjoys the same form as Proverb 16 (Ikuku kuo, a hu na Father na eyi kwa trousers). Proverb 60, bearing an 'obscene' proverb term (the romp of a chicken), is the older saying which was probably meant to be replaced by Proverb 16. It is thought more civil to use the latter proverb.

61. Elewecha ihe no na mmiri, agaghi anu ya anu (If all the things in the stream are reckoned with, its water will not be drunk)

The above saw is close in use to Proverb 29, and is also close to Proverb 62: "E sowecha ihe nkita riri,anu ya gaadoro e righa eri" (If what the dog ate were to be reckoned with, its meat would remain unconsumed). However, setting will determine which one to be used and where. Proverb 61, for instance, is advisable where decorum is of essence. On the other hand, in an airy social setting in which jokes and ribaldry are encouraged or even solicited, Proverb 29 would go.

63. Ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akpara ya (If a lizard abandons a tree stem, it will soon be caught)

The above saying enjoys proximity in meaning with Proverb 8. In other words, convenience counts in the attempt to navigate through life. We relate with objects or beings which assure us of some advantage or afford us a headstart. The white Catholic priest of old, finding himself in a strange place would do well to stay close with fellow whites who were colonial administrators just as the lizard escapes once it gets hold of a tree stem.

64. Nnunu hapuru aja-ala gaa bere na elu nkpu ka bere n'aja (A bird that leaves the ground and perches on an anthill is still on the sand)

Both the ground and the anthill are made of sand. Leaving one and perching on the other has not changed anything. The Igbo also say: (65) "Onye rere nkita ya zuo enwe, ihe ntukwu ka no n'ulo ya" (He who sells his dog and buys a

monkey that stoops is still in his house). However a recent saying which is meant to stand in for Proverbs 64 and 65 is Proverb 66 : "Onye *police* chupuru nkita n'ogbo oha, achupula *colleague* ya" (A police who drives away a dog from a public arena has driven away a colleague). The newer saying elicits a guffaw each time I have heard it used in public places.

In other words, what has largely changed in the relevant proverb modulations cited in this conclusion segment is their proverb–image, rather than their form. If this is true, what we may then need to ask is why the recent version of an older proverb should subsist side by side. We have along the line attempted to adduce reasons for the subsistence of the old and the new. We may re-cap by saying that the two variants survive in juxtaposition because the older one may have in its content items that which no longer exist or appeal to current imagination. It may also be that the older one is 'obscene' which may not be appropriate in certain oral discourse settings, considering today's notion of decorum and morality. Oftentimes the newer one easily elicits laughter or forces a smile as it is heard used, notwithstanding the quaintness of combining two languages in one utterance. Finally, the newer proverb may possess a current view of the social history of the modern society which may be of utmost interest to the present user.

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J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada
Department of English
Abia State University
Uturu
Nigeria
E-mail: jojagbada@yahoo.com