

**ANNANG NATION: RAISING THE BAR IN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE –
A paper delivered at the 4th Edition of Annang Heritage Lecture Series, Organized
by Ati Annang Foundation Lagos, 29th October, 2022.**

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the strategies by which Annang Nation could step up engagements in politics and governance. In trying to situate these strategies, the paper underpins the need to actualize the pristine philosophy of the Annang people which embeds in itself the methodology of social praxis in politics and governance. By arming itself with this philosophy which is christened ANNANGAGWOISM, a comprehensive *weltanschauung* that specifies the strategies for coping with life and the obstacles that life present, the Annang Nation might rediscover itself and thereby raise the bar in politics and governance in the society it finds itself. In executing this discourse, the paper adopts analytical, critical and expository exploration of the issues, tinged with a hermeneutic of *verstehen* (interpretative understanding).

Key Words: Annang Nation, Annangagwoism, Bar, Politics, Governance

Introduction

When I was first intimated about this year's lecture topic, I was a bit perturbed intellectually - because speaking on a topic like this, one needs to have transliterated it into a conceptual category that would be easily graspable by the audience, as well as encapsulate the key terms of discourse and their subordinate adjuncts. At first, I wanted to look up to historical analysis but, then, I was restrained by the fact that historical events are particular, dated, and unrepeated complexes of human interaction. Similarly, sociological conceptualization appears to me to be situational and context-bound.

However, my perturbation evaporated when I turned to ontology - a word of Greek origin that refers to "being" and which a later coinage sees it as a branch of metaphysics that concerns itself with what exists. Along this trajectory, then, questions can be asked: who or what are we raising the bar in politics and governance for? Do they exist? Or are we talking of a nominalist fairy-tale subject? If we are raising the bar for Annang, then the next question would be whether it

exists To be sure, Annang had existed, is existing and will continue to exist. What then would characterize these three phases of Annang's existence, such that whether we are talking of Annang in the past, or the Annang of the present as well as that of the future, we can be sure we are referring to the same ontic reality.

At this stage the concept of **Annangagwoism** becomes a touch-stone for our analysis. The **Annangagwo** is a "timeless" being who exists in various historical, sociological and political contexts. Having thus raised the question of its existence, who and what category of being it belongs to, history can now proceed to ask the question of "whence" of this Annangagwo. Accordingly, were it to be a discourse about the "whence" of the Annang, it is here that one could delve into the history of the Annang people. However, this paper would not veer into that aspect. I am sure that there are many Annang historians who have attempted to explore history of the Annang people.

Nevertheless, let me parenthetically say here that many authors have written about the history of the Annang by tracing her ancestry to the Bantu warriors and the Zulu hunters in Central Africa. More insights on this can be gleaned from U. E. Udoh, **The History of the Annang people** (1983);

J. Udondata and J. R. Ekanem, **The Annang people of Nigeria: History and culture** (2013).

On the whole this paper adopts the method of analytical and critical enquiry along with expository exploration to interrogate the issues and cap it with hermeneutical method of *Vestehen* (interpretative understanding) to decode not only the philosophy but also the social practice of Annang nation.

The Concept of Annangagwoism

Annangagwoism is a conceptual formulation and understanding of the Annangagwo. The Annangagwo is the exemplar of the Annang person ontologically. It can be likened to the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato's "forms". Plato's "theory of forms" has been seen to be a further expatiation of Socrates' doctrine of absolute standards – of **Goodness** and **Justice**, for example. For Plato (1994), there are such 'absolutes' or 'forms' acting as patterns or models for things belonging to the physical world. According to Plato, "we always assume that there is a single essential form corresponding to each class of particular things to which we apply the same name" (596).

In other words, the forms are to be understood as existing in some sense independently of the individual physical or moral things or qualities for which they are the absolute models. Although Aristotle, Plato's student, disagreed with Plato on the status of the "forms" as having independent existence apart from the particular things that exemplify them, he still could not escape a conceptual trap when he tried to differentiate in each particular existent thing what he called "essence" and "accident". The essence is what makes a thing what it is; this 'essential' or 'species form' of (Annangagwo) which for example, determines that Victor Inoka belongs to the species (or

kind) of Annang Person, that is, makes me an Annang man (Achrill,1987). The 'accident' for Aristotle refers to that thing that does not count for what I am, as for example, my complexion. Whether I am dark or fair does not determine my Annangness.

Aristotle also distinguished between a thing existing in "potentiality" and its existing in "actuality". A boy is potentially a man and a girl is potentially a woman. In other words, one can exist as an Annang Person only in potentiality and one can also actualize his or her existence as an Annang Person. Existing as an Annang person potentially, here, means the individual, even though being born as an Annang man or woman, has not achieved the standards of excellence required of the Annangagwo.

Why am I attempting to briefly capture these Platonian and Aristotelian categories? The answer is because they seem to embody, summarily, our concept of Annangagwoism and how it sheds light on the topic **Annang Nation: Raising the Bar in Politics and Governance**. For us, Annangagwo is a created being that embodies absolute standards. The Annangagwo is an embodiment of goodness, of justice, of fair play, of communion, of excellence, of togetherness, of truth, of honesty, of beauty, of courage – in fact, the Annangagwo embodies all the positive moral universals. That is why any act of deviation from these positive moral universals, an Annang Person is bound to ask: **Ayem asuk ade Annangagwo?** (is he/she an Annang Person?)

For instance, an Annangagwo is an embodiment of courage and therefore knows the distinction between courage/cowardice and foolhardiness. As Udondata (2013) puts it:

The Annang creation myth portrays the Annang Person as a typically courageous human being. This courage is typical of the hereditary name of Annang Nation as **Nnung Ugwod Ekpe** (4-5).

Equally, the annangagwo is the model of creative genius. Hence, in Annang universe of thought, any invention or new way of doing things is called **Ndomo Annang** (made in Annang or made by Annang). As a creative genius, the Annangagwo devises new and better ways of doing things. To further decode this philosophy of Annangagwoism, it is instructive to note that the Annangagwo is a communitarian being. Communion and community spirit pervade the Annangagwo. Here, the Annangagwo is very much like the ancient Greek understanding of citizenship as 'one who shares or participates'; hence the Greek notion of 'polis,' **he Koinonia Politike** – the communion of life in the form of a city- state (Aristotole, 1981).

The Annangagwo believes that he lives because others live. The Annangagwo is not an isolationist and atomistic being; he/she is "being-with-others: "an openness of man to man reigns...all stand firmly on the principle of collective co-operation...." (Ennang, 247). This philosophy of 'I am because we are' can easily be seen being

given expression to in various Annang sayings: **Eto Isidaha Ikpong Ikakpa Akai** (one tree alone does not form a forest); **Ikpong Inyiehe Iberedem** (A person with no human support has nothing to lean on). In short, the Annangagwo is his/her brother's keeper. The idea of individualism is foreign and anathema in Annangagwoism.

Incidentally, the Annangagwo's sense of communion is not just limited to the temporal realm. Annangagwoism is a comprehensive philosophy of the Annang understanding of life, the universe and the world beyond. Like many other indigenous African people, the Annangagwo sees an intricate cob-wed relationship not only between man and his fellow man, but also a relationship between the Annangagwo, other living/non-living things, the dead and departed forebears and culminating at the Supreme Being, the author from which all things flow. Hence, the Annangagwo is not just a religious being, a **homo religiosus**, but he is a being in communion with the Divine. This philosophy automatically sets the moral compass as well as the moral attitude of the Annangagwo such that he does not operate a dualistic and segregated moral life: pious in the public but vile in his closet.

This alien notion of piety, I dare say, is partly responsible for the many issues of corruption and moral turpitude in Nigeria. It is this notion of piety that has slowly crept into and is silently distorting the Annang pristine moral basis - which was an understanding of Annangagwo's interconnectedness and awareness of his actions and their implications for himself, his family, his society and his responsibility to God. A fuller elaboration of this contention was long pursued in one of my seminal articles titled "The Metaphysic of Corruption and Moral Turpitude vis-à-vis the Supra-Abundance of Religiosity in Nigeria" (Inoka, 2005).

Allied to the Annang sense of moral rectitude is the sense of justice. Annangagwoism, as a philosophy of life, sees justice as an immanent attribute of the Annangagwo. In this conception, both equity and fair play are an integral part. Here, some of the fundamental pillars of natural justice had long been noted and practiced by the Annangs: **Kop Edem Iba** (hear from both parties); **Anyie ikpe isibiereke ikpe ino idem amo** (a man cannot be a judge in his own case); **Asiana Ubok Isikobo Ndik** (he who goes to equity must go with clean hands) are all sayings that the Annang used in dispensing justice.

However, the Annangagwo knows that the ultimate arbiter and dispenser of justice is God. Hence, the Annangagwo believes in **Awasi Nduehe** (literally meaning God of the innocent).

So far, I have attempted to crystallize the philosophy of Annangagwoism. Put it jejunely, Annangagwoism is the philosophy of the Annang Nation. Now, the crux of the matter is: how can this philosophy be used in raising the bar in politics and governance as it concerns the Annangs?

Raising the Bar in Politics and Governance

The very idea of raising the bar implies that what is talked about is not where it ought to be. It suggests a scaling-up, an upgrading, so to say. But what, after all, is politics? The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines politics as "the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or society"(Hornby, 899).

In other words, Politics involves a "system of power relations." Relations of power here simply mean the position that an individual or a group occupies in the power metric of a specific referent. Does the individual or the group relate in the metric tangentially, peripherally, centrifugally or centripetally? This point must be borne in mind because as Allan Hunt and Gary Wickham (1994) have aptly shown, "relations of power exist alongside the production of truth and, in turn, are linked to questions about how we are to live"(24).

However, modern political thinkers have given different academic theorization of politics. The prevailing perspective on politics, as indeed shown in the general Dictionary definition given before, is identified as the **Power approach, or behaviorist** or the **Process approach** (Udokang, 2006).

According to Udokang, Laswell defines politics as "who gets what, when and how" and therefore sees "politics as the struggle for position of power and influence" (444). Similarly, Udokang also states Vernon Dyke's view of politics as a "struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desires on public issues"(444), while same author sees Wright's definition of politics as "The art of influencing, manipulating and controlling others"(444). These academic conceptions add credence to my earlier contention that politics entails a system of "power relations."

These "relations of power" become particularly intricate in what has come to be known as a "plural society" like Nigeria where the Annang Nation finds itself. As Rabushka *et al* (1972) would put it, "the hallmark of the plural society, and the feature that distinguishes it from its pluralistic counterpart, is the practice of politics almost exclusively along ethnic lines" (20). This ethnicization of politics in Nigeria makes ethnic groups to be competitive for the strategic resources of the Nigerian society. This general fact of the nature of plural societies was well noted by Elliot skinner (1975) when he stated:

The nature of ethnic groupings in each society and the competitive short-term tactics and long-term strategies they employ are functions of history and of the resources they seek to control. Groups with more effective tactics and strategies normally gain competitive advantages over the other groups within their societies (131).

Many commentators on Nigerian politics have also realized to their chagrin the grim fact that this ethnic competition is not only limited to the focal struggle for state power alone, but that it pervades political affairs and the activities of governmental bodies. This is indeed the view of Robin Cohen (1974) when he asserted that:

Behind the liberal façade of formal political institutions and debate lay a series of vicious struggles over the allocation and distribution of political offices, the award of contracts, positions in the corporations and state boards, and the distribution of social and economic benefits (28).

What therefore comes out as social psychology of ethnic competition for power in Nigeria is an inversion of Mancur Olson (1971) and here we must acknowledge that the perception of the welfare and interests of individuals becomes intricately bound with those of his or group.

Since we are talking about “getting and using power in public life,” politics, therefore, embraces government, governmentality and governance. As Michel Foucault in his study has noted,

the word (government) must be allowed the very broad meaning which it had in the sixteenth Century. ‘Government’ did not refer only to political structure or the management of states; rather it designates the way in which the conduct of individuals or states might be directed... it did not cover only the legitimate constituted forms of political and economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered, which were designed to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others (Dreyfus *et al*, 221).

What all this means is that politics, together with its ancillary concepts of government, governmentality, governance, involves a system of domination and every individual or group must strategize in order to position himself or itself well at the centre of this system.

Accordingly, with respect to politics, therefore, the Annang Nation must fully actualize its Annangagwo philosophy, by raising the bar from being a tangential appendage in the power metric either of the state or of the country. The Annangagwo must reach out to the inner recesses of his creative genius and perhaps devise a new

Ndomo Annang method of catapulting the Annang Nation to the centre-piece of political dominance both at the State as well as at the National level. The Annangagwo does not belong to second-grade. He is a first-grade - **Awo Annang Ade Awo Uko**. He must do this not by wanting to act alone; for as we have said before, team-spirit, togetherness, a community spirit, are what define the Annangagwo.

Again, to raise the bar in politics, the Annangagwo must call forth the virtue of excellence in craftsmanship that defines Annangagwoism. The Annangagwo must become a political craftsman. Let me parenthetically say here that the acclaimed superior performance of His Excellency, Senator Godswill Akpabio – an Annang son -, during his tenure as Governor of Akwa Ibom State was not because of any good fortune of circumstance, but an immanent inspiration of the spirit of **Excellence** that defines the Annangagwo. It is thus gratifying to note that that bar that was raised has become a defining yardstick in measuring subsequent dispensation(s) and this urge to meet up to, and perhaps exceed the bar, appears to be what is propelling the extant administration of the State.

Consequently, in order to raise the bar in politics for Annang Nation, every Annangagwo must endeavour to win his way through positive concrete actions and not to dissipate energy in unnecessary talk, protestation or disputation. I have already alluded to the prominence achieved by His Excellency, Senator Godswill Akpabio, as Governor of Akwa Ibom State. This point should be internalized by any Annang politician or public office seeker that desires to raise the bar in politics. As Robert Greene (2000) clearly shows, in the field of power play, “it is much more powerful to get others to agree with you through your actions, without saying a word. Demonstrate, do not explicate”(69).

Now specifically referring to governance, I wish to align with Hunt and Wickham (1994) when they take governance to be any attempt to control or manage any known object. This “known object” may be an event, a relationship, an animate object, an inanimate object, or in fact any phenomenon which human beings try to control or manage. The authors then proceed to formulate four principles of governance. Firstly, that “all instances of governance contain elements of attempts and elements of incompleteness or failure” (79), emphasizing thereby the perpetual character of governance. Secondly, that “governance involves power (but only in a very particular sense) and as such involves politics and resistance” (80). For them, therefore, just like governance involves ‘power’, it also equally involves ‘politics’. While ‘power’ summarizes the processes of the operation of various techniques of governance, ‘politics’ on the other hand summarizes the processes which have emerged and which continue to emerge, in many ways, concerned with the contestation of power. Hence, politics as the contestation of instances of governance is very much part of the perpetual character of governance. Thirdly that “governance always involves knowledge” (87). Here, there are two roles assigned to knowledge: knowledge that is used to select objects for governance, and knowledge used in the actual instances of

governance - here the rise of those formal knowledge complexes known as the human sciences have come to inform widely used techniques of governance in the modern world. Fourthly that “governance is always social and always works to bind societies together” (92). Of course this may not always successfully happen, as in cases where it seems dysfunctional for binding, as for example, in anti-religious dissent or political revolution.

If we follow the four principles enunciated by the authors, the Annang Person can begin to raise the bar in governance by first of all knowing that governance is a work in progress, never a completed task; that it involves power that can fundamentally alter the modes of existence of a people; and that it calls for knowledgeable people who can apply the right techniques of the processes of governance, and finally, that ultimately, governance is for the good of the society in which it is practiced.

To begin with, therefore, the Annangagwo, who, as I have said earlier, is the exemplar of creative genius, must first of all locate the ‘known object’ of governance. No matter the politics involved in governance, if the right knowledgeable Annangagwos are carefully chosen to administer the Annang Local Government Areas and, through positive action, raise the developmental status of these Local Government Areas, then this “demonstration,” without much “explication,” could likely attract attention to not only our region of universe, but equally to the actors concerned. In no distant time, these Annangagwos could catapult themselves to both state and National prominence.

Since we say **Ke Ufok ke Ufok Idehe Adusat** (Charity begins at home), the second factor in raising the bar in governance, for me, would be how we are able to transform our localities for the benefit of the Annang People of those Local Government Areas. Let me be clear here: the manner in which the Local Government Councils are being administered by the States might continue to remain the same - neither worse nor better. However, through an informed political leadership imbued with the philosophy of Annangagwoism, we could begin at this little corner of ours to raise the bar in governance. From there, through superlative and performative political action by individual Annangagwos, we can collectively work our way to the centripetal power axis of both the state and National politics.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to answer the question of how the Annang Nation can raise the bar in politics and governance. In tackling the issue, our approach was not the pedestrian method, the popular introduction to politics and governance, but the attempt to lead the Annangagwos from the popular understanding of politics and governance, to the philosophic one. There could not be a group of people, the Annang, without their philosophy about life and their place in the universe. Our approach then was to show that Annang people have a philosophy that encapsulates who and what they are, a comprehensive **weltanschauung** that specifies the strategies for

coping with life and the obstacles that life present at them. What therefore we have done was to make a clarion call to the Annang Person to rediscover him/herself and take his/her pride of place in the universe by arming one's self with the philosophy of Annang Nation - and that philosophy is what I have christened **Annangagwoism**.

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