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ELIJAH OKPANACHI

Kogi state university, Nigeria

ONOGU WILLIAMS

Kogi State University, Nigeria

PHILIP IDACHABA

Kogi State university, Nigeria

MERCY MABE OCHENI

Kogi State University, Nigeria

SELF-KNOWLEDGE, THE INTELLECTUAL, LIBERATION AND THE AFRO-CONSTRUCTIVIST STRATEGY

Abstract:

This paper is motivated by the level of self-deception with the attempts at genuine national liberation are replete on the African continent, even among the intellectuals. The situation is that which we want to save ourselves when we do not know ourselves. Consequently therefore, this paper seeks to demonstrate that the Afro-constructivist strategy would be a lead way in the right direction as African struggles for liberation. Following this strategy, the paper will also establish specifically that; a) the African ideological framework is not comprehensive enough for the kind of liberation she so desire; b) the African educational system/intellectual seem to keep perpetuating and recycling this comprehensiveness; c) the true project of liberation consist in keying into the project of pluri-versality as a universal project. In sum, our liberation consists in us freeing ourselves from the clutches of self-deception.

Keywords:

Afro-constructivism,, liberation, pluri-versality, self-knowledge, the intellectual

JEL Classification: A30

Introduction

Happy is the man who is able to discern the pitfalls in his path, for he can avoid them.

(Wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross*,7)

Constantly, Africa keeps singing the song of being underdeveloped because she was robbed of her beauty and bounties. Colonialism and slave trade are handy instances and references for this dastardly and heartless plundering of Africa by the West. This heartlessness of the west is often the reference point for the 'African predicament (Oguejiofor, 2001). Afro-centrism (Bernal, 1987) seeks to restore to Africa its lost pride on the global stage and scale. Afro-constructivism, for its part, is set in opposition to Afro-centrism and the Afro-constructivist strategy is the focus of this paper. The paper will demonstrate that the Afro-constructivist strategy could be a lead-way in the right direction as Africa struggles for liberation. Following this strategy, the paper will also establish specifically that; a) the African ideological framework is not comprehensive enough for the kind of liberation she so desires; b) the African educational system/intellectual seems to keep perpetuating and recycling this incomprehensiveness; c) the true project of liberation consists in keying into the project of 'pluri-vesality as a universal project'.

Afro-Constructivism in Perspective

Afro-constructivism, as a model for exercising African philosophy, upholds strongly the universalist outlook within the philosophical enterprise. This is the model developed in the works of Oguejiofor and Njoku, but its clearest articulation is in the works of Abgakoba. The concept was first used in "Philosophy in Nigeria Today". Agbakoba (2011b) proceeds in this paper by splitting philosophy that is done in Nigerian and on the African continent into three: ethno-philosophers, eclectic Africanists and constructivist. The Afro-constructivist school is placed under the constructivist school. On this he writes,

The constructivist seek to develop or adopt the nodal philosophical principles that would serve as guiding principles to the African in all spheres of life, including borrowing, adapting or rejecting ideas from African tradition as well as other arts of the world. They rely on the human cognitive faculties, especially reason in the development and/or adoption of these nodal philosophical principles and ideas. For them African identity is not an immutable thing inextricably intertwined with traditional African values, but rather the changing product of African cognitive and creative faculties. They thus tend to provide strong critical and constructive elements in African philosophy, In Nigeria the works of Josephat Oguejiofor and Francis Njoku reflect aspects of this approach. This approach which we may

describe as afro-constructivist (which contrasts with the afrocentricist approach) cannot as yet boast of many scholars but it is growing in influence; and, the weaknesses, both theoretical and practical, of the other schools may help this process (Agbakoba, 2011: 11-12).

This quote above lays bare the sketch of what Afro-constructivism is all about. He even goes ahead to also emphasize that this model has not fully been developed as the afro-centrist model that even sponsors the teaching of ethno-philosophy in Universities, but will soon get to that stage.

For the Afro-constructivists, part of the defects of the Afro-centric school is the attempt to push certain positions that are erroneous or are not completely true all in the name of establishing the unique nature of the African and also to establish the case of how African was robbed. Also there is this fervent desire about the past; often this past of Africa is gloried leaving the impression that African's destiny lays in the return to this past. This cannot be the case. One of the areas of this perpetuation of incomprehensiveness is that of self-knowledge. This will be the focus of the next section.

Issue of Self-Knowledge in the African Quest for Liberation

In dealing with this issue of self-knowledge, some of the areas of error or issues are identified. Some of these include:

Issue I: The first error here is the prevalent thinking among us Africans that we are a communal people. The fact that we did things together most of the time does not mean we are communal.

Issue II: the second error is the prevalent thinking among us Africans that we are a religious people and the general frame of mind that such an affirmation is a compliment. This is not the case because a close look at our ideological outlook shows that the African religious outlook is materialistic and not spiritualistic.

Issue III: the third issue is the thought among us Africans that development is all about spending money. As such once we have a development blue print, the next thing is to dole out millions. The commonest language on everybody's lips now is 'no funding'. One begins to wonder if it is money that produces development or selfless and dedicated service.

Issue IV: We as a people have taken to the blame game by first blaming our leaders and secondly blaming colonialism. In blaming our leaders we sound as though leadership is not a product of followership. If our leaders have failed, then it means followership is a failed practice in Africa, simple! There is no need to sing that song as though leaders come from space. Our leaders come out of us followers and are like us followers. Whatever we say about them is also true of us followers. For the colonial question, Africa is simply singing the blame song. By this I mean there has been no concerted effort to produce a viable alternative to western influence on the African continent. The Jews have moved on and so too have the Indians. The Latin-Americans have even the most robust decolonial philosophical heritage in recent times. But Africa,

we have only produced Afrocentrism which is just a *spontaneous* reaction to a derogatory designation. It is not *sustained* and *thorough*.

The Dimension from Education and the Intellectual

Education particularly in Nigeria only drowns the child more in the culture of corruption. By this, a child who goes through our education system in Nigeria learns more of corruption than anything else. All the examinations written at terminal levels in Nigeria are guided by malpractice which is conducted even by the teachers themselves. From the common entrance examinations, which qualifies primary school pupils for secondary education, up till degree awarding examinations in Nigeria are conducted in the same manner.

Secondly, the African scholar is more like a rent seeker. His/her target is not knowledge production but how to make more money. For this reason, scholars in our ivory towers (university) are not too keen about research. They interested more in making money. Thus, they hand out ill-supervised degrees to graduating students. These students graduate having met the requirements in their university education exception proper studies. They make scores and good ones at that without any form of hard academic work. Calling this kind of system by its proper name is what Afro-constructivism does. What then is the Afro-constructivist approach?

The Afro-Constructivist Approach and the Quest for Liberation

The critical elements that this school of thought presents have the Integrated Approach (or development hermeneutics) as its most systematic approach. This approach proceeds with the following steps: identifying and classifying social phenomena and imperatives, philosophical analysis and evaluation of these phenomena and imperative, and establishing the hierarchy of causal efficacy about these phenomena. But the bulk of the work is done is at the second stage; philosophical analysis and evaluation of social phenomena and imperatives. The tools adopted in this analysis are the principles of 'the internal consistency of the worldview' and 'the horizon of consistency of the worldview'. Logic is of the essence in the making and functioning of these principles. The basic presupposition is that "the formal quantification of any possible supreme belief can be schematically presented thus: any possible supreme belief (P) is such that it is either expressed universally in space (S) or not universally expressed in space (-S) ; its expression in space either includes itself (m) or does not include itself (-m); it is either expressed constantly in time T or not expressed constantly in time -T; either it expresses commitment to constancy C or it does not express commitment to constancy -C. symbolically we have $(x)(Px \supset (SxV-Sx)(Mx \supset -Mx)(TxV-Tx)(CxV-Cx)$. The structure for the maximal position or affirmative expression of a supreme belief symbolically is $(x)(Px \supset SxVMxVTxVtxVCx)$ " (Agbakoba, 2003: 47-49).

By this scheme, the principle of internal consistency of a worldview, defined as a system in which each proposition implies, and is implied by others, taken alone is insufficient in evaluating worldviews. But when the principle of the horizon of consistency, defined as the scope (breadth, depth, extent) of consistency, with regard to time and space such a system exhibits; the scope of reality such a worldview can

actively or positively bring under its purview, the consistency theory of evaluating worldviews becomes totally complete (Agbakoba, 2005: 39).

The primary quest of all of the above is to avoid the scourge of relativism, since it sees philosophy as a universal enterprise. As such, caught in between the irreducible multiplicity of historical horizons and the demand for universal standards, afro-constructivism opts for universality. Thus, afro-constructivism seeks to understand and to predict rather than to propose. Consequently therefore, it lays bare the conditions of adequacy for universality, but it does not show how to meet these conditions. The closest this model comes to construction is in its idea of the commensurability and incommensurability of worldviews. Commensurability here “refers to whether a pair of ideology/belief systems agree on the kind of evidential support required to validate/invalidate the claims of an ideology/belief system. It is a situation that allows one ideology to subsume another with minimal irreconcilable conflicts. Commensurability allows for the universalization of an ideology or elements of an ideology as it goes onto subsume other ideologies” (Agabkoba, 2009: 49). But given the fact that incommensurable ideologies also abound, this model suggests communication as the mechanism for building a global dialogue (Agbakoba, 2009: 51).

True dialogue/communication is the way forward the major problem here is with the idea of the commensurability of ideologies/beliefs. This principle, if followed strictly, drives at what Tong (2009: 461) refers to as “homogenization in various other forms”. This principle tends to make the world one whole that looks a like all through. Dialogue is only mentioned, but the processes and the ingredients of the dialogue are not fully mapped out. Also, given the full focus of this model, the contention of this paper is that this model is one suited more for evaluation than construction of worldviews. This is because it takes time to map out a model for evaluation rather than construction. It talks about ‘a standard evaluation scheme’, but nothing of ‘a standard construction scheme’. Secondly, this model is painstakingly critical. At a closer look, one discovers that the little constructive elements it has collapses under the weight of its critical elements. These oversights of the afro-constructive model can be proper dealt with using the transmodern procedure for construction of worldviews and ideologies.

Plurivesality As a Universal Project: Afro-Constructivism and the Transmodern Project

Given the obvious fact that we live in a world that is increasingly becoming polycentric, the aspiration of Afro-constructivism to build a universal whole has to be complemented. This complementation is done using the transmodern idea of ‘pluriversality as a universal project’. This complementary perspective signals the fundamental dimension we seek to establish. This dimension consists first in the fact that this principle is hinged on the idea of epistemic disobedience. That is, it breaks through the conventional understanding of rationality and brings in prejudices and the historicity into the articulation and expression of rationality. This epistemic disobedience is already taking place in the transmodern emphasis on shifting the geography of reason. It is a radical violation of the familiar, it is changing the status of the game altogether rather than just changing the rules of the game. It is qualitative rather than a quantitative change. And Mignolo is so apt in describing the value of this kind of disobedience. In his words,

epistemic disobedience is necessary to take on *civil disobedience* (Gandhi, Martin Luther King) to its point of non-return. Civil disobedience, within modern Western epistemology (and remember: Greek and Latin, and six vernacular European modern and imperial languages), could only lead to reforms, not to transformations. For this simple reason, the task of de-colonial thinking and the enactment of the de-colonial option in the 21st century starts from epistemic de-linking: from acts of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009: 15).

From the above, it becomes clear the connection between the 'body-politics of knowledge' and 'epistemic disobedience'. And the ultimate aim in this regard is to defy the 'monocultures of the mind' within Western imperial knowledge scheme, as well as its totalitarian and epistemically non-democratic implementations (Shiva, 1993).

This model is aptly designated by Dallmyr as the ethical-hermeneutic principle of cross-cultural evaluation/interaction. A description of this model in his words will warrant a long quote here. For him,

in ethical-hermeneutical dialogue, partners seek to understand and appreciate each other's life stories and cultural backgrounds, including religious (or spiritual) traditions, literary and artistic expressions, and existential agonies and aspirations. It is in this mode that important cross-cultural learning takes place ... *Ethics here is oriented toward the 'good life'—not in the sense of an abstract 'ought,' but as the pursuit of an aspiration implicit in all life-forms yet able to take on different expressions in different cultures.* Since ethics on this level speaks to deeper human motivations, this is the dimension that is most likely to mold human conduct in the direction of mutual ethical recognition and peace. Hence, there is an urgent need in our time to emphasize and cultivate this kind of ethical pedagogy (Dallmyr, 2007, 251).

After this, he goes ahead to mention specific examples of some areas where this kind of dialogue is already in place. He talks about parliaments, and various forms of world forum where this kind of dialogue is already taking place. The aspiration of ethics is key in this regard and most important is the fact that this ethics moves towards an aspiration that is implicit in all forms of life, yet is able to take on different expressions in different cultures. This in the opinion of the research is a classic statement of the idea of 'universality as a pluriversal project'. Here then, universality does not have any meeting point with uniformity or homogeneity. What is demanded is that the ethical aspiration of such a position is made most clear. In this context, it becomes very reasonable to argue that economic interactions are implicit in very human community, hence economic interactions are universal, but capitalism is only a specific mode of economic interaction therefore capitalism is not a universal. As such it will be wrong to think every economy must be capitalist for it to survive. The same argument can be made for the question of political structures within any human community. Every human community must have political organizations and structures, hence political structures are universal. But democracy is only a form of political organization within human communities therefore it is not a universal. Instances can be cited on and on of examples where the West has valorized various aspects of its culture and made them into universals for others to follow in order to have eternal life as for as development is concerned. This should not be the case.

Dallmayr identified further another category of this ethical-hermeneutic principle of intercultural dialogue and evaluation. This he calls agonal dialogue or contestation. In the agonal dialogue Dallmayr contends that,

...partners seek not only to understand and appreciate each other's life-forms but also to convey their experiences of exploitation and persecution, that is, grievances having to do with past or persisting injustice and suffering. Along with better understanding, agonal dialogue adds the dimension of possible retribution and rectification of grievances. Yet retribution does not necessarily involve the desire to "get even," take revenge, and possibly repay injustice with injustice by turning the previous victimizers into victims. When the latter happens, the element of understanding—constitutive of genuine dialogue—is crushed in favor of sheer antagonism and possibly violent conflict. At that point, we reenter the domain of the "clash" of cultures and societies that is at the margins of intercultural dialogue. This is why I prefer to list the agonal case as a subcategory within ethical-hermeneutical dialogue. In this context, confrontation and contestation are not ends in themselves but are placed in the service of ethical reconciliation and healing (Dallymar, 251-2).

He even goes ahead to mention some examples of the institutions that are aimed at arriving at this form of reconciliation. Some of these are the Truth and Justice or Truth and Reconciliation Commissions established in various parts of the world to investigate crimes committed during ethnic conflicts or by dictatorships. The point of these commissions was both to establish a record of past criminal actions and injustices and to promote a process of social healing that would prevent the recurrence of victimization. In light of the horrendous forms of oppression and injustice prevailing in the world today, one can only hope that humankind will someday have the wisdom and courage to establish a global Truth and Reconciliation Commission charged with exposing and rectifying existing abuses and laying the groundwork for a more just and livable global future (Tutu, 2004; Amstutz, 2005; Phelps, 2004). For those within the transmodern school of thought retribution for the crimes of colonialism should also be part of the functions of this kind of commission.

Integral pluralism is also what helps this model of intercultural dialogue to perfectly identify that sphere of universality and how particularity can be disguised as a universal in this sense. What then is integral pluralism? Dallmayr calls this 'unity in diversity' and "just as in the case of hermeneutical dialogue, *the point of intercultural encounter is not to reach a bland consensus or uniformity of beliefs but to foster a progressive learning process involving possible transformation*. For this to happen, local or indigenous traditions must be neither jettisoned nor congealed (or essentialized)" (Dallmayr, 2010: 115). Dallmayr further quotes extensively from Gadamer to establish this. In Dallmayr's words,

in an interview with an Indian political thinker conducted a few years before his death, Gadamer clearly pinpoints the global significance of hermeneutical understanding. 'The human solidarity that I envisage,' he states, 'is not a global uniformity but unity in diversity [another name for integral pluralism]. We must learn to appreciate and tolerate pluralities, multiplicities, cultural differences.' As he frankly concedes, such an appreciation is in short supply and is actually undermined by the rampant power politics pursued by military-industrial complexes: 'The hegemony

or unchallengeable power of any one single nation . . . is dangerous for humanity; it would go against human freedom.' Hence, the unity in diversity that has been a European legacy must today become a global formula; it must be extended to the whole world—to include China, India, and also Muslim cultures. Every culture, every people has something distinctive to offer for the solidarity and wellbeing of humanity' (Dallmayr, 2010: 116).

The last sentence re-echo's the idea of Asouzu that everything in reality serves 'a missing link', hence no culture can afford to be discarded within the context of this new discourse which seeks to found the new world order. The aim here is to touch and be touched and to be ready to revise our positions based on these touchings.

Conclusion

An honest and a truthful look can be as offensive as a derogatory and demeaning look. But the ultimate difference consists in the fact that while a derogatory look aims to keep the person ogled at perpetually in a state of degradation, an honest look seeks to motivate the one stared at to positive self-assertion. All the above is just an honest look at the African situation and the earlier we realize that we are mostly the cause of our problem, the better for us as nations and a continent. Like the epitaph from Ngugi in the introduction, this is just an attempt to outline some of the pitfalls on our path to greatness and dealing with them (avoiding them) will indeed make us great and happy; for 'happy is the man who is able to discern the pitfalls in his path, for he can avoid them'.

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