

INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY: PANACEA FOR THE CRISIS OF NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The gamut of intercultural discourse covers the theoretical as well as practical aspects of human interrelationships. Structured on dialogic values, and fast-tracked by the phenomenological hermeneutic system, it opens up the vista for mutuality and convivial relationships. Intercultural philosophy seeks to create a mosaic where individuals with divergent cultures, worldviews, religions, philosophies and scientific notions coalesce in mutual respect without the violence of unilateral claim to epistemic privilege of any. In this essay, we shall identify the forceful merger of various ethnic nations into a composite nation-state by colonial lords as germane to the crisis of nation building in Nigeria. We shall demonstrate that this crisis is exacerbated in postcolonial era by the continual meddling (neocolonialism) of the 'world powers' in the internal affairs of their erstwhile colonies. By the same token, and given the epistemic neutrality of interculturality, we shall suggest the application of intercultural values as a panacea to this crisis. By turning its eyes outwards to encourage mutually beneficial dialogue, the application of intercultural philosophy, as is proposed, is the best shot against the crisis of nation building in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Intercultural philosophy, mutuality, dialogue, nation building, crisis.*

Introduction

A key feature in the progressive functioning of a complex reality is the alignment of its parts to its determined goal. Without falling into the trap of compositional error, all aspects of a system must be structured to function in unilineal manner in order to attain set goals. In the field of biology, for instance, the human person is a complex organism with organs and systems, structured to correlate with each other to produce this beautiful specimen that has life. In isolation, or in partial relationship, these organs and systems pose a fatal challenge to the existent being. A being can only function optimally to the extent of its attainment of homeostasis—equilibrium in the internal biological functioning.

In similar vein, a nation is considered a living organism with communities/ethnicities as its organs, and administrators as the systems. Hence, for a nation to achieve its goals and attain enviable heights in the committee of nations, all the organs and systems must work in synergy. As with human organism, both the administrators of a nation and its component ethnic groups must attune themselves to building a common front for its survival—to building the nation. Discussions on the question of nation building are rife in post-independent Nigeria. Haven arisen from the ashes of a forceful amalgamation of multiethnic, multi-religious and multicultural groups, the challenge of structuring a united front, amidst the seeming ‘tower of babel,’ was daunting. This challenge was exacerbated by the immediate post-independent military foray into political affairs of the nation, and its subsequent elevation of ‘identity politics’ into the mainstay of governance. All through the decades, successive governments have latched on ‘identity politics’ to galvanize their base in order to cling on to power. In the end, they have created a divisive culture that fans the ambers of ethnic, religious and linguistic bigotry.

In the main, the 21st century Nigeria is deeply mired in the murky waters of tribalism. Since independence, the skewed contraption has failed in all aspects of cohesion between the predominantly Muslim north and the Christian south. What politics of identity, or perhaps, for better understanding, ‘politics of exclusion’ has done, as Columbus Ogbujah has rightly noted, is to profile individuals into infantile familial and ethno-religious constrictions, in alienation of others, leading to victims’ formation of separatist groups and ethnic militias for pushback.¹ Since, as the holy writ affirms that ‘two or more cannot walk together unless they are agreed’ (Amos 3:3), this essay proposes that the first step to nation building must begin with the integration/unification of constituent ethnic groups. It demonstrates that the best way to achieving this integration is by adopting intercultural values of intercultural philosophy—the coalescence of divergent cultures, worldviews and philosophies in mutual respect without the violence of unilateralism.

Understanding the Model of Intercultural Philosophy

Although the concept of intercultural Philosophy emerged in the 1980s among the German thinkers, its imports and meaning-content already resonate in the thoughts of other Europeans, Asians and Africans, especially in relation to their study of culture. Since the modern period, there has been tremendous increase of attention regarding the significance of culture to social growth. This came as a result of the complexities occasioned by the confluence of 2 ærgent traditional practices, religions and

¹C. Ogbujah. “Ethics of Exclusion and its Impact on Nigeria’s Trudge to Democracy.” *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 3/6, (2020), 54-63.

philosophies. Each philosophy or culture accentuates its particularized interests and goals, and constantly jostles for supremacy. To address this quagmire, a proposal for a comparative or an intercultural philosophy was made.² Similar efforts at reconciliation have also been made in the fields of literary, religious and political studies, but in intercultural philosophy, it is imperative to engage philosophers from different cultures and/or traditions not only to actively engage one another but to do so in a way that emits mutual respect devoid of a monopolistic knowledge and also in disregard to the infallibility of one person's or group's view.

To be able to grasp the full imports of Intercultural Philosophy, it is pertinent to first understand the reach of interculturality. Interculturality, according to UNESCO designates "the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect."³ The term intercultural elicits the idea of contact between cultures that is exemplified in comprehensive mutuality, reciprocity and equality.⁴ As eliciting the idea of cultural contact, some have viewed intercultural philosophy in relation to comparative philosophy which is the bringing together of philosophical traditions that have developed in relative isolation from one another and are defined quite broadly along cultural and religious lines.⁵ One key scholar in this camp is Paul Masson-Oursel (1882-1956) who proposed the development of a comparative philosophy as an approach to the question of intercultural philosophy. For him, comparative philosophy is the "general examination of the ways in which human being of all races and cultures reflect upon their actions and act upon their reflections".⁶ The intent of this reflection is to expose the reality that while philosophical facts arise from history, their objectivity must acknowledge contexts. Masson-Oursel terms this comparative approach as the analogical method that gives a more "securely founded scientific view" of reality.⁷ In the rendition of Skof (2008), comparative philosophy, for Masson-Oursel, offers a "pure and universal positive science of analogy".⁸

Masson-Oursel's ideation was later taken up by Indian scholars like Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and P.T. Raju who proposed the development of a "comparative

² W. Sweet. (Ed.). *What is intercultural philosophy?* (Cultural heritage and contemporary change. Series I, Culture and values; Volume 44, Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2014).

³ UNESCO. *Basic Text of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. (Paris: UNESCO, 2015), Art. 4.8, 8.

⁴ United Church of Canada. "Defining Multicultural, Cross cultural and Intercultural," (2011), <file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/multicultural-crosscultural-intercultural.pdf>

⁵ D. Wong. "Comparative Philosophy: Chinese and Western." In E. N. Zalta (Ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Fall 2020 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/comparphil-chiwes/>

⁶ P. Masson-Oursel. "True philosophy is comparative philosophy". *Philosophy East and West*, 1 /1, (1951), 6.

⁷ P. Masson-Oursel. "True philosophy is comparative philosophy", 39.

⁸ L. Skof. "Pragmatism and Social Ethics: An intercultural and phenomenological Approach." *Contemporary Pragmatism* 5, (2008), 123.

philosophy” that would involve philosophical traditions from the West, China and India. Raju espouses that even though there exist some differences in the thoughts of these varied cultures, their complementarity, which can only be effected through a kind of intercultural dialogue, provides a means by which each can “widen its scope”.⁹

Nonetheless, even though the outcome of “comparative philosophy” or what Skof calls “pure and universal positive science of analogy” might include some level of improvement in mutual understanding of peoples and cultures, it has the potential to elicit judgmental cultural ranking, which is often averse to mutuality. In this sense, comparative philosophy seems more attuned to multiculturalism than to interculturality. Although multiculturalism as an ideology, hangs at the opposite end of the spectrum—promoting non-acceptance of rankings in the values of the committee of cultures, its endorsement of “group-differentiated rights”, which is at the base of “identity politics”, or “the politics of difference” is exclusionary in structure. Perhaps, in an inverse manner but with similar outcomes as comparative studies, multiculturalism is averse to mutuality, and is at the heart of recurrent xenophobic feelings across diverse sections of the world.

Intercultural Philosophy, on the other hand, is an approach or attitude that reiterates the culmination of influences from different cultures. It represents the coming together of diverse philosophical traditions such as Western, Asian, African, Latin American and Islamic Philosophy in such a manner as to learn from each other in mutual respect. According to Chen, in order to philosophize interculturally, philosophers must be able to “de- and re-territorialize their cultural territories or deconstruct their views towards interculturality over and over again”.¹⁰ Chen argues that this deconstructive effort is not static, but a continuous engagement given that reality continually evolves, and that it must be a collective labour with others from other cultures without necessarily forsaking one’s own singularity.

In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, Ram Adhar Mall constructed a somewhat clearer view of intercultural philosophy¹¹, noting that it stands for a process of emancipation from all types of centrism.⁴ He seeks to exhibit a philosophical attitude and conviction that no one philosophy is the philosophy for the whole of mankind. Mall tasks intercultural philosophers to mediate between two ends – the specific philosophies as found in different cultures and the universal philosophy which, is not culturally bound.¹¹ While acknowledging that in terms of method, intercultural philosophy is based on comparative studies and in particular, on the comparison of cultures and their philosophical traditions, Mall distances himself from some characterizations in Masson-

⁹ P.T. Raju. *Introduction to comparative philosophy*. (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 335.

¹⁰ H. Chen. “What is Intercultural Philosophy?” in Sweet, W. (Ed.). *What is Intercultural Philosophy?* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2014). 78.

¹¹ R.A. Mall. *Intercultural Philosophy*. (Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

Oursel's thoughts, insisting that intercultural philosophy is not the same as comparative philosophy.

Perhaps, there isn't a clearer and more encompassing description of how intercultural philosophy ought to be done than that offered by Franz Martin Wimmer. Wimmer sees intercultural philosophy as the endeavour that gives expression to the many and often marginalized voices of philosophy in their respective cultural contexts. This generates a shared fruitful discussion that grants equal rights to all, with the aim of facilitating and developing "a new and timely culture of a plurality of philosophical dialogues between thinkers from around the world" which is called POLYLOG.¹² Wimmer therefore wishes to open up traditional approaches to philosophy by his insistence on the awareness of the philosophies and wisdom traditions of different cultures. He, in effect, differentiates between three models of influencing processes, namely—one-sided central influence (monologue); mutual partial influence (the level of dialogue); and mutually complete influence (the level of the polylog). Complete mutuality is ascribed the consistent form of polylog and of intercultural philosophy. For him, the polylog model

entails a new orientation because, in acknowledgment of the cultural situatedness of philosophy, claims must prove themselves interculturally It entails a new practice because this consciousness demands a departure from an individual, mono-cultural, frequently ethnocentric production of philosophy and seeks instead a dialogical, process-oriented, fundamentally open *polyphony* of cultures and disciplines.¹³

Wimmer's polylog of cross-cultural mutuality fully represents the spirit of interculturality

Due to the extenuating influence of imperialism, colonialism, and 'power politic', many modern philosophers like G.W.F. Hegel, Georges Cuvier, Günther Patzig, and a host of others interpret the idea of *philosophiaperennis* in the sense of Greco-Eurocentric cast with claims of exclusive propriety to philosophy. Such absolutist claims reinforce subjugation, and are against the open and tolerant spirit of intercultural philosophical perspective.¹⁴ Karl Jaspers rejects these claims, but rather construes *philosophiaperennis* as foregrounding the coming together of peoples of distant times and cultures in the spirit of interculturality.¹⁵ Intercultural philosophy thus, is an approach to overcome various forms of 'isms'—Eurocentricism, Africanism, Asianism,

¹² M. Wimmer, as quoted in W. Sweet. (Ed.). *What is intercultural philosophy?*, 4.

¹³ M. Wimmer, as quoted in W. Sweet. (Ed.). *What is intercultural philosophy?*, 5; see <http://ev.polylog.org/>

¹⁴ R.A. Mall. "Intercultural Philosophy: A Conceptual Clarification." *PhilPapers*, 1, (2014), 70.
<https://philpapers.org/rec/MALIPA-3>

¹⁵ K. Jaspers. *Weltgeschichte der Philosophie*. (ed. H. Saner, Munich: Piper, 1982), 56.

etc., — claiming to be in sole possession of a single, unilateral Truth. It is, as Mall asseverates, an orientation that pleads for unity without uniformity; not a matter of unity in diversity but of unity in the face of diversity.¹⁶

The Crises of Nation Building in Nigeria

As a nation-state with its inhabitants often espousing conflicting values due to a plethora of religious, linguistic and cultural diversity, Nigeria is in dire need for integration and nation-building. To engage in nation-building implies that the state would have slid into one or more of the following conditions: a) was never integrated from its inception — as in the case of Nigeria where the component divergent ethnic units were forcefully brought together for economic and political convenience of the British imperialists; b) fell apart in the course of history— as in the case of the Soviet Union that soon disintegrated after the perestroika of Mikhail Gorbachev; or c) has been destroyed either by war or natural disaster. Here, the devastation of Biafra land, or the current decimation of the entire north east by Boko Haram are instructive. Both of these have elicited clamour for the institution of Development Commissions for remediation. Nation building thus, is a socio-political construct that entails efforts at integrating the people, and fashioning a national self that leads to prosperity and stability of life. It is the application of state powers in harnessing human and natural resources for development. For Ibrahim Gambari, the core of nation building lies in creating a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, and a collective imagination of belonging; it is in building of tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together and give it a sense of purpose.¹⁷ Although every individual inhabiting a nation has a role to play, the process is, for the most part, driven by state actors. The level and quality of integration and nation building do generally reflect the leadership type and structure.

Good state actors deploy their initiatives in fostering a feeling of common unity through promoting programmes that enhance national content, public education and military conscription, if need be. Nation building can come in the form of widespread infrastructural development, or creation of conducive atmosphere through enforcement of security and peace for individuals to thrive, or by propaganda to engender social harmony and activate economic growth. It may involve the creation of uniting social structures, such as national anthems, flags, holidays and airlines; national stadia and sports teams; national heroes and myths as well as national language. As the medium of

¹⁶ R.A. Mall. *Intercultural Philosophy: A Conceptual Clarification*, 69.

¹⁷ I.A. Gambari. "The challenge of Nations Building: The case of Nigeria." (A lecture delivered at the First Year Anniversary of Mustapha Akani Foundation on 7 February, 2008), https://www.mafng.org/anniversary/challenges_nation_building_nigeria.htm

communication, language is the most powerful instrument of integration and nation building.

The process of nation building begins with the integration of the people within the country. Integration, is the “process by which hitherto distinctive and autonomous people and cultures incorporated into a multi-national state can achieve higher levels of mutual trust, cooperation and independence, shared values, common identity and national consciousness”.¹⁸ To be concerned with national integration connotes that within the society, there exists a pluriformity of actors, with each promoting particularized interests that impinge on social cohesion; it means that constituent state groups espouse actions that are inimical to general goals and aspirations. Oftentimes, these subversive efforts appear at three levels of disintegration, namely: a) the fragmentation arising from varied cultural loyalties; b) the fragmentation arising from discordant political processes; and c) the fragmentation arising from antagonism between the political elites and the masses. To set the society on the path of integration and nation building then, strong efforts must be made at all these three fronts.

Since independence, Nigeria has made several efforts in these regards to integrate the varied ethnic groups into a strong nation. The first of these came immediately after the civil war through Gowon’s administration’s policy of “No victor, No vanquished”. To achieve this, the federal government introduced the hapless programme of 3Rs — Reconstruction, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation, with a view to reintegrating the warring parties into national life. This was followed by the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) through Decree No 24 of 22 May 1973; the promulgation of the Land Use Act; the moving of the federal capital territory from Lagos to Abuja; the institution of the federal character principle, etc., all of which were aimed at providing equal development and national integration. But these have met with strong challenges. In the essay: “Fostering national integration: A guide from Nyerere’s philosophy of *ujamaa*”, Ogbujah carried out an incisive analysis of these projects and came out with the conclusion that instead of promoting love and unity, most of the programmes ended up as ploys that strengthened sectionalism against national ideals.¹⁹ In the main, the impediments that led to these failures range from the challenge of history, to that of leadership, and socio-economic inequalities; from a faulty constitution, to that of corruption. A more closely analytic of these would provide insights into the layers of rot that manifestly clog the wheel of nation building.

The first key impediment to nation building arises from what Gambari, dubs the “challenge of history.” During the advent of colonization, it was glaring that the

¹⁸ E. O. Awa. “National Integration in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects.” (Paper delivered at Bayero University, Kano, - Distinguished Lecture Series no. 5, 1983), NISER.

¹⁹ C. N. Ogbujah. “Fostering National Integration: A Guide from Nyerere’s Philosophy of *Ujamaa*.” *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4/26, (2014), 55.

geographical area known as Nigeria was not going to be easy to govern. Anthropologists claim that Nigeria houses over 250 ethnic groups, with over 500 languages, different cultures, religions and traditions. Due to this complexity, the colonists divided the country into a seemingly homogenous dual lines of Northern and Southern protectorates, with different administrative structures and educational systems.²⁰ It was like running two separate countries using a common currency. The foremost nationalists from different regions were drawn in a battle of attrition with each other rather than building the nation. The historical legacy of regionalism bequeathed to the founding fathers was a major challenge to integration. Several efforts at remediation, such as the adoption of the federalist policy of unity in diversity, has not been able to effectively deal with this challenge.

Allied to this is “the problem of leadership.” According to Chinua Achebe, the trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership. “There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership”.²¹ Leadership involves the personal qualities of integrity, honesty, commitment and competence as well as the collective qualities of common vision, focus and collaborative spirit. Since independence, it has been a herculean task getting competent leaders to manage the nation’s heterogeneous society. They have always been drawn to assuaging the feelings of their infantile primordial attachments over against national interests, with the resultant disruptions of coups and ethnic agitations that have caused awful damage to the national psyche.

Besides these, it is impossible for citizens of any nation to be in sync with each other and match towards a common goal amidst socio-economic inequality. The building of common citizenship where everyone’s welfare is adequately taken care of, is an important aspect of nation building. But in Nigeria, there is neither equality/equity nor social justice in the socio-economic livelihood of the citizens. Some citizens are denied the right to education, health, basic infrastructure, etc., while others labour under a glass ceiling that thwarts their ambition for sensitive leadership positions. All of these disincentivize and demotivate citizens from supporting national projects, and adversely impact on nation building.

Furthermore, the problem of crafting an acceptable constitution for the overwhelming majority is a clog in the wheel of nation building. The federal system of government adopted by the constitution has not been able to douse the tension and agitation arising from feelings of marginalization and exclusionist policies. For the most part, the southern region feels shortchanged by the constitution which has not provided

²⁰ I.A. Gambari. *The challenge of Nations Building*.

²¹ C. Achebe. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1984), 1.

for evenly distribution of the number of states between the two geopolitical blocks, as this foregrounds the delineation of constituencies, the allotment of federal legislative seats, and the overall sharing of national resources. Several efforts at correcting the imbalance through constitutional amendments have failed, as those empowered to do so are the ones benefiting from the skewed structure. More so, the unbridled adulation of super hero leaders has broken down institution-building, destroyed the last vestige of constitutional powers, leading to unconscionable manifestation of nepotism. Despite statutory provisions in the 1999 Constitution as Amended²² to checkmate this malady through the federal character principle, not much progress has been made. Successive governments have unabashedly skewed the power sharing formulae in favour of their cronies, leaving other sections of the country to bitterly rue their electoral losses. In point of fact, the prospect of nation building is in shambles as all arms of government at different levels are more allured to arrogant use of power than its use in building bridges.

Besides, the Nigerian democratic structure has always been truncated by military rule, or military style interventions. Currently, the executive branch of government uses its military and paramilitary agencies to dictate activities for the judiciary and legislature. At first (in 2016), they broke into the homes of judges, claiming to be fighting corruption. Now, they are poised for more brazen infractions, as is depicted by the siege at Justice Mary Odili's house on Friday October 29, 2021. Shortly before this, on October 21, 2021, the Police and DSS locked up the Federal High Court Headquarters in Abuja because of the trial of Nnamdi Kanu's case. It was done in a familiar gestapo fashion of forcing judges, lawyers and their clients to retreat from performing their constitutional duties. This is a classic case of government sacrificing the welfare of the general citizenry in pursuit of its adversary; a demonstration of arrogance of power. The larger problem is that if judges can only sit at the instance of agents of the Executive, then it becomes almost impossible for them to deliver judgements in favour of government's opponents. Executive meddlesomeness compromises the judiciary, and a compromised judiciary is a recipe for anarchy. The blatant disregard for the "separation of power," as enshrined in the constitution, makes a travesty of democracy, and is a clog in the wheel of nation building.

Added to these is the issue of corruption, which has dealt a devastating blow to the efforts in nation building. In Nigeria, as in many developing nations, corruption is a recurrent feature in both private and bureaucratic lives. No strata of the society are impervious to its effects. Corruption is at the center of every act of impunity, as in the taking and acceptance of bribes; in acts of nepotism; in the denial of justice; in the

²² THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA. 10 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, with Amendments*. (Lagos: Government Press, 2011), CH. 11, 14-[3], LL26.

usurpation of other's property; etc., and as such is the lynchpin for underdevelopment. In her paper presented at the Annual General Meeting, AGM, of the Nigerian Bar Association (2012), the erstwhile Vice President of the World Bank for Africa—Oby Ezekwesili revealed that Nigeria had lost about \$400 billion to oil theft/corruption since independence.²³ In 2018, the country ranked 144th out of the 180 countries listed by the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. In 2019, she ranked 146th; in 2020, it was 149th; while in 2021, she ranked 154th out of 180 countries/territories examined.²⁴ In her 2018 report, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) notes that "Corruption remains a significant impediment to law enforcement, access to justice and basic public services such as affordable healthcare, education, and electricity supply. Several Nigerians have to pay a bribe to access police, judiciary, power, education and health services. Corruption is still a key concern in the country....".²⁵ The consequence of widespread corrupt culture is creating a wasteful leadership that has plunged the nation into the poverty capital of the world. With concentrated poverty in the horizon, the dream of nation building is a mirage.

Intercultural Values: A Diffusion Mechanism for Crises?

Intercultural philosophy, as is envisaged here, is not to be understood as emerging merely from the need to boost tourism in an era of globalization; neither is it to be seen in the sense of making recompense for, or propping up non-European cultures that have for long, ineffectually jostled for recognition. As Ram Adhar Mall succinctly notes, it is neither an ad hoc response to current issues arising from cross-cultural encounters, nor a simple construct or syncretic idea.²⁶ With regard to syncretism, there is a palpable push within some quarters to construe Hans-Georg Gadamer's "fusion of horizon" as entailing the creation of a 'melting pot' or some sort of cultural homogenization. Rather than push for cultural homogenization which, in itself is averse to dissent and oppressive to alternative views, Gadamer's 'cultural overlap' provides the grounds for the appreciation of diverse values in a pluralistic manner.

Mall had severally underscored that rather than representing a particular or concrete system, intercultural philosophy is an orientation or stance that "allows and encourages the spirit of philosophy to be realized in different cultural contexts."²⁷

²³ O. Ezekwesili. "Corruption, National Development, The Bar and The Judiciary," cited in I. Nnochiri. "Nigeria loses \$400bn to oil thieves – Ezekwesili," *Vanguard*, (August 28, 2012).

²⁴ Transparency International. "Corruption Perceptions Index," <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019>; <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020>; <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>.

²⁵ Press Release. "Police most corrupt institution in Nigeria – Survey." *Premium Times*, (March 26, 2019), <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/322439-police-most-corrupt-institution-in-nigeria-survey.html>, para. 6.

²⁶ R.A. Mall. *Intercultural Philosophy: A Conceptual Clarification*, 68.

²⁷ R.A. Mall. *Intercultural Philosophy*. (Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

Rather than seen as an academic subject besides others, it is an attitude that grounds the act of philosophizing. The impetus for this arises from the pluriformity of world cultures. In the wake of discoveries in analytic thinking and Ethno-philosophy, that besides western European culture, there exist equally other well developed traditions, it becomes imperative to question the ostensibly imperialistic posturing of Eurocentric presuppositions. The Eurocentric or 'Euro-chauvinist' posturing that pervades the works of scholars like Georg W. F. Hegel, Georges Cuvier, Günther Patzig and Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, among others, sees philosophy as a purely western affair. By claiming that "the West and Europe, and only these, are, in the innermost course of their history, originally 'philosophical,'"²⁸ Heidegger couldn't extricate his feelings from this hue. This conceited arrogation, as Yousefi suggests, is at the base of their bogus claims of not only understanding non-Europeans more than themselves, but of knowing better their rightful needs.²⁹ In contrast, Intercultural philosophy entails the idea that no single philosophical outlook is representative of human philosophy. It seeks to create a mosaic where individuals with divergent cultures, worldviews, religions, philosophies and scientific notions coalesce in mutual respect without the violence of unilateral claim to epistemic privilege of any. Given its epistemic neutrality, interculturality abjures the practice of adopting an absolute or monolithic stance that hurts interrelationships, but rather promotes outward engagements that encourage mutually beneficial dialogue. Mall asseverates:

Doing philosophy means reflecting not only on our experience in relation to ourselves but also on how we relate to others and to the world at large. Reflection involves description, explanation, and interpretation. There is always a point of view at work and whoever puts one's own point of view in an absolute position is guilty of not taking alternative ways of doing philosophy seriously.³⁰

As entailing descriptions, explanations, and interpretations, every philosophical outlook is reflective of a perspective, and there can be no greater harm to "love of wisdom" than to absolutize a perspective. It can only amount to some sort of philosophical apartheid. Let us then delineate, in specific terms, how intercultural orientation as thus elucidated, can serve as diffusing mechanism to the Nigerian crises.

To begin with, by entailing that "no single philosophical outlook is representative of human philosophy," intercultural philosophy, by the same token, espouses perspective relativity, as well as the value for interdependence / camaraderie,

²⁸ M. Heidegger. *What is Philosophy?* Trans. by J. T. Wilde & W. Kluback. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1956), 31.

²⁹ H. R. Yousefi. "On the Theory and Practice of Intercultural Philosophy." *On Community. Community and civil society*, Nr.47/48, Vol., 12, (2007), 105-124.

³⁰ R.A. Mall. *Intercultural Philosophy: A Conceptual Clarification*, 68.

which comes from a humble disposition. As a country, Nigeria arose from the ashes of a British forceful merger of multi-ethnic nationalities with divergent cultures, worldviews, religions and philosophies. As the merger was purely for the economic interests of the colonial lords, little efforts were made to integrate divergent component groups in order to engender nation building. On the contrary, challenged by myriad resistance from a more egalitarian south, the British skewed power in favour of the pliant north, through which they mounted firm grip over the people in an indirect rule system. In time, this calculation elicited a feeling of “entitlement to power” within some groups, deepening the polarization of the erstwhile protectorates, and leading to patent hostility in all structures and institutions of society. Since independence, the north and the south have been embroiled in bitter power rivalry, leading to suspicion, mistrust and arrogant use of power. The situation is exacerbated by the continual meddling (neocolonialism) of the erstwhile imperialists in the internal affairs of the nation through proxies. In the end, this mistrust or arrogance of power traps politicians into promoting ethnic interests over and above national unity—a phenomenon that has snowballed into a repertoire of actions that keep national progress at bay.³¹ If agents of government and competing societal cultures should step down from the high grounds of arrogance and embrace each other in humility, the prospects for nation building would be brighter.

Furthermore, as creating a mosaic wherein divergent cultures, worldviews and religions coalesce in mutual respect without the violence of unilateral claim to epistemic privilege, intercultural philosophy engenders multilateralism. Multilateralism is a process of relational organization that promotes collective security, indivisibility of interests, and reciprocity among participants.³² The import of reciprocity or mutuality in multilateralism seems to diverge it from multiculturalism. Although it somewhat accommodates the ideal of mutual respect and harmonious living of people of diverse cultures, multiculturalist policies legitimize and accentuate the specificity of isolated cultures within the same society, and as such, has the potential to fan the ambers of conflict. In contrast, interculturality supports cross-cultural dialogue, and defies unilateralism of ethnic groups within the civic nation, in a manner of what Martha Nussbaum calls “the recognition of common human needs.”³³ Its willingness to dialogue, as we have consistently noted, elevates the possibility of arriving at commonly shared ‘transcultural’ consensus that is significant for promoting understanding and cooperation in multiethnic societies. Adopting the intercultural values of respect,

³¹ C. N. Ogbujah. “Power and Good Governance: Observations from Nigeria.” *MELINTAS, An international Journal of Philosophy and Religion*, 32 /1, (2016), 1-22.

³² J. Scott. *Multilateralism*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. (2015, October 13). Retrieved October 10, 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/multilateralism>

³³ M. C. Nussbaum. *Cultivating Humanity*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998), cited in Kolapo F. J. (Ed.). *Immigrant Academics and Cultural Challenges in a Global Environment*. (New York: Cambria Press, 2009).

tolerance and mutuality—key ingredients of multilateralism, would deflect the recurrent arrogance of power among leaders, and reignite the desire for nation building.

By shunning monolithism and promoting outward engagement, intercultural philosophy foregrounds the flourishing of the human society. A monolithic conception of society abjures every form of dissension or parallelism of ideas. In religion, it leads to a grandiose elevation of a creed over others, as is exhibited in theocracies; in politics, to some hegemonic arrangements that manifest now and again in autocracy or absolutism. Monolithism forecloses convivial communications exercised within the democratic space, and constricts the path to human exploration and excellence. This is typified in the attitude and policy implementation of the current leadership of the country. Backed by a skewed constitution which stealthily elevates Islam and Muslims above all else, President Buhari has broken grounds in stratifying and institutionalizing northern Muslim hegemony. He achieves this, as Hassan Kukah says, by reducing others in public life to second class status, turning nepotism into a state craft.³⁴

Acceptance of monolithic ethic in a pluralistic society is a recipe for absolutism that often displays acts of impunity. This underscores the method of race subordination in the United States manifest in the hypodescent or ‘one-drop-rule’ of exclusion, the Nazi German exclusionist policy, and the ethnic bigotry (ethnicism) in Nigeria. Of recent, constituent ethnicities have begun to see themselves as unique groups, with somewhat bizarre belief in the purity of their members—analogueous to those of the Nazis or American chauvinists. This has fueled all forms of nepotism that are crippling the system. Ogbujah (2020b: 10) observes:

Lowering educational standards for a group of people, and at the same time acting as though such an “educationally disadvantaged” group possesses the best expertise for sensitive administrative and managerial positions in a nation, is more like a comic relief. This structural harm is destroying the fabrics of the country by heightening mutual suspicion, anger and hatred.³⁵

The solution to the problems arising from these brazen acts of impunity lies not in power rotation, nor in reciprocal discrimination, but in shunning the monolithic mindset that demeans others. It is in promoting outward engagements with, and tolerating other cultures, worldviews, religions and philosophies—in intercultural philosophy. Given to their epistemic neutrality, intercultural values entail a non-discriminatory dialogue that accepts and supports people in the exercise of their liberty; they involve fair and

³⁴ M. H. Kukah. “Another Christmas with Dark Clouds of Death,” (2020). Retrieved December 30, 2020, from <http://saharareporters.com/2020/12/30/full-text-bishop-kukahs-christmas-message-sparked-reactions>

³⁵ C. N. Ogbujah. “Philosophy: A Pathway to System-Building in a Fractured Nation.” *Philosophy and Praxis*, 10/1, (2020), 10.

respectful conversation between diverse cultures which, increases the prospect of formulating sublime trans-cultural policies that engender human flourishing. They are indeed, mechanisms for the dispersal of crises, and enhancement of nation building.

Concluding Remarks

Intercultural philosophy, as thus elucidated, is not a branch of philosophy, or a homogenization of philosophical strands reminiscent of a “melting pot.” It is rather an orientation, an approach or attitude that shuns rigid claims to epistemic privilege to knowledge, religion or culture, but promotes inclusive dialogue. In the wake of analytic philosophy and Feminist epistemology, scholars began to appreciate the perspective relativity of knowledge. Every knowledge comes from a perspective; a tradition, a culture, and stands to be enriched through dialogue with other perspectives and cultures. In approaching intercultural philosophy therefore, we must shelve the hegemonic idea of using only our own perspectives to describe or demonstrate; we must include others’ perspectives. No matter how sublime we feel our philosophical or cultural orientations are, we must admit that other people’s philosophies and cultures are as well important, and should be taken into consideration.

As a nation, Nigeria has had a chequered history of ethnic suspicion and rivalry, leading to coups and counter coups, a civil war that consumed more than three million lives, consistent failure of policy implementation, ethnicism and religious bigotry that have cascaded into barefaced nepotism in this current administration. In the end, for over sixty years (60) of independence, the component groups are unable to integrate to build a thriving nation. Today, Nigeria has become a pariah nation shunned by investors, as she is sometimes ranked in the same category as failed states like Somalia and Afghanistan. But this was long coming, as it was foregrounded in the historical legacy of “divide and rule” bequeathed to her by the British colonist, and has persisted through furtive meddling in her internal politics by ‘world powers.’ Definitely, a prosperous Nigeria with strong institutions would threaten the illicit economic interests of these external and internal agents of destabilization.

To build a nation with strong institutions, there is need to reset the values and norms espoused by the component ethnic groups—a reeducation of the citizenry. Ogbujah is emphatic that this could be achieved by adopting the principles of interculturality, justice and inclusion. These, for him, would lead to “transformative education” that highlights the benefits of harmony and collaborative living.³⁶ Intercultural philosophy rejects those reified and dogmatized philosophies and intellectual opinions that lead to philosophical apartheid, discards claims to absolute right in theory and practice, and reconstructs on the basis of diversity of human

³⁶ C. N. Ogbujah. “Equality, Equity and Justice in Resource Distribution in Nigeria,” *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, 10/2, (2021), 138.

cultures.³⁷ It is a means of harnessing and operationalizing variety for the attainment of the greatest good.

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