

Review of African Metaphysics, Epistemology and a New Logic: A Decolonial Approach to Philosophy

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The book is an effort at intellectual decolonization that employs the tool of conversational thinking. As the powerhouse of human thoughts and actions, mental faculties are highly pivotal in decolonization. Little wonder why the great Jamaican singer Bob Marley made a clarion call in his *Redemption Song*: “Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.” As if to proffer a *sanatio in radice* (healing from the root) to mental colonization and as a sort of response to the above call from the great musician, Jonathan Chimakonam, who has in no small measure distinguished himself in breaking new horizons in the fields of Logic and African Philosophy, and his co-author Uchenna Ogbonnaya undertook the task of intellectually dismantling coloniality, employing the *instrumentum laboris* ‘conversational thinking’, which builds on Ezumezu logic, a homegrown African logic.

The authors focused on two of the core quadrivium in philosophy: African metaphysics and epistemology. These are foundational in any authentic philosophical system. Accordingly, the book divides into two broad parts. The part one (chapters 2-6) is on African metaphysics whereas the part two (chapters 7-10) is preoccupied with African epistemology. The chapter one serves as the

introduction. It discusses the authors' understanding of coloniality and its corollary decoloniality. It equally outlines the method, which is a necessary step in any philosophical engagement worth the name. Unlike Frantz Fanon who perceives coloniality as a raw or unmitigated violence, to be combated with greater violence (*fire-for-fire* approach to decoloniality), the present authors perceive coloniality as divisive intellectual predicament or system that privileges one part or group but marginalizes the other. Conversely, decoloniality becomes salvific intellectual efforts or measures that not only bridge divisive borders but also harmonize subjective and oppressive dichotomies. The authors categorically state that "the sense of decoloniality implied is that of an intellectual dismantling of coloniality using the method of conversational thinking grounded in Ezumezu logic" (vii).

Indeed, the method has more to say about the aim at hand. According to Heidegger, it is fundamentally the way or method and not the individual(s) that organizes what is thought, sets the boundary or limit and determines the interplay between the variables under consideration. This simply underscores the importance of method. Writing about hermeneutic phenomenology, Ana Maria Lopez Calvo de Feijoo submits that it is not "methodologically structured to anticipate an absolute or Almighty value assigned to any given proposition irrespective of the context." This submission squarely applies to conversational method. This is to say that context plays significant role in the search for truth. Ordinarily, conversation takes place among those who accord themselves respect and recognition. Conversationalism eschews, or rather bridges superiority-inferiority dichotomies. Above all, it is dialogical, complementary, of broader-embrace and creative in its approach. In fact, if coloniality is to be an intellectual malady, the authors argue that conversationalism will become a proper therapeutic intellectual tool for decoloniality.

The chapter two not only presents a bird's eyeview of existing African metaphysical thinking but also espouses the theory of *nmekoka* metaphysics with its undergirding logic and the attendant method. Having highlighted the deficiencies of their predecessors, the present authors went ahead to launch a model theory which is *Nmekoka* Ontology. The chapter three is an exposition on the metaphysical themes in Agada's Consolation philosophy. The strengths of Agada's input, according to the authors, lie not only in transcending the ethnocentric commitments which was a clog in the wheel of previous authors (such as Tempels, Alexis Kagame and Mogobe Ramose), but also in grounding his consolationism on Ezumezu framework with its three-valued system and being conversational in approach.

The chapter four is a discussion on Pantaleon Iroegbu's *Uwa* ontology, a cosmologized ontology that is characteristically conversational in approach. Innocent Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda* ontology is examined in the chapter five of the book while the ontology of personhood preoccupies the chapter six. A brief survey of the African and partly Western views on personhood are also done here. Of great interest is the complementary solution the present authors proffered to the age-long and irksome dichotomy between the physical and nonphysical components of person as well as that between the individual and community. The book gave a more concordant rather than discordant approach to the problem, using the tools of Ezumezu logic and conversational thinking.

Then comes part two (chapters 7–10), which dwells on African epistemology. The book here harps on conversational method with its background decolonial logic (Ezumezu logic) and *nmeko*, the guiding relational principle. The book does not fail to highlight points of application of these vital principles in the different authors that were reviewed. Chapter 7 curates some epistemological ideas in African philosophy. Amongst the theories that were discussed

are Senghor's negritude, Anyanwu's epistemological relativity, Wiredu's notion of truth, Ijiomah's humanizing/humanistic epistemology, Paulin Hountondji's Endogenous Knowledge, Godfrey Ozumba's and Jonathan Chimakonam's Integrative Epistemology, Chimakonam's cogno-normative epistemology, Tavernaro-Haidarian's deliberative epistemology and others. The tension and avalanche of criticisms that had trailed Senghor's negritude were remarkably doused here by harmonizing the age-long dichotomy between reason and emotion in Senghor's philosophy. This was facilitated through the application of the principles of complementarism and integrativism, which undergird Ezumezu logic. In all, the chapter gives a bird's eye view of the attempts by different authors to nibble on African epistemology.

Chapter eight articulates the distinctive features of African epistemology in a more streamlined manner. The Ezumezu logic that grounds its propositions and method is equally highlighted. The unitary, communitarian and relational ontology that undergird the epistemology account for its highly inclusive and enriching nature.

The chapter also considered the various forms of knowledge in, and the humanistic dimension of African epistemology.

Chapter nine formally presents the authors' prototype African epistemology, which is the cogno-normative or complementary epistemology. The two factors of relationality and context, according to the authors, not only inform the structure of truth and knowledge but also account for the moral dimension of knowledge. The authors argued that the logical and moral tend to go *pari passu*. Indeed, knowledge cannot be ascetically value-neutral. This is one of the core theses of cogno-normative epistemology. Finally, chapter ten makes a critical summation of the book. This equally serves as the conclusion.

It is apparent that the book leverages the avalanche of existing works in African philosophy and more from African cultural givings. For instance, the method employed in the work, which is conversational method is an African developed method. I had somewhere else remarked that the fodder for developing the method was gleaned from African cultural sources. One of the authors here, the ingenious Jonathan Chimakonam regurgitated on the fodder, refined and axiomatized the same. Similarly, the authors conversationally engaged their sources, deconstructing and further reconstructing it to establish a more solid logical and methodological footing for African philosophy in particular and African studies in general.

Furthermore, it can be said that the authors succeeded in using one stone to kill two birds at the same time by way of proffering an African metaphysics and epistemology deeply rooted on African logic and methodology and by so doing, contributed cognitively to the current wave of emancipatory transformation that has become globally known as decolonization. The authors confidently averred that African epistemology and metaphysics are gradually taking their rightful places within global philosophy, as part of the overall decolonial program to dismantle the cognitive empire of the West (136).

No doubt, some criticisms of the book are apt. For example, the book has a lot of neologisms and some of them are couched in non-English words and expressions. Some critics might frown at this. This is one of the reservations one may have about the book. But it can be argued that the authors might have purposely left some of the words and expressions in the aboriginal language so as to retain the cultural originality, vigor and the spirit of the work. Secondly, such highly technical words and concepts as, ‘conversational curve,’ ‘tension of incommensurables,’ ‘benoke point,’ et cetera, may not be easily grasped and digested by an average reader. Yet,

this can be defended in that philosophers are most times known to employ unconventional terms in the development of their thoughts. Martin Heidegger, for example, is said to have coined a number of neologisms in the original German version of his *Being and Time*; and these were not easily understood by his immediate German readers or audience. In the attempt to express or describe a new concept or reality, a thinker may associate the new concept or reality with already existing ones, thus leading to minor or major modification through the use of prefix or suffix or, altogether inventing new terms to properly capture and express the new reality. This is inevitable. Barring the above reservations, one can say that the authors have not only made a landmark contribution but also opened a new vista in African philosophy.

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