

IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY OF INTERCULTURALITY: TOWARDS A SHARED CONCEPTUAL PHILOSOPHICAL SPACE

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.20726.47684

Abstract

This article presents a contribution to the on-going discourse on intercultural philosophy, with particular emphasis on the African context. By utilizing the concept of Igwebuike, the article presents an African perspective on the interculturality of philosophy, highlighting the potential contributions of African ontology towards this field. The purpose of this paper is twofold: to aid in the process of decolonizing philosophy by challenging its eurocentric tendencies and to reorient Western philosophy and hermeneutics towards interculturality. While interculturality has been extensively studied, there has been little attention given to an African perspective. As such, this paper seeks to deepen our understanding of interculturality by focusing on Igwebuike philosophy. The theoretical framework of the paper is grounded in Igwebuike, while hermeneutic, thematic, and analytic methods of inquiry are employed to articulate thoughts on interculturality. The findings of this research will contribute to the existing body of literature on African perspectives of the interculturality of philosophy. Ultimately, this paper argues that the foundations of the interculturality of philosophy can be found in African ontology.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Interculturality, African, Philosophy, Decolonization

Introduction

A cursory glance at the historical development of philosophy, especially during the modern and contemporary epochs, reveals that changes, from the historiographical point of view, have begun to emerge in the conception of what is to be considered philosophy. Before now, the corpus of works referred to as philosophy was the collection of literature by European authors, with also the understanding that philosophy emerged from Europe,

with particular reference to Greece. This is evident in the works of Hegel who considers philosophy as that which exists only in Europe, that is, in the European tradition, and any other philosophy outside of this he considers non-philosophy.

This Eurocentric perspective originated between 1750 and 1830 during the European Enlightenment and continues to persist in certain circles. Notable proponents of this perspective include John Locke and David Hume in England, A. R. T. Turgot and Voltaire in France, and Immanuel Kant and Gotthold Lessing in Germany. This perspective posits that European philosophy serves as the standard against which all other perspectives are measured. Hegel, in particular, dismisses Indian thought as mere precursors to philosophy, characterized by fanciful and arbitrary notions, abstract oppositions, and superficial representations. Such comparisons were often made from a position of ignorance of other cultures' worldviews or structures of reality, as there was little to no contact or mutual awareness among world cultures at that time.

However, in contemporary times, there is now a greater appreciation and understanding of the wisdom of other cultures, in contrast to the armchair analyses of the past, which were rooted in assumptions rather than a genuine expression of reality. This newfound awareness is the result of increased global contact and cultural exchange, as noted by Wimmer (2004) and Mall et al (1989).

However, the advent of Arthur Schopenhauer and Paul Deussen marked a new chapter in the history of philosophy, as they expanded the scope of philosophical discourse by including non-European traditions such as Indian, Chinese, and Japanese philosophies. This development opened up contemporary philosophy to non-European traditions and allowed for comparative and intercultural methods to be applied to the field of philosophy. It was within this context that African philosophy later emerged.

The concept of Igwebuike intercultural philosophy adds to the ongoing discourse on intercultural philosophy, with a specific focus on the contribution of Igwebuike as an African philosophical system to the interculturality of philosophy, or its potential as an indigenous intercultural philosophy. This study will examine the various dimensions of Igwebuike philosophy, including its relationship to globalization, cosmology, and ontology. However, the underlying question is: what exactly is intercultural philosophy? Is it a theoretical abstraction without a concrete expression, or is it a synthesis of incompatible elements within the philosophical enterprise? Is it a response to the domination of the European perspective, or is it a compensatory measure for non-European cultural perspectives? The subsequent section of this paper will address these questions and more.

Igwebuike and Interculturality

The concept of Igwebuike provides a basis for discussion on interculturality, as it endorses openness to alterity or to the lifeworld outside of that of the thinker or the thinkers. Igwebuike is a combination of three words: *Igwe*, a noun which means number or population; *bu*, a verb, which means *is*; *ike*, a noun, which means *strength* or *power*. Put together, it means ‘number is strength’ or ‘number is power’. This means that when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force. At this level, no task is beyond their collective capability. This provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. As an ideology, *Igwebuike* rests on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. It holds that ‘to be’ is to live in solidarity, relationality, and complementarity and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation.

The Igwebuike perspective expresses the African complementary concept of reality; thus Asouzu (2007) presents African reality as “an all-embracing whole, in which all units form together a dynamic play of forces, which are in harmony with each other, by completing and supporting the other” (p. 14), and as that which “exist only in relations” (p. 74). Asouzu (2004) further speaks of reality as “necessary complements of each other” (46). Igwebuike hermeneutic of intercultural philosophy sees philosophies of different life-worlds as complementary to each other and as such, philosophy is not exclusive to any particular people or race. It is in this sense that George (2014) defines interculturality within the context of a new orientation in philosophy that is inclusive of other traditions:

Interculturality denotes a pluralistic mindset. It is a kind of norm such as ‘believe and let believe’, ‘live and let live’, ‘read and let read,’ and so on. It is an attitude or conviction that no one culture can claim an absolute priority or status as the culture of the whole of humanity. The prefix ‘inter’ may be used as an equivalent (but quite inadequately so) of other prefixes such as ‘intra’ and ‘cross,’ and may mean ‘trans’ as well... ‘Inter’ points to the space or ‘holy void’ which can be experienced in the intersection of cultures. This space is needed. This void is meaningful in the interplay (p. 52).

To think of philosophy in the sense of being particular to only a people or a particular means of expression and questioning is to limit the power of philosophy by denying her of her compliments. With globalization emphasizing communication and collaboration between different methodologies, traditions and cultures, intercultural philosophy remains one of the greatest developments within the parameters of contemporary philosophy.

Interculturality as the Manner of the Being of Philosophy

According to the Igwebuike perspective, the essence of philosophy lies in openness and dialogue. In other words, philosophy cannot exist without being intercultural. This interculturality exists on the level of rationality, which philosophy upholds. The philosophical space must be able to accommodate diverse perspectives and transcend local commitments. This requires openness and tolerance in the philosophical discourse. Failure to uphold interculturality in philosophy results in self-alienation. Therefore, emphasis on interculturality in philosophy is necessary to preserve its dignity and vitality.

Ram Adhar Mall, a Professor at the University of Munich, developed the concept of intercultural philosophy. He argues that interculturality arises from the convergence of cultures that do not exist independently, and from an attitude that precedes philosophical thinking. In his words, "interculturality means the encounter of various cultures in the mutual recognition of their differences and similarities" (Mall, 2000) writes:

Intercultural philosophy stands for a process of emancipation from all types of centrisms, whether European or non-European,...a philosophical attitude, a philosophical conviction that no one philosophy is the philosophy for the whole of humankind (p. xii).

Mall (2000) in another text writes:

It is the task of intercultural philosophy to mediate between...two ends, i.e., the specific philosophies as they are found in different cultures and the universal philosophy which is not culturally bound itself...Methodically intercultural philosophy...is based on comparative studies, and in particular on the comparison of cultures and their philosophical traditions (n.p).

Franz Martin Wimmer laments that even though philosophy claims to be universal, it is always embedded in the Eurocentric culture, which is only a certain means of expression and questioning. Thus Wimmer (2002) defines intercultural philosophy as:

The endeavour to give expression to the many and often marginalised voices of philosophy in their respective cultural contexts and thereby to generate a shared, fruitful discussion granting equal rights to all,...to facilitate and develop a new and timely culture of a plurality of philosophical dialogues between thinkers from around the world (np).

It is in this regard that Raúl Fornet-Betancourt proposes intercultural philosophy as an approach in philosophy for overcoming eurocentrism, a kind of decolonization of philosophy; Kimmerle Heinz understands intercultural philosophy as a method of thinking differently from colonial thinking to open the door for dialogue with African philosophy

based on complete equality. Despite variations in thought among scholars of interculturality, they all agree on the relevance of this practical approach to philosophy.

As a new approach in philosophy, Intercultural philosophy emphasizes the need for the integration of influences from different cultures and traditions in the doing of philosophy. It is in this regard that it is simply defined as philosophy being intercultural, therefore, allowing the spirit of philosophy to be realized in different cultures and traditions. While for some philosophers it means relating to, involving, or representing different cultures; for some thinkers, it implies contact or social intercourse taking place between cultures as in intercultural communication; and for some others, it denotes contact among cultures which exemplifies, or leads to, comprehensive mutuality, reciprocity, and equality.

In the contention of Sweet (2014):

Genuine interculturality.... designates contact among cultures which exemplifies or leads to comprehensive mutuality, reciprocity and equality, arguably it is this sense of interculturality that many of those who see themselves as engaged in intercultural philosophy aspires....is it to be a field or subject area of philosophy? or is it more of an attitude, method, or approach or plurality of approaches to doing philosophy? Does it provide a positive direction or agenda, or does it focus more on avoiding certain problems in (traditional) philosophy? (p. 2)

Heeson Bai et al (2014) go further to present interculturality as a basic function of philosophy, implying that there cannot be philosophy without interculturality.

If we understand the function of philosophy as cultural work, the aim of which is to attend to the problematic aspects of a culture or cultures and introduce and implement alternate ways of negotiating reality, then philosophy's primary activity would be to search for worldviews and values that promise or have been shown to be efficacious in responding to the problems that a culture is experiencing (p. 15).

This integration of traditions and cultures will, therefore, serve as a meeting ground for philosophies such as Oriental, Western, African, Latin America, Islamic, etc., for the construction of a philosophical system that will give birth to a thought system borne from the fullness of global traditions of thought. The purpose of such an approach is to expand and extend one's pattern of thinking, demonstration and description to include that of others. For thinkers like Panikkar (2000), this expansion of thought should include religious perspectives as well as other key elements of other cultures like dance, music, architecture, rituals, art, literature, myths, proverbs, folk tales, etc. He writes about introducing the concepts of love, healing and knowing into the intercultural philosophical enterprise:

....it is the talk of philosophy to know, to love and to heal all in one. It knows as much as it loves and heals. It loves, only if it truly knows and heals. It heals if it loves and knows.....it is not foreign to the nature of philosophy to act with wisdom, to love with discernment and to perceive with detachment. (237).

Even though comparative and intercultural philosophy have similarities, there is a difference between the two. This is because while comparative philosophy creates a round table for dialogue among various sources of thought across cultural, linguistic and philosophical streams, in the case of intercultural philosophy, the round table leads to the generation of a thought system that is global in character (Sweet 2014, Chini 2004). According to Kaltenbache (2014):

Intercultural philosophy should not be confused with comparative philosophy; the starting points are different. Comparative philosophy does not have, as its main object, the cultural context of philosophising. Still, intercultural philosophy depends on the comparison of different philosophical traditions (p. 42).

This notwithstanding, there is always an element of comparative philosophy in intercultural philosophy given that one must understand the various traditions of philosophies before making comparison. It is in this sense that it can be said that while intercultural philosophy involves an element of comparative philosophy, comparative philosophy is only an aspect of intercultural philosophy.

Igwebuike Socio-Economic Model for Interculturality

Igwebuike presents globalization as a socio-economic model and foundation for interculturality, given that globalization is gradually turning the world into a cosmopolitan global conference table. Thus, Asouzu (2007) thinks that globalization is “a necessary consequence of the character of our being as relative subjects seeking full actualization” (p. 382). Omoregbe (2007) avers that “... man by nature is a social being with an irresistible urge to associate with his fellow human being, globalization is a manifestation of this natural urge in man” (p. 148). Asouzu (2007) refers to it as “a necessary consequence of our being” (p. 382). Agbo (2010) writes that “Globalization is not only part of nature, it is the mode of being for human beings, it expresses our internal state. In an ontological sense, it is the category of our expressive existentiality! It is the name we give to the invisible force that is propelling reality forward with incredible velocity” (p. 36). Asouzu (2007) adds that globalization is: “the life we live, the completion we seek in our search for meaning and the measures we take to stay alive in the face of challenges that involve many” (p. 414). In the face of globalization, philosophy cannot be less

intercultural, and in fact, interculturality within the parameters of philosophy is a manifestation of the spirit of globalization in the philosophical enterprise.

With globalization, ideas, texts, and practices about the life world of other peoples have been able to move from one part of the world to another. Sweet (2014) refers to it as the migration of ideas across different cultures of the world.

We can think of the presence of Buddhist philosophy in China, Korea, and Japan – and more recently in North America and Europe. Thus, from an ‘original’ Buddhism in India, there has been a ‘migration’ – the development of ‘schools’ of Buddhism in different cultures: Mahayana, predominantly in north and northeast Asia; Theravada in Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma), and several further developments (within Mahayana) in Tibet, in Japan and China (including Pure Land and Chan/ Zen), and Korea (Seon). Many philosophies originating in the West seem similarly to have migrated’ east and south; they have been introduced and, it would seem, have often been integrated and appropriated, into non-western cultures and traditions (p. 6).

Sweet (2014) observes further that these ideas and texts have not only migrated from one place to another but that have been introduced as courses in universities in places outside of their origin:

...we can think of the introduction of British philosophy (e.g., empiricism, utilitarianism, but also idealism) into India in the 19th and 20th centuries and the exchanges that resulted, and the introduction of hermeneutics and postmodern thought into Asia. Today, some Asian scholars adopt phenomenology and hermeneutics in their work on Asian thought, and there is a steady market for the translation of texts by H.-G. Gadamer and others – e.g., J. Derrida, G. Deleuze, and M. Foucault – into various Asian languages, particularly Chinese (p. 6).

The movement of these texts, practices, cultures, and life-worlds of people from one place to another, and the introduction of these life-worlds into institutions of learning outside of their places of origin are the result of the wave of globalization. From the Igwebuiké perspective, globalization is an expression of the modality of our being and philosophy cannot be any less in expression.

Igwebuiké Cosmological Model for Interculturality

Igwebuiké is an African cosmological idea that is symbolic of the African universe, where every creature as an independent entity must negotiate another’s existential highway for mutual survival. It is a dependent, interdependent and combinational universe. This perspective is very important given that the African universe is a world that one share

with the other in an atmosphere of inter-subjective relations (Kanu 2018). These inter-subjective relations only play out without chaos when the individual is able to skillfully bridge his or her interiority with the individuality of the other.

The African universe has physical and spiritual dimensions. In the spirit realm, God represents the Chief Being and sits at the apex of power. In the physical world, human beings dominate, occupying the central position in the scheme of God's creation. The structure of the African universe can be illustrated in three levels: the sky, the earth and the underworld: the sky is where God *Chukwu* or *Chineke* and angels reside; the earth is where human beings, animals, natural resources, some devils and physical observable realities abide; and the underworld where ancestors and bad spirits live (Kanu 2013). These worlds interact despite their peculiarities and persist because of a healthy inter-subjective relationship. There is no wall between the physical and spiritual worlds, between the visible and invisible, the sacred and profane as there is a cooperate existence of reality. Thus, certain elements can move from one structure to another to commune with other elements. This conception of the African world creates a cosmological foundation for an intercultural approach to philosophy.

Igwebuike Ontological Model for Interculturality

Igwebuike conceptualizes a world of mutual relations and complementarity. This is anchored on the following basic human ontological conditions:

- a. The world in which we live is one in which we encounter several needs, however, with very few resources to take care of the needs. This limitation calls for the mobilization of other forces outside of the self, a social fellowship for the satisfaction of particular needs.
- b. Nature has placed in us the likeness for fellowship. This is based on the fact that we were created by God in His image and likeness.
- c. Although we are equal essentially, we have different gifts and abilities. What I may be able to do another may not be able to do, meaning that my relationship with the other completes what is lacking in me.
- d. Collaboration with the other is ground for becoming, as everything takes a bit of another to make itself. It is a ground for staying alive and transforming the universe (Njoku 2015).

The reality of human nature is characterized by an inherent capacity for social interaction and cooperation, which when avoided, limits the fullness of our existence. Human fellowship is thus an essential element inscribed in human nature for survival, constituting a fundamental unit of order. This ontological dimension provides a foundational basis for

the intercultural nature of philosophy. The greater the extent to which philosophy embraces interculturality, the more it fulfills its essential purpose.

Igwebuike Anthropological Model for Interculturality

Rene Descartes, in his 1637 work, initiated a new path in philosophy known as gnoseology. He defined a person in terms of self-consciousness and, through his methodical doubt, discovered that something resisted doubt: the fact that he was the one who doubted and who could be deceived. This led him to the famous statement *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore, I am). Descartes answered the question of “who am I?” by stating that he was a “thinking thing”. However, his transformation of the person from an ontological to a psychological fact had significant implications, resulting in either great reductions or enormous exaggerations of the concept of the person (Kanu, 2012 and 2015). In the wake of Descartes, individual consciousness became the privileged center of identity, and ‘the other’ was often regarded as either an epistemological problem or an inferior, diminished, or negated form of the self (Kanu, 2013).

Contrary to Descartes’ position, Igwebuike philosophy provides a horizon that presents the human person as a being that possesses a relational character of mutual relations (Kanu 2016). ‘To be’ is ‘to be with the other’, in a community of beings. (Kanu 2015). Igwebuike understands life as a shared reality. And it is only within the context of complementarity that life makes meaning. Life is a life of *sharedness*; one in which another is part thereof. A relationship, though of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole (Kanu 2017). It is a relationship in which case the two or more coming together make each of them a complete whole; it is a diversity of being one with each other. Ewulu (2010), writes:

If the other is my part or a piece of me, it means that I need him for me to be complete, for me to be what I am. The other complete rather than diminishes me. His language and culture make my own stand out and at the same time, they enrich and complement my own. (p.189).

From this perspective, the self is not only complete in relating with the other but also attains self-realization through the other. This has great implications for the philosophical enterprise; it is at the level of interculturality that philosophy achieves self-realization.

Implications of Igwebuike for the Interculturality of Philosophy

From the foregoing, the following implications can be drawn from the Igwebuike philosophy of interculturality:

- a. Igwebuike has a unique understanding of what philosophy constitutes: it understands the philosophical enterprise as one that involves reflecting not only on our own experience as a people or a person in relation to ourselves. It understands philosophy as engaging in a reflection that involves how we relate to other persons as well. This creates a basis for interculturality in philosophy, knowing fully well that the idea of reflecting in relation to others must include their culture, traditions and manner of thinking or understanding reality.
- b. The universality of thinking suggests that philosophy cannot be constrained to a specific geographical area or people. Limiting philosophy to the Eurocentric realm only serves to diminish its potency and richness. The ability to engage in philosophical inquiry should not preclude the ability to think beyond one's immediate surroundings and to be receptive to the cultural and traditional practices of others. Philosophy inherently encompasses the notions of vastness and universality, and to pursue philosophy without these attributes is to deviate from the essence of the field. In accordance with the Igwebuike philosophy, philosophy can only attain its true nature when it embraces cultural diversity and inclusivity.
- c. The very essence of philosophy is intricately linked to cultures and traditions, as it draws from and engages with their diverse worldviews, values, habits, and practices. Hence, to exclude particular cultures and traditions from the realm of philosophy would not only curtail its universal appeal but also impede its potential for growth and comprehensiveness. Rather, different philosophical traditions ought to be viewed as complementary to one another. An appreciation of philosophy in the absence of this fundamental tenet risks succumbing to a narrow culturalism, which contradicts philosophy's intrinsic nature as a bastion of pluralism, alterity, and dissimilarity.
- d. In the works of prominent philosophers such as Hegel, Kant, and Hume, a tendency to devalue cultures and traditions associated with people outside of Europe is evident. The African people, in particular, have been subject to the perception that their thoughts are thoughtless, and their natural capacities are incapable of sound thinking and, as a result, philosophy. This view, however, deprives philosophy of the richness and diversity that it warrants. Differences in thought should not be regarded as differences in the capacity to think and philosophize, but rather as differences in underlying logic that shapes a pattern of thought. When one questions the philosophical content of the ideas of others merely because they differ from what one is accustomed to, the problem lies not with the ideas themselves but with the adequacy of the judgment of the person who thinks in this way. The consequence of

such thinking is that other people and their ideas are unfairly judged, stereotyped, underestimated, and disparaged.

- e. At the base of the arrogation of philosophy to a particular people and pattern of thought is in many cases, rooted in a feeling of superiority, which is predominantly an emotional disposition rather than a rational one. This sense of superiority arises from the fear of the potential collapse of one's own superiority, which can lead to the formation of irrational opinions that are meant to reinforce rationality. However, since rationality and irrationality cannot coexist, irrationality ultimately corrodes rationality.

Conclusion: Decolonizing Philosophy

Igwebuiké philosophy contributes significantly to the interculturality of philosophy through its efforts to decolonize the discipline, which has been historically Eurocentric and exclusionary. The colonization of philosophy refers to the marginalization and neglect of the philosophical traditions of colonized peoples, while the philosophical traditions of the colonizers are deemed as the only valid form of philosophy. The Igwebuiké intercultural philosophical approach opposes this pattern of hegemony and exclusion and seeks to enrich our understanding of philosophy by displacing the European canon as the normative center of the discipline.

Decolonizing philosophy within the context of Igwebuiké intercultural philosophy involves expanding the discipline beyond the colonial paradigm and replacing it with universality. This does not necessitate the rejection of canonical figures in philosophy but rather entails a philosophical practice that transcends the colonial paradigm.

Mladjo (2019) observes that:

In effect, all of the experiences, histories, resources, and cultural products ended up in one global cultural order revolving around European or Western hegemony. Europe's hegemony over the new model of global power concentrated all forms of control of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and the production of knowledge under its hegemony... They repressed as much as possible the colonized forms of knowledge production, the models of the production of meaning, their symbolic universe, the model of expression and objectification and subjectivity (p. 98).

The conception of philosophy that has been widely accepted, along with the criteria that determine its validity, have historically been disproportionately influenced by Western thought and ways of existing in the world. These standards were employed to legitimize Europe's colonial endeavors, which eventually became integrated into colonial rule and

systems of civilization (Dreyer 2017; Zavala 2017). Based on the colonial mindset, knowledge produced by the Western system was regarded as superior to that produced by other systems due to its supposed universality. The Western philosophical outlook continues to dictate what should be deemed philosophical and scientific knowledge, which consequently leads to the exclusion, marginalization, and dehumanization of non-European philosophies. Igwebuike intercultural philosophy, therefore, not only advocates for a new approach to philosophy but also provides an African ontological and epistemological foundation for such a philosophy.

A fruitful interculturality in philosophy, according to the Igwebuike approach will depend on the following concrete actions:

- a. The path towards interculturality should be guided by the search for truth and not by emotions or sentiments;
- b. There is a need for openness to the cultural or philosophical traditions of other people without an air of pride or a feeling of superiority of one's tradition over that of others;
- c. There is need for the translation of texts of particular philosophical traditions into languages that people from other life-worlds can read and understand. This should be done in such a manner that no particular mother tongue is advocated for. This would open the door for real encounters of philosophical traditions;
- d. There is a need to create a shared conceptual space for the understanding of differences; where concepts fail in conveying a message, regular concepts from such a space can be introduced for better understanding;
- e. Ensuring that such a conceptual space does not end up creating a global philosophical tradition against particular traditions, but rather promotes the peculiarities of the different traditions within the said space; it should bring about unity and not uniformity.
- f. There is a need for a sympathetic and non-dominant approach towards the philosophical traditions of other people;
- g. There is a need to broaden the horizon of what is considered today as the history of philosophy to include the history of other historical traditions like Asian philosophy, African philosophy, Indian philosophy, Chinese philosophy, etc.

While these concrete steps do not promise the achievement of the purpose of intercultural philosophy, it provides basic elements required for the journey towards interculturality.

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Igwebuike Philosophy of Interculturality: Towards a Shared Conceptual Philosophical Space

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