

Review of [African Metaphysics, Epistemology, and a New Logic: A Decolonial Approach to Philosophy], by Jonathan O. Chimakonam and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya

Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, 226, xix
ISBN: 978-3-030-72444-3

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Most African scholarships have been devoted to dismantling the subtle coloniality that accompanies colonialism on the African continent. They have focused on questioning the imposition and the absolutisation of western ideas by drawing attention to unique African ideas and correcting misconceptions about Africa. While it is essential to have a conceptual presentation of what has been done in order to know what is left to be covered, true decoloniality requires that we promote African voices that are not merely an African variation or adaptation of Western voices. Therefore, due diligence is required to identify the method and logic underlying existing ideas in African literature and whether they inform future works on Africa. Jonathan Chimakonam and Uchenna Ogbonnaya's *African Metaphysics, Epistemology, and a New Logic: A Decolonial Approach to Philosophy* takes up this challenge. The book provides a compelling insight into the ideas of some contemporary African philosophers by discussing their contributions to the decolonial discourse in philosophy. The book employs conversational thinking, a new and fast-growing method in African philosophy, to engage these ideas and shows how they were, in turn, informed by the logic of conversational thinking. A detailed analysis of the book shows that its main objective is to use this African-inspired method to channel the course of the future of African philosophy.

Conversational thinking as a method for engagement in African philosophy has its root in the principle of relationship (*nmeke*), dominant in African thought that emphasises the possible complementarity of opposing realities (CHIMAKONAM 2017, 2018). It is a method grounded on the African three-valued logic of Ezumezu, which according to its proponents, is a tool to deconstruct the bifurcated Aristotelian logic and seek a middle ground while reconciling two opposing truth values (CHIMAKONAM 2018, 2019). Using this foundational logic, conversational thinking becomes a decolonial method that seeks to dismantle the dominant western form of reasoning. Considering the history of contemporary African philosophy as the history of decoloniality, one can easily agree with Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya that the future of African philosophy rests on grounding its ideas and engagements on decolonial frameworks if it must contribute to world philosophies.

A thorough study of the books further shows that the authors want to promote engagement with the ideas of the scholars discussed therein. The book laid the foundation for such an engagement. The book's overall conversational attitude and the decolonial altitude of the various ideas discussed in it are apparent in each of its chapters. In the first five chapters dedicated to African metaphysics, the authors engage ideas such as *Nmekoka* metaphysics, *Ibuanyidanda* ontology, Uwa ontology, consolationism and the ontology of personhood. Chapters in the second part of the book curate some epistemological ideas in African philosophy and discuss the nature of African epistemology. The authors' choice of taking off from metaphysics might be the essential point of getting to understand 'reality' before the epistemic process that aids its knowing. However, the authors choose metaphysics and epistemology in the book instead of ethics or aesthetics because both areas, as they argue, have been the least discussed in contemporary African philosophy.

As the authors alluded to in the book, some of the reasons for such slow development may be the non-recognition of individual innovative and creative thinking. They argue that the development of African episteme is affected by the communitarian standpoint of viewing ideas from the lens of collective ownership, where the community is seen as the only framework for African epistemology. For African epistemology to develop like its western counterpart, they recommend the need to move beyond communal ownership of ideas and give due acknowledgement to the ideas of individual thinkers. Nonetheless, while it is essential to recognise the promotion of ideas of individual thinkers in contemporary African philosophy, there might not be a contradiction between ideas ascribed to individuals from the African place and those ascribed to the community. I think the project of decoloniality requires occasional historical adventure and investigation of traditional thought to promote the depth of the philosophical ideas hitherto silenced by western intellectual hegemony. Some of these traditional ideas are difficult to separate from communal thought. However, our engagement with them must reflect a depth of personal insights if they must be brought to the front burner and if we must decolonise the centre.

In this book, Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya establish the decolonial position of Innocent Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda* ontology by noting that it provides one of the earliest responses to the error in western philosophical thought. *Ibuanyidanda* holds the principle of complementarity or complementary reflections that emphasises integration, interconnectedness and the integration of beings and realities, as against the Aristotle's clash of opposites between realities. Each being is a missing link of reality - the whole. Each needs other missing links for it to complete its beingness and contribute to the whole.

Acknowledging the need to seek a complement between opposing realities, that is, a balance in the contradictions is a consolation that makes human existence meaningful and the universe purposeful. This is the view of Ada Agada's consolationist philosophy, which is captured in this book as one of the ideologies influenced by the principles of complementarity. While human seeks to pursue the good of life, they are aware of the reality of its contradiction and the possibility of being dragged behind by it. Human beings find consolation in the awareness of the contradictions in the world and how to navigate through them.

Like Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda*, Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya argue that Pantaleon Iroegbu's *Uwa* ontology maintains the logic of binary complementarity and the principle of relationship (*nmeke*). Reality to Iroegbu is *Uwa*, which means the 'world'; however, with a plurality of manifestations, known as zones, interconnected and in mutual relationship with one another. *Uwa*, which includes the human world, divine world, ancestral world, and good-spirit world, are ontologically related in that one cannot talk of one without talking about the other. As a result, what is, to Iroegbu, is *Uwa* (world).

Both *ibuanyidanda* ontology and *Uwa* ontology, as discussed in the book, trace the importance of the relationality of beings in the world. They offer an appreciation of a global mindset that acknowledges seeing reality from a holistic perspective and maintains that no single approach can attain objective truth. As a result, *Ibuanyidanda* ontology and *Uwa* ontology allows for a comprehensive understanding of existential problems of the world through the accommodation of different worldviews and ideas, and more fundamentally, as decolonial thoughts, draw attention to the principle of inclusivity of ideas.

However, the tension of absolutism generated by *Uwa* ontology questions its decolonial objectives. Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya note this challenge by saying that Iroegbu *Uwa* seems to be making a similar mistake as Aristotle's substance as an absolute reality. However, they excused *Uwa* ontology from the challenge by noting that "while Aristotle absolutised substance by saying that it is that which is inherent in all realities, Iroegbu absolutised *Uwa* by asserting that it is that which encompasses and houses all realities within it. However, it is true that *Uwa* is at the base of every existent reality since all other realities are found within it; but it is not an absolute entity like Aristotelian substance. One argument that can be made is that *Uwa* is one reality among other realities and that all of these realities are complementary to *Uwa*. Thus, *Uwa* cannot exist without them, just as they cannot exist without *Uwa*. *Uwa* needs them to continue to exist, just as they need *Uwa* to exist" (CHIMAKONAM AND OGBONNAYA 2021, 85).

It is unclear how the above response excuses Iroegbu's idea from the challenge of absolutism. If *Uwa* is the only thing that is and is the foundation of other realities, that which must be present in all realities, we can conclude that nothing comes into being without *Uwa*. Consequently, the possible relationship and complementarity exist among realities because of the aspects of *Uwa* found in them. Nothing makes a thing more significant and prime than the feeling that others must continue to bow in appreciation to it. I think the intention to remove absolutism from the scheme of conversational thinking and its logic does not seem to work for *Uwa* ontology.

An assessment of the ontological and cosmological ideas in African metaphysics results in the conclusion that doing African metaphysics requires a method. A method that will help systemise how to look at reality. The authors identify the theory of *nmeke* metaphysics, an African-inspired idea grounded on the logic of Ezumazu, as a viable theory that sets the structure for looking at reality from African philosophical perspectives. *Nmeke* underlying logic enables the possibility of an imagined reality irrespective of how contradicting its nature is to existing or known realities. Like *nmeke*, one of the authors identified the theory of cogno-normative epistemology as a theoretical proposal for African

epistemology. Cogno-normative epistemology is an epistemic idea that emphasises the significance of the complementarity of cognitive certainty and moral value in the discourse of knowledge. It charges epistemologists to pursue knowledge that enhances human flourishing and shun, for instance, those that aid human destruction. In addition, cogno-normative epistemology allows for the complementarity of the doctrines of rationalism and empiricism rather than the superiority of one over the other.

It will be appropriate, therefore, to refer to the book as a book on methods in African philosophy. Apart from its primary method – conversational thinking, most of the metaphysical and epistemological ideas discussed in the book can be deployed as a framework for research in the humanities, especially decolonial research.

However, it is unclear if Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya present the conversational method as ‘the method’ in African philosophy, which rules out the possibility of other methods in analysing thought and ideas in African philosophy. That would translate to another form of hegemonic reasoning, thereby contradicting the authors’ decolonial intention and conversational thinking that prides itself on acknowledging the viability of other epistemic ideas and logic. However, the authors’ confidence gives credence to this assumption. They note, “as many more concepts continue to be unveiled in African philosophy, conversational method and Ezumezu logic remain crucial in explicating and justifying these developments” (CHIMAKONAM and OGBONAYA 2021, 42). Even if the authors argue that conversational thinking and Ezumezu logic are not meant to be domineering or hegemonic, the emphasis on ‘crucial’ suggests other methods or modes of reasoning involved in discourses in African philosophy must do so with conversational thinking by the side. By implication, no other method may sufficiently analyse ideas in African philosophy without the involvement of Ezumezu logic.

Furthermore, the method of conversational thinking raises the question as to whether philosophy as a discipline has not always been conversational in its approach and outlook. The history of philosophy, particularly contemporary African philosophy, is the history of continuous dialogue on issues and even methods (see MATOLINO 2021). This raises the question of whether what this method represents qualifies for the African signifier. However, I presume that one of the authors’ responses to this charge would be that conversationalism as a system in African philosophy is grounded on a different logic. It is based on a system of logic in African thought (see CHIMAKONAM 2017). Therefore, this distinction may pass as its uniqueness. One may add that seeing conversational thinking as an element of philosophising demonstrates that some of the tenets of philosophy are not exclusive to certain philosophical traditions, such as the Western tradition; they are also part of other traditions of philosophy. Therefore, the reality of conversationalism as a system in African philosophy contributes to dismantling the parochial hegemony of ideas and thought in philosophy. In this sense, the book delivers on its purpose to offer a decolonial approach to studying and writing about philosophy through its African-inspired logic. In addition, the book delivers on its purpose in showing the decolonial nature inherent in the

epistemic and metaphysical ideas discussed. It also shows that they are not just reechoing or imitating western ideas.

While it is convincing to accept the African signifier based on the unique trivalent African logic that undergirds conversational thinking in African philosophy, one may raise the tension about whether African thought is strictly trivalent or holds other non-trivalent logic. As seen elsewhere, it is easier to detect the presence of bivalent reasoning in African thought and practices. The struggle between males and females in African culture that shows where power is located in patriarchal African societies manifests the self and others, self/subjects, superior and the inferior sense of a binary, other-regarding logic. It suggests a strict opposition between binaries. One may conclude that two-valued reasoning might not be inherently Western. This tension must be decisively addressed by Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya, as well as other adherents of the conversational view.

Notwithstanding, the book is an excellent, ambitious addition to the volumes of literature on African thought and culture and how we can engage other ideas that are not from the African place. The book has not only made an essential contribution to African philosophy, but if decolonising canons, axioms and thought count as advancing discourses in philosophy, the book has contributed to it.

Relevant Literature

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