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Interculturality in African Political Philosophy

Professor Bekele Gutema (PhD)

Professor of Philosophy, Addis Ababa University

Email: bekele.gutema@aau.edu.et/bekele_gutema@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Intercultural philosophy as a new orientation in philosophy wants to ascertain the plurality of philosophy. Its main purpose is the critique of the monologue of Western philosophy to enrich philosophical reflection on the different issues of philosophical concern. African political discourse and practice has been an uprooted activity. The pre-colonial African cultures were undermined by colonialism. Despite the attempts by some of Africa's post-independence leaders to ground the political orientations of their countries in indigenous political ideas, they are the Western ideas that were implemented, although they could not take roots. It is necessary to understand the predicament of Africa as an outcome of the political practice. Africa is in a situation where it could not use its indigenous ideas. On the other hand despite the attempts to use them the Western ideas of democracy and others could not take roots. They could not take roots and probably cannot also take roots in the future as they are, since they were not meant for Africa. However, there is a wide-spread interculturality in terms of politics, philosophy, education, and so on as a result of the fact that we have taken a lot from outside and also given certain things to the rest of the world. This creates a favorable condition for intercultural philosophy in Africa with regards to political orientation and practice. It can create a new situation to create a political culture of reappropriating our own African political philosophies and appropriating European political philosophies. The article discusses intercultural philosophy and tries to show that its principles and methods can be used to propose a political philosophy that can better address African issues. It tries to achieve this by critically reviewing and analyzing the available literature in the realms of political and intercultural philosophy.

Key Terms: *Dialogue/polylogue, Gadaa system, intercultural philosophy, Political philosophy, primordial systems*

Falaasama Walkkeessummaa Aadootaa Falaasma Siyaasa Afrikaa Keessati

Axareeraa

Yaadni falaasama walkkeessummaa aadootaa yaada hedumina falaasamotaa hubachuu barbaadu. Kaayyoon isaas falaasama warra lixaa qeequufi falaasama gali falaasamoota adda addaatiin gabbisudha. Waanti siyaasa Afrikaa keessattii haa'saamafti dalagama tureef jirus waanta bu'ura ofi gadi lakkiisee turee akka ta'e nibeekama. Aadooni Afrikaa kan sirna koloneefataa dura turan ukkamfamani turani, jirus. Carraaqqiin hoggantoota Afrikaa kan sirna koloneefataa boodaa siyaasa Afrikaa yaadota falaasama biyya keessaarratti hundeesuf yalee yoojiraateeyyu, kan hojirra oolcuuf yaalame garuu yaadoota siyaasa kan warra lixaati. Haala rakkisaa amma Afrikaan keessa jirtu akka rakkoo siyaasaatti ilaaluun barbaachisaadha. Afrikaan yaadota biyya keessaatti (indigenous) fayyadamuu hindandenyee. Yaadonni warra lixaas lafa qabachuu hindandeenye. Gara fulduraattis lafa qabachuun isaanii shakkisiisaadha. Maaliif yoo jedhame, durumaa yaadota Afrikaaf yaadamanii kan bocaman waan hintaaneef. Haa ta'u malee, yaadota falaasama walkeessummaa aadotaa kan bal'aa ta'eefi siyaasa irrattis ta'e amantii, branoota irrattis ta'e falaasamuma mataasaa irrattis mul'atutu jira. Kunis, waa'ee aadonni gara garaa waantota baay'ee walirraa fudhatanii waliifis kennaniifidha. Yaadni kun, yaada falaasama walkeessummaa aadotaa kan cimsudha. Keesumaa, siyaasaaf yaadni falaasama walkkeessummaa aadotaa bu'ureefate haala mijataa uuma. Akkaataa yaadoota falaasama biyya keessaa kan iraanfataman yaadannee, deebisnee jiruu irra oolchinuuf, yaadoota falaasama Awurooppaa kan nu fayyaduu danda'an immoo fudhannee walitti fidnee itti fayyadamuu akka dandeenyu nu agarsisa. Qorannoon kun falaasama aadaa walkkeessummaa xiinxaluun, tooftaafi dudhaaleen isaa akkamiin yaada falaasama siyaasa kan rakkoo Afrikaa furuu dandahan agarsisa. Barreefamoota adda addaa kan kanarratti katabamaan gadi fageenyaan xiinxaluun barbaachisumma falaasama aadoota walkkeessummaa agarsiisuuf yaala.

Jechoota Ijoo: *Wal-falmi/marii, Gadaa, Falaasama aadoota walkeessummaa, falaasama Siyaasaa, Seera bu'uraa*

1. Introduction

Intercultural philosophy, due to its essential nature, tries to broaden the horizon of philosophy and is well-suited to engage various areas of study such as philosophy, politics, pedagogy, and religion. Many cultures had traditions of philosophy, political culture, pedagogy and so on. However, with the advent of modernity, philosophies, political thoughts and practices emanating from the different traditions of the world started to be marginalized. The need to do philosophy interculturally is rooted in the understanding that in today's world we cannot properly understand philosophical, political, religious and pedagogical issues based on a philosophy emanating from one cultural center. Although that was what modernity advocated today's complex problems facing us at different levels cannot be mastered by the knowledge and methods that Western philosophies provide us with.

Genuine universal philosophy is intercultural philosophy, because it is able to appropriate methods and philosophies in different cultural traditions, thereby broadening the horizon of philosophy. The attempt to understand and solve philosophical, political, environmental, moral and other problems based on philosophy rooted in a single cultural experience, like the Western experience would be very limited. Its implication is that there is always one model for economic activities, politics, pedagogy and other realms.

To look at global problems or even regional problems based on a philosophy that is ethnocentric hardly achieves what would be expected to overcome the problem. Dealing with problems based on perspectives from different cultural traditions and philosophies will help us to understand a given problem in the context of a broadened horizon i. e. concepts enriched by dialogue/polylogue between philosophies from different cultural traditions.

In this article I will try to discuss the role of intercultural philosophy in African political thought and practice. I will show the existence of political cultures in African countries that served communities for long periods of time. This debunks the ideas of the thinkers of modernity like G. W. F. Hegel in his *The Philosophy of History* where he talks about the non-existence of the institutions and cultures of politics and culture in Africa. Against this background, I will try to show that the advent of colonialism undermined systems established generations and even centuries ago. In the last part of the article, I will argue that if Africa wants to establish a stable and peaceful political system, it has to revert to an intercultural, dialogical approach that draws on both external, mainly Western and internal, i. e. indigenous political thinking and practice. The diversity in every African country makes it a requirement that different communities engage each other dialogically to tackle their problems with thoughts enriched by their dialogical interactions. Such an approach will enable us to develop philosophies and practices that have been mutually enriched by the encounters between the endogenous and exogenous political cultures.

2. Political Philosophy from an Intercultural Perspective

It is not easy to point out the similarities of political thinking and practice in precolonial Africa. As we know Africa's diversity is astounding: over a thousand languages, a huge geographical diversity, cultures and history that reflect this situation. Hence it is impossible to talk about an African political thinking and practice that was applicable all across the Continent. Nevertheless we could still think of a kind of an overarching thread flowing through the political practice of many African countries.

This can be seen from the testimony of African intellectuals, leaders and elderly people who talk about the mechanisms of political decision making. J. Nyerere, K. Kaunda, and others, in their writings indicated that there was a culture of dialogue and palaver that involved deliberation on matters of great concern which very often led to making decisions and resolving issues through consensus (cited in Wired, 1997). The level at which decision making occurs differs. But nevertheless there was a culture of political decision-making mechanism through consensus. It could be at the village or other levels but people who want to make a decision or resolve an issue sit in a conclave usually under a tree or some similar venue and talked about it until everybody was on board and a decision consensually made.

The effort that this requires is not easy. It is about convincing people in a group despite their number and varied interests to make a decision upon which all could agree. Most importantly reaching a decision requires making compromises. In today's context it is called give and take. One need not be entrenched in one's position. One needs to place oneself in the shoes of others. One also needs to understand that without compromises it is not possible to make peace and solidarity. Additionally the way such an engagement is undertaken also is important. It requires eloquence of speech in such a way that one is able to explain to his interlocutors what could be considered a public/common good.

It will be an exaggeration to say that this was the only sort of political decision-making process that Africa knew. As a manifestation of its astounding diversity we have other mechanisms and institutions. What needs to be underlined is the presence of political cultures, institutions and practices that have a long history.

Africa is the cradle of mankind. Africa also is home to many civilizations that include but not limited to Egypt, Ethiopia, Songhai, Timbuktu, Zimbabwe and many more. It is by forgetting these or setting these aside that the thinkers of the Enlightenment and modernity characterized Africa as a continent without history, culture, civilization, institutions and so on. Such approaches by the likes of I. Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and Lucien Levy-Bruhl (Hegel, 1956; Levy- Bruhl, 1985; Kant, 1974) and many more do not at all show the real nature of Africa. We cannot doubt that such ideas are meant to give justification for the civilizing mission and thereby colonialism.

In order to understand Africa's predicament and why we face so many hurdles with regards to establishing societies in which there is justice, peace, law and order, peaceful transfer of power and happy societies reconciled with themselves, we need to address these issues. There are those who want to blame these on the nature of Africans, the absence of political culture and culture in general. The fact that this is not the case can be shown by the point that the nature of Africans is not different from the nature of other humans not disregarding the differences that emerge as the result of cultural differences. While being the cradle of humankind how can Africa have features and characters that are different from the rest of humankind? Africans have the same worries and concerns that other humans have; Africans put survival and flourishing at the top of their concerns just like other humans on other continents. The absence of political culture – political culture and others included- is not at all an issue in so far as Africa had a whole lot of complex cultures and philosophies that could be useful to humankind. We have to, therefore, look for answers to the enigma at the encounter between Africa and the outside world, how Africa appropriated that and how that went a long way in undermining Africa's cultures and the very being of Africans.

Africa has been uprooted. How can uprooted peoples overcome uprootedness and reestablish themselves on a foundation that enables them to reconcile with themselves and transform on the basis of both what it can reappropriate from the indigenous culture and also appropriate from the cultures and philosophies of humankind?

Africa had and has cultures and values in their various manifestations although some of them have been undermined and forgotten. They guaranteed survival for millennia until Africa's encounter with the West. Now, who is to blame for what happened during the colonial period and its aftermath? Is it the undermining of African values by the West or the inability of Africans to use their values that is responsible for the currently prevailing situation? And did Africa really need to accept European values to grow? It has to be underlined that the encounter did not happen at the request or will of Africans; it was imposed. This is wrong on two counts. First of all it is based on a unilinear understanding of society's evolution that the whole of humanity has to and can develop along the lines followed by the West. Secondly, it has imposed a philosophy and practice on others (Africans) without their consent and desire. It cannot also be warranted that such cultures and philosophies can foster development as they did in the West.

Theodore H. von Laue discusses the points that I raised above. For him European values and institutions are the only ones that are appropriate for development and progress (1987). He refers to their pervasiveness across the globe and laments that Africa lacked development and stability due to its inability to embrace those values and institutions. Instead of asking how these institutions are understood and taken by Africans and their impacts on the indigenous values, he claims that Africa's malaise lies in the inability to embrace those institutions. Here we have to ask, are they the only institutions that enable survival and development? By what scientific measure would we be forced to abandon our values and institutions and accept those that have been built in a different context and then we get blamed when

they don't work? Were they meant to work or to undermine our values and institutions so that once we lose them we become appendages to the West, all our activities become extraverted serving primarily non-Africans?

Von Laue's position is based on the unwarranted assumption that without accepting the values of the West we cannot even survive let alone flourish. He assumed that indigenous values could not harmonize or be replaced with that of the West and this is the cause of Africa's malaise. The question is which rational and philosophical ground makes acceptance of the values of the West necessary? Should Africa be blamed if indigenous philosophies, civilizations, and values clash with Western expansive values and philosophies and the outcome is a disaster? That is what von Laue wants to suggest saying, "Tragic indeed is the record of state building and development through the non-Western world, in the past and in the present; ominous are the prospects for the future" (1987, p. 6).

Von Laue's argument assumes that Western values are coming into a vacuum and wonders why they could not function. It is this assumption that is wrong. They came into an avenue occupied by not only long held values and institutions, but those that sustained the communities for generations. One should see the reluctance, not to say the opposition that the indigenous people show to accept the European values. Nobody denies that Africa had her problems before the advent of colonialism. She had her problems, there were conflicts, wars and other events that any society could have. But she also had institutions with which those could be handled. She had institutions, rules, regulations and mechanisms to resolve conflicts and decide on important matters. There were different forms of government that had long history, elaborate mechanisms both for times of peace and war and many more.

While assessing Africa's postcolonial situation and the kind of problems we need to solve, it is important to take into account those points raised above. To try to solve Africa's problems of justice, governance and equality there are no easy solutions. By recommending the ways of the West (democracy, free market economy, etc.), Africa's problems won't go away. By returning to the source as advocated by A. Cabral and others also and reviving or resuscitating the indigenous ways, Africa's problems cannot be solved. What will probably be working could be a kind of approach that takes into account the magnitude to which Africa has absorbed the ways of the West and also her desire not to leave behind her indigenous ways, be it in the social, economic and political realms. That means that we may be resorting to appropriating ways of the West that could be useful for Africa and reappropriating African ways that could be of utility today. I will go back to this later on. But before that, it is necessary to see a few primordial African systems of governance practiced in African countries before the advent of colonialism to show how they functioned in sustaining African ways of life for many generations.

3. Examples from Precolonial Africa: the Case of Ghana and Uganda

Africa had systems of ruling that operated for a long period of time, but largely interrupted at the centers of power as a result of the encounter with colonialism. What colonialism did was to dislodge the indigenous systems in order to shape the world after its own image. With the assumption that the West had a superior culture, what was done was an onslaught on the indigenous culture, economy and politics decrying them as primitive or archaic. V. Y. Mudimbe expresses the outcome of the encounter with the West playing out at different levels. He wrote,

...it is possible to use three main keys to account for the modulations and methods representative of colonial organization: the procedures of acquiring, distributing, and exploiting lands in the colonies; the policies of domesticating natives; and the manner of managing ancient organizations and implementing new modes of production. Thus three complementary

hypotheses and actions emerge: the domination of the physical space, the reformation of the natives' mind, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective. These complementary projects constitute what might be called the colonizing structure, which completely embraces the physical, human and spiritual aspects of the colonizing structure. (1988, p. 15)

In terms of politics, there were monarchical, democratic and other systems. It is totally wrong to assume that with regards to politics or political order anarchy reigned in Africa, the colonialists pretext to 'civilize' Africa. Each one of the systems mentioned and those that have not been mentioned had elaborate mechanisms of political decision making processes, legislation and the like. It was also wrong to assume that those who ruled Africa before colonialism ruled by sheer force or violence. Like any other system force is an aspect of ruling in Africa as well. But apart from that there were laws, rules, regulations and principles through which ruling was conducted. One such mechanism is the consensual process of political decision making. In places where there were monarchical systems the monarch had his councilors and mechanisms of decision making.

Africa had its own home-grown system of governance that may be termed African primordial system of governance. It is quite logical to assume that such systems grew out of the desire of African societies and had long years of service along with the dynamism that this required. The system of the West which came to Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries or even earlier in some cases clashed with the primordial system. The societies and the rulers, whether they were chiefs or monarchs or whatever were not to blame if the system of the West could not function here as von Laue lamented. That of the West was developed in a totally different context. The kind of affairs it was meant to regulate and its cultural and philosophical underpinnings are different and hence no wonder if it clashes with the indigenous system of ruling. According to H. Lauer,

African primordial systems of governance are non-confrontational, noncompetitive. They have developed since the origin of civilization itself, featuring very good notions of judicial process, third-party arbitration, executive authority by council sanctioned by the impartiality of ancestral power, and consensual decision making fueled by the will to accommodate every view point via compromise rather than the will to dominate via the tyranny of majority opinion. (2007, p. 299)

It is in an arena where there was such an indigenous system, that the system of the West came, assumed that it is operating in a vacuum and then accuses Africans for not being able to embrace a system that the West wants to promote as universal. Those who are in favor of the system, whether Africans or Westerners themselves, are not willing to examine why the system is not working. Worse still they do not want to recognize that the peoples of Africa have an old indigenous system that worked for centuries and do not see any good reason why they should ditch their home-grown system. It is the assumption that the system of the West is coming into a vacuum, facing a politico-social scene that is a *tabula rasa* that is wrong.

In countries that have allegedly adopted the system of the West it is possible to see how the indigenous system functions along with that of the West. We could say that we have two systems operating side by side with each other. In the capital, i. e. around the center we have the system of the West, while at local levels far away from the center the primordial system plays a significant role. The primordial system has a great role in the various activities of communities. The point where we could see that there is a clash is when we see the allegiance of the people with the indigenous system, whether this is chieftaincy, monarchy or whatever. As Lauer stated, "Chieftaincy with which the community remains fixated,

Ghana's *Nana* institutions are not mere figments of nostalgia. The yearlong activities and festivals, weekly court sittings, and daily routines of the royal families are not ceremonial, symbolic vestiges of precolonial heritage. And in this respect, Ghana is not exceptional in the continent" (H. Lauer, 2007, p. 300).

As I will show later on with regards to the *Gadaa* System of the Oromoo of Ethiopia, the indigenous systems play important roles in legislation, the delivery of justice, resolving conflicts, religious rituals and in a whole range of economic, social and political activities. Neither Ghana nor Ethiopia is an exception. We find this in Uganda, and other countries where even if marginalized and decried as pre-logical, traditional and archaic, they are, however, key to their societies' continuity.

The system of the West is not of much significance for the population that is particularly far away from the centers of power. The local people see these so-called modern institutions as unnecessary appendages to the indigenous system. They are stumbling blocks in the path of authentic indigenous governance. Again according to Lauer,

Modern state structures, with their imposed boundaries, imported bureaucratic apparatus, externally distracted loyalties, and preoccupation with greed-motivated dealings of foreign states, are regarded in the collective African experience for longer than half a millennium as unfortunate necessities reflecting the nature of engagements with the outside world. (H. Lauer, 2007, p. 300)

Africa became an arena for the conflict of values, not to say the clash of civilizations, when colonialism started to shape the world in general after its own image. The examples drawn from the experiences of the *Nanas* of Ghana show the loyalty of the people with the indigenous institutions and the primordial system. The system is key to handling the economic, social and political problems of the communities.

The question of how such institutions, values and systems could evolve if not tampered with by Western institutions is only a matter of speculation. But we cannot deny that the Western values/system could not take roots after such a long time. It probably is wrong to assume that it could take roots. As a system that grew on different experiences and values, it is impossible to graft it on a context with totally different values.

The diversity in Africa is obvious. Ghana, Uganda and any other African country display similarities as well as differences. Along with diversity based on history, culture and even geography all of them had systems that functioned in their contexts. These varied systems from the north to the south and east to west did have certain commonalities that could have come about as a result of the interactions existing between them. It is possible to talk of interculturality between societies that are on different continents let alone those on the same continent. However, as much as there are commonalities there are also differences. What are seen in Ghana could be seen in other countries with some variations. But there are also other communities with big differences. It is important here to note that it is impossible to enumerate the kind of political systems in precolonial Africa in this short paper. Along with its diversity in culture, history and even geography, it is possible to assume that many societies have systems of government suitable to their situation and regulated economic, social and political matters.

That is why it is wrong to assume that Africa before the advent of colonialism was a white paper as far as systems of government, education and others were concerned and on this basis assume that the colonial powers could establish new systems of ruling, education, etc. or bring a system to where none existed. Moreover, those systems had mechanisms by which to regulate matters that are germane to the

specific activities. Africa was not a scene of chaos with regards to governance before colonialism. There were systems that functioned on the basis of consensus, counseling, deliberation, and so on.

Examples of consensual political decision making process and governance are to be found in many countries in Africa. The Ganda society in Uganda practiced an elaborate consensus based system of ruling. In fact the kind of system was monarchical. However, it was a monarchy that did not rule arbitrarily at the will of the monarch. That is what E. Wamala wrote regarding the Buganda society.

As a rule, the traditional consensus system worked well. It was a monarchical system of a limited rather than an absolute sort. The monarch ruled through a council of heads of clans, and there were heads, subheads, and chiefs at the various levels of society. In any debate the aim was to reach consensus. Consensus was thus central to the operation of democracy in Buganda society and, in deed in many African societies. (2004, p. 440)

Wamala's statements show us a number of points as regards indigenous governance in Africa. Africa had an institution that survived even the onslaught of colonialism after the introduction of European based governance system. As indicated in H. Lauer's article cited above the indigenous institutions function far away from the center and their significance for people's daily lives, the delivery of justice and similar activities germane to governance are indispensable. They also indicate that counter to many colonial narratives about Africa, what they show is the existence of institutions, rules, principles and procedures and therefore that those who ruled Africa prior to colonialism ruled neither arbitrarily, nor by sheer force/violence.

Dependence on heads and subheads of clans, etc. indicate that counseling is very much part of the ruling process. Authority is divided among different sections of the society rather than being concentrated at the center. In fact one can claim that the assumption that government is best when it is done with the consent of all is firmly rooted in African systems of government. Both written and oral sources, attest to the fact that consensus and counseling are very much part of African precolonial and postcolonial political culture. Such a practice was anchored in the culture based on the sort of epistemology espoused by many Africans/African communities. As Wamala said, "The dedication to consensus seems to have been rooted in the firm epistemological belief that knowledge is ultimately dialogical or social and in the ethical belief in the collective responsibility of all for the welfare of the community" (2004, p. 437).

The above are just a couple of examples of institutions and mechanisms of governance in Africa. A more extensive study of the issue could deliver a variety of systems developed in specific contexts. Before ending this section I want to point out how the Zulu king conducted the affairs of his government. Writing in 1940, M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard described how the Zulu king ruled. They wrote,

The Zulu believed that the welfare of the country depended on the king's having wise and strong councilors ready to criticize the king. In council the king (or chief) was supposed to put the matter under discussion before the council and he himself speak last so that no one would be afraid to express his own opinion. The king might inform his close councilors of his views and they could put these to the council. ...the king ended the discussion, if he were wise, adopted the view of the majority. (1940, p. 33).

4. The Gadaa System

The *Gadaa* system practiced by the Oromoo people of Ethiopia is another good example of how indigenous governance in Africa functioned. The *Gadaa* system had a long history spanning centuries while others even claim that it functioned for over a millennia. Although telling the exact date of origin

of the *Gadaa* System is difficult at this point in time, the fact that it is multiple centuries old is incontestable. Its difference with that of monarchs and chiefs is that it is a democracy where office can be held only through elections. Dinsa Lepisa (1975) compares the *Gadaa* system to Plato's Republic claiming that the *Gadaa* system had a scheme similar to Plato's where leaders pass through different phases of training before they assume leadership at age forty.

The *Gadaa* system is part and parcel of the philosophy/world-view of the Oromoo people. The Oromoo have a holistic philosophy where their ontological and metaphysical conceptions determine their moral and political understandings (Baisa, 1944; Megerssa and Kassam, 2019; Verharen, 2019). The holistic philosophy has conceptions about a God created reality where everything has a place in an ordered universe. The ordered reality is governed by the moral code called *safuu*. The moral code understands natural and man-made laws that give everything its proper place. The order should be maintained lest its violation would disturb the moral code or the Godly order.

Now I will discuss the *Gadaa* system showing its role in political activity. According to A. Legesse who dedicated a good part of his life studying the *Gadaa* system, "The *Gadaa* system is a system of classes (*luba*) that succeeded each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political and ritual responsibilities. Each *Gadaa* class remains in power during a specific term (*Gadaa*) which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony" (1973, p. 8).

The *Gadaa* system is a complex one that divides male members of the community into five *Gadaa* grades. The five *Gadaa* grades are known as *Itti Makoo* or *Ilma Galmee*, *Dabballee*, *Foollee* or *Kuusaa*, *Qondaalaa* or *Raabaa* and finally *Lubaa*. While the grades basically are five they may be known with slightly different names in the different parts of Oromoo land aka Oromia in Ethiopia (Legesse, 1973).

Each one of the grades passes through different activities performing the tasks designated for its generation and training and preparing for the tasks ahead, i. e that of the next generation set. The age of the generational group is a social age, rather than a biological one. Children in the age category between 1 and 8 years of age constitute the *Itti Makoo* grade and pass through this age learning and doing what is appropriate for the generational group. Upon reaching the final age of the group they transition into the next group through an initiation ceremony and once they enter into that category the learning and performing of the group's activity commences. In this way every generational group learns tasks that are meant for their generation and also perform the tasks meant for the generational group. Every generational group internalizes skills and knowledge meant for the group while performing the duties of the group.

Scholars who studied the *Gadaa* system, both local and international have given testimonies as to the nature of the system. Just to mention a few of them, H. Lewis wrote, "...the basic element of the system are "republican" in nature. These include: (1) *Elected officials* who have (2) *Specific functions* (as chair of the assembly, war leader, "assessor", ritual leader, proclaimer of the laws, etc. (3) Hold "power" during a *specific limited term of office* – but are subject to recall if necessary (4) The Officers are expected to lead, but are dependent on the *will of the assembly*" (1994: 54) emphasis in the original. According to Donald Levine, the "*Gadaa* system represents one of the most complex systems of social organization ever devised by the human imagination" (1974, pp. 131-132). It is possible to come across similar descriptions of the *Gadaa* system in the works of philosophers, anthropologists, political scientists, etc. that have studied it. I need not venture into the detailed explanation of this system. For the purpose of this paper, what I would like to underline is the existence of an elaborate, comprehensive democratic system in Africa that was undermined by the southward expansion of the Abyssinian hierarchical system. Secondly, I want to only mention some of the rules and practices that show how it

functioned by citing some of its salient features. In this regard worth mentioning would be the fact that it is an egalitarian system that established mechanisms for peaceful transfer of power from one class to another. In the law making process it involves the direct participation of male members of the community, while guaranteeing the distribution of power across generations and communities as well. Moreover, it has the institutions that are essential for peace building and social cohesion and integration.

In his book published in the year 2006, titled “*Oromoo Democracy: an Indigenous African Political System*”, Legesse enumerates the set of laws that could be considered as the pillars of Oromoo democracy and which are also subject to reviews and revision when the *Gadaa* council meets every eight years at *Gumi Gayyoo* in *Boranaa*, the cradle land of the *Gadaa* system in Oromia, i. e. Southern Ethiopia.

From among the eighteen laws that he enumerated, I just want to mention ten of them to give a flavor of what they look like for my readers. The laws are:

- 1) The laws that stand above all men;
- 2) Supreme authority of the General assembly;
- 3) Government by councils and assembly: seniority and equality;
- 4) Limitation of office to a single term;
- 5) A period of testing: time gap between election and investiture;
- 6) Use of history as precedent and ethical guide;
- 7) The principle of staggered succession;
- 8) The problem of discontinuity of authority;
- 9) The principle of balanced opposition; and
- 10) Distribution of power across generations. (2006, p. 200)

These are part of the laws of Oromoo democracy that avoid arbitrariness and guarantee the rule of law. In elaborating the first law, Legesse said, “Most importantly, the Oromo idea of the rule of law is reflected in the notion that those who govern the people must also be judged by the same laws they are empowered to enforce. In other words, there are no leaders whose position is so exalted that they stand above the law” (Legesse, 2006, p. 200).

In elaborating on how meetings are conducted at the *Gumi Gayyoo* where the laws are made and/or revised, Legesse explains the manner in which the discussion is carried out as follows:

...there is no concept of “majority” that can impose its will on a “minority”. Debate must be continued until the councilors come to agreement. That does not mean, however, that their debates are endless. There are effective methods of pressuring the participants to refrain from adversarial talk for its own sake. Indeed the participants in *Gumi Gayyoo* are reminded that clever disputation has no place in the meetings. Nor should people attempt to pull rank or resort to self-praise (Legesse, 2006, p. 212).

What we find in the *Gadaa* system is something important developed by a people based on their needs, history and requirements of the environment in which they live. In fact thinkers of modernity who wrote about the absence of institutions, laws and the like have done this in total ignorance of what the people of Africa had. The ‘civilizing mission’ was based on this totally an uninformed approach to African communities. In places where they said there were no institutions or philosophies or mechanisms to regulate different activities, there were actually comprehensive systems like the *Gadaa* system whose value cannot be undermined even today. The end result of such an approach was the imposition of an alien system that is facing challenges due to the clash of values and the lack of direction for African countries after several decades of independence.

5. Whither African Politics?

Africans themselves are part of this drama when they totally disregarded the endogenous systems and were convinced that there is only one way, the Western way. This is costing Africa a lot. Due to the inability of Africans to embrace the Western system because of a clash of values and because of our reluctance to return to the source, Africa is paying a price in the form dysfunctional systems, conflicts of all kinds, apathy and pessimism. When I say this I am not advocating an isolationist approach to politics and or political philosophy. It was wrong to deny one's own system and try to embrace a philosophy based on an un-African experience. It was also wrong to assume that ours is archaic and that we tried to embrace and promote that of the West. We should not forget that Western democracy had its origins in ancient Greece. The Europeans appropriated it in such a way that it could serve them two thousand years after its inception. We could not do the same. We threw away our systems that evolved and grew based on African epistemologies and experiences. We were looking for something that probably could not work for us unless we appropriate it in such a way that it does not undermine our values. We could have looked for an intercultural approach to the issue where our values and philosophies could be used along with Western values in the spirit of enriching each other. That could probably save us from uprootedness while at the same time enabling us to borrow where we may not be able to use our resources. I am apt to say that adapting an intercultural way could be the benefit for all of us with the conviction that this is the proper way to evolve universal values, philosophies, practices, etc.

It is reasonable to argue that precolonial Africa had its institutions and systems of government. The advent of colonialism put a brake on the indigenous systems. A European expansionist system that looked down on non-European indigenous systems was planted. That system could not take roots in Africa for various reasons, chief among which is the inability of Africans to accept it in view of its being alien to the indigenous culture. The cases of Ghana, the Oromoo in Ethiopia and Uganda briefly discussed, show that although decried as backward and antiquarian they had a considerable role, particularly in areas that are far away from the centers.

Today there seems to be a conviction among many scholars on African issues that the way forward is following the Western model. By looking at what is going on around the world and particularly in Africa we can be witnesses to this. Even in the academic discussions Wiredu's plea for a non-party polity based on consensual democracy largely failed on deaf ears. Those like the late E. C. Eze wrote an article countering Wiredu's proposal in the same volume in which Wiredu's article came out (1997). With the trials and tribulations of democracy and particularly Africa's enigmatic present we need to make a soul-searching undertaking as to why we could not embrace Western democracy. The inability to embrace it should not force us to throw it altogether and return to the source alone. Being an advocate of return to the source as stipulated by A. Cabral, I want to argue that we have to look for an intercultural and intracultural approach to politics. Our political philosophy can adapt an intercultural compass with the hope that it will enable us to use the resources of the West, the indigenous systems and other systems that may be available from the East and elsewhere.

When Wimmer called for an intercultural approach to the philosophy of history, he was convinced that the so-called history of philosophy was one-sided so long as it was based on the experiences of the West alone. The need for a history of philosophy that could possibly reflect the history of philosophy of humankind was the motivation that enabled him to undertake an intercultural approach to the history of philosophy. It was a critique of a definite type of ethnocentrism that set intercultural philosophy in motion and that with justifiable reasons. Ethnocentric Eurocentrism could try to expand to which ever corners of the world, but what it has been able to achieve could not bring justice, peace and development.

The intercultural approach to philosophy and politics can be justified on the grounds that both the West and the Rest have known each other for a long period of time that it is not possible to ignore each other or not plausible to adapt only one of them particularly when looked at from an African point of view. The interconnectedness of the world today also calls for this. What probably could explain Africa's predicament not to say stagnation is that the elites are trying to enforce a definite philosophy upon Africa at the expense of the indigenous philosophies and systems. The understanding of the situation in which we are, should have already forced us to ask questions like why are not our attempts at democratization not bearing fruits? Can't we see problems when the elites as well as the people are unable to internalize Western democracy and its values? The question should have been, could we ever internalize it throwing away philosophies and practices that are indigenous and served for generations?

What I am suggesting is the adapting of an intercultural approach to politics and governance in Africa. By this I mean that in view of the longstanding contact between Africa and the West we have already learnt a lot from the West and have internalized Western philosophies. On the other hand we are entrenched in our culture in its various senses. Our ideas of governance, right and wrong, good and bad are ideas that we cannot throw away at will. It was K. Marx who once said, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered given and transmitted from the past" (398). Our existential situation hence calls for an intercultural approach. Before I proceed with that, I would like to briefly elaborate on the notion of intercultural philosophy, thereby showing its necessity.

Intercultural philosophy is not about introducing new concepts and themes into philosophy. Rather, in view of the diversity of cultural and philosophical traditions, it is about looking at different philosophical perspectives and world-views critically and give them the chance to engage with other perspectives to foster understanding and the search for truth that could be considered universal or better still pluriversal. It is about the right way of dealing with the difference between monocultural universalism and multicultural particularism. Monocultural universalism is a spurious universalism. Multicultural particularism needs to be bridged with other perspectives through dialogue or more appropriately polylogue. Describing intercultural philosophy, R. A. Mall said,

In its positive import, intercultural philosophy is the name of a philosophical conviction, attitude and insight. No philosophy is *the* philosophy, and no culture is *the* culture. Such an insight accompanies all of the different philosophies and cultures and prevents them from absolutizing themselves. Interculturality of philosophy thus resides in different cultures, but it also transcends their narrow limits. ...it does not unnecessarily give privileged treatment to any philosophy, culture or religion. It also rejects the idea of a mere hierarchical gradation of cultures and philosophies. (2000, p. 5-6).

Involving an intercultural approach to politics both at the theoretical and practical levels serves a better purpose to understand and practice politics by designing appropriate policies that help to formulate realistic theses on how politics should be conducted. As Wimmer wrote, "There are good reasons to hold that philosophy today and in the future will have serious shortcomings if it continues to discuss global issues only within the framework of concepts and methods derived from Occidental lore" (2002, p. 8).

An important aspect of intercultural philosophy is the epistemological modesty underpinning its approach not only to philosophy, but also religion, pedagogy, politics and so on. The epistemological modesty indicates that nobody or no cultural tradition holds monopoly on whatever field of knowledge. In politics the idea of the multiparty system in democracies, for instance, is based on the assumption that political wisdom does not exclusively lie with the party guided by liberal, communitarian and whatever

philosophy or ideology. There are elements of political wisdom in the different philosophies through which parties try to articulate societal interests and desires. It is plausible to assume that the same holds true for pedagogies, religions and so on. One system of pedagogy alone does not exhaust all the right principles and substances to properly educate young persons.

Hence epistemological modesty is seen in the way intercultural philosophy tries to handle philosophical issues. It requires involving different philosophies with specific cultural backgrounds to understand problems of politics, economics, education, morals and so on. Philosophies crafted on the basis of experiences that are very far away from us may not help us a lot, although it does not mean that they are of no use. There are conceptions and principles that could probably help in shedding light on many issues. On the other hand the indigenous cultures and philosophies of Africa that have had roles over centuries if not millennia are indispensable both theoretically and practically in view of the fact that they are based on the experiences of Africa and helped African peoples survive and flourish until they were decried primitive for no rational or philosophical reasons.

From the indigenous/primordial systems I may return to the *Gadaa* system of the Oromoo of Ethiopia once again by way of recapitulation. The *Gadaa* system's insight and farsightedness is demonstrated in the principles enshrined in it and are implemented in the political processes and practices. It was looking at those that Legesse said, "Oromo democracy is one of those remarkable creatures of the human mind that developed into an indigenous political system as a result of five centuries of evolution and deliberate, rational, legislative transformation. It contains genuinely African solutions for some of the problems that democracies everywhere have had to face" (2006, p. 195).

In the first place if we have such a system, is it necessary for us to look elsewhere for ideas without testing these ones? Isn't it necessary for politicians in Ethiopia and beyond to look into such philosophy/system when they try to establish or reform the political system? It is here that I want to involve the idea of interculturality that can use Western ideas of democracy and the *Gadaa* democracy or other consensual democracy dispensations since their dialogical/polylogical encounters can appropriate the best in all of them and give us a system/mechanism that will probably put us on the path of justice, peace and development. Their dialogical encounter will create a condition for mutual/reciprocal enrichment for people who are really concerned about establishing a system that can work locally, nationally and even regionally or globally. That is the spirit of interculturality. That is also the idea of advancing enlightenment through other means advocated by Wimmer. Instead of monologue, instead of a system based on limited experience and one culture it will be better to look into systems that can show us how it is understood and also done in different contexts. In such a situation there will definitely be something that those from place x can learn from those in place y and vice versa. A view of democracy, morality, pedagogy, political understanding and practice, environmental protection, conflict resolution and justice enriched by ideas and practices from different cultural backgrounds/interculturally could represent the universal/pluriversal meaning of the said concepts and serve humankind better.

The approach to politics/political philosophy in this way is in line with Wimmer's understanding of the continuation of the Enlightenment by other means. The Enlightenment had as one of its main goals the act of relying on reason to tackle social, political and other problems. The Enlightenment is about the overriding role of reason in the pursuit of freedom. When Kant characterized the Enlightenment as "man's release from self-incurred tutelage", the point is, if we ascertain our autonomy and have the courage to use reason and decide what is appropriate for us instead of some authority, then that would be the triumph of freedom and hence enlightenment. While this is good, the way reason is understood by Kant at that particular time and place may not have the kind of universality that Kant thought about. This

is the case owing to the historicity and embeddedness of reason. The assumption that Eurocentric reason is panacea for the whole of humankind is a point that is not tenable. In fact as R. A. Deacon said, "...it seems somewhat pervert that Western philosophy has spent millennia elaborating upon the universality and necessity of what effectively was no more than a particular, contingent and culturally specific Hellenism" (2003, pp. 38-39).

That is why it is impossible to talk about an overarching reason that can apply everywhere, while recognizing reason's ability to understand problems in specific contexts. At the same time it is necessary that interculturality creates avenues for contextualized reason/s to enter into dialogue enlighten and enrich one another and seek solutions for human problems from such a perspective enriched through different experiences and epistemologies. Hence in view of reason's embeddedness (*Seinsgebundenheit*) the more appropriate way has to be the intercultural approach that is able to formulate positions and/or theses not only on the basis of "occidental lore" alone as Wimmer said but that takes into account different perspectives. The continuation of enlightenment by other means could be understood as the pursuit of freedom, truth, justice, etc. in the global context depending on an intercultural approach developed through dialogue/polylogue between different philosophical and cultural perspectives.

It is possible to think of how this can work out in today's situation. Regarding political ideas and practices, I tried to indicate the existence of different political philosophies in Africa that have been undermined or sidelined for no justifiable reasons. But on the other hand there are the kind of hurdles we come across not being able to move forward in establishing systems that enable citizens to take their destiny into their own hands. The aspiration for justice, equality and democracy remains at the level of mere wish particularly in African countries, although there are many problems in other parts of the world including the ones that have been developed.

It could have been enlightenment if we are to overcome those problems. In the case of Africa instead of looking at an exclusively Western style of democracy or an indigenous African primordial system like the *Gadaa* system of the Oromoo or some other consensual indigenous system, it is possible to look for components of all that could be overlapping. Moreover, is it also not possible to find elements in all that could help overcome shortcomings or problems in the other? Definitely, a polylogue among those systems regarding political problems will have an enriching effect on every one or some of them. It will give representatives of all perspectives new elements that are outside of their own system. It is possible that such perspectives are enriching and/or enlightening. I can argue that this constitutes one form of continuing the enlightenment by other means.

This can also be considered from the perspective of other issues. Questions of morality and ethics, environmental problems, global warming, global justice and terrorism, for example, can be approached in the way that I am suggesting now.

There are different approaches to environmental ethics. It can be approached from a perspective that is monotheistic and treats the environment from a teleological perspective of treating nature as an object of utility without much concern about what will happen to it after some generations. The way in which the administration of Donald Trump withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord shows the kind of conception that people like him have about the environment. On the other hand there are cultures in many parts of the world that consider human beings as part and parcel of nature and recommend living in harmony with nature rather than exploiting it without concern for future generations. Such an understanding of nature enables not exploiting nature as a mere object of utility, but as an integral part of the environment that sustains life and that we need to take care of to guarantee human survival and flourishing. Such cultures are many. A polylogical encounter between cultures with such varied and at times contradictory

conceptions about the values of nature/the environment could provide useful lessons for those engaging in dialogue about those issues. Some of the conceptions in cultures that are alien to us could really be enlightening pointing to things that we have never thought of in our setting or culture. Couldn't this be continuing the enlightenment by other means?

6. Conclusion

I made an attempt to understand political cultures, systems and practices in precolonial Africa where indigenous, largely deliberative and consensual systems of political decision making prevailed. The advent of colonialism pushed such thoughts and practices from the scene with the assumption that colonialism along with its "civilizing mission" has brought a "superior culture" that every country has to emulate. Such an approach was based on the unwarranted assumption that Africa did not have political culture and institutions. After discussing, by way of examples, a few political cultures of precolonial Africa that have also survived the onslaught of colonialism, I have tried to argue that if Africa wants to have a genuine and emancipatory political thinking and practice, it has to be an intercultural one that could dialogically/polylogically bring together appropriate ideas from outside and also revive the indigenous political culture which was mainly based on deliberation, counseling and building consensus.

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