BOOK REVEW

Philosophical Foundations of the African Humanities through Postcolonial Perspectives

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Dannabang Kuwabong
Professor

English Department
University of Puerto Rico, San Juan.
Email: dannabang.kuwabong@upr.edu

Philosophical Foundations of the African Humanities through Postcolonial Perspectives, edited by Helen Yitah and Helen Lauer of the University of Ghana is one more excellent scholarly collection of essays from well-established and internationally acclaimed scholars in their respective fields. The book follows in the footsteps of the impressive 2012 publication*, Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities through African Perspectives*, vols I & II, edited by Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho. This collection, in addition to the 2012 collections, makes me believe that at long last, our universities are creating new scholarly foundations that will enable scholars in Ghana to take control of their own scholarship, rather than continuing to depend on materials that are published outside the reach of Ghanaian academics and students. So let me offer my thanks to the editors upfront for the great work this book is, and how important it will be for those Ghanaians outside who want to read works produced by scholars in Ghana. It demonstrates that the vision of the editors and authors of these essays to device ways in which to argue for the decolonization of the humanities in African universities is bearing fruit.

I am particularly happy that the essays are transgenerational and transdisciplinary positions on better ways of addressing the study of the humanities in African universities. The interlacing of multiple areas and perspectives on decolonizing and recuperating African voices in the humanities, be it in challenging reading habits in literature, literary theory, the problems of neocolonialism, structural weakness in research funding and knowledge dissemination, the deceptions of neo-liberal capitalism, research methodologies, cultural disarticulation, language studies,

performance arts, spirituality, art, healing practices, music, dance, and theory inter alia makes reading the book exciting. One is never bored. Moreover, though this is a collection of essays by academic heavy weights, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, J. H. Kwabena Nketia, Kwasi Wiredu, M. E. Kropp Dakubu, Helen Lauer, Gordon S. K. Adika, John Collins, Alexis B. Tengan, Francis Nii-Yartey, Olúfémi Táíwò, Abena Oduro, James Gibbs, and Bernth Lindfors, the essays are easy to read and digest. Their readability does not mean the absence of serious scholarship nor rigorous research. Even the last essays, which are celebratory remembrances of some of the contributors, are so well written they read like short academic biographies, and contribute to the overall excellence of the book.

What then is *Philosophical Foundations of the African Humanities through Postcolonial Perspectives* all about? What is its contribution to the growing collection of books that I believe are consolidating African based contributions to the humanities and housed in African universities? The introductory essay, "Introduction: Mediating a Hapless Postcolonialism through Experiential Critique," by Helen Yitah, brilliantly brings together the main arguments, strategic debates, and liberatory maneuvers posited by the authors to define what African scholars need to do to achieve an Africanized and African-centred humanities programs. A better introduction could not have been written. Yitah undertakes incisive reflections of these complex essays and translates them into readable summaries that make the reading of the essays better appreciated. Additionally, I find the arrangement of the essays very apt. Making the transcribed theoretical conversation between Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and doctoral students titled "Philosophical Foundations of the Humanities" as the opening chapter, is ingenious. The dialogue with the students at least tangentially touches on almost all the issues raised by the subsequent essays. Her conversation takes on the title of the book and questions whether philosophy can ever play the role of being the foundation of the humanities. She rejects position such as onto-phenomenological positions which humanities scholars are not competent to handle. Likewise, her position argues against any pretense to the idea of universality in the humanities. Here she raises the specters of gendered, racialized, and ethnocentric learning praxes that can turn into "unexamined culturalism" and the dangers of cultural nationalism through which marginal voices and identities are subsumed under the illusion of universality and linguistic neutrality in order to silence difference. She calls for academics in postcolonial or neocolonial academic institutions not to be sucked in by false dichotomies nor remain passive recipients of knowledge transmission, but to engage in emerging/emergent resistance to counter the psychological mechanism used by neo-imperialism.

Awoonor's piece, "The Humanities and the Postcolonial Ghanaian Experience: The Jubilee Year" probably written a few years earlier at Ghana's golden jubilee year after the establishment of the Institute of African Studies, by Kwame Nkrumah, touches on pioneer Ghanaian political thinkers such as Casely-Hayford and Kobena Sekyi. He contrasts the two thinkers and gives a brief review of their creative work. In this review, he seems to list J. Casely-Hayford among the cultural nationalists, who advocated indirect rule, and Sekyi his opposite. Awoonor also rejects the concept of the universality of knowledge or of knowing, and challenges the institutions in Ghana to open up to new frontiers of learning. His position is based on the failures of the Institute of African Studies set up by Kwame Nkrumah in 1965 to live up to its mandate. Helen Lauer in "Beyond the Labor Market: Reinforcing the Epistemic Advantage of African Universities in the Global Knowledge Society," picks up where both Spivak and Awoonor leave off, to articulate the need for the equitable diversification of knowledge, especially in the age of digitization and artificial intelligence, compounded by neo-liberal economics that controls project funding which often leaves out scholars in African institutions. Thus, a point she raises which is pertinent to this book's central focus is how to break away from the paralysis caused by what she calls the mechanistic capitalism that acts as a gatekeeper to knowledge. Arguing for a multidirectional flow of knowledge which the richer nations in the West are unwilling to practice, which turns African academics to be mere research assistants or raw material reserves to well-funded researchers from the academies in the West, she challenges local researchers also to be more inclusive in their research areas in Ghana. One factor she claims as hampering research in Ghana also is the type of culturalism that Spivak speaks against, which hierarchizes research locations and communities while silencing others in Ghana. She gives examples of healing cultures among the Dagaaba and Ga for example that are never investigated by senior Ghanaian researchers as they perpetuate what Spivak labels as unexamined cultural nationalism.

Lauer's call for a rejection of Western notions of science especially in the study of African-based knowledge systems engaged in healing practices, is taken up later by Alexis B. Tengan in "Scientific Decolonization and Language Use in the Study of African Medicine, Religion, and Art." Tengan, like Awoonor, Nketia, and Wiredu, laments the distorted views of everything African pertaining to religion, healing, etc. Though he spends a lot of energy tracing the history of the conversion of the Dagara to Christianity, he also maintains that this conversion has not eroded the worldview of the Dagara, and hence their strong pre-Christian cosmological worldview enables them, as Wiredu in his piece testifies about the Akan, to approbate certain Western Judeo-Christian ideologies and enculturated

them into their society. Tengan's focus, however, is not about the spirituality of the Dagara but about how their spirituality guides them in the direction of crafting strategies toward holistic healing practices. He details briefly how the Dagara house has sacred spots for different divinities, and where religious artifacts are kept. Wiredu's piece, "The Humanities and the Idea of National Identity," takes Akan spirituality studies as an approach to craft, defines and defends what he believes is the Akan philosophy of human identity and existence. His position is analogous to Tengan's as they both reveal and debate the complicated nature of understanding the African human person through Euro-Judeo-Christianity and scientifics alone, while abrogating and negating African concepts of their universe, human relations, morality, God, and how these differentiate and influence their politics and cultures. Wiredu's and Tengan's positions, in conjunction with Nii-Yartey's "Contemporary Ghanaian Dance: A Basis for Scholarly Investigation of the Human Condition," and Collins' "Ghanaian Neo-traditional Performance and 'Development': Multiple Interfaces between Rural and Urban, Traditional and Modern," cover the methodological paradigms suggested by Nketia in "The Formulation of Research in the Humanities: Perspectives from the Creative Arts," as they approach their studies through anthropology, philosophy, healing science, and cultural performances.

These others present their studies as cognitive representations of what is available, and can be recuperated, though not as pristine cultural artifacts, but as evolving, developing, and changing modes of behavior while remaining true to their cultural worlds. Nketia's contribution showcases individuals whose roles in appropriating, extending, and contemporizing their Ghanaian music traditions to make them relevant to modern Ghana, while inserting them in global cultural poetics. Indubitably, Nketia exhorts contemporary Ghanaian humanities researchers to engage critical and cognitive experiential research methodologies that are transdisciplinary, to make their work relevant, as against the current system of seeing culture as abstract objects for research. Collins' essay proves that even if academics continue to exacerbate the problem of what Lauer labels epistemic injustice which stifles the multi-directional exchange of ideas, non-academic Ghanaian communities seem to be living these ideologies of shared experiences which humanities scholars need to recognize and tap into, rather than the present system in which researchers cocoon themselves in their disciplines, create hegemonies of knowledge, and paralyze new voices that seem to transgress these borders of knowledge.

Interestingly, in "Kofi Awoonor: The Essays of a Humanist," Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò reveals how African humanities scholars have often failed to critically engage the work of thinkers such as Awoonor, even if such an enterprise is necessary.

His position is that Awoonor as an essayist, philosopher, literary critic, cultural activist, poet and novelist has demonstrated his plural-disciplinarity of ideas as a Ghanaian/African(ist) humanist which this volume advocates and showcases. Táíwò then proceeds to give the reader a sampling of the extraordinary contribution of Awoonor to the humanities in Africa. He details some of the great thinkers of the twentieth century starting with Kwame Nkrumah through José Marti, Léopold Sédar Senghor, W. E. B DuBois, George Padmore, and other African descendants in diaspora, for whose differing ideologies and positions Awoonor was able to find linkages and compromises toward crafting consensual positions for the liberation of African identities locked up in the control rooms of Western epistemologies and politics of separation. Táíwò elevates Awoonor's philosophy, which covers other writers whose literary works often hold similar views about their communities as his own, such as Allen Ginsberg, Norman Mailer and Nikki Giovanni. In all his work, Táíwò argues that Awoonor was in search of a rhetoric of peace, selfhood, and cohabitation of all peoples, not revenge poetics.

Abena Oduro's "Sell, Borrow, Work or Migrate? Exploring the Choice of Coping Strategies in Ghana," explores qualitative research methodology to explore types of coping strategies employed by Ghanaians in times of financial difficulties where there is little or no state intervention to bail out the individual. Oduro's research is important, first, for its coverage area of six districts in six regions across Ghana, and second, for its arrival at the qualitative evaluation of data through quantitative selection process of respondents. The strategy of leaving open the potential of replacing target respondents in each location created a flexibility in methodology that often seemed difficult for researchers who resist modifications to their research methods. Reviewing the types of shocks that generated individual coping mechanisms, Oduro's essay reveals the spirit and culture of resilience and independence exhibited by the respondents who represent a cross-section of Ghanaians. The evidence from the research contests economic anthropologists who often present the ordinary Ghanaian as lacking in industry and self-help projects, the role of the extended family and sociocultural groups, and visiting conjugal relationships, in the life of the individual, as hinted by Wiredu and Tengan. Nonetheless, Oduro's speculation that the absence of a stronger governmental spousal and child support system, the limited educational qualification of most of the respondents except one, and the threats of natural and ecological disasters, all tend to weaken these coping mechanisms.

Adika in "Credibility and Accountability in Academic Discourse: Increasing the Awareness of Ghanaian Graduate Students," tackles an issue close to my heart as teacher of graduate students at my university. The problem, he laments, is

equally shared by professors in the humanities at the University of Puerto Rico. His critique of structural and pedagogical weaknesses in the teaching of academic writing to graduate students is well argued. As a professor at the Language Center of the University of Ghana, his frustration with the inability of graduate students to effectively communicate their research data in their essays, theses, and dissertations, indicates an area in academia that calls for redress. Adika takes issue with multiple factors that exacerbate the problem: students' lackadaisical attitude to academic writing, the dictatorial attitudes of professors who do not encourage what Spivak in her piece calls collaborative learning, overcrowded classrooms that undermine one on one tutoring, thus creating a situation in which professors tend to focus more on grammatical correctness and narrative structures, rather than on the internal dynamics that make academic writing a discipline of its own. Implicitly, Adika considers that universities in Ghana need to develop better tools to tackle the problem of academic writing among graduate students to make them globally competitive.

Dako's "About the English Language in Ghana Today and about Ghanaian English and Languaging in Ghana," takes up the challenge of teaching English in Ghana offered by postcolonial debates on colonial language usages in former colonies such as Ghana. Her study is not so much a lamentation as it is an argument for recognition of English in Ghana as different and Ghanaian. Thus she identifies Ghanaian English (GhaE) not as a foreign language anymore, but as a second language with its own characteristics, something she showcases in her 2004 book, *Ghanaianism: A Glossary*. She discusses several variables from code-switching, pronunciation, accent, pidginization, and more recently locally acquired foreign accents that have added to the repertoire of accents in the Ghanaian use of English. Her essay is one of the most technical in the field and challenges those who insist on a purist approach to English language teaching, learning and usage in Ghana. But if Dako's position reveals the complications of English in Ghana, Dakubu's "Polylectal Description: Reflections on Experience in Ghana," extends the language debate to cover four Ghanaian languages. Reflecting on her own struggles with facilitating the learning of four related but distinct languages such as Ga, Dangme, Dagaare and Farefari, and having to deal with issues of monodialectal, multidialectal and idiolectal translation and transcription differences and the politicization of language policies in Ghana. Her essay is a critical piece that puts in center stage, the problem of language policy in Ghanaian schools, in which dialects are selected for political reasons which resonate with cultural and numerical hegemony. Though she does not proffer any mono solution, her arguments bend toward crafting language policies such that even as they try to standardize Ghanaian languages in writing,

must also be democratic enough to allow for multidialectal pedagogies. Though not a linguist, I as a Dagao understand her despair as a linguist dealing with Dagaare, a language that I often refer to as the creole language of modern Ghana. Thus, Dakubu's prescription for a multidialectal mechanism toward attempting some standardization of these languages challenges scholars in the humanities in Africa not to try to design a monolingual approach to the study of the humanities, to avoid hierarchization of disciplines, and to try to establish negotiating terrains that are conscious of other voices and positions that, as Wiredu puts it, are cognitive, normative, and decisional consensuses.

The appendix contains personal reflections of praise by James Gibbs for Francis Nii-Yartey, Bernth Lindfors for Kofi Awoonor, and Helen Lauer for Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu, who all passed away before the book could be published. I wish to dedicate my review to J. K. Nketia who also passed away while the manuscript was at the press, and hence a dedication review could not be written for him to showcase his great and immeasurable contribution to the study of African music. Finally, I would like to commend the essayists and editors for a job well done. The essays reflect what Nii-Yartey in a subsection of his piece calls a dance of unity in diversity toward creating humanities programs as sites of identity, behavioral formation, interchange of ideas, democratic politics and emergent cultural, academic, and intellectual activism, the dismantling of uneducated culturalism and cultural nationalism, etc. Indeed, the essays show that in the humanities, it is possible to engage in democratic learning in which there is epistemic justice and equity in knowledge interchange. Indeed, *Philosophical Foundations of the African Humanities through Postcolonial Perspectives* should be required reading for graduate students in all departments of African Studies, and in libraries focused on research in African studies. The essays give hope that all is not lost and that there is a future for the humanities in African academies. The transnational composition of the scholars also testifies to how humanistic scholarship should be done. The collection reminds me of a weeklong workshop I attended in Quarzazate, Morocco in 2018 organized by linguists from the University of Cologne, Germany titled "Hospitable Linguistics." *Philosophical Foundations of the African Humanities through Postcolonial Perspectives* is a representation of hospitable humanities. A must read.