EXISTENTIAL INTERROGATION OF MAX WEBER'S CULTURAL DETERMINISM AND ITS IMPLICATION ON AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
Culture is a critical factor in the development of a people, it is without doubt the foundation upon which a formidable socioeconomic structure necessary for development can be built. However, since the time of Weber, culture took a deterministic nomenclature, by asserting that a given set of cultural factors will give rise to a given pattern of socio-economic life. Thus, in Weber's and other cultural determinists view, certain 'traditional cultures' in most Third World Countries are negative and as such contributed to economic backwardness and poverty. This work rejects this view and argues for cultural possibilism the existential tradition. We submits that culture is not static but rather dynamic through man's existential powers, who has the ability to recreate or reconstitute the world as he deems fit.

Key Words: Existentialism, Culture, Determinism, Possibilism, Development.

Introduction
Development without doubt is central to human existence. Development involves transcendence from one level of life to another. This is a stage by stage evolution of a more advanced and sophisticated personality. It is therefore safe to say that culture is the soul of a nation, it is what distinguishes a people. Culture therefore drives development, it is the hallmark of authenticity, a loss of which leads to inauthentic living or a life controlled by the anonymous 'they'. Max Weber in his seminal work The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, first published in 1904, followed by The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism (1951), where he argued that Confucianism created an environment hostile to capitalist development by emphasizing kinship as the primary source of social relatedness and thereby promote economically inefficient nepotism. The cultural and religious determinism of Weber was in many ways reminiscent of the environmental determinism of Hippocrates and Aristotle, both of whom had in their various works invariably argued that the natural environment determined not only the physical appearances of human groups, but also their social consciousness and psychological predispositions (Tatham, 128). Hence, according to Hippocrates, Asians generally were "easy going" because they lived in very favourable regions. They stood in stark contrast to the "penurious Europeans", who, living in a harsh environment, had to work harder to ameliorate their suffering (Ibid). Aristotle held more or less the same views on environmental and social life. However, the spectacular economic performance of Japan, China and Other Confucian societies since the 1950s has demolished Weber's thesis and it would appear an underestimation of man's existentials at challenging the "givens" or the facticity of existence. Thus, we rejects this view and see humanity everywhere surrounded by possibilities.

Philosophy and Culture
The role of philosophy to the cultural development of any society cannot be overemphasized. It is in fact, "the base and the apex, the foundation, the ceiling and the roof of any civilization, any religion and science, indeed any discipline" (Momoh, 2). Philosophy, it must be noted is rooted in the problems philosophers attempt to resolve (Fadahunsi, 167). It is thus "not just a theoretical armchair ability to analyse and understand reality" (Oguejiofor, 13). Philosophy can therefore not be divorced from the environment, this informs Balogun's (2014) position...
when he maintains that, philosophy could not have occurred in isolation of events in the environment which have great influence on the cultural mainstay of various people and races (14). A classic example is the response of the Milesians to mythological explanation given by the Ionian culture on the origin of the cosmos, rejecting the myths and offers a scientific, explanations on the original stuff. This tradition was to characterize the history of philosophy through the ages, as an existential reflection on the activities in the society. Hence, Sodipo (1973) conceives philosophy as a:

Reflective and critical thinking about the concepts and principles we use to organize our experience in morals, in religion, in social and political life, in law, in psychology, in history and in the natural sciences (3).

Similarly, Plato's Idealism is rooted in the social expression of Greek Society that unjustly condemned Socrates to death. Thus, Plato's idealistic metaphysics can only be appreciated in the light of the decadent political period of Greek. Philosophy can therefore not be separated from the environment, every philosophy is culturally founded, it is therefore rooted in the problems philosophers attempt to resolve (Fadahunsi,167). Again, in the medieval period or a time otherwise known as "dark ages" attention was shifted to the relation between faith and reason. The early Christian theologian, Tertullian gave classical expression to the view with rhetorical question "what hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Consequently, the prevalent culture in medieval thoughts was the Church with its creeds and practices as such philosophical thoughts and reflections during this period hovered around the predominant cultural indexes (Balogun, p.12).

Immediately following the Middle Ages was the period of enlightenment when efforts were made to separate religious theses from reason. Notable thinkers in this period includes but not limited to Francis Bacon, David Hume and other scientific minded thinkers who sought for an empirical explanations thereby rejecting *a priori* notions which eventually pave way for the development of science which blossom in the industrial revolution and the consequent capitalism. From the foregoing, philosophies are not devoid of the prevailing intellectual, sociocultural and economic conditions at the time. This fact is captured by Fredrick Hegel (1973), when he writes:

Whatever happens, every individual is a child of time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overlap his own age, jump over Rhodes (11).

Examples of the Nexus between philosophical reflections and the history surrounding them are endless. Existentialist philosophy (with which we intend to interrogate the African predicament) is a response to the challenges of ruins and penury following the Second World War, when humanity was faced with the possibility of extinction (Fadahunsi,168). Expectedly, existentialist thinkers were averted to the prevailing abstract rationalism which tends to put God at the centre of his woes, but on the contrary, existentialist rose against this thought, placing man in charge of his destiny. Hence, regarded as a movement of protest. Thus, for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both leading lights in the existentialist movement agree that "the system, the impersonal public is suffocating. They agree that abstract thought leads to a continuous "suicide of reason" (Unah & Osegenwunwe,131). This is the true condition in Africa, hence all the philosophies of development are founded on abstract terms and not on the individual person that drives development, whose authentic selfhood is lost to his experiences of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is thus clear that all philosophies are epochal, having their source in time. This is aptly captures by Ogundowole (2004):

The emphasis made by each philosopher depends on the major problems prevalent at a given historical period of the development of mankind. That is why a good
grasp of what philosophy is, demands that we approach and view philosophy epochally (23).

To establish this truism, Ogundowole further states:
Epochal comprehension of the essence of philosophy enables one to realize that philosophies differ in content depending on the nature of problems tackled by the given philosopher at a given time and space; as well as the overall level of comprehensive awareness of the society and mankind in general and the ability to relate such special awareness to the development of philosophy (Ibid).

The point of emphasis is that though philosophical language is crafted in abstract terms, which implies that pure thought are the raw materials for philosophizing, philosophy however transcends the bounds of pure thought to be socially relevant, hence, “social milieu affects the content of philosophy, and the content of philosophy seeks to affect social milieu, either by confirming or opposing it” (Nkrumah, 14).

It is logical to say that no philosophy can exists in a vacuum, as philosophies of all cultures and epochs attest to this fact. Philosophy is a response to the socio-political exigencies of the various epochs. Philosophy can therefore not be divorced from the socio-political realities of a particular time, Nicolitio Gianan (2009) writes on the relationship between culture and philosophy, when he writes:

Philosophy and culture and interdependent entities. The latter is said to be the cradle of the former; the former analyzes, refines, and appreciates the latter. Culture in this view needs to cultivate and nurture philosophy; and philosophy functions as an evaluator and studies culture in order to further develop and enrich it (118).

Accordingly, Gianan conceives cultures as “the ideas, customs, skills, arts, attitudes, sciences, modes of perception and habits of thought and activity of a people or group that are transferred or communicated, or passed along as in or to succeeding generations (p. 119). For this reason, Gianan concedes that all philosophy is culturally shaped and socially determined. He was of the opinion:

No one can deny that most cultures have changed, and philosophizing also has evolved in the process. Philosophy has transformed itself into something that is already in dialogue with culture itself, not in opposition to or away from it (118).

Human cultures as a mode of existence, is therefore not static, rather dynamic through the ingenuity of philosophy which continuous to probe the foundations of beliefs and knowledge to refine same for the betterment of man and his society. Hence, the function of philosophy everywhere according to Wasedu (1980) “is to examine the intellectual foundations of life, using the best available modes of knowledge and reflection for human well-being” (p. 62). It can be deduced that “culture is subject to philosophical examination” (Balogun,17). This explains way Olusegun Oaldipo in his essay “philosophy and culture” (1999) opines:

Philosophy has a crucial role to play in the production, clarification and propagation of the ideas and values that guide a thought and life of a person. Philosophy serves to challenge a people’s established views of themselves and their condition as a precondition for defining or re-defining who they are and what they can be (20, 21).

The nexus between philosophy and culture shows that, culture shows that, culture needs philosophical reflections, since these reflections are rooted in the social milieu or cultural
heritage of the people. Every society has benefited immensely from this relationship, laying the foundation of development as it did to the prevailing myth in ancient Greek. The African situation cannot be exempted from this revolutionary character of philosophy. What is however needed is to engage African culture in the existentialist tradition of possibilities, man the creator of culture is a bundle of possibilities an unfinished product, this is captured by Unah (1996):

Genuine human existence demands that the self assumes true responsibility for itself and its deed and that the genuine individual create new possibilities for himself or seek to realize his historical possibilities (107).

We agree with Godwin Sogolo that an emerging African philosophical tradition need to be rooted in and also to be nourished within the context of the African culture, history and the experience of the people (Oyeshile, 186), in the same vein, developmental crisis in African can only be remedied genuinely through the existential values of the people, it only requires that the African person needs to be rehabilitated existentially. More importantly is the crucial role of philosophy in “the production, clarification and propagation of the ideas and values that guides, the thought and life of a people” (Oladipo,20). Again, there is the critical aspect of philosophy, where it “serves to challenge a people's established views of themselves and their condition as a precondition for defining or redefining who they are and what they can be (Ibid 20, 21). Thus through man's existential activities cultures assumes a dynamic trait as opposed to rigid status, for which cultural determinists are guilty.

On Cultural Determinism
Max Weber, in his book, “The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism” (1930), maintains that the emergence of the modern economic development (in Europe) depended on a prior shift in cultural values generated by Protestantism. Weber argued that discipline, auterism, frugality and individualism – all traits of those Protestants sects – were key ingredients in the development of capitalism. Buttressing his point, he argued that areas of German and Switzerland which were protestant were on the whole more economically developed than those which were catholic. In 1951, Weber published another book, The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism in which he argued that Confucianism created an environment hostile to capitalist development by emphasizing kinship as the primary source of social relatedness and thereby promoted economically inefficient nepotism. The cultural and religious determinist of Weber was in many ways reminiscent of the environmental determinism of Hippocrates and Aristotle, both of whom had in their various works invariably argued that the natural environment determined not only the physical appearances of human groups, but also their social consciousness and psychological predispositions (Taylor, 1872:p.128). Hence, according to Hippocrates, Asians generally were “easy going" became they lived in very favorable regions. They stood in stark contrast to the “penurious Europeans “, who, living in a harsh environment, had to work harder to ameliorate their suffering (Ibid).

Aristotle held more or less the same views on environmental and social life.
However, the spectacular economic performance of Japan, China and other Confucian societies since the 1950s has demolished Weber's thesis and it would appear an underestimation of mans existential potentialities at challenging the “givens" or the facticity of existence. Thus, we rejects this view and see humanity everywhere surrounded by possibilities. Francis Fukuyama's “Trust: the social virtues and creation of “Prosperity” (1995).

Added a new dimension to the cultural determinist theory when he argues that societies with higher levels of trust are inclined to be more developed when compared to societies in which there were lower levels of trust. He writes; “A nation's well being as will as its ability to complete is conditioned by a single pervasive cultural characteristics the level of trust inherent in society” (Hamilton, 24).
To make good his point Fukuyama argues that “low trust” societies such as China, France and Italy, where close relations between people do not extend much beyond the family, are poor at generally larger social institutions like multinational corporations so, Fukuyama observes, they are at comparative disadvantage. In contrast, ‘high trust’, countries like Japan, Germany, and the USA are bound to do much better at generally multinational corporations which, in turn, will lead to improved conditions of life and economically vibrant economics (ibid). Fukuyama’s position has been criticized by scholars who have tried to show that, contrary to his central thesis, some societies which Fukuyama categorize as “low trust”, actually have been able to facilitate the development of large scale corporations. Then, too, China, which according to Fukuyama is “a low trust society”, has not only actually been able to create large corporations but also is developing very rapidly.

Furthermore, in advancing his theory of social trust as an all pervasive factor, Fukuyama ignored the role of government control and direction. In the case of both South Korea and China, the role of government is an important factor in evolving socio-economic policies. In such a situation development may take a given direction whether the society in question is “low trust” or “high trust”. Another major criticism against Fukuyama’s social trust theory is the seemingly bias. Instead of a global outlook, he concentrated on the Euro-Asia cum American social economic experiences and completely ignore the African realities. In Africa, there is a higher degree of social cohesion and trust than perhaps in any other part of the world. Surely, if “social closeness” and “social trust” were the key for corporate development, then Africa could be a cradle of multinational corporation. Reacting to this view, Mazrui argued in his article “Social Distance and the Trans-class Man in Africa”, that rather than be a blessing, this close knit social unit to which members belong, any upward economic mobility of a few is likely to be tempered in order to satisfy the social demands of the community. Should that happen, social closeness, rather than being an asset, actually turns out to be a liability (Mazrui, 195).

Though A. A. Mazrui rejected Fukuyama’s cultural determinist theory, he without doubt advances his own scientific language, in a paper, “Development in Multicultural Context: Trends and Tensions” He proposes as a “cultural foundation “for all “other development” the fostering of a common language (p. 129). Mazrui worries that Africa could be missing out on development, particularly scientific development because of not having adapted her indigenous languages for scientific work. His hope for Africa lies in Africa adapting her indigenous languages so that “scientific concepts can become the necessary economic tools for economic development”. Mazrui is a cultural determinist in so far as he subscribes to the view that a scientified language ipso facto leads to development. But to what extent is “the scientific adaptation” of a language is a sine qua non for scientific and technological development? Because of not having adapted her indigenous languages for scientific work. His hope for Africa lies in Africa adapting her indigenous languages so that “scientific concepts can become the necessary economic tools for economic development”. Mazrui is a cultural determinist in so far as he subscribes to the view that a scientified language ipso facto leads to development.

But to what extent is “the scientific adaptation” of a language a sine qua non for ‘scientific and technological development’? An examination of a few selected languages will highlight the problematic character in Mazrui’s thesis. Starting with Arabic, we note that since time immemorial this language has Chad scholars like Avicenna (Ibn Sina 9801037) teaching medicine and philosophy. Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198), a medical scholar, mathematician and philosopher, also used Arabic in his studies. Bertrand Russell, commenting on science in the Arabic language observes, “Writers in Arabic showed some originality in mathematics and in chemistry - in the latter case as an incidental result of alchemical researches. Mohammedan civilization in its great days was admirable in the arts and in many technical ways.”
To go by Mazrui’s thesis that adapting a language for science leads to (technical) development, what is one to say about Arabic on the one hand, in which language at a very early historical period there was a rich scientific and mathematical heritage. On the other hand, today the majority of the Arab speaking world is still regarded as a developing world. Arabic then is not only an old language with a rich scientific heritage, but is now also spoken in many less technically advanced areas? Mazrui seems to subscribe to the view that Japan and Korea have been successful because they have adapted their ‘languages for ‘science. A careful examination of the facts, however, reveals that such adaptation of the Japanese language was not a cause, but an effect. Although the Japanese language had “for millennia been influenced by the Chinese language (which was itself scientific to some extent) transcultural exchange remained largely barren. Only during Meiji times (also known as the period of enlightened rule, 1867-1912) did Emperor Mutsuhito issue the imperial charter (April 1869), in which he announced the government’s intention to modernize Japan and to turn to Western countries for new ideas.

In these circumstances, the adaptation of the Japanese language must have been but one of the many programs arranged to carry out an already conceived plan or policy in which the predominant or ‘primordial element was the intent to modernize by obtaining outside (Western) technology. If the scientific adaptation of language per se were enough to engender development, the Chinese language with the largest number of speakers, its imperialistic past and, of course, its scientific heritage, would have led to development much earlier that the Meiji period. But the Korean experience raises an interesting point in that Korea was able to develop scientifically precisely at the moment it was colonized. Why was that so and why have African countries continued to use the “colonial excuse” to explain away the failure of development efforts? Did Korea develop in spite of colonialism because of the benevolence of Japanese imperialism, or are we to look for the reasons for Korean development in some internal strengths of the Korean people?

An inquiry into the language factor vis-à-vis colonialism is especially pertinent to our discussion because the colonial powers in Africa spoke either French or English – two languages rich in scientific terminology, if scientific language was an aid in scientific and technical development, then Francophone and Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa received a rich scientific language transfer. Why then did Africa not, take advantage of that rich heritage? Mazrui could argue that although used by colonial rule, these languages remained largely elitist and were not sufficiently diffused to the ‘grass roots; consequently the relevant technical terminology was not sufficiently diffused in society’. But that argument would be spurious at least. There are such countries as India and Malaysia, both colonized by the British, both using English as the official language in schools government and business, and both with a large grassroots populace who have never really came to “speak English”. Moreover, their mother tongues, namely, Hindustan and Malaya, are not scientific languages in the strict sense of the term. Why is it that those countries have been able to develop? If hypothetically, Zaire and Uganda were to become 100 percent French and English-speaking in the next years, would they be on the threshold of an industrial revolution?

**Cultural Alienation and Adaptationism**

Obi Oguejiofor in his work, Philosophy and the African Predicament (2001), painted a graphic pictures of the African Condition historically. Apart from being the cradle of the human race, “Africa was also the cradle of the technological evolution of humanity from the invention of wooden and bone tools to the momentous advance into the stone-age” (24). In addition, the continent was host to ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Kush, Napata and Meroe, Nubia and Axiam (Ibid). However, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a darkest blight in African history. Thus, the experience of slave trade alter the progress and advancement of the continent, not only in terms of the exploitation of physical resources but of the mental effects
on the people. The effect of slavery on African societies was thus not limited to visible factors, even of greater consequences is the invisible political, psychological and social effects (29). Consequently, the legacy of the slave trade on the continent was that of fear, social insecurity, violence and political instability (Olaniyi, 120).

If for any other things, colonialism left the African persistently stigmatized as inferior, hence, the lost of authentic selfhood and the utter dependence on 'others'. Ayittey makes this comments on the devastation colonialism caused on the psyche of the African, to the effect that though it ended in 1840, Africans are yet to recover from the psychological trauma. It was probably this, rather than the physical and economic damage of the slave trade, that wrenched the heart from the inner psyche of blacks and assailed the very cultural soul of their existence (Ayittey, 5). Colonialism, according to him, compounded the problem, since colonial subjugation was a cultural and emotional humiliation suffered on top of the pervasive denigration of Africans as inferior (Ibid. 7). Thus, the assault on Africa's dignity through history were not sufficiently looked into by the subsequent philosophies of development, hence, a neglect of man's existence at the expense of the exploitation of his physical environment. However, in the existentialist tradition we submits that man is not a product of history but rather, history is the product of human activities. Even in the face of economic situation, man is free to decides what to do and how to react to the situation.

F. N. Ndubuisi (2006), Freedom and Determination: An Inquiry Into Man's Moral Responsibility. This is basically a critical evaluation of J. P. Sarte's notion of freedom. Man makes himself, the author declares. Man's freedom to recreate his world is not negotiable. Failure to accept freedom on the level of practical reason and refusal to live according to the reality of human condition are the evidence of bad faith (56). Acceptance of any deterministic forces outside man is illusion. Hence the facticity of human being can be seen as a particular set of contingent facts that are true of him strictly. There is no compelling factor outside one to value something as high or low. One's decision in regard to the value of things is entirely one's (60). However, human reality or freedom encounters limitation on account of the given which is surpassed or nihilated. But when obstacles cease to exist then freedom becomes nonexistent. We constitute a freedom that chooses but we do not choose to be free. We are condemned to freedom.

Freedom is germane to authentic nation building, it is the human capacity of self determination, self orientation and self detachment. MuyiwaFalaiye in his work, “Theoretical Black Activism and Social Change: beyond Rodney and George Ayittey”(2005), where he chronicled the African woes as adumbrated by the internalistsand externalists percussion, he calls for an end to the blame game, which generated more heat than the needed energy. Falaiye in an existential language calls for a development that is rooted in the people's environment, as such, the “people must recognized that development must be a true reflection of the needs of the environment in which they live” (50). Characteristically, Falaiye makes case for cultural adaptationism, where we accept what is useful from other cultures for the development of our environment, “Africa must consider the appropriateness of adapting elements of external cultures especially as they relate to its own existential needs”. (51).

On the whole, Falaiye's philosophy of cultural adaptationism is central to this work, by demonstration that the lamentations of the externalists and internalists are impartial but a close circle. In the process of development, cultures need not lose their essential consciousness that makes for the uniqueness of a people. They can still maintain their linguistic, socio-cultural, legal, economic, and political heritage” (Ibid). As we have shown in this work the bane of development in Africa is the total loss of our cultural roots and wholesale acceptance of everything Western. A characteristic of an unauthentic being. Thus, cultural adaptationism is the hallmark of an authentic people, the unauthentic who already losses what it means to exist, will automatically adopt all that is available.
Conclusion
Having shown the weaknesses of Weber's Cultural Determinism, we subscribe to cultural possibilism, showing that it is within the People's existential power to alter culture and eventually the superstructures erected upon it. Through the existential possibilities, we see the human person as ultimately responsible for charting a course for one's own development and for humankind. To achieve these task of social reconstruction, we agree with Wamala (1999) that Africa needs:
- a marshal plan, not in terms of finance, but in its cultural, intellectual and conceptual frameworks.
- a close examination of issues like cultural laxity towards work, leanings toward corruption by leaders, and a sober view concerning money and management.
- a check on such cultural traits as lack of accountability, and an instinctive desire to get rich quickly. (57).

Works Cited