

# Review of: "Honorific Conception of Philosophy and Exclusionism in Nigeria"

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It is very much true as pointed out by the authors that exclusion of masses on the basis of identity although received rational and philosophical foundations in the era of the European Enlightenment, social, ethnic and religious exclusions predated this era and in the colonies it predated the phase of colonialism. However, the European Enlightenment introduced a unique dimension to such exclusions by providing rational foundations to these phenomena.

The era of Enlightenment has underlined the fact that identity has occupied a predominant place in the reasoning ability of every human-being. Rationalisation of identity has occurred primarily because modern scientific theories as intellectual offshoots of the Enlightenment era rationalised sameness as a means to realise modern concepts of liberty, equality and justice if not in the primordial sense of identity but on the basis of shared moral and constitutional principles.

Modern scientific theories can be divided into modernisation theories which take the impact of the objective socio-economic changes on society as a result of the European Enlightenment into account and the liberal and social theories which are interested in the modern goals such as liberty, equality and justice and deliberate on the socio-economic and political changes that can be brought about to realise such goals. The modernisation theorists find nationalism as the end result of such objective socio-economic changes and liberal and social theories use nationalism as the necessary means to realise the modern goals of liberty, equality and justice. However, the scientific theories failed to separate the historical roots of identities from their theorisation as the history of identity groups could also be interpreted in scientific and rational terms. All these factors led to rationalisation of identity without diminishing the role of identity in the history of human civilization.

The meta narrative that was gaining ground in the Western philosophy was the non-Western societies lacked the potential to philosophize and the people were bereft of rational capabilities hence they were excluded based on civilizational identity. It was not surprising then that one of the leading philosophers of the Western tradition- Immanuel Kant asserted that the Chinese, Indians, Africans and the indigenous peoples of the Americas lacked the innate intellect to philosophize. David Hume imbued with racial prejudice excluded Africans, and other non-western from the potential of Philosophizing.

Christoph Meiner goes further in arguing that the human races are of different origins and that the black Africans "have distinct attribute or nature that makes them inferior". Then he goes on to argue 'the Negroes do not possess human feelings thereby they could not demand the same privilege and liberties as the Christians and Whites because they were

different-belonged to different levels of humanity'. Hegel granted humanity to only the Westerner because they had history and development- the twin indicators of civilization whereas others did not. Based on his notions of history and development and levels of the continent's interactions with the Western civilization, Hegel divides Africa into three parts: Africa proper (the territory south of the Sahara), European Africa (the territory north of the Sahara), and Egypt (the territory connected to Asia). While the Western scholars' theses of exclusions primarily focused on larger civilizational and racial identities by forging linkages with the abilities to philosophize, identity groups were constructed and reconstructed at various other levels where socio-economic dynamics had a significant function. The larger identities could be split into taking ethnic, religious, economic and cultural dimensions.

There are several identity groups functioning at different levels in the African continent such as Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, south-south, south-east, Kaduna south and Kaduna north, Christians, Muslims and so on.

Citing the recent instances of different forms exclusions based on identity, the authors point to the Presidential election conducted in Nigeria on February 25, 2023 which witnessed lots of exclusion on the basis of party affiliation, ethnicity, location, and religion. In Nigeria, the major identity groups are Hausa and Igbo ethnic groups. While the former sees himself as born to rule, the latter sees the former as an enemy that impedes his progress and development spurring tribalism and nepotism in the country.

The authors aptly quoted and referenced various Western philosophers and rightly pointed to identity politics plaguing the African societies. However, they could have strengthened their arguments further by establishing strong linkages between the Enlightenment norms that were promoted by the Western philosophers and how these norms are being used/misused by the different identity groups for socio-economic and political gains and for further splits.

It needs to be noted that the modern liberal state is the result of disintegration of medieval empires and democratisation of centralized westphalian states. Identity provides the common thread joining the three stages. The modern liberal state is, therefore, the climax of localisation and democratisation of identity. Increased localisation and democratisation of identity has effectively linked identity with the popular concepts of equality, liberty and justice and provided reasons to act for its preservation and promotion. Democratisation of identity has shifted rationalisation of it by the Church or king to academics, various political and public bodies and media. The intellectuals forming the world of academia have exerted decisive impact on human reason while media and political institutions played on human emotions. It can be argued that the roots of identities go much beyond the statehood of the modern era so do the adversarial relationships between them. However, it is within a modern state that conflicts relating to identity claims became more localised and violence-ridden.

The mutual enforceability of the pre-modern political and socio-economic power and identity balanced by the Enlightenment norms has contributed to the rise of dominant ethnic groups in three ways. First, where there was a self-conscious bourgeoisie as in the west which used identity for securing socio-economic and political interests and used the modern norms of popular sovereignty as a cover formed the dominant ethnic group. Second, the people who led the fight against aristocratic rule on the basis of Enlightenment norms and became the true interpreters of identity and formed dominant ethnicity as was witnessed in the cases of many third world post-colonial states. Third, in the cases of states without a colonial history and a self-conscious bourgeoisie, it was pre-modern rulers who used identity for the socio-

economic and political interests and applied the Enlightenment norms to stay in power and formed dominant ethnic group.

Though dominant ethnicities, most of the times, have shaped the nation-building process in several countries due to the socio-economic power they wield and the political power they use by dominating the modern state which institutionalises the Enlightenment ideals, people have nevertheless become politically important. The Enlightenment tradition inspired the liberal thinkers and welfare nationalists who deliberated on popular sovereignty and suggested either a shared moral identity or a liberal version of cultural nationalism or solidarity to make the society safe for democracy and human welfare. The modernisation process required continuous support, participation and loyalty for its success. Thus, elites cannot use identity groups as they wish to forge nationalism, the cultural markers used and the cultural belief imbibed by people are considered crucial elements to be analysed and understood for successful construction of identities. As the liberal thinkers have not been able to address the Enlightenment dilemma- how to reconcile the interests of individuals with the collective interests represented by a political community- without problems, the people can seize the liberating ideas of the Enlightenment in their favour and challenge the political authority in the case of a modern state's breach of the Enlightenment ideals for narrow socio-economic and political gains.