Short communications

A Philosophical Examination of Liberative Pedagogy from the Perspectives of Solarin and other Liberative Thinkers

ABSTRACT

This research proposes the thesis that liberative pedagogy is germane for the realization of such ennobling ideals like independence, freedom, creativityanddevelopment. The work has among its objectives the task of exposing the idea and ideals of liberative pedagogy articulated by selected liberative thinkers. The major problematic unraveled in the course of the research is that the attempt to fully exercise the concept of liberation has the potency of generating contradictions: oppression, anarchy, etc which it is supposed to negate. Thus the work recommends that to sustain the ideals of this pedagogy from engendering contradictions, strong institutions should be established to constantly protect and safeguard the exercise of those ideals. The work concludes by asserting that the positive ideals of the pedagogy when properly delimited and protected are necessary for the realization of a humane democratic society.

Keywords: *liberative, pedagogy, oppressive, philosophy, education*

1.INTRODUCTION

The concept of liberative education as championed by Tai Solarin can best be exposed and understood when studied within the wider framework of the conceptions of other proponents of liberative pedagogy. Thus, this work shall expose and appraise Tai Solarin's liberative concept of education in conjunction with the thoughts of selected liberative thinkers like Nnamdi Azikiwe – the renowned anticolonialist of Nigeria, Frantz Fanon; the Algerian liberation activist and Paulo Freire, the South American educator and renowned advocate of liberative pedagogy.

2. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF TAI SOLARIN

This gem was born to Mr.& Mrs. Daniel Solarin on 20th August 1922 in Ikenne village of Ogun State. He was named Taiwo at birth due to the fact of his being twin. He was later to be christened Augustus owing to the Christian affiliation of his parents. He started his formal primary education at Ogere Wesley School, Ogun State (1927 – 1929). He obtained his standard six Certificate at Wesley School, Osun State and his Grade Two Teacher's Certificate at Otapete Wesley School in 1931. He taught in different primary schools before joining the Royal Air Force as a navigator during the Second World War. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in History and Geography and a Diploma in Education variously from Manchester and London Universities. On his return to Nigeria; he served as a Vice-principal and a Principal to Molusi College Ijebu Igbo between 1952 to 1955. He later resigned due to the fact that the Governing Board of the school compelled him to open each school day with hymns and prayers and to march his students to Sunday service. He and his wife Sheilla established and managed the Mayflower school in 1956. He occupied other public offices likeCommissioner of public complaints for Oyo, Ondo and Ogun States, 1976, Chairman of People's Bank, 1989 etc.

Among other famed achievements of his, he was a columnist in some National Dailies and an author who piled numerous articles and books to his credit. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Education and Ogun State College of Education was posthumously named after him at his death on 27th July, 1994.

2.1 Influences and Philosophy

Solarin was a thorough African who was endeared to the traditional forms of communalism and productivity. He noted that the traditional African was more on his feet working than on his knees praying (Enoh 159). He was influenced and inspired by

personalities like Nehru of India, Mao of China and Castro of South America. Notably, these three were Atheists and secular humanists who displayed rare leadership in their countries. In terms of philosophical affiliation, Solarin was an advocate and proponent of three prominent philosophical world-views. The first is Atheistic secular humanism. This is the strand of humanism that was practiced by Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Leninand Stalinand it is regarded as a humanist philosophy that accepts reason, ethics, and justice and rejects the supernatural and the spiritual as the basis of human action (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/secular humanism). In line with the tenets of his philosophy, he is reported to have asserted in the *Daily Times* of Lagos that there is no God but only a soporific phantom of the indolent (Kayode Soyinka "Obituary: Tai Solarin, www.indepent.co.uk/news/obituary-tai-solarin html).

Inevitably, his Atheistic humanism was greatly informed, synergized and complemented by an avid belief in Existentialism and Pragmatism. In line with core existentialist doctrines, he denounces essence in preference for existence, rejects life after death and affirms nothingness, heralds freedom and choice against force and irresponsibility and idolizes man in denigration of God. In consonance with the pragmatist tradition he commends and recommends American pragmatism where "the ideal type of individual tends to be the self-reliant, resourceful, energetic pioneer, able to cope adequately in a world of pressing problems, solutions of which is a condition for survival" (Cited in Enoh, 165).

3. AN EXPOSITION OF TAI SOLARIN'S CONCEPT OF LIBERATIVE EDUCATION VIS-A-VIS SOME ANTI-OPPRESSIVE/ANTI-COLONIALIST THOUGHTS

A successful phenomenology of Solarin's concept of liberative education can be best studied when it is placed within the wider context of the anti-oppressive/colonialist perspective on:

a. The substance and logical entailment of the oppressive/colonialist system of education and
b. The framework for deconstructing the oppressive/colonialist system and constructing a liberative system of education.

Most anti-colonialist of the pre-independent and the immediate post-independent Africa were unanimous on the position that the system of education bequeathed by the colonialist was only useful for the perpetuation of the oppressive and dominating interest of the colonialist. At this juncture, a catalogue of some of the anti-colonialists' appraisal of the colonial system of education and their proposal of a liberative framework is imperative for asserting our thesis above.

3.1Nnamdi Azikiwe: The foremost anti-colonialist avers succinctly in many of his literature that western education was a calculated imperialist contraption to miseducate Africans into internalizing the imperialist negative opinions and description of Africa as 'demonic', 'uncivilized', 'barbaric', half-child', etc. Consequently, to achieve their intrinsic aim of keeping Africans in perpetual servitude, the imperialist foster on Africa an educational system that negated and alienated them from aboriginal values, depreciated their self esteem, created inferiority complex and these culminated in the imposition of the condition of mental slavery on the natives (*Selection from the Speeches of Nnamdi Azikiwe 147)*

Agbator Igwe mirroring Azikiwe's conception of the entailment of the colonial education opines that "… the average colonial subject was educated to seek only white-collar jobs, shun manual labour… with this miseducation, the recipients of colonial education were only fit for public or private employment of the imperialists who retained them as junior workers and grossly underpaid them" (*Zik: The Philosopher of our Time* 120).

Substantially therefore, colonial education was oriented for the enslavement rather than the freedom or liberty of the natives and its resultant entailment is the inculcation of the culture of mental, economic and political dependence of the Africa on the Westerner. In reversing and countering the conditions of slavery and dependency in Africa, Azikiwe sets out to articulate a framework of education for the native Africans that will liberate or emancipate them from the shackles of mental, economic and political slavery. Azikiwe's ideals and contents of such emancipative or liberative education are conterminous with his ideals and criteria for the new or renascent Africa, namely spiritual balance, social regeneration, economic determinism, mental emancipation and political Risorgimento (A. Owan Enoh *Nigerian Educational Insight* 42-46).

Explaining these ideals, Azikiwe ("Nnamdi Azikiwe Africa in Renascence" 164) observes that the cultivation of **spiritual balance** implies possessing a balance between respect for others opinions and personal opinions. The African should thus be educated for critical objectivity in order to achieve this ideal. **Social regeneration** involves the jettisoning of all forms of prejudices and barriers that have been militating against the realization of the African consciousness of a common humanity and brotherhood. In this regard, the re-education of the African should include a study of the

salient aspects of the African history of common heritage so as to enable the natives regain, regenerate and reimbibe germane traditional values that were discarded during the colonial plundering and invasion of culture and values. **Economic determinism** connotes the realization of the primacy of the economic substructure to the development of the society. Thus education for this ideal should go beyond classical aphabetamia type which condones parasitism to the practical skills acquisition type which engenders self-reliance, freedom and sufficiency. **Mental emancipation** has to do with deconstructing the mind of inferiority complex and passivity or inactivity. Thus the educational programmes geared for this purpose should encouragepsychological balance and individual creativity. Lastly, **Political regimento** which means political freedom is an ideal achievable only as a necessary outcome of the realization of the former ideas.In submission, liberative or emancipative education in Azikiwe's framework means the education of the mind, heart and hand of the individual for freedom from parochialism, prejudices and independence from economic and political enslavement.

3.2 Frantz Fanon: Hewas a renowned anti-colonialist and an apostle of violent revolution. His analyses of the colonial system project it as a system that adopts violent measures to indoctrinate the native to valorize and assimilate the colonizers values and devalorize and eschew aboriginal values.In the colonialist axiological framework of values education, a Manichaean world-view of the dual existence of good and evil is erected whereby "the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil" (*The Wretched 32)* and as a corollary or a fortiori the settler imposes himself as the par excellence or paradigm of good. This pathological psychology of supremacy instilled by the settler creates an existential state of dualism in the native; whereby, the native is

brainwashedto be alienated from himself and oriented to imitate the settler. This condition is dramatized by Fanon in the title of his work, *Black Skin, White Masks,* and he describes it thus: “in the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence” (*Black Skin*…60).

Describing further this dual condition of the native’s self alienation and mimesis of the settler, he says “The look that the native turns on the settler’s town is a look of lust, a look of envy, it expresses his dreams of possession-all manner of possession: to sit at the settler’s table, to sleep on the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible” (*The Wretched …* 30). The neo personality of the native resulting from this colonial violence is a dualism described ably by Fanon as the phantom of “Black Skin, White Masks.”

The other ambit of this discourse is to expose the nature of the educational framework articulated by Fanon for the deconstruction of the colonialist educational system which perpetuated the idea of supremacy of the settler’s culture over that of the native. Fanon emphasizes that the monumental task before the native is that of liberation from two types of impediments, namely, psychologically internalized impediments, that restrains the individual from actualizing self autonomy and external political impediment, that restrains the natives from actualizing self-governance or independence. (*Black Skin, White Mask* 8, 37). Education for the purpose of liberation means for Fanon – “To educate man to be actional…” (*BlackSkin, White Masks* 229) in the sense of evolving a critical consciousness that will challenge and question the colonial situation. Fanon reasons that since colonialism or the state of slavery was achieved via violence “…the exploitation of the native by the settler – was carried on by dint of a great bayonets and Cannon” (*The Wretched 28)* then reversing this trend will

similarly involve the unleashing of violence by the natives on the settlers. For him decolonization or liberation must necessarily be violent in nature because “it is the intuition of the colonized masses that their liberation must, and can only, be achieved by force” (*The Wretched* 57). In submission, liberative education for Fanon consists in the training of both the mind and hand to overcome psychological impediment and prepare for violent revolution against any oppressive order. The reference to “oppressive order” above evokes immediately the analysis of the Colonialist pedagogy offered by another anti-colonialist cum liberative thinker, Paul Freire.

3.3 Paulo Freireis an avidadvocate of the liberative concept of education as well as a critical analyst of the oppressive concept of education. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30-41) he attempts a distinction of the fundamental characteristics of the worldviews of the oppressor and that of the oppressed. Defining oppression as “Any situation in which A objectively exploits B and hinders his pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person…” (31) he discusses the oppressors world-view in terms which we have thematically captured thus,**Exclusive Nihilistic anthropology:** The oppressors exclusively perceive themselves as human beings and nihilistically perceive others as “things” who do not possess humanity.**Necrophillism:** The oppressors conceive everything surrounding them as object of domination. Thus they strive to transform everything organic around them into the inorganic objects for domination.**Materialistic ontology:** For the oppressors, to be is to have and to be of the having class. Having is understood materialistically as possession of more money and profit making.**Sadism:** The tendency of the oppressor to transform the organic and animate to the inorganic

and the inaminate corresponds with a sadistic love which attempts to deaden or petrify all things.

In contradistinction, the oppressed, in the depraving condition of oppression projects a world-view dotted by the following characteristics,**Existential duality:** This is a condition, akin to Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks' phenomenon, where the oppressed possesses a dual personality-being himself and also being the oppressor whose image he has internalized and assimilated.**Fatalistic docility:** This is the condition whereby the oppressed perceives the order of the oppression and their suffering as the acts of God that cannot be changed.**Horizontal violence:** Borne out of the assimilated violent image of the oppressor, the oppressed reacts violently against any act of aggression by people in his category.**Self-depreciation:**The oppressor lives with the complex of mediocrity as a result of internalizing the depreciating terms with which the oppressor employs in making reference to him.**Passive acquiescence:**Perceiving his condition, unauthentically, as a given unalterable destined order, the oppressed acquiesces to the order and refuses to rebel against it and lastly, **Anaclitic anthropology:**Theoppressed perceives himself as a man that is totally dependent on the oppressor.

In consonance with the characteristics of the world view of the oppressor, Freire (45-58) categorizes the method and processes of education employed by the oppressor under what he calls the "Banking concept of education." The banking concept of education generally conceives knowledge as a deposit possessed by the teacher (Depositor) for deposition in the depositories (students).

The fundamental method employed under the banking concept is the Antidialogical method. As the name implies, this method is non-communicative (81). The theoretical characteristics underlying the Antidialogical pedagogy include, **Conquest:** Since the motive of the oppressor is to conquer the oppressed, he mythicizes realityas tactic to subjugate the critical consciousness of the oppressed.**Divide and rule:**In order to keep the people under their domination, the oppressors do everything to divide the people into antagonizing classes. Beingin perpetual acrimony and attrition, the oppressed can never rise as a community against the oppressors.**Manipulation:** This has to do with the deployment of ideologies and myths aimed at anaesthetizing the consciousness of the oppressed masses from being critical and **Cultural invasion:** This portrays the act of the invader oppressor annihilating the cultural categories of the oppressed by superimposing the oppressors' culture on it as the authentic culture.

To this end, it can be gleaned that the Banking concept of education operated via the antidialogical method of the oppressor is dehumanizing since it annuls criticality, turns men into automatons; useful only as depositing objects, and above all dichotomizes the teacher from the students and ultimately creates a dichotomy between the knowing man and the unknown world.

Our next focus on this discourse is to unveil the concept, method and processes of the pedagogy that will counter or deconstruct the oppressive system of education.Freire (53) proposes the Liberative or the Problem Posing concept as a panacea for the dominating pedagogy. In defining the concept, he notes that "liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information" (53). The method employed under this concept of education is the Dialogical or the Communicative

method (61). Essential to communication or dialogue is “the word”. Freire (61) views the *word* as an effective medium for transforming the world. He analyses the “word” to be made up of two constituents, namely*reflection* and *action.* For true transformation to occur there must necessarily be a copula between the two constituents. Anytime one of the constituents, say, reflection is emphasized in devoid of action, the word will become empty verbalism whereas, if action is emphasized against reflection, the word becomes mere activism. Since the word is the medium of changing the world, then the act of speaking cannot be reduced to the exclusive right of any one individual or group as in the case of the Banking concept of education. Thus, Freire appears to conceive education as the process of cognizing and transforming reality through the medium of dialogue using the world.

Enumerating the theories that underlie the liberative concept of education, he (135-149) submits that it is characterized by,**Cooperation:** Unlike the antidialogical method that absolutizes ignorance on the students and knowledge on the teacher and imposes a diametrical gulf between the two, the dialogical method transforms the teacher-of-the students and students-of-the teacher dichotomy to a teacher-students with students-teacher relationship. In this relationship everybody is a teacher and student simultaneously and arguments based on the authority of status become invalid. In this cooperative act, criticality and reflection is encouraged and hence freedom of thoughts is engendered. The dialogical method therefore denounces superiority and inferiority in education but promotes equality and freedom.**Unity for liberation:** This connotes the idea of the oppressed reflecting and understanding his true personality as an “I” or unity and not as a duality of the ‘I’ and the oppressor. The recognition of his

individuality and the individuality of all the oppressed and humanity at large will engender solidarity among the oppressed for the transformation of their condition and the condition of man generally. Thus unity for liberation counters the divide and rule theory of the antidialogical system.**Organization:**Unlike the manipulation theory of the antidialogical scheme, the dialogical scheme encourages organization and unity of the people to commonly witness for the fact and act of liberation from oppression.**Cultural synthesis:** Cultural synthesis involves a process whereby the dialogical actors do not impose, teach nor transmit their cultural models on cultures of the oppressed but rather synchronizes with the people to mutually learn about the people's world. Thus the framework of liberative education denounces the culture of silence and monologue for the culture of speaking and dialogue, it prohibits absolutizing of ignorance or knowledge on any party and promotes the raising of critical consciousness by all parties, thus the liberative pedagogy will abhor the pedagogical processes of indoctrination, instruction and conditioning which all operate to stifle critically and promote credulity.

3.4Tai Solarin: The theme of liberation occupies a prominent place in Tai Solarin's philosophy of education. This theme is most pronounced, especially in his critique and proposal for the overhauling of the pedagogical system inherited by Nigeria from her colonizer. The meaning of liberation in Solarin's philosophy of education as they appear in his evaluation of the colonialist system and his imperatives for a deconstructive framework can be thematized thus:

3.4.1 Education for independence:Solarintook on the anticolonialist toga in his evaluation of the Grammar school system of education that was bequeathed by the British colonialist. He denounces it as "a useless school fashioned for colonial period which

has died, at least physically, and which can only be soundly and permanently buried by deliberately uprooting the agency that perpetuates its lingering existence" (*Our Grammar school Must Go*8). The Grammar school as instituted in Nigeria by the colonialists designed its curriculum to suit the needs of the colonizers. Thus people were trained in the Grammar school to serve as secretaries, cooks, clerks, office assistants, cleaners, gardeners, interpreters and teachers. Indeed, the grammar school was a breeding ground for people who were trained to perpetually remain as dependent subject. In replacement of the Grammar system, Tai advocates a system that expunges the colonial trappings and a curriculum that is designed to minister to the needs of the indigenes, thereby making them independent and non subservient to the colonial masters.

3.4.2 Educationfor self reliance: Solarin bemoans the system of education that prepares the learner to minister to foreigners as 'the education for indolence and parasitism" (*Towards Nigeria Moral*…3). This type of education places more value on certificate without a comparative value for technical skills. Thus, rather than emphasize academic knowledge at the expense of practical and functional skills, Tai proposes a system that will enhance creativity by promoting academic knowledge in *pari passu* practical knowledge. The acquisition of such functional knowledge by the citizens is fundamental for economic freedom from the imperial powers.

3.4.3 Education for mental freedom: Solarin reasons that education, especially for the oppressed people must be conceived as the practice of freedom. He avers that schools ought to accord learners the opportunity to express their views without fear (*May*

*Flower*98). Mental freedom in this milieu implies the ability of the individual to express autonomous and critical views on any subject matter without bias and intimidation.

In consonance with those stated imperatives of education, Solarin proposes a non-secterian, secular school system for Nigeria. Thus he advocates a divorce of the school from religious patronage and proprietorship saying, “we are going to use our scalpel… to perform an operation that would, for ever, put a stake of divorce between the church and the state, making the state to completely own the school and the church own religion” (*Our Grammar School*15). Also, Solarin advocates a school system that promotes equality. He sees discriminatory and anomalous the stratification of the society through the establishments of “anomalies like unity schools, model schools, command schools…” (*Tai Solarin in a Nutshel* 35). The creation of these special schools entrenches inequality which is destructive to the egalitarian tenet of Nigeria’s republicanism.

4. APPRAISAL AND RECOMMENDATION

A conception of education as a tool for liberation assessed in this work via the auspices of the liberative thinkers is generally for training a people who are reflective and critical. The liberative conception of education can be viewed as the most potent instrument for gaining freedom and acquiring emancipation from political, economic and mental slavery. Creativity, dynamism and incredulity; which are *sine qua nons* for progress and development, blossom and flourish in a liberative framework as against passivity, staticism and dogmatism, all features of an oppressive system, which dominate in a stagnating non-progressive framework.

Though the positive values of liberative education are overwhelming and obtrusive, the system,its methods and values are not fault free. The liberative method's indulgement of freedom if not coupled with some measure of constraints can turn out to be as tyrannical as oppression itself. Freedom and criticality emphasized in the liberative framework should be practiced with the restraining sense of responsibility.

Also, the liberative pedagogy eulogises freedom as if an ontological state of absolute freedom is possible. Existentially, freedom comes as an admixture of freedom and determinism and is not capable of being exclusively realized.

Germanely, if the liberative concept of education should be ideally practiced then it is most likely to lead to a society where all competing models are given free and equal reins. If practiced in this ideal form and intention, then it will lead to anarchy, and if not, it will lead to the domination and imposition of the liberative model against other models and that would mean oppression. Thus the liberative pedagogy when exercised in its intents and contents become paradoxical.

Tai Solarin's liberative model of education seems to down play the acquisition of literal and academic knowledge for technical and practical skills. This is expressive in his avowal that the grammar school must go, this disposition cannot be said to be liberative but oppressive.His statement for the radical divorce of the schools from religious bodies negates his tenet of education for freedom. If that tenet must be sustained, then religious bodies should be free to participate in the educational process. In containing and protecting the ideals of the liberative pedagogy from contradictions such as discussed above, this work recommends the establishment and enhancement

of credible institutions like the Press, Security, Justice, Civil liberty societies and such other institutions that will uphold, monitor and safeguard the ideals from being eroded and abused by exposing perceived excesses and penalising all violations of the ideals.

5. CONCLUSION

This research set out to examine Tai Solarin's concept of liberative education in conjunction with other anti oppressive thinkers. The work has established that liberative pedagogy enunciated by the liberative thinkers is germane for the exercise of independence, freedom, critically, creativity, progress and development of humanity.

The work has established also that liberative pedagogy could be paradoxical; that is capable of leading tocontradictions, if practiced in its intents and contents without safeguards and delimitations. It is the position of the work therefore that the exercise of the liberative pedagogy should be protected from such anomalies through the installation of strong and viable social and political institutions that will check and safeguard the ideals of this pedagogy from generating contradictions.

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