

PROMOTION INTELLECTUAL IMPERIALISM: THE CASE OF NIGERIAN SCHOLARS

Dr. A. Iyela

Abstract

Intellectual imperialism is the tendency of the developed world to systematically attack and destroy the values of developing nations and not only that to consciously influence the way they reason and do things. This paper examined the tendency by Nigerian scholars to promote intellectual imperialism in the country. No conference or workshop paper is deemed good unless it is backed up with a long chain of references of white scholars which were cited. The reasons for this trend and the way out were discussed.

Introduction

In 1960, Nigeria became an independent nation after many years of British colonial hegemony. As is well known, political independence did not mean complete freedom from alien control. This is because the colonial political, economic, social and cultural systems remained basically intact and largely untouched. It was therefore, not surprising that in the post-colonial period, the major challenge that confronted a newly independent nation like Nigeria was how to shake off the colonial system foisted on the country by the departed colonial masters. Although the extent to which the country has succeeded in achieving this, is highly debatable, it is nevertheless true that recently some Nigerian scholars have been promoting the important functions performed by intellectuals in every society. The pertinent questions at this juncture are: What is meant by intellectual imperialism? How have Nigerian scholars been promoting intellectual imperialism in the country? What is responsible for this? What is the way out? These are the questions which we attempt to answer in this paper.

Intellectual Imperialism

Before we define Intellectual Imperialism, it will be more rewarding to begin by clarifying the issue of what intellectuals and imperialism are. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1981) defined an intellectual as a person with a highly developed mental ability. As far as Sills (1968:399) is concerned, intellectuals are:

those members of the society who in their communication and expression, employ with relatively higher frequency than most members, symbols of general scope and abstract reference concerning man, society, nature and the cosmos.

It is clear from the definitions above that (1) intellectuals have highly developed mental abilities and, (2) intellectuals have mental abilities higher than that of other members of the society. Generally speaking intellectuals perform important functions in the society. For instance:

- (i) Intellectuals produce intellectual works which are added unto the tradition or stock of intellectual works - the "high culture" which is made available to the society.
- (ii) Intellectuals also elaborate, modify and carry on the tradition of beliefs about various aspects/sectors of the universe.
- (iii) Intellectuals transmit to future generations those fundamental disposition, tastes and modes of apprehending reality which cannot be readily articulated and codified and which cannot be transmitted except by prolonged and intimate interaction.
- (iv) Intellectuals play an important role in influencing social change, and elicit, guide and form the expressive dispositions within a society. This is because of the role they play in providing models and standards through the presentation of appreciable symbols.

The concept of imperialism on the other hand, has been subjected to different definitions. These definitions are to be found in the work of Ake (1981). An examination of the varied definitions is outside the scope of this paper. However, imperialism can be defined as the extension by one.

country of its authority over other lands by political, economic, military and cultural/intellectual means. Thus, the concept is generally associated with a state of unequal relationship between states, like the inequality of political, economic, military and cultural/intellectual dependence of the developing nations on the developed nations of Europe and America.

Intellectual/cultural imperialism is the policy by which the developed world attack and destroy the values, the individual and collective minds of the peoples of developing nations. This they do by supplementing the cultures of the peoples of the developing countries with their own. When this is achieved, the people in the developing nations are robbed of their sense of self-worth and identity.

Intellectual imperialism warps the mind and undermines one's confidence, competence and institutions in his society. The implication of this, is the reliance on persons and institutions of imperialist countries even when they are mediocres. Thus, an invention of finding or idea has no meaning without the stamp of approval of the imperialist master.

In the case of Nigeria, an important consequence of intellectual imperialism is that many scholars in the country are hooked to intellectuals from Europe and America. No conference paper is deemed to be good unless it is backed up with a long chain of reference of the works of white scholars which were cited. Although his Nigerian counterpart may have done standard work on the area he is writing on, the Nigerian scholar still find it more convenient to cite the works of white scholars. This is in spite of the fact that such works may not be culturally relevant to our Nigerian situation.

Promoting Intellectual Imperialism by Nigerian Scholars.

As pointed out earlier many Nigerian scholars have been guilty of promoting intellectual imperialism in the country. No conference paper presented by them is considered erudite enough unless it produces a long list of references of works of white scholars. Even when his Nigerian counterpart has done a substantial work in the area he is writing on, there are many Nigerian intellectuals who find it more convenient to cite or quote from the works of white scholars no matter how irrelevant they are to our circumstance. Some examples can be used to buttress the point being made.

Example One

A professor wrote a "learned" paper which incidentally was a lead paper submitted to a National Conference recently (Junaid, 2000). In the paper, he examined the future of public education in Nigeria. At the end of the 17 page paper, the professor cited 8 works featuring names such as Bray. N; Dore, R; Hill, D; Ki-Zerbo; Lewis; Newby; Opolot and Shaeffer. Of the 8 references, none was the work of a Nigerian or even an African scholar. This is surprising because the professor admitted that the task of predicting the future of education in Nigeria in the coming years is:

Normally the exclusive reserve of the most distinguished academics, the prophets of education of Babs Fafunwa, Aleiyedeno, Ezeomah, Lassa and Adamu, Baikiean genre whose rich and long standing experiences in the business put them in a better position to forecast the future of Education. Though, I accept to dabble in their terrain, I am under no illusion of equating myself with such great sages of education.

However, although, the learned professor admitted above that Nigerian intellectuals such as Fafunwa, Aleiyedeno, Ezeomah, Lassa and Baikie are distinguished academicians and great sages of education, he failed to make reference to any of their works in his paper. Instead, he borrowed from the works of white intellectuals located in far away Europe and America.

Example Two

Another scholar - A Pli.D holder; (Nwangwu, 1999:406), wrote another learned paper in which she examined the issue of teacher burnout and its implication and strategies for the 21st century. At the end of the paper, the scholar cited 11 works, all of which were foreign. These include Amundson, Apple, Bergen, Beck, Borg, Byrne, Capel, Cook, Covey and Emmal. None of the white scholars has ever been to Nigeria in order to examine the issue of teacher burnout. In spite of this, she tried to relate the problem of teacher burnout in Europe and America to the Nigerian situation without taking cognisance of the fact that factors to teacher burnout may differ from one country to the other.

Example Three:

Another Nigerian scholar, published his research paper titled "Identifying Training needs for the Nigerian Local Government System. A Procedural "Compass" for Training Administrator" (Onyishi, 1997:339). In all, our learned professor cited 17 authors and works. One would have expected that he would draw from the works of distinguished Nigerian political scientist such as Professors A. D. Yahaya, P. Daudu, A. Jinadu and so on. Instead our learned scholar went to Europe and America and used the works of people who have never been and may never come to Nigeria. He found intellectual foundation for that he wrote in the views of Bloom, Chapman, Flangan, Fleishman, Harris, French, Flanagan, Howell, Kast, Rosenzweig, Krawthowol, Optner, Simpson, Torrigton, Von- Bertalanffy, and so on.

Example Four

A Nigerian scholar also contributed an article to a textbook. The article sought to examine how girls' movement away from sciences is influenced by teachers' classroom behaviour (Nzewi, 1999:98). The author amassed about 19 references of works cited. Only 2 of them were the works of Nigerians. The majority of the works cited were those of white authors in Europe and America such as Bossert, Bressler, Chandler, Chrwanye, Cherry, Czike, Getzels, Entiwistle, Lawrenz, Obiepias. Usmani. Vetter, Vockell and Welch.

Reasons for Promoting Intellectual Imperialism by Nigerian Scholars

Some factors account for the increasing dependence on the works of white scholars by Nigerian scholars. These are:

- i. In intellectual circle, making reference to the work of a scholar invariably confers visibility, authority and recognition to the work and the author cited. However, most Nigeria intellectuals are proud and jealous of one another. Thus, they find it difficult to make references to the works of their colleagues due to the erroneous belief that they would be promoting or according recognition to them.
- ii. There is also a feeling of insecurity among some Nigerian intellectuals. This is because of the fear that by citing and therefore according recognition to the works of a colleague, one is providing him with the ladder to pre-eminence. The fear is that an author whose work is cited may become so prominent as to over-shadow the intellectual who is always making reference to him. In order to avoid this situation, some Nigerian intellectuals deliberately down play or bury the work of their colleagues while promoting the works of white scholars in far away Europe and America.
- iii. There is a feeling of inferiority complex among some Nigerian intellectuals. Some of them feel inferior to their European or American counterparts. For instance, it is generally believed that a Nigerian scholar who makes a lot of reference to the works of scholars in far away Europe or America is sophisticated, intelligent and current. On the other hand, a Nigerian scholar who relies mainly on the works of his colleagues is believed to be unsophisticated and not intelligent. Thus, in order to be counted among the very intelligent, many Nigerian scholars downplay the works of their colleagues while extolling those of white scholars outside the country.
- iv. There is the factor of laziness. Some Nigerian scholars are lazy and therefore, do not have the 'time' to stretch themselves in search of the works of their colleagues. The argument by these scholars is that there is a shortage of published works by their colleagues and that it is difficult to lay hands on such works. It is easier for such lazy Nigeria scholars to make reference to the works of white scholars since they are many and easily available. However, it must be pointed out that this argument is not a convincing one in the sense that the same Nigerian scholars do not make reference to the works of their colleagues even when they are available.

Recommendations

In order to bring an end to the tendency of Nigeria scholars to promote intellectual imperialism in the country, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) There is the need for re-orientation on the part of Nigerian scholars. They should realise that promoting the works of foreign scholars at the detriment of works by their Nigerian counterparts will not help the country.. It will only further entrench the dependence of the

- country on the erstwhile colonial masters in Europe and America. Nigeria intellectuals should realise that their well-researched views are what will move this country forward irrespective of whether these views are sent to Europe or America for recognition.
- (ii) Nigerian scholars should pull and pool and pull together. They must learn to stand on their own legs and in their own rights. There is the need for them to make our country, cities, towns, villages their laboratories and libraries and extract from them original approaches to the problems which we are going through. To our mind, this is the essence of creative and redemptive scholarship.
 - (iii) In order to make the works by Nigeria authors readily available, the Nigerian government should assist by subsidising the cost of publishing. When this is done, Nigerian scholars would find it easier to published their books and also make them affordable by the generality of Nigerians.
 - (iv) There is the need for a concerted effort to change the content of Nigerian education to reflect Afro-centric views.
 - (v) There may be the need by intellectual/learned societies to sanction their members who over rely on foreign literature.

Conclusion

The paper examined the tendency by Nigerian scholars to promote intellectual imperialism in the country through over-reliance on the works of white scholars no matter how trite or culturally irrelevant such works may be to our situation. Mainly, Nigerian scholars indulge in it because of the belief that it is eminently scholarly to copiously cite the works by white scholars. The implication of this is that the Nigerian scholar and society become more and more dependent on the white scholar and values of the white society for ideas and wisdom towards self-understanding and interpretation. Furthermore, our identity and psyche are distorted. Because of the negative consequences of intellectual imperialism, there is the need to stop it by re-orientation on the part of Nigerian scholars and radical changes in the content of Nigerian education to reflect Afro-centric views and so on.

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