

Philosophical Fundamentals for Sustainable Development in Kenya: Karl Popper's Perspective

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Abstract: The study aims at critically assessing the reasons that inform the unstable socio economic and political development of Kenya and suggest the way forward in terms of sustainable development. Kenya is a multicultural society, and the basic assumption is that, diversity has tended to produce more 'heat' than 'light'; and the ensuing conflicts have resulted into stagnated socio economic and political development. Karl Popper's theory on 'closed and open societies' forms the theoretical framework of the study. The theory challenges diverse societies not to remain isolated but to open up towards the global society where positive values from each society when integrated will benefit the country and the global community. The philosophical method appropriate to the study is the rational critical approach that will unveil the reasons behind 'praxis' that is then subjected to critical appraisal. The findings are that, each culture has its own unique mindset (epistemology) that is the foundation of its idiosyncratic praxis that tend to conflict with others that are different. The way forward is to accept internal criticism and the value of tolerance in the context of open society and hence the need of a paradigm shift in epistemology. Since epistemology (thought) precedes action, the new thinking will be the foundation of a sustainable development leading to a more cohesive Nation towards a global community.

Key words: Closed, cultural, development, diversity, mindset, open

INTRODUCTION

Looking at Popper's main achievements, may it be in the progress of scientific methodology, the debate on democracy aiming at avoiding bad governance, the contributions from an ethics perspective and so on, they all could be interpreted as the search for a better world. The Popperian philosophical fundamentals including equally the perception of truth, the principles of tolerance, rational discussion, criticism which include self criticism and intellectual honesty and responsibility can be seen as prerequisites for development for a better sustainable Kenya, Africa and world with less tensions and conflicts (Vavrik, 2002).

There is a general consensus of what a better world might constitute despite varying cultural idiosyncratic descriptions. Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, justice, creativity, self discipline, intellectual honest and responsibility and material well being and happiness (Rodney, 1971). The paper will endeavor to analyze the concepts of closed and open societies as propounded by Karl Popper and critically assess their applications in the Kenyan context in reference to social cultural, economic and political development for the sake of a better world.

The magical or tribal or collectivist society is called closed society while the society which individuals are

confronted with personal decisions, is the open society. A closed society resembles a tribe whose members are held together by ties like kinship, living together, sharing common efforts, dangers, joys, hopes and distress.

Each of the ethnic tribes in Kenya has their own unique concept of development and a value system that is specific to the uniqueness of its culture. Each community protects and defends all that it has reason to value against outside influence which creates anxiety in respect to the unknown and unpredictable variables.

Each ethnic community adheres to its own subjective epistemology thinking that it is a universal mindset. In reality such a mindset is particular and subjective and enclosed within a specific society's social cultural ethical values. This explains the endless war of all against all in the Hobbes's dictum of the state of nature in the economic, social, political and developmental perspectives.

The ontology of a people is the foundation of their existence without which any action is impossible since one cannot act from a vacuum. Our main interest is the human person who is the mover and beneficiary of development by virtue of his rational dynamism. The name given for a person within a Kenyan ethnic group is indicative of priceless value and dignity provided such a conception hails from our community, race, clan, or tribe. But the name given to a person different from one's own ethnic group (foreigner) is normally diminutive, devoid of

dignity and in some cases assumes a category of an object. In a good number of Kenyan ethnic groups, the semantic analogy of a term referring to a foreigner is lacking, in its place, the term enemy or any other term semantically related is used. This ontology is the foundation on which an epistemological structure is built and action follows from such kind of mind set. This epistemology is counter productive and detrimental to social cultural economic development. This paper argues that, such an ontology and epistemology that belongs to a closed society is the reason for endless wars in a multicultural, racial, tribal society like Kenya. There is need to transcend the closed society and develop the open society policy whereby multicultural pluralism in ontology and epistemology is appreciated as an enrichment towards integral development as opposed to selective developmental areas based on a mythical epistemology.

This Two-thirds of Kenya is semi-arid, the main economic activity of people in this region revolves around pastoralist economic activity. People who live in this region have special rigid ontology and epistemology in respect to cattle. This explains the endless ferocity of cattle rustling of claims and counter claims of animals from one community to the other based on contradictory self-focused value systems. The various tribal communities in this region are in constant wars and conflicts based on cattle ownership. Each of the different pastoral communities claims that all the cattle of world belong to them, and if another different cultural community has cattle, that is an anomaly that needs a remedy, so the cattle must be brought home. The process to do it is through force and ferocious endless wars that enhance poverty, insecurity and political instability. This cultural practice is anti-developmental from an outsider's ontology and epistemology (Kiruki, 2010). To overcome this problem, there is need to break the walls of the ontology and epistemology of the closed society into the open society leading to dynamism of mutual recognition, enrichment and respect of diversity so as to keep pace with sustainable development. There is need for massive investments in terms of infrastructures in these regions so as to open up the areas to progressive multicultural integrative development that will change the lives of the people in this region for the better in terms of security and productivity in the national economy.

INTELLECTUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SELF-CRITICISM AS KEY TO DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: POPPER'S OPEN AND CLOSED SOCIETY AS WORKING THEORY

It is my argument that a lack of a certain philosophical fundamental may be interpreted as a hindering factor to sustainable development. There is

need for a deliberate and sustained education system which ought to include critical thinking in its curriculum all the way from primary to university level to address this lack for accelerated development and critical thought. No student ought to graduate without this crucial ingredient to positive development in handling diversity in an intellectually cool manner. A system which allows all the diverse mixing of the Kenyan youth in most of the levels of education will be productive in that direction.

Western civilization originated with the Greeks. They seem to be the first to make a step from tribalism to self criticism beyond tribal cocoons (Popper, 1994). The early Greek tribal society resembles in many respects small bands of tribal warriors, usually living in fortified settlements, ruled by tribal chiefs, or kings or by aristocratic families who constantly wage war against one another. There is however no universal standardized cultural way of life. There are some common characteristics that can be found among the tribal closed societies, some of them include superstitions, magical practices and cultural rigidity and practices. Taboos which cannot be objects of critical thought rigidly regulate and dominate all aspects of cultural life and follow individuals to the grave like the proverbial Achilles heels. Tribal institutions leave no room for personal intellectual responsibility and creativity, they are not based upon a principle of reasonable accountability, but rather upon magical ideas, such as the idea of blindly appeasing the powers of fate which is a kind of irrational escapism from reality (Popper, 1994).

Our ways of life are still beset with taboos in respect to, food, politeness, sex, relationships, social cultural and political affiliations and many what have you! The challenge however is letting the power of critical logic and reason penetrate and influence our cultural taboos and superstitions by minimizing them and coming out with cultural and developmental oriented rationality. Most of our politicians though of the elite urban educated type were hardly educated in the school of critical thought, we thus do not expect much from them in terms of integrative intellectual responsibility except endless squabbles that lead to no economic progress. A person cannot give what he does not have!

The tribal community is the place of security for the member of the tribe. Surrounded by enemies and by dangerous or even hostile forces, one experiences the tribal community as a child experiences the safety of his family and his home in which he plays his definite part; a part he knows well and plays well.

In the open society, reason is supreme where challenges and competition are encouraged. Flexibility and dynamism towards a better all encompassing society is envisaged. The transition from closed to open society is a revolution of sorts that might take a lot of time. Thus changing mindsets is no mean task; it may take decades

or centuries for some where thought becomes free from magical or superstitious obsessions towards the birth of critical thought necessary for integral development in the open society.

The dawn of open society brings with it a new uneasiness of lack of universal ethos individualism and pluralism creeps in and takes the toll while personal intellectual responsibility takes shape. This is the price to be paid for every increase in knowledge, logic, reasonableness, security and dynamism in development.

The open society brings with it challenges that seem endless, whether social, political or economic. Arresting political change is not the remedy, we cannot turn to the alleged innocence and beauty of the closed society. Our dream of heaven cannot be realized on earth. Once we begin to rely upon our reason and to use our powers of criticism, once we feel the call of personal intellectual responsibilities and with it, the responsibility of helping to advance knowledge, we cannot return to a state of implicit submission to tribal magic. For those who have tasted the fruit of the tree of intellectual freedom and knowledge, paradise and tribal patronage (closed society) is lost but no tears are to be shed! (Popper, 1994) There is no return to the lure of false harmony of the state of nature. If we turn back, then we must go the whole way, we must return to the beast of the Hobbes's state of nature of endless conflicts and insecurity. If we wish to remain human, we must not dream to return back to our mother's wombs, but be ready to accept the challenges of intellectual, social, cultural pluralism and maturity of critical thought, the way of open society.

THE KENYAN SITUATION: CLOSED SOCIETIES TOWARDS THE BIRTH PANGS OF OPEN SOCIETY

Diverse Kenyan cultures had their own different cultural milieu and mindsets. Thus the ontology could be as diverse as the cultural idiosyncrasies. A good number of Kenyan tribal communities were closed societies (Popper, 1994) that were/are in constant social cultural political conflicts with each other on account of their diversities in respect to ontology, epistemology and consequently value systems.

This existential situation is a common occurrence in many communities within Kenya where consensus on many social cultural political issues are difficult to achieve. Tribal leaders have a passion for active hatred against each other. This study argues that, such an ontology and epistemology that belongs to a closed society is the reason for endless wars in a multicultural, racial, tribal society like Kenya. There is need to transcend the closed society and develop the open society policy whereby multicultural pluralism in ontology and epistemology is appreciated as an enrichment towards

integral development as opposed to selective developmental areas based on a mythical epistemology.

When tribal leaders are confronted with grave ethical issues of corruption, ineptitude, economic crime or otherwise and consequences threaten, they retreat to the security of their closed societies.

Intermittent conflicts, banditry, cattle rustling and wars are symptomatic of diverse mindsets. Good development strategy will less conflicts is supposed to lead towards economic, social, cultural and political stability where all the talents are fully exploited for the benefit of economic development of the nation.

The origin of conflicts can be traced to ontological, epistemological, cosmological and ethical diversities of the many ethnic groups in Africa. Each community has tended to exclude the other in its cosmology or world view, and the other has been seen as an antithesis or threat to the thesis of the existence of the other. The difficult in transcending one's world view has been a big challenge that needs to be overcome in order to enhance the mutual recognition and tolerance that will lead to integrative development.

THE CLOSED SOCIETIES AND THE CHALLENGES TO OPEN UP TO CRITICAL THOUGHT FOR THE SAKE OF INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT

Language depicts the logic, spirit of a people, it preserves the philosophy, values and cultural treasure of a community (Kiruki, 2004). If you want to understand a people delve deep into the philosophical concepts depicted within that language, and there you will encounter a people's conceptual framework as symbolized in words.

A people's logic may be warped in our judgment, but it is their subjective cultural logic that needs critical appraisal in the event of its contacts with the pluralistic culture. On the semantics level for instance, the word for a foreigner in respect to different African linguistic analogy is almost non-existent, where it is found, it is equated to an enemy. This follows in line with Popper's description of closed tribal communities that had little or no regard for others existence. This mindset is a recipe for conflicts because, a given community does not recognize the other as legitimate and authentic in terms of establishing mutuality in existence.

Thus a foreigner is an enemy. This is existentially true because of the evident conflicts and wars that different communities wage against each other just because they belong to different ethnic groupings (tribes, clans). An enemy's ontology is reduced to the level of an object. This relativistic epistemological position also dictates the ethical direction on how a foreigner ought to

be treated, not as a person worthy of dignity but as an object whose value is below that of a human person.

Communities that harbor irrational hatred and fear for each other and remain closed are like active volcanoes due to explode and release their fiery magma and dust all around causing untold suffering to all to the detriment of development. Closed societies that exclude and demean the ontology of the others is a sign of a closed society's mindset that can have grave consequences and implications in a nation's social, cultural, political, and economic spheres.

Popper advocated for tolerance in cases of cultural diversity for the sake of development.

A Marshall Plan of building roads, schools, universities, industries, irrigation would be appropriate. The global community ought to take moral leadership in this respect because the world has become a global village and any neglect of any part of the globe is a process of nursing tomorrow's terrorists who are constantly dissatisfied and ignored by the wealthy nations.

It thus becomes difficult to maintain national unity where the ontology, epistemology, and ethics of the closed communities become supreme. The diversity of mindsets and closed communities become breeding ground for endless conflicts. There is hence need for open societies that mutually acknowledge and recognize the rights of the existence of others with their own different mindsets thus taking up intellectual responsibilities.

No sooner had the African leaders taken over the leadership of their countries than they focused themselves on the egoistic ethics of the stomach under the clarion call, it is our turn to eat (lead). African leaders had been used to leading their own closed tribal communities, but not an open society or nation composed of a conglomeration of tribes with diverse epistemologies and interests. To ask them to lead and treat all people of all tribes and races equally was a tall order and a big paradigm shift from the tribal closed society ontology and epistemology to an open society national outlook and mindset that was intellectually challenging and no mean task for intellectual dwarfs. The relativistic tribal ethics were in application and the major qualification was the tribe and not the know-how. It is/was an issue of technical know-who and not the technical know-how. The universal ethical considerations were out of their mindsets conveniently. Further the others from different communities were considered on the basis of political correctness but not on the basis of qualification.

EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Intellectual empowerment brings about pictures of inspired and confident people or groups of people who are ready and able to take control of their lives and better

their world in terms of development. The closed communities in Africa (Popper, 1994) thought themselves self-sufficient in terms of exercise of their powers in the traditional magical context.

Nobody questioned the authority and power (God given) of traditional leaders and the exercise of the same over their own people. With the breakdown of closed societies and the emergence of open societies during independence, the power game brought about a paradigm shift and was more complex on account of many divergent societies in the whole nation as opposed to a tribe.

There was need for mutual recognition and acknowledgment of the existence of diversity in a nation. The sharing of the national resources and opportunities equitably was critical in national cohesiveness. Thus new nationalistic or universal ethical theories had to take precedence of relativistic cultural ethical theories that were based on traditional epistemological mindsets.

Intellectual empowerment is about giving people the confidence, competence, freedom, and resources to act on their own judgments. Hence, when a person or group of people are empowered, they undergo a change in their relationship to other people who hold power and with whom they share mutual goals.

In a community, empowering citizens changes their relationship to each other and to other holders of power such as business and government. In a business, empowering employees changes their relationship to each other, management, and the work process. In order to be integrally empowered, the system of education must not be regionalized or localized, rather the youth must be given an opportunity of mix and learn from each other's diversity from all corners of the country so as to nurture the principle of tolerance early enough.

It is a people's mindset that determines the moral value they apportion to a variety of realities and actions and development. Thus the ontology of the open society or a nation in regard to the human worth determines the moral value the nation puts in human life in respect to basic rights of food, health, shelter, education, security, water, good infrastructure and determination of one's life through hard work and creativity.

Before the advent of Europeans in Africa, the various ethnic communities in Africa had their own developmental structures based on their specific epistemologies that were divergent. The Europeans too had their own value system based on their own ontology and epistemology.

The coming of the Europeans and establishment of arbitrary conventional boundaries meant that, a given people that were separate were now going to be seen to belong to one country. They were to share a common destiny in terms of the new concept of a Nation. This

meant that, their various relativistic and pluralistic leadership developmental structures and value systems were to be challenged to come from their closed communities into open society with its critical scrutiny.

Developmental agenda ought to be divorced from politics such that all regions of the country can receive equitable share of the national cake. There ought to be no politically correct regions that would receive a Lions share of developmental funds while other regions get neglected and are punished for being in the opposition. When the populace notice that justice and fairness is done in national developmental, they feel secure and protected and hence they do not need to fear or be defensive. There would be less politics and more focus on development such that the energies used in politics can constructively be utilized in positive development and real improvement of people's lives.

CONCLUSION

The Popperian philosophical fundamentals including equally the critical and responsible perception of truth, the principles of tolerance, rational discussion, criticism which include self criticism and intellectual honesty and responsibility can be seen as prerequisites for intellectual development for a better sustainable world with less tensions and conflicts for Kenya, Africa and the world.

Africa has had more than enough share of its own home-grown conflicts that have irrationally (closed society) misled their people to the abyss of economic ruin and hopelessness where development has been a magical myth. Many anachronistic cultural practices within the closed societies are irrational because they are incompatible with the global common moral horizon, they are symptoms of poor localized and hazy development.

Despite diversity and plurality of values in different cultures: There must be some frontiers of freedom (red line) as subscribed by the global open society which nobody should be permitted to cross.

An intelligible culture suitably privileges at least some minimum core of equal rights for all. A value system that does not do this is unacceptable in the global open society. All cultures ought to be schooled in this thought system so as to instill in them the global character of the nature of existential existence of man in the open society.

Equal rights for all must be established. Moral rules must distribute equal rights even if these equal rights do not actually receive equal protection under prevailing laws and customs, as a result of prejudice or ignorance in particular social contexts. The system of equal rights must be viewed with paramount moral value. The values attached basic rights must generally override other values

in case of conflict, so that a minimum extent of individual liberty may remain inviolable.

Other crucial factors to integrative and sustainable development include the idea of human rights which rests on the true belief that there are certain goods – freedom, justice, pursuit of happiness, honesty, love – that are in the interest of all human beings, as such, not as members of this or that nationality, religion, profession, character, culture, tribe, ethnicity; and that it is right to meet these claims and to protect people against those who ignore or deny them. I think that every (intelligible) culture which has ever existed assumed that there exist such rights – or at least a minimum of them.

If development is to become a reality, there is need to acknowledge the many deficiencies that ought to be corrected and rectified. The mental attitude which is a key to any kind of development or progress ought to be less subjective and emotive and more objective in the search of truth. The movers of African development strategies may borrow a leaf from Popper:

Standards of objective truth and criticism may teach him to try again and to think again, to challenge his own conclusions...to apply the method of trial and error in every field...and thus may teach him how to learn from his mistakes, and how to search for them...may help him to discover how little he knows, and how much there is he does not know...may help him to grow in knowledge, and also to realize that he is growing...may help him to become aware of the fact that he owes his growth to other people's criticisms, and that reasonableness is readiness to listen to criticism...this way may even help him to transcend his animal past, and with it that subjectivism and voluntarism in which romantic and irrationalism philosophies may try to hold him captive. This is the way our mind grows and transcends itself (Popper, 1989).

Any traces of dogmatism in matters concerning cultures ought to be dismantled in favor of a subdued attitude that accepts criticism and reasonableness. The mythological past (closed society) in view of anachronistic mannerism is to be transcended as the light of reason and intellectual responsibility takes control in the open society. The destiny of Africa is in the hands of its people who are to be instruments of change and dynamism towards shared prosperity in the dawn of a global open society.

RECOMMENDATION

The open society is no panacea of all the human challenges in the global world. The open society leads towards economic well-being and highly individualized society. Values are more or less highly pluralistic and subjective where agreements in many issues are not easy

to come by. Life is more than economic well being. Relationships are crucial and important, but the value for money in the open society has depersonalized individuals and made them automatons at the service of the economy.

There is need for more integrative developmental society for Kenya and Africa that borrows from the positive values of both the open and closed societies. The positive values to be adopted from the open society include the policies for economic and technological development. From the closed society, the value of communalism where family values derive their source will enrich a depersonalized individualistic open society. There are many good values that need to be integrated in a hybrid developmental strategy that takes note of both societies.

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