UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN AND DIASPORA STUDIES LAGOS ACC PIS MONTHLY PRESENTATION

TITLE OF THE PRESENTATION: RECLAIMING THE SELF THROUGH A RE-READING OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

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- **Solution** Reclaiming the self through a re reading of African human relationship
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- Abstract
- This presentation addresses a puzzling trend in human relationship in contemporary times pictured by the culture of lying. I argue that while lying may seem casual and a daily routine, it is evolving into a culture of lies in human relationship. This culture portends a danger exhibited in the process through which history is rewritten. Drawing insight from Hannah Arendt's existential phenomenology as developed in *The Human Condition*, I further argue for a reclaiming of our authentic social and cultural selves that ultimately serves as a basis for self-rediscovery, positive identity projection and recognition of Africa and beyond.
- **Key words:** African human relationship, the culture of lying, self-rediscovery, the self.

Outline of the Presentation

- Introduction and background to the study
- Statement of the problem
- Aim and Objectives
- Research Questions
- Methodology
- Theoretical Framework
- Detailed analysis and Contribution to knowledge
- Conclusion

Introduction and Background to the study

- This study starts in an unfamiliar manner with a story told by, Diogenes. Diogenes (404-323 BC) of Sinope was Greek Philosopher and a Cynic who was known for interesting cynical and philosophical stories.
- The History of Philosophy taught us that Diogenes of Sinope of the Cynic school of thought (Hellenistic Period) went searching for an honest man. He travelled far and wide carrying a lamp with him even in broad day light. The aim is to put every opportunity to use in finding this honest man. Unfortunately, all efforts and labour were exercise in futility.
- All the travels did not yield any positive result. Diogenes could not find any honest person anywhere.
- This story apparently cynical, simple and amusing carries a deeper meaning than it appears.
- If we were to put ourselves in Diogenes's shoes in this contemporary age of technology, information technology and social media, dictating the pace of human relationship, we may have the same experience Diogenes had thousands years ago.

Statement of the Problem

- Different features characterize human relations. One of the features is communication. Human beings have different ways to relate and communicate. Communication can be through speech, voices, gestures or through the sense organs. It is a way of transmitting a message.
- Communication is the act of impacting meaning among individuals, groups of people through the use of mutual understood medium such as signs, symbols or semantic conventions. This feature explains why man is naturally a social being whose essence is to relate and communicate with other human beings.
- However the question is: what do we communicate? What message do we pass across? How do men relate and communicate in contemporary times considering that societies are dynamic and not static.
- Recent studies by Psychologists and sociologists reveal that we are living in a time of proliferation of lies. Lies are everywhere and the trend is so alarming that if not checked it can destroy the basic foundations of any society.

Aim and Objectives

- The aim of this study is to reclaim and save the authentic African self from the drift towards self oblivion.
- The objectives of this study are to:
- Understand lies in the context of human relationship
- Examine the different manifestations of lies
- Reassess the self in an African context
- Redefine the "Homo africanus" (Okolo, 118)

Research questions

- What are lies in human relations?
- What are the different manifestations of lies?
- Who is the African Self?
- How is the "*Homo Africanus*" redefined?

Methodology

- The methodology used in this study is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics derives from the Greek word *Hermeneia* meaning interpretation.
- In the Greek mythology, it has an affiliation with *Hermes*, the swift footed messenger of the Olympian gods. His duty was to master the language of the gods, understand and interpret the message of the immortal beings to the mortal beings.
- In philosophy, hermeneutics is a theory, a method of interpretation of texts, messages among others. In this study, hermeneutics is put to contribution to recapture the proper meaning of human relations in contemporary times and reclaim the "embattled" African self/man.
- Considering the story of Diogenes, The Greek Philosophy embarked in his time in a cynical way into a philosophical analysis of daily experiences. Diogenes was indirectly inviting the people of his time to reflect critically on what life in society was offering.
- Similarly, Hannah Arendt in *The Origin of Totalitarianism*(1951), *The Human Condition*(1958) and *Between Past and Future* (1961) was also inviting contemporary men to relate their daily experiences with the act of thinking. Her focus was to make sense of daily happenings and events of her time. Her method was an experiential method of thought. In the same manner, this study invites everyone to think critically one of the burning issues of our time, lies in public space.

Theoretical framework

- The theoretical framework underlying this work is existential phenomenology.
- Two philosophical movements are put together.
- Existentialism critical understanding of ourselves and others.
- Phenomenology reasoned inquiry that finds out the inherent essences of things.
- Existential Phenomenology considers in this study the totality of human relationship in the world, in terms of human concrete existence as Being-in —the world and Beingwith-others.

Detailed analysis and contribution to Knowledge

Meaning of Lies

- The Webster's Comprehensive English Dictionary(2013) defines lies as an untrue statement, falsehood. Anything that deceives and creates false impression. It is an assertion with a purpose of deceiving someone. The practice of communication that uses the art of deceit.
- With the advent of new forms of communication in our society, lies have become a norm, capable of destroying the society.
- However, they are some lies that said to be honest and noble.
- An honest lie has no intention to misinform and the messenger is unaware that the information is false.
- a noble lie is often told to maintain law, order and safety
- Historical delineation of lies in human relationship.
- In the history of man, lies appeared form inception.
- In the Bible for instance Gen. 3.6 Adam Eve and the fruit in the middle of the garden. Adam when asked who gave him the fruit, he answered my wife. But the Bible recorded, "she ate and gave the man with him".

Detailed analysis and contribution to knowledge (cont'd)

- Still in The Bible, some accounts of lies.
- Ex.1 :15-21 The midwives lies and said incapable of killing the children in Israel.
- Rahab lies about hiding the Hebrew spies(Josh. 2:4-5). In the new Testament, Judas, Peter lied at different moments. Paul admonished Christians to desist from lying.(Col.3.9) etc.
- In the Medieval Period in Philosophy Augustine wrote different books on lying.
- On Lying (De Mendacio) and Against Lying(Contra mendacio)
- *Augustine* classified lies into eight categories:
- Lies in religious teaching
- Lies that harm others and help no one
- Lies that harm others and help someone
- Lies told for the pleasure of lying
- Lies told to please others in smooth discourse
- Lies that harm no one and help some one materially
- Lies that harm no one and help someone spiritually
- Lies that harm no one and that protect someone from "bodily defilement" (On Lying)

Detailed analysis and contribution to knowledge (cont'd)

- Many other scholars in Ancient and contemporary times had a look at lying in human relationship. Hume, Foucault and many others.
- However Hannah Arendt was in contemporary time the philosopher that wrote extensively on lying. Her focus was lying in Politics. She had a deep insight into the consequences of lying in politics, an experience that we have even in our time.
- Unfortunately, honest people are seen in our world as naïve.
- What is the essence of this study to Africa and the reconfiguration of African Studies.
- The question is a fundamental one as it addresses the subject of human relationship, the African Man.
- Understanding the self in Africa.
- The traditional African man is basically and fundamentally a relational being. In this relationship, he finds his on essence and fullness of being. His reality is all about relationship. He relates with the mortals and the immortal beings. He is the link and the nexus between those who are and those who were. Okolo(1993,119) notes that he is a dualistic being. He relates with the visible and the invisible. See also, Placide Tempels (1959, 61-63)

Analysis (cont'd)

- As it is the relationship between the mortal and the immortal makes the African to have a different pattern of relationship.
- This pattern that involves the non living, the spiritual makes his position and status in life more complex.
- He has a duty and a responsibility towards his community, himself, the ancestors and by extension the spiritual world. This complex situation compels him not to entertain deceit.
- Placide Tempels in *Bantu Philosophy* reiterated this idea by giving a clear demarcation and synergy between the visible and the invisible order of existence. They interact and relate with each other.
- The interaction and intercommunication between the visible and the invisible are only possible through men.
- The African traditional man is the centre of creation (Okolo, 1993, 120-121)
- The African traditional self has the duty to be focus and desist from falsehood because the reward of a fake life is disastrous.
- Fallenness as the existentialists note is one the essential trait of man. It a structure of man in the world. Whenever, it happens there an inauthentic life displaying. How is an authentic life possible?
- Many scholars such as Nyerere, Nkrumah defined the African man and tried to proffer solutions to the ills of their time by redefining the African man through their ideas. But the greatest misdeed of these theories is that it did not consider the spiritual angle to these redefinition and reclaim.
- Arendt in BPF emphasized tradition as the missing link in the journey to reconcile the past and the future. By inference, we submit that tradition is possibly the missing link.
- As such to reclaim and reset human relationship to its original position tradition must be put to contribution.

conclusion

- The redefinition of the self in Africa is a venture into a possible redefinition of the self and his relationship with the world.
- The self in African tradition is essentially as Okolo (p.125) puts it "a social self, man-in-relation to others. However, the notable distinction is that the interconnections and relationships of the self to mothers extend to the spirit-world, the dead ancestors, the "living-dead".
- The same idea is also ex[pressed in Gyekye's work on the Concept of Person among the Akan . A person, he notes is constituted by two principal substances, one spiritual and the other physical. (Gyekye, 1978, 282).
- This work submits that that the self in African tradition is not individualistic, rather, he is social and enters into a web of relationship designed by the society.
- As such, the self relating with the living and the spiritual beings can not but watch his/her steps and speech in order to avoid lies and not to offend the "gods".