

African Philosophy Is A Defense Of Africa Identity

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Abstract: *Philosophy is a universal human process or exercise that cannot be exclusively being attributed to a particular human race. There is no one human race devoid of thinking or reasoning. To think is one of the characteristics element of all human beings which differentiate it from other lower animals and things which cannot think like stone; trees; rivers; etc. to say that a particular human race is bereft of reasoning is fallacious and then tantamount to a racist assertion.*

By this we mean that for devoid human and his western Euro-centrists to say that Africans had no ingenious manufacturers, Arts and Sciences of their own amount to a racist proclamation said to denigrate Africans as a primitive and uncultured as it had no history and positive contribution to the world's civilization¹. Africans as people with culture and philosophy joined the wider-world in the exercise of philosophizing about their problems; as such they too reason and think in giving solutions to common problems of life that confront them. If they are found doing this, it therefore means that they have philosophy as their counterpart in the other side of the world i.e. Western and Eastern.

The issue of whether there exist philosophy in Africa is no longer an issue; the question and existence of African philosophy had been settled more than four decades ago when it was established before all eyes and hears that African philosophy is the world-view upon which the Africans reflect upon their problems affecting them in their world and solve such problem that is common to humanity through African mode of thought.

I. INTRODUCTION

Africans were conceived by the Europeans as beings not only in historical darkness but equally in divine, mural and above all philosophical darkness. This has been debunked by academic African philosophers, for C.S. Momoh "*philosophy is the base and apex, the foundation, the ceiling and the roof of any civilization, any religion, any science, indeed any discipline*". Philosophy is a light which shuns and eliminate the darkness. It is the road to civilization; it is that which brings about science and technology by which modern life is assured. Modern life with its ease and splendid joy is engineered by philosophy; without philosophy there will not be science and development both material and human wise.

The human Art i.e. philosophy was derived sometimes ago in Africa which is the cradle of human civilization base on racist conundrum by some European racists like David Wume, G.W.F Hegel and a host of racist philosophers and anthropologists as well.

Even when philosophy in Africa was later accepted, it was simply seen as a cultural anthropology or derogatorily referred to as "ethno-philosophy". Philosophers like Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Huntondji; late Bodurin; Odera Oruka of Nairobi Kenya were among the philosophers who are the logical Neo-positivist joined the western philosophers to attribute African philosophy as cultural philosophy and not philosophy in its proper sense, simply because to them African philosophy is nothing than myths; proverbs; folktales; stories and more native slogans. This groups of Africans because of the western accession of logical analysis which they have imbibe from the western education view philosophical endeavors from analytic perspective of scientists basis concluded that so long African philosophy do not conform to the western paradigm then philosophy was not yet in Africa; that what existed then was mere traditional African thought system which comprises of myths and stories. That academic philosophy was more than myths and stories telling by the moonlight.

This above elements to which the denialist made of African philosophy was a calculable mistake on their part because every philosophy has a sub-structure to which myths and folktales belong. There is no philosophy that does not have myths as its foundation. No wonder Father Tempels, the Belgian who philosophized into the Bantus ontology who systematized the structure of the Bantus way of life and thought system thought that he did the Bantus favor by writing about their philosophy thereby making the western know that the Bantus have ontology. This work primarily did a good service to Africa since the work aimed at showcasing the rich philosophy of Africa people as against the earlier position of ultra denial.

The acceptance of a philosophy in Africa has been long established more than four decades ago. This came after a long debate and questions about the existence and non-existence of African philosophy by both the western philosophers and Africans who school in the western school who because of their western orientation supported the Europeans that except philosophy is done in western ways analysis, logical structure and critical examination. Philosophy cannot be ascribed to Africa. To them therefore, western education and missionary activities are what brought reading and writing to Africa until then there was no philosophy in Africa.

The debate which brought a lot of issues as to what constitute a philosophy – The question whether literary piece is what make a people to have a philosophy? Or is philosophy generally perceived as thinking and reasoning?

If philosophy is reasoning or thinking than a writing pieces of literary work then philosophy exist before writing down what one thinks as reasoning come first before writing down ideas. Therefore philosophy is a universal phenomenon; not just an activity peculiar to a given set of people while others folding their hands to look as the western philosophers portrays that philosophy began in Greece with the Ionians, Melitian and Sicilians.

While philosophy has been ascribed to be in every human community as human activity born out of human cultural practices for survival need and process of understanding reality; a curious look into the long debate and question over the reality of African. Philosophy suggests that the various issues raised on the existence of African philosophy portend a defense of African identity.

This paper therefore attempts to examine how the question and debate of African philosophy is a defense of African identity. By so doing, this paper aimed at studying such issues as European biases or prejudice about Africa or the black race. Philosophizing a university activity and some issues which arose during the debate and reaction on them which show cases African world-views as their own identity-like African mode of thought; writing tradition in philosophy; the historical perspective of a philosophy and the issue of method of philosophizing and ideology for good governance etc.

II. EUROCENTRIC BIASES ABOUT AFRICA

The Europeans early writers on Africa distorted the picture of Africa for racist reasons. They instead of

recognizing and appreciating the fact that Africa in the past was the cradle of world civilization, labeled Africa as a dark continent influenced by hot weather, infested with hunger, mosquitoes, diseases, superstition and stagnation². None of these above mentioned issues is true about Africa about the time mentioned Africans were farmers with fertile land and large human population could till the soil for agricultural practices for large scale food production of both food crops and cash crops; about this same time European traders came to Africa for purchase of raw materials for their existing industries such items as: cotton, cocoa and rubber were largely produced for the growing Europeans industries for cash exchange with profitable values against negative report of hunger, mosquitoes and diseases and stagnation wrongly imposed on Africa. If not for a racist ideology to bring down the image of Africa before the wider-world. This wrong impression would have been said about Africa.

The Europeans anthropologist, ethnographers and historians maintained that Africa had no history and high culture to contribute to the world's civilization and progress. To avoid contradiction and self-defeat in their mission of misrepresenting Africa to the world, they ignored the indigenous African Statesmen and Kings whose advanced knowledge, wisdom, technology and administration in their ancient kingdoms like Ghana, Mali and Songhai³. Africa had always had notable men and women of great reputes such as Jupa II; Marius Cornelius Pronto; Atristippus of Cyrene; Hegesias Crates of Thebes in Egypt, Amo Anthony William etc. They were all endowed with great wisdom with which the entire world recognized them by which they contributed meaningfully to their mediate environment and the world at large yet for the purpose of denigration. The European would always say that Africa had never contributed to the civilization of the world. All that the above Africans did and were applauded for where have they gone to in the world records? Thrown over-board and erased off because they are Africans their contributions towards world civilization cannot be heard and echoed simply because they are not Europeans. The problem with the western historians, ethnographers and philosophers who defended eurocentricism and wrote negatively about the African contribution to the world's civilization was due to the initial error committed in antiquity by the Greeks. The Greeks regarded all nations outside the Hellenistic culture as Asia; the great land beyond Europe, all of them including Africa they considered under Asia.

The Imperialists and philosophers that support eurocentricism to justify and rationalize colonialism in Africa, all their reasons are falsehoods that Africa before the coming of the Europeans were barbaric and unrefined. To support this claims of their superiority over African, David Hume (1711 - 1770) the sceptic Scottish claimed that the inhuman and oppression of Africans by the white justified since Africans had no Arts and Science of their own; that colonization of Africa was for the good of Africans as they were children who are incapable of thinking.

David Hume's claim has no substance but rather a statement made out of envy over the giant stride made by African son in Germany called Anthony William Amo, a man who stood to challenge the Eurocentric attitudes against the Africans.

Another notable European whose words were denigrating and insulting against Africa is G.W.F Hegel. Hegel maintained that Africa was primitive and uncultured that Africa had no history and positive contribution to the world's civilization. He asserted that the western exploiters and slave traders on Africa are the ones who brought the thought of history and value to Africans.

Lastly, on the account of Eurocentric assertion and negative appellation against Africa by the Europeans is Karl Jasper an existentialist philosopher who lived between 1883-1963. He denigrated the ancient Egyptian civilization by saying that it was an age of myth and stagnation. He pointed to the claim that the time of colonization of Africa was the beginning of African history. To him there was no high culture in Africa before the coming of the Europeans: that if not for the advent of the colonizers who exploited, enslaved Africans they would have be out of existence.

III. DEBUNKING EUROCENTRIC CLAIMS ON AFRICA

The imperialists claims on Africans are baseless assertions that do not hold water rather they are mere racist statement made suppress, subjugate and make Africa and Africans look inferior before the Europeans so that they can lord it on us and find bases to justify their ill-treatment against Africans enslavement, colonialism, imperialism and compradors systems instituted against Africa and Africans.

To debunk some of their claims such as we do not think and reason even if we do our reasoning is pre-logical. This cannot be true. Africans reason as well as the Europeans but the mode or logical structures between Africans and the European are not the same and they cannot expect us to reason the same way as they do because no two different person view things the same way. The ultral differences do not warrant their claim that Africans is pre-logical or at worst they do not reason at all. Evan-pritchard defense of Lucien Levy-Bruhl explained that what Bruhl meant by "pre-logical" are the modes of thought (Magi co-Religious thoughts), which appear so true to the primitives and so absurd to the Europeans. Lucien meant something quite different from what his critics accused him of saying. Evans explained that Lucien Levy-Bruhl did not mean that primitives are incapable of thinking coherently but merely that most of their beliefs are incompatible with a critical and scientific view of the universe. He was not saying that the primitives are unintelligent but that their beliefs are unintelligent to the Europeans that African reason quite logically but they start from different premises which are absurd to the Europeans⁵. What all this bore down to be is that our mode of thought is different from the Europeans. The categories from which Africans reason are different from the Europeans. The Europeans adopt the Aristotelian logical forms. The primitive do not go out of his way as Evan said they do in avoiding contradictions.

To say that Africa has no history in the past and as such having contributed to world civilization is a blatant lie; there is not an iota of truth in such an Eurocentric assertion. In the African origin of Greek philosophy Innocent Onyewu Enyi pointed out that Greek philosophy is an Egyptian origin. This

goes to show that Egypt a nation in Africa is the centre of human civilization and that the present day Egyptians were before now black Africans but due to inter-marriage and immigration of white most Egyptians are presently populated by white. Egypt has an outstanding records of great painting; sculptural works and govern mental ingenuity. The solemn agricultural practices in the rich Nile valley with sophisticated techniques for the cultivation both cash and food crops with numerous animal rearing which supported human life cannot be overemphasized. Charles Darwin (1809-1882), a biologist who is known and remarkable for his evolutionary theory mentioned man developed from millions of years ago from animals, said that human progenitors lived in Africa⁷. This statement of Darwin is taken to be true since the fertile land of the Nile valley supported agricultural activities that provided food for life.

The Egyptian civilization brought with it profound wisdom; knowledge and great artistic works like the earliest forms of writing called the hieroglyphics dated back to 3500 B.C. which started some million years before the Greek advent of Coptic forms of writing.

The need for debunking negative history attached to Africa in the bid to denigrate the continent in the area of not having Art and philosophy of its own can be vividly showcased from the profound philosophic insight of some Africans particularly of the Worth African breed. The Numidia or Algeria, Egypt and Cyrene had some worthy thinkers such as Jupa II (46 BC – 23 AD) Marius Cornelius Pronto (100 AD - 166), Aristippus of Cyrene (435 - 366 BC), Hegesias; Crates of Thebes in Egypt and so on. These people of Africa origin contributed immensely to the shaping of minds in Africa and the world at large.

Jupa II was known for his knowledge in Roman culture which he transported into his kingdom. He had great insight of the history of such kingdom as Libya, Arabia, Assyria and Rome. Marius Cornelius Pronto was the best known orator of his time. He is a contemporary of Cicero and Quintilian. Marius propagated the Cyrenaica philosophy which led to the philosophy of Aristippus who is a close associate of Scrates the teacher of Rhetoric.

Hegesias was a notable atheist and pessimist who was known for the ethical philosophy that happiness could not be attained since pain occurred more often than happiness in human experience. Hegesais propagated the philosophy of Hedonism.

Crates lived between (365-285), he was from Thebes in Egypt. He went to Athens at a young age and became the head of Plato's academy in Athens. He is known for the preaching of voluntary poverty. Crates was said to have been so loved by people of his generation that they each wrote on their door post the inscription: "*Welcome to Crates, the good spirit*".

Africa produced in the middle ages men whose philosophy manifested love for God and humanity. Yet the Europeans had it that Africa never contributed to the world's civilization and in some Quarters they argued that they had no philosophy and if they had any, they say philosophy in Africa is but traditional Africa thought consisting merely fables, folktales, proverbs and myths which are not philosophy in the academic sense.

IV. PHILOSOPHIZING AS A UNIVERSAL ACTIVITY

Thinking is not a mark of a particular human race but a universal mark or feature of all human races. The finding in some philosophy text that the Melitians, Sicilians and Ionians were the philosophers who made frantic effort to explore the meaning of reality does not attribute to them the sole right or claim to the originator of philosophy. Philosophy does not have origination. Philosophy is an innate borne practice in every human being. It is an endemic element in all human person to reason and reflect upon things surrounding them especially problems of life which are common to all humans.

So, to say that philosophy is an activity of a particular set of people or persons is worst than a fallacy without grounds.

V. AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: A REALITY

To say that there is philosophy in a particular region is a truism as philosophy is a product of a peoples culture. Philosophy is borne out of culture from a particular socio-cultural milieu makes it relative. Hence, the appellation western philosophy; eastern philosophy; American philosophy; British philosophy and perhaps African philosophy as well. Philosophy in Africa denied as a history and also an orientation concern. It is the orientational background that makes some of the denialist like Wiredu to make a distinction between "African philosophy as folk-thought pre-served in oral tradition and African philosophy as critical individual reflection using modern logical and conceptual techniques. This would have not come up had Wiredu not been brought up in logical-analytic tradition of western philosophy.

The question and debate concerning the existence or non-existence of African philosophy was so intense that when it appeared that a reprieve was coming Africa can have a philosophy - the debate shifted to what makes a philosophy "African". The question became: "*is a written piece classified as African philosophy because it was written by an African and within the geographical location of Africa? Who is an African? Someone who is born of an African parent, those blacks in Diaspora?*" There came different senses to the world African. The sense which portress the geographical location; the one writing in the manner of or styling; while the third sense comprises of the two sense yet not constituting African. This third sense is what made Hountonji to reject father Tempel's Bantus philosophy as not African while accepting Alex kagami's work as an internal part of African philosophical literature.

Professor Sophie Oluwole's "The Africanness of a philosophy" rejects metaphysical and epistemological attributes, geographical origin as target of a philosophy as options in identifying what makes a philosophy "African". She pointed that "The Africanness of a philosophy" therefore must transcend these features that define the specificity of various theories of metaphysics and/or epistemology.

What this means is that philosophy is not defined based on the existence of written works and that there is need for African philosophy to extricate itself from the hegemony of western mind or orientation rather African philosophy should

be particular with how African make meanings out of their life. Meaning that the subject matter goal and nature of African philosophy should be the immediate determinant of what constitutes African philosophy. This is the exact point of the topic: the question and debate of African philosophy is the defense of African identity.

VI. AFRICAN IDENTITY

The concept of African identity is an aspiration of the Africans to showcase their personality which involves such items as African personhood; African values; African culture(s) and a host of other personality issues that bothers on selfhood. It therefore becomes the emergence of movement towards decolonization of African continent from all negative appellations against it. African personality is the attempt to reconstruct and rebuild Africa from the ruins of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

African identity is the idea of who the Africans really are against negative postulation held about it image. Thus, the African personality movement is an effort for building up pure image of the African person, a re-establishment of the African self-a-self directed and self controlled continent.¹¹ African identity stems out of what can be called the African world view. The African world view encompasses a holistic approach to understanding humanity and the cosmos. Within the world view are multitude of interconnections and interactions between the cosmos, high god, lesser gods; spirits; ancestors; vital force; divine kings; elders and familial bonds.¹² Core to African world view is the thesis of community-individual model that tells of the interconnections of the extended family relation with the individual as the ground for personal identity.

The African identity is built upon the idea of communal relations which expresses itself in what the Zulu people of South Africa refers to as "*Umutu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*" i.e. a person is a person through other persons. Secondly, the African philosophy of "*Ubuntu*" i.e. the philosophy of communal-individual model that talked of the content of humanity is core to African identity¹³. At the heart of African otology, philosophy and epistemology we can find so many slogan which express the communal-individual model of African identity. Among the Bini speaking people of Edo state of Nigeria we haer of traditional Bini family consisting the extended ones; the living elders ancestral members of the family and community each and every one influencing one another by the vital bond; each partaking in the spiritual bond with roles that out lived death.

The African identity which is explicated by communal-individual model is quiet difernt from the western model. The difference rest on the western understanding a kind of 'atomistic being' whereas the Africans self is being bound by the vital force hence the relevance of the communal-individual model showing the connectedness of both the community with the individual both are integrally bond together with separateness. This echoed out in what the Binis' regard as "*Otwanwan*" i.e. my "*relations*" which consist of both male and female forming an extended whole. Such is the nature of African identity that is found in African philosophy becomes a

cistern repository of African world view by which Africa science and technology could be tapped for the service of the Africans hence the belief that African philosophy is a defense of African identity.

VII. AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY IS A DEFENSE OF AFRICAN IDENTITY

The question and debate of the existence and non-existence of African philosophy for the Africans.

This simply means that the debate and question raised over the existence and non-existence of African philosophy at last called Africanness of a philosophy which some African philosophers like professor Sophie Oluwole rightly answered above.

According to her - she said:

If our quest for the identification of Africanness of a philosophy is a demand for a particular cultural characterization of thought, what we need is an explicit statement of African thought in general and then of her philosophies in particular, using an analogy in the absence of a better alternative. The reason for this is simple. Philosophy is only part of a people's realm of thought in general. It is only because some literacy pieces partake of the general goal of African, not just because an author is African by origin. This is why we cannot role against the possibility of alien writing an authentic African philosophy just in the way many of what some of us produced are nothing but western philosophy. The Africanness of a philosophy therefore must transcend these features that define the specificity of various theories of metaphysics and/or epistemology.

What Sophie means by this is that African philosophy is the philosophy that is made out of African situation, African mode of thought and African existential conditions, the process of giving solution to problem affecting Africans the African way. Transporting this to the objective of this paper, then the question and debate of African philosophy is a defense of African identity which have been vividly showcased in the work of notable African literacy texts such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania titled "*Ujaama*". The political philosophy of Nkruma titled "*Consciencism*" and Nnamdi Azikiwe's "*Neo-welfarism*". This task of doing things the African way is also vehemently spotted among the purist such as C.S. Momoh; Barry Helen; J.O. Sodipo; Innocent Onyewuenyi; K.C. Anyanwu; Jim Unah; Enyeribe Onouha and the likes of Henry Odera Oruka and M.A. Makinde.

All of these believed that the fundamental questions similar to the western philosophy are also raised in African philosophy and answers are also attempted. They maintained that there is always a spirit of African in philosophizing. African philosophy should be pure and unadulterated i.e. free from foreign influences and culture. African philosophy, it is argued, should break away from western paradigms, conditioning and conceptual schemes. African philosophy

should be oriented towards African environment, basic assumptions, culture and goals. They queried the uncritical acceptance of western values and development models and urged that we see the need to make African culture and tradition the foundation of African philosophy. This position goes to show that philosophy can both be individual and/or collective or communal.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The question and debate of African philosophy rables so many issues about the existence and non-existence of African philosophy, such matters like: Is philosophy a universal activity? What is African philosophy? The goal and nature of African philosophy, it also raised the problem of what constitute African philosophy? Is it literacy pieces written that constitute a philosophy? Is it when it's written by an African that makes a work African philosophy? The answers given by the protagonist and the denialist automatically led to the position that there is indeed African philosophy which culminates in the defense African identity.

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