

REDEFINING AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY FOR EMANCIPATION FROM WESTERN CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

Moses Debo Gbadebo

Department Of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria.
Email: mgbadebo@unilag.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This work explores the possibility of redefining African Philosophy for emancipation of Africans from Western Cultural Imperialism. It proceeds from a consideration of the relevance of African philosophy and the recognition of the influence of Philosophy generally and African Philosophy in particular on the human mind both in thinking and knowing. It discusses the relevance of African Philosophy to the challenge of Western cultural imperialism and the quest to ultimately build up African culture and civilization. Man, we must note is a cultural being as well as a cultural builder, who is expected to make cultural contribution to world civilization. The work begin with clarification of our working terms, which are, the concept of African Philosophy, emancipation, culture and imperialism, thereafter, we discuss the relationship between African philosophy and the issue of cultural emancipation.

Keywords: Africa Philosophy, Culture, Emancipation, Imperialism.

INTRODUCTION

Available evidence in contemporary Africa, South of the Saharan indicates that Africa depends largely on western cultural values. This dependency poses a lot of challenges to the Africans. It has for example made the Africans to develop a sense of inferiority and disdain for his cultural values. Instead of looking for ways to develop his cultural heritage to the fullest, average Africans are forced to imitate others and to Escape from his African heritage, thus creating a cultural vacuum. This challenges requires African philosophers to explore the possibility of redefining Africa philosophy for emancipation of Africa from western cultural imperialism. The role of philosophy generally from ancient time in development

of the society cannot be overemphasized. Thus African philosophy must pay attention to confront or challenge western cultural imperialism and the need to build up African Culture and civilization in agreement with African cultural values.

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

African philosophy is that field of study that articulates and critically reflects on the total experience of the African, for example, on the way or ways he perceives reality. In general, it explores the particular ways the African experiences, conceives and interprets nature, society, religion, man, God, human conduct, and so on.

African philosophy according to C. B. Okolo is essentially a critical and systematic reflection on African experience, The African himself, his prospects and move of being in the world (Okolo, 1993: 4)

CULTURE

Culture simply refers to common ways of life of a people. It encompasses the people's beliefs, language, food, dresses, knowledge, customs, traditions, music, celebrations, festivals, norms, behavioural patterns, tools, arts, skills and values that are available in that society and everything that relates to human thoughts and works. In fact, culture touches on every aspect of human life.

IMPERIALISM

"Imperialism is an action that involves a country (usually an empire or a kingdom) extending its power by the acquisition of territories. It may also include the exploitation of these territories, an action that is linked to colonialism. Colonialism is generally regarded as an expression of imperialism" (Wikipedia, 2017). Imperialism is the policy of forcefully extending a nation's authority by territorial gain or by the establishment of economic and political dominance over other nations.

EMANCIPATION

This is the act of setting free from the power of another, from subjection, dependence, slavery or controlling influence. It is also the state of being thus set free, liberation; used of minors, slaves of a person from prejudices, of the mind from superstition or of a nation from subjection.

"Emancipation is any effort to procure economic and social rights, political rights or equality, often for a specifically disenfranchised group, or more

generally, in discussion of such matters. Emancipation stems from *ēx manus capere* ('detach from the hand')" (Wikipedia, 2017).

THE RELEVANCE OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy from ancient times has always been interested in human emancipation, either of the human mind from superstition or nation from tyranny or subjugation. This shows the relevant to human and societal development. If Karl Max's assertion is anything to go by, that philosophy has hither to interpret the world, but should now change it. This shows that Marxian philosophy is one of the forces that shapped western society.

It is also important to note that J.J Rousseau is referred to today as the father of French revolution because of his famous book "*The Social Contract Theory*" which was believed to be the strong force behind the French revolution, his forceful assertion that "Man is born free but everywhere in chain" was highly motivational to French revolutionaries. If we applied this to African countries, you will agree with me that Africa though is blessed in natural and human resources but everywhere in chain.

In the words of Obi Oguejiofor, African continent is bedevilled by political instability, permanent economic depression, poverty, famine, inter-ethnic conflict, wars just to mention a few (Oguejiofor, 1998: 202).

In a similar vein, B. O. Eboh and C. B. Okolo share their views on problems that militate against what I refer to as emancipation. These according to them includes Moral decadence, which gives birth to injustice, materialism, mediocrity, corruption, lost for power, intolerance and technological backwardness that made the country remain a dumping ground for all sort of inferior and useless product. (B. O.Eboh in J. Obi. Oguejiofor, 1998: 203). In view of the above, coupled with our earlier assertion that Africa though free politically, but not free economically, culturally and even mentally necessitate the need to redirect African Philosophy for emancipation of African minds in thinking and knowing. This in Kwes Wiredu's word is to exercise mental decolonization of African minds. In Socrates words, it is an ability to know oneself. Since an unexamined life, to Socrates does not worth living.

It is a result of these problems that African philosophy became relevant to redress of all western cultural imperialism that undermined her sense of worth, power and dignity. One this note, we torn our attention to the relevance of African philosophy.

THE RELEVANCE OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY FOR EMANCIPATION

The call for the relevance of African philosophy therefore is the call for the possibility of redefining African philosophy to rescue the continent from the challenges posed by western cultural imperialism with the aim of formulating clear, progressive, relevant and positive ideas that will stimulate the consciousness of Africans both in thinking and knowing which will ultimately help to build up African culture and civilization. We must note that our collective aspiration cannot be realized by merely copying foreign models, however perfect such models maybe. In spite of the various conception of philosophy, generally and African philosophy in particular, we can boldly talk of the impact of philosophy to the society hence the need to redefine African philosophy in line with the African existential struggle to actualize one's self through effective choices in the quest for self realization. The task of African philosophy therefore is

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION

There is no doubt that economic emancipation is central to African existential struggle for emancipation. It is a truism that African countries have all achieved political emancipation but are still struggling to attain economic emancipation which will bring about the desired development. This, in a way, is similar to what Ayittey referred to as the prevailing elite's mentality. Accordingly, Ayittey attributed most of Africa's economic woes to external factors as lingering effects of Western slavery, colonialism, American imperialism, and exploitative international economic system. There was little analysis of the contributory role played by such internal factors as defective and incompetent political leadership, economic mismanagement, corruption, and political repression (Ayittey, 1991: xv). The implication of this assertion is that Africa is still being exploited in different ways by develop nations or through their collaborators in African continent.

Jack Woddis attests to this fact, he argues that,

Colonialism enabled the imperialist powers to rob the colonial peoples in a variety of ways. They were able to secure cheap land, cheap labour and cheap resources. They were free to improve a system of low priced payment to peasant producers, export crops to establish a monopoly controlled market for the import of the manufactured goods... The newly independent states of Africa and Asia

inherit economies which are not merely underdeveloped but distorted under colonialism a certain development took place but one which resulted in a completely, unbalanced economy and in the impoverishment of the people (Woddis, 1971:7)

In agreement with this assertion, C.B. Okolo argues that:

One sure proof of an unbalanced economy, certainly of impoverishment of the people of Africa is that the subsistence farming which most people engage in, does not really sustain them. Consequently, nearly half of the population, if not more, are economically poor and many go to bed hungry in a country rich with natural resources. Many people also lack meaningful skills to really help themselves (Okolo, 1993:18).

The implication of this is that, lack of relevant knowledge skills to develop one's economy makes most African countries poorer. Nigeria for example depends on developed countries of the world to drill and refined her crude oil. This should stop if the country is serious about development. It is a truism that there can be no real development if there is economic dependence. Our socio-economic order must be emancipated from foreign nations which exploit and impoverish us.

In Ogundowole's view, the root cause of the bulk of developmental problems of the new States lies in foreign relations (Ogundowole, 1988:238). Most of the new states allows unrestricted trade and economic interaction between them and the advanced capitalist states. It is ironical that rather than working for their own self reliance, most of the new states that is, economically backward state not only subordinate themselves to the imperialist countries and their allies but also facilitate the development of the clique.

To this end, we agree with Ogundowole that, if the new states are to realize the objective of complete emancipation and recovery, it must learn to avoid participation in any neo-colonialist inspired political, economic, military or cultural organization (Ogundowole, 1988:214).

To achieve economic emancipation most quickly therefore, Africans must look inward, invests in education where critical and creative thinking all of which are within the domain of Philosophy would be thought. This would bring about new frontiers in science, technology and humanism through an understanding of, and exploration of indigenous knowledge and value system which are all embedded in African Philosophy.

For this reason, African countries and Nigeria in particular should must come to term with this existential realities and eliminate all sources of wastage spending and block all loopholes which alien and their collaborators exploits to cart away the resources of the nation and develop an internal-oriented economy. This will become a new socio-economic order that is independent and self-reliance.

CULTURAL EMANCIPATION

Cultural emancipation is a must, if we are serious about any meaningful development. It is instructive to note that Africans also struggles to emancipate themselves from alien cultural influences. The effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism have not allowed Africans to make their modest contribution to world civilization, in term of culture, it must however be stated that man is cultural being, and a cultural builder who is expected to make his/her modest contribution to cultural civilidzation. Western imperialism greatly affected African culture, African were considered as object to be used and dump, they were not seen as subject of history, one who is expected to take an active and responsible part in the affairs of his destiny. To this end, African culture were disregarded, disrespected and jettison. The cultural ideal then was those of the colonial interlopers and not the African's. These atrocities were perpetrated through a process of assimilation and other colonial policies. The resultant effect of this atrocity is that, the African no longer take pride in him/herself nor his or her culture. This was attest to by C.B. Okolo that

Neither Africa nor her culture was really understand it was furthermore a sobering fact for him (African) to realize that colonial education gave him academic degrees but denied him pride in himself in his culture and in his fellow African. Above all it did not teach him to be self-reliant (Okolo, 1993:20).

The implication of this is that western cultural imperialism brought about an eclipse in African cultural civilization. Hence the inability of the Africans to make cultural contributions to world civilization. It is therefore imperative for the Africans to be awakened from her cultural slumber to the task of building and projecting his own world, values and culture through a dynamic philosophy, so that African culture can be fully emancipated from the shackles of western imperialism and exploitation.

True emancipation for the African, would then mean that African will take pride in himself and his culture and not alien culture. It must be stated that there is a strong connection between culture and development if a people therefore

predominantly reflect foreign culture, the people cannot be said to be really develop. The struggle for cultural emancipation by the African is to lay claim to his culture as an authentic way to self-identity, self-survival, self-sufficiency and ultimately, self-reliance which will bring about the desired development.

THE AFRICAN MIND-SET AND NEED FOR RE-ORIENTATION

Perhaps the most devastating damage of Western imperialist is that of imperialist domination of the African mind. This has affected African mind set, her creative and imaginative powers, it has in fact, crippled Africans innate creative potentials, condemned Africans to apassive roles and isonferiors jobs on their father land. African suffered all form of complexes; as a result of western imperialism; they had no confidence in themselves or their culture. All of which were the results of negative and derogative remarks made on Africans by earlier writers on Africa. For example, Owolabi sighted Hegelian analysis of the Africans; He states that, Africans lack faculty necessary to enable them participate in the dialectical process of the absolute spirit (Owolabi, 2000:20). In a similar vein, one of the leading anthropologists Lucient Levy-Bruhl in his book *Primitive Mentality* (1923) portrays the Africans as “pre-logical people who always ascribed causality to invisible and supernatural forces (Luvy-Brush, 1923:19). In reaction to that S.B Oluwole argues that most of the information paraded by the early anthropologist about Africans is misrepresentations. Placid Tempels for example she stated, “a Belgium born, Catholic indoctrinated and Western trained may not be right in his assessment of the Bantu people (Oluwole, 1989:21). The assessments of Africans, as mentally inferior people who operate with pre-logical tools of analysis and incapable of critical and rigorous reflections are aberration. Hence “Africans are therefore regarded as people who have contributed little or nothing to Human civilization (Ibid). Here again, African philosophy must come to the rescue since Philosophy is a consciousness of a people at a particular point in time.

This is the “black predicament (Falaiye, 2003:156) as rightly stressed by Muiyiwa Falaiye. The blacks, he argued, have always been made to view their predicament in terms of whites’ assessment. Hence he characterized Africans as “Marginal men that exist in two cultural worlds and in two different societies at the same time, without being totally a part of either (Ibid).

It is absurd on the part of Western folks to equate all the evils of this world with black race and qualify them with derogative adjectives such as black skin, black sheep of the family, third world countries etc. Even some aspects of the Holy Bible did not help matters, it traced African race to Ham and Canaan his

son, the cursed descendants of Noah after the flood, who settled in Africa Genesis 9:18-28. Since Africans, are descendants of Ham, and God cursed Ham's descendants, to be enslaved by their brothers can we then attribute African predicaments to a divine order? Although, another portion of the Holy Bible, especially The New Testament has negated this Old Testament verse, and argued that "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law... Galatians 3:13"... If this assertion is true, it then follows that mankind, African inclusive are no longer under any curse and must therefore be emancipated from every form of negative and derogative words used to describe African people and their societies. This in our view is the task of African Philosophy.

In Nkrumah's assessment,

The social effects of colonialism are more insidious than the political and economic. This is because they go deep into the minds of the people and therefore take longer to eradicate. The Europeans relegated us to the position of inferiors in every aspect of our everyday life. Many of our people came to accept the view that we were an inferior people (Nkrumah, 1974:32).

This has brought about inferiority complex, intellectual slavery and has created the problem of self worth. This is an enormous epistemic assertion that must be redress if we must move forward. Here again, African Philosophy is call to the rescue. Even in the Ivory tower, this problem of intellectual slavery may be the reason for foreign publication that is often been required before moving to certain level of academic position, I am not sure that scholars in the West are subjected to having some publication from Africa before they could be promoted to higher cadre. What we are saying here is that the greatest obstacle to self realization of African is partly lack of mental emancipation. True liberation is rooted in the mind; development itself is a product of the mind. African Philosophy must dispatch its intellectual prowess to re-educate the African populace on the reality of African existence.

This negative comment has strongly decides how Africans feel, think and act. The continued use of these words should be discouraged. Africans must attempt to understand their situations and to re-define themselves, their behaviours and activities on their own terms of acceptance not the way the Western folks has defined them. This is purely an exercise in creative and critical thinking which falls within the domain of Philosophy as well as African Philosophy.

This can be achieved through a system of indigenous rigorous education on self identity, self consciousness, self worth and self development. This is an attempt to intellectually decolonized African minds from Western cultural and

epistemic imperialism. This will bring about a change of inward characters of the Africans towards themselves, their cultural heritage and values. By this token, African will be able to control his own world in tune with his ideals and to be the main realize of his dreams. This will enable Africans to be responsible, stand on his own feet, hard work and independent in the true meaning of Erich Fromm, that is, independence which is based on man standing on his feet, using his own powers and relating himself to the world productivity (Fromm, 1973:61). The implication of this is that, the struggle for mental decolonization of African to be human in the African world and to actualize himself through his indigenous knowledge and value system which will enable him to make his model contribution to world civilization is still ongoing.

This can be achieved most quickly through a process of education in traditional African values. The purpose of this education will simply be pragmatic in such a way that it will make the young Africans grow up in such a way that they will understand the norms and nature of the society in which they were born and in which they will live. It will equally enable them to develop a positive mind-set towards themselves and the society. Furthermore, it will help to develop correct attitudes and values that would be needed not only for them to live in their local communities but also for them to be able to play their own roles in and make their own modest contributions to society at large.

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