

HEGEMONY, IDENTITY AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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INTRODUCTION

The African who has understood us is the one who, after reading our works, would have felt a birth in him, of another person, impelled by an historical conscience..(Diop, 1991)

This essay focuses on the contributions of African philosophy in relation to recent discussions on the future of philosophy. It challenges some recent views on the future of the philosophical discipline, and on the use of philosophy in an African environment. It confronts the problem of the source of the current crisis of African philosophy. It contends that central to this crisis is the current form of the internal contradictions within the discipline. In focusing on the issue of philosophy and cultural identity, and the impact of these on human survival in Africa, the essay challenges some of the conditions for liberation and transformation as set up by some scholars. We argue that there is a need for more novel and adequate theoretical formulations of the problematic of hegemony and identity in ways that can provide the conditions for African cultural rejuvenation and ascendance in the new millennium. We argue that there is a need to create and sustain more viable alternative forms of social and intellectual action and appreciation and interpretation of social realities.

A background for this essay can be provided by emphasizing the need to review the African philosophical experiences in the context of recent discussions on the future of philosophy and the current state of the philosophical discipline. More so, we can examine the implication of the above for the future use of philosophy in Africa. To put it more concretely, a central question can be: what opportunity does the future hold for the ascendancy of the African tradition(s) in philosophy? This question can be posed in a methodological way by asking: whether it will be possible in the future to discover some philosophical system that would universally be regarded as the ultimate solution of the great problems? (Schlick, 1964:647-648). The question can also be posed in an existential manner by requesting that "those who are engaged in philosophical inquiry in the African continent should

review the relevance of their pursuit to a continent bedeviled by apparently endless and intractable problems" (Oguejiofor, 2001:13). It is the context of raising questions about the viability of existing discourses on the future of philosophy, exposing the nexus between past and new forms of culture humiliation, as well as, highlighting the pitfalls of hegemony and syncretism among others, that our essay can retain greater capability for theoretical insight. We can no longer overlook the fundamental issue of the role of philosophy in the reconstruction of the political and moral consciousness of the very society that we live in. Indeed, we must face in a conscious and direct manner the pressing question of "what is one's responsibility as a philosopher?" (Chomsky, 1968:2-4). What has been the role of the philosopher himself in engendering the current crisis of African philosophical theory or practice.

ECLIPSING THE THEORETICAL SPACE: NEGLECTED ISSUES IN THE ANALYSIS OF THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY

Most scholars in recent times have presumed that it is easy to discuss the future of a contentious discipline such as philosophy. Of course, problems have arisen which jolt us and humble us to reconsider the realities before us. One of the scholars (Leaman 1998) has tried to discuss the future of philosophy without even a mention of African philosophy. He only succeeded in acknowledging the existence of the philosophies of the east, and the lessons for western philosophy that it does not deserve and mention. We are then faced with the types of dilemmas that will pervade the discursive arena and which our essay shall seek to overcome theoretically.

From the above, the initial question is: to what extent can we talk about the future of philosophy in a systematic manner. Leaman (1998:1-3) argues that the "trouble with predicting what is going to happen in philosophy is that the history of philosophy is rather like old-fashioned history with its fascination with outstanding individuals. When we link philosophical ideas with history, we tend to expect the future to mirror the past or at least follow a comprehensible pattern". This could simply mean that things will be the way that they have been, or that at best, any changes that occur will not constitute any significant departure from the status quo. This implies that philosophers remain interested in the views and problems highlighted by the ancient philosophers. But is this all there is to the question of the future of the discipline? Korner (1969:278) argues differently that "the future of philosophy is, like its past, inextricably bound up with the whole of man's intellectual life. Philosophy develops by giving birth to new disciplines or acting as Socratic midwife, by internal criticism, by reacting to changes in its social and intellectual environment and by the independent exploration of new possibilities of thought. There is no reason to assume that philosophy has lost the power to produce alone or with already existing disciplines- new forms of systematic inquiry."

In the light of the above, another set of question arises; is there any unique formula to be used in revisiting the past? What exactly does the future hold for currently marginal African philosophers feel relatively comfortable when talking about the present and the past, but most feel uncomfortable when talking of the future' (Clark, 1970:169). Thus an examination of the future of African philosophy requires more insight, open-mindedness and broader perspectives in the analysis of issues.

Contrary to Leaman, there is no univocal way of examining the future. There are different senses in which it is possible to talk about the future. Firstly, it is possible to talk about the various future of philosophy, in the sense that there exists a wide range of prospects open to the field each of which will mark a distinctive future pattern for the discipline. Secondly, it is possible to talk of 'a set of futures' for the discipline philosophy, corresponding to the futures of different traditions or positions within philosophy. Thirdly, we can ask whether, it need be the case that any 'specific future' as conceived by an individual philosopher, is indeed the future of the field. Fourthly, we can ask whether given the very same facts of arguments, any two different philosophers will arrive at the same conclusions on the future of philosophy. The above simple indicates that there are crucial conceptual and practical problems in talking about the future of philosophy, which cannot be taken for granted. How then can the discussion of the future of philosophy be done in a more thorough manner?

In confronting this problem, we cannot avoid some level of theorizing such as is available within philosophical sub-field such as metaphysics and modality, as well as philosophy of mind, etc. basically, there is a need to recognize not only that the future exists in connection to the past and the present, but also that a thing which is necessary for conceiving the future is the power of imagination. Given that there are basic data or impressions in the world around us, and the nature of such data are varied, then every one may not have the same capability for processing these data imaginatively. In discussing the ideal of imagination and its linkage with the future, we can appeal to Ryle (1973: 117-119) who holds that imagining is linked to the concept of seeing or picturing. People are capable of 'picturing' or visualizing things. The operations of imagining are exercises of mental powers. However, Ryle's view raises the problem of whether there is only a univocal idea of picturing or visualizing. Shorter (1973: 155-156) holds that the notion of 'imagining' can be clarified by distinguishing, visualizing or picturing, from the sort of imagining that a drunkard does. A perfectly healthy woman who casts her mind back to some experience, is engaged in an experience that is different from that of a person suffering from delirium tremens or hallucinations occasioned by high fever. Although Shorter (1973: 157&163) holds that to visualize, is to do something, yet, he notes that

a man's excellence at visualizing may count at all in favor of saying that he is imaginative. Indeed that fact that one can visualize complicated diagrams, solve problems in her head or have a good visual memory does not mean that one is imaginative. Rather the notion of imagination is close to that of originality.

While agreeing with some of Shorter's views we can say that there are more serious problems and questions arising from the notion of imagination. If imagination is original thinking then we may ask; Is the imaginative capability of a woman acting in the capacity of a mother, to be taken as the same as that a soldier operating in the battle field, or even that of a philosopher belaboring his arguments? Also, how do we define thinking that is consciously systematic and logical? What can we say about the notions of the quality and quantity of thinking, when we realize that not only do we have there specific programme (critical thinking) intended to enhance thinking, but also that there are disciplines that place premium on the capacity to think rigorously or analytically (philosophy). There are even professions where logical thinking is an imperative of successful practice (law and the military). We can even be faced with another type of problem: how do we evaluate the same, or different outcomes of the imagination of two different persons, one of whom has induced imagination through the use of stimulant, while the other has not? What happens if the imaginative production of the person using a stimulant is better and more fruitful to society than that of the other? The issues are obviously complex.

This point of our analysis is to show among others, that the progressive movement of philosophy may not necessarily be a charted one in itself. Also, it may not necessarily be the way that any particular person says that it must be. Progress in philosophy which may be charted or uncharted, raises the question of the extent to which our current philosophical tools and thinking can meet the existing and known challenges of human personal and social life? This issue is most significant in the context of Africa, which is currently occupying an unequitable position vis-à-vis other world regions. It is in the light of the above that we examine certain ideas that are basic to the definition of Africa's situation today. For example we have the concepts of hegemony and identity. In charting the future, we expect that the problems of philosophy "should prove intellectually fertile by suggesting new insights and new lines of philosophical and non-philosophical inquiry" (Korner, 69:5) that "the most important role of the intellectual has been that of unmasking ideology, exposing the way to a new and higher form of social life that will extend the possibilities for a free and creative life". Specially, we are challenged to unmask the internal contradictions and defects existing both in the society and more importantly within the philosophical discipline. An effective survey of the situation must compel both a historical, conceptual and even an empirical approach to the issues at stake.

OF HEGEMONY AND CONVENTIONS: THE DILEMMAS OF HISTORY AND THE SITUATION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

The situation of African philosophy can be analyzed in terms of the ideas of hegemony and identity. Let us start with the former. Gramsci (1995:97) proposes the idea of hegemony in order to describe the hidden and coercive power of an entity over other elements. Whatever be the forms of these elements the key feature of hegemony is "the rule of the dominant classes, or the dissemination of dominant ideologies through the securing of consent and coercive imposition of the dominant 'will' using intellectual, moral and political instrument" (Callinicos, 1999:213-214). Thus, the hegemony is a representative 'individual' whose dominant interests prevail in the struggle for resources (Sklair, 1992: 107-108). Such resources may include concrete or abstract things, e.g. space, information, power, privilege, status, knowledge, etc. the phenomena of time and space provide the battleground of hegemonic engagements between the superior future and the (inferior) past. Hegemony symbolizes power play where superiority is proved in victory and the story of progress is told by the victors. This picture can be expressed concretely in the history of human or cultural progress and modernity through western incursion and ruptures of non-Western spaces (Slater, 1996:275).

It may be pointed out that it is not always the case that the future things, experiences, materials, ideas, procedures, etc will be better or superior to those of the past. Hence, the ideas of the future and the superior are not synonymous with each other as Slater suggests. To understand the challenge facing the African philosopher, let us recall that Leaman (1998:7) pushes the argument that the nature of philosophy is not likely to change in the future, because the main effort in philosophy remains the understanding of the thoughts of past philosophers, and this will no doubt continue in much the same way as it has in the past. Schlick (1964:646) holds that the question of the future of philosophy will be answered by an appeal to the history's method. When the philosopher studies the history of philosophy, he will be inspired by the wonderful display of genius throughout all the ages. The above analysis clearly implies that there is a prominent advantage for those philosophical traditions with a longer history.

With reference to Africa the of philosophical cultural space is defined as an ex-colonial enclave, and actions are mediated and imposed upon by the persistence of neo-colonialism arising from the continued intrusion of western worldviews in the present day African. The aim of this intrusion is to reproduce and perpetuate Africa's subordinate status in the contemporary world (Serequeberhan, 1994:20-21). This hegemony deals with power relations existing in time and space, and of which Africa is currently marginal. On the state of African philosophy, Outlaw (1987:10) holds that "there is a difference between 'Philosophy' and 'philosophy'".

The former refers to the enterprise as it has been characterized by the dominant figures in the dominant tradition throughout its western history. The latter refers to an enterprise more critically self-conscious of its own historicity in ways that inform its practices and makes its possible to identify other discursive modalities and traditions as appropriate instances of a refined notion of what constitutes philosophy, especially in non-European cultures" in the light of the above, what then should be the attitude of the African philosophical traditions, which remain in a current state of magnetization, and therefore, is in need of reinvigoration in order to meet up with other comparatively progressing traditions?

We cannot underestimate the problem of defining exactly how a philosophical method can retain its identity, while enjoying the benefits of greater cooperation with others. The existing dominant and marginal spheres of philosophical discourse, are locked in conflict for influence and direction. The advantage retained by the dominant tradition(s) is not lost on Serequeberhan (1991:5) who argues that western philosophy has always been the 'philosophy of the center' which designates the periphery and frames it as such. Under this aegis, 'African philosophical discourse exists in the form defined by canons provided by western philosophies both in aim and details' (Oluwole, 1992:109). If it is true that "as in all professional areas, one learns by interacting with the masters and discussing some of the problems previous philosophers were confronted with" (Boundarin, 1992:28), then it is clear that the nature of Africa's theoretical and practical disadvantage in the global arena is awesome. What are the causes of this disadvantage facing African philosophical discourse? There are many reasons. Some are recent, while others are the result of historical offshoots. Oguejiofor traces the roots of African's failures to colonialism that ensured the subjugation and cultural humiliation of the Africans. In his views, "the loss of self-confidence, resultant complexes (both of superiority and inferiority), the incalculable denigration suffered through history, and the modern quagmire have all but given rise to a humiliated culture" Oguejiofor (2001:46&121).

While the historical conditions leading to the current circumstances are well known, this essay examines the implications of these for the future form of the philosophical discipline in African. There are links between the humiliations of the past and those of the modern era. The current disadvantage of this discipline can be linked to the underdeveloped character of most African societies. The larger part of the African world is epitomized by the visible lack of capacity to grow in the most vital areas of human personal and social life. African philosophical discourses operate in 'spaces' that do not allow for the fullest realization of potentials. In these social arenas neither security nor freedom is guaranteed or appreciated as a substrate for intellectual stability or creativity. To create a leeway in the discourse we must move beyond the views of those scholars who hinge the failures of Africa on the colonial influences.

Wamba-dia-wamba (1991:224) rightly identifies the challenge facing Africa as the protracted struggle for the complete liberation of the entire African people, "the struggle to destroy every form of exploitation of man by man, of African nations by other nations, of the African masses of people by one section of the African people, of African women by African men, etc." what then are intellectual material resources that the African philosopher requires in order to attain this liberation? The African philosophical discipline must struggle to identify, and affirm the qualities of truth and goodness in its diverse practices. The issues of the human and moral factors cannot be overlooked. What is the extent of the African philosophical input in the quest for a more meaningful intellectual and social life? Given that philosophy as a strictly professional or academic activity is certainly a latecomer in Africa and among African academics and universities (Masolo, 1997:62; Bodunrin, 1992:16; Okolo, 1992:192-195), it can be said that "the professional philosopher in modern Africa is in a dilemma arising from inherited professional handicap due mainly to historical antecedents as well as the pressure to respond to the growing demand for utility" (Sogolo, 1990: 39-40). But this is not all.

Worse forms of the dilemma arise out of self-inflicted problems and lapses in the construction of the theoretical and practical trajectories of the philosophical discipline in Africa. Thus, there are visible lapses in the area of imaginative expansion of the frontiers of the field; and in the areas of the theoretical capacity of problem solving. Mafeje (1991:1) holds that "the continued intellectual domination of Africa by foreigners in research and development policy formulation (can be) seen as a sign of failure on the part of African intellectuals to stake their claim and develop endogenous theoretical perspective and, thus put themselves in a position where they could provide new solutions to African problems."

The dilemma facing the African philosopher can be analyzed from other perspectives. On the one hand, there is problem of the practical challenges of development. And on the other hand, there is the issue of social conventions that define or establish patterns of philosophical practice. In the case of the former, Okolo (1992) argues that the philosophical enterprise is constrained by the post-independence African's primary concern with practical problems of development. Given this emphasis on material development, philosophy as a discipline was not taken to be something that held a promise, (evidence of philosophical inputs in other human societies as since shown the dubiousness of such an idea). Okolo (1992) argues that economic poverty ensures that philosophy which was in itself a difficult enterprise, became all the more difficult, given the general lack of recent books or good libraries for research, lack of funds, private or public for philosophic studies such as, symposia, conferences, professorial chairs. Tower (1991: 187) also re-enforces this point that "the present situation of African philosophy is characterized

by the limited number of people engaged in it, the absence of great works and the lack of appropriate organs of expressions". Thus, the social arena existing in parts of Africa, proved inimical to systematic and sustained thinking needed in philosophy, such as was necessary for the emancipation of the society. In a profound way, erwhile historical and cultural challenges of the colonial experience and the mismanagement of the African societies by Africans themselves, have contributed to the undermining of the discipline.

On the other hand, the issue of social conventions has contributed to the vitiation of the potential of the African philosophical discipline. The enterprise has been vitiated by largely unfavorable social practices, rules, norms, and conditions of operation. These factors have constituted the conventions or institutionalized ways of practice that hinder the capacity of growth in the field and in the social environment at large. The underdeveloped nature of the society makes it impossible for scholars to practice their vocation outside the confines of the structures set up by the state, university or other institutional forms. Naturally, the ethical, professional and infrastructural inefficiency, anomie and decay in such institutions lead to obstacles and inconveniences for the philosopher. The decay of the universities is but a reflection of the wider debasement, moral and spiritual weakness of the entire society. This creates a condition where initiative is stifled, and monotony and conformity is promoted. The lack of necessary facilities for serious and productive research has taken its toll on the philosophical discipline. Things have been worsened by the unfortunate malignant belief that people can always "manage" or operate within largely minimal, uninspiring and unproductive circumstances. Of course, such calls for intellectuals to manage whatever meager resources are available to them, stands in painful contrast to the objectionable pervasive corruption, profligacy and debauchery prevalent among those in position of public power and trust. These people simply mismanage the limited resources of the society out of ignorance, greed and selfishness. The culture of "managing" inadequate resources can only bring about the vitiation of productivity, initiative and promise. This is a key explanation of the why the brain-drain problem continues.

Worse still, the institutionalization of immorality and despair occasioned the decades of military rule, as well as the attendant deprivation, insecurity, and degeneration of the quality of human life has led to the lack of belief in the worth, and benefits of education as an instrument of social and national development and above all as a critical driver of social transformation. The rise of the nouveau riche and commercialization of intellectual work has aggravated and accelerated the decay of the philosophical discipline. Infact, few, if any, seem bothered, as to the extent to which these adverse circumstances are far removed from both the ideal. Most, are not bothered about establishing the minimal conditions for the effective practice of

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the vocation. These are parts of the problems of conventions. Such apathy and decay has ensured that the society as it exists today has become one in which people tolerate all manners of untidiness, inconveniences and deprivations with little or no meaningful efforts at seeking a rectification of these ills. The current social conventions underlining the practice of the philosophical discipline is one that consciously engenders injustice, breeds frustrations and deprivations and it encourages or rewards all manners of impropriety. It is within this ambit that philosophical enterprise is expected to thrive.

THE DECLINE OF A DISCIPLINE: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL OBSTACLES TO PHILOSOPHICAL INPUT IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Serequeberhan (1991: 10) has correctly noted that the basic and most fundamental facts in Africa today is the misery the continent is immersed in and the varied struggle-in different areas-to overcome this wretched condition. More often than not, problems in the definition of such struggles have led to failures and ineptitude in dealing with the core problems of the continent. It is in this context that Wambadia-Wamba (1991:220) makes the painful but true statement that, "only very rarely does African philosophy concern itself with the struggle against the African people's own weaknesses. As in the case of a slave freed by is master, still looking for his identity (as a freeman), some of our African philosophers are still looking for in Africanity, and authentic Africa philosophy". Our point is that the person that is seeking an authentic African philosophy has not adequately engaged in a critical self-examination in order to determine his abilities and limits in relation to the challenges confronting him.

The interface between philosophy, social anomie and national development can be seen both from the point of view of extrapolation and empirical account. Let us start with the formal. Social anomie retains the potential for vitiating national development. With reference to the impact of anomie on the philosophical field to national development, we can say that strong feeling of despondency and distraction that would envelop the cadres of intellectuals, may effectively lead to the stifling of creativity. Few scholars will be capable of making any enduring contributions and breakthroughs in a frontier of knowledge, on a consistent basis. There will also be a diversion of intellectual capabilities into less inspiring and productive sectors of social lives. In a society plagued by anomie, the characteristics will include a general pattern of decay and corruption among many practitioners of philosophy, other intellectual and social groups. There will be an incidence of poverty in the midst of plenty. We are not just talking about material poverty here. This is a more pervasive type of poverty epitomized by the laws of the ability to exercise genius and enterprise. There will be a lack of genuine patriotic, humane, and imaginative conduct among

many intellectuals. These will ensure that no systematic programme will be set for the emancipation of the society from the shackles of underdevelopment in all its facets. The eventual outcome will be the establishment of a society that displays hostility towards intellectual efforts, and which lacks informed appreciation of the role of the philosopher in national development. Ironically, the most intense hatred of the intellectual will come from within the so-called citadels of intellectual learning. This will be seen in the diminishing creativity, integrity and productivity. Such a society may be unable to define the critical factors necessary in charting the pathways to national development.

At more concrete or empirical level the actual situation of things in an African society reveals that, the philosopher may not have made himself relevant to the quest for national development due to certain attitudes that he or she has displayed over a period of time. These attitudes are the results of theoretical and practical, social and professional factors. The modern African philosopher is faced with problems arising from within and outside his discipline. These problems hinder the capacity for creativity, diligence and promise necessary for genuine and enduring philosophical endeavor. Firstly, at the level of methodology, the view that philosophy is far removed from day to day experiences, and so the philosopher need not seek relevance, has been a key weakness of philosophy in a society very much in need of concrete theoretical inputs to development strategies at the intellectual and practical levels. What are the features of such conception? The fundamental question of the relationship between philosophy and the 'real world' has been variously answered. For some, if the study of philosophy has any value at all, "it must be only indirectly, through the effects upon the lives of those who study it. Philosophy though unable to tell with certainty what it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of philosophy is to elicit the consequences of our linguistic usage. Its questions are purely logical ones. (Ayer, 1964: 133).

But then the above view on the nexus between philosophy and the real world has begun to receive some criticisms and modifications, especially in the light of the problems confronting the African philosophical discipline. There is something called applied philosophy and philosophers have often focused on the practical issues of the day. In rethinking the task and pursue of the discipline, philosophers of diverse persuasions hold the view that philosophical knowledge should benefit the society as a whole, not just the philosopher personally. To this effect, philosophical insight should be applied to the practical problems of human society (Leaman, 1998: 9, Gyekye, 1997: 18). Philosophy need not keep its distance from reality permanently. Its closeness to reality should depend on the character of its development (James, 1964: 615-616). Even Bodunrin (1992: 38) has admitted that there will be philosophers of different callings, representing those who will contribute to burning social issues,

travel widely, write philosophy for the masses, and others who will remain mainly within the academic community. It is for this reason that Rorty (1996:180) suggests the need to bracket many standard topics of philosophical inquiry and to show which side of the divide between abstractions and application that they fall. Indeed, the increasing complexity and sophistication of modern life has ensured that this division between abstraction and application cannot be sustained in its primordial form.

Secondly, there is the practical problem of the lack of focus and a resource that has ensured that the philosopher has not been relevant in the society. To start with, there is the absence of adequate financial and material resources to effectively study and practice philosophy in a more organized and accomplished manner. Towa (1991:199) has rightly pointed out that the African researcher in most underdeveloped African nations or countries can hardly publish the results of research, even if such research have some recognized theoretic value. Most practitioners of philosophy have resorted to all sorts of distractions and subterfuge in order to fill the gap existing for them, in the material realm. To meet their needs these practitioners engage in morally and professionally questionable actions; such as, acting and collaborating directly or by proxy with dictators to unleash pain and suffering on the citizens; the abuse and commercialization of the discipline through arbitrary composition and dissemination of academic materials. These factors ensure that the quality of the teachers, research and students that are produced are below expected standards.

Worse still, the pervading feeling of anomie and decay in the institutions of higher learning and the society at large, has ensured that there is an ever increasing gap between major academic breakthroughs. There is a painful diminishing of the quantity of landmark contributions in scholarly endeavours such as philosophy, etc. for some of these scholars, the reason for doing occasional and questionable research is to ensure (undeserved?) promotions through the ranks, in line with a corrupt and inefficient bureaucratized administrative setting. There have been accusations of impropriety, immorality, sycophancy and deception in the practice, incompetence in the direction of leadership, administrative and research functions. The eventual outcome of this has been the irrelevance of the philosopher in the scheme of things. The above situation raises the fundamental question of what use is the philosophical enterprise that is faced with these kinds of problems? What will become of a society that faces such difficulties within philosophical practice? How can these problems be tackled?

CULTURAL IDENTITY, AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE QUEST FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL:

In discussing the future, we need to identify and define the meanings and purposes of things as these pertain to our world. Okonda Okolo (1991:208) holds that this must reflect in the question, 'What is our vision of the world? And what is our idea of destiny that directs our readings and our retakes?' in what ways can we adopt the various resources existing in the world around us without as it were, negating our tradition, our needs and our history? We may say that to the extent that philosophy is the "spiritual basis of culture, binding together its various elements in a single system. The extent of philosophical development will be one of the main indications of the extent to which the culture of any society is developed" (Iribadajakov, 1973:71).

The very question of using philosophy as a means of establishing Africa's cultural identity and social progress is a challenge, to the extent that Africa faces a crisis of self-identification which Oladipo (1998:79) maintains, "is not just cultural crisis but rather, a problem that has economic and political undertones. The question of how Africans can achieve the goals of freedom and development without compromising their identity" (Oladipo, 1998b:67). This problem arises from what Okolo (1991:201) refers to as "a generalized identity crisis due to the presence of a foreign and dominating tradition, and the necessity for a self-affirmation in the construction of an authentic culture and tradition". The crucial problem arising from the role of philosophy in the quest for cultural identity lies in the fact that it retains "the honorific character of being recondite, speculative and abstract, and since it requires a certain level of intellectual awareness, or even in some sense, the highest development of the human intellect, philosophy is tacitly and surreptitiously... privileged as the measure and standard of the human. If the humanity of the African is to be recognized vis-à-vis that of others he must also 'have his own philosophy to show'" (Oguejiofor, 2001:92). This type of assumption or expectation tends to lead to the proffering of solutions that eventually become greater problems than those that they intended to solve.

Societies and individuals see the religious, scientific and especially the philosophical aspects of their lives as the very basis of their cultural identities and the perspectives from which they view their relations with other cultural groups. And even though they do not mind sharing certain features of these values or worldviews, yet, their sense of possessiveness or ownership is not eroded. Bodunrin (1991:67-68) says that it is the nature of human beings to look for comparisons. Not only do individuals study the intellectual histories of other cultures, these individuals also want to study the intellectual history of their own culture. Hence by implication, every group or culture wishes to have a set of beliefs, attitudes and values it can call its own. This indeed, is the whole issue of identity. Philosophy or the possibility

that a philosophical tradition exists can be used as a means of establishing cultural identity for a number of reasons. According to Bodunrin (1991:68) philosophy has come to be seen in an honorific way. Philosophy has become a value-laden expression such that for a people not to have philosophy is for them to be considered intellectual inferior to others who have. The significance of philosophy for the affirmation of cultural identity lies in the fact that it enhances a person or people's self esteem, and thus their sense of uniqueness or accomplishment. The question of cultural self-identity elicits a dilemma of whether to choose between a form of cultural nationalism, as opposed to Westernization. This crisis has been well defined by Gellner (1991:509) who holds that the

Underdeveloped societies are those humiliated by a technological, economic and military inferiority condition either by means of 'Westernization' or by some kind of populist romanticism. The former seeks to recover equality, at the humiliating cost of endorsing the foreigner as a valid model the latter idealizes the alleged virtues of a local central authority and its associated high court culture. Either option has grave defects, and carries a great psychic cost.

However, it may be said that Gellner does not recognize the possibility of some types of syncretism as an escape from his dilemma. Of course, the issue of the success of this position is another matter.

Let us leave that for now and go on to other paradoxes. Wiredu (1992:65-66) points out another paradoxical aspects to the issue of cultural identity. This paradox lies in the fact that "a culture can shed off many of its traits and gather foreign accretions without sacrificing its identity; provided that it does not lose its contingent features. The contingent is normally contrasted with the necessary, but in this case the contingent becomes the necessary". Wiredu argues further that any culture has procedures, customs and usages that have no essential bearing on questions of either human well-being or truth or falsehood. He argues that style of apparel or of address is frequently (though not invariably) of this nature. Consequently, adopting one style rather than another often makes no objective difference to human well-being or to one's belief about the world.

Specifically because of this there cannot be any compelling reason to change such elements of a culture in favor of foreign ones. Language, dance, music, are

more contingent in this sense in some of their aspects. Since it is not rational to give up such components in preference to foreign substitutes, to do so is a sure sign of the loss of cultural self-identity.

On the other hand, Wiredu (1992:66) argues that such components of culture as philosophy and religion are anchored to truth-value. "Philosophy, Religion and science are areas of human experience in which the effects of cultural differences could conceivably be eliminated through the peaceful give-and-take of dialogue among cultures". Wiredu (1992:59-60) identifies some problems that can arise when cultural identity is not properly in place. He holds that when individuals or nations face a crisis of self-identity, then the human dignity and self-confidence of the people are adversely affected. The crisis of identity confronting Africans especially in the post-independence era, gives justification to the imperative of modernization, constructed as the task of building viable modern states in Africa. According to Wiredu (1992:62) the "answer to Africa's problem of identity in the contemporary world does not lie in a cultural traditionalism but in a critical and reconstructive self criticism. This self evaluation is made extremely difficult, even now, decades after independence, by the colonial mentality induced in our people during colonial times".

There is a need to criticize some aspects of Wiredu's analysis. Firstly, at the level of clarification, it could be said that some things or qualities may be vital for human well-being, while at the same time these things may not be needed for the affirmation of cultural identity, while that thing will not be of particular significance for human well-being. This view is questionable because, if by well-being, we mean the capacity of a person, group or culture to thrive or flourish, to be comfortable, in short to be secure and protected, then we see clearly that certain modes of dressing, feeding and constructing shelter can indeed become very significant for whether a peoples security can be guaranteed or not. As an example, the security and comfort of the tribes of the icebound regions is guaranteed only through their high protein diets, thick clothing made from animal skin, and houses made from blocks of ice. These peculiar patterns of feeding and infra structural development are absolutely vital for the preservation of the lives and the attainment of the well-being of these peoples in their environment. If these peoples were to replace or alter their dress codes, dietary patterns and mode of shelter in this ice-bound territory, then their very survival would be jeopardized. Their actions will have far-reaching consequences for the idea of suffering and the capability to absorb this feature of life. Also, contrary to Wiredu there can be compelling reasons to change even these modes of feeding and shelter within that ice-bound environment.

Changes in these patterns would be tolerable if for instance, they had access to superior dietary and shelter materials that can further improve their possibility of survival in ways that surpass those already existing. One would not retain an objection

to change under such condition since the people would be better off on the whole with these new features of life, the point must then be made that even the imminent issue of identity is to be understood as instrumental to the question of survival. Thus, contrary to Wiredu's view, modes of dressing can have far reaching consequences for the well being of a people. At another level of criticism, Wiredu holds that philosophy, science, and religion are not crucial to cultural self-identity, because one cannot ignore developments in these areas as they emanate from other cultures. This view is questionable, because, the peculiarities of religious, cultural, scientific and philosophical beliefs and attitudes constitute the very aspects of cultural life by which various races distinguish themselves from others this point is readily seen in the areas of science and philosophy, where individuals are avowedly faithful to, and paternalistically protective of their cultural and historical attainments in these areas.

Intellectuals are perpetually aware of this reality, because there is always a demand for relevance, construed either as what peculiar knowledge. This point does not in any way detract from the view that certain philosophical, scientific or religious beliefs or attitudes may be more compelling or appealing than others and therefore would gain more adherents or sympathizers than its less profound or flamboyant alternatives. There is clearly a link between the nature of the philosophy, science and religion that a society upholds and its capability to thrive or survive in relation to other societies. The failures of Africa in these three critical areas have led to much of the circumstances besetting the continent today.

Bodunrin (1992:18) holds that central to the understanding of the importance of philosophy for identity is the question of showing its relevance either by the application of philosophy to African problems or by egoistically "showing a distinct and autochthonous philosophy of our own" (Bodunrin, 1992: 18&20). In the debates over the strength and weaknesses of particular cultural traditions and modes of living, there is a latent belief that cultural identity is necessary for some equitable 'conversation' between cultures. If a culture becomes an acolyte or satellite of another, then, not only is its capacity to converse undermined, but also its capacity to affirm self-worth is vitiated. The point needs to be made that there is a limit to what any one, individual or group can borrow from another, without losing her human dignity. The well being and dignity of a person or group depends to a large extent on the ability of such an entity to achieve adaptation, self sufficiency, self reliance, and distinction as a prelude to recognition and the identity arising thereof.

The quest for development, independence and dignity in Africa can only be attained if the search for cultural identity is seen as a holistic one, encompassing the political, social and other realms of life. To this effect, Owomoyela (1991:181) recommends the study of the form(s) of African civilization, so that we might rediscover and resume our proper selves'. It is clear that the issues central to the

survival of Africa and Africans today are finding imaginative and humane approaches to the achievement of personal, social and national development. Diop (1997:726) states the need to redefine the 'image of a modern Africa which in its actions is reconciled with its past and preparing for its future'. This situation calls for 'an autochthonous overcoming of the indigence of our indigenous political and historical existence' (Serequeberhan, 1994:37). Oladipo (1998b:68) suggests that the approach which can best resolve the Africans quest for cultural identity construed as the search for freedom and development, is that which seeks to achieve what he takes to be a relevant synthesis based on the best values form the different cultures.

However, there is a need for caution and the point must be made here that both philosophy and religion as key elements of a culture, share in common the fact that they retain a living core which makes them aspects of life, or things that are cherished and believed in. It is for such reasons that we need to display caution in order to avoid the pitfalls of syncretism which will pose itself as a difficult answer to the more fundamental multidimensional problem of African philosophical and cultural identity. Though syncretism looks at first glance to be promising yet it can only provide what is at best a hybrid or artificial construct that lacks the needed essence or a driving force. The hallmark of cultural systems that have been able to progress is that they retain an innermost sense of dignity and purpose, which imbue them with a sense of identity and uniqueness. This in turn, gives direction to all other levels of socio-cultural actions. Phillips (1963:150) holds that though people "advise us to select the best elements from each and make our own combination of the whole. You could both make a body by taking a leg from a man, an arm from a woman, a head from one animal and a trunk from another, and somehow tying them together. All syncretism fall from lack of a central vivifying principle, a heart."

In the struggle for freedom, the most fundamental task of the African philosophical project is to establish the conditions that will as one scholar has put it, "diminish the current mastering of space, and rather seek the empowerment of the subaltern" (Kofman, (1996:214). Gyekye (1997:25-26) holds that the African people must attempt to "modernize" their societies or evolve forms of life, which is in harmony with the ethos of the contemporary world. Africa must deal seriously with the ideas, values, practices and institutions that sub-Saharan Africa has received from other cultural sources. We argue also that Africa must confront and overcome its own self inflicted denigration and deprivation and seek to transcend to a higher level of human existence. More importantly, the establishment of enduring cultural identity in Africa requires the clarification to the means of achieving genuine national reconciliation and sociopolitical advancement. This is the point that Abrahams (1992:31) makes when he says that the crystallization to cultural identity in Africa depends upon "the need to achieve cultural coherence and cohesion and the need to establish

new comprehensive ways of life, which will be grasped as being of values".

Although, Wiredu (198:18) insists that Africans are in need of science and technology as well as the human values that can bring out the best in this endeavor, there is a need to be more specific about these values. African philosophical discourses can promote the theorizing of basic social values needed for more peaceful human social action. These include fuller discussions and promotion of the values of tolerance, consideration and dialogue. There will also be the need for the entrenchment of the values of discipline, vision and humility, etc. At the level of socialization, education can be an instrument in the fostering of such values. When these values have been conceptualized and entrenched within an African society, it will be easier to attain social reconciliation. Science and technology can then be applied with more discipline, taking into consideration the values of good resource management, civility, patriotism and accountability as necessary conditions for productive social life.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

There is a need to discover the thrust of the African philosophical project as it concerns the future. Keita (1991:147) has optimistically maintained that the African philosophers or theoreticians of philosophy in an African context are admirably placed to construct a modern African philosophy that will focus on the development of a modern African civilization. The question then is, what type of solutions or approaches exist in the quest for the concrete definition of the future of African philosophy? The first type of solution that can be offered is one that concerns infra-structural expansion. This involves the installation and sustenance of vital machineries for the effective transmission and learning of African philosophy in an African society. To this effect, Towa (1991: 199) holds that large centers of research may be established in the key regions of Africa. They should be funded and endowed with a view to acquiring wide and current knowledge. This will imply providing libraries for advanced research. Universities should also be sufficiently endowed with libraries to enable works of research at higher levels.

While the infra-structural approach is important and commendable, yet it cannot be itself direct and sustain the level of social transformation needed in Africa. Neither can it chart the direction of the African philosophical discipline. This takes us into the realm of methodology and theoretical contents of the discipline. Oguejiofor (2001: 124) holds that "among the broad outline of how philosophy could contribute to development is that it does so by being a training in rationality, a critique of ideology and a training in morality". However, if we are to be able to drive our

definition of the task of African philosophy to its conclusion, we must reject the position of Oguejiofor (2001:143) that

The reason is that philosophy has very little of concrete, tested, knowledge to offer. Its method is such that no opinion or position is sacrosanct, and is immediately open to a cacophony of responses from others with rival theories. There is nothing that philosophy in any direct term can do, any more than other disciplines, or in addition to them, to aid development if development is ultimately understood in economic and scientific-technological terms. There is little special knowledge that philosophy can impart in spite of the avowal of its practitioners, be it knowledge of morality, of politics or of logic which will immediately, and surely, make the subject of that knowledge to be an effective agent of development".

We argue against this view by insisting that in so far as, every system of philosophy is inseparable from a people's experiences, their world and their perception of it, the type of philosophy which will interest Africans is rather that which is concrete, practical and relevant to their culture, needs and dominant concerns (Okolo, 1992: 199-200). Wamba dia-Wamba (1991:233) has correctly noted that any serious attempt to entrench the foundations of the philosophical discipline in Africa, "cannot conjure away the question to the theoretical requirements of the victory of such a struggle". This will translate into the greater appropriation of the scope of politics and education as critical drivers of change. Such a conception of philosophy, will not only teach and develop attitudes, but will also impart the core doctrinal imperatives of the field to its scholars. We cannot overlook the benefits derivable from the numerous concrete views or arguments posited by the myriads of philosophers down the ages. It would be misleading to suggest that all philosophy does is to train

one in methodology. This is the point that Towa (1991:195) makes when he says that "defining philosophy only in terms of epistemology would lead us to exclude from the domain of philosophy works universally recognized as philosophical works of ethics-ontology, political philosophy, aesthetics, etc. In this case, it would be difficult to speak of an African philosophy".

The above view is to be understood here as an endorsement of the core doctrinal imperatives discovered within the African philosophical discipline itself. To take the argument further we can say that we have much to benefit from even the classical and contemporary philosophers on a wide range of issues, in the course of building a unique, but more importantly viable philosophical tradition. For instance, there are benefits for Africa in Plato's views on justice and knowledge, Aristotle on ethics and politics, Augustine on God and history, Hobbes on the state and security, Locke on government and property, Descartes on knowledge and metaphysics, etc. Must we undermine or neglect these views just because some individual thinks that it is only the training of a critical mind that is useful to the philosopher? There can even be other more practical dimensions of the quest for change, which for Towa (1991:198) implies the need to diversify the educational formation of philosophers so that they can be oriented to wider areas of social intervention or employment as opposed to teaching and research. Such areas will include diplomacy, journalism, politics, etc. It may even be necessary to extend the teaching of philosophy to the junior levels of education. These are strategies of disciplinary and intellectual rectification, however, sincere analysts will concede that these applications if or where they exist, currently lack systematization, coherence and a conscious moral foundation. In short, the social placement of the philosophical discipline is far away from where it could be or ought to be.

In conclusion, it is in this sense of having a concrete as well as conceptual and methodological impact that the future of philosophy can be defined. If it is true that there are no immutable idea of philosophy that is absolutely valid for all times, that in the course of its own historical evolution, the discipline has developed through stages, and that the inner consciousness and intellectual environment induce in the philosopher a continually changing array of problems (Iribadiakov, 1973: 68, Korner, 1969:279), then, the question remains; how well prepared is African philosophy to utilize existing opportunities for its ascendancy? How well prepared is African philosophy to embrace the task of the future, which as Sontag and Roth (1987:503) argue requires us to rethink the fundamental questions of virtue understood as identifying 'what is good or what is just', in order to contribute to human survival and well being.

Philosophy must remain in the service of the difficult and often dangerous struggle for freedom, justice, and the dignity of the human person in Africa. This struggle must be reflected within the discipline and also in the wider arena of social life. The values of freedom, justice and dignity must have a concrete reflection of human life, if they are to retain their worth. The struggle for justice, order and integrity must commence from within the rank and file of the practitioners of the field, who will seek to rise above the material and spiritual limitations that currently stifle their potentials, vision and productivity. Finally, the point made by Jose Ortega in (Sontag et al, 1987:504) is instructive here. He says that "a constant process of deciding what we are going to do". The crises of confidence that has bedeviled the African philosophical tradition(s), as seen in the reduction of its status and in its apparent difficulty in addressing the issues of internal focus, intellectual direction and social relevance or identity are issues that must be urgently tackled in the search for the future of an African philosophical field capable of holding its own in the world.

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