

THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY AND AFRICAN POLITICS: A PHILOSOPHICAL INTERROGATION

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Abstract

The contemporary African situation has been a paradoxical and a pathetic one. Africa is presently battling with an identity crisis, socio-political and economic challenges. These challenges possibly arose from Africa's experience of colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism, globalization, poor national planning, hunger, diseases, abject poverty, intra/intertribal wars, irresponsible leadership, massive corruption, infrastructural deficit, weak government institutions, poor legal framework, poor water supply, violation of human rights and dignity, gender inequality, high infant mortality, poor health care system, irregular supply of power, environmental degradation, poor per capita income, lack of due process and low life expectancy. The objective of this paper is that African identity ought to be redefined, reasserted and reaffirmed. African identity demands the need for African emancipation and social order. African identity is a reflection on a better and deeper understanding of African situation. This paper adopts the analytical framework in discussing the pathology of African identity examined in the light of African existential, socio-economic and political situation. The principal findings of this paper are that Africans must redefine their identity through re-evaluation of their cultural values; that Africa is a rich continent and must be protected from any mundane interest. African societies take preferences on communitarianism over the cult of individualism. This paper suggests that Africans must disengage their minds from the vestiges of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism. Africans must retrospectively turn their minds to African values, traditions and cultures. Africans must pursue a deeper understanding of African societies despite all their differences, fixations and specificities. This paper calls for the need for eclecticism and African renaissance using the principles of African communitarian consensus. African identity is based on a rich historical trajectory, identity, cultures, traditions and values. This paper concludes that Africa as a continent ought not to herself from the rest of the world.

Keywords: African Difference, African Identity, African Person, Philosophy, Westernism

1.1 Introduction

African identity is anchored on the re-vitalization and the reinvigoration of “African freedom”, cultures, values, traditions and practices. African identity is anchored on

improving the African values, culture and existential condition. African identity is deeply rooted in perceptual representation. A deeper understanding of African identity is deeply rooted in what Obi Oguejiofor calls “African predicament”. As Oguejiofor rightly observed, “philosophy gives a deeper perception of reality and opens the mind to numerous possibilities that are very enlightening. To explore the role of philosophy in understanding the African predicament and perhaps, provide some insights into how it can be ameliorated seem to necessitate a description of what one understands to represent that predicament. Philosophy has a practical role to play in human society (Oguejiofor, 2001, 20). Ruch and Anyanwu in consonance with Oguejiofor and assert that “for the sake of cultural decolonization, Africa has her own philosophy”. For African philosophy to grow there must be a creative confrontation of individual thoughts in the present and for the future (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1984, 11-12). African identity has been distorted by poor democratic values and poor leadership structure. For Aigbodion and Idjakpo:

African democratic values are predicated on the “communitarian consensus” system which has been described as a new social philosophy for Africa. A person is determined by the fulfillment of his social obligations and duties to his fellow neighbours. Communitarian consensus promotes a better consensus building mechanism by integrating all members of different segments of the society in the decision-making process. The communitarian consensus elevates and promotes consensus more as an African heritage; it captures more the fundamental elements of our African heritage by integrating the metaphysics of African ontology (Aigbodion and Idjakpo, 2010, 2-3).

Worthy of note is that Africa as a continent has been characterized by paradoxes despite the fact that Africa is a blessed continent. The parameters we can use to measure and arrive at this subscription is that Africa is rich in both human and natural resources. Africa is rich in forest reserve, water resources, landscape and human resources. The African continent has been bedeviled by a myriad of socio-political and economic challenges. These include the vicious cycle of poverty, poor productivity level, international debts, environmental degradation, low life expectancy, increase in infant mortality rates, gender inequality, sicknesses and diseases, dependence on foreign aids, poor democratic governance, irresponsible leadership, massive corruption, lack of strict adherence to the principle of the common good, infrastructural deficits, poor health care system and lack of attitudinal change. Maathai in consonance with Aigbodion and Idjakpo asserts that:

Africa is a paradox. It is one of the richest continents on the planet yet faced with plethora of socio-political and economic challenges. The vicious cycle of poverty...when international debts are not cancelled, when trade barriers are raised, or when foreign assistance is given to governments who do not dispense it

to their people responsibly; and when political leaders fail to invest in their citizens and do not protect their interests and not model service for the common good of the African peoples, the conditions are set for the underdevelopment that has held back Africa (Maathai, 2009, 274).

Furthermore, this paper is divided into four sections. Section one is the introductory remarks. Section two is anchored on the exposition, hermeneutics and pathology of African identity. Section three is anchored on the evaluation of the pathology of African identity. Section four is the concluding considerations.

1.2 An Expose of the Hermeneutics and the Pathology of African Identity

African identity defines who we are as a people. African identity is defined by the principle of common consensus or communitarian agreement or sense of belongingness. The African person is not defined by the cult of individualism but by the principle of we-consciousness. The pervasive state of the African continent has been a source of apprehension to scholars and to the peoples of Africa. Today, Africa is presently combating with serious economic challenges and socio-political conditions due to poor leadership structure in Africa. The battle for African socio-political and economic challenges must be a continuous one. According to Owomoyela:

The pervasive state of anomy on the African continent has conferred credibility on the short view that Africa's problems began with the departure of the colonizers and one can legitimately ascribe the blame for them only to the crop of corrupt and often murderous politicians and dictators who have plagued most of the continent since the end of European rule. The fight for African liberation, emancipation and historization must continue as long as the belief in the essential pathology of Africanity can boast a proponent (Owomoyela, 1996, ix-xi).

Nonetheless, the contextualization and the conceptualization of African identity presuppose the fact that Africa should not be seen as a foreign invasion. Accordingly, Owomoyela asserts that:

Africans should not view modernization as a foreign invasion but as a general search for development that involves all humankind but has hitherto left them behind. African societies are conversant with many instances of the de-emphasis of the cult of individualism necessarily that Africans do not believe in individualism. Any society that advocates heroism and worships it as Africans certainly do, evidently encourages individual excellence. The receptive mind can be a reflective mind (Owomoyela, 1996, 24-25).

In addition to the foregoing, Owomoyela, further argues that Africans cannot be said to live by intuition alone. Science, in its final analysis, is such a boon to humankind. Given the experiences of the last few centuries that have resulted in the cultural amnesia prevalent on the African continent, the most urgent need for Africans would seem to be self-rediscovery and self-determination. The African movement ought to be predicated on the basis of African identity and cultural renaissance (Owomoyela, 1996, 28). Owomoyela in consonance with Mabila Kalanda and Eboussi-Boulaga further asserts that a thorough and dispassionate understanding of the African past is indispensable for effectively confronting the future of the African continent. The presentation of this understanding of the African past is that of the deep-seated African experience of the thesis of internal colonialization and decolonization.

Moreover, the African ways strongly indicate the need for cultural rehabilitation and moral rebirth. A true African philosophy would aim at reconciling Africans to Africanness, not at advocating dissolution in a European cultural *mélange*. Philosophy is not a closed discipline but it requires a universal dialogue (Owomoyela, 1996, 31-32). Worthy of note is that, Owomoyela asserts that Africans must do away with the current pervasive state of anomy and a discredited complex of values, traits and practices. For Owomoyela: “we must avoid the paradox of making philosophy as closed discipline and opens up the way for the normative possibility of an equal dialogue between African thought and Western thought. Moreover, the need for a universal dialogue would undoubtedly be beneficial for both sides. African thought reflects on the need for the valorization of African identity (Owomoyela, 1996, 33-34). However, Owomoyela further heightened his theoretical position by asserting that:

When one considers the record of African performance since the 1960s, when the wind of change caused the emergence of several independent African states out of territories colonized by Europe, when one considers especially the almost universal slide into disorder that has prompted once-enthusiastic champions of the cause of Africa and Africans to abandon it as ill-advised, one might justifiably wonder if it was not perhaps perverse to defend and even valorize an African difference. After all, is that difference, is not a mark of the much-advertised African insufficiency and the cause of the African morass. Is it something to celebrate and be garrulous about in the face of reminders that it also proved its worthlessness by the ease with which it delivered the continent to inconsiderable forces of European slavers first and colonizers later? And, in any case, does insistence on an African difference, even if it was not a discredited complex of values, traits and practices, and amount to promoting a pure and unitary African essence in disregard of the obvious diversity of

Africanism and in a world of hybrid cultures and identities (Owomoyela, 1996, 34-35)?

Nevertheless, Owomoyela posits that the logical necessity for African sufficiency in the midst of its current inadequacies and insufficiencies caused by the profound persistence of post-colonialism is for the Africans to redefine, reassert and reaffirm their African identity. According to Owomoyela, “colonialism has not been eroded in the African soil. However, colonialism had not ended the colonial arrangement persisted in a neo-colonial guise. Africans are still witnessing the residual effects of colonialism. The intellectual tendency that has been described in this theoretical discourse is a paradox, in as much as it co-exists with pronouncements in favour of exposing and thus facilitating the demise of the ideological construction of a pathology of African difference and all the implications of that construction” (Owomoyela, 1996, 69-70). For Owomoyela, our cause of Afrology should be predicated on “African realism” (Owomoyela, 1996, 68-69). As rightly observed by Owomoyela:

What is most realistic and indeed incumbent upon us, is the acknowledgement of the historicity of our present African condition and a resolve to refrain from any actions that might impose the necessity of Westernism on future African generations. What is past cure may be past care, but it is not past blocking from contaminating others. To uncritically invest the status-quo colonialism engendered with an aura of necessity or inevitability would be to render a disservice to posterity and to the cause of Africanity. What is possible, and what Africans in favour of cultural de-colonization do advocate, is the re-instatement of those habits of the heart and of the mind that constitute the African difference (Owomoyela, 1996, 51-52).

Moreover, what constitutes African identity is the concern about the habits of the heart and of the mind. What constitutes African identity is deeply rooted in cultural rebirth. What constitute the African essence are their cultures, norms and traditions. The African was communitarian and has a sense of belongingness before his identity was distorted due to the influence of colonization, westernization and globalization. The African man was communally-based. He was defined by communitarianism rather than the cult of individualism. Africans are now questioning their very existence and essence because African governments have made existence burdensome to the African peoples. African existence has been a very questionable and burdensome one. Many Africans are groaning in harsh economic realities and socio-political conditions. Poverty and hunger have become a fundamental problem in Africa. Poverty and hunger have become dehumanizing forces for the African peoples due to ineffective and irresponsible political leadership and economic wastages. African leadership has been bedeviled and distorted by the evils of

poverty, hunger, egocentric politics, Godfatherism and corruption. This theoretical discourse argues that there was never a time in African societies when hunger and poverty were not major challenges but hunger and poverty have been aggravated in contemporary times due to poor leadership ineffectiveness and political irresponsibility caused by the evils of corruption.

Broadly speaking, Owomoyela's theoretical position has become a clarion call for the African peoples to reassert and reaffirm their African essence and their socio-political and economic freedom. The African essence reflects the beauty of blackness. Some scholars like Leopold Sedar Senghor have argued that black is beautiful and it reflects the richness of our African identity, African communalism, African culture and sense of belongingness. For Owomoyela, "the argument typically requires the negation of the African self, not the European pseudo-self, the end result being rampant Europeanism at the cost of the eradication of all vestiges of Africanness. On the other hand, the "justification for this radical Europeanism is that assimilation is empowerment" (Owomoyela, 1996, 52-53). Owomoyela further argues that:

Marcien Towa's call for African self-negation and Hountondji's plea for abandoning difference in order to Europeanize stems from the belief that the persistence of Africanity perpetuates the status of the African as "the absolute other" of the civilized [read European] man. To us as civilized Africans is in tandem with Said's critique of Orientalism as the limit of the human encounter between different cultures, values, traditions, practices and societies are logically unnecessary and strongly insignificant (Owomoyela, 1996, 48-49).

Nonetheless, the evils of poverty, hunger, corruption, colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism have become irreconcilable to African development. Accordingly, Owomoyela further asserts that colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism were simply not conducive to African development; it was in Europe's interest to exploit its overseas colonies rather than encourage their equal access to the means of technological advancement. Worthy of note is that we have the examples of China and Japan as proofs that the retention of traditional beliefs and practices are not incompatible with industrialization and technological advancement (Owomoyela, 1996, 50-51). Worthy of note is that, Owomoyela further asserts that:

I am not suggesting that we do away with all things Western and substitute for them all things Africa only that we look a new, with de-colonized eyes, at African cultural resources for possible contributions to the common human treasury. African philosophy, in my view, cannot be simply a replicated Western discipline; it must be a practice that is unconcerned with proving its compliance with or at

variance from the rules of Western philosophy, one that will independently pose its own questions and pursue their answers in ways that are consistent with African values. It is certainly premature to concede to Western philosophy sole access to the path to truth. Instead of being paranoid about difference (or alterity), therefore, we might do well to embrace our African originality and our identity. The mission of African originality and difference (alterity) should be a practical one (Owomoyela, 1996, 64-65).

Moreover, Oladipo in consonance with Owomoyela asserts that “the mission of African philosophy in the contemporary world is a practical one. This practical context of African identity is closely associated with the Marxian tradition” (Oladipo, 2000, 112-113). African Marxists have opted for the need for social change. Change is the only thing that is always fundamentally inspired by human positive actions. African realism questions the existentialist burden of the African peoples caused by the evils of irresponsible leadership and massive corruption. Okoli in his work entitled “*Corruption: The Need for a Paradigm Shift*” asserts that regrettably, corruption in Nigeria is all pervading, endemic and systemic (Okoli, 2010, 60). However, a dialectical variation of African identity ought to be unswerving with the African communalistic principle. For Owomoyela, “committed African intellectuals should lead the way in researching the African past to recoup the triumphs of social organizations; our fathers and mothers developed and to refurbish them as viable alternatives to colonial impositions” (Owomoyela, 1996, 95-96). However, African societies ought to thrive on purity of intentions, honesty of purpose, trust, mutuality, cooperation and accommodation rather than conflict. For Owomoyela, African society thrives on a “communalistic experience” (Owomoyela, 1996, 117).

In addition to the foregoing, African communalistic experience is deeply rooted in African culture and the need for the necessary condition of good leadership structure that may align itself with the African communalistic principles. According to Owomoyela:

It is this guarantee of the conditions necessary for good leadership, and therefore, good social order. We must historicize and contextualize. We must be careful so that we would not endanger our African cultures in a bid to Westernize. Our insistence is on our deeper understanding of African origin and ridding ourselves of the essentialist notion of African contrariness. Otherwise, we would be in danger of doing away with some desirable outcomes and features of our cultures, simply because they are African. Our motivation is to discourage the error of castigating African sensibility without an adequate understanding of African realities and social formations; an error that we have unfortunately received from our late colonizers (Owomoyela, 1996, 139-140).

Furthermore, the sustainability of African identity remains an existential imperative for African development. African societies ought to consolidate themselves on the proposition that all Africans are important, so long as they are not marked by some sort of irregularity. Africans must emancipate themselves from attitudes towards Western culture and Western hegemonic tendencies. Western culture should not be viewed as the “ideal paradigm” for African emancipation. African emancipation is deeply a unique one that calls for a constant search for re-thinking African identity. African societies must begin to evolve in order to prepare themselves for the federation of world order. For Owomoyela:

African societies were organized on the premise that all its members and all its component groups were important, so long as they were not marked by some sort of abnormality. We must emancipate ourselves from attitudes towards Westernism. Westernism should not be viewed as the “ideal paradigm” for African liberation. Our emancipation towards our Africanity is a unique one and it calls for a continuous search for re-Africanizing our sense of reasoning and our attitudes towards Africanity that derives from the proclivity to see Westernism as the ideal paradigm. African societies must begin to evolve in order to prepare ourselves for some new federation of world order (Owomoyela, 1996, 162-163).

In addition to the foregoing, Owomoyela further heightened his theoretical position by asserting that Africa is a diverse continent and so are its peoples and their cultures. It is also a dynamic continent that bears the marks of its passage through time. Africanity requires some rallying principle by which they identify themselves as members of an exclusive group with mutual obligations and responsibilities. Moreover, “Africanity implies a certain way, a learned way, in which people relate to one another, to the environment and to the universe (Owomoyela, 1996, 172-173). For Owomoyela, our Africanity requires “the vaunted principle of African communalism or reciprocative communalism. Africanity is built on the solid bedrock of African philosophy- an anthropocentrism which is community- based or oriented insofar as the African individual is perceived as a member of a specific community, that is, to say his or her being-for-itself can only be linked to his or her being-with-others” (Owomoyela, 1996, 177-178). Accordingly, Owomoyela further asserts that:

The African person is never a confrontational person. The African person is defined by accommodation through less confrontational means. The African way was never to pre-empt oppositional expression but to encourage dialogue, the airing of all views and to negotiate a communitarian consensus based on accommodation of all views. We must not undermine the continuing struggle for African emancipation by confirming and reinforcing the notion of African

pathology. What defined our Africanity includes the task of reclaiming African humanity. For many Africanists, it also includes the championship of Africa's interests in all its ramifications. The pathology of African identity should be devoid of some sort of sentiments, the sentiments Africans have always expressed about the West have been characterized by significant or paradigm shifts and transformative moments ranging from orgasmic adulation to nauseated repulsion and giving rise to strange paradoxes that sometimes defy reason or rationalization (Owomoyela, 1996, 207-208).

It is worth noting that Odhiambo in consonance with Owomoyela asserts that the African mental disposition and rational faculty was equal to that of the European. The African person "is a being that is not static but a dynamic being" (Odhiambo, 1995, 97). On the other hand, Donohue in consonance with Odhiambo asserts that "being is not something static, but is essentially dynamic. African society confers on the individual strength and life". Society does not only constrain the African person; it also confers strength and life; it provides moral support, making the individual bigger and better. Society is sacred and the individual is profane" (Donohue, 1994, 19). Moreover, African identity is simply tilted towards African philosophy. On the other hand, African philosophy is geared towards certain ideological construction, deconstruction, reconstruction and orientation and it is a very dynamic and sensitive one. For Imbo, "philosophy thus became the handmaiden of ideology in colonial Africa" (Imbo, 1998, 45-46). In addition to the foregoing, the role of philosophy is aimed at solving the fundamental problem of reasserting and reaffirming African identity.

1.3 Evaluation

The pathology of African identity arises out of the problem of the hegemony of Western culture and the cultural hybridization of globalization. Globalization, for instance, is not really a bad idea but it has assumed a negative connotation due to its misapplication by Africans. African societies were defined by rich cultural values, and the high esteem the Africans owe to their languages and cultures. These rich languages and cultural values are now eluding the African people. Various African languages and cultures are gradually fading away due to the influence of Westernization and globalization. Based on these subscriptions, in concurrence with the theoretical perspective of Owomoyela, this paper therefore observes that Owomoyela's theoretical position presupposes the egocentric politics prevalent in Africa and that Africa is actually distorted by serious existential burden of poverty, hunger, diseases, corruption, irresponsible leadership and identity crisis. All these constitute the African condition. African identity is deeply rooted in charting a new course for Africa. As rightly observed by Owomoyela, the idea of Western

culture as the paradigm shift for African identity is not the fundamental solution. However, African identity has been distorted by some Africans themselves. The disruption of African societies is not actually caused by the imposition of European values or Western cultures alone.

Nonetheless, there is so much poverty and hunger in Africa. Africa has remained in a sorry state due to the threats of poverty and hunger caused by endemic corruption and irresponsible leadership among African governments. However, these senses of hopelessness, irresponsibility, meaninglessness and human degradation have become worsened by the fundamental problems of irresponsible leadership, abject poverty and hunger in Africa. For Owomoyela, one may as well ask “what these practical problems have to do with philosophy...A fitting response would be that the colonial experience made African identity acutely problematic and challenging; and thus, the pathology of African identity is inextricably tied to these practical fundamental problems” (Owomoyela, 1996, 62-63). Odimegwu in consonance with Owomoyela asserts that fundamental problems require fundamental solutions (Odimegwu, 2008, 6-7).

In addition to the foregoing, some of the fundamental solutions to Africa’s fundamental problems include democratic accountability, even distribution of human and natural resources, gender equality, good educational system, employment, zero-tolerance to corruption, mechanization of agriculture, rapid industrialization of different regions, increase in infrastructural facilities such good road networks, communication system, regular supply of electricity, strong legal framework or rule of law, due process in government institutions, adequate health care system and normative peace by ensuring that African societies are devoid of chaotic atmosphere. According to Davidson, “the current African socio-political situation is marked by chaos and so, there is good reason to imitate the good characteristics of traditional African systems of democratic governance that is hinged on collectivism or sense of belongingness. The African worldview is basically anchored on “the primacy of community interest, co-existence and cooperation, democratic accountability and a sense of responsibility in individuals” (Davidson, 1992, xxiii). Accordingly, Oguejiofor asserts that “at independence, most African political leaders simply dusted the seats of colonial masters and sat comfortably in these seats.

Furthermore, the reason is a deep-seated acceptance and reflection that the colonial structure of governance was ideal for all, including Africans” (Oguejiofor, 2001, 22-23). Wiredu in consonance with Oguejiofor, asserts that neocolonialism and colonialism involved not only political subjugation but also cultural de-personalization” (Wiredu, 1998, 97). Innocent Asouzu, in consonance with Wiredu and Oguejiofor, argues that:

The African experience is a search for a comprehensive cause. African identity has been distorted by the problematic of poverty or economic depravity of the African people mainly caused by their leaders in African governments. Poverty and deprivation, for example, derive from the fragmentation of our historical situation and these must not be reasons for negative experience of our historicity (Asouzu, 2004, 227-228).

It is worth noting that based on the above subscription, Oguejiofor further asserts that “African philosophy has been given the task of political analysis, of critique of ideology, of moral rejuvenation, of fertilizing the grounds for positive democratic debates, as well as proposing the structure of socio-political organization that will eventually suit the African condition” (Oguejiofor, 2004, 34-35). However, the contextualization and the conceptualization of African identity is deeply rooted in the need for ensuring the normative outcomes of the common good. For Asouzu, the idea of the common good refers to a common source of collective legitimation beyond the dictates of the ego. African philosophy is aimed at the tendency of we-consciousness. African society anchors on the need for social wholeness or universality devoid of any mundane private interests”. The dangers of the intrusion of our private interests notwithstanding, the challenge to universality, comprehensiveness, wholeness and totality, in the search for objectivity and truth, remains at the theoretical foundation or solid bedrock of all authentic philosophizing and human existence”(Asouzu, 2004, 380). It is germane to note that African identity is basically a dialectical variation of Africa’s voyage of social, cultural, psychological, political and economic struggle from Western colonization. For Dukor:

The identity question, apart from the associated problems of freewill and choices, is a big problem itself, because as human nature, its predictions can or cannot be about its substance and hope. Intercultural philosophy would absolve the conflicts between the sacred and the secular in the post-colonial Africa and the world at large. The problematic of African identity raises a fundamental question about Africa’s quest for civilization and transnational development. The African person believes in belongingness principle (Dukor, 2010, 108-109).

Moreover, the African person engages in a sense of belongingness, social harmony and communalistic principles. The communalistic principle of African wholeness presupposes shared common experiences and objectives. The idea of belongingness also relates to the shared common destiny. It revolves around the whole ideas of political participation. For Dukor:

The African person engages in functional belongingness, harmony and communalism. The principle of manipulation in the ideas of belongingness also relate to the sharing which the ideas of participation project too, though not

explicitly. Both ideas equally relate to the principle of solidarity among forces (entities) so as to maintain the integral wholeness of the universal system (Dukor, 2010, 425-426).

Nevertheless, the question of African identity in African philosophy is humanistic, animistic and holistic in nature. For Dukor, African identity is deeply rooted in the animistic spirits and the animistic spirits also shares belongingness principle, which is necessary in African medicine. These animistic forces are also the fundamental categories of African ontology and communalism. On the principle of participation, it is by participating that the active side of animistic forces engages in functional belongingness, harmony and communalism (Dukor, 2010, 426). Accordingly, Oladipo argues that the crisis of identity in Africa is “the crisis of relevance”. Various attempts have been made in contemporary writings in African philosophy to locate the *locus classicus* and focus of the problem surrounding the idea of African philosophy. There is a crisis of relevance in contemporary African philosophy. Africa has always been a victim of European epistemological ethnocentrism (Oladipo, 2000, 15). For Oladipo, these socio-economic processes have contributed to the impoverishment of the continent. African identity and existential condition can be nothing other than reflections by African philosophers on African cultures, customs and traditions (Oladipo, 2000, 20). Accordingly, Oladipo further heightened his theoretical position by asserting that, philosophy has not been able to grapple with the African experience. The primary task of African philosophers should begin to create a tradition of thinking and discourse whose main focus would be on contextual and contemporary issues affecting the interests and aspirations of their peoples. The primary cause of this crisis has been located in the failures of African philosophers to put the interests and aspirations of African peoples at the centre-stage of their intellectual pre-occupations (Oladipo, 2000, 18-19). Accordingly, Oladipo further asserts that:

Philosophy is a social phenomenon which derives its being from the experience generated through the continuous interaction between human beings and their environment between themselves. But just as it is a product of this experience, it also shapes it by providing the conceptual tools for comprehending human existential realities as they manifest themselves within a given socio-historical space. In other words, the relationship between philosophy and human experience is dialectical (Oladipo, 2000, 31-32).

It is worth noting that based on the above presuppositions, Oladipo asserts that the crucial issue in contemporary African philosophy is “the issue of whether it is possible and if possible, how, to achieve a knowledge-power order which is African while remaining

within the purview of a Western epistemological framework or Western paradigm” (Oladipo, 2000, 24-25). For Oladipo:

Philosophy is the reflection of human beings either on themselves or the world process of which they constitute an integral part. The idea of African philosophy in terms of its definition is a misguided one. Thus, the preoccupation with the definition of philosophy in contemporary debates on the idea of African philosophy is misguided. African philosophers have been out of tune with the deepest aspirations of their peoples. African philosophers should base on their intellectual aspirations on the service of the struggles and destiny of their peoples (Oladipo, 2000, 23).

Nonetheless, Oladipo asserts that the contemporary African realities are peculiar ones. African philosophers should engage themselves in the African projects as vanguards of social change (Oladipo, 2000, 31-32). For Oladipo, “given the peculiarity of the African situation today, they should serve as vanguards of social change in Africa. African identity goes beyond culture-specifics and it is contextually-bound. The culture specifics are quite crucial to a proper and deeper understanding of the contemporary African experience and reality” (Oladipo, 2000, 27). Be that that as it may, African identity is not all about “culture specifics” but it is deeply rooted in the cosmic network of connectivity. For Dukor, the network of connectivity among “forces” links every aspect of the cosmic order (Dukor, 2010, 426). However, contemporary African reality ought to be the focus of African scholarship.

In addition to the foregoing, the crux of this theoretical discourse is that African societies ought to pursue and promote respect for human freedom, rights and dignity. African identity ought to pursue a deeper understanding of African societies based on a rich cultural heritage, value pluralism and belief system that encourages the sanctity of human rights, privileges and dignity. African identity is predicated on the social, political, economic, historical, technological, scientific, cultural and linguistic perspectives or dimensions of African societies. The philosophy of African identity should be people-oriented; and is actually premised on the self-re-assertion and self-reaffirmation of the African people. The question of African identity basically goes beyond an ontological turn of the African beingness, but it is a re-examination and the self-reassertion of the African person. The ontological turn cum the socio-political, cultural, psychological, economic and existential condition of the African person demands the need for self-transformation and self-actualization or self-realization. Africans are actually experiencing cultural loss or attrition due to the crisis of relevance, economic balkanization and brain drain syndrome. Many Africans are travelling Overseas due to the economic hardship that is prevalent in Africa. This harrowing experience of economic hardship has affected the psychological import of many Africans.

Broadly speaking, African identity demands the need for re-humanization of the African person and it requires the need for African emancipation. The philosophy of African identity has a broader spectrum because it traverses the educational, social, political, technological, scientific, psychological, existential, linguistic, cultural, ontological, historical and economic condition of the African person. The philosophy of African identity requires the need for social and attitudinal change. African identity vis-à-vis African socio-political and economic/existential situation requires what Peter Drucker (1999, 73) calls “radical social change” of African societies. Africans must pursue and grasp a better and deeper understanding of African societies despite differences in their origins, social structures, beliefs, languages, cultures, traditions, customs and values. African identity is deeply rooted in a rich cultural milieu and historical trajectory that traverses the whole of the African continent. A closer look at the philosophy of African identity demands the need for what George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepnisky call cultural hybridization (Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2014, 572-573). Based on this subscription given by Ritzer and Jeffrey (2014), Africa as a continent cannot isolate herself from the rest of the world. At this junction, African societies must begin to embrace the spirit of unity in diversity. Worthy of note is that differences are part and parcel of humanity.

Furthermore, this paper aligns its theoretical position with the Aristotelian tradition that says; no man can live in complete isolation because any man who refuses to live in society is bound to be an angel, a beast or a god. For Africans to experience sustainable development, the continent must begin to embrace what Peter Drucker (1999, 63) calls global competitiveness. Africa as a continent is not a paradox as some scholars like Wangari Maathai (2009) would assume but it is a continent that is endowed with both human and natural resources. What Africa as a continent requires is the harnessing of the African potentials and this will greatly help Africans to redefine their African identities and to achieve their dreams and aspirations.

1.4 Conclusion

So far, this paper concludes that Africa as a continent ought not to isolate itself from the rest of the world. What should be logically necessary in Africa is the need for Africans to go beyond every form of tribal sentiments, Eurocentric tendencies and cultural hegemony. Africans ought to engage in a dialectical variation of mutuality and cooperative relationships. However, the evils of corruption, irresponsible leadership, poor legal framework, tribal sentiments, gender inequality and God fatherism have been the bane to African development. The battle for African socio-political and economic challenges and liberalization is a continuous process.

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