

HISTORICISING PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Protocols

Perambulatory Remarks

I am profoundly grateful to the organisers of this conference for giving me the privilege to deliver a keynote speech to this important academic concourse. I see my presence here as an honour and I appreciate the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, Dr Sir Paul Chukuma. I share with the Chairman of Council two things. (1) We are both learned colleagues (2) we share the same affinity as philosophers – he is a graduate of philosophy and I am a fellow of the most prestigious philosophical association in Nigeria – the Philosophers Association of Nigeria (PAN).

My gratitude goes to the Management of the University for approving and supporting the Dean, Faculty of Arts, Prof. Agaba Ebute, and the Ag. Head, Department of Philosophy, Revered Father Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi, Dr. Benedict Michael. We note the recent change of the name of the university as part of a going trend to change the name of tertiary institutions after politicians. It is a phenomenon that requires thorough interrogation by the calibre of scholars in this conference. I sincerely thank my

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colleagues in the Departments of Philosophy, History and conferees at this historic conference. Our customers and students of the Department of Philosophy, and other departments, it is because of you all that we are here. Your presence here today is appreciated. Lastly, I like to specially thank Dr Anjov, the prime mover of my presence in this hall today. He it was that requested that I give this lecture months before I became a Vice Chancellor with an unanticipated crowded program. I had no option than to accede to his request. I just had to; given his comraderies and spectacular performance while with me at the Nigerian Army Resource Centre as one of the Visiting Researchers. He flew that flag of BSU credibly.

The theme of this 1st National Conference, *Philosophy and Social Change*, is apt and has come at no better time in our history as a country than this. This is especially so, given the rate of societal changes that we have witnessed in the last two decades in this century. They are not only humongous but monumental. A glance at the Information Technology sphere amplifies this point; however, it is often not remembered that they are all a product of deep philosophical thought, one that is reshaping the technology culture, setting/shattering its boundaries and determining its acceptability. Before delving into the main gravamen of the theme of this conference, I like to place on record that I have had to tweak the theme and derived the topic of my address from it. I have domesticated the topic to bear the African imprimatur and contextualised it to fit largely into the 21st century. I shall be speaking on 'Historicising Philosophy and Social Change in Africa in the 21st Century'. You will agree with me that the twenty-first century has been characterised by accelerated changes that modern man is barely grappling with. The rapidity, degree and dimensions

are frightening. Most of us are struggling to cope with these social changes. It is frightening when we take into cognisance the postulations of Charles Darwin in his *Origins of Species*, that species that are unable to change and adopt are most likely to go into extinction. So, I am saying that as we interrogate Philosophy and Social Change, we must be ready to apply the knowledge produced to our individual lives.

Indeed, the culture of conferences and seminars is now increasingly endangered by, amongst other factors, the paucity of funds that has necessitated this fading tradition from our universities. As an undergraduate of the university of Ibadan in the early 1980s, I attended an average of eight international conferences in my university campus every year. From these conferences, I made a lot of friends with scholars from across the globe. Indeed, we experienced the universe in our university; again, a phenomenon that has almost completely disappeared from our universities. Part of our lived experiences as a citadel of learning is the social experience of the changing composition of our universities as academic hubs of international colouration to ones of a very high local content in staff and student composition in Nigeria. I hope and pray that the glory that has departed shall be restored. The senior academics in this hall have a responsibility to gravitate the *academe* in the direction of restoring the dwindling glories of the past; this will, as the American anthropologist, Jane Guyer put it, require a reconfiguration of our academic traditions. Let us get into the main gravamen of my discourse today.

Conceptualisations

There is a consensus amongst scholars that the term Philosophy is a collage of attributes that reflects wisdom, deep reflection,

intellectual rigour and critical thinking. Plato defines philosophy as “the acquisition of knowledge”. Aristotle sees it as “the science which investigates the nature of being, as it is in itself”. Karl Marx defines philosophy as “an interpretation of the world in order to change it”. Philosophy is a body of ideas, knowledge, systems, and principles arrived at through man's rigorous inquiry and intercourse with nature and its dynamics at a particular place, over a given period of time.² As an academic discipline, philosophy positively shapes and sharpens human reasoning faculties, abilities, thoughts, expressions, and actions, and urges human inquisitiveness to know. The abstractness of the discipline of philosophy repels many, in contemporary times, from studying this subject; for it poses a challenge of utilising the knowledge produced as a skill for solving contemporary problems. This challenge is not peculiar to Philosophy; it is one that has besieged the humanities and challenged their relevance in society. Yet, even the accepted relevant disciplines end up at the peak of their formal knowledge production as holders of doctorate degree in philosophy; an acknowledgement of a deep thinker in that chosen field of study and in obeisance to the mother of all disciplines.

Given the earlier identified attributes of philosophy, it will be apt to surmise that it is a way of life. In this sense, philosophy is connected to culture. By this understanding, the abstractness or the theoretical nature of philosophy has been subsumed into its practical application by understanding, analysing and influencing unique challenges and opportunities relevant to societal transformations. In its applicability to everyday life, the knowledge of philosophy

². “Philosophy and Social Change in Nigeria: An Abstract” Being the text of an invited paper by the National Association of Philosophy Students (NAPS) of Edo State University, Ekpoma, on the occasion of its Philosophy week on 27th February, 1996.

helps in shaping human values, human ethics, and social structures. The critical thinking generated from philosophical knowledge is often used to address pressing social issues like poor character formation, prevailing existential threat, electoral misconduct, kidnapping for ransom, banditry, corruption, bad governance, poor leadership styles, underdevelopment, lack of accountability, and when properly used can promote positive change, politically, morally, religiously, culturally and a secure nation. It can therefore be argued that the predicaments of the Nigerian nation are partly explicable in terms of the lack of application of philosophical knowledge cum rigour in the policies and implementations of various aspects of Nigeria's actions and inactions.³ Olu Owolabi has argued in his 2009 inaugural lecture that 'my people perish for lack of philosophy'.⁴

Indeed, I have over twenty-seven years ago argued that if we must get it right as Africans, Philosophers must collaborate with other disciplines to get it right.⁵ Take our confused political systems that have remained polemical, for instance. From Parliamentary to Presidential and the debate is still on. No one is factoring into the mix our indigenous political experiences down the ages. Hence, we are a republic with traditional rulers all over the place.

^{3.} Ogbogbo, C.B.N. (1998) "Explaining the Continued Crisis of Relevance in African Philosophy" *OPHIA: An African Journal of Philosophy*, University of Calabar, Vol. 1 No.1 pp. 59-65

^{4.} Olu- Owolabi K.A. (2011) 'My People Perish for Lack of Philosophy' An Inaugural Lecture delivered at University of Ibadan, 11 August, University of Ibadan Press, Ibadan.

^{5.} Ogbogbo, C.B.N. (1997) "The Poverty of African Philosophy", *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, No.7 pp. 35-42 see also Ogbogbo, C.B.N. (2017), "Revisiting the Terms of African Philosophy" in I. E. Ukpokolo (ed.) *Themes, Issues & Problems in African Philosophy*, Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, pp.11-18.

As an African Historian, I would not bore you with philosophical syllogism of the relevance of philosophy in our contemporary times. Historicising philosophy especially in relation to social change, takes us back to the days our ancestors were using their brains to promote ethical thinking. If colonialism did not interfere in the way members of the African society were thinking, they would have developed solutions that challenge our indigenous cultural values and traditions. The products of our continuous African thinking and knowledge production would have set us apart and made us better person than the indoctrinated orientation of becoming more Western to the detriment of losing our identity, rights and human dignity. As E.A. Ayandele put it, we, the educated elite, have become deluded hybrids. What is philosophy? There is no single response to this question, neither does it have universal acceptability. There are fourteen subthemes on the flyer apart from those chosen by other conferees.

Each conferee has a unique operational definition of philosophy which is geared to the search for truth and wisdom. Simply put, Philosophy broadens the human mind and equips it with essential tools of criticality, consistency, logicity, comprehensiveness, profundity, and coherence.⁶ Philosophical ideas are often influenced by their cultural perceptions and outlook on life, nature, the origin of the universe, beliefs, norms, and traditions.⁷ Philosophical thoughts have provided the intellectual foundation for movements seeking to improve society across the ages. It has encouraged critical examination of social structures and values, promoting awareness and potential for change, which sometimes

⁶ Gregory Emeka, *CHINWEUBA*, Philosophy and Governance in Contemporary Africa, 95-109

⁷ T.U. Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, (New York: Tritlantic Book, 2010), Pg. 24.

instigate conflicts and social changes in political systems.

Social Change

Social change is said to be “when change takes place at large scale or at the societal level that affects customs, traditions, mores, norms, social relations, social institutions, political system, economy, standard of living, way of thinking, attitude and type of occupations, technology and the entire culture of society”. According to Brady Wagoner and Seamus A. Power “Social change describes the transformations of a society in terms of value systems, social organisation, and practices”. This social change in most parts of Africa is perceived as social evolution because it is very slow and ultimately gradual in a way that it is very difficult to feel the changes immediately. For instance, the habit of eating together which was a cultural norm and practice to most African societies as a sign of unity has been altered. This singular change is like a bad fruit in a basket full of fruits. The rotten fruit plays a significant role in changing the healthy status of the entire basket of fruits. There is a second way social change occurs, it is fast, drastic and highly radical. This is referred to as a revolution. This is not too common in contemporary African History. Some scholars have argued that African societies have failed to enjoy the gains of revolution because of our docility and resilience in the face of pains and suffering.

It is our choice to adopt gradual social evolution that seems to be making us more European than who we are as Africans. We can go all out for revolution to chart a different path and identity. Whichever way we choose to go with our discussion during this august conference, the moral certitude is that our perception of social change will contribute significantly to the entire structure and

functioning of the kind of society we wish to create with immediate consequences and serious implications for the future. The greatest gift of philosophy to social change is its ability to foster critical thinking and provide frameworks for understanding and addressing societal issues as philosophy is all out to encourage us to question our *status quo*, analyze ethical dilemmas and imagine alternative social structures that are crucial for driving positive social change. Ultimately, Social Change is characterised by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organisation, or value systems.

Historicising Philosophy and Social Change in Africa Up to the 20th Century

Having laid the foundations of Philosophy and social change, it will be pertinent at this juncture to critically examine the interaction of these two variables through the lenses of history. Put differently, what has been the matrix of Philosophy and Social Change through the ages. Let us however lay down some postulations:

1. Societal changes have influenced philosophical ideas, acting as a catalyst for reform and a mirror to existing social structures and values. Conversely, philosophical ideas put into action have transformed existing social structures and practices.
2. Like on-going human development through time, philosophy is an ever-present phenomenon as long as humans exist.
3. Philosophy is evolutionary and not static, and it is influenced by changes in the world, just as changes may be influenced by philosophies.

The paucity of written documents on Africa's earliest past, the over four hundred years of slavery and slave trade, and the European imperialism and colonialism of Africa were used as measures to

deny the existence of African history and philosophies that sustained and evolved early states and societies for hundreds and - millions of years. Africa was regarded as incapable of intellectual reflection, and hence it was assumed to have no philosophical thinking.

The earliest civilisations and cultural evolution in Africa, and other parts of the world were products of philosophical thought. However, for centuries, African thinkers, concepts and traditions were denied recognition, and African philosophies were deemed unrelated to world philosophy and excluded from major reference works on the history of philosophy. There was Western Philosophical thought but not for Africa. Indeed, there was the question of whether African philosophy existed.⁸ My teacher, Peter Bodunrin's 1981 piece on 'The Question of African Philosophy' steered up the debate about its existence and nature. The implication of this denial of the existence of African Philosophy, is that it laid the philosophical foundations of the claim that Africans contributed nothing to humankind's march of civilisation.

African societies were classified as primitive societies, a continent devoid of philosophical thinking or history, by several European scholars. Although the Egyptian, Phoenician, and Ethiopian early philosophies were recognised, these were not ascribed to Africa, but to Western and Greco influence.⁹ Recall C. G. Seligman's *Races of Africa*¹⁰ in which he postulated that very significant civilisation in

⁸. P. O. Bodunrin, 1981, 'The Question of African Philosophy' in *Philosophy*, Vol. 56, No. 216

⁹. See Hegel, 1939, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, delivered in the winter of 1830–31, 110=117, in Anke Granness, *Questions of Canon Formation in Philosophy: The History of Philosophy in Africa*

¹⁰. C. G. Seligman, 1930, *Races of Africa*

Africa was the product of external influence - the Caucasians. This was styled the Hamatic hypothesis and it gained currency from 1930 when the book was published. Such ideas conditioned how the Europeans perceived Africa and Africans. Such stereotypes greatly affected Euro-African relations in the 19th and 20th centuries. Some, even in the 21st century, have not shaken off this cloak of Hermatic hypothesis. For our purpose, the effect of such thoughts is to the effect that Africans were not capable of profound thoughts that can birth great civilisations. Such ludicrous thinking was used as a justification for Eurocentric views, which denied the existence of African history and philosophy, to justify European imperialism and colonialism, which they ascribed to a civilising mission of a dark continent.

Studies of early Egyptian and Ethiopian scripts, Arabic-Islamic Ajami and Swahili literature (many of which are still largely unexplored),¹¹ archaeological, ethnographical, genetic, linguistic, and historical analyses have proven that early African societies evolved sophisticated systems of thought, ethics, and belief systems and cultures long before the arrival of Arabs and Europeans. Most of these thoughts were often unwritten and passed down through oral traditions, arts, and culture, and were integral to communal life. Also, philosophers emerged in those earliest societies that influenced changes and evolution in the cultures,

^{11.} Discussion with the management of the Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto state, on 9 June 2017.

spirituality, and advancements in early eras.¹²

It is now a settled matter that African Philosophy did beget Western Philosophy. It produced and influenced early Greek philosophy. The philosophies of Egypt and Axum formed the corpus from which much of what became Western philosophy derived from. The work of Cheik Anta Diop and Innocent Onyewuenyi¹³ eloquently amplifies this assertion. This challenged the dominant narrative of the superiority of the Aryan race. The countering and dismantling of this idea of the domination of others by the West, helped in the struggle by African countries to attain independence in the second half of the 20th century.

This wind of change in the thought process of Africans ignited considerable change in the intellectual history of Africans. It is this that caused a revolution in the study of History at the University College at Ibadan in the mid-1950s. Kenneth Dike who had been bitten by the liberation bug revised the History curriculum from a dominantly European one to that which focused on African. African History became reformatted at Ibadan and soon the History Department gained reputation as the Ibadan School of History. They became the main purveyor of African History globally.¹⁴ This

¹² Ugwu, A. K. (2025). African Philosophy: The Question of Periodisation and African Historical Events from Ancient Era to 21st Century. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 6(1), 334-355. <https://doi.org/10.25082/IJAH.2025.01.007>. Ogbogbo, C.B.N. (1995) "Some Problems in the Writing of the History of African Philosophy" *Quest An International Journal of African Philosophy*, The Netherlands, Vol. IX, No.2 pp157-172. See also, African Ethics, Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010. Getye Abneh, The Contribution of African Philosophy in Challenging Western Hegemony and Globalisation, *PhilArchive*.

¹³ Innocent Onyewuenyi *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy and C.A. Diop*, 1974, The African Origin of Civilisation

¹⁴ See J.F. Ade-Ajayi, 1980, 'The Historical Society of Nigeria: Presidential Address' *Journal of the Historical of Nigeria* Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 7-10

revolution in African studies was to later catch up with what has become African philosophy. Although it has existed since antiquity, as a field of study, African philosophy began with the advent of Western literacy in the 19th and 20th centuries, following the establishment of colonialism and the rise of educated classes on the continent.¹⁵

They traced the roots of African philosophy to ancient civilisations of Egypt in the Nile Valley and Phoenician-Nubia civilisations. The philosophical schools of ancient Egypt, such as those at Memphis, Heliopolis, and Thebes, were centres of learning that, as we have earlier noted, influenced later Greek and Western thought. These schools developed sophisticated cosmologies, ethics, and political philosophies. Suffice it to state that these early African philosophies influenced social changes in the early Egyptian societies by providing a framework for governance, ethics, and cultural outlooks.

Beyond the Nile Valley, other ancient African civilisations and societies, Carthage, Kush, and Nubia, among others, were not devoid of philosophical thoughts. Earliest African states and societies evolved diverse ethical and belief systems that sustained their societies over the ages. Studies have shown that ideas and beliefs about moral conduct are articulated, analysed, and interpreted by sages and moral thinkers of the society.¹⁶ They developed their own philosophical systems, often transmitted orally through proverbs, myths, ethical systems, and the wisdom of community elders.

^{15.} See Mbiti J. S.

^{16.} African Ethics, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 9 September, 2010, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/african-ethics/#:~:text=Since response to a moral, also to kamera or tibo.>

The African tradition of Philosophy emphasises the collective nature of knowledge and the importance of community well-being, usually embedded in traditional beliefs, proverbs, fables, folklores, and customs, and transmitted through oral traditions from one generation to the other. The early philosophical ideas of these societies formed the basis of their worldview and advancements. Until the 19th and 20th centuries, most African philosophies were largely in unwritten forms. However, they provided ethical frameworks and outlook that sustained early African societies for centuries and even millennia. For instance, the Yoruba concept of *Omoluabi*, which underscores the importance of a person's moral character, integrity, community, responsibility, and ethical development, has been used as a moral value within the communities since antiquity. It formed the practical bedrock of social order in the society, influenced judicial systems, leadership styles, and communal decision-making, demonstrating that African philosophy has always been deeply concerned with creating a functional and harmonious society.¹⁷ The point in emphasis is that since antiquity, African philosophy has been a veritable tool not just in the maintenance of social order but in the transformation of society.

The devastating experience of the slave trade and the rise of African consciousness in America and the West Indies ushered in the rise of ideas against racism, segregation policies, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, spurring up movements across Europe and the Americas. The experience of the slave trade, oppression, racial discrimination, and segregation faced by Africans in America, the

¹⁷. R. O. Banjo and A. O. Afolara, 'Reconsidering the Yorùbá Concept of Omolúàbí and The Peaceful Coexistence in the Society', *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, Vol. 6, Issue 5, 2023, 54-61

Caribbean, Europe, and elsewhere led to the creation of settlers' colonies dominated by blacks. Individual ideas and groupings of these people evolved and perpetuated shared creative responses to the impositions of various forms of systematised racialised oppression and class exploitation. This period saw the emergence of African thinkers, notably, Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784), Frederick Douglass (1817–1895), and Maria Stewart (1803–1879), whose writings highlighted the ills of slavery and advocated for freedom and justice for Black people in the “New World” including America, Canada, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Trinidadia, Haiti, Jamaica, France, Britain, etc. while, as slaves. For example, Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, and Gustavus Vassa's, *the African*, written by Himself (1789) were of such writings that documented the experience of blacks and their stance against racism and oppression of blacks. Equiano's *Narrative* discloses the significance of a compelled struggle to reclaim and exercise a person's right and power of identification of self and social being.¹⁸

These philosophers were independent thinkers who created philosophical systems rooted in their cultural contexts, which served to create social order, integration, and movements that led to social change in diverse slave colonies. The intellectual and philosophical movements that emerged from African thinkers during the 15th to 18th centuries contributed to the abolition of the slave trade and the independence of African colonies in the New World. It also laid the groundwork for later pan-Africanism against racial domination and subjugation of blacks across the world, nationalism, and ideological theories in response to colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

^{18.} Africana Philosophy, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2010

Philosophy and Social Change in Post-Colonial Africa and the 21st Century

The post-colonial period witnessed the consolidation of the changes ushered in by earlier movements, debates, and ideologies, notably the independence of states on the continent and the establishment of facts about Africa's past histories and philosophies. Philosophy moved on to engage enduring legacies of colonialism and pressing issues facing the continent and the world. This initiated a shift in focus from justifying historio-philosophical existence to applying philosophical tools to contemporary challenges, including the issues of underdevelopment, neo-colonialism, the rise of democratic movements, challenges of corruption, poor governance, and the persistence of conflict. Philosophers are engaging with questions of good governance, the nature of the state, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. 21st-century philosophies are intersecting with emerging technologies, exploring how technology can be used for development, but also critiquing how it might perpetuate existing inequalities and the power imbalances in the global arena.

Post-colonial philosophies and focal ideologies spell out the darkest injuries caused by colonialism to African states and the ills of neo-colonialism, bad governance, and other emerging challenges. Intellectuals continue to lead the discourse and utilise their writings to highlight social ills as they affect diverse aspects of African underdevelopment. The 21st-century Africa has been marred with diverse challenges, including extreme poverty, insecurity, bad governance, corruption, instability, and others, and these have instigated intellectual thoughts on how to address the same. African philosophers influence change by critiquing Western influence, highlighting fault lines, and proposing theories that would help

address these challenges. They promote decolonisation of knowledge and cultural viewpoints while advocating for development models tailored to Africa's peculiarity against the imposition of African ideas. Philosophers such as Kwame Gyekye and Ifeanyi Menkiti, while deeply engaged with the concept of community, developed theories of African communitarianism, arguing that African thought places the well-being of the community at the core of morality and politics. This philosophy has provided a powerful critique of unbridled individualism and has been used to advocate for social justice, collective responsibility, and forms of governance that are more attuned to African cultural realities.¹⁹

The 21st century also witnessed a new variant of pan-Africanism. The theory of African renaissance was championed to overcome the obstacles that are hindering African countries on their way to development. In this regard, Muhammad Gaddafi, former Libyan president, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, and Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal became promoters of this theory through their exposure and fearless audacity in the movement of Pan Africanism.²⁰ Also, there is a resurgence of decolonisation thoughts. Patrice Lumumba talked about decolonisation of European concepts and the interpretation of African spirituality. Other thinkers like Achille Mbembe and Oyeronke Oyewumi have deconstructed the lingering structures of colonial power, not just in politics and economics, but

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^{20.} Babangida B. Shira, 2021, Generation of African Poets: their philosophies, ideologies and the theory of African renaissance, [*African Literature*](#)

also in knowledge production, language, and gender relations. Mbembe's work on the "Postcolony" has provided a critical framework for understanding the complexities of power dynamics in contemporary African states, while Oyewumi's "The Invention of Women" has challenged the Western-centric view of gender, highlighting the unique social structures of pre-colonial African societies and instigated the discourse of African feminism, women in philosophy and development, which is still ongoing.²¹ Several conferences, workshops, and symposiums have been organised by varied institutions and scholars to interrogate the different areas of decolonisation to liberate the continent completely from European influences, which still mar relations and development on the continent.

Various theories have been propounded to address challenges on the continent. These include African feminist theory that offers insights into several theoretical areas and questions, as well as topics with political relevance. It interrogates issues of the social, economic, and political position of African women as well as gendered roles while also engaging in critical reflections on colonialism, racism, neo-colonialism, and the postcolonial global structure, as well as the hegemonic position of the "West" and the issues of conceptual decolonisation.²² Another theory, the Afromodernism, seeks to integrate African values and traditions with the demands of modernity. It challenges the idea that African societies must choose between their heritage and progress, arguing for a synthesis that is uniquely African. Conversationalism is another school of thought

^{21.} Oyewumi, O., 1997, *The invention of women: Making an African sense of western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

^{22.} Anke Graness, *Questions of Canon Formation in Philosophy: The History of Philosophy in Africa* p. 91

proposed by Kwasi Wiredu and Jonathan O. Chimakonam. This approach emphasises dialogue between African philosophical traditions and global philosophical trends and the exchange of ideas as a core method of philosophising, drawing inspiration from the oral traditions of African societies while engaging with global intellectual currents. It rejects the idea of a single, monolithic "African philosophy" and instead advocates for a critical and creative engagement with diverse intellectual traditions. This approach encourages a "critical reconstruction" of African thought, making it relevant to modern challenges. Conversationalism contributes to social change by fostering intellectual autonomy and promoting an open-minded and adaptable approach to problem-solving.²³

Many contemporary African philosophers are applying critical theory to analyse the enduring legacies of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and global capitalism. They are at the forefront of debates on social justice, human rights, and the ethics of international relations. More so, the age-old *Ubuntu* philosophy continues to prove relevant in the 21st century. Philosophers like Thaddeus Metz have used the principle of *Ubuntu* to construct a theory of human rights and justice that is uniquely African. By grounding rights in the promotion of human fellowship, Metz provides a fresh perspective on human rights that can be used to address issues like poverty, inequality, and lack of dignity.²⁴ This demonstrates how African philosophy is contributing not only to a local discourse and global conversation on justice but stirring to the

²³. Hugo R. Corral & Sheila I. Velez Martinez, 2024, Critical Theory of Law and Social Justice in the Americas. (2024). Available at: https://scholarship.law.pitt.edu/fac_articles/618

²⁴. Thaddeus Metz, *Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa*, *African Human Rights Law Journal*, Vol 11, 2011

debate that influences global social change.

Conclusion

Critical thinking is an approach that enhances a culture of innovation and resilience. It unlocks the latent potential of Africa's youthful population who are gathered here to exchange useful ideas. When philosophy interfaces with social change, a culture of self-reliance is created through appropriate education, awareness creations, role modeling as students of philosophy in the 21st century still depend on molding their lives on their lecturers and senior colleagues. I think embracing self-reliance as a core philosophy of life will guide individuals and communities to always implement the targeted strategies. It is only through this way of life that Africa can effectively foster economic growth, and address a range of emerging social challenges, ultimately creating a more resilient and prosperous society.

African philosophy, deeply intertwined with the lived experiences and existential challenges of the people, is the dynamic force that informs social changes through the ages. Likewise, the social changes that occurred spurred philosophical ideas towards the quest for advancing the continent and ensuring its sustainability. In the face of ever-evolving challenges as a result of humans' interaction with the environment, philosophy continues to influence changes and vice versa. African philosophy has consistently served as a critical and constructive force. From the initial struggle to assert intellectual dignity against colonial denigration to the political-ideological foundations of nation-building, development, and African unity, African philosophers are constructively engaged with contemporary issues of governance, ethics, and technology, and are propounding ideas on how to address global issues. It has

moved from a reactive project of self-defense to a proactive discipline that generates new concepts, critiques existing power structures, and contributes to the ongoing project of building a more just and equitable future for Africa and the world. New philosophical currents have been directly engaged with the most pressing issues facing the continent in the 21st century. African Philosophies have served as tools for resistance, nation-building, and social cohesion, demonstrating the enduring power of African intellectual traditions. They demonstrate that African philosophy remains a living and evolving tradition, committed to both intellectual inquiry and the practical pursuit of a better future for the continent.

To the question of why Africa has remained on the boil and the socio-economic, political and material conditions of Africans seem to be on the decline. I answer that it takes time for ideas to fructify into actions and social change. Social change in Africa is a continuum, gradual in occurrence unless it erupts as a revolution; the possibility of which, from our history, is remote.