

The Significance and Possible Shortcomings of African Philosophy: A Look at Ekwuru, Emeka George Afrizealotism

Oko, Agha Christopher

Lecturer II

School of General Studies

Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas, Bonny Rivers

Nigeria

Aokris065@gmail.com, ao.kris@yahoo.com

Yahaya Abubakar

Lecturer III

School of General Studies

Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas Bonny, Rivers state

Nigeria.

Yahavaidoko9@gmail.com

DOI: 10.56201/ijssmr.v9.no10.2023.pg125.134

Abstract

African philosophy's and its attendant development in the twentieth century is relatively recent, traceable to some seminal texts, and ancient, drawing on cultural forms that stretch back in time and space. Since its inception in the mid-20th century, African Philosophy has become a full-fledged academic discipline. Many readers and anthologies, introductions, and other pedagogical publications have been published, along with a great number of texts striving to give an overview of the field, often in comparison with Western philosophy or with philosophies from other regions of the world. However, the discipline and pursuit is bedevilled with issue around relevance as many school of thought and scholars have not question its existence but also what its stand to achieve. Hence, in this paper, we will be examining the significance of African philosophy, and highlighting its possible shortcomings. The paper will also recommend possible solutions to the decline of African philosophy.

Keyword: Africa, Philosophy, African Philosophy, Afrizealotism

Introduction

Philosophy have established itself as a discipline of academic pursuit at the tertiary level worldwide. It is also an essential general studies course that serves as a criteria for students must be assessed on like any other courses before a certificate in other discipline is issued. It is a partial requirement for the award of bachelor degree in any field of study. Thus, it is not just discipline, but serves as a course for all undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in the world. Hence, A discipline that is regarded by Paulin J. Hountondji (1983) as the most self-

conscious of disciplines. It is one discipline that have in its very nature, a constant process of reflection upon itself. The process of self-reflection, inherent in the nature and practice of philosophy bears not only upon its purposes, objectives and methods, upon its relation to the world and to human experience in its multiple expressions, and upon its status among other disciplines and forms of intellectual pursuit and discourse, but also, most radically upon its very nature as an activity and as an enterprise. The view of philosophy as a critical activity whose function embraces an interrogation of its own nature and meaning is undoubtedly a legacy of the Greek philosophers (Hountondji 1983). It is worth noting that African philosophy is an offshoot of philosophy which embodies reflection and critical thinking. However, an attempt to define African philosophy can help in understanding philosophy itself. Philosophy can be defined and at the same time be described as the critical examination of the ideas which men live by Staniland (1979) such as the idea of justice, morality, political and religious ideas, even the idea of God, average men, perfect men and so forth.

African philosophy according to Hountondji, bears a direct relation to history and culture and that the reflection of African intelligentsia upon our total historical being represents a significant moment in the intellectual response of Africans to the challenge of western civilization (1983). In this critical examination, we will be analysing the significance and possible shortcoming associated with African philosophy in the light of Ekwuru, Emeka George Afrizealotism.

Clarification of terms

African Philosophy

It is true that there are as many definitions of philosophy but it is possible, according to Staniland, to say that it is the critical examination of the ideas which men live by (1979). In the same vein, it is a difficult task to give an accurate or faultless definition to African philosophy. Thus, regardless of this shortcomings, we can recognize some essential ingredients that make it a philosophy. For anything to be philosophical, it has to do with the reflection on the experience of a society, group or an individual. This reflection has been necessitated by wonders about some compelling problems of life and existence. Another essential ingredient is that such reflection must be critical and logical. As long as anybody or group meets these requirements such a person or group can be said to engage in what is called philosophy. To that extent, for anything to qualify as African philosophy, it must meet the requirements stipulated above. Hence, we submit that what African philosophy is, involves the application of the above categories of conceptual analysis, logic, criticism and synthesis to the reflections on issues that are of paramount importance to the African needs and ways of life. African in this context is not based exclusively on geographical congruity, but also on certain shared values among Africans.

Africana philosophy can be formally defined as a critical thinking by Africans and people of African descent on their experiences of reality. Nigerian born Philosopher K.C Anyanwu defined African philosophy as that which concerns itself with the way in which African people of the past and present make sense of their destiny and of the world in which they live (Peters 1959). Africana philosophy includes the philosophical ideas, arguments and theories of particular concern to people of African descent. Some of the topics explored by Africana philosophy include: modern day debates discussing the early history of western philosophy, post-colonial writing in Africa and the Americas, black resistance to

oppression, black existentialism in the United States, the meaning of “blackness” in the modern world (Gyekye 2010), and many topics relating to the African diaspora (Zalta, 2017). Lucius Outlaw (2017) writes:

Africana philosophy is very much a heuristic notion—that is, one that suggests orientations for philosophical endeavours by professional philosophers and other intellectuals devoted to matters pertinent to African and African-descended persons and peoples.

African philosophy encompasses the traditional culture and values of Africa, the analysis and solutions to contemporary issues bordering the continent; it is the reflection upon the human existence and ultimate reality in the rational investigation and solution to the rational questions that arouse the mind, when reflecting on African realities.

Afrizealotism

Afrizealotism is the philosophy of self-redemption embarked upon by the modern Africans to ensure adequate re-integrations and a possible synthesis for a new way of living as authentic Africans (Ekwuru 2011). It is an existential theory which seeks not to restrict the African being or humanism. In the post-colonial era, the African emerged distorted, not purely African but not purely Western. This is due to the colonial contamination of the African system of thought. Afrizealotism therefore, seeks, not to purge the Western influences totally, and certainly not to admit all of African tradition without censorship, but to produce a viable synthesis by sifting new and relevant variables from the Western system that is sufficient without making the new synthesis western. All the while, it seeks to retain enough relevant African traditions to ensure that the synthesis is African but not archaic.

Afrizealotism is a movement designed to assist the Africans to return to an authentic African life with pride. Afrizealotism is meant to awaken the Africans from their slumber and enhance unity and solidarity amongst African states. Afrizealotism shall promote more vigorously and religiously greater intra African cooperation, interaction and solidarity.

Significance of African Philosophy: Ekwuru Emeka George

African philosophy has come of age such that debate on its existence may no longer be scholarly topical. Given its growth and content, African philosophy in the twenty-first century tends to arguably assume the status of counterpart continental philosophies. In view of its steady progress, we shall look the emerging forces that have propelled African philosophy to this height using Ekwuru, Emeka George factor.

The Structure of Afrizealotist Revolutionary Movement

When the Europeans came to Africa, they had the bible and Africa had the wealth. They gave Africa the bible and took Africa’s wealth to develop their home land. They scrambled for, and partitioned Africa. The end result was imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Many Africans became Europeanized or westernized. Afrizealotism addresses the issue of returning to authentic African life characterized by black dignity, black nobility, black power and black consciousness. Afrizealotism awakens the African from his slumber and makes effort to

liberate Africa from the shackles of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Hence, the Salvation of Africa must come from Africans through the Spirit of Afrizealotism.

Since Africans' contact with Europeans, there are many cultural and ideological problems arising from conflict of culture. Many Africans became Europeans in attitude as a result of the Afro-Euro contact. The outcome of this contact was a cultural ideological conflict. The efforts made by the Africans to liberate themselves from the shackles of European imperialism and colonialism gave rise to Afrizealotism. Afrizealotism, a vision and an attitude to life which originated due to the dehumanizing situation of oppression that characterized the African continent in the post contact era. Afrizealotism therefore, is a revolutionary movement that intends to project a synthesized African culture that is free from European bondage.

The Afrizealotist movement is a movement that seeks to promote the great name of Africa and restore the beauty of the black race. Through the movement, the dignity and pride of every African is restored. According to Ekwuru, Afrizealotists are not men motivated by one form of selfish ideology or the other; they are moved by a lived experience of an urgent practical need for their people's total liberation (2011). The basic aim of Afrizealotism is to liberate the African from every form of slavery, poverty and backwardness. In trying to achieve the objectives outlined above, the movement shall concentrate mostly in three areas of great need. The three areas are:

- i. Conscientisation for the change of mental attitude.
- ii. Conscientisation for peace and social justice.
- iii. Conscientisation for new framework of civilization.

Conscientisation for the Change of Mental Attitude

There is the great need for a change of mental attitude by all Africans. Conscientisation and re-orientation of the African is very necessary if we must realize Afrizealotism. A return to Afrizealotists movement is essentially demanded because of the long period of colonial rule and domination which has done reasonable damage to the African mental framework. According to Asiwaju (1984):

African States must consider themselves to have now reached the stage at which the Eurocentric and generally outmoded notion of sovereignty, which at their inception led independent states to insist dogmatically on maintaining their territorial boundaries, should be seriously questioned.

The most desirable solution for the change of mental attitude is to be persuaded to view Africa like any other continent in the world. The need for this has already been recognized. Change of mental attitude is necessary as the history and activities of several multinational and bilateral organizations operating in Africa has shown. It is generally believed by most Africans that the long period of colonial domination has done a great damage to the Africans' mental framework. Many African scholars including those in Diasporas such as; Blyden, Du Bois, Chimakonam, Oyebola, Senghor, Nkrumah, Mazrui and Chinweizu believe that colonialism is not just a political and economic conquest and domination of Africa. Thus they called for a change of mental attitude. In support of the above view, Ekwuru (2011) writes:

Colonialism, conquered, destroyed, and made nonsense of every bit of African cultural world of established universe of meaning. It has been discovered in retrospect that we have been colonized so much to the point of not only losing ourselves, but of losing our concrete touch with reality. We were colonized and brain washed to the extent of not only hating ourselves, but also anything that is associated with our own nature.

Conscientisation for change of mental attitude is therefore, very necessary because African history through the centuries has accumulated much of confused teaching and orientations from external influences. African past witnessed a conflicting and confused experience at the hands of the colonial imperialists and others who are against African traditional values and ideals. The situation was worsened by the deceptive presentation of African history as a story of European adventure and the Africans acceptance of such incoherent history. Afrizealotism uses eclectic principles to achieve the conscientisation for change of mental attitude. The basic aims of Afrizealotism were indirectly echoed in consciencism of Kwame Nkrumah. The book consciencism is a forerunner of Afrizealotism. According to Nkrumah (1964):

Consciencism is the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African societies to digest the western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality ... that philosophical stand point which taking its start from the present content of the African conscience, indicate the way in which progress is forged out of the conflict in that conscience.

Thus, conscientisation for a change of mental attitude is a way of achieving Afrizealotism. This was foretold indirectly by many African scholars as well as scholars of African descent in America and the West Indies. The main theme of their activities was the encouragement of African-ness (African identity), that Africans should be proud of their heritage which should not in any way be assumed to be inferior to the European culture. Afrizealotism as a philosophical concept was articulated because consciencism and negritude as philosophical concepts have not thrived nor created the required mental disposition for an authentic African-ness.

Conscientisation for Peace and Social Justice

There is the urgent need to redirect, convince or conscientise Africans to see the importance of peace and social justice among Africans and in Africa. The arbitrary division or balkanization of various African people brought Africans of the same linguistic and cultural groupings under different European domination. The tendency is hatred of fellow Africans and the championing of European culture and civilization. The Europeans scrambled for, and partitioned Africa thereby planting the seed of disunity and hatred among Africans. The lack of peace and social justice caused by the European invasion and the subsequent occupation of Africa is expressed by Ekwuru in the following words:

Through various forms of political intrigues, Africans have been made to hate one another for the benefit of colonial nations. During the colonial invasion and conquest, Africans were used to fight and

conquer their fellow Africans out of ignorance. Later on, during the full swing of colonial occupation, Africans were employed to suppress their fellow Africans. This did not end with colonialism, but continued with the various forms of neo-colonialist intrigues (2011).

Even after independence, Africans were still being used against Africans. Most civil wars in Africa were set-ups to delineate Africa. The balkanization of Africa and the colonial policy of divide and rule provided grounds for hatreds resulting in the secessionist movements that sprang up in several African States. Buttressing the above points, Asiwaju (1984) notes:

The Congo (now Zaire) saw strong secessionist sentiment among the Bakongo in the 1950s. After coming to independence in 1960, it had to content with Katanga's attempt to secede. Ethiopia has been troubled by the secessionist stance among its Somali population in the south, and among the Eritrean population in the north-west. In Ghana, the Ewe claimed the right to secede and join their brethren in Togo. In the Ivory Coast, the Sanwis rose in 1959 and claimed the right to secede. On the eve of independence in Kenya, sentiment in the Coastal province favoured separation and union of Zanzibar, and in addition a strong secessionist movement existed among the Somali in Northern Kenya. In Mali, the Tuareg rose in revolt in 1963 and refused to recognize the government's authority. The Sudan was torn to civil war... Uganda's unity was threatened both before and after independence by separatist sentiment among the important Baganda people.... In Nigeria, the Igbo people tried to secede and establish the abortive "Republic of Biafra.

This view of Asiwaju above show that crisis of civil wars and dissension have continued to trail Africa since the colonial era and the entire continent continued to disintegrate and deteriorate. Most African States are in one dispute or another. Some of them are internal while some are international. In fact, most African countries are at daggers drawn. The question then arises; can there be peace and social justice in Africa? The answer to the above question is found in Afrizealotism. The revolutionary conscientisation of Afrizealots will definitely bring peace and social justice to the entire continent of Africa. Afrizealots will act as messengers of peace and at the same time dedicate their live to ensuring peace in Africa. Afrizealots will have the basic function of redirecting, reshaping, remoulding and concientizing fellow Africans to see and appreciate peace and social justice. Ekwuru (2011) observes that "the most radical mission of Afrizealots is to see to the end of any form of oppression in the continent and to defend the cause of the downtrodden throughout the world." Afrizealotism has an African origin but will carry its programme of emancipation of the down trodden beyond Africa. According Ekwuru (2011):

Their message will not be one of hate and retaliation as would have been expected from the disfigured and downcast faces they wear, the soulless bodies they resemble, and the fettered legs of their colonial slavery. Instead their message will be one of creative love and

redeeming universal brotherhood. Such great message is not going to be cast on empty words and based on false diplomatic rhetoric formulae, but on concrete facts.

The realization of the above situation or condition by Afrizealotist movement will obviously and definitely give rise to peace and social justice in Africa and beyond.

Conscientisation for a new civilization framework

The new civilization framework for the realization and achievement of the basic objectives of Afrizealotist movement is a return to the root of our African-ness and ensure cooperation among States. Senghor (1988) outlined the framework for a new African civilization in these steps:

The first step is the bringing to light the traditional civilization as the root of African socialism: the second step should involve the study of the colonial impact of African civilization: the third step should be the synthesis resulting from the interfecundation between African socialist roots and the values assimilated from European civilization.

This synthesis if achieved would affect the development of African social, economic, political and cultural life and further achieve a new world civilization. Ekwuru observes authoritatively that the framework for Afrizealotist (Afrizealotism) movement is black consciousness epitomized in black nobility, Black beauty, black dignity and black power. These concepts are the things that are guaranteed by a new civilization. He pointed out that in the historical evolution of some of these concepts, black consciousness has always been linked to them. From the foregoing, one notices that the achievement of a new civilization, there is need for a strong awareness of our situation as Africans and equally accepts our African-ness (Identity) with pride. Afrizealotism becomes a tool for the creation of the awareness and the proudly reacceptance of our condition. Afrizealotism is not violent rather it is radical in its approach to issues as they affect Africans. Its major aim is to create awareness and consciousness as road maps for achieving authentic African life (African-ness).

The philosophicality of African philosophy is also rooted in what Chimakonam Okeke conceived as the moves of Afrizealotism developed by G. Ekwuru, For him; The import of Afrizealotists is to build African philosophy into a reconstructive system of thought by engaging other African philosophers in critical discourse. Chamakolam captured it just as the like Iroegbu Asouzu, Ozumba, Chimakonam and Agada, the champions of Afrizealotism are building the new edifice by reconstructing the deconstructed domain of thought in the later period of African philosophy. The central approach is conversation. By engaging other African philosophers or tradition in critical and positive discourses, they hope to reconstruct the deconstructed edifice of African philosophy. Hence, the New Era of African philosophy is safe from the retrogressive, perverse dialogues which characterized the early and middle periods.

State of African Philosophy

Over the years, African philosophy has grown from strength to strength, in leaps and bounds diversifying and consolidating. Its areas of focus include, Afrocentricism, Negritude, Ujammaa, African Metaphysics, African Ethics, and African Social Philosophy. The evolution

and development of Bantu philosophy prefaced the development of other ethno oriented philosophies like Igbo philosophy, Akan philosophy, Yoruba philosophy, Kenyan philosophy. Of course, the study of African philosophy in higher institutions of learning across the continents already signifies its global spread. Notably, African philosophy like Chinese philosophy, Indian Philosophy and other regional philosophies constitute areas of study of comparative philosophy. In academic fields and institutions within Africa and the West, African philosophy now exists as a field of study in departments of philosophy for both undergraduate studies. In fact, the study of African philosophy was taken up by West African universities during the 1940s and 1950s, and by East African universities during the 1960s and 1970s. In Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka-Nigeria, African philosophy is an area of specialty for Master of Arts and Doctoral studies. Chimakonam Okeke is currently at the verge of succeeding in the study of African philosophy as a first degree study in University of Calabar, Nigeria. Professor Bonaventure Umeogu of Department of philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka-Nigeria, is also processing the establishment of Igbo University with special attention to African philosophy. Some notable universities within and outside the continent of Africa, where African philosophy is studied include; American University, Washington DC, Institute of African Studies. Others are; Lincoln University, Marist College, University of Nairobi, School for Oriental & African Studies, University of London Siena, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut. Etc. The set objective is that the students should, at the end of undertaking the course, be able to demonstrate solid knowledge of African philosophy, its history, main topics, and its relationship to other philosophical discourses in the world (European philosophies, Intercultural Philosophy, Latin American philosophy, etc.) and developed the ability of fundamental reflection and critical analysis of central philosophical issues

More so, in developing a critical approach to the underlying cultural presuppositions of philosophical discourses and developed oral presentations skills (gained practice for giving conference papers). Also, having to develop writing skills (learnt to produce high-quality academic articles).

In furtherance, the establishment of the Faculty of Afro-American studies of Harvard University in 1970 was informed by the need to study the African historic experiences in relation to the new world order. Professor Ewart Guinier (1970) stated, in the preface of his report for founding the Afro-American Studies Department, that “we are building a program graduate as well as undergraduate- which is being developed from a black perspective to serve the interests of black community and thereby the interests of all.” He further indicates in the introduction that the purpose of the department is “the development and use of appropriate tools with which to examine the black experience in African and New World in all its aspects and from a Black perspective”. Guinier reports a total enrolment of 354 students in the department's 25 courses during the first academic year.

In the light of the above, the afrozealotist movement have paved the way for the growth of African philosophy through its African-ness and the quest to be proud of the African value, belief, norm and thought pattern, which basically form our philosophy. Afrozealotism is the grabbing of the Africa thought pattern and putting it up in writing.

Afrizealotism and Its Possible Shortcomings

Afrizealotism and its movement as propagated by Ekwuru, Emeka George was a great course and a philosophical concept that was supposed to give African that paradigm shift its desires. The European contact with Africa have greatly influenced and distorted the African thought pattern and identity, thereby eroding our culture and heritage and uplifting that of the Europeans. But as great as the idea may seem, it has its own overlapping short comings or weakness. This idea lack not only the require publicity and advocacy, it also continue to suffer in the sense that how many Africans are ready mentally, and physically to change the narrative and allow the narrative to change them.

Africans still subjugate themselves in the hands of the European through the activities of many multinational activities and through our quest to seek education abroad, as we tend to view their education as superior and of quality than ours. The effect of colonialism is still felt on the fabric of many African countries through neo colonialism.

The act afrizealotism was to conscientise Africans on the need to be Africans, embrace the African culture and heritage and return back to the root. Hence, books and articles are supposed to serve this purpose of educating the African people to return back to reality and foreclose the European culture which has continue to hold swerve in the African civilization.

Conclusion

Afrizealotism is a movement designed to assist the Africans to return to an authentic African life with pride. Afrizealotism is meant to awaken the Africans from their slumber and enhance unity and solidarity amongst African states. Afrizealotism shall promote more vigorously and religiously greater intra African cooperation, interaction and solidarity (Eluwa 2005). This is necessary because only in the unity of purpose created through Afrizealotism that the Africans can achieve their cherished objectives and totally eradicate colonialism and neo-colonialism, remove ethnicity and tribalism. Finally, Afrizealotism provides grounds for the accomplishment of national integration and unity, patriotism and national greatness, and serves as a ladder for the growth and development of African philosophy.

References

- Asiwaju, A.I, (1984) Partitioned Africans, ethnic relation across Africa's International Boundaries 1884-1984 (Lagos: Lagos University Press) .13
- Ekwuru, E.G. (2011) *The Dynamics of Afriraciogenesis, the dialectics of Afrizealotism*, (Owerri: Totan Publishers) 423.
- Eluwa, G I C et al, (2005) Africa and the Wider World since 1800 A.D, Enugu: Africana First Publishers Limited. 229.
- Guinier, E. (2005) Report of the Afro-American Studies Department.
- Gyeke, Kwame (1987). An Essay in African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Hountondji, P.J., 1983. African Philosophy: Myth and Reality, (London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa) 7.
- Nkrumah, K. (1964), Consciencism, (London: Heinemann education books) 79
- Outlaw Jr., Lucius T. (2017) African Philosophy in Zalta, Edward N. (ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2017ed.), Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, retrieved 2019-12-17
- Outlaw Jr., Lucius T. (2017). Zalta, Edward N. (ed.). Africana Philosophy. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2017 ed.). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. Retrieved 2021-03-21.
- Peters, R.S. (1959). Authority, Responsibility and Education. London: G. Allen & Unwin.
- Ruch, E. A. and Anyawnu, K. C. (1981). African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa. Rome: Catholic Book Agency.
- Senghor, L.S. (1988), what is Negritude in M.I. Nwoko, basic world political theories, (Ibadan: Claverianum press) 212.
- Staniland, H.S. (1979). "What is Philosophy", Second Order, Vol. Viii, Nos. 1 & 2, (Jan/July 1979) 8.