



Maduabuchi Dukor

African Freedom

The Freedom of Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

The essence or the spirit of this book is my Doctoral Dissertation titled 'The Concept of African Freedom', successfully defended and awarded by the University of Nigeria in 1993. However, it is now reworked with new ideas and some revisions on the original work. Therefore, this is *ipso-facto* an expanded version of my Doctoral Dissertation. The objective is to revisit the historical experience of Africa, by which it is hoped, her freedom from European domination and control will be achieved **only and only on the proposition that African Freedom is the Freedom of Philosophy**. Philosophy criticizes the mode and the terrain of thought of a people :it is a conscious exercise reflection, revisionism and self-criticism resulting in the laws of thought: the laws of identity, excluded middle and contradiction Therefore in a localized and nationalistic sense, it portrays the identity of a people . Philosophy pictures the cultural basis of a people's freedom. Hence, the assertion of African Philosophy is the assertion of African freedom. This assertion has grave limitation and weakness in the face of issues that have been thrown-up in the debate about the status of African Philosophy. Yet the assertion of African Philosophy as the philosophical basis of African freedom is only plausible in the historical context of African colonization. Besides, this as the basis of African freedom is understandable in the context in which we notice the paradox involved in the concept of African freedom. The paradox of African freedom as embedded in the debate about the status of African Philosophy is obvious. The writings and the quest for a distinctive African Philosophy, that is, from ideological point of view, are in a way a support for African freedom, to liberate Africa from the pervasive Europeanization while a monist conception of Philosophy holds that African participation in the common world heritage of philosophizing could be seen also as constituting an African freedom. Conversely put, African philosophical freedom must of necessity be ideological while the later school of thought holds that African philosophy must be withdrawn from the ideological myth of ethno philosophy and viewed from the universal conception of philosophy. Whichever is the case, Philosophy, by its impersonal and critical nature, presupposes the freedom of every race. There are indeed many literatures and books directly and indirectly dwelling on this subject matter but passing under

various titles, predicates, axioms and nomenclatures. However, this book would neither pretend to represent the only answer to the questions of African slavery nor the last of the attempts to pursue an analytical and rigorous examination of a thematic humanitarian question on African's right to self-realization and self-determination.

Africa, the land of the blacks, was conquered and colonized by the whites, the Europeans. This was followed swiftly if not simultaneously by literatures, philosophies and ideologies empowering the white over and above the blacks even in their own lands. The motive for this was to distort the reality and create a pseudo world-order to promote racism against the blacks. It was not, therefore, natural that the 'moment' and 'epoch' of Hobbesian state of nature and Darwinian survival of the fittest without the sovereignty of the omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient Being who creates and induces order, was a historical and premeditated action to see to the white's intellectual, ideological and material domination over the blacks. Since this epochal twist of history and fate, the African was pushed and cornered from all directions to the precipice of defeatism and fatalism. The preoccupation of this book is to understand whether it is epistemologically, metaphysically, and ethically worthwhile for Africa to accept her fate. The truth which is hereby, therefore, being sought and analyzed is that the creation and descent of man was distorted to fit into the furniture and structural prejudice of the white. This is the 'politics of white and black' which started from the ancient Greeks, through the Medieval European racism, the Enlightenment European philosophy of 'I' and 'the other', the 19th century colonialism to the 21st century and 3rd millennium lopsided world order of imperialism and neocolonialism. Hence, the African continent known in this century and millennium as the land of war, poverty, economic depression and man made disasters has its *explanans* and *definiens* in the historical, missing links and white man's opportunism, racism and prejudice.

Critical and philosophical questions have continued to reverberate the walls of learning as to the cause of African predicament. If nothing else, it is a puzzle as to why and how 'the young or the old refuses to grow for too long'. The European Racists have posited the answer to this puzzle on the black skin. But Barnabas Chukwudum Okolo asked these questions in his essay: "why are African powerless?"

Why are Africans in this mess? Efforts should be made to find the way out. The African, like anyone else must know the root causes of his problems. And Joseph W – Zerbo also asked: "what is Africa? What ought Africa to be? Such are the basic questions to which the conscientious African or Africanist must find a reply: Africa must be defined".² Indeed as we pursue to understand the cause of African problems we need to define and redefine Africa. That African problem is historical has in fact been corroborated by George G.M. James in his *Stolen Legacy*. His account not only provided historical answers to African question but also a food for thought. He says that the Greek and European contribution to civilization "was really and truly made by the Egyptians and the African continent, but not by the Greeks or the European continent."³ Continuing he says,

We sometimes wonder why the people of African descent find themselves in such a social plight as they do, but the answer is plain enough. Had it not been for this drama of Greek philosophy and its actors, the African continent would have had a different reputation, and would have enjoyed a status of respect among the nations of the world. This unfortunate position of the African continent and its peoples appears to be the result of misrepresentation upon which the structure of race prejudice has been built, i.e, the historical world opinion that the African continent is backward, that its people are backward, and that their civilization is also backward.⁴

From this statement and others, we hereby deduce that what Africa had experienced down the ages are historical effects of historical antecedents, accidents and causes engineered and propagated by Europe who before everything else stole the African Legacy. The diachronic and synchronic consequence of all this is the African condition which Ali A. Mazrui described

in six paradoxes viz:

- a) Africa is the first habitat of man but is the last to be made truly habitable
- b) Africans are not the most brutalized of all peoples but probably the most humiliated in modern history.
- c) African societies are not the closest to the west culturally but have been experiencing the most rapid pace of westernization in this century.
- d) Africa is not the poorest of the regions of the world in resources but it is the least developed of the inhabited continents.
- e) Africa is not the smallest of the continents but it is probably the most fragmented.
- f) Africa is the most central of all the continents in geographical location but politically, and to some extent, militarily, it may be the most marginal

The above paradoxes exemplify the meaning of African unfreedom as it relates to political instability, economic penury, social disorder and ultimately its slavery to Europe. An explanation of the scenario, based on the historical, ideological and conceptual origin of African dependence is, therefore, worth a social, scientific and philosophical study especially in this age of compounded imperialist pressures on Africa. Nevertheless, there are a number of injuries which this historical quagmire and drama has perpetrated on the African. Firstly, the African has falsely become a retarded homosapien close or equal in intelligence to animal. Secondly, it has ceased to contribute nothing to civilization. And thirdly, it has been denied the right to self-realization, self determination and self-fulfillment. This weird logic, undoubtedly, provided the impetus and lubricating oil for colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism. That African has been set-adrift is the logical outcome of this process. Ironically when colonialism was made out of fashion by humanity, Europe devised neocolonialism and imperialism as another subtle method of skewing the noble goals of the nascent African states. These agents of the white man have been the bane of African development.

Ever since the neocolonialist and imperialist pressures by the white man, African independence has meant a 'dependent concept' caused by a number of dependent variables namely distorted historical faces, loss of material conditions, racism and lack of ideology. Consequently, the Africa continent has been denied the positive freedom to choose or reject (or what is called self-realization) and which again leads to the loss of negative freedom or the right to self-determination in terms of economic, political, cultural and psychological independence. The absence of positive and negative freedom was programmed to scientifically ensure that the African remain perpetually dependent, crisis-ridden, confused and in the wilderness.

The phenomena of war, poverty, economic depression and man-made disasters in Africa today is simply the result of a process that started since the invasion of the Egyptian antiquity and civilization. Hence, the African, as a depraved and diminished specie in governance, economic organization, culture and humanitarian matters, could be seen as a fall-out from the logic of western and European (or white) domination over the years. Even in several particular situations, where the Africans and African leaders had to be

held responsible for most of the humanitarian, political and economic crises as wars, internal colonialism, corruption and man made disasters; the problems were still reducible to imperialism and neo-colonialism. This work is subdivided into these sections according to the motifs, the historical violence on African and their theoretical, ideological and thematic relatedness.

In section A, titled "Africanism and the praxis of Freedom" comprising of chapters 1- 4, this work examines freedom in modern philosophy and African predicament, the concept and nature of African freedom, background to African freedom and concept and language function in colonialism In Section B titled "Africanism Colonialism" comprising Chapters 5-9 examine the philosophical bases of African freedom, ideologies role in African political under development, racist ideology and African freedom, identity, citizenship and African freedom and Secularism, fundamentalism and freedom . The wars, economic and political crisis, poverty and to some extent many of the man-made disasters are analyzed as the manifestations of the will of the neocolonial and imperial mindset. In Section C, titled "Globalization and African Renaissance", and comprising Chapters 10-13 examine, globalization and social change in Africa, a post modernist anatomy of Africa in a globalized world order, Africa in a globalized democratic existentialism and the logic of African freedom The categories of African freedom are highlighted namely: political, Psychological, Cultural and Economic Freedoms. It is also argued that postmodernism as a philosophy of pluralism of truths could lead to an African freedom. On the direction of African freedom, it is perceived to be more meaningful along cultural, social and ideological revolution and processes of Africanization. Finally, in the concluding reflection, the tools of symbolic and deductive logic are employed to understand better what is meant by the reversal of African history for her freedom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Introduction	viii
SECTION A	
Africanism and Praxis of Freedom	xiv
CHAPTER ONE	
Freedom in Modern Philosophy and African predicament	1
Laissez faire and moral conception of freedom	2
African conception of freedom	3
Theoretical evolution of the concept of freedom in western philosophy	6
Colligatory concepts of freedom in modern philosophy	13
The pure intellection of African freedom	17
CHAPTER TWO	
The Concept and Nature of African Freedom	19
The notion and ontology of freedom	19
Ignorance, colonialism and the African	20
Christianity and colonialism	22
Education and colonialism	23
The phenomenon and reality of freedom	26
Philosophy and African freedom	28
Hermeneutics of African freedom	32
Limits and limitations of post –colonial nationalistic literatures	33
African Renaissance	46

CHAPTER THREE

Background to African Unfreedom	50
Historical explanation of African unfreedom	50
Dualism	55
Enlightenment philosophy and Fascism	57
Social Darwinism	61
Dependency syndrome and political instability	64
Colonial legacies in Africa	67
African emancipation and nationalities' freedom	69

CHAPTER FOUR

Concept And language Function In Colonialism. The dynamics of Ontological Falsehood And Immoral Beliefs.	73
Immoral concepts and ontological bias	73
Language and Bewitchment of the African	79
Myths and realities about Africa	84
Truth and falsehood about Africa	87

SECTION B

Africanism and colonialism	91
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER FIVE

Philosophical Bases of African freedom	92
Humanity of man	92
Metaphysical basis of African freedom	95
Beyond black and white pluralism	104
African philosophy and the paradox of African freedom	108
Geopolitical right and liberty	112

CHAPTER SIX

Ideologies Role In African Political Underdevelopment	117
The collapse of consensual democracy	117
The right political philosophy	120

The left political philosophy	122
The centre right political philosophy	125
The centre left political philosophy	126
The third way theory	130

CHAPTER SEVEN

Racist Ideology And African Unfreedom	135
The concept of Racism	135
Western culture and nationalism	140
The dynamics of western domination of Africa	151

CHAPTER EIGHT

Identity, Citizenship and African freedom	114
The question of African identity	154
Who is an African	156
African identity and citizenship	159
Citizenship and African freedom	160
African citizenship and development	164
Problems of African citizenship and identity	172
Neo-colonialism and African identity	176
Problem of corporate citizenship in Africa	180

CHAPTER NINE

Secularism, Fundamentalism And Freedom	191
Nationalism, History and predictions	191
Imperialism and liberation theology	193
U.S. versus Arab League	196
Africanisation of Crisis	198
The way forward	202

SECTION C

Globalization And African Renaissance	205
--	-----

CHAPTER TEN	
Globalization and Social change	206
The concept of Globalization	206
Globalization as western technology and development	212
Implications of Globalization for Africa	213
The economics of Neo-colonialism	222
CHAPTER ELEVEN	
Africa In A Globalized World Order	232
From modernism to post-modernism	232
Post modernism and African Revolution	239
Categories of African freedom	245
CHAPTER TWELVE	
Africa In A Globalized Democratic Existentialism	260
The direction of African freedom	261
Black African existential renaissance	264
Africanizing education	270
Ideology of liberation	273
Prospects of African freedom	278
CHAPTER THIRTEEN	
The Logic Of African freedom	282
Reference	292
Bibliography	324

CHAPTER ONE

***FREEDOM IN MODERN PHILOSOPHY AND AFRICAN PREDICAMENT**

The aim of this chapter is to examine the different conceptions of freedom in modern philosophy and in African philosophy and then an articulation of what African freedom means. Freedom in modern philosophy is hereby related to the question of African predicament. The concept of 'Freedom' itself is a nebulous concept. It has often been discussed and written about as an abstract concept, and in some other contexts, it is viewed as a socio-political *praxis*. An adequate analysis and understanding of the question of African freedom demands an analysis of the concept from the vantage point of modern philosophy.

Freedom and determinism are contrary concepts in philosophy and science and, none could be adequately understood without first deciphering the other. So, the discussion of the concept, 'freedom' in Philosophy and Science goes hand in hand with the discussion of causality or determinism. Everything that occurs or exists does not so in space and time or spacio-temporal reality, consequently we are concerned with whether there are causal relations or non-causal relations and pre-occupation of philosophers of science, social sciences and history. If determinism is true, then there will be no room for human freedom or African freedom in socio-political praxis. But "determinism is the view that everything that happens is determined".¹ "Freedom is possible only to the extent that determinism is true"² We may not be talking of freedom if there were no somewhat deterministic influences. The obvious paradox in this conception of determinism and freedom is better stated.

An understanding of freedom is not only a lee-way to scientific advances, but also a way of understanding the limits and powers of man. It has accordingly assumed a wider socio-political dimensions, precisely, because man is a social animal who wants not only to be free but also wants to assert himself and determine his future. It is not accident, therefore, that 'freedom' has assumed cultic dimensions. Mortimer Adler therefore says in his book, *Freedom* that,

*the demand for freedom has been the tocsin and storm
signal of political upheaval but also, in another phase, the*

¹ Freedom In Modern Philosophy And African Predicament" was first published in *Izu: Journal of History and International Studies, Vol.1, No.1, Dec. 2007*, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nigeria.

watch-word of peace and conservation. It has been the battle cry of revolutionists and counter-revolutionists, of reformers and reactionaries, of authoritarians and anarchists, of utopia and men who fear all forms of enthusiasm."³

In today's world, in geopolitics, in intra-politics in different nations and in tribal and family units, people are divided as a result of conflicting conceptions of freedom. Hence one is hereby constrained to be acquainted with some conceptions of Freedom.

Laissez Faire And Moral Conceptions of Freedom

Freedom in political and social practices is often construed more as liberty, which means 'doing as one wishes' or "doing what one ought".⁴ There can be two sub contrary conceptions in educational policy or penal reform. One of these conceptions, that is, precisely the *laissez-faire* conception, holds the opinion that one should have the freedom to assert oneself in specific areas like religion, education and so on. Extreme analogy to this line of reasoning is the pursuit of freedom to the point of reckless exercise of power to the detriment of others. The seed of this conception was sowed in the ancient Greek period by the minority thinkers like the Sophists, but germinated and flowered with wider acceptance in the modern philosophical era of Hobbes and Darwin. The other conception, otherwise known as the moral conception which was the main pre-occupation of the ancient Greek philosophy, says that there is no absolute freedom, and that freedom has to be in tune with the dictates and demands of the society, community or the state. The conception demands limits to the exercise of religious and educational freedom, and as well as what one can do socially or politically. For this school of thought freedom neither lies in pursuing individual interests based on personal idiosyncrasies nor in running away from societal demands and expectations, but in learning with fuller experience what is construed to be good. The basis of *laissez-faire* conception is articulated and couched in western socio-economic philosophy which maintains that freedom flourishes if only external circumstance favour the consummation of desire, and is destroyed by counteracting circumstances⁵ whereas for the moral conception, outward circumstances though important in other respects, are irrelevant to freedom. It has been argued that in the field of education *laissez-faire* insists on spontaneity and growth, and urges that curricula follow the bent of the pupil's awakening interests, whereas moral freedom entails discipline along the high road of religion,

morals, science, or classical learning.⁶ While the former would presuppose that African unfreedom and European domination is natural, the former would argue that though human freedom is natural, it would not be pursued to the extreme point of man's inhumanity to man.

The two conceptions also have different views on the nature and treatment of crimes. For *laissez-faire*, it is circumstances that makes criminals, whereas for moral conception, it is the power of every man to achieve virtue or excellence. While the *laissez faire* would require corrective reforms or punishment in redressing the imbalances and lopsidedness in human society's and national's freedom and powers, the moral conception is supported by the doctrine of free-will in manning the individual societies and nations responsible for their crimes and weakness. The point of interest to note here is that for *laissez-faire* system African Slavery is natural though it could be corrected by improvement of conditions and institutions that made it so. But for the moral conception, Africa is to be held responsible for her predicament, and in a global context, Europe has to be blamed for her brazen and wanton exercise of her freedom to the detriment of Africa.

African Conception of Freedom

No less important is the African traditional conception of freedom and its implication for African freedom from European domination. There is African conception of freedom extant in the underlying principle of African political philosophy called communalism, and in a popular conception of individual personal gods among the Africans. Analytically speaking, therefore, African conception of freedom can be traced to a realm of ideas bordering on African 'communalistic ideology' and her conception of 'personal god'. African man is understood and explained in terms of his integration in a net-work of relationships in the society, among the individuals and their relationship to the past, present and future generations.

According to Nkeonye Otakpor, African community is the

condition of the possibility for everything else. It is this micro-system that is 'sacred' to all Africans. At that level many Africans believe it is excellent to work for the common good and the progress of the community. The socio-cultural and philosophical assumption is that man is by nature born into a community whose members include the past, present and future generations. The community is the soul of African development because it is the spiritual as well as the economic and political viable entity that gives meaning and value to social

and cultural life⁷

Because of the kinship relationships in the society and the communalistic ideology, African conception of freedom is therefore defined in terms of only actions contributing to the progress of the community and the individuals in it and against actions detrimental to the community and the individuals in it. Okorie Emmanuel Monye writing on Igbo conception of freedom again accordingly observes; that,

*Freedom for the Igbo does not, therefore mean doing what one wants. It is more of doing what is right. The Igbo community has a strong emphasis on individual achievement. . . . Through individual achievement and individual participation, everybody is given a chance, an opportunity to seek his own level of harmony with the community's unity and harmony. The metaphysical need to achieve unity and harmony operates both at the individual and also at the community level 8.*⁸

In other words, freedom in Africa means harmonizing one's actions (political and social) with the society's norms and values which, of course, means that there is never an absolute freedom from an African point of view.

From purely ontological view point, the concept of personal god or 'ori' as the Yoruba would call it or 'Chi' as the Ibos would call it, has a significant influence on individuals freedoms. The general belief among Africans that this ontological entity (personal god) existed ever before a soul is born into the society presupposes that the personal god, the determinant of what ever one becomes in life, always and definitely, determines ones fate in whatever he does. This could, of course, mean that there is no freedom for mortal beings. But this belief, when analyzed from the vantage point of a set of African beliefs presents a philosophical contradictions and inconsistencies. For instance the notion of 'personal god' and the other notion that whatever 'will be will be' which are contradictory is very rampant. As such, individuals' failures and successes are rationalized fatalistically. In my article, "African concept of Man" I made the following observations with respect to personal god, freedom and destiny.

On a critical note the idea of personal god in African thought is a hypothesis or a myth which is open to many interpretations. The interpretation given to it by people not only begs question but