Human Dignity and Social Order as Key Values for an Endogenous African Development

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Abstract: This study looks at the issues of instability, lack of human dignity and social disorder as endemic problems in most parts of Africa. The problem has its roots in the African traditional thought and is now carried over into the modern African experience. In much of traditional Africa anachronism, supernaturalism and authoritarianism were the core values of social control hence posing threats to human dignity, but ensuring a tightly controlled social system. In the modern era, human dignity and even social order were challenged by a seemingly high rate of ethno-religious conflicts, wars, poverty, intolerance, authoritarianism, corruption and lack of equity and social justice. These led to serious weak points in human and humane values for African development defined by a problem of rationality. Since the primary beneficiaries are the human beings and societies of Africa, then the paper aims to philosophically examine what kinds of values are required for African development. Values are desirable or important, and some values are needed for development in Africa. More importantly, there is a need for a philosophical foundation for key values without which Africa's quest for development will be a mirage. Basically, the quest for an endogenous approach to development reinforces the search for an African identity. This can be attained via the role of conceptual decolonization in African philosophy as a means of building a critical and tolerant disposition to ideas and life in Africa. This decolonization will help establish the two values of human dignity and social order in Africa so as to improve the quality of mental and social life of people.

Keywords: social order, human dignity, Africa, development, decolonization

INTRODUCTION: COMPETING NOTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

It is possible to argue that the well being of the human person can be more easily achieved when there is a balanced use of the resources in

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nature. This combination can safely be said to be a key task of sustainable development. Pursuing sustainable development implies seeking ways of promoting human dignity by establishing a viable, humane and stable social order. A good social order has as a key feature the quest for human wellbeing at the individual and social levels. The well being of the human person, according to Wiredu (2000, 181-182) is the singular task of development. In the continent of Africa, shortfalls in these two aspects clearly point us to the present crisis of development in Africa.

Some traditional attempt to conceive development sees it in terms of the technological, economical or political dimension. However, scholars such as Kwasi Wiredu (in Oladipo 2000, 121) would argue that the notion of development is material and moral. While the material dimension of development involves the careful application of the dividends of science and technology to exploit and control the physical environment, the moral aspect of development is made up of the consistent endeavour in regulating, as well as improving human relationships via the promotion of equality and mutual cooperation. (Igbafen 2003, 2-3). Most African societies seem to have a weak point in this latter aspect. Hence the need for this essay to stress on core values for African development.

At the heart of development, it seems, is the human person and all his innate potentialities and creations. These manifest in the different social, psychological, moral, political, physical, spiritual, intellectual, and even aesthetic realms. This culminates in the realization of development by the "utilization of natural resources at man's disposal, perfecting and coordinating them toward the ends of both the individual and the community." (Igbafen 2003, 2-3) Chris Uroh conceives development as a progressive elimination of poverty, unemployment, social inequalities, authoritarian political structures, monopolization of opinions by the state and all other negative tendencies that have today, regrettably though, become the defining characteristics of the continent' (Uroh 1998, 3-4). Consequently, we may frame the research question as: How, if at all, might a philosophical discourse of human dignity and social order be useful to the quest for African development? Let us review these two values needed for African development by looking at the hitherto prevailing values of traditional Africa.

AUTHORITARIANISM AND ANACHRONISM IN THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN EXPERIENCE AS THREATS TO HUMAN DIGNITY AND SOCIAL ORDER

It has been argued that in much of the traditional African world there seemed to be certain core values that guided the lives of the people. Philosophy can be relevant by helping us to review or revise some of our dominant ideas about elements of an African human nature and how to deal with others around us. In the context of most of the traditional African environment, Wiredu was emphatic that "the three evils currently tormenting most if not all African cultures and nationalities are authoritarianism, permanent control of all aspects of life, politics included that ensues in people doing things against their will, anachronism, systems or principles outliving their suitability and utility, supernaturalism, the tendency to establish supernatural foundations for a natural code of conduct" (cited in Kaphawagani 1998, 86). There is a need to discuss two of these values; authoritarianism and anachronism and show how they undermine or threaten human dignity and social order in Africa, thereby precipitating the need for alternate values.

A key limitation of a traditional African culture is seen in its authoritarian orientation. This is seen in the demand for, and a legitimating of unquestioning obedience of the social members, to the authorities of elders. The point is that "each community or society has its form of restitution and punishment. It is generally the elders who deal with disputes and breaches. Traditional chiefs have the duty of keeping law and order, and executing justice (Mbiti 1969, 211). Because traditional African society and its modern derivation was essentially authoritatively communitarian, not much room could be made for deviant ideas or social practices. This point is significant, given the serious communal religious preoccupations with strengthening the moral-cultural bonds for collective survival in a physically and psychologically hostile environment. Such a situation and the desperate circumstances surrounding it ensured that little premium, if any, was placed on "intellectual qualities such as curiosity or independence of thought" (Oladipo 1996, 47). The imperative of community survival, the real life threatening consequences of any putative social deviance and the near impossibility of eliciting specific and subordinate justice claims from the restrictive collectivistic countenance, made the negotiation of non-ontological justice a mirage. As such human dignity was threatened because authoritarianism

suggested that there was no room for tolerance of other views as a social value. Hence, some persons, the elders got more respect than others in the society. This means that the freewill and individuality of members of the society were often subsumed under the collective or common interest or what was perceived or defined by the authority as the common interest. It means that the authoritarian social order was restrictive denying persons of their natural and social abilities to express themselves and have their voices and choices recognized and utilized. Let us examine anachronism next.

In the context of traditional Africa, the endemic inability to rebel, revolt or reform and thence, to achieve endogenous transformation or change in the vital realm of values is called anachronism. These proclivities crystallize to truncate the spirit of revolution or rebellion. They also fundamentally, run counter or contrary to the principle of positive change. According to the philosopher Albert Camus, we face the fundamental problem of human life as the problem of the absurd. Thence, he recommends that we respond to our predicament by uniting as human beings, to transform life into a positive incentive to live and create. It is on this platform that he introduced the idea of 'rebellion', which he used interchangeably with 'revolt'. The attitude of rebellion is a refusal to remain passive in the face of evil, injustice and oppression. It is the determination to fight against absurdity, against evil, against injustice, etc, with all the means at one's disposal in a whole length of a life; it restores its majesty to that life (Camus, in Murchland 1962, 61). The real fact is that in a repressing environment, rebellion must take the form of utter chaos and violence. A more salient fact that decrees the failure of traditional society is that "neither submission nor rebellion generates development. Submission leaves a society without innovators, and rebellion diverts energies away from the constructive effort toward resistance, throwing up obstacles and destruction (Grondona 2000, 48). Anachronism threatens human dignity by being impervious to change that is in tune with the evolving times, and vitiates social order by objecting to innovations and creativity in fashioning new approaches to human relations. To escape from authoritarianism and anachronism there is an African philosophical procedure called conceptual decolonization that the Africans need to subject their values to. Thus there is a need to ask: How does conceptual decolonization help to make a needed transformation in our values and value systems?

SUSTAINABLE HUMAN VALUES IN AFRICA AND THE NEED FOR CONCEPTUAL DECOLONIZATION

It may be said that a central matter of urgent concern "in terms of which these directions of research can be defined is that of African self definition in the contemporary world" (Oladipo 1998b, 67). When the issue of African self definition is considered analytically, it highlights the problem of rationality or the way to situate the African traditions, cultures and belief systems within a critical and analytical lens that defines the ways we develop meanings, learn and transmit lived experiences as markers of our understanding and knowledge. Put simply, the rationality issue engages the dynamics of a logical mind set of the Africans, their modes of causality and pursuit of ultimate reality. The idea is to examine key differences in the way Africans view the world and even more importantly, the significance of these facts for African development. At the heart of the rationality question or problem for the Africans, would be the fundamental enquires concerning: Who are you? How do you think? What can you do? What can your philosophy, politics and science do? What are the real and possible consequences of pursuing a different way of thinking about problems?

As Oladipo (1995, 9) insists "the problem of self definition arises from the fact that African philosophers, like their colleagues in other disciplines, are products of foreign institutions, whether these are located at home or abroad." Oladipo argues that "it is time to begin the process of decolonizing our minds so that we can undertake painstaking investigations into the nature of causal explanation in traditional thought" (Ibid., 100). Decolonization raises philosophical issues about the way Africans can attain self definition and live according to the dictates of the modern scientific experiences without compromising their human dignity and freedom as rational and responsible beings. To attain this level, a certain kind of temperament is encouraged. Wiredu (1992, 62-63) holds that "the answer to Africa's problem of identity in the contemporary world does not lie in a cultural traditionalism but in a critical and reconstructive self evaluation, in the struggle for African mental decolonization."

This issue of decolonization is critical to the area of philosophy because "the search for African philosophy's identity also stems from the internalization of western condescension about things African" (van Hook 1999, 12). Conceptual decolonization is a combination of two things: "reversing through a critical conceptual self awareness the

unexamined assimilation in our thought of the conceptual frameworks embedded in the foreign philosophical traditions that have had an impact on African life and thought" (Wiredu 1995, 22). Also there is a second dimension of: "exploiting as much as is judicious the resources of our own indigenous conceptual schemes in our philosophical meditations on even the most technical problems of contemporary philosophy" (Ibid.). The idea here is to leverage on endogenous and exogenous elements to build up a uniquely modern African experience in a way that disengages from the ancestral shortfalls and foreign domination.

Oladipo (1998a, 88) argues strongly that "the intellectual programme of the African philosopher will have to be a broad based one. It has to transcend the two commitments that now dominate the African philosophical scene, namely the commitment to African culture and the commitment to philosophy as an academic discipline." Africa must look inwards, critically interrogating and rediscovering its cultural values in order to select those, which may be relevant and adaptable to the needs of the modern day. We must caution against the view that it is sufficient to outline the glorious legacies of the African past and seek their uncritical re-imposition upon the African worlds of the contemporary era. Such a process of romanticization of the past definitely portends nothing good for Africa in its struggle to make the best of the centripetal forces of globalization, science and cultural identity raging across the world today. In order to confront the diverse imperatives of human survival in the new millennium, the vital lessons of ancient Egypt for Africa lies in the urgent and critical enquiry into the reasons and consequences of past actions and inactions, their successes and failures of the great African civilizations over the ages.

One reason for the recourse to the historical past of Africa is to seek for the empowerment of Africa in the new era. In this way, Diop's (1974; 1991; 1997) contributions to African philosophy means not only a question of the content of his position, but more importantly and enduringly, an interrogation of his motives and desired goals in the wider context of the rejuvenation of Africa at the threshold of the new millennium. Serequeberhan (1991, 10) has correctly noted that the basic and most fundamental fact in Africa today is the misery the continent is immersed in and the varied struggles – in different areas-to overcome this wretched condition. More often than not, problems in the definition of such struggles have led to failures and ineptitude in dealing with the core problems of the continent. It is in this context

that Wamba-dia-Wamba (1991, 220) makes the painful but true statement that "only very rarely does African philosophy concern itself with the struggle against the African people's own weaknesses. As in the case of the slave freed by his master still looking for his identity (as a free man), some of our African philosophers are still looking for in 'Afrocentricism' or 'Africanity' an authentic African philosophy". Our point is that the African person needs to engage in a critical self-examination in order to determine his abilities and limits. We wish to review the challenges and prospects of human dignity and social order as impetus for African development.

PURSUING HUMAN DIGNITY

What is human dignity? Why should the African government and people take this idea seriously? Let us have a philosophical study of human dignity. Dignity has to do with esteem and worth of a person. This worth can easily be seen in the quality of life or standard of living of a person or a society. The quality or condition of life leads us to examine issues about the value of the human life or the dignity of the human person. Let us have a philosophical look at this issue. Philosophy can be further relevant by helping us to review or revise some of our ethical underpinnings of foreign models of generating relevant knowledge for managing human society. Oladipo (1998b, 71) identifies a problem of knowledge by which we wish to discover "how to acquire and apply scientific knowledge and how to utilize man's accumulated wisdom for promoting human wellbeing." We note the need for science and technology to assist the promotion of human dignity which is itself the foundation of human rights. Human dignity involves individuals, institutions and groups in the society acting knowingly and willingly to define their worth, affirm the sanctity of human life and obey the rule of law.

This implies that human beings should in their personal and social lives be capable of acting freely and responsibly in view of their obligations to work for the common good and respect social rules and conventions for upholding the rights of others. Put more theoretically, we can analyze two key elements of human dignity such as freedom and responsibility in this way. In general, "freedom refers to that state of not being forced or determined by something external in so far as it is joined to a definite faculty of self determination" (Brugger 1974). Freedom for Brugger can be viewed from the physical, moral and psychological perspectives. Seen in the context of the principle of

personality, Brugger holds that freedom presupposes freewill or the power a being possesses to determine itself with regard to known limited values, and to choose or not to choose any limited good. Freewill is important to the personality and dignity of man because, without freewill a man cannot be held responsible for his willed actions as such he is not worthy of praise or blame. For him, if freewill is abandoned, then the moral dignity of the person is renounced (Ibid.).

The dignity of man is achieved by upholding the freedom and responsibility of the individual as necessary conditions for existence in a social order. According to Brugger, responsibility is also linked to the principle of personality because responsibility is a necessary consequence of human free will, which allows the moral person to be a decisive cause of his good and evil deeds. Responsibility also ensures that a person answers for his deeds and accepts any consequences of his actions. Brugger holds that the dignity of the human person, as a vital condition for his existence within a social order, is seen in his capacity to bear personal responsibility. It is within this context of the freedom and responsibility of the person that the idea of social order as the allocation of social roles, rights and duties in a social system can best be understood. Put simply, the dignity of the human person is maintained by imposing freedom, choice and responsibility upon him. In most parts of Africa we notice that freedom to actualize oneself and the exercise of responsibility to live socially, decently and productively are severely threatened by corruption, wars, terrorism, injustice and lack of rule of law. This raises the question of what sort of knowledge can Africans generate to enhance human dignity?

Wiredu (1998; 2000) makes a connection between knowledge, action and survival. For him "the most obvious problem is that much of the knowledge we need in Africa now is in the hands, and sometimes in the heads of non Africans. The problem of science and technology in Africa is a case in point. But as things stand now pressing for science and technology in Africa is apt to give the appearance that Africans simply want to imitate their erstwhile colonizers" (Wiredu 1998, 17-18; 2000, 181). Uroh (1998, 8) reminds us that "developmental dislocations in Africa were brought about as a result of Africa's contact with the outside world." These contacts were mainly due to slavery and colonialism. Hountondji (1983, 136-137) observes that "Africa must go to the capitals of industrialized countries in search of modern science and technology. Colonial Africa served rather as an immense reservoir of data to be supplied to the

laboratories and research centers of the "mother country" where alone these new facts were analyzed and categorized. In the economic as in the scientific field only the metropolis had the initiative." The truth is that the best equipped laboratory, universities and research centers, inspiration and leadership, material and human bases of scientific journals, publishing houses, books, manuals, and pedagogic tools are all based outside Africa (Hountondji 1983, 136; 2006, 532).

Although, Wiredu (1998, 18) insists that Africans are in need of science and technology as well as the human values that can bring out the best in this endeavour, there is a need to be more specific about these values. African philosophical discourses can promote the theorizing of basic social values needed for more peaceful human social action. These values include tolerance, compassion and dialogue which are themselves tied to human dignity and social order. There will also be the need for the entrenchment of the values of discipline, vision and humility. At the level of socialization, education can be an instrument in the fostering of such values. When these values have been conceptualized and entrenched within an African society, it will be easier to attain social reconciliation. Science and technology can then be applied with more discipline, taking into consideration the values of good resource management, civility, patriotism and accountability as necessary conditions for productive social life. Oladipo (1998b) is clear on the view that while we are committed to the development of science and technology in Africa the concern over its desirability is secondary to that of "how it may be used to promote human values. This makes the problem of knowledge in Africa to be how to exploit all the resources of the modern world for the benefit of our society without jeopardizing the strong points of our culture" (Oladipo 1998c, 5).

THE QUEST FOR STABLE AND VIABLE SOCIAL ORDER

What is social order? Why should knowing how to establish and sustain a social order be important to Africans? The idea of social order connotes a significant level of control, reliability, predictability, negotiation, bargaining and division of social and economic roles and duties of individuals and institutions in the society. A philosophical study of social order leans on an analysis of concepts. Philosophy can be relevant by helping us to review or revise some of our models of human society as places where we can realize our fullest humanity in a fair, just, equitable and humane manner. Oladipo (1991, 100) observes

that "the man centeredness of the African conception of reality makes pragmatism a powerful current in African thought". Pragmatically, we seek to focus on "the development and maintenance of social institutions through which viable social orders can be established throughout the African continent" (Oladipo 1998b, 71). The point needs to be made that in many of the African societies certain institutions are already in existence. These institutions have been beset by a combination of man-made and structural problems leading to their vitiations and even outright failure. The problem of identifying a set of core moral and democratic values necessary for the sustenance of social order or our schemes of social relations is most relevant for the promotion of the dominant social paradigm (DSP) of peace, dialogue and security in the conflict-ridden, multi-religious, multi-ethnic societies of Africa (Ujomu 2008; 2009).

As Ujomu (2001a, 201; and 2001b) has noted many societies in Africa are faced with the challenge of internally creating sustainable forums for problem solving, intercultural communication and social reconciliation. These societies are faced with the challenge of providing basic frameworks for defining and articulating mutual experiences on the basis of dialogue and compromise. They are confronted by the problems of establishing appropriate values and institutions for the mitigations of mutual mistrust, conflict and instability. The crisis of social order in most African states today is clearly illustrated by the fact that they lack viable institutions for the sustainable attainment of social goals such as security, peace, freedom and justice. Some of the core social institutions that are lacking in most of these societies include; a viable constitution, good and purposeful leadership, effective systems of social justice and a strong civil society. The crisis of social order in most African societies has ensured that such societies cannot sustain core values and institutions necessary for maintaining social order. Hence, most of these societies have not been able to meet the challenges of national development and political integration. It is important to note that central to the crisis of social order in Africa is the absence of effective rules of political integration (Ujomu 2001, 203).

Given the above fact, most of the crisis ridden societies of Africa have failed to meet those conditions that will transform them into viable modern states. Therefore, in these societies 'the presuppositions of a modern state such as common citizenship, shared nationality and common interests and value, the cultivations of which provide the

bedrock for mutual coexistence (of the diverse groups and interests) are lacking to a significant degree. Hence, they are societies which are susceptible to all manner of conflicts, political, ethno religious and economic which are life- threatening (Oladipo 1998c, 107; Davidson 1992, 9-19). A lack of trust, dialogue and justice in most societies, has led to the demands for institutional arrangements for the rectification of injustices and marginalization in most of these societies. To this effect, there has been a consistent demand in some African societies for some sort of a National Conference. The essence of this call is that there should be a forum for clarifying the pressing issues of the common good, social justice and restructuring of the society. These demands focus on the need for installing elaborate procedures of dialogue and reconciliation which will counter balance the reality of marginalization of various social groups in the physical, political, economic and social realms of life. The idea is to seek avenues for the effective articulation of the principles of justice, and the rules for the distribution of benefits and benefits in the society (Ujomu 2001, 202; 2008).

Social order refers to the social systems and schemes of social relations that define the political, economic and social roles, rights and duties of people in a society. It is the sum of all the human arrangements, values, rules, norms, regulations, ideologies and institutions that enhance the proper functioning of the various parts of the society or community (Ujomu 2001, 6; Bierstedt 1963, 1; Messner 1949, 149; Fagothey 1959, 523). The real issue is can African societies attain social order? In what way, if any does the social order facilitate the proper functioning of various parts of the society? Social order is a set of arrangements put in place by man in order to attain certain important ends like justice, peace, self and group actualisation as well as the general well-being of all in a social system. Social order arises out of the need to balance the conflicts and interplay of interests existing among individuals and between individuals and the society. It means that a community or society will possess a framework that defines rules, roles and functions of its members (Ujomu 2001, 7). Social order is akin to a skeleton that supports a body, a scheme of social relations or a social system that underlies our real life actions as members of a society. We need to review the purpose or goals of social order and how they promote African development.

The study of the goals of social order is scientific because every society or country can use this empirical parameter to award itself a

pass or fail mark or score. It can use this rule or principle to decide the humaneness and efficiency of its institutions and policies.One of the most important goals of social order is to achieve the security, protection, safety, defence and preservation of the lives and properly of people in a society. The protection of lives and property is the central goal of social order because society cannot survive for long in any meaningful sense if the safety of life and property is not maintained. To ensure security of lives and properties, the social order allows each person to have certain valuable possessions and commitments which can only be retained within a social environment that is secure and safe (Ujomu 2001, 34). It means that security can be better guaranteed if people are made to see themselves as stakeholders or contributors to the common cause or collective good.

The concept of a stakeholder is central and critical to social order. A human being who has an interest or investment, construed in the broadest sense, will usually not want anything untoward to happen to his possession, or what he perceives to be his possession in the society. A second goal of social order is to ensure that things are done in the common or public interest. This means that the social order ensures that people do those things which assure the sustenance and security of everyone in the community. Common interests are thus separated from the private interests of individuals or even the group interests of associations which serve personal or sectional ends. The idea of common interest or public interest suggests the conscious promotion of the shared interests of a community as an effective means of guaranteeing certain rights and advantages to individuals and groups. Such advantages include security of lives and property, freedom, mutual co-operation and peace.

Peace in the community is emphasized because, it is only in an atmosphere of peace that any community can survive and make progress. A peaceful environment allows all the social rules, policies and institutions to operate efficiently and purposefully towards the central goal of the society in whatever way it has been designed (Ujomu 2001, 35-36). There have been some attempts to argue for some values and principles of democracy as pathways to a viable and sustainable conception of social order that can guarantee African development. A democratic society should be humanistic, pursuing responsiveness through the creation of access to equitable opportunities for citizens' republican attitude that justifies interest in matters that concern everyone, the participation in public service

without discrimination, access to legal and customary mechanisms of redress, a needs assessment based provision of social amenities for the citizens so as to guarantee human dignity and well being. The principles of democratic participation need to ensure the rule of law and the dignity of the human person as occasioned by responsible and responsive conduct among electors and elected, based on the humane, just and fair treatment of all. To have a viable African development concept or plan, there needs to be a holistic and humanistic view of social knowledge to embrace some idea of science and politics that allows for human dignity.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at the issues of instability, lack of human dignity and social disorder as endemic problems in most parts of Africa. Evidence of this shortfall was easily seen in the seemingly high rate of ethno-religious conflicts, wars, poverty, intolerance, authoritarianism, corruption and lack of equity and social justice that affected most of the human beings and societies of Africa. In much of traditional Africa, anachronism and authoritarianism remained part of the core values of social control. These led to serious weak points in human and humane values for African development. The paper examined in a philosophical way the problem of: What kinds of values were required for African development? Values that were desirable and needed for development in Africa included conceptual decolonization as a means by which Africans would build a critical and tolerant disposition to ideas and life. We saw how such values established and sustained human dignity and social order in Africa. They aided development through the improved quality of mental and social life of the people. Also we used a philosophical approach to study these key values without which Africa's quest for development would be a mirage.

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