

Self-determination in E.K Ogundowole's ideology: toward Africa's Emancipation

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to project Ogundowole's ideologies of self- determination and self-reliance as a political framework to achieving most of African's agitations and desire for freedom and sustainable development. The piece focuses on the concepts of self-determination and self-reliance. We examine self-determination in the sense in which if well understood and imbibed would definitely lead to meaningful and sustainable development of the African Continent.

Keywords: *self-determination, ideology, Africa, reliancism, ogundowole, development*

Self-Determination

Self-determination is a compound word comprising the terms "self" and "determination". Determination as used in this context could easily mean to assert, to be in control, independent, free, without compulsion, subjective and authentic. But when we talk about the "self", that is not very easy to define and so would require a little investigation. One of the most engaging and perennial problems in philosophy is that concerning what the self really is. Descartes for example, equates the "self" with the act of thinking, hence his "*cogito ergo sum*" - *I think therefore I am*.

The idea of self-determination is fast becoming a complex issue among policy makers in international community. The nature of this complexity does not stem from the existence of the right to self-determination as contained in many international human right documents but rather what each policy maker or political actor consider as a self-determination.¹ A practical manifestation of this complexity played out in the Swedish and Finnish current foreign policy backtrack of non-alignment and the current bid to join NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) that is now accompanied by Turkey and Russia open rejection.

But contrary to this precarious prevailing political reality that now engulfs Eastern Europe, Woodrow Wilson, a chief advocate of the doctrine of self-determination once argued that;

Settlement of every question, whether of territory, of sovereignty, of economic arrangement, or of political relationship is to be made upon the basis of free acceptance of that settlement by the immediately concerned and not upon the basis of material interest or advantage of any other nation or people that may desire a different settlement for the sake of its own exterior influence or mastery.²

Although our focus in this paper is not on current political reality in Eastern Europe but on Africa and how various agitations in our continent could be transformed into a meaningful development and the total emancipation of the continent of Africa. However, the above allusion is meant to show us the fluidity and complexity that comes with any meaningful discourse on self-determination. This paper relies on philosophical and epistemological framework to appraise Ogundowole's self-determination ideology to foster Africa's political and economic emancipation.

In his inaugural lecture "*Inexhaustibility of Self-Reliance*", Ogundowole makes a distinction between the authentic self and the token person or split-personality.³ He says that a socio-cultural being who is uprooted from her aboriginal universe and transplanted into an entirely new universe of being undergoes a crucial severance from her original state in a manner that alters her character, memory trails and history. Such a being becomes a *token - person* to the extent that even though still retaining her physical characteristics has had the self in her perforated,

¹ Patricia Carley, Self-determination, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right to decision, Report from a Round-table held in Conjunction with the U.S Department of State policy Planning Staff, Accessed, May 15, 2022.

²Wilson Woodrow in *Tomis Kapitan, Self-determination and International Order*. Online article, Wilson1927. P.233

³E.K. Ogundowole, *Inexhaustibility of Self-Reliance*. (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2007. P.16

emptied and refilled with other foreign element.⁴ This for example is the case with the former African slaves now called black Americans in the United States. He thinks also that those who still exist in the continent-the contemporary African personality, to the extent that they still take in, accept, and reflect these characteristics also can be termed token persons in that they have lost touch with their unique aboriginal identity and now a mere caricature and poor image of the European.

In our own conception of the self, we take a cue from the Cartesian and Husserlian analysis of the concept of consciousness. While Descartes captured the essence of the self in his *cogito ergo sum*, Husserl in his famous theory of "*Intentionality of Consciousness*" shows that thinking is always thinking about something. *Ego Cogito cogitatum*. Every thinking activity necessarily has an object with it. Thus every thought activity has an intentional object.

But if thinking is always thinking about something, then thinking is always thinking about something in this or that language. There can never be thinking therefore without doing so in a language. Language therefore is an intrinsic element of thinking, for one cannot be said to be thinking except one was doing so in a language. Therefore language is as primary to thought as thought is to existence.

The 20th century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in the introduction to his seminal work, , captures this succinctly when he suggested that the limit of a man's language *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* is the limit of his thought and perhaps we should add that the limit of a man's language is the limit of his development.

What can be said at all can be said clearly and whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent... We can draw a limit to thinking or rather -not to thinking, but to be expression of thoughts, for in order to draw a limit to thinking, we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit. (We should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought). The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be completely nonsense.⁵

The train of our argument can thus be expressed thus: language is basic to thought just as thought is basic to development and advancement, and the limit of one's language is the limit of one's thought. It follows that the limit of one's language is the limit of one's development and advancement. The point then is that any social, political or economic arrangement which tends to superimpose a language outside of the autochthonous language of any group of people automatically becomes a threat to the self-determination of every individual 'self' in that grouping and to the group as a collectivity.

The natural collection of a group having similar, cultural and socio-historical ties is called a nation. A.E. Afigbo defines a nation as a human community that is, united by language and culture. "Ogundowole's definition is more comprehensive. He defines a nation as a stable community of people bound together by a common language, common territory, community of economic life, and certain peculiarities of social psychology, as expressed in the specific features of the culture of the given people which distinguishes its culture from that of other peoples."⁷ What is gleaned from all these is that the idea of self-determination has to do with a yearning by a socio-cultural group to free themselves from the crushing influence of a wider power, which often times is an artificial state power, superimposed on the natural socio-historically existing group and which attempts to mould a supra-identity out of the original authentic identities of the peoples.

It is evident that only in the original, primordial identities of any people is their potential and authenticity maximized and given meaning. We have noted in the early parts of this paper that globalization has been as old as history. Yet side by side globalization has been the idea of freedom, separation, the urge to be independent, to be self-determining and free from oppression. This has been the logic of universal history and the fundamental principle underlying all conflicts between peoples.

As a guide to self-reliance principle, self-determination is key in the sense that the principle cannot be fruitful if the individual or nation at large and in this case Africa as a whole is not self-determined to move ahead and this is in consonance with Ogundowole's view that;

⁶A. E. Afigbo. "Myth, History and National Orientation in Nigeria." in Ayo Banjo(ed.) *Humanity in Context*. Ibadan: Nigerian Academy of Letters.2000. P. 81

⁷ E.K.Ogundowole. *Philosophy and Society*, Lagos, Correct Counsels Ltd., 2004. p.46.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ludwig Wittgenstein *Logico Tractatus Philosophicus*. Edinburg: Edinburg Press,1922

The drive towards self-determination is anchored on the will to be free. The will to freedom is the first act of self-cognition. While freedom itself is the basic right of any living being. This right finds its complete unfoldment in self-determination. Self-determination is the freedom of the self to be self and remain self. It is the minimum condition for the self to be in freedom. The freedom to act and shape the present and the path leading to the future of the collective self, using the resources about the self (in freedom) to realize these objectives. Doing this in freedom and as maximally as possible. Self-determination then is self-retrieval of the collective personality – the nation, self-reliance and self-realization.⁸

What the above view means is that self-determination is not just a principle but is backed up with the willingness to act and regain ones freedom to really detach from any string of external or as the case may be colonial dictate. Self-determination is an entity's autonomy, that is, managing its own affairs as it sees fit independently of external interference. Africa need to rise and take her destiny in her hand in order to direct the course of her destiny and it is by only this means that Africa's development is guaranteed. There is need for Africa to stand outside the present order in other to evaluate clearly and to know what really is the case for it is not possible to judge objectively what one is also a partaker of, that is an act of self retrieval. Self-determination entail self-consciousness to enable one know where he is and where to go, but in all, it is most dignified to confidently walk along the path of self-established path rather than live on external dictate that promise no future either for you or the generations to come which is dangerous to the very existence and survival of such a state. And to this end Ogundowole argues that:

The hesitant, indecisive, passive, feeble, new state with its incapacity to make decision and to liberate itself from the complicatedly woven but exploitative realities of the world, the lopsided international economic order, to be specific, in the end develops a complete blockage of action. Such society destroys its own chances of self-realization, progress – technologically, economically and of course, culturally by unconsciously placing obstacle

between its people's socio-historical natural goal, self-reliancism and its actual realization.⁹

To this end, South-African revolutionary thinker, Stephen Biko once held that “the most potent weapon in the hand of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.” A careful look and reflection on the nature of modern technology especially as seen in the Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the Satellite technology shows that any attempt to transfer such technologies simply amounts to exposing the totality of the African culture which comprises her secrets and her very originality. This can most aptly be interpreted to be the mind of Africa. The result of this is that the data of Africa in its most updated form is more with the western or foreign world than Africa itself. This places the continent in the most vulnerable of postures and can account for the multiplicity of maladies that have plagued the continent in recent history.

It is also uncondonable that the life-span of the African is drastically reduced owing to intake of pollutions (toxics) or waste products of industrial productions that serve little or no end of his. It is common knowledge as well, that oil wealth particularly in Nigeria which should be a source of joy and comfortable living for the citizenry, has not only alienated a cross-section of the country from direct agronomy or crop production but has become an albatross round her neck as most of her problems emanates directly or indirectly from there. It is against this background that the African reconsiders an inward looking; a reasoned philosophical reflection on a technological, economic, political and cultural Africa; a quest to put an end to the unentertaining paradox of lack within abundance; of severe disadvantage in absolute advantage; of hunger amidst the best of foods; of dying in the struggle for survival; of ailments in the midst of very naturally healthy environment; of poverty in a very rich region; and of meaninglessness in an absolutely meaningful geo-cultural natural configuration.

Self-Reliancism

Africa, rather than relying on the two major socio-economic colonial ideology which are capitalism and socialism which we have practiced and in fact still

⁸E. K. Ogundowole, *Self-Reliancism: Philosophy of a New Order*. (Lagos: John West Publications, 2011), p.135.

⁸E.K.Ogundowole, Op. cit., p.33.

practicing and have failed us should embrace the principle of self-reliance as a viable vehicle of the long search development and progress in Africa. What then do we really mean by self-reliance? Self-reliance is the realisation of the principle of self-reliance. It is the ideology or orientation based on this principle. A set of purposive activities directed toward self-realization.¹⁰

As earlier stated in this work, creativity is a human quality and lies in every human person regardless of racial leaning. Human and societal development even along the technological lines is a product of human reason. Man transforms his world through meaningful thinking (reflection); to think is to connect; to connect is to establish causation; to establish causation is to deny haphazard or accidental progress and development; to do this is to be purposefully committed to human and societal development; and this is made possible by a translation of idealistic metaphysics into materialistic metaphysics with the former controlling and regulating the latter. It is on this score that Kant declared the human person free to use his reason to transform his entire world. He calls this enlightenment and the refusal to use one's reason unguided by the other, immaturity. He argues:

Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's intelligence without the guidance of another. Such immaturity is self-caused if it is not caused by lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another. SapereAude! [Dare to know!] Have the courage to use your own intelligence! is therefore the motto of the enlightenment. Through laziness and cowardice a large part of mankind, even after nature has freed them from alien guidance, gladly remain immature. It is because of laziness and cowardice that it is so easy for others to usurp the role of guardians. It is so comfortable to be a minor....¹¹

Enlightenment here is a new dawn; a time of action; an avenue to consciously take hold of one's fortune, in this sense, the African fate. He was quick to declare in his

Critique of Pure Reason that there is no such thing as impossibility that presents itself before human reason. In other words, human reason is capable of surmounting every and anything. He argues:

Now I maintain that, among all speculative cognition, the peculiarity of transcendental philosophy is that there is no question, relating to an object presented to pure reason, which is insoluble by this reason; and that the profession of unavoidable ignorance—the problem being alleged to be beyond the reach of our faculties—cannot free us from the obligation to present a complete and satisfactory answer. For the very conception which enables us to raise the question must give us the power of answering it; inasmuch as the object, as in the case of right and wrong, is not to be discovered out of the conception.¹²

The foregoing is, aside any other thing, a formidable impetus to self-reliance for Africans. This appears to be the most workable model for the African condition, given the success of China and even Japan. Explaining this as a workable African Ideology, Ogundowole explains this as earlier stated when he writes that "Self-reliance is the realization of the principle of self-reliance. It is the ideology or orientation based on this principle. A set of purposive activities directed towards self-realization." He argues further:

The characteristic features of such process of societal development is its high degree of variability in the maintenance of a constant and uniform direction. The aim, objective dominates the entire process, regulates its changes and determines the alternative courses open to the society. The variability is thus never random, but is governed by the relevance of available means to the end and is systematic and embracing... It demands of all and sundry competence, dedication, confidence, national awareness, and above all, originality, inventiveness and creativity which are necessary facts for self-respect and self-realization and without which the

¹⁰ Ibid. p.71

¹¹ Immanuel, Kant, *The Philosophy of Kant*, translated, edited and introduced by Carl J. Friedrich. Random House, Inc., 1977.(Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2009. © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation

¹² Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason..* J. M. D. Meiklejohn. Trans.PSU-Hazleton, Hazleton. ed. PA 18202, (A publication of The Electronic Classics Series, 2013), p. 339

colonial dehumanization and degeneration cannot be undone.¹³

He went further to say that;

Self-reliancism through his demands and requirements, stimulates the development of human reason, causes a growth in self-confidence and mastery of life on the part of the individual. Engulfed in the feelings of self-confidence, the chances that the individual becomes inclined to take responsibility on himself are increased proportionately.¹⁴

Such is the nature of authentic independence and developmental strides. There lie in Africa some very colourful technological systems albeit unsystematized. The traditional African for example, has no need for assisted reproductive technological systems. This is because, the natural-historical and cultural metaphysics of Africa is antithetical to barrenness and impotence and so traditional African men and women are always virile and fertile.

Again, the African continent has got all it takes to develop the best of power supply or electricity with the requisite intellectual strength and commitment. We have got large bodies of water with which to consistently generate electricity uninterruptedly like other nations of the world. Electricity is, in recent times, generated from sunlight as solar energy. Countries that have little or no sun do this. How then can the African continent where the scorching nature of the sun has accounted for the blackness of our skins not be able to tap power from this viable and constant source? Also, atomic or nuclear energy has, in recent times, attained tremendous heights in power generation and preservative technology. Africa has got personalities with urge for such skills and can only attain the desired technological heights by having to send her own people out for such trainings.

Agriculturally, Africa has got about the best of arable lands for proper cultivation of all kinds of crops. This gives African countries a prolific voice in the international system. The farming systems can be radically mechanized and given proper attention, for this alone has the capacity of committing the problem of poverty to the African past. It is when a nation produces in large quantities what other nations may

not have or produce as much, that she operates on the basis of comparative cost advantage and then development springs from there.

It is true that we have a tainted mentality from our colonial experience about ourselves that we almost think only in western concepts and in western values. Ogundowole expresses this as follows:

We find it difficult to think systematically, rigorously and economically; difficult even to use the ideas we construct ourselves to enable us to do so, because the hold on us of the old modes of thinking is so strong. To guarantee upward thrust, therefore, we must break with this obsolete mentality. We must make bold to advance new concepts, new principles, new ideals, new criteria to guide both our thought and practice.¹⁵

Every age presents certain tasks determined by inherent processes connected by mankind's general advance. Man's purpose in a particular age is determined by the solution of these tasks; by mankind's advance along the path of social, scientific and technological as well as spiritual, including moral progress. Hence, man's purpose is to devote his energy to the solution of the tasks advanced by history to improve social life, increase mankind's powers and well-being.¹⁶

Man's purpose also consists in overcoming the opposition of those who are trying to prevent him from rising higher and to extend human happiness in a definite socio-historical period of societal development.

It is on this note that Nyerere also emphasizes the need for a self-reliant educational system noting that the root of the present educational system is inherited from the colonial masters and hence for meaningful development to really take place in Africa, we need an educational system that is born out of our culture and historical experience and not one that will alienate us from our environment. This view is captured thus:

In education for self-reliance,... The need arises from his diagnosis of the major pitfalls of inherited colonial education. Essentially, colonial education was founded upon the principle of capitalism. As such, colonial education entailed several features. First, it tends to promote a class of elites, thus

¹³E.K. Ogundowole, *Inexhaustibility of Self-Reliance*.op.cit,pp.26-27

¹⁴E. K. Ogundowole, *Self-Reliancism*:op.cit.,p.133

¹⁵Ibid.,p.7

¹⁶Ibid.

encouraging inequality and class structure. Second, it divorced its participants from society and discouraged them from unconditional service to the community. Third, it tended to be formal, stressing book learning and dispensing traditional informal knowledge and wisdom. Finally, it tended to be unproductive, discouraging students and pupils from hard work. Post independent education in Tanzania simply imbibed the colonial aims and curricula, and thus enhanced its subsequent ideals.¹⁷

The message here consists in locating the fact that Africa is capable of sustainable development in the areas of technology, economy, politics and culture. It rests on the thesis that Africa has got more than enough of what she seeks outside of herself in futility and this can be tapped and systematized only with a re-orientation of faith in what is African and the capabilities of the Africans. Self-reliance in this case is the attaining of economic and cultural independence at a corporate level. All data should be examined from the standpoint of Africans as human agents rather than as objects in a European frame of reference. It's a philosophy that places Africa at the centre of all human activities carried out in Africa. The authentic African technological, political, cultural and economic renaissance begins ultimately with decolonizing the mind of the African, for mental enslavement is worse than physical subjugation. Thus emphasizing the fact that Self-reliancism, demands of all and sundry competence, dedication, confidence national awareness and above all originality, inventiveness and creativity which are necessary facts for self-respect and self-realization, without which it is difficult to appreciate and rectify the degeneration, humiliation and decadent concepts established by foreign colonial and neo-colonial interests.

Hence it is both means and at the same time an end in itself. by means it means it guides us in choosing purposive conscious activities for realization. As an end however, it attempts to eradicate the humiliation, decadence and degeneration brought on the new states by colonial interlopers.

¹⁷Joseph W. Nasongo and Lydia L. Musungu *The implications of Nyerere's theory of education to contemporary education in Kenya* Educational Research and Review Vol. 4 (4), April 2009, p113,

Thus, by national self-reliance, it means the autonomy of decision making and full mobilization of a society's own resources under its own initiative and direction. Emphasizing the need for Africa to come together as a nation and pull our resources together with the aim of achieving development and progress. That is, a self-reliance state controls its economic and socio-cultural destiny. This is buttressed by Ogundowole when he writes that self-reliancism is the concept of harmonic determination;

The driving force behind the self-reliancist transformation is thus assumed to be inherent in the individual and the collective, or more accurately, in their togetherness, in harmonious social relationship. the horizontal orientation of the self-reliancist principle provides little room for considering antagonistic contradictions as an important driving force for social change, societal progress. The principle of self-reliancism may therefore be regarded as a class neutral point of view.¹⁸

This is in consonance with the indigenous composition of African societies in which priority is given to the collective good of the individual in the society. It can best be explained as a kind of cobb-web relationship in the sense that what affects one affects all and hence the happiness of one is derived from the happiness of all.

The argument is not for us to go back to the primitive age, of cause it is not possible given the empirical facts around. The point we are making here is that Africa needs a bit of self retrieval especially from those that parade themselves as being the developed and most civilized, rather than depending on their aids for survival, it is high time we think of ourselves as capable of existence and survival without their aid. This is what he meant when he opined that;

...the so-called foreign aid, especially as is available today, cannot be a substitute for, or an unf fully tapped "savage" homeland which, in the past, gave credence to colonialism; neither can it be an alternative equivalence of unpaid slave labour that built up the foundation of the economic fortune of present day United States of America. The only possible equivalent alternative is the actual recovery of our natural resources from foreign exploration, exploitation and

¹⁸E. K. Ogundowole, *Self-Reliancism*:op.cit., p.76

expropriation through an act of outright nationalization.¹⁹

He went further to say that rather than scrambling for aid, we better uphold the right to nationalize and the right to determine the price rise on our raw materials and other commodities. In all we see that self-reliance ideology is an ideology of sustainable development, the call therefore is for Africa to strive for sustainable development. Clearly development requires much more than economic and social index. Growth as it were must exceed the capacity of the larger system to generate resources and absorb wasn't at sustainable rates, and without disrupting other vital natural services. To this end Jacob argues as follows;

...the existing process of economic development cause poverty even as they generate wealth...Human suffering and injustice can no longer be tolerated on the ground that "progress will gradually eliminate them. General aid for economic growth is now morally inadequate. It has become imperative rather for the rich nations to tackle poverty directly in particular by addressing those aspects of their own international economic policy which contribute to it.²⁰

Much of what is said to be development is simply growth, that is, material excesses which itself creates a consumer society, which in turn degrades the environment and dehumanizes the person. What counts then as development involves reducing the consumption and dependency level of the society or a nation. Hence, for Africa, it implies that the state is meant for the strengthening and fulfillment of life, not the individual life but the whole society.

The ruling saying of development which enjoyed prominence over the years that "what is best for the rich must be best for the poor" is outdated, because upon a careful examination, it promotes and protects mass poverty, misery and degrades the human person. Development cannot be understood in a vacuum, development is human, and so it is for human person. It does not start with goods but rather with the people and their education, organization and discipline without which all resources remain latent, untapped and potentials. Thus Schumacher argues;

¹⁹ Ibid., p.184

²⁰Jacob M., *The Politics Of The Real World* London, Earthscan publications, 1996, p.43

... the material factors are entirely secondary: such things as lack of natural wealth, or a lack in capital, or an insufficiency of infrastructure. The primary causes of extreme poverty or immaterial lie in certain deficiencies in education, organization and discipline.²¹

Hence for development to take place, the deficiencies have to be corrected. Human development is not primarily for economists for their expertise is founded on cruel materialistic philosophy, human development requires a new philosophy which takes cognizance of the yearnings and aspirations of the entire human population. It must be humanistic, which takes poverty and other inhuman conditions as disease which must be permanently exterminated from the human system. Hence it no longer follow that "what is good for the rich must be good for the poor" but rather support a development policy that 'care for all people because they are the primary and ultimate source of wealth'.

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²¹Schumacher E.F. *Small is beautiful* New York, Harper and Row publisher, 1979, p.164.

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