

THE LOGIC OF AFRICAN DIGNITY AMID 21ST CENTURY NEO-SLAVERY

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Abstract

Slavery has a long tradition which is as old as human existence. Slavery is the condition in which a person is owned by another in whom all the powers attaching to the right of ownership belong. It is either physical or mental. In Slavery, two actors are known: the slave and the slave master (Lord). A slave assumes a mere property to his master (Lord) who uses and disposes his slave at will. In moral psychology (ethics), slavery is a direct violation on human dignity in the sense that, it uses human being (slave) as a means. Recent studies show that slavery is of increase with the inception of 21st century. Most of the significant victims of slavery in history is the black child especially, the African child. The African is discriminated against because of his skin colour and technological backwardness. This in effect affects the affirmation of an African as a 'person'. The purpose of this study is to defend logically, from the 'philosophy of being a person', that all human beings are endowed with dignity. The study will be of relevance in supporting the fact that the African is rational, and he is qualified and entitled to dignity.

Keywords: Dignity, Slavery, Neo-Slavery, Human, African

Introduction

Slavery is one of the old and universal practices of mankind. Its definition is deemed elusive because some academic analysts define it in a way to either mean 'physical control over someone' or 'complete ownership/possession'. Bales' definition gives an insight of what slavery means. According to him, slavery is: -

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The control of one person (the slave) by another (the slaveholder or slaveholders). This control transfers agency, freedom of movement, access to the body, and labour and its product and benefits to the slaveholder. The control is supported and exercised through violence and its threat. The aim of this control is primarily economic exploitation, but may include sexual use or psychological benefit. (p.91)

It happens that the primary indicator of slavery as contained in Bales definition is control; control that diminishes the activity of the person (slave), with demonstration of the physical control of the slave that prevents escape from enslavement and forces him or her to work. In practice, the element of slavery is possession and this, is so necessary for slavery to take place. The common impression about slavery rests on absolute ownership; that a person must legally own another in order to profess that slavery has taken place. Allain & Bales (2012) reject the claim that slavery rests only on absolute ownership since slavery cannot only be applied in 'de jure' situations - that is, where a person legally owns another, rather, it also be applied in 'de facto' situations where a person exercised the powers attaching to the right of ownership instead of exercising the right of ownership over a person. This means that a person can be in a condition of slavery without legal ownership if it can be shown that he or she is treated like a slave in fact, if not in law.

As a condition, slavery is not defined by the customs, practices, methods, or mechanisms of enslavement. A person may be taken into slavery through different paths, but the means of enslavement, the vehicle, the path or mechanism by which the person arrives at this condition is important in stating his situation but it is not relevant in the determination of whether the person is a slave. For instance, what is the status, in a case, of a person subjected to force labour in another country as a consequence of illegal migration? Some academic analysts will confine that the person is not enslaved but simply in a situation of peonage, a legitimate exercise of legal control over miscreants. Hence, it is illogical to narrow that the mechanism of acquisition of a person is an essential component in defining whether a person is in slavery. Even an appeal to ownership as the concept that best defines slavery will leave a researcher in a state of dilemma because in property law, possession is the standard as being put by Honoré (1961) to mean, "the foundation on which the whole superstructure of ownership rests" (p.113). This means that, despite a number of rights, what underlies these rights is possession. One cannot sell a

thing or profit from it to the exclusion of others unless the person possesses it. And possession in law ultimately turns on demonstrating control.

In moral psychology (ethics), slavery is an unhealthy human exercise because it completely deals with human exploitation. In its form, slavery comprises of, a totality of dehumanised activity which constitutes an absolute control over a person in a way such as to significantly deprive that person of his or her individual liberty, with the intent of exploitation through the use, management, profit, transfer or disposal of that person. While the ancient form of slavery is supported by and mostly obtained through means such as violent force, deception and/or coercion, the 21st century slavery (neo-slavery) is concerned with ideological, economic and technological control and exploitation; an imagery of racism. In both stances, personal liberty is lost; the free will of the person is taken away, transferred from the slave to the slave lord who assumes the slaveholder. This happens that, the slave can be exploited, his or her labour used, his or her sexual autonomy disregarded, all at the whim of the person who now possesses the enslaved. This is why the likes of Abraham Lincoln, William Wilberforce, etc. fought for its abolition.

Most conducted surveys on the practices of slavery show that "being black" is the driving force behind slavery and human marginalisation. Some people feel that pigmentation (skin colour) is the major determinant of human superiority. According to Ekwuru (2012), one of the strong points which the west has posited in various attempts to determine the humanity of the African is the glaring fact of colour variation. The case of George Perry Floyd with officer Chauvin who placed his knee on his neck is a good example (though it has been argued that what the police officer did by placing his knee on the neck of Chauvin was within the confines of the law). But unfortunately, that sense of racially motivated marginalisation and inhumane treatment is felt among the black people of the world: black Americans, blacks found in Island of Luzon in Philippines, Melanesians of the Solomon Islands Northeast of Australia, Afro-Pakistanis known as Siddi who are direct descendants of Bantu people in the African great lakes region, black people of Asia found in many Asian countries like India, Thailand and Philippine. Even Columbia that has the third largest black population outside of Africa and the second largest in Latin America, after Brazil, Africa is the only largest place of the world inhabited by black people that constantly suffer slavery. This is presumably attributable to the biblical account after Egypt lost battle to ancient Babylon. Africans then, are marked-off from the rest of the world due to pigmentation.

The attachment of black colour with bad images remains a dehumanising factor and disqualifying emblem to the African in the history of Western thought. In every department of human endeavour, this remains a constant indicator of inauthenticity of being, inferiority of race, and a socio-political, religious mark of backwardness. Consequently, this gives-in for colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa. Not minding that the African is not lacking when it comes to rational activities, the African is discriminated against, treated with disdain and approached like a second-class citizen of the world wherever he migrates to in any part of the world. This is due to the destruction of the image of Africa. Most people still believe that Africans as a people have contributed nothing to civilisation while the truth is exactly the opposite, namely that almost everything comes from Africa. Recent atrocities of the modern age like neo-slavery and migration are significant of 21st century man's inhumanity to man leading to deeper philosophical interrogations on human dignity.

Philosophical Exposition of Human Dignity

The discussion of human dignity finds its way into the study of philosophy as an academic discipline through the studies of jurisprudence, ethics and political philosophy. As a concept, human dignity is blurred and ambiguous because different Schools of Thought define and use it in different contexts. To have a lucid understanding of human dignity, it is ideal to consider first the meaning of dignity. Etymologically, dignity relates to Latin word, 'dignitas', which means to deem worthy, to regard as fit or becoming, to deign. Dignity is simply a rational comparative judgement regarding the relation of things to one another. It thrives on the respect or honour accorded to a thing because of the recognition of its factual distinguishing quality from other things (Amaku, 2009). Dignity thereof, connotes a certain superiority or ordination accorded to a being over another which revolves around a certain measure of intrinsic quality upon which the reputation and rank of a being is based. In human nature, dignity signifies a man's due, his dessert. When dignity is attached to a human, it considers the intrinsic quality or value of the human person. Human dignity in turn signifies the worth, reputation, the suitability, the rank, or the superiority of the human person in comparison to other existing things (Amaku, 2009). The question of human dignity depends on man's self-discovery, self-evaluation, self-reflection, in comparison to other living things.

From a philosophical perspective, the idea of human dignity sticks to the ontological evaluation of man as man. It is pinned neither to sexual differences,

nor with the idea of racial superiority, nor with social ranks, which depend on the opinions of others, but on the essential peculiarities of man as man found in rationality. The most distinguishing feature of man is nothing other than his capacity to reason, or his rationality (Ekwuru, 2010). Reason thereof, constitutes man's ontological position in the world, his uniqueness, superiority, transcendence, eminence, greatness, and not in his position in a socio-functional relationship, technological advancement, colour vis-à-vis his peers. It is a commonplace belief that man is a special creature, one clothed in ineffable dignity and honour. For instance, the Igbos of the Eastern part of Nigeria call man 'mmadu' which signifies the beauty of being. Human dignity however, is the inherent status of man; it is a shift from certain particular individuals to the universal texture of the admirable value of man qua man. By the virtue of human dignity, the subsequent questions are who is an African? Does he qualify to the rank of personhood?

What is Africa and who is an African?

When one thinks about the definition of Africa, lots of questions come to the mind because Africa signifies different things to different people. For instance, the meaning of Africa to some Western Scholars constitutes a region without indigenous written philosophy, and this makes the meaning of Africa basically, an echo of the white man's portrayal. Africa remains a playground for the experimentation of all kinds of ideas and ideologies. Those who are of not African extraction take Africa to mean a little village or cultural entity bedevilled with famine, epidemics, civil unrest and dictatorship coupled with intellectually stunted, morally bankrupt, technologically primitive and economically destitute. According to Janheinz (1961): - "Only the most highly cultivated person, humane, cosmopolitan, enlightened, progressive, counts as a 'real European'. A 'real African', on the other hand, lives in the bush, carves 'primitive' sculptures, can neither read nor write, goes naked,..."(p.20). In the actual sense, the African writer is, without doubt, better placed than anyone else, to discuss issues from direct, live experience, and to present African worldviews authoritatively, comprehensively and with the greatest understanding. More than anyone else, the African writer is more placed to present Africa to the world from within, and largely it is in his or her power to demonstrate the higher possibilities and capabilities of his people.

The word 'Africa' etymologically is traceable from the Latin adjective "aprica" meaning sunny. Ekwuru (2012) states that Africa, the land that bestrides the equator, where the sun has chosen more than on any other

continent in the universe to mount its solar beam upon the world. There is some effort to define and delineate clearly as possible the various issues involved in the study of Africa. In this regard, the reality that is, Africa can be considered as a geographic locale, in which the physical, climatic and ecological factors are considered. Africa can also be considered as an ideological concept in terms of its characteristics as a socio-cultural and political entity (Onyeocha, 2007). This is to say that the knowledge about Africa depicts its geographical, physical and cultural settings.

Africa is the second largest of the Earth's seven continents, covering 30,244,000 sq. km (11,677, 000 sq. mi), including its adjacent islands with countries. From the geo-numerical designation of Africa, one can point to a place, or even on a map and say that, this is Africa. This happens that, Africa has a geographical, political, economic, and ecological base as she provides her own share of member states for world organisations. Africa is the second most populous continent with about 1.1 billion people or 16 percent of the world's population (Aguzie and Umunakwe, 2019). Different languages are spoken languages in Africa among the popular ones are Arabic, English, French, Berber, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Amharic, Oromo, etc. Africa is a continent with fifty-four countries and one 'non-self-governing territory, the Western Sahara. All of Africa is colonised by foreign powers during the 'scramble for Africa' except Ethiopia and Liberia. The Pharaohic civilisation of ancient Egypt is one of the world's oldest and long-lasting civilisation. With this, one can call someone from this area an African.

The ontological inquiry into who is an African, is at the heart of the entire quest for African identity. According to Onyeocha (2007), a pure African will be one that is not totally affected by any factors that are extraneous to the African experience. Onyeocha identifies four categories of people that can be called Africans. First, those that were born in Africa and of Africans parents, nurtured and grew up in an African environment. Second, those born of African stock, whether domiciled in or outside of Africa, but who are brought up in a non-African environment. Third, those of non-African extraction that have taken up residence in Africa, but whose nurture and/or culture are firmly based in Africa. Fourth, those who, though originated outside of Africa, come to develop a lasting affinity for Africa for cultural, religious, political, ideological, or other reasons. Generally, Westerners tend to refer to people of a certain hue as African, to draw a tacit contrast with people of other colours. Obviously, this form of cultural politics has been in the main, an indubitable politics of racial definition and castigations (Ekwuru, 2012). It is thereof, illogical to indicate

one's origin by colour variation. Being an African is not by colour stereotypes, instead an African is one that stems from Africa, whether such a one is at home in Africa or in diaspora. The term 'African' seems to have gained currency in some instances as a euphemism for the term 'native'.

The Partition of Africa: A Herald of Neo-Slavery

By neo-slavery, it means a new or modern form of slavery. What we know today as neo-slavery in Africa is an offshoot of 1884-85 historic Berlin Conference. Through this conference, African continent was partitioned and shared out mostly among European sovereign states: England, Spain, Germany, France, Portugal, Belgium and Italy. Remarkably, this partition connotes the absolute control of Africa. According to Onyeocha (2007), the effect in partitioning Africa sets the stage for the absolute control of Africa by self-claimed colonial masters. Hence, the arbitrariness with which Africa is fragmented and parcelled out by the colonial powers is such that it divides each from each. It divides from each other people who belongs together, shares the same roots and the same destiny, and should have been kept together. The partitioning also strains together people who in their roots and inclinations belong separately, and who would have been better off charting their separate and distinct tracks.

Prior to the partitioning of Africa, there is an indigenous form of slavery existing among African chiefs. This happens that before and all through the period of partitioning, slavery has been going on among indigenous Africa. Africans who are forcibly extracted from their roots; the erasure of their links with their roots; family names, their mother tongue, their culture, their songs and dances, and every identifiable trace or link that point to their specific home is, without doubt, a most traumatic experience and has become one of the most tragic aspects of the slavery. History records that when the slave trade started and the slaves are captured, Black women were forced to shave off all their hair. This is the beginning process of eradicating the 'Black' identity and culture. It is also a tool used to minimise Black beauty and dehumanise black women, as slave owners know their hair is something they value enormously; is part of their identity and it also holds so much significance (Du Bois, 2007). Slave-Lords' robust efforts to abolish the cultural practices in African, a feeling of nostalgia, stigmatise or place a taboo on them, and all, kill those who have this knowledge to transmit African values. All this, by the barrel of a gun.

During slave trade proper, many Africans were transported in the most inhuman conditions across the Atlantic and Sahara. The trauma of the lucky ones who survived it is to enter a life of hard labour, chattel slavery. Those who

didn't survive perish like flies, unwept and unknown and we are told that over the 300 years of the slave trade they were in the millions. Today, scholars equate the activities of slavery with the Blackman's equivalent to holocaust (Okere, 2005). When colonialists invade part of Africa mostly Congo, Cameroun, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, South Africa and Gambia, slavery then was a kind of brutal sport carried against the African. For instance, Democratic Republic of Congo is invaded under the guise of 'civilising the savages'. Belgians killed off fifty percent of the population from 1885-1908, reducing 20 million to just 10 million (Hugh, 1997). Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is the most popular of African slavery accounts which began around 15th century but took a commercial outlook in the 19th century involving items like palm kernel and other goods.

Arabians are the first slave masters to commercialise slavery in Africa. In fact, the most brutal form of slavery (the bulk of slave trade in Africa) was done by Arabs than Europeans did). Slavery in Africa worsened with the Arab in the game. History has it that Arabian invasions of North Africa kicked off in early 647 AD when Abdallah Bin Sa'd marched into North Africa occupied by the Romans. At the time, Rome just ended a 700 year battle with the Persians, so instead of fully engaging in another war, they simply gave the Arabs territory in North Africa which they didn't have any use for. Arabs settled in Egypt, Libya, Morocco, etc. (Domingues da Silva, 2017). The Slavery of Africans as a business venture began in Darfur in the year 652. There was a peace agreement between the Arab invaders and the Sudanese leader. So, to meet up with his own end of the treaty, the leader provided the invaders several hundreds of African slaves every year. This supply of slaves continues for centuries. The slaves were sent along the Red Sea route up until the 18th century, which is the peak of the Arab slave trade.

21st Century Neo-Slavery in Africa

Slavery never ended in Africa; it only changed its form. The 21st century neo-slavery of Africa is characterised with a kind of ideological and mental control by the so-claimed centre of democracy and human right capital of the world. The new slavery takes the chains off African feet and place it on the mind. Hence, under neo-slavery, Africans are not subjected to slavery by coercion or violence instead, they are diplomatically controlled through those non-African values and systems believed to be of international standard. This idea connotes racism in disguise. In the view of Onyeocha (2007), every new fad or fancy from hairstyles to modes of dancing, from movies to novels, from fashion to modes

of expression, seems to receive indiscriminate enthusiasm in Africa. Africa has turned to a dumping ground for toxic industrial wastes. Sometime ago, hundreds of people in Senegal reportedly died from the inhalation of toxic chemicals deposited in their country. One wonders if Africa is destined to be a dumping ground for industrial, cultural, ideological, behavioural and other types of waste.

The 21st century Africa is an ideological battleground for conflicting ideologies: religious, socio-economic and political. Major world religions, and many minor religions, find their rest in Africa. Whether it is the interplay of exuberance of the Charismatic Movement and religious fundamentalism in Christian religion or the newly rediscovered radicalism and fundamentalism in Islam, or the quietism that comes from the religions of the Far East, there is a ready audience in Africa. Africans thereof, antagonise each other in the name of defending the tenets of alien religions. Just around 2021, in the Northern part of Nigeria, a man identified as Talle Mai Ruwa is set ablaze for alleging insulting Prophet Mohammad. Multi-national Corporations wittingly have converted Africa as a place for cheap raw materials and labour force. What about France which is today known as the unofficial largest supplier of timber in the world but doesn't have a forest. France achieves this fame base on control on its 14 African colonies especially those around the Congo Basin. Even French Billionaire, Vincent Bollore, the CEO on Investment Group controls 16 seaports in West Africa including Ghana's biggest port, Tema Port. The most worrying part is: How much is he paying in taxes? How much these African governments are making?

The African is deemed stark ignorant when it comes to world innovations and ideas. When Madagascar claims to find the cure to Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), non-African countries rejected and criticised it. Madagascar was denied the access to global hearing. In a bid to migrate to developed countries, Africans take all kinds of incredible risks to life. They go there not as explorers or entrepreneurs but as underdogs willing to join the underclass. Sadly, the more efforts Africans make to get there, the more efforts are made to keep them out. The visa requirements are toughened and the fees increased many times over what they were in the past. Those that manage to get in are never allowed a breathing space in the bid to get them out. They are hounded out as economic refugees. The lucky ones who get jobs are paid a fraction of the legal minimum wage. Those of them with skills are forced to apply them at a fraction of their actual worth. Often, at the entrance immigration posts of the United States and many Western countries, Africans

tend to be minutely scrutinised as they try to gain admittance. The controls are more rigorous and sometimes include embarrassing questioning as well as intrusive body searches. The experience for the African is all the more painful as he or she watches other fellow arrivals literally sail by immigration controls with little more than cursory looks from the officials.

The Logic of African Dignity

The rationale in the defence of African dignity in this 21st century neo-slavery centres on the philosophy of being a 'person'. The word 'person' etymologically is a derivation of two Latin words "per" meaning 'through' and 'sonare' meaning 'to sound' traceable to the Greek word 'prosopon.' The verb 'personare' means 'to sound through' and the Greek 'prosopon' means 'see through and out'. Earlier, the word person does not refer to human being in any way but later, to represent man because of his intrinsic worth. In its earliest origins, person is used to indicate the mask worn by actors in a drama. Due to religious festivities and theatrical influences, persona comes to acquire the meaning of a mask in the Graeco-Roman world (Umunakwe, 2017). During religious festivals, masks were used to represent the god or goddess being celebrated. In theatres too, masks were used to dramatize important personalities which are called persona because the actors appear as ghosts or larvae or maniacs (Umunakwe, 2017). Referring one as a person, is similar to being referred to, as a biological being that possesses among other things, a rational, social, moral and metaphysical nature. Hence, person as a term, is a socially constructed category that separates man from other realities.

African is a person. Historians agree that, Africa precisely Egypt and Ethiopia, set-off today's civilisation. The Moors equally excel in many fields but their achievements in the sciences are outstanding. It is in the sciences that the Moors did the most for Europe and the world. For one thing, the Moors are known for their skill in medicine. At the time, Europeans offered no competition at all with Moorish advances in pathology, aetiology, therapeutics, surgery, and pharmacology (Sertima, 2003). The Westerners claim they gave Africa philosophy but most of their scholars came to Egypt to learn philosophy. Unfortunately, international politics has conspired with other systems to confine the African to the lowest rungs of everything. Those who partition Africa do it that with the objective that the African has not woken to see the shine of reason. Western scholars like Hegel, Hitler, Locke, etc. attribute this rational backwardness to colour stereotypes. To them, the colour 'Black', is the lowest among other colours. It a symbol of inferiority and irrationality, thereof,

any black being is inferior and irrational. This is purportedly, the premise that controls African sense of inferiority. The African is not synonymous with the dunce but like other human beings elsewhere that knows and thinks and solves his or own problems. Some Africans like any other human beings might be more talented or less talented than others. Hence, African is not completely characterised by either unlimited genius or irredeemable vice and lack of insight. Africa has in many ways been a paradise and a food basket for greedy nations and individual entrepreneurs with an economic intent (Onyeocha, 2007). It is against the principle of humanity to confine the operational capacity of the African to the level of feeling or, worse still, that of a merely being there. This might result to the detraction from the actual worth of the African.

African scholars like Tempels, Jahn, Mbiti, Gyekye, Edeh, Oruka, Iroegbu, Masolo, Hountondji, Onyeocha, Njoku etc. strongly defend that the African is like a signpost for humanity. On one side of this signpost is boldly written: 'humanity begins here.' On the reverse side of the signpost is written: 'humanity ends here.' No wonder Kaunda (1966) states that: "even though the western world might have its technology, and the eastern world its spiritualism, Africa might be the last place where man can still be man" (p.22). The beauty of this symbolic signpost is that, humanity survives in Africa. As 21st century civilisation runs along the tracks of economic and technological prowess, it is illogical for humanity to marginalise African due to claimed backwardness in Western and Eastern sciences and technologies. Wealth creators because of African economic leakages savage African resources without a thought about the eventual outcome. They forget to know that African is not a causal labourer for menial works. Professionally, the African engages in all kinds of human activities requiring different gradations of intellectual presence of minds or experimental skill and promising varying degrees of reward. Even the unskilled types of engagement abound in Africa just as they abound everywhere. The African does not and cannot truthfully claim to be the best in everything. But the African should not be dismissed as the worst in everything either. Africa and her children can speak to the world and learn from the world through education, the media, and through human interaction like others. They belong fully and squarely to the world as citizens of the world.

These logical propositions are enough to prove that Africans are not just merely there but at every point in time have positive roles to play in the environment in terms of action and thought. They have things going for them in various areas of human experience, just as there are many things that are lacking to them in many aspects of life. Africans are not minor players in the

scheme of things or an afterthought, the dignity of African is deep and original. The dignity of a being comes through its identity. Hence, African dignity is activated through African identity. This notwithstanding, it is worthwhile to state that although African identity is not documented, it does not imply absence of dignity. The originality of African identity is compressed in proverbs, aphorisms and pithy sayings; its philosophicality is not known by writing. To Busia (1963), "the African has not offered learned and divergent disputations to the world in writing, but in his expression in conduct of awe, and reverence for nature, no less than in his use of natural resources, he demonstrates his own epistemology" (p.148).

Conclusion

Though slavery entails that, once someone has established control tantamount to possession, he/she can manage or sell the person controlled. In the annals of history, African has been the significant victim of all forms of slavery, still he retains his dignity as a human being. Africans are not dunce since they prove mastery in everything: academics, administration, economics, sports, music, etc. Africa seems to have continually lost its most valuable members for Europe, America, China and Arabia for migration and quest for greener pastures. The present brain-drain and youth emigration from Africa to the Western countries is not a new phenomenon, but an ancient culture. The young ones who are supposed to stay and improve Africa are those running away from their responsibilities. The result of this irresponsibility to Africa is why the continent is being enslaved and controlled in this 21st century. The blame should not continually be on the slave trade (for which Africa were the primary slave capturers and sellers) nor colonialism. Africans are the true cause of their problems and are the only solution to their problems. Africans must know that they are human beings and should erase every sense of inferiority, weakness and incompetency whenever among western peers. Africa is a continent full of people with creative gift and ingenious talents. Even those in diaspora are making the continent proud in every aspect of human affairs; the likes of Apollo Crews, the professional wrestler who recently defeated his opponent, Ettore 'Big E' Ewen, to become the intercontinental champion, Ngozi Okonjo Iwela, the current boss, World Trade Centre, Burna Boy and Wizkid who recently won Grammy Award in music industry and others. Africans should leave Europe, America, China, etc. for them and throw them out of Africa while returning the Diaspora to help reclaim Africa. Africans should be sensitized to remain home and improve the motherland for change to be.

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