

AFRICAN MUSIC AND AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Today, many informed contemporary scholars are no more ignorant of the place and position of African continent with regard to world scholarship and scholarly enterprise. Africa have been treated and regarded as an unfortunate continent. In spite of the rare privilege of Africa being the cradle of civilization and mother of civilization of all civilizations and the much lauded gained independence, Africa still, in this 21st century, struggles to survive independently, socio-politically and economic wise. Music and philosophy as disciplines, underlined by Africanity or Africanness, are human enterprises each communicating the other. Coming from the chequered historical background of African musical tradition, African Music, in spite of the inherent African predicament, shares in the world musical heritage. Equally, African Philosophy, an offshoot of African philosophical tradition enjoys the privilege of sharing in the world philosophical heritage. Both African music and African philosophy enjoy a differential but complementary relationship. Music enlivens and invigorates the human society embedded within its great lyrical salvaging-message, Philosophy in its stricto sensu, remains the conscience of a reasonable humane and human society. African philosophy is ingrained in African music as seen in reggae music, Africa Unite, one of the popular lyrics of Bob Marley asking Africans to come together so as to fight holy Armageddon in the name of injustice and oppression as well as all forms of corruption. Back to My Roots and Prisoner of Lucky Dube remind us of whom we are amidst the apartheid struggle then. Emancipating Yourself from Mental Slavery will be a philosophical admonition with which Bob Marley lyrics will continue to haunt as one sings, One Love calls for our world to be healed. Through critical analysis method the researcher discovers that African philosophy, as reasoned inquiry within the limits of continental Africa excludes nothing of value especially African Music as it entertains and communicates.

Keywords: African Music, African Philosophy, Music, Philosophy, Reggae

Introduction

Music has been regarded as a universal phenomenon with human preoccupation and animal involvement. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines music as "the art of combining vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression". As a discipline or course in the school system, music is an organized sound. It is an art and most popularly a performing art. The Webster's Collegiate Dictionary Online Edition's definition of music is a typical example as it is "the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity". Etymologically, music with its old English *musike* of the mid-13th century; the old French *musique* of the 12th century; and the Latin version *musica* derives from the Ancient Greek *mousike* literally meaning "(art) of the Muses".

Philosophy is the highest of the human *sciences*, that is, of the sciences which know things by the natural light of reason. Philosophy, etymologically from the Greek Lexicon is *Philos* (Love) and *Sophia* (Wisdom) transliterated *love of wisdom*. To this point, philosophy remains a human science that seeks wisdom and a personal enterprise with an unaided reason. Maritain, J. (2005,72) maintains that Philosophy is *Cognitio rerum per altissimas causas, solar rationis* (science that studies all things in their ultimate and universal principle). It is *scientia rerum per ultima causas*- knowledge of things through their ultimate causes. With its main and minor branches, philosophy studies every aspect of human endeavour with an unaided reasoning. It is worthy of note that neither discipline nor culture, science or arts and every form of humanities and society is devoid of philosophical influence. Taking cognizance of its main branches and other applied areas, Philosophy cuts across every learning and teaching to be known as *Mater Scientia*, Mother Sciences or Knowing. Obenga, T. (1990, 51), in his philosophical discourse writes, "Philosophy has nourished science. It preceded the sciences. Science (Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Political Science, Aesthetics, Logic, Biology, Sociology, etc.), was born of Philosophy". No wonder the Medieval philosophers influenced by the religious innuendoes of their time, based on the chronological coincidence of Medieval philosophical tradition and relationship with the figure of Jesus and the dominating power and influence of His teaching, regarded philosophy as *ancilla theologiae*, handmaid of theology. It is neither by chance nor fate rather by designed implication that every school of learning is crowned finally with PhD, that is, Doctor of Philosophy. Hence, the

nature and place of philosophy in learning and living, societal influence and general directives, is unquestionable.

Appreciation of African Music from African History

The geography of continental Africa shows that the history of Africa begins with the emergence of hominids, archaic humans, that is an anatomically modern human (*homo sapiens*), circa 300–250,000 years ago in East Africa. If we do not understand how vast Africa is as a continent, we may not appreciate the length and breadth of her natural environment and endowment. In line with this, Africa has been regarded as the mother or cradle of ancient civilization with Mesopotamia on the lead. Through years of research, it is accepted that Alkebulan meaning *mother of mankind* remains the original ancient name of Africa. Africa is the most tropical of all continents with five geographic regions as North, South, West, East and Central. The climate and vegetation range from equatorial rain forests, tropical deserts and Savannah grassland to Mediterranean. The Sahara Desert, the largest of its kind anywhere in the world, is over 10.4 million km² North-South is approx. 1800 km and East-West is 5600km. As an acclaimed mother of civilization, the history of Africa is not contentious even though some enlightened but frustrated philosophers like Hegel and Hume declined as such.

In the 1830s the German philosopher G. H. F. Hegel remarked that Africa “is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit.” From Hegel's perspective, Africa is said to be unhistorical; undeveloped Spirit: *Geist* – still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, religions and political constitution. This came with the justification for Europe plundering and ravaging, from exploration, exploitation, slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, capital flow and now debt. Africa has been a victim of misinterpretation since the first African exploration. This remains a form of pedagogy of the oppressed which thwarted African progress leaving it with yet another contemporary great divide in the global south.

This is why Colonizers unfortunately made some of us to believe that before their visit and exploration that Africa was backward, barbarous and uncivilized savages without art and culture. Yet we had Artifacts they took away and kept in their museums. Many of our arts and crafts of men that were not progressive for example, Igbo Ukwu bronze and Mali bronze were carted away into their museums. Africans, traditionally cured many ailments, tapped their palm wine and lived a comfortable life before the colonialists interfered in their

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development and progress. Many of African arts are now decorating European museums while many of African legacies which they removed dot their world and history as they partitioned Africa. Amidst all these about Africa, there remain two Africas: One, the Africa, Europeans created for their selfish gains, the other Africa, the original black Africa, the pride of Africa. The latter is making it possible for contemporary quest for Africans to be or not to be.

History shows that Africans have art and by implication music. Blain Muema in an on-line paper, *A Brief History and background of African Music* asserts that "African music has undergone many and significant changes over the years, as is acknowledged. Traditional music now is likely to be different from African music in the past; neither has African music been associated with certain ethnic groups in the past. Individual musicians, their styles, and their originality have always been significant". Even as African people migrated in large and small groups, they did so with their musical styles and instruments. Equally, most of African music literature is based on western theoretical frameworks, with categories such as African music, world music, global music, and ethnomusicology. Nevertheless, the Africinity of African Music as well as the Musicality of African Music makes this paper *ad rem* as *African Music and African Philosophy* will be dealt with as an effort is made to understand the interplay between the duo.

African Music

Music is an integral part of African life in general. African music is a discipline sharing in the world musical heritage. It is African music because it is done within African and or by Africans outside the Africa Continent. It is African as long the theme or the message is African as such, African music is as a result of the unique African Musical tradition that smacks styles and spans across African continent. African Music, often referred to as Traditional African Music or Music of Africa is as vast and varied as the continent's many regions, nations, and ethnic groups.. Thus, New World Encyclopaedia on a *Music of Africa*, formerly *Music library* explains that:

Africa, and music intersects with every aspect of life, expresses life through the medium of sound. By helping mark the important moments in life, music helps to underscore the divine and eternal value of human life. African music also helps to connect people together in a variety of ways, strengthening the fabric of the community, which in turn reinforces people's commitment to support each other and the community,

toward mutual health and prosperity. Another crucial role of music in Africa is as a mode of communication. Talking drums, signal drums, songs, and the sagas of the historian griots each communicate different types of important information.

African music is as diverse as its cultures and nations, languages and peoples. It has flourished in many indigenous forms as well as shaped by foreign influences. Of great benefits is African music to the existential life of the people that owns it. However, *New World Encyclopaedia on a Music of Africa*, formerly *Music library* reiterates that:

As African society has changed in response to the forces of colonization, independence, and globalization, the role of music changed as well, adapting to the new situation in which the people of Africa find themselves. Though there have been changes in some of the forms of the music, including the infusion of instrument, musical styles, and genres from outside the African continent, music remains very important in Africa today. Also, as Africans travelled from Africa to other parts of the world, both as a result of African slave trade and later migrations, the music and dance forms of the African diaspora have influenced a number of international musical styles and genres.

The current idea of African Music as well as African Philosophy and other African disciplines are simply championed because Africans have come to stay. Most importantly, liturgical music has seen a lot of adaptations or properly put, inculturation with regard to her music becoming soothing for Africans. Iroegbu, P. (1996, 72) envisages this complementarity and inculturational ecclesiology when he writes thus:

African traditional cultures, religion and thought-patterns cannot cohabit side by side with now the arrived Christian religion. An authentic African ecclesiology must dynamically integrates these ...The languages, symbols and ritual expression like *Ofo*, *Ogu*, *colanut* and Music (African Music of course-emphasis mine) are to be used to express Christian truth.

Understanding African Philosophy

African Philosophy traditionally is knowledge of Africa realities and African realisms in their universal principles. *In* Contemporary times, African Philosophy is primarily a *discipline* and then a *movement*. It is more of a

movement as it tries to reclaim its position as a discipline within the world philosophical heritage. It is, therefore, fundamentally a *disciplinary movement* as it tries to rediscover itself within the world philosophical heritage and equally establish itself as such. *In lato sensu*, African Philosophy is that branch of knowledge that grew from African Philosophical Tradition as a philosophy done within and without continental African for humanity as a human enterprise with regard to authorship, scholarship and literature. Moreover, the adjective African qualifies the noun Philosophy and beyond delimiting it, it expands such critical enquiry on the far side of just African. *In stricto sensu*, it is that course that is African and Philosophical within the limits of Africanness and philosophicality or Africanness and Philosophicalness.

Moreover, as a discipline, it is the *love of African wisdom*, that is, *philos Africana sophia*. Iroegbu, P. was very *premier* in giving this succinct definition. In this definition one can read a *kind* of defence as regards African philosophy. This is why for Iroegbu, P., African philosophy is a *philo-sophia*, a *quest for African wisdom*. African Philosophy, therefore, is *scientia rerum per ultima causas* within African realities. It is the search for the unaided authentic human knowledge that is philosophical and African. It is the habit of every wise and reasonable African man.

More so, a reflection with profound application of criticality, analyticity and originality on African thoughts and cultures *will* give credence to Philosophy and rightly put, African Philosophy. However, such profundity in the critical appreciation of African cultural worldviews make of them, veritable moments for African philosophy. Okere (1983, 58-79) was the *primus inter pares* in asserting authoritatively that culture is the foundation of Philosophy by hermeneutically engaging Paul Ricoeur extensively on the existing relationship between culture and philosophy thus:

It is by interpreting the symbols of a culture that one can arrive at reflexion, philosophy. Ricoeur defines reflexion as the connection between the comprehension of signs or symbols and self-comprehension...In a methodical process from culture to philosophy, the movement from symbols to reflective thought, Ricoeur proposes three stages, or levels of interpretation: the phenomenological stage...the hermeneutical stage... and the reflexive stage...Thus for Ricoeur, one can philosophise from culture, or at least from those elements of culture that can be called symbols.

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African Philosophy is Philosophy as it is done in and for Africa and others. It is a by-product of human enterprise on people's culture. It is a philosophical tradition that is African within the mainstream of Philosophy as a systematic study. African Philosophy is the critical and universalizing interpretation of the culture and the worldview of African people by philosophers within and outside African continent. It is philosophy done within African philosophical tradition designating the *corpus* of African philosophical writings. However, African Philosophy like other philosophical traditions has an historical development along the path of human consciousness, critically encountering their realities.

This is against some philosophers' views and philosophical currents trying to demean and oppose the existence of African Philosophy. African Philosophy, therefore, is a systematic study within the limits of the *Africanity* of Philosophy and *philosophicality* of African realities and heritage. Osuagwu, I. M. (1999, 28) in his criteria for the scientific philosophicality and scientific Africanity of African Philosophy was apt to note thus:

African philosophy is at the same time African and philosophical. In and by these terms, we are searching, on the one hand, for the genuine philosophicality, i.e., formal scientific philosophy, of the said African enterprise, and on the other hand, for the authentic scientific Africanity of that scientific philosophy. These two basic scientific criteria make African philosophy to bear the characteristics marks of its particularity and universality.

Philosophicality simply places African Philosophy at par with *philosophia*, which is love of wisdom. To this extent, African Philosophy remains part of the *world philosophical heritage* with one philosophical monoculture though from African *weltannchaunng*. Philosophicality nevertheless prunes African Philosophy of the old socio-cultural bias of existence, of a mere movement of reclaiming lost status and mere sceptical influence with pseudo-philosophical orientations. However, by this singular application of philosophicality, African Philosophy is philosophy *qua* philosophy irrespective of the philosophical traditions and or philosophers' postulations as long as it expresses the needed *love for wisdom* and maintains the search for knowledge with an unaided reason as the most basic instrument within philosophical innuendoes. Onebunne, J. I. (2019a,19) summarily opined thus:

Philosophicality, as a basic scientific criterion makes African philosophy to bear the characteristic mark of its universality. Hence, echoing Osuagwu,

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I.M., therefore, in line with this understanding, African philosophy is, therefore, a universalization, a universal vocation, ordination, destination and determination of and in the African particular.

Equally, the *Africanity* of African philosophy is worth the salt. Scientific *Africanity* is a complementary principle in the definition of African Philosophy. *Africanity* is a criterion that defines African Philosophy properly with some parameters. According to Osuagwu, I.M. (2001, 24): “by its *africanity*, it is a particular, that is to say, a particular reflection, concentration, concretization, contextualization, experience, identification and differentiation of the philosophic, scientific universal”. *Africanity* tries to solve the controversy and the project of African Philosophy by going beyond the boundaries of the geographical Africa. Within the geographical context, *Africanity* expresses what it takes for any Philosophy to be qualified, identified and differentiated as specifically and typically African. It contextualizes African experiences, life and reality within the realm of Philosophy. For I. Osuagwu, I. M. (2001, 26) therefore:

Scientific *Africanity* refers to a set of African parameters or factors which include nature and culture, persons, places, times, events, doctrine, text and methods involved in philosophic enterprises so designated. These factors and many more constitute the common requirements by which a given subject matter is said to be African.

Borrowing an impressive idea from J. Kinyongo, Osuagwu, I. M. (1999, 28) writes that “African Philosophy is carried on at the same time according to philosophy’s general scientific exigencies and Africa’s particular natural and cultural factors. In this cooperation, and mutual integration, Philosophy and *Africanity* look into each other to detect, engage and determine the scientifically valid and available in themselves”. African Philosophy therefore, has a share in the mainstream of philosophical traditions growing as a human enterprise as a result of critical interpretation of tradition and cultural realities. Okere, T. (1983, 38) asserts that “all philosophy is essentially an historical and time bound interpretation of being”. Amidst all sorts of bizarre and false ideas on the capability of African man to philosophize, questioning the depth of their philosophy, one can boast of African philosophical scholarship as well as African authorship. However, Iroegbu (1994, 116) an optimistic contemporary philosopher was very apt in defining African philosophy as:

The reflective inquiry into the marvels and problematics that confront one in African world, in view of producing systematic explanation and sustained responses to them. It is an inquiry with two aspects: *philosophical* and *African*.

However, Iroegbu was academically astute enough to reiterate that “African philosophy is philosophy done in an African context...the different aspects and complexities of existence that challenge him as an African person. In this respect, every philosophy is contextual philosophy”. For Iroegbu, P, therefore, these philosophical concepts alone “are what we generally call the African philosophical *philosophemes*: raw materials for philosophical reflection, questioning, responses, analysis and eventual synthesis”. In this statement of fact, Iroegbu, P. continue to echo his teacher Okere Theophilus who had earlier conceived the idea of *philosophemes* as deposit of conceptual data or realities for philosophical enterprise.

Recognising Contemporary African Music

Traditional African musical forms, in spite of their diversity, is rhythmic with an entertaining melodious and harmonious air amidst a body movement that scintillates as such with the whole person. African music always informs and communicates. Blain Muema reiterates as such, “African music is often used to transmit messages and ideas; and to record and recount historical events. Today than ever, it is good to know that there is an Africanization of every form of music within and outside African as long as it suits our musicians, with their local languages and styles, versions and presentations. One can equally allude that Africans have natural disposition to sounds and beatings. This plays out as every African culture is very much in-tune to a musical style as they people responds easily to every African musical beat.

Modern African Music is highly influenced by Traditional African Music. Contemporary African Music is equally vast, vibrant and dynamic. African Continent can boast of multicultural popular and musical genres, from Reggae to Afrobeat. Equally, Contemporary African music continues to developed more national musical and international genres, emerging throughout the continent, assimilating and adopting global musical styles such as jazz, Rhythm and Beats (R&B), hip hop, rock'n'roll, country music and Reggae as they make their impacts on today's African musicians. Successful musicians are usually the one who successfully blend some of these foreign musical styles with the musical traditions of their different African countries. Contemporary African music

continues to africanize global musical genres while retaining our traditional ones even with a tincture of westernisation. At this point a special reference is made to Reggae as an African genre.

African Philosophy of Reggae

Reggae is a brand of musical genre, very original to Africa. Reggae is *African Spec* and African made. Reggae is a musical genre developed by Jamaicans of African ancestry in the late 1960s. Reggae bands incorporate musical idioms from many different genres, including *mento* (a Jamaican folk genre), *ska*, *rock steady*, *calypso*, and *American soul music and rhythm and blues*. Etymologically, Reggae comes from the term “rege-rege” which means “rags” or “ragged clothes”, and this gives the first clue into the story behind reggae music. Another source had it that reggae is said to derive from the term “streggae,” which is a derogatory term meaning a woman of low morals. The former seems to align with what reggae portrays all along. Reggae was recognized by UNESCO and added to the list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2018. Reggae has been a medium for sending message to the world condemning the ongoing inequities and forms of injustice that affect not only Black people, but people everywhere. At the front of that worldwide trend was Jamaica’s own planetary icon: Bob Marley and the Wailers. Often referred as Rastafari, Reggae bloomed on its mission of salvaging all from the shackles man’s inhumanity against mankind.

Rastafari, sometimes called Rastafarianism, is a religion that developed in Jamaica during the 1930s. It is classified as both a new religious movement and a social movement by scholars of religion. Rastafarianism has symbols associated with it as *the Lion of Judah*, *Pan-African colors*, *dreadlocks*, and *ganja*. The Online Merriam-Webster defines Rastafarianism as a religious movement among Black Jamaicans that teaches the eventual redemption of Black people and their return to Africa, employs the ritualistic use of marijuana, forbids the cutting of hair, and venerates Haile Selassie as a god. The boast alongside Rastafarianism was dramatic. Jake Homiak in *Folkslife Magazine* recalls thus:

Like so many other things that have altered the course of Jamaican history, the birth of reggae music would require a catalyst from beyond the island’s shores. It came in the form of the three-day state visit of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I to Jamaica in April 1966. Emperor Haile Selassie I—deified by the Rastafari from the early 1930s as their God and King—had attracted the support of the entire Black world when Italy invaded his kingdom in 1935. He arrived in Jamaica not merely as the biblically

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enthroned monarch of Africa's oldest state, but as a champion of racial equality and as the recent founding chairman of the Organization of African Unity (1963), the organization then spearheading efforts at decolonization on the continent.

The name Rastafari is taken from Ras Tafari, the title and first name of Haile Selassie I (Ras **Tafari** emperor of Ethiopia) before his coronation. In Amharic, Ras, literally "head", is an Ethiopian title equivalent to prince or chief, while the personal given name Täfäri means one who is revered. Reggae from the root and origin is a movement like African philosophy is. Onebunne J. explained this in his lecture notes on African Philosophy thus:

As a movement, African Philosophy, rooted in and springing from African philosophical tradition, is a cursory look into the problematiqués and prospects of Africa as part of the world philosophical heritage. As a movement African philosophy is an effort at rediscovering and recovering all lost status as a result of the stolen legacies with regard to philosophy and its origin. As a movement, African Philosophy searches for the authentic knowledge that is Philosophy and African within and or without the African cultural world-view.

Reggae was made in African, for Africans and her invaders rooting Africans of their natural and human resources. Reggae became a message with *onuma*, that is *frustration* as Chimakonam, J., would opine with regard to the effects of colonialism and racialism and other bumps of African predicaments orchestrated by many years of doubt of its historical existence that is greatly shrouded in controversies and submerged in conspiracies of lies against the African continent and Africans. There other scholarly works that have shown great interest in Reggae as African music and movement as: Marcus Garvey's *Garveyism: Back to Africa* and Barry Chevannes' *Rastafari: Root and Ideology*.

African Philosophy Redefining African Music

African music is as vast as the continent of Africa as well as the cultures and languages and people of Africa, in and beyond geographical Africa. Having come to stay and influencing the world with its message, African Music becomes the conscience of the society with its nature of entertainment. An Online paper by Lia Peralta published in *Save the Music Foundation* on "How does the music affect the Society" has it that, "music, as a cultural right, may aid in the promotion and protection of other human rights. It can help in the healing

process, dismantling walls and boundaries, reconciliation, and education. Around the world, music is being used as a vehicle for social change and bringing communities together”.

African Philosophy can only redefine music as African Philosophy of Music. African Philosophy of music is an applied philosophy as well as a Philosophy of Arts under Practical Philosophy as a major broad division of Philosophy. African Philosophy of Music, therefore, is a reasoned inquiry into the role of philosophy in Music creating musical transformation. It delimits excess and encourages musical creativity especially as there are many vulgarism in music in general. As some of African music are gradually losing the lustre and literary genre. Even though music has been defined as an organised sound but a traditional African music is beyond an organized sound to a meaningful organized sound that invigorates as well as entertains amidst a specific rhythm.

Today, many contemporary African music has lost the lustre or the musical genre for which music is made. Many of what is called music today do not entertain nor inform rather they exalt a kind of titanic moral uproar. Some of the lyrics often are incoherent if not for the sake of the beatings that have a kind of rhythm.

Conclusion

African music and African philosophy take cognizance of the interplay in Traditional African Music amidst other world musical heritage. The global movement of western or world music influences African music as such as musicians continues to experiment on African Musical compositions and instrument mixed with international style of music. This gives room to Africanization of music or Africanized style of musical genres. With African philosophy as an applied philosophy on African rhythm and sounds as well as on African lyrics and instruments, African Music will have a great influence and also be a major factor in the shaping of contemporary African music and reshaping of traditional African music. To this end African Music will be very significant with African philosophy qua tale.

African traditional music which was greatly prevalent before the era of the exploration, through slavery unto colonization, lost most of its glorified genre to those unspeakable moments in which Africa was plundered. Traditional African music lost its originality and finesse as a result of such reticulation and often

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regarded as assimilation. The era of and after independence became another good moments for the marriage and total absorption even with the local languages between Traditional African music and Western music with regard to musical genre, styles, instruments and new varieties given birth to Highlife, Afrobeats and many more. More so, in the 21st century, African music has simply developed into many musical facets with many global and successful blend of musical styles. With the methodological moment of proper hermeneutics, one can dependably and realistically infer that African Philosophy is Philosophy with African source and is nourished from African culture as its cultural reservoir and primary critical nourishment. African music in its entirety remains a value in any functional African society and equally tries to address the realities in and around Africa from the point of view of bringing order and harmony, bringing a kind of equipoise in one's personal life and existential living.

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