

ON THE NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF AFRICAN LOGIC

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Abstract

In order to understand and know the way of life of a people, their modus operandi and modus vivendi, one must first of all study and understand how they think and reason. The reason and thought of a people originate from their ontology. Hence, every people's systematic way of reasoning explains the cosmological interaction peculiar to them; assessing a people, independent of their logic, results in misjudgment and misunderstanding. African Logic is thus an imperative that explains and accounts for the cosmological experiences of the African people. If not studied, African ontology, African World-view, African Metaphysics and their nature of connectedness maybe misunderstood and misrepresented. Examining the Nature and Structure of African Logic, is an essay that explains how unique and peculiar their reason is in connection to African world view. It does not conflict or rule out the possibility of Western logic on Africans instead, it helps Western logic to be able to assess and define African system of existence and the operational moods of Africans as different from the Western thoughts and World-view.

Key Words: *African Logic, African World-View, Connectedness.*

Introduction

Human existence in an African situation can better be understood when we understand the African ontology and world view. These world-view deals with the way Africans perceive, think and react in their dealings and culture. The ontology, explains how beings in African perspective react and interact in their varying culture. It is interesting to note that in an African setting, both spirits, the living

have a way they interact. Ijiomah affirms this when he says “all beings exist in a dual and interrelated fashion. The sensible are not wholly sensible. Things exist as phenomena of visible and invisible realities. This dual but interwoven existence...” (120). Thus, it shows the connectedness and relationship that exist in African system and belief between the living and the spirits.

Following this dualism in African ontology, one begins to wonder how possible this can be. How can the spirit co-exist and interact with the living? These questions can only be understood in the study and understanding of African Logic. It is the system of reason and thoughts within the African perspective and world-view. Understanding Africans and knowing how they interact is not by encountering Africans alone but by knowing their beliefs, world-view and how they reason. By doing this, this connectedness can be understood. From a western perspective, this could be considered as contradictory in nature because what is not, can never in any way, be that. Thus, whatever is not, is not and whatever is, is. This is the law of identity. But in African cosmology, a thing cannot be, and in some context, that thing which is not, can play a vital role in achieving a significant result. All this is born out of the connectedness that exists between the two worlds. As such, African Logic does not emphasize contradiction but contraries. Contraries because every reality is relevant to each other and there is always complementarity among and with every reality.

Finally, this work shall critically examine the purpose why Africans have connectedness between the spirit world and physical world. It shall discuss the need to understand the culture of Africans in order to know how they operate. This can only be known when African ways of reason is known and understood. That is the study of African Logic.

Why African Logic

The systematic study of the way people reason, shows the ability to comprehend and handle the affairs of such people. Therefore, the basic notion of Logic generally, enables the systematic understanding of humans. It enables one to be able to apply human knowledge and experience in any circumstance or situation one is faced with. This study of the African people and how they interact cannot be understood using western Logic. Western Logic does not understand and have not done justice to African world-views. Western Logic promotes Contradictions as opposite whereas, within the African world-view, it is contraries that can complement each other and mutually co-exist.

That we may understand African thoughts effectively, Asouzu (2007:375), says “in order that human interpersonal relationship can attain that level of refinement expected of it, there is need to offer viable mechanisms for the transformation of maxims into universal imperatives.” This viable mechanism is what Africans have come up with to help understand how Africans function. This is the African Logic. It describes and cuts across the African world-view, thus explains effectively the way of life of the Africans. African Logic is the only reason Africans can comfortably account for the relationship between spirit and human, truth and false in a symbiotic manner. It refers to the balancing and stability gotten when realities come together. For Ijiomah, it results in “unity of contraries harmonising each other.” When there is a balancing in reality there is functionalism but when one overshadows one, there is a problem and not Harmonious co-existence.

Through African Logic, we are made aware of the African ontology that explains how Africans have and believe in hierarchy of beings. At the Apex is the supreme God called *Chukwu* in Igbo. Next in the rank are ancestors, which Africans consider as head of clans. They

are ruling forces and protectors of the community. Thus, for the Africans, nothing happens by chance “Every change is caused.” (Ozumba, 17). Hence, the idea of chance is reflected to ignorance. For Ozumba, “what we call chance is our ignorance of the series of actions and reactions that have given rise to the given event.” With Western Logic, these realities could be termed fallacious and unreasonable. African Logic becomes a sine-qua-non and ready tool in dealing with the African world view.

Nature and Structure of African Logic

When we term it African Logic, it does not imply way of reasons from Africans alone but it demonstrates a method through which realities within African perspectives could be understood. It helps to open the rationality of those who do not know African values and ontology to be well orientated. Importantly, all proponents of African Logic, aver it as a system that complements realities. Asouzu in his *Ibuanyidanda* 2007, “everything that exist, serves as a missing link to reality”, connotes complementarity. Ijiomah in his *Harmonious Monism*, 2014, says Harmonious Monism, brings about complementarity. By complementarity, it refers to the balancing and stability gotten when realities come together. It results in “unity of contraries harmonising each other.” Finally, Chimakonam In his book titled *Ezumezu...*, 2019, avers that in African logic;

Where two standard values are treated as sub-contraries rather than contradictories as in Lukasiewicz and Kleene, the complementary mode where they converge becomes a truth glut. This is because the complementary mode (ezumezu) is a distinct value in itself where the other two standard values ezu and izu converge and complement. But this convergence does not lead to a synthesis where the two values lose their identities, it is a tentative mode which disintegrates

by means of a conversational mechanism called creative struggle to re-instate each truth value in their different contextual modes.

Unlike the western Logic, there is no law that permits complementarity or harmonious bond or an opposing value acting as missing link to the other. It sees the other opposing value as contradiction to the other.

The structure and nature of African logic is that which tolerate contextualism. In contextual approach we refer to situations and circumstances where T can be true in a context and in another context, that same T can be False. According to Chimakonam, “Strict semantic evaluations in African thought are read contextually ... In contextual semantics, that which is true; is true only in a context, it could be false in another” (106). Contrary to Western world-view, it is against the Law of Contradiction that states that; A cannot be A and B at the same time. It explains reality only in two varying point. A thing is either A or it is not A, as different from the African system.

African logic accommodates the supernatural realities, transcendental realities and physical realities. It presents them in a manner and nature that reality is one and indivisible. From the argument of Harmonious Monism as a system of African Logic, there is a communal relationship between the spiritual and the physical. “For the Africans, each reality, whether spiritual or physical, appears and disappears into and takes the nature of the opposite reality” (Ijiomah, 118), thereby confirming relationship of these two worlds in the Yourba cosmology as unifying world where both realities complement each other in their actions. According Oladipo:

*In spite of its supernatural
underpinning...nature for the Yoruba people is*

an integrated whole in which all forces and power-human and non-human, physical and quasi-physical- interact in a manually re-enforcing manner. There is thus in Yoruba world –view, like that of many other African people, a sense of order and continuity of experience. It is this sense which underpins the people’s being that everything is ultimate explicable in both the animate and inanimate realms (149-158).

In African ontology, Africans believe in the hierarchy of beings and the existence of sprite even in the manifestation of affairs in the physical world. This is the extent in which African logic uses the third level of its logic to relate the complementary roles of both physical and spiritual realities.

Scholars views on the Nature of African Logic

The views by different African philosophers on African logic would assist readers to digest without difficulty the nature and structure of African Logic. In his article titled “The Possibility of African Logic”, Etuk raised salient issues beginning with a rhetorical question on what African logic involves:

Could logic be in superstition and myths and folk tales and oral traditions and religious rituals which are common features of Africa? Perhaps not exactly in that crude sense; but then that is the reason why this paper is flying a kite. For it is my desire to stimulate the thinking of African philosophers (by which I mean philosophers of African origin, rather than scholars who specialize on African philosophy) along the lines of whether or not there is African logic (99-100).

Etuk's position though rhetorical, draws our attention towards what and how African Logic laws work. This work is been understood from this statement that African Logic as a system of right reason based on the African ontology can account for and provide understanding to folktales, oral traditions and religious rituals. In fact, it answers the questions of those who ask if there is African logic, as well as explain to them, how African logic takes into cognizance her traditional values and tales in building African Logic. Although one begins to ask if every tribe may have her own logic since, every tribe has her tradition. In response to this, it is necessary to note that African logic, seriously considers those basics that cuts across all African culture and ontology to be able to have her unique logic.

Also, Asouzu in his book *Ibuanyidanda* (2007), proposes that African logic is complementary rather than contradictory in nature. "This is because they are firmly anchored on the one indivisible principle of non-contradiction; a principle that shares the character of being in its essential dynamism as it is expressible as missing links" (311). Asouzu's argument of complementarity, points out that the nature of African logic varies from the bifurcating Aristotelian logic that emphasizes contradiction. For Asouzu, every reality is a missing link of reality. Missing link shows that no one reality opposes the other. It explains that all realities are necessary in existence. Thus,

The basic ideas of complementary reflection can be systematically applied to all areas of human experience and knowledge both theoretically and practically, in metaphysics, science, technology, in ethics, in epistemology, logic, in politics, in religion, in Law, in International relations, in situations of dialogue and polylog, in in negotiation etc. in all these areas, one is concerned with understanding being in its essentiality

as something fundamentally complementary in constitution. Such understanding is the capacity of the mind to intuit missing links in complementary harmonious relationship in view of the attainment of the joy of being (311).

This complementary view of Asouzu, possibly clarifies justifications for the harmony that exist in African logic. It talks about contraries between values that do not fit into the same circumstance instead of as contradiction. It is in these contraries that Chimakonam considers his Ezumezu African logic as dynamic (Ezumezu, 106). X-raying the dynamism of African logic and accommodative nature of African logic, Chimakonam in his book *Ezumezu* (2019:105), accepts that truth and false, complement and its character content dependence, can be false or truth. More so, he adds:

In Ezumezu logic where two standard values are treated as sub-contraries rather than contradictories as in Lukasiewicz and Kleene, the complementary mode where they converge becomes a truth glut. This is because the complementary mode (ezumezu) is a distinct value in itself where the other two standard values ezu and izu converge and complement. But this convergence does not lead to a synthesis where the two values lose their identities, it is a tentative mode which disintegrates by means of a conversational mechanism called creative struggle to re-instate each truth value in their different contextual modes. The interpretation of the third value is the “complement” or “complemented” and is read roughly as ‘it is known that it could be both true and false (106).

This is the dynamism of *Ezumezu* and African logic complementarity at large. It shows the tripartite nature of African

Logic. This system of reason, emphasizes contraries, complementarity rather than contradiction, opposite and negation of values. More so, it explains that even in its complementary form, where value T and value F at some point can harmonize, it does not reap them off as independent standard value T or value F.

According to Pantaleon Iroegbu (1994:135), “the logic question in African philosophy must address specific African conceptual framework that is different from western”. This framework observed by Iroegbu, are the salient points Etuk mentioned in the early part of this essay, when he mentioned those things that make up African Metaphysics such as, folktales, oral tradition etc. hence, for Iroegbu, when these frameworks are well grasped in African Logic, the means and manner of explaining African activities without bias, is possible. It affirms Uduma Oji’s words that “logic is an indispensable and basic appurtenance of African world view. Any proper and genuine question raised around African philosophy must therefore admit that Logic is a fundamental aspect of African thought” (280).

From the foregoing, we have been able to deduce that African logic just like western or Aristotelian Logic, is a systematic and organised way of reason. It is the method through which right reason is understood and it stems from the world view of such people. In difference, African Logic is dynamic as proposed by Ezumezu and it is complementary in nature. African Logic like any other logic has considered carefully the African world view and Ontology of the African people to be able to explain without fallacies reasons for occurrences in Africa cosmology.

The belief in spirits and supernatural realities and their ability to play a role even in our physical world, shows the communal and inter-

connectedness that exist in the African cosmology. In circumstances of this nature, without the third value of complementarity as used by Asouzu, or Harmonious Monism as suggested by Ijiomah or the sub-contraries that is known as Ezumezu in Chimakonam's postulation, two-valued logic of Aristotle, would run into crises because it would be unable to explain such realities. Hence, to be able to understand the African realities, one needs to know how African Metaphysics and ontology operate. It is through this that African Logic bears in relevance and essence.

Conclusion

Reading from the different authors and scholars and their systematic way of reasoning for the Africans, it is really crucial we observe that all talk about three valued system of logic and this third value, plays a complementary role. There also accept that Africans world view and Ontology, differ from that of the west as such, not all about the western Logic can account for happenings in Africa existence. This is possible too because Africans generally hold and believe in communalism as a way of life and this communal living among them, follows even to the ancestors and spirits. Thus, Ijiomah says African Logic is the relationship between and among realities. For realities could be material, physical or spiritual.

Drawing from this, we can say that African logic in its strict sense is broader than western Logic. It accommodates both the physical realities and transcendental realities. It does not emphasize contradiction instead it promotes contraries hence, the reason for complementarity. It accepts situations where both T and F can unify to form a reality. In this Asouzu talks about every reality being a missing link of another reality. As such, African logic is dynamic, Harmonious and accommodating. It can be seen as a method of the

African people, as well as their systematic principles in the ways of African thoughts.

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