

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE RIGHT TO CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper argues that promoting the right to cultural heritage preservation in Nigeria will help and boost a sustainable tourist industry. One of the important disciplines that can help in the promotion of this right is African Philosophy. African Philosophy as a sub-discipline in philosophy and as a discipline by its own right is concerned with critical reflection on African realities. Cultural heritage preservation is a group right. Both individuals, social and religious groups, and the state need to promote this right. Scholars, teachers, practitioners, and students of African Philosophy have a serious obligation to promote this right. From the birth of academic discourse on the reality and existence of African Philosophy, African cultural heritage had been highlighted to counteract western hegemonic discourse on Africa. A critical analytic and hermeneutic method is used to break open the issues involved in this paper. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) enunciates in article 31 that indigenous peoples have a right to having their cultural heritage maintained, protected, and developed. The UNDRIP maintains that States have a duty to ensure that this right is recognized and protected. The paper finds and concludes that it is important this right is preserved.

Keywords: African Philosophy, Group rights, cultural rights, cultural heritage, preservation, and Nigeria.

Introduction

Culture is a quintessential characteristic of human beings. It is human beings who create culture; non-human animals don't create a culture. Culture can generally be defined as the totality of a people's way of life inclusive of their arts, sciences, technologies, religions, agriculture, food, and diverse ways of interacting with their environments. Whatever human creates in the process of their interactions with their environment becomes their cultural heritage. While some cultural heritages both tangible and non-tangible ones are more valuable than others, some are of lesser significance. For continuity of the human race and transmission of values from generation to generation, humans need to preserve their cultural heritages. If this is not done the basis for continuity of the human community will be lacking.

Preserving and promoting one's cultural heritage is a human and group right. There is an obligation placed on states and other bodies to guarantee and ensure that the right to culture and cultural heritage preservation is preserved. A central argument of this paper is that scholars,

writers, and all those interested in African Philosophy ought to promote the right to cultural heritage preservation. The issue of African cultural heritage need to feature prominently in African Philosophy, after all to a high degree African Philosophy is hermeneutics of African culture. It should be kept in mind that cultural heritage preservation is essential for the survival of every people. Through cultural preservation values, norms, ethics, rites of passage, histories, languages, symbols, and other things that make a people is passed on to future generation.

The thesis of the paper will be pursued by presenting an analysis of terms, doing a literature review/ and theoretical orientation. The task of African Philosophy in preserving cultural heritage in Nigeria will also be examined.

Conceptual Analysis

The phrases needing explication here are “cultural heritage preservation,” and “African Philosophy.” For the International Council on Monuments and Sites (2002) the terms cultural heritage are used to describe the various ways of life that a community had developed from time passed and are transmitted to present and future generations. These ways of life include their values and expression of arts forms, practices, customs, places and objects. Cultural heritage can be tangible or non-tangible. It includes the spiritual and religious resources of a people. It includes their entire cultural ways of life in the food they eat, the way they farm, their sciences and technologies, etc. Tangible aspects of cultural heritage include the built environment, the natural environment, and artefacts. Non-tangible aspects include their values, beliefs, laws, etc. United Nations Scientific Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2017) says that Cultural Heritage (CH) includes tangible cultural heritage which in turn includes moveable cultural heritage (such as sculptures, coins, paintings and manuscripts), immovable cultural heritage (such as archaeological sites, monuments, etc), underwater cultural heritage (such as underwater ruins and cities, shipwrecks, etc); intangible cultural heritage (performing arts, rituals, oral traditions); and natural heritage (cultural landscape, physical, geological or geographic formations).

According to Franchi (2019) cultural heritage is a people’s shared communal bond representing their history, identity, past, present and indicative of the future passed on from generation to generation. ScienceDirect (2019) cites Christoph Brumann (from *the International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*) who writes that: Cultural heritage means moveable and immovable artefacts, knowledge items, sites that a society deems worthy of conscious conservation because of their values. Matthes (2018) notes that the concept of cultural heritage is a nebulous and broad one, and citing Kersel and Luke says: “it” is something that someone or a collective considers to be worthy of being valued, preserved, catalogued, exhibited, restored, admired.” Cultural heritage preservation refers to all the actions, activities and processes

that are carried out to prolong and keep from degradation of cultural heritages.

African Philosophy in this paper is understood as critical evaluation, appraisal, and critique of the African traditions, cultures, realities and the African experience. The two prominent schools in African Philosophy are those who see philosophy as a universal human experiences of all peoples and cultures and it has been present in African from the dawn of civilization and can be found not only in the contemporary reflections of African philosophers but also in their ethno philosophies (cultural beliefs, customs and ways of life). Belonging to this schools are Placid Tempels, Joseph Omeregbe, C.S. Momoh, J.S Mbiti, etc. The other school sees philosophy in a very particularistic manner and that it is the product of rationality and critical thinking rooted in analytic and argumentation. For this school ancient African traditional thoughts and cultural beliefs cannot constitute philosophy. Those who belong to this school are Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Houndtoudji, etc. This paper is of the opinion following Omeregbe that philosophy is a reflective experience and does not have to follow western categories of argumentation. The Greek philosopher Aristotle showed that philosophy began in wonder, that being the case wondering at the universe and postulating about the universe from that wondering is philosophic. Tersely, as Etim 2013 notes: "African philosophy... a critical reflection on the total experience of the African" (p. 13). By its nature of reflecting over all of African realities, it behoves it to be concerned about cultural heritage preservation in Africa.

Literature Review and Theoretical Orientation

Onyima (2016) describes Nigerian cultural heritage as endangered by "human activities such as trafficking and exportation of Nigerian arts, thefts and looting of museums, vandalism, iconoclasm, Christianity, civilization, commerce, change, and developmental projects among others" (p. 273). Anazi (2010) focuses on the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage by noting the impact of globalization and the need for librarians, archivists and museum professionals to rise up to the challenge. Oyinloye (2018) is concerned with the preservation of cultural heritages in Nigerian museum using the National Museum at Oron as a case study. He shows that the museum is facing challenges and calls on the National Commission for Museums and Monuments to come to the aid of the Oron museum "by providing conservation laboratory, modern equipment and facilities to improve the level of conservation" (p. 28). Ekwelem, Okafor and Ukwoma (2011) discuss the need to digitalize cultural heritage using library and information services. Anasi et al. (2013) devotes their study to the preservation of women's cultural heritage in Nigerian libraries. In this study they revealed that in terms of virtual forms, materials on women cultural heritage cannot be found in large quantities. They write that: "Consequently, there is need to create more awareness of the need to develop mechanisms to collect and preserve women's cultural heritage information materials." In their study they recommended

attending to the adverse climatic conditions, capacity building and fiscal commitment to women cultural heritage preservation. And they also show that people in the localities of valuable cultural heritages such as Sukur kingdom and Osun Oshogbo sacred grove lack adequate knowledge of their values.

Ayaji (2009) while highlighting the importance of cultural heritage to human life, national integration in Nigeria, states that there is need to promote cultural virtuous values to enhance economic growth. Arua et al. (2019) concern in their paper is on the endangerment and destruction of cultural heritage in Nigeria. They aver that tangible cultural heritage have been plundered and stolen and taken abroad for sale. Greed, religious beliefs, ignorance, conflicts and neglects have also contributed to degradation of cultural heritage. All these have negative effects for civilization as cultural values and norms are lost in the process. In Omeluzor, Iman and Bamidele (2014) the attention is on the imperative of information communication technology in African cultural heritage preservation. They equally state that attention should be paid to rural libraries in preserving African culture; there should be digitization of recorded oral culture. Chidozie and Ayibainewoufini (2014) using the Lagos Eyo festival as a case study argue for governments harnessing the potential tourist benefits in the festival to promote nation building, national consciousness and awareness. In Endong (2019) the focus is on how modernization and globalization threatens cultural heritage in Nigeria and Cameroon. Abara (n.d) shows that cultural heritages such as arts galleries, antiquities, monuments have been destroyed by violent conflicts and conventions regarding protection of cultural heritage are hardly adhered to in Nigeria.

It is clear from the above literature review that much work has been done in the area of cultural heritage preservation. It becomes necessary then to state while this paper is still necessary. The fact is that none of the works above treats the issue from the perspective of human rights and none examines the role that African Philosophy can play in this regard. A Google search on the phrase, "African Philosophy and the Right to Cultural Heritage Preservation in Nigeria" produced no direct article that discusses this issue from a right perspective or states the role of African Philosophy. Results were almost the same results that came from a search of cultural heritage preservation in Nigeria.

The paper will discuss its subject matter bearing in mind the theoretical framework of functionalism. On a surface level, the word, "function" means as Haralambos, Holborn, and Heald (2004) states: "The concept of 'function' in the functionalist analysis refers to the contribution of the part to the whole. More specifically, the function of any part of society is the contribution it makes to meeting the functional prerequisites of the social system. Parts of society are functional in so far as they maintain the system and contribute to its survival" (p. 938). Functionalism is the quest for functional aspects of society, though on rare occasions, Haralambos, Holborn

and Heald (2004) affirm they also speak of what is dysfunctional, meaning not aiding in the maintenance of society. Both Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), founding fathers of sociology featured functionalist analysis in their work prominently. The sociologist Emile Durkheim who lived from 1858 to 1917 developed it in greater detail.

In the functionalist perspective society is one social group that should be seen as one system. Like an organism it is made up of various parts and all the parts are essential and necessary for the functioning of the organism. All the parts function for the good of the whole. Society is the object and subject of analysis in these functionalist perspectives. All the individual parts function in an inter-related and cooperative manner to enhance the good of the whole body, in this case society.

Culture is an essential of society. Every society or community has a culture. It is indeed true that all of society is culture. Yet culture can still be singled out as the subject of discussion. Cultural heritage is vital to the functionality of the Nigerian society. Without cultural heritages being preserved in Nigeria there will be no Nigerian society. It is through preservation of cultural heritages that the values, norms, mores, laws of the Nigerian society are passed on from generation to generation. Cultural heritage has a role to play for the wellbeing and welfare of the society. Without cultural heritage the Nigerian society will be dysfunctional and disordered. Cultural heritage binds a society together, gives a sense of collective belonging, affinity, solidarity, and communal identity. Cultural heritage preservation contributes to the health of the Nigerian society.

Imperative of Cultural Heritage Preservation for Tourism

The United States Embassy in the Philippines notes that: "Cultural heritage is central to protecting our sense of who we are. It gives us an irrefutable connection to the past – to certain social values, beliefs, customs and traditions, that allows us to identify ourselves with others and deepen our sense of unity, belonging and national pride." A people's cultural heritage gives them a sense of identity and purpose. It gives them a sense of connectedness to this inter-generational story. Luciani (2017) aver that: "For many communities, wellbeing and prosperity are defined, in part, by an active connection to their cultural and spiritual heritage, often tied to geographic sites." Ekwelem, Okafor and Ukwuma (2011) cite Williams saying, "preservation of cultural heritage resources is essential to sustainable development. It recognizes the importance of cultural continuity and of human history in nourishing social cohesion, a sense of self, of belonging, and of place in a context within which to understand the past and to contemplate the future."

Cultural heritage that is preserved should be opened up for world tourism. Tourism is a major human activity. Countries like Israel, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, South Africa, etc earn millions of dollars yearly from tourists. What people go to see in all these places are ancient cultural

sites, beautiful natural landscape, etc. There is need then to enhance cultural heritage tourism. IGI Global (2019) writes that cultural heritage tourism refers to people travelling to places of where cultural heritage have been preserved to experience and delight in those heritage. It includes travelling to listen and reminisce in stories from the past and the lessons to be derived from them. Cultural heritage tourism is crucial for every group of people. There are many benefits from tourism. These benefits include: contribution to national income, source of employment, educational, and psychological wellbeing. Okoli (2017) shows that tourism helps in economic development as it fosters investments, infrastructural developments of the destinations and boost local industries. Other authors such as Anunobi, Anyanwu and Egere (2017) corroborate the importance of tourism by arguing that it helps in regional economic growth, job creation, reduction of economic inequalities, and diversification of the economy.

It will be difficult to preserve cultural heritage especially the tangible ones without money. Great sites of historical value, natural landscapes, natural history museums, and others need money and financial resources. Think of the massive damage that can be done to tangible cultural heritage from natural weather and climatic conditions. Natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, tsunami, and even global warming can either wipe away or destroy cultural tangible artefacts. Money is needed to protect sites and landscape from the disasters mentioned above. Tourism is a rich source of revenue that will help in preserving cultural heritage sites. Through fees and charitable contributions money can be raised to preserve such sites.

Cultural heritage is important for through it people can learn from the past as they hear stories and are instructed about the past at cultural sites and locations. People can learn braveness and courage from the heroes and great persons of the past. People feel inspired when they hear stories of great courage from the past. Writing of cultural rights, Donnelly (2003) propounds that: "cultural rights are especially important because they protect individuals in minority cultural communities against the state and the majority community" (p. 219). The implication is that there is something in one's culture that give a sense of meaning and purpose, and when one is denied of one's cultural heritage it can negatively impact psychological and spiritual wellbeing. It is on this note that the paper now examines the role that African philosophy can play in preserving the right to cultural heritage preservation.

African Philosophy and the Right to Cultural Heritage Preservation

Peoples and societies have a right to their cultural heritage. They equally have a right to the preservation of that heritage. Ezejiolor (1964) states that: "Human rights or fundamental rights is the modern name for what have been traditionally known as natural rights, and these may be defined as moral rights which every human being, everywhere, at all times, ought to have simply because of the fact that, in contradistinction with other beings, he is

rational and moral" (p. 3). Udu (2011) states that by the fact of humanness rights reside in the human person and by this he has certain basic claims. Kusumalayam (2008) states that some scholars understand rights as claims, entitlements, liberties or even interests. From a holistic view, Kusumalayam (2008) says that: "a right is that which one needs to actualise or realise the possibilities to actualise the fullness of being. Not any possibilities, but those which would actually lead one to the realization or actualization of the purpose or the goal that one has, whatever that may be" (p.35). Rights are inherent in humans and enables humans to fulfil their humanness.

People have a right to the enjoyment of the benefits of their cultures and to the preservation of that culture. Cultural membership and the preservation of one's culture is both an individual and a group right. With regard to the question of group right, Kusumalayam (2008) notes that the idea of collective or group rights may have its origin in the rights of States (to territory, political independence, sovereignty, etc). Today various international human rights instruments have come to acknowledge that aside States, minorities, indigenous peoples, and other groups have rights. One of the core rights that groups have is the right to their culture and the preservation of that culture. Xanthaki (2011) says notwithstanding the significance of individuals in discourse on rights, collective rights such as cultural rights that gives the individual meaning should not be denied.

It is important to point out what various human rights instruments states on this right. Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) states that: "The State shall: (a) protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian cultures which enhance human dignity and are consistent with the fundamental objectives as provided in this Chapter; (b) encourage development of technological and scientific studies which enhance cultural values" (chapter 2, no 21). It is interesting to note that the constitution speaks of protecting, preserving and promoting Nigerian cultures. There is more than one culture to be preserved. There are many cultures in Nigeria. Each cultural group is equal to every other cultural group. Their cultural values are to be preserved in as far as the aspects of the culture to be preserved are not hostile to human dignity. It is important to note that not every aspect of culture is to be preserved. In time past there are aspects of culture that are hostile to human life and values that have been abrogated such as killing of twins, human sacrifice, etc. It was in the light of the civilizational values and historical traditions, that the Organization of African Unity (1981) proclaimed the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*. The Charter declares that: 'Every individual may freely take part in the cultural life of his community' (art. 17, 2). The Charter equally affirms that: "the promotion and protection of moral and traditional values recognised by the community shall be the duty of the State" (art 17(3)). There is a right to cultural heritage preservation. The state is to work to promote this right. One of the historic landmark achievements of the United Nations (2007) is the enunciation of the rights of indigenous peoples:

Article 5. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions...

Article 15.1 Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.

Article 31 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures...

It is clear from the foregoing that not every aspect of culture should be considered a heritage and not every aspect of culture should be preserved. This is one of the areas that African Philosophy has a prominent role to play. It should be critical of aspects of culture that denies women of equally ontological dignity with men,

UNESCO (1968) has enunciated that some of the measures to be taken for cultural heritage preservation and to salvage heritage in danger is educational programmes:

31. In a spirit of international collaboration, Member States should take steps to stimulate and develop among their nationals interest in, and respect for, the cultural heritage of the past of their own and other traditions in order to preserve or to salvage cultural property endangered by public or private works.

32. Specialized publications, articles in the press and radio and television broadcasts should publicize the nature of the dangers to cultural property arising from ill-conceived public or private works as well as cases where cultural property has been successfully preserved or salvaged.

33. Educational institutions, historical and cultural associations, public bodies concerned with the tourist industry and associations for popular education should have programmes to publicize the dangers to cultural property arising from short-sighted public or private works, and to underline the fact that projects to preserve cultural property contribute to international understanding.

34. Museums and educational institutions and other interested organizations should prepare special exhibitions on the dangers to cultural property arising from uncontrolled public or private works and on the

measures which have been used to preserve or to salvage cultural property which has been endangered.

The above recommendation brings out the significance and the point of this paper. Burden is placed on educational institutions and others to promote the importance of cultural heritage. All and sundry should be educated on their values and the need to preserve them. The paper has noted that cultural heritage is a human and a group right. Because it is a right there is an obligation to keep and preserve it.

This paper is of the opinion that African Philosophy as a special field that studies African cultures and African life and issues should be interested in reflecting on this issue of cultural heritage preservation. Cultural heritage preservation and people's right to it should be of concern to African Philosophy and her scholars. This ought to be so because by nature, African Philosophy is a philosophy of African culture. Karp and Masolo (2000) rightly see "African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry."

There are various responsibilities that African Philosophy and African Philosophers can do with regard to cultural heritage preservation. Actions that African Philosophy and African Philosophers can take with regard to cultural heritage preservation: (1) critical reflection, (2) cultural hermeneutics, (3), educational tourism, (4) lessons and teachings at cultural heritage sites,

It belongs to philosophy to do critical reflection. African Philosophy is critical reflection on African realities. To exclude African cultural heritage from critical reflection of African Philosophers will be a tragedy. No African realities should be excluded from the mind and reflection of African Philosophers. In most philosophy programmes in Nigeria there is a course on Philosophy of Arts and Aesthetics. The teaching of philosophy should focus more on African realities. In philosophy of Arts and Aesthetics both tangible and non-tangible cultural heritage should be reflected upon. What is the goodness in African cultural heritage? What is the beauty that can be found in African cultural heritage? What are the values that can be derived from a study of African cultural heritage? How can African cultural heritage help in African development? These are questions that should not escape the critical mind of Africa scholars and student of philosophy.

African Philosophy should also do hermeneutics of African arts, cultural heritage, etc. Hermeneutics is concerned with interpretation of words and languages. African cultural heritage is given various names and described in various native languages in various ways. Cultural artefacts, sites, natural landscape, etc are given local names. African heritage is a heritage for the world. It has value and lessons for the world. African cultural heritage resources that should be subject of African Philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenological study include the following mentioned by Onyima (2016), the Argungu festivals(Kebbi State), Sallah Durbar (Katsina State), Gidan Hausa (Kano State), Farribachama festival (Adamawa State), Eyo masquerade (Lagos State), Bakor Yam festival (Cross River State), Osun -

Oshogbo festival (Osun State), Imo Awka masquerade ceremony (Anambra State). These traditional cultural heritages should be the subject of critical study. Other important cultural heritages relevant to African philosophical study are: the Benin Kingdom's Queen- Mother Idia, objects from the Nok culture, bronze artefacts from Benin, Ife bronze works, Igbo-Ukwu bronze works and many others.

Both these critical reflection and hermeneutics can be done not only in the physical classroom of African philosophers and students but through writings in journals, magazines, newspapers and the new media such as face book, twitter, satellite television and all internet mediated medium of communication.

To promote cultural heritage preservation, African philosophers should organize and engage in educational tourism. Excursions to places of cultural significance such as museums, nature game reserves can be important learning medium. Students of African Philosophy should not only be taught in the physical classroom, they should be taken to the classroom of nature. To teach topics on African social and political philosophers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, etc students can be taken on excursion to their places of birth and where some significant events in their lives took place. The libraries in which they studied can be visited. One of the easier ways in which people learn is receiving vivid impression from physical objects and nature. To teach students about environmental damage students can be taken to physical landscape that are suffering from environmental degradation.

Concluding Reflections

This paper has done a discussion of African Philosophy in relation to preservation of cultural heritage. It showed that cultural heritage is vital to the soul of a people. It enhances a people's sense of belonging, identity, shared history and common purpose. The paper also revealed that without a preservation of cultural heritage there will be no transmission of values from past generations to the present and future. The cultural heritage of a community or society is a vital source of tourism. Cultural heritage has benefits such as economic, environmental, spiritual, etc. The paper also revealed that in line with international human rights instruments, culture and preserving it is a human and a group right. Promoting this right to cultural heritage preservation is the responsibility of States, educational institutions and academics. It is in this light that the role of African Philosophy in critically reflecting on African cultural heritage and sifting out what is morally relevant for sustaining the Nigerian society was examined. The paper did not examine many other issues with regard to cultural heritage preservation as they are not within the ambit here. It is concluded here that African Philosophers and indeed all scholars in Africa should pay attention to preserving cultural values.

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