

## TRANSCENDENCE AS A PANACEA FOR AFRICAN UNDERDEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*In this work I examine Africa's problem of underdevelopment from a philosophical standpoint by demonstrating how countries in Africa can exploit the power of transcendence for their development. The power of transcendence is understood in this work as the rational, imaginative and reflective power of man to integrate the non-physical with the physical in order to transform the physical to his desired state of affair. In this sense, transcendence serves as the seat of innovation, creativity and authentic development in any society. Interestingly, some men as well as societies have tapped into this transcendental power in man than others, and in some cases, at the expense of others. The impressive level of infrastructural and technological advancement in many countries of the West, and some countries in South East Asia (Japan, China, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and so on) accounts for why this work regards them as nations that have converted their transcendental imaginations to actual development. It is with this in mind that this work brings to the fore the nexus between transcendence and development. The argument of this paper considers the possibility that the narrative of African underdevelopment will continue unless and until contemporary African leaders tap into the power of transcendence to proffer African solution(s) to African problem of underdevelopment.*

**Keywords:** Transcendence, Development, Underdevelopment, Man (man is used here in a generic sense), Globalisation, Africa.

### Introduction

Scholars from diverse disciplines have conceptualised different solutions to the problem of underdevelopment in Africa. The desired result is yet to manifest in the continent. Almost all African countries are regarded as underdeveloped when compared with many countries of the West (and some countries in South East Asia) despite the abundance of human and natural resources on the continent. The pertinent question is: Why is there a wide gap of infrastructural and technological development between other continents and Africa? In other

words, what are those countries in other continents doing right to achieve advancement in infrastructure and technology that African countries are doing wrong? The answer to these questions is not far-fetched.

Apart from other contributory factors that may have hampered the growth of infrastructural and technological development in Africa, the one central to the argument of this work is the failure of the contemporary African leaders to positively channel the power of transcendence of their people to authentic development. By authentic development I mean the ability of a people to achieve infrastructural and technological development through their own initiatives. This includes, but is not limited to, a creative use of limited national resources to galvanise physical development. This work is aware of the general disposition of African leaders towards the adoption of different developmental models or strategies that are completely alien to African cultures and traditions as solutions to the problem of underdevelopment in Africa. Such a disposition is seen in this work as a “negative initiative”. This is so because any decision taken by a leader that makes the life of her followers to be worse off is a negative initiative as far as this work is concerned.

Therefore, this paper is a conscious effort towards waking Africans up from their ‘development slumber’. For the time has come for Africans to actively tap into the universal property of man, the power of transcendence, in their quest for infrastructural and technological development on the continent of Africa. The paper contains three mutually inclusive sections. In the abstract, I argue for the thesis that the narrative of African underdevelopment can be interrupted if the contemporary African leaders tap into the power of transcendence of their people to proffer African solution(s) to African problem of underdevelopment. This argument will be sustained throughout the work. In so doing, the first section interrogates the meaning of underdevelopment while the second section establishes the nexus between transcendence, globalisation and development. The third section dwells authoritatively on how transcendence can promote authentic development in Africa. Concluding remarks are made thereafter.

### **What is Underdevelopment?**

The meaning of development should be fathomed easily, by any layman, if the concept of underdevelopment is lucidly clarified in this work, given that the present state of development in any country is an offshoot of its people’s response to their state of

underdevelopment in the past. Having made this point, underdevelopment is not a concept that embodies single meaning. It can be understood in different senses.

W. A. Lewis discloses five senses of underdevelopment, namely, (a) unutilized valuable natural resources, (b) institutions relatively unfavourable to investment, (c) backward technology, (d) low capital resources per head, and (e) low output per head. According to him,

a country may be underdeveloped in the sense that it has valuable natural resources (water, soil minerals) which are not yet utilized or in the sense that its institutions are relatively unfavourable to investment, in the sense that its technology is backward, when compared with that of other countries, or in the sense that capital resources per head are low when compared say with Western Europe, or in the sense that output are low (Lewis, 1963: Cited by Opafola, 1997: 1-3).

A country is also said to be underdeveloped if its citizens live at a little over or slightly below the subsistent level. In other words, a country is underdeveloped if the quality of life of its citizens is low. It is against this backdrop that Dudley Seers raises three fundamental questions aimed at showing the difference between developed countries and underdeveloped ones:

What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening with inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result “development” even if per capita income doubled (Seers, 1969: 3).

The above Seers’ claim, in Torado and Smith’s view, is neither an idle speculation nor a description of hypothetical situation because;

a number of developing countries experienced relatively high rates of growth of per capita income during the 1960s and 1970s but showed little or no improvement or even an actual decline in employment, equality, and the real incomes of the bottom 40% of their populations (Torado and Smith, 2012: 15).

Consequently, if poverty, unemployment and inequality have declined considerably in a country, then, we talk of the country concerned as developed. Whereas if poverty, unemployment and inequality are on the high level in a country then we say that such a country is at the state of underdevelopment. Regrettably, poverty, unemployment and inequality are prevalent in almost all countries in Africa, especially in Nigeria where some citizens live in brazen opulence while others live in abject poverty.

Walter Rodney is of the view that the term ‘underdevelopment’ makes sense only as a means of comparing levels of development. This is because human social development has been uneven from time immemorial. The moment one group seems to be wealthier or richer than others, Rodney says, some investigation is bound to take place in order to decipher the reason for the unequal level of development. Apart from the comparative meaning of the term underdevelopment, a second and even more indispensable component of modern underdevelopment, Rodney argues, is the exploitation of one country by another (Rodney, 1972/1990: 15-34).

Contrary to Rodney’s submission, exploitation is not what accounts for modern underdevelopment. Rather, the difference between developed and underdeveloped countries today is basically the difference in their appropriation of power of transcendence. Most developed countries would not have achieved tremendous growth in infrastructure and technology if they had failed to properly appropriate the power of transcendence. No doubt, the exploitation of one country by another would necessarily raise some moral questions. It must also be noted that only a country that intelligently thinks outside the box would be able to exploit another one in the first place. This means that if nothing is ingenious about the method or the approach of the exploiter, the would-be exploited would resist any form of exploitation *ab initio*. Therefore, any concept or ideology that either exploits or develops a country is seen in this work as an outcome of the power of transcendence. It is with this in mind that I will now discuss the nexus between transcendence, globalisation and development.

### **Transcendence, Globalisation and Development**

Two considerations triggered my interest in the concept of globalisation in this work. The first consideration has to do with the fact that Africa is part of the global village in all ramifications. Hence, it will be superficial to discuss African problem of underdevelopment

without reference to the concept of globalisation. The second consideration is informed by how difficult it is for African continent to feign ignorance of the negative impact of globalisation on its developmental trajectory. Thus, digging out the philosophical underpinning of the concept of globalisation will afford me the opportunity to properly situate transcendence as a panacea for Africa problem of underdevelopment.

As topical as the concept of globalisation is, there is no generally acceptable definition of it, thereby making it a controversial concept. Al-Rodhan and Stoudmann explain that:

globalization is not a single concept that can be defined and encompassed within a set time frame, nor is it a process that can be defined clearly with a beginning and an end... It is a concept that has been defined variously over the years, with some connotations referring to progress, development and stability, integration and cooperation, and others referring to regression, colonialism, and destabilization (2006: 3).

Any definition or description of globalisation as a ‘regression, colonianism and destabilisation’ like in the above fits perfectly into the reality of Africa today. Despite that Al-Rodhan and Stoudmann were uncomfortable with any definition of globalisation; they still could not escape from the academic demand of definition. For they defined globalisation as “a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and nonhuman activities” (ibid., 5). Eddy Lee and Marco Vivarelli (2006) also noted the controversy surrounding the actual definition of globalization in their work entitled “The Social Impact of Globalisation in the Developing Countries”. The essence of globalization, for Okpeh Jr “is the worldwide promotion of free markets, individual initiatives, and private enterprise, which has at times led to ruthless, unbridled competition” (Okpeh Jr., 2011: 572).

What Okpeh Jr. fails to harp on is the supreme place of the power of transcendence in the formation of individual initiatives. The point here is that there is no way a man can give birth to a new theory or ideology without engaging in deep thinking. For it is only by transcendence (by deep thinking) is globalization possible. This last statement debunks Okpeh Jr’s allusion to globalization as the fountain of individual initiatives.

Meanwhile, Simon Reich holds an opinion that is different from others by saying that globalization “is often distinguished more by what it is not, rather than what it is.” (1998:4)

Reich's argument brings to the fore the need to differentiate between globalization and globalism— for a proper understanding of the former. In this context,

globalization stands for a value-free phenomenon, an objective present day reality, while(sic) globalism... represents a viewpoint, doctrine and ideology that promotes the spirit of interdependence and unity of the whole world, all nations and states instead of national and state particularism (Kukoc, 2009: 3-4).

From the foregoing, I infer that globalism is the philosophy of globalization. This is so because what drives a practice is always the philosophy behind it. It is in this sense that globalism serves as the undercurrent philosophy or ideology or the driving force for the practice of globalization.

Plato and Aristotle should therefore be seen as precursors of philosophy of globalisation in the West, in the sense that these two iconic philosophers acknowledged, in no small measure, the important role being played by the faculty of reason in the interdependence of man. For instance, Plato described man as an intelligence aided by organs, while his foremost student, Aristotle, defined man as a rational animal. The import of this is that man is man anywhere in the world irrespective of the hue of his skin. The faculty of reason is always at the disposal of every rational being. Therefore, the interdependence of man championed in the philosophy of globalization is not meant to encourage the development of one nation at the expense of others, a scenario which is typical of today's practice of globalization. It simply means that every country should concentrate more on its area(s) of comparative advantage for mutually beneficial relationship with other countries. Surprisingly, the current African leaders are of a disposition that suggests that Africa cannot proffer African solution(s) to African problem of underdevelopment. Otherwise, why are they looking up to developed countries for aids in different spheres of their collective life? In as much as the faculty of reason is not an exclusive preserve of a people, then the continent of Africa has all it takes to shake the global table through creative way of proffering African solution(s) to African problems.

Even if the practice of globalization does not create a level plain ground for all countries to participate as equal competitors, I insist that globalisation is a product of the power of man to transcend the realities around him. For the power of transcendence is like dynamite; it is capable of bringing into existence concepts that were hitherto unknown to man for social reengineering. May I also add that man can never exhaust the need to go beyond the

limitations of everyday experience of the world in his quest for positive development in the society. The pragmatic nature of the concept of transcendence was accentuated by Robert F. Greegan when he argued that “the theory of democracy is founded upon the concept of transcendence because it is a theory of human progress” (Creegan, 1953: 538). This work agrees with Greegan because every theory of human progress is a product of the power of transcendence.

### **Transcendence and Authentic Development in Africa**

Let me, at this juncture, water down what transcendence is, for easy comprehension. Transcendence simply means going beyond or “climbing beyond” as derived from the *latin* word *transcendentiam* (Schoenberg and Majeran, 2016: 170). Therefore, “to transcend is to go beyond” (Omosulu, 2011: 11-33) every limitation of experience.

In philosophy, the concept of transcendence strongly has its root in Plato’s theory of the world of form. For Plato believes that everything in the material world is a photocopy of the original (perfect) thing in the world of form. But the modern understanding of the term transcendence is credited to Immanuel Kant due to Kant’s attempt to explain the possibility of experience. Accordingly, philosophy does not only see man as a finite being but also as infinite. This explains why transcendence, after Kant, is understood as:

... the act of projection beyond this being to that being in order to connect them into stable regularity or meaningful units. Transcendence is the act of forming relations or connectedness between beings to render them accessible. It is the finitude or native hunger in man which propels him to project from one state of affairs to another, from now to not now, from what is to what is not (Unah, 1997: 78).

It is within this philosophical context that Abraham Harold Maslow refers to transcendence as “the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than as means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos” (Maslow, 1969: 66). This is exactly what Kolawole Ogundowole has in mind when he dwells on “the inexhaustibility of self-reliance” (Ogundowole, 2007: 1). Man is the only being who is endowed, to a large extent, with the faculty of reason. This faculty of reason is the highest faculty in man as acknowledged by Plato and Aristotle. It is this same faculty that makes transcendence possible.

Man's reason, Joseph .I. Omoregbe observes, is a rich reservoir of power and light. Among the rich resources in this reservoir of reason is the power of transcendence, that is, the power to transcend the present situation, go beyond it and envisage a totally different and better situation (Omoregbe, 2007: viii). This is exactly what I mean by transcendence as the seat of innovation, creativity and authentic development.

It goes without saying that no nation can experience meaningful and sustainable development unless and until it creates an identity for itself in the comity of nations. And for a nation to actually carve out a niche for itself in the global world, its citizens must be challenged and creatively motivated towards using their power of transcendence for the development of their nation because "man alone has the intellectual ability to raise and answer question about himself and all other things in the world." (Okoro, 2001: 95).

For instance, if a society is underdeveloped (in infrastructure and technology), it becomes expedient for the people of that society to transcend, through deep thinking, that state of underdevelopment to the state of development and fashion a way of connecting the two together in order to produce the desired result which is a state of authentic development. But a man who is unwilling or unconscious of his role as a purveyor of authentic development in the society will do little or nothing to propel himself towards creative and innovative thinking. Unconsciousness is here defined as a state of 'unintentionality'. That is, a state of one's unwillingness to channel one's transcendental power towards proffering enduring solution(s) to the problem of development around one's proximity.

In this connection, no nation can conquer poverty, endemic diseases, unemployment and economic recession without thinking outside the box. America, Britain, Japan, China, Russia and Scandinavian countries achieved tremendous growth in science and technology because they were able to tap into their power of transcendence. Therefore, harnessing the power of transcendence in us as Africans is one of the answers to the African question of development. If tapped into, the impact of the power of transcendence will be felt in the area of agriculture since Africans will grow and eat their own food; in textile industry because Africans will begin to wear their own clothes; in the banking sector Africans will keep their money in their banks to grow their domestic economies, and in sports, Africans will start to passionately appreciate their indigenous football clubs instead of being fanatics of foreign clubs.



Similarly, things will happen in the automobile industry as Africans will start to drive their own cars.

Finally, exploiting our power of transcendence in Africa will save Africa from political instability and lethargy of development. This is instructive since Africa cannot continue to be ravaged by hunger, poverty, conflict of different shades, disease and ignorance as if the continent had no licence to the universal property of man, the power of transcendence.

## **Conclusion**

I have demonstrated in this paper how Africa could benefit from the power of transcendence. Man, as earlier said, is irrevocably transcendental. The claim that man is inherently transcendental reveals an indispensable fact about man; the fact that man is the only being on earth that has the natural inclination towards asking fundamental questions about his existence. Little wonder Jean Paul Sartre describes man as a being who puts his own being into question. That is, man is the only being who wants to know the ultimate meaning of his existence, the ultimate value of his life, and what he is living for? (Omoregbe, 2001: 6).

A man who fails to tap into the power of transcendence in him will find it difficult to satisfactorily answer any question about the ultimate value of his life and what he is living for. This explains why Kant gives high regard to pure reason (the source of transcendence) as the foundation of every form of development. Consequently, Africans must, as a matter of urgency, vigorously channel their faculties of reason towards genuine development of Africa. The developmental approach that I have in mind in this paper is 'inward-looking-approach'. If America, Britain, Japan, China and Norway laid the foundations for infrastructural and technological development largely on self-sustaining approaches, then, Africans should not be outward looking in proffering solution(s) to African problem of underdevelopment. Inward looking approach guarantees not only genuine development but also the much needed spirit of authentic nationhood in Africa. As C. B. Okoro argues;

Kant's philosophical anthropology yields two basic conclusions as follows: (a) that philosophy has the task of inspiring a people with the patriotism and nationalism required for accomplishing the dream of authentic nationhood and (b) that the task of authentic nation, herculean as it appears, can easily be achieved if people are woken

up from dogmatic slumber, to realise and actualise the power of transcendence locked up inside them that begs to be tapped for world transformation (Okoro, 2002: 238).

Africans and present African leaders must, therefore, take the good advantage of the power of transcendence, the metaphysical power of man, to promote authentic development in the continent. We need Africans who can take Africa to where it ought to be by liberating African languages from the domination of Western languages. Today, because of the use of European languages, discourse on development has become an elite preserve, ring-fenced by foreign languages. True and authentic development must flow from African context and African historical realities. We need to study our own historical developments more than the way we study European economic histories so that we can know where we went wrong and subsequently make amends.

Africa, as a continent, deserves to have leaders who would tackle the problem of underdevelopment in Africa from the standpoint of African mindset by exploiting the power of transcendence in them. Africa leaders need not hero-worship those leaders in developed countries. Africa must stop serving as an appendage to any country or a dumping ground for developed countries. If the best helping hand is at the end of one's arm, then the time is already overdue for African leaders and Africans to positively exploit the power of transcendence in them for infrastructural and technological development of Africa.

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