

REDISCOVERING AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN THE GLOBAL FUTURE

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Abstract

Africa as a continent is rich in cultural diversity, with a wealth of traditions, languages, art, music, and spiritual beliefs that date back centuries. This cultural heritage is not only a source of pride for African communities but also a valuable asset with the potential for economic empowerment, social cohesion, and cultural preservation. This work explores the importance of rediscovering and promoting African cultural heritage for sustainability in the global future as a commodified glocalization. This glocalization emphasizes the importance of incorporating local perspectives and preferences into the global exchange of goods, services, and ideas rather than simply adopting global trends and practices. By accentuation and promoting African Cultural heritage, the continent can attract tourists, and invest in cultural industries, and create job opportunities for its people. Additionally, the preservation of these traditions is crucial in the face of modernization and globalization, which pose a threat to the continued existence of many African cultural practices. Embracing African cultural heritage can foster a sense of unity and pride among African communities, bridge cultural divides, and promote understanding and respect for different cultural background in an increasingly globalised world. Using a qualitative and analytical approach, the paper concludes that the preservation and promotion of African cultural heritage are essential for ensuring the sustainability of these traditions for future generations.

Keywords: African, African Cultural Heritage, Sustainability, Global Future, Glocalization

INTRODUCTION

A discourse on African cultural heritage provokes the mind of every ideal African towards the quest for identity and self-affirmation against the wide spread malignant and obnoxious squalor of Africans by the European and Americans. In the words of Njoku as cited in Kanu¹ the principle of identity is a value expressed by one of the first principles of being. It states that every being is determined by itself, is one with

itself and is consistent in itself. Thus, every being is one with itself and divided from others. The qualities of matter, referred to in traditional metaphysics as accidents, such as size, color, shape, etc, distinguish one being from the other. If being does not have an identity, then everything would be everything, giving birth to one thing since nothing can be differentiated from the other. In this case, there would be no subject and object relationship. This would create a causal traffic in the order of being and knowledge.

Commenting on the traditional African cultural heritage in the face of the western values, Makamba² writes, there is no doubt that the dichotomy between traditional values in Africa and the western paradigm that governs the very idea of modernity has come to assume a practical importance and to present something of a dilemma. The Africanness of the African has an embodiment of values that made him live authentically his African worldview. Culture is a factor that characterizes virtually the beingness of every society. African continent in pre-colonial era lived in a multi-cultural society, with enduring values that guided and protected the interest of all her citizens. However, there has been some kind of cultural malaise or forgetfulness, occasioned by the culture-clash in the encounter between Africa and the West (Rest). This encounter left behind some kind of cultural vacuum, or alternatively, they have been replaced by foreign values of doubtful worth for Africa. The whole idea of this encounter between Africa and Europe was occasioned by the process of colonization. These strangers (the Westerners) came to our land with an obvious appearance of godliness and paternal gesture that made us accepted them and gave them unrestricted access to all that they needed. Little did we know that their purpose was destructive on our cultural heritage. The first strategy employed by these strangers (colonial masters) according to Ekwuru as cited in Kanu³ was that of disassemblage, concealed in the exploitative colonial ideology of benevolent paternalism. It is first instance, an ideology of condemnation, which identified everything “good to be white” and everything “bad to be black”. Today, in Europe and America respectively, African cultural heritage is being displayed as being paganistic, and anachronistic yet kept in their museums if you like for veneration. We however censure this misrepresentation upon the problem we call 'an ignorance of the other'. It is our belief that the European/Americans live in such erroneous conception of our cultural heritage consequent upon their ignorance of our values. We therefore encourage that African scholars should intensify their efforts and interest in writing about our cultural heritage in national and international publications so that the European/Americans will always have access to them and learn more about our values. It is believed that their subsequent knowledge of our values will lead them to appreciate those values.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

African

What does it mean to be an African? What is African? etc, are recurrent questions debatable. In following from the thoughts of Onyeocha,⁴ Africans can be understood as people who stemmed from Africa, and whose experience of life and life's

activities are tied to Africa. Whether these are resident in Africa or abroad, their spirit is in Africa, and their destiny is tied to that of Africa. Thus, Africanity, or being an African, is thus a horizon of experience, of life and living, of thought and thinking that centers on Africa as a home and wellspring, as a concept, and as a realm of possibilities. In a bid to underscore the impact of Africans in the global community, Onyeocha⁵ opines, already, the African, in spite of his or her present predicament, has had quite a few things to offer to the world in terms of humanity, crisis management, and conflict resolution. In the case of humanity, many a visitor to Africa has remarked how people are honored in life and venerated in death. The life and death of each affect all and is never considered a private affair. Speaking on the competence of the African in his world he affirms, not only does the African speak the language of the West, he or she has also imbibed Western culture, and can, with creditable temerity, practice practically all their crafts. Most importantly, he or she can now live in freedom and equality with them and among them anywhere in the world. He or she can now acquire or exchange citizenship rights with them, and where applicable, can even vie for, and get into public office.

African Cultural Heritage

African cultural heritage according to Sogolo as cited in Kanu⁶ consists of the patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired by the African and transmitted by symbols. It includes the embodiments in African artifacts, the historically derived and selected traditional ideas and values. It is a way of life that is particularly African. African cultural heritage is basically two dimensional: the tangible and the intangible features. The tangible features include archaeological sites, historic sites and monuments, traditional sacred sites and other places of importance. Intangible features are traditional beliefs and practices, such as religious rites of passage, ritual, crafts, and other cultural traditions. These intangible features are the embodiment of all African values that are continuously inculcated to all African citizens that they may know and observe them for a meaningful, peaceful and progressive African society. These features are cherished by the generality of African people and are transmitted from one generation to another. These features from the implication refer to such knowledge, norms, and mannerism of the Africans that are transmitted from one generation to another. They are invariably those set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize the African society. They are referred to as the worldviews expressed by the Africans as basis of their living

African Traditional Society

Africans of antiquity lived a multi-societal system of society. They can however be seen in four basic societies. Starting from the 'Hunter-gatherer societies': these categories travelled widely for food, depending virtually on natural resources available. They ate and drank basically from what nature gives. Second are the 'Stateless societies': these groups are known as stateless in that they did not operate on a state-based system of governance. They were very few and did not need a

centralized government. 'Stratification societies': these are the categories that lived in a divided-class style of society. At this stage, the society believes in separation of people according to their class differences; and invariably led to the broad division of specialization.

The fourth, being the last of the division is known as the 'Kingdom societies': they lived under a centralized government, usually governed by a king. Amidst the divergences of culture among the Africans, there are certain traits that characterize the generality of the African society. Prior to the advent of the colonial masters, Africans were generally known of having certain values that are common among the Africans. These cultural values will therefore be examined respectively for a better appreciation of the ideal African society.

African values may be taken to mean a set of institutionalized ideals which guide and direct the patterns of life of Africans, It includes the embodiments in African artifacts, the historically derived and selected traditional ideas and values. It is a way of life that is particularly African. The values of the African culture include: honesty and truthfulness, and the Igbo put this ontological principle in the maxim: *Eziokwubundu* (truth is life), hospitality is another value, this is seen in the expression made by Iroegbu as cited in Igboin⁷ “there is no special rendezvous required to join in meal, on arrival, once there is food, the visitor is invited to eat”. Elders in Africa are esteemed as figures of wisdom; as such respect for elders is a tradition. There is respect for sacredness of life: the African believes that life is from God. This is manifested in the names that the Urhobo people give to their children: *Oghenevweakpo* (God is the owner of life), *Oghenemakpo* (God made life). Purity of life is also valued and prized as life itself. Communal living is at the heart of African cultural value, and this is summed up by Mbiti⁸ Thus, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am”. However, following external influences on the African culture, these values are fast eroding.

Onyeocha⁹ opines further that there are some essential contributing factors that must be considered in determining the African personality, among those of descent, art,

religion, family life, respect for elders, land tenure, and a communal system of government. In the words of Onyeocha¹⁰ “to be able to produce what is distinctly African, these factors must be taken in combination with one another rather than in isolation from each other. For more clarity, we shall expatiate on the above concepts that characterize the African values.

Descent: Africa is by right the first homeland not only of all of the human race but also of those of African descent. By that fact, none of her children even those who, as a result of historical circumstances have been scattered in various parts of the world, is excluded from her protective shield, no matter the legal or geographical situations in which they find themselves. She is thus the rallying point for all her children at home and in Diaspora. Nkrumah¹¹ put it thus, 'the core of the Black revolution is in Africa, and until Africa is united, the Black man throughout the world lacks a national home.

Art: The African personality is evident in African art. In this setting, art is not mere representation like photography, it is also like “tuning-in” a joining-the chorus, a vigorous and enthused capturing, a purposeful harnessing or domestication of reality. Images are presented as rhythm, form and movement on the one hand, and as color, texture and rhythm on the other. Thus, colour, texture; rhythm and movement blend together in harmony. They are integrated into life, not divorced from it.

Philosophy: Ever since Placid Tempels produced his monumental 'la philosophie bantoue' (Bantu Philosophy), critics and supporters alike have had a heated debate as to whether there was such a thing as African philosophy. If by philosophy we mean a systematized discipline recognized as such and taught in schools of philosophy in universities then one could hardly answer categorically in the affirmative, but neither could one give it a blanket denial.

Religion: The African is very religious and usually bears witness to religion in every aspect of his or her life. The African bears witness to the divine everywhere and in various religious forums. His or her immediate surroundings, his or her own life and all his or her activities have for him or her, sacred values and meanings.

Marriage: In Africa, as everywhere else, the family is the basic unit of society. Every male and female marries at the proper age. The matrimonial system is flexible without being impulsive or arbitrary. It was designed in such a way that it is possible for every male or female to be married and to take part in the process of continuing the human race by procreation. There was no room for life-long bachelorhood or spinsterhood since that was perceived as a wasting away of a human live. The marriage institution in Africa is based on a multi-wife system; this is largely due to the influence of traditional religion and Islam.

Family: Group membership, kinship, lineage, and the ethnic groups are very important socio-political institution in Africa. An African must either be born within the continent or be a descendant of one born within it, the African family system is broad and extended to include near and distant relations almost ad infinitum. Each family is responsible for the care of its own weak ones, the aged, the incurable, the helpless, and the sick. If the family fails, then responsibility falls upon the village or town, etc.

Respect for Elders: In Africa there is the principle of respect for elders. This presents an inescapable consequence to the African as far as African philosophy of human nature is concerned. In traditional Africa, old age is a virtue. It is associated with wisdom. Hence it is generally agreed that the elders are the repository of communal wisdom. the justification for this mentality takes root from the fact that the wisdom of traditional Africa was acquire not through academic knowledge but through practical experience of life through long and judicious associations with different individuals, with nature, and with the gods.

Land tenure: Land belongs rather to all the people as a legacy from the ancestors. Land is indeed a patrimony that comes to the people through the generations but is ultimately referred to God. The land and the water are accessible to all. Nobody is left in want of either, for work, for food, or for clothing. The use of land as a commercial venture is quite unknown in traditional Africa.

Communalism: The community spirit in the African theory and practice is philosophically concentrated in the notions of Ubuntu and communalism. Music and

dance are special relevance in African art. The notion of Ubuntu and communalism can be found in African art and music and is the most important form of art in Africa. Africans unlike the Americans place high value on communal living. Communal values express the worth and appreciation of the community, the values which guide the social interaction of the people towards a common goal. Interpersonal bonds go beyond biological affinity in expressing the values of communality. Africans share mutually, they care for one another, they are interdependent and they solidarise

The Clash of Cultures and the beginning of crisis: European/American on

The Clash of Culture marks the beginning of the crisis of African Heritage. Part of the original problem for Senghor¹² came as a result of the encounter they had with the European and the African culture. Kanu¹³ argues in Senghor's favor that, the encounter between European and African cultures is better described as a forced acculturation. A word that describes a situation in which a highly developed society imposes certain elements of its culture in the other, thereby forcing it to derail from its unique tract of cultural civilization: the observed result is an initial form of resistance and conflict that often leads to a situation of cultural disorder.

It is doubtless that colonialism stimulated positive and negative changes in Africa. More importantly, colonial rule was an imposition that unleashed deadly blow on African culture with the immediate consequence of the introduction of such values as rugged individualism, corruption, capitalism and oppression. Colonial rule disrupted the traditional machinery of moral homogeneity and practice. The method of moral inculcation was vitiated which resulted in the abandonment of traditional norms and values through a systematic depersonalization of the African and paganization of its values. Instead of the cherished communalism which defined the life of the African, for instance, a burgeoning societal construct was introduced which alienates and destroys the organic fabric of the spirit of we-feeling. Apart from the economic exploitative agenda, colonialism expressed the ethnocentric belief that the morals and values of the colonizer were superior to those of the colonized. This belief was programmatically achieved through the establishment of schools, which curricula were tailored to achieve the goals of the colonizer rather

than train the colonized to be independent. This scenario naturally created two classes, one being the supererogatory and the other subordinator, with deliberate administrative structure that favored the former. One consequence of this was the erosion of the values, culture and religion of subordinator. The African cosmos became a victim of extraneous ideology which it has continued to grapple with, with little or no success, for instance, as part of the erosion of the African cultural values, African now bear at least an European or Christian name. This means that African names, arts, music, religion and so on, are inferior of pagan orientation.

Consequently, despite the clarion call for globalization and remaking the world into a global village, Africa has been ill-treated by the rest of the world. These ill-treatments which have their roots in the historical pasts are still being practiced today as factual facts beyond fable and fantasy. The Africans are relegated as less humans, inconsequential or insignificant people whose value is only exploitative. The above quotation is meant to introduce us to the obnoxious experiences of Africans Under the control of their wicked white kidnappers. The sufferings did not begin in the Americas, it did indeed, begin back home from the African continent. Ghana, Lagos, Dahomey, Zanzibar were leading slave ports through which the Portuguese, who later joined the slave business, Spanish, French, Dutch and British colonies in the Americas. It is estimated that over the centuries, twelve to twenty million people were shipped from Africa by European traders, the black Africans in their respective locations suffered inexplicable racism based on skin color, attributed innate mental backwardness and low graded cultural civilization. Achebe in his book, *Things Fall Apart* as quoted in Kanu¹⁴ brought out the consequences of the encounter between the European and African cultures. He particularly looks at the Igbo society, especially at the period when the white man broke into it as a missionary, trader and administrator:

Does the white man understand our custom about land? Asked Okonkwo, how can he when he does not even speak our tongue? Responded Obierika, and then he continued, but he says our customs are bad, and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly

and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. Lamenting further on the destructive impact of the colonial masters, Ekwuru¹⁵ writes, colonialism represents for the Igbos, a higher and more disastrous form of slavery, the “deculturation” and “depersonalization” of a people within their own land. With the exploitation and instrumentalization of the colonized as its main objective, colonialism was nothing other than a suppressive form of territorial cultural slavery. Europeans in general and European missionaries in particular, with some few exceptions, admitted little if any culture of value in Africa, just as many have denied that Africa really has any religion other than fearful superstitions. They came with their culture which includes their language, religious customs, morals and ways of praying and acting which defines their identity and imposed it on Africans. In this way, they killed our culture and denied us of our true identity and uniqueness.

The African culture in any of its manifestations was the bull's eye for attack. The Christian church working hand in hand with the colonial masters declared an all-out war on African culture, regarding them as primitive, savage, pagan, barbaric and the like. Culture is the sum total of a people's way of life, which embraces their mode of dressing, talking, the food they eat, and the way they conceive death and welcome live. By destroying the African culture, the European dealt coup de grace to the African personality, to his is-ness, by destroying the African cultural values. Unending is the regret of Africans for Accepting the white man into the African territory. The white man came in apparent love and gentleness, and the Africans from their usual culture of acceptance gave way to them believing that the white man came in with a noble agenda, and lately did Africans discover the trick employed by the white man. It is upon this realization that the Africans came up with different ideologies as a way of rediscovering the African cultural values that were almost eroded consequent upon the encounter.

The Process of Rediscovering the African Cultural Heritage for Sustainability in the Global Future

African cultural renaissance movement is about the reawakening of fellow Africans

to the need for a cultural rebirth in Africa. This would help bring about a revival of the African culture, which has been subdued, devalued and bastardized by the European culture. It is a movement for originality, which should involve governments, educationists and the wider society. It is a search for meaning, a search for identity and for culture. It is a search that must lead to the roots of Africa's being. It is therefore, a search for Africa's fullness of being. For Hastings as cited in Ekwuru¹⁶ captures the content of an African cultural renaissance when he speaks of it as “rediscovering the wisdom of the ancestors, revaluing their ceremonies, reawakening their names, renewing their languages” The call for a cultural revolution from the above does not mean a call to primitivism: it is not a call back to cultural practices such as the killing of twins, patriarchy, human sacrifices and so on. It is not a call to close the door against cultural interactions, because every culture gives and takes from the other. The move for a cultural renaissance is a reminder to Africans that the western culture is not a finished product, they must be considered as raw materials still requiring processing and refinement before use. Scholars argue that Africa should define itself in and on its own terms regarding methodologies, subject areas, and issues without reference of deference to any alien culture. The problem that African cultural renaissance tries to avoid is what is known as 'cultural hegemony'. That is an attempt by some cultures to dominate, to assimilate or even to totally obliterate another or other cultures. Some cultures including cultural aspects like languages, customs, habits and values have been known to have disappeared or been absorbed into other cultures.

The culture of the Indians in North America was eliminated by the new American culture; the cultures of Egypt were absorbed by that of the Persian Empire; the culture of Arab nomads was absorbed by the conquering Palestinian cultures of ancient times. We are already deep into westernization but we can still bail out the water while it is still an ankle's deep. In the contention of Mugambi, according to Ekwuru¹⁷ the future of African can only be forged by accepting and mending the socio-cultural present. Colonialism and westernization have brought a permanent and irreversible change on Africa. African cultural renaissance is not a speculation that should be left hanging on ivory towers; it is a reality that is praxis-oriented. Africa can right her present wrongs as a necessary condition for a healthy future, and here again the African must first be in rapport with himself so as to construct the truth of his world and be the controller of his destiny. Our identity must not be sacrificed

on compromise. We must step forward towards restoring our values. Already, Africa is beginning to be intensely conscious of the cultural questions. In January 1972, a new law was promulgated in Zaire which abolished names that were not African. This decree was the most striking expression of president Mobutu's policy of "authenticity" the assertion of African cultural values over and against European culture whose standard has been normative throughout the colonial period. Comparatively, the change of name of country by some African countries is also a public announcement that expresses the hunger for authenticity. In the area of Philosophy there has emerged an African philosophy, after several debates as to if there is an African Philosophy. In the area of theology, an African theology has also emerged. A theology, which is African, not just because it is done by Africans or in Africa, but because it speaks of African problems from African viewpoints. And at the same time, is nurtured and developed in Africa. As leaders of the family, parents have the duty of making their families the place where culture is taught, transmitted and sustained. Parents should take the teaching of culture as an important duty and primary right. To regard ignorance of one's culture as 'civilization' is at its best misnomer and at its manipulation of ignorance for questionable ends. In this age of globalization, science and technology, and near invasion of the mass media in our homes, it is incumbent for parents to insist on sound African moral values for their children. Parents must make out time to stay with their children to provide them with alternative African perspectives. In an age where 'economism' has become the yardstick, it is crucial to inculcate African values, such as solidarity, sense of ritual and festivity, sense of the sacred, hospitality, and love for life. These values should rather serve as yardstick. One great instrument for cultural renaissance is language. Irrespective of where parents find themselves with their children, they should endeavor to teach their children their native language. Language carries with it the culture and worldview of the people who own it. Some African families can be described as 'expatriate' even though they live within Africa. These are the wealthy families who think that it is a sign of prestige to act like and teach their children everything in the western way. Learning institutions also have a role to play in this process. It is through education that our values can be restored in the heart of young Africans. The African law-making bodies also have a role to play: if laws and policies that can safeguard our values are promulgated by the government or enacted by traditional ruling councils, the decay of our values will be impeded and their recovery enhanced. There should be censorship of whatever comes from outside

before they are allowed for local consumption.

European/American Projection of African Cultural Heritage: A Display of His-Story of Ignorance of the 'Other'

A close examination of the present cultural bigotry among nations of the world intimates us of crucial challenges that demand immediate attentions, especially the European/American display of African cultural heritage. It is indeed a challenge that needs to be readdressed if we must achieve a meaningful and effective inter-cultural dialogue: that is, the problem of “human ignorance”. The challenge of human ignorance is twofold. There is the challenge of “self-ignorance”, and there is the challenge of “one's ignorance of the other”. The twofold challenge of ignorance applies to both individuals and groups. However, our main concern in this work is the challenge insofar as it concerns groups, which leads us to the challenge of cultural ignorance and the sorts of prejudices it breeds. The limited scope of this essay will further restrict the discussion to the issue of a group's “ignorance of the other” and the implications it has for inter-cultural dialogue. More precisely, we are focusing on the challenge of “mutual ignorance” among European/America towards African cultural heritage. In the context of this essay in which mutual acquaintance is advanced as a major pillar of cultural symbiosis, we are giving priority to the issue of “mutual ignorance among European/American as it concerns African cultural heritage. It is our view that there is much ignorance and prejudices on the sides of these nations (European/American) of the world. What we call “misperceptions” and “misconceptions” of the 'other' that under certain circumstances may even lead to unnecessary conflicts and wars are largely the bitter fruits of this cultural ignorance and prejudice. The well-known saying “ignorance breeds prejudice, and prejudice breeds hate” constantly reminds us of the fundamental nature of the challenge that cultural ignorance poses to the wellbeing of the human community at its various level. The fact that philosophy plays a pivotal role in tackling the problem of ignorance is inarguable. To that effect, we encourage that the indigenous African scholars should educate these (European/American) counterpart on the nitty-gritty of cultural diversities, especially as it concerns African cultural heritage. It is believed that their subsequent knowledge of the African cultural heritage will pave a way towards transforming their thought pattern about our cultural heritage. One of the factors that engender conflicts among people of different cultures is one's ignorance of the beauty and worth of the cultural values of the other.

Our experiences of the perceived “misconceptions” and “misperceptions” of European/American of African cultural heritage prompted the move towards these expositions and analysis of culture for a better understanding of the diversified cultures of the world, especially of the culture in question (African culture), in a bid to achieve mutualism among nations of the world, especially European/American and African society. We believe that the only way to come out of this dilemma is by creating a cultural literacy across the globe. The idea of cultural literacy is basically concerned with our capacity to learn about cultures other than our own, to know commonalities that bind all cultures together and differences that set them apart, and to enlist the support and contribution of every known culture in the world in the pursuit of the common good. Moreover, cultural literacy is about having the right attitudes toward both commonalities and differences. The challenge before us is how to appreciate and celebrate similarities and differences at one and the same time, especially when differences tend to breed prejudices and disrespect and, more disconcertingly, when even similarities tend to be viewed negatively. This is indeed the challenge of cultural literacy for twenty-first century humanity.

Conclusion

Ignorance is one of the greatest enemies of mankind. It is an enemy that prevents one from progression and delights solely on stagnancy. In terms of growth it delights in diminutiveness. Little wonder the 'ignoramus' makes little or no effort to learn but remains contented with his/her present state of ignorance. One who finds himself in this condition has little or nothing to do in order to liberate himself from this quagmire unless he/she is helped externally. In view of this, we consider that those who lack the knowledge of African values will make little or no effort to learn them unless the Africans get involved in the process. It is on this note that we encourage that the African scholars should endeavor to reach out to those alien who constantly misconceive our values and at such misrepresents us even in the global community. Thus, until the European/American are cleared of this debris of misconceptions and misperceptions, they will continue to hold such notion about our cultural heritage.

EndNotes

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