

African Cosmology and the Duality of Western Hegemony: The Search for an African Identity

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Abstract

This paper attempts to deconstruct a myriad of negative images that denigrate the African continent as dark and seeks to place into proper context distortions of the original African creative intellect twisted by Western hegemony. It further attempts to invalidate the stereotypes that were pervasively consecrated as historical truths in literature, philosophy, religion, and politics.

The denigration of African mental culture disfigures the African worldview by condemning it “to swallow the synthetic, even if not digestible” (Nzewi, 2007: 271). This work will also testify that African indigenous system and other human civilizations that were condemned as backward and relegated as irrational are still viable for human existence. Next, it seeks to inspire, create and produce a true and authentic African modernity by criticizing and demystifying the superiority of the white race. And in its final analysis, the paper becomes the magic fountain where readers can draw upon that which gives power and knowledge to the real dynamics of social change in Africa.

Introduction

The long time colonial relationship between Europe and Africa saw the dehumanization that gave birth to the enslavement of the African people for the sole reason of economic exploitation and the perpetuation of racial and cultural stereotypes. This rendered Africans an epitome of barbarism, morons, primitives, and sexual perverts among other binary oppositions. Africa was not only viewed as a dark continent but also seen as “*a land of despotic civilizations with no legacy of those democratic principles that have been so clear to the West’s self image*” (Mengara, 2001:1). This colonial encounter has led to what Mudimbe calls the “*invention of Africa*” as opposed to the Africans’ Africa, with the negative characterization based on the Aristotelian paradigms of a chain of binary oppositions that seek to affirm the duality of Western hegemony. Aristotelian categorization of Africa has what Daniel Mengara (Ibid :2) calls “*the systematic and systemic manufacturing of a continent*” labeling it on the basis of “*superiority versus inferiority, civilized versus uncivilized, pre-logical versus logical, mythical versus scientific among other epithets*”. Such philosophical prejudices against Africans have continued to be circulated and recycled by many other European scholars in this modern day without stopping to check the facts.

The concept of color as a distinctive criterion of racial classification was more pronounced within the Western universe. Mengara (Ibid) thinks that, the rain started to beat Africa on the Berlin conference of 1885 that signaled the “*scramble*” for territorial ownership of Africa for the following predictable scenarios of:

- “*the European empire’s long attested desire to own portions of the world as a way of signifying their hegemonic grandeur.*”
- *the transfer of their secular European rivalries onto virgin grounds where imperial wars could be indirectly fought; and*
- *a capitalist fervour that the colonial ‘discoveries’ of rich lands in Africa and America, the slave trade and the development of commerce with the Eastern and middle Eastern worlds had helped to trigger”.*

For the process of colonization to appear to be a noble undertaking to the European's perception, it needed justification by expropriating the Africans' being by turning their minds into western objects. This resulted into the invention of a European-made Africa. It was out of Europe's explorations and expropriations that it embarked on a mission to re-map, re-shape, re-name Africa according to how it viewed the world. In the expropriation process, African as judged by indigenous African standards was replaced by a single monolithic African identity as was specifically reworked by the European empires. Names of towns, streets and institutions bore foreign designations and nature was not spared either as shall be discussed later. It is not fair that Africa was forced to imbibe and accept values and cultures of her conqueror at her own peril. The world tends to lose much when we forget that Africa remembers that, in the words of Patrice Lumumba's famous speech during a Congolese independence ceremony:

We were insulted; we had to suffer beatings, morning, noon and evening because we were niggers. Who is going to forget that a black person would be addressed tu, not of course, because that is how one addresses a friend but rather because the respectful vous was reserved to Whites only.

African Cosmology

In its most general and widely used sense the term cosmology refers to a people's worldview hence one can speak of the Shona cosmology, the Dogon cosmology or as in this case the African cosmology. However as with so many other issues about Africa it is important, as Ikuenobe (1999) noted, to remind readers that while there are many cultures in Africa it is almost acceptable in the philosophical literature that whenever a 'thought' or 'tradition' is predicated of Africa it does not connote homogeneity of cultures, but reference is only being made to dominant themes, in the sense of common generative themes in African cultures. It is with this sense that this section talks of African cosmology. In articulating the forces that denigrates African creativity, Ngwabi Bhebe (2000 : 7 - 8) blames colonialism as a hindrance to the advancement of African science and technology:

Before the European conquest of Africa, Africans had built up a pool of knowledge and technology which they used to sustain agriculture, human and animal health, industrial production involving food processing, metallurgy, leather tanning, timber seasoning, fermentation of beverages, making of dyes, mining and architectural engineering. But political subjugation by Europe so traumatized Africans that many of them lost confidence in and looked down upon their own culture, forcing some of them to view and embrace Christianity and Islam as a progressive move but without totally losing their old cosmology or basic beliefs.

The above corollary is enough justification that the African indigenous system and other human civilizations that were condemned as backward and relegated as irrational are still viable for human existence in present day Africa. As a result of the colonial misfortune much of what constitutes contemporary Africa both metaphysically and epistemologically is, though arguably, to a large extent a product of the European gaze. As the gazing subject the European enjoyed the privilege of seeing its ‘*Other*’, the African, without being seen for some time and in the process took this opportunity to define the African as its negative Other. As a result much of what goes into defining African cosmology is what was developed from the privileged position of the outsider. This representation, or call it misrepresentation of the African at various levels did not only end with the Westerners but a few African protégées in the mould of mostly the first crop of African Christian scholars such as John Mbiti bought into these misrepresentations about their own people. It is with this in mind that a number of philosophers and other Afrocentric scholars such as Ramose (1998), Makgoba (1997), Crossman (2004) among others are calling for the Africanisation of knowledge. Africanisation of knowledge is basically a call to place the African worldview at the centre of analysis and recognition that there are different pyramids for the construction of knowledge none of which should be regarded as inferior for knowledge is basically a cultural construct and hence boasts of its own cultural regalia. When one culture considers another as the product of its analysis, it would always be ‘*one cultural perspective*’ since culture is the window through which every man makes sense of the world. If this is anything to go by, then it is not difficult to realize that when the Europeans write about Africa, their perspective is always a product of their culture. And for this reason:

- *The conceptual framework within which they define linguistics as a field of study is non-African.*
- *The concepts with which they work are not contextualized within African cultural traditions.*
- *Western academic perspectives determine their definition of what constitutes a linguistic problem.*
- *The language and linguistics of Africa are not centralized, with most of their illustrative material coming from outside Africa.*
- *The language and language-related problems typical of this comprehensive and complex multilingualism of Africa are not dealt with substantially.*
- *The background knowledge assumed in certain textbooks are Western in nature, and the information they provide and the skills they develop are not specifically directed at African conditions, and finally,*
- *Very little reference is made to the work of African linguistics. (Webb-Sure, 2000: ix)*

In view of the above set of inferences one may begin to realize the importance of what Outlaw (1991) defines as the inevitable challenge of deconstruction and reconstruction that faces any African philosopher. The whole search for an African identity entails in large part the deconstruction of the existing texts and the concomitant reconstruction to produce an authentic African position. Africa has linguistic problems that are peculiar to its own language situations, as an example. These problems require African-oriented solutions, in form of knowledge, insights, theories and skills that are relevant to Africa. For Ngugi wa Thiongo (1999: no pagination), it is such challenges as “*the question of language that goes to the heart of the very being and existence of the African or for that matter any community deprived of its language*”. Africa was remembered strongly during the colonial scramble for Africa. Europe searched for empires and missionaries saved souls. They profitably invested in the exploitation of both natural and human resources. This political and socio-economic appropriation of this continent denied it of its recognition as a result suppressing it of its memory. An astounding example of forgetting Africa has been convincingly assembled by Susan Buck-Morss about the origin of Hegel’s idea of lordship and bondage: She puts it that:

Either Hegel was the blindest of all the blind philosophers of freedom in Enlightenment Europe, surpassing Lock and Rousseau by far in his ability to block out reality right before his nose (the print right in front of his nose at the breakfast table); or Hegel knew-knew about real slaves revolting successfully against real masters, and he elaborated his dialectic of lordship and bondage deliberately within this contemporary context.

Renaming: Towards the Search for an African Identity

In its bid to recreate a new home in Africa, Europe’s exercise of re-shaping, re-naming and re-mapping was necessary. Africa was Europeanized, made to be devoid of its African identities by an imposition of a European identity. This is why scholars like Mudimbe (1988) argue that colonization boils down to a process of organizing and reorganizing in both structures and in mind. All the European explorers, Rhodes, Livingstone, Speke, Stanley, Jameson, Victoria, to mention a few, because they left indelible marks by traveling across and throughout Africa, were to be remembered by bearing names of streets, hotels, schools, natural places of wonder and prominent buildings in the then Salisbury. They imported from Europe classifications and codes that were matched to people, their cultures and topographies. These imported symbols became labels that stuck. Elleke Boehmer (1995: 17) puts it that:

Colonial maps grew dense with old toponyms applied to new contexts –names like New York, Windsor, Perth, East London, Margate, or the many Newcastles the world over. New places, named after regions and towns left behind, re-created in some part the symbolic experience of the old world. But at the same time they marked out a new region, where a new life could begin to unfold. Naming set up a synchronous time frame for the colonies: though not Europe, they were declared to be contiguous to Europe, and subject to it.

In Harare for example, street names like Baker, Jameson, Stanley are significations that were transferred from England that were doomed to take on a different cast in a new context. Looking at this system of naming in general, Kaphagawani (1991) argues that names and naming has a philosophical significance. Names just like paintings are spectacular expressions of popular culture in a post-independence setting. Johannes Fabian (2006:148) puts it that names and current paintings have “*capacity to remind the viewer of past events and present predicaments, specifically for its becoming the occasion to tell a story*”. This nomenclature that the Westerners coined and gave to places and roads, named after their heroes, had a ritual and symbolic purpose. They served to re-live the memories of the their dead relations so that they remain somewhat ‘*alive*’ and do not recede into what Mbiti (1969) calls ‘*a state of oblivion*’ as a result of being forgotten by the survivors. As such the cultural significance of those names given to streets and other places during the colonial period cannot be underestimated. Besides serving basically as indelible marks of their footprints, the names had also a broader metaphysical significance. Metaphysically those names served as symbols of ‘*worship*’ in the sense that they would remind each member of the white race that the comfort and everything they enjoyed at whatever time to come was a result of the generosity of those individuals. Local cultures were dismissed as primitive. Before dismissing it, they firstly legitimized:

...colonial rule in an indigenous idiom. Through the medium of translation, so gaining command over a variety of texts, British administrators hoped to undermine the native monopoly on legal knowledge, and to gather the information needed to impose their own authority. To name a foreign land, to make of that land and its ways a textual artifact, was to exercise mastery. (Boehmer, 1995:19)

The postcolonial renaming of Zimbabwean towns and streets was in part a process of reclaiming a humanity that was denied under the colonial era thereby destroying the inherited foreign identities. These new names reconstructed a history where cultural memory is bound to live till eternity. In a post-independence state like Zimbabwe, naming exercise became a demand for social fulfillment and political self-determination with a quest for cultural and geographic authenticity. This made Zimbabwe the much sought after home, a place which to call our own and a spiritual repossession of the landscape. As part of the anti-colonial postcolonial discourse the practice of renaming places has continued throughout Africa with the last country to get independent in Africa, South Africa, currently engaged in the process of renaming some of its places in order to reassert a lost identity.

The Duality of Western Hegemony

Abdul Rahman Mohamed Babu (1981: 56) defines dualism as “*the philosophical concept which defines human nature by two opposing sets of qualities – good versus evil, egoism versus altruism, vice versus virtue*”. The Enlightenment period in Europe produced great thinkers such as Montesquieu, Hobbes, Hegel, Kant, Hume, Condorcet and Victor Hugo to mention a few, whose view of the world is dualistic. Paradoxically, the so-called enlightened scholars did not think that a continent such as Africa could have a history. Shame on you enlightened scholars. The fact that they are great thinkers becomes suspect. In fact they allowed their scholarship to sink so low as to represent a brand of racist pseudo-science and unqualified dogma. They, according to Mengara (2001:6), did not hesitate to formulate racist theories about Africans as barbaric people who:

- *Had no history; therefore, they could not claim to know themselves and had to be told who they were by Europeans.*
- *Were cultural children shaped by sexual lust, immorality and degeneration?*
- *Could not rule themselves because of their primitive irresponsibility; therefore, they needed enlightened masters to show them the ways of superior civilization and deliver them from ignorance.*
- *Could not claim ownership of Africa, or even of their lands since they were incapable of cultivating and managing them.*
- *Had no right to human justice, being sub-humans as they were.*
- *Had no religion and therefore needed the light of Christianity if they were to be freed from their chaotic state of nature and from animism.*

African humanity is doubted and still remains a victim of racism. The above unfortunate statements on the human inadequacy of the African were meant to justify territorial occupation of Africa, to justify enslavements of the African and to fabricate multifarious images of Africa. (Mengara, *ibid*) In support of David Hume’s belief that Africans were inferior to whites, Thomas Jefferson quoted by Charles Tembo (2006:62) viewed blacks in the following light: “*The blacks whether originally a distinct race or made distinct by time and circumstances are inferior to the whites in endowments of the body and mind*”. Cecil John Rhodes quoted by Mengara (*ibid*:5) further bluntly puts it that:

I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race... Africa is still lying ready for us – it is our duty to take it.

These racist remarks were meant to cripple the Africans' perceptions about themselves and doubt their integrity and self esteem. These undertones of racism, in Achebe's words quoted by Tembo, (2006:62) portray: "*Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity into which the wondering European enters at his peril*" This dehumanization of the African grew harsher during the imperial process with Western philosophers celebrating triumph through the writing of Aristotle's *The Poetics*, cited in Mengara (ibid:7) who declares:

For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient, from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule... The rule of the inferior is always hurtful. The same holds good of animals in relation to men; for tame animals have a better nature than wild, and all tame animals are better off when they are ruled by man; for then, they are preserved. Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind.

The present-day Africa is essentially the European made Africa waiting to be ruled in the Western philosophical thinking. The African indigenous sensibilities are doubted when the denial of the existence of African history is evidenced by heinous statements such as one made by Trevor-Roper quoted by Tembo (2006:63) who argues:

Perhaps in the future, he argued; there will be some African history... But at the present, there is none, there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness... and darkness is not a subject of history.

The denial of history to the Africans meant that there was in the African past, nothing of value; neither their customs nor their culture. By implication the African is being expected to take on the customs, the logic, and the language of the colonizer. This Western thesis that the African had no history also implied that the African had no future of his own to look forward to and hence it was incumbent upon the generous and caring white-man to carve out a future for him thus perpetuating the myth of the African as the '*white-man's burden*'. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1999: ibid) notes an interesting twist of historical fate that those Africans nurtured in the colonial mold held the key in molding new nations in the military, educational and economic realms. Africans who inherited colonial traditions and theory almost unaltered in the era of independence, are the products of the Horton-Asquith model. This model is a Macauleyite system of education, where these Africans, are the ones who filled the vacant places of white judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, lawmakers, governors, military leaders, and heads of departments of education. Ngugi wa Thiongo (ibid) admits that these colleges, particularly in their heydays, have produced a remarkable scholarship:

African scholars, whose first degrees were acquired in the colleges of the Horton-Asquith model, are to be found in major universities in Africa and abroad. But they are clearly alienated intellectuals, exiles at home and abroad, or exiles in search of a place they can truly claim as their own. In the context of the collective social body, they become beings for others, at the very least beings against themselves, against the very soil that gave birth to them. African-language communities pay for intellectuals which cannot put a single idea, even about agriculture or health or business, or democracy, or finance, into the very languages which gave them birth. This great paradox of African scholarship in general is best mirrored in the particular case of the production of African literature.

Despite traumatic experiences of slavery and subjugation from colonialism, the history of Africa has been eventful and a dynamic one. Through bodies like the African Union, Africa is determined to grapple with political and economic challenges bedeviling it as it forges ahead some mechanisms towards a unified continent.

Typical of Trevor-Roper, is Hegel's irresponsible statements in his *The Philosophy of History* quoted by Akachi Adimora – Ezeigbo (2003:28) that claim that Africans were “*a people without a history.*” Europe developed these biases and prejudices by attributing to itself a central position compared to African groups. Among African writers of international repute who wrote to set the record straight by reconstructing the history and cultures of the African people is the well articulated position by Chinua Achebe in his *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* where he quotes a Ghanaian Professor of Philosophy as saying:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections, – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.

Achebe's response demonstrates unequivocally that no matter how Europe, in Buluda Itandala's (2001: 63) wording, “*nourished its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its divinities and looks with contempt on outsider*” indeed Africans are a people with a history that they value positively. Besides just looking up to the West for ideas, Africa has cogent ideas to share as well. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (2003: 27-8) shows that Africa has a lot to give in these days of globalization when he says:

However, it is not totally correct to say that Africa has only been at the receiving end of ideas, for ideas that emanate from Africa have influenced the West in many ways. We see this in the impact of black culture on aspects of life in the USA, in Europe and in South America and other places, even long before that, the ideas developed in Ancient Egypt in various spheres of life preceded and impacted upon Greek and Roman civilizations that came later.

Meki Nzewi (2007:139) gives clear-cut distinction between an African mind as opposed to the European or American in the way they interpret life. Says Nzewi:

His indigenous African mental ecology, philosophies and human-cultural rationalizations are unique. They make appropriate and abiding human sense in the African human environment, and have sustained Africa's cultures through millennia of relatively peaceful, health and research-conscious human development. Indigenous Africa understood best its human environment and accordingly reasoned adequately functional cultural systems and practices for living in harmony with the physical as well as metaphysical cosmos.

Cultural practices should be viewed, understood and integrated from original perspectives of the African mental culture and worldview. (Ibid: 140). African civilizations should be elevated to the level of superiority that it deserves and not the Africa that is “*totally manufactured in image*” as a European-made continent. (Mengara, *ibid*: 8).

Biblical Images of Africa: Cry the Beloved Continent

This section seeks to invite attention on how the proliferation and reverberation of biblical images are reproduced through diverse representations. The section adds on to the paper's thrust to deconstruct Africa's European-made identities, which have exploited and ransacked the continent from time immemorial. Buluda Itandala (*ibid* : 77) quotes Charles White whose racist pronouncements have established a hierarchy of humankind where Europeans are considered to be at the top, followed by Asians and native Americans and in that descending order, Africans are found at the bottom next to apes. The size of the African brain was said to be smaller than the European's, leading to the conclusion that:

Africans and Europeans, for instance, were not members of the human species and could not have emerged from a common origin given their physical, mental and cultural differences, and the resemblance of the former to apes.

It is these negative images that have served to represent alternative sides of the Other in popular biblical depictions of Africa. In his discussion on the struggle for reason in Africa, Ramose (1999) highlighted that biological accidents such as skin colour, the colour of eyes and type of hair among others were used as a pretext to buttress the racist myth that there cannot be one human race and that if anything there were humans proper and sub humans. It was on the basis of these phenotypic differences that even among Christian believers it was difficult to conceive the fact that the God who created Adam and Eve could have been the same God who created the

African nor were the Africans descendants of the two great ancestors of humanity. More-so when the scriptures were then read to them, because of their positions in society then, the Africans fitted very well into the description of Noah's cursed son, Ham, (Genesis 9v20) who was doomed forever to serve as a slave to his other two good brothers because of his failure to respect his drunken father. While the Bible may not have anything explicitly stated that links the disrespectful son to the African, the plight of the African was quickly used by those who hid behind the scriptures as a pretext for the enslavement of the African. In this same vein, Nhamo Mhiripiri's (2002 : 395) observation is succinct:

Religion was used to legitimise racism within the context of modernisation by citing the dubious notion of the Great Chain of Being, which placed one Man immediately beneath in the order of moral, spiritual and intellectual importance. Within the category of man more contestations for positioning are found, with the white man claiming superiority and virtually denying an equal humanity for Africans.

The same verse on the Genesis account of Ham's spiritual curse was also used to convince Africans that the position they were occupying was not out of anybody's malice but it was basically their ultimate destiny divinely put in place because of their ancestor's lack of respect. When everyone looked around who else would fit the description of the descendants of the spiritually cursed Ham other than the servant and slave African? Europeans became up to today the blessed sons of Noah called Japhet. Throughout history therefore the African became somewhat the divinely defined slave for which no living human had the power to change. This enslavement of Africans was not viewed as a violation of law against humanity but that black colour was preordained for slavery. In an article entitled "King Leopold II's Ghost hovers over Africa still" King Leopold II was delivering a speech which urged missionaries who were being deployed to the Congo in 1883 that they were supposed to interpret the scripture in a manner that protected and served the interests of Belgium. They would do it in a way that African "*savages be not interested in the riches that their soil possesses in order that they will not want them.*" King Leopold II continued:

Your knowledge of the scriptures will help us to use special text that recommends the fidels to love poverty such as "The Beatitudes". "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom" "It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven" "You will do all that you can to cause the Negro to fear being rich in order that he may go to Heaven from time to time

Some texts on Christian teachings contained illustrations that even went further to portray the devil, Satan as a black fellow with horns. Hence as one looks at the bible and Christianity the colour black became a symbol for sin, somehow rendering the black person a true candidate of resentment. Christianity in Africa was basically for the African a replacement of one metaphysics by another. The African metaphysics gave way to Christian beliefs and much of the traditional African belief system suffered unprecedented onslaught. The Bible, during scramble for Africa, became a reference point at the root of the imperial agenda. They used the bible as the vehicle in which they rode as they colonised Africa. The spirit of conquest was hailed supreme by supportive scriptural references to the book of Deutronomy Seven verse one to three. (Deut 7: 1-3) which reads:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you are entering to occupy and drives out many nations before you...when the Lord delivers them into your power and you defeat them, you must put them to death... you must not intermarry with them, neither giving your daughters to their sons nor taking their daughters for your sons.

As one goes through all this it becomes apparent that in almost every facet the African became the 'negative Other' of what the Westerner was not. Even spiritually he was cursed right from the onset and represented darkness and evil while his Other stood for light and all that was good and blessed. It is this dualism that has continued to haunt Africa since her colonial encounter with Western modernity a period that marks the advent of one of Africa's major postcolonial problems, that of self identity. The black colour of the African skin was a criterion used to place Africans at the bottom of the human social scale. This justified using them as slaves resulting in Africa suffering serious cultural, religious, economic and socio-political dislocations. Closer home are glaring examples of the apartheid era. A speech made by former South African President P.W. Botha (2006 : 12) adapted from Sunday Times of South Africa on the 18th of August 1985 was published by the *Daily Monitor* entitled "From the grave : Botha's dark plan" is shocking and mind-boggling to say the least. Says Botha:

The fact that, Blacks look like human beings and act like human beings do not necessarily make them sensible human beings. Hedgehogs are not porcupines and lizards are not crocodiles simply because they look alike. If God wanted us to be equal, he would have created us of a uniform colour and intellect....It is our strong conviction, that the Black is the raw material for the White man. So, let us join hands together to fight against this Black devil...Surely, God cannot forsake his own people whom we are. You've seen that Blacks can't rule themselves. Give them guns and they will kill each other. They are good in nothing else but making noise, dancing, marrying many wives and indulging in sex. The Blackman is the symbol of poverty, mental inferiority, laziness and emotional incompetence.

This perception of the African is inaccurate and misleading to the extent of manipulating biblical images in order to bestow authority that reinforces the relationship between primitive and civilised, naked and clothed, dark and light. However, despite this denigration, not everything African was lost, some ideas that informed and defined the social ontology such as the philosophy of *ubuntu* have managed to survive the total onslaught.

Revitalizing *Ubuntu* in Search of an African Identity

While African cosmology includes a whole lot of issues, this work has selected aspects of African cosmology such as human nature and society, which are subsumed in the whole concept of *ubuntu* for closer analysis. The aim is to demonstrate how a traditional African social philosophy can still be used as a viable framework to shape life in contemporary Africa and as a counter to the widespread individualism threatening humanity in the world of today. The point is to show how African indigenous systems that were condemned as irrational and backward can inform life today in a much more beneficial way by shaping a unique African modernity. While there is debate on whether one can speak of an African modernity given that modernity has its historical origin well grounded unequivocally in Western civilization this work in agreement with Gyekye (1997) argues for the existence of a unique African modernity. According to Gyekye (ibid) African modernity is distinct and unique from the Western one in the sense that within the West and outside, modernity has been experienced differently by both Africans in the so-called new world that is in the West and Africans on the continent. African modernity is modernity as experienced by Africans and it involves how Africans have interacted with and at the same time transformed Western modernity as they shaped their own lived experiences.

The philosophy of *ubuntu* is basically an indigenous philosophy of social existence that defines the relationship that ought to obtain between members of the society. The distinguishing features of this philosophy are its welfarism, altruism, universalism and basically its utilitarian outlook. Central to it is the near universal lessons that '*to be human is to affirm one's humanity by affirming the humanity of others*'. Its Shona equivalent is put as *munhu munhu nevanhu*. This is what the Westerners failed to live up to when they denigrated the African and other so-called inferior races by practicing such horrendous acts as slavery and other various forms of dehumanization of especially the Africans. This philosophy of *ubuntu* is one element that has remained despite efforts to sideline it through other ideologies as capitalism and liberalism that put priority to the individual interests always in contradistinction to those of the community of beings. It is ironic that the so-called rights enshrined within the doctrine of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 crafted by the so called '*rational*' peoples with the idea of making it a '*universal religion*' do not bring anything new to the way the African has been living serve for its exceedingly individualistic tone. Were it not of the arrogance of the West and for their grant plan to ensure the success of *what Ramose, (2003) calls epistemicide*, that is, the

killing of the knowledge of the indigenous peoples of Africa, the philosophy of *ubuntu* should have been universalised. The much-celebrated institutions of modernity such as democracy, capitalism, human rights and the rule of law among others would make much sense to the contemporary African and his life if they were suffused with the philosophy of *ubuntu*. While Western scholars have gone to length to demonstrate that there is nothing worth noting from the African continent besides its vast forests and wild animals the philosophy of *ubuntu* stands out clearly as one aspect of the African cosmology that has to be salvaged to promote a humane social existence.

It can be argued that it is because *ubuntu* was relegated to the background as Africans celebrated the modern institutions from the West that a number of problems peculiar to Africa are persisting. If only people had embraced the philosophy of *ubuntu* one reckons there would be less problems that mark social life in most countries in Africa such as stayism, corruption and the general disregard of human rights despite the fact that there is a document to that effect for which many governments are signatories to. Africa needs the philosophy of *ubuntu* as the mortar in the construction of its own African modernity.

Conclusion

The best way to conclude this research would be to challenge other Afrocentric thinkers with the wise words of Molefi Kete Asante (cited in Mengara, *ibid*: xiv) who avers:

The verdict on the continent can neither be given today nor tomorrow, but must await future time when an Afrocentric Africa, aware of itself in a self conscious way, will step back on the world stage with its own gifts, however evolved, shaped, and altered by experience and history, to claim what was lost.

Words, vibes and sentiments captured in this research are well echoed in a statement by one of the renowned and celebrated African writers. "If I were God," Chinua Achebe (1965: 201-5) wrote in one of his most famous essays entitled "*The Novelist as a Teacher*," that "*I would regard as the very worst our acceptance, for whatever reason, of racial inferiority*" and he went on to articulate his role as a writer as that of an educator trying to help his African "*society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration*". It is therefore the duty of all Africans to bring about genuine revolution in order to change styles of living in this continent.

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