

## **Afrocentrists and the Revitalization of Africa's Cultural Heritage: A Critical View**

**Bruno Yammeluan Ikuli, Ph.D.**

Institute of Foundation Studies,  
Federal University, Otuoke, Nigeria  
Email: ikuliby@fuotuoke.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

Does Africa possess an impressive cultural heritage? If yes, what is the heritage? Can one really build on nothing or non-viability and expect great outcome? Several African writers, Afrocentrists, over-glorify Africa's cultural heritage. They argue that sustained western negative discourses and publicity and education of Africans in western culture and values cause Africa's servility to Europeanism. This somewhat ill-orientation leads to self-alienation characterized by neglect and abandonment of Africa's cultural heritage and values in preference to western culture. Afrocentrists believe that self-alienation is the ultimate cause of Africa's backwardness, dearth of development and non-competitiveness with other races. They suggest that for Africa's renaissance - that is, Africa's rebirth or jumpstarting of prosperity, development and competitiveness with the first world - revitalization of Africa's cultural heritage is the solution. The problem this article seeks to resolve is this: in this 21st century, is flight to the past for the purpose of revitalization of Africa's cultural heritage truly a solution to Africa's development backwardness? It is in view of this that this paper rejects the Afrocentrists' 'revitalist' thesis, which it considers as 'psychologistic-artisticism' and recommends greater imbibing of the 'epistemological-scientific and technologically orientated cultural order of the west. In doing this, the study employs the expository, critical analytic and comparative methodologies of scientific study to, respectively, expose vital conceptions, critique

Africa's cultural heritage and values and compare Africa and western cultural heritages and values.

**Keywords:** Africa's cultural heritage, African values, Development, Afrocentrists, Revitalization

### **Introduction**

The phrase 'Africa's cultural heritage,' a coinage of Afrocentrists, expresses a subtle, yet an overt assumption in the homogeneity of cultures across Africa. This cultural heritage, Afrocentrists say, is rich, impressive, splendid and glorious (Onyewuenyi, 1993, p. 23). Nevertheless, it suffers abandonment and dormancy. The two factors, which Afrocentrists attribute to as cause of this problem, are: first, sustained negative discourses and publicity by western scholars (Oladipo, 2006, p.60) and, second, education of Africans in western culture and values (i.e., the adoption of western educational syllabi/contents and curricula in African schools and space). Eurocentric education, Afrocentrists say, put generations of Africans into servility of Europeanism or westernization. The result of Africans neglecting and abandoning Africa's cultural heritage and values, because of preference of a foreign culture, Afrocentrists describe as self-alienation.

For Afrocentrists, self-alienation is a fundamental problem affecting most post-independence Africans. By it, most Africans alienate themselves from their first nature, and never fully, but only secondarily, participate in the borrowed culture of the west. This way, modern Africans reduce themselves and value by becoming lifetime mediocre in the scheme of global affairs due to lack of mastery both of the indigenous culture they have separated themselves from and the alien culture into which they are not fully integrated. Indeed, Afrocentrists argue that self-alienation denies modern Africans the chance of being fully African, while not being compensated with western-ness; despite having falsely self-transformed into 'westerners.' This way, the self-alienated is trapped between African and western cultures and identities. Hence, Afrocentrists hold that self-alienation is the ultimate cause of Africa's poverty, development bankruptcy and non-competitiveness with races. Every development, Afrocentrists say, is culture-based. So for them, by neglecting and abandoning Africa's cultural heritage, Africa's cultural content becomes

excluded from the continent's development efforts, thereby inducing poverty, backwardness, underdevelopment and non-competitiveness with the first world. However, to jumpstart development and put Africa in the frontline of global competitiveness, Afrocentrists suggest a flight to Africa's past for self-retrieval, cultural revival and reinvention.

The problem this article seeks to resolve is this: in this 21st century, is flight to the past for the purpose of revitalization of Africa's cultural heritage truly a solution to Africa's development backwardness? What constitutes Africa's cultural heritage and values? What in Africa's cultural heritage suggests its innate capacity to successfully reposition Africa among frontline races in global development competitiveness? What options are open to this study if a flight to Africa's cultural heritage fails to unveil impressive cultural assets and values with capacity to rival or, even, offset western cultural heritages and values in terms of engendering development in the 21st century? The study seeks to counter the Afrocentrists' thesis that cultural revitalization holds the key to Africa's prosperity, development and competitiveness in the 21st century. Its secondary objectives include: one, to offer a brief insight into the movement of Afrocentrism; two, to reject in part the *psychologistic-artistic* argument in favour of Africa's renaissance via reinvention of Africa's cultural heritage; three, to propose enthronement of an *epistemological-scientific* and *technologically* oriented cultural order in place of the *psychologistic-artistic* conception floated by Afrocentrists as Africa's pathway to development and flourishing.

The study employs the expository methodology to uncover the thrust of Afrocentrism; adopts another methodology, the critical and analytical tools of research, to investigate Africa's cultural heritage to determine its strengths and weaknesses; and applies the comparative methodology to evaluate which, between the African and western cultural values, stand the chance to promote greater physical and material, or rather, infrastructural development for Africa. To adequately deal with the problem, the paper is roughly divided into five parts, namely, Afrocentrism and the Afrocentrists' cultural project; the conception of cultural heritage; constituents of Africa's cultural heritage; comparison of western and Africa's cultural values; and a demonstration of the higher values of an *epistemological-scientific* and *technological* cultural

order in relation to the goals of Renaissance. At the end, it concludes with a recommendation suggesting that, if Africa must flourish, develop and be competitive, African scholars need to draw from the western *epistemological-scientific and technological culture*, not the African *psychologistic-artistic* orientation couched in the idea of a radical revitalization of Africa's cultural heritage.

### **Afrocentrism and the Afrocentrists' Cultural Project**

Afrocentrism - this is a scholarly movement started with a vision to urge the world to rewrite world history so as to incorporate black African heritage into it. Afrocentrists argue that in the writing of world history, Africa's heritage is expunged from it by Eurocentric bigots, who working with highly ethnically cum racially tinted glasses imprint Eurocentric narratives as eternal truths in the pages of history books and curricula the world over. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Afrocentrism emanates from the intellectual efforts of African-Americans and Africans. Writing about it, Onyewuenyi (1993) says:

The Afrocentric movement is a series of activities initiated by concerned African and African-American scholars and educators towards achieving the particular end of ensuring that the African heritage and culture, its history and contribution to world civilization and scholarship are reflected in the curricula on every level of academic instruction. (p.39)

Onyewuenyi (1993) continues: "advocates of Afrocentrism demand a reconstruction and rewriting of the whole panorama of human history in its account of the origin of mankind, the origin of philosophy, science, medicine, agriculture, architecture, etc." (pp. 39 - 40). It involves teaching about Africa, her many past achievements or cultural heritages and values, etc. Also writing on Afrocentrism, K. Horsthemke (2006) says that the movement means: placing Africa at the centre', historically, culturally, philosophically and morally (Schiele 1994, 152; Ani 1994). It encompasses the view that Africa is the cradle of humankind and the locus of the first great civilizations from which all others derive (Asante 1980, 45; Asante 1987, 170; Van Sertima 1999; Seepe 2000). It teaches that Africa is the birthplace of technology, metallurgy, astronomy, mathematics, agricultural science and

medicine (Asante 1980, 45; Van Sertima 1999; Seepe 2000), and that African values are superior to European values (p.450).

Afrocentrism holds that Greek philosophy originates from Africa, specifically Egypt, and contests as “utterly unscientific the theory of Africans’ intellectual incapability, by which racist anthropologists and philosophers deny Africans the ability to philosophize and rationalize” (Onyewuenyi, 1993, p.40). In its strict term as a distinct historiography, Afrocentrism is acknowledged to have reached its zenith in the 1980s and 1990s with Cheikh Anta Diop, John Henrik Clarke, Ivan van Sertima and Molefi Asante as the names most associated with it. Recently, however, it has acquired a large followership of not-yet-accomplished African scholars, who though not professional historians, believe that a return to Africa’s cultural past and heritage is the path to kowtow in pursuant of authentic development of the African continent and the flourishing of African peoples. The word “Afrocentrists” is herein employed indiscriminately to refer to anyone whose view supports Africa’s culture over and above alien cultures.

### **Conception of Cultural Heritage**

The phrase ‘cultural heritage’ is coined from two words: ‘culture’ and ‘heritage.’ According to the *Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language* (2011), culture means the “ideas, customs, and arts of a particular society,” (p. 244) while heritage is “anything that has been carried over from the past or handed down by tradition” (p. 479). Cultural heritage, therefore, means ideas, customs, and arts developed in the past by the ancestors of a given society that have been passed on to their descendants through tradition, which may be active or dormant. Also, cultural heritage is synonymous with the word culture. Therefore, both may be used interchangeably. As a formal, scientific term, culture, according to Isaac E. Ukpokolo (2004), “originated within the field of anthropology. However, anthropologists disagree over its conception” (p.17). Nevertheless, Clyde Kluckhohn (as cited in Ukpokolo, 2004), offers several meanings of culture, four of which are selected and presented here as follows: (1) “the total way of life of a people,” (2) “the social legacy the individual acquires from his group,” (3) “a way of thinking, feeling, and believing,” and (4) “a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment

and to other men," etc.(18-19). Similarly, Theophilus Okere (2005) defines culture as "the accumulated experience, knowledge and lore of a social group stored, for future use, in the memories of men, in books, in objects" (p.37).

In line with the aforementioned, particularly, the dictionary's definition, H. Odera Oruka (2002) conceptualises culture as "a general way of life of a people which, among other things, demonstrates their celebrated achievements in thought, morals, and material production" (p.58). Beside capturing much of the other definitions, three elements in Oruka's definition, namely, thought, morals and material production, respectively correspond with the Collins dictionary's three elements of: - ideas, customs and arts. Oruka (2002) explains that these three elements "summarize the content of culture which in totality is a people's body of knowledge, beliefs and values, behaviour, goals, social institutions plus tools, techniques, and material constructions" (p. 58). Based on the foregoing; therefore, the paper now turns to the cultural contents of Africa's heritage.

### **Constituents of Africa's Cultural Heritage**

Every society, every people have culture. That means every ancestor bequeath cultural heritage to their progenies, thus, the idea of Africa's cultural heritage. The question becomes: what constitutes Africa's cultural heritage? In a sense, Africa's cultural heritage may be defined as the ideas or thoughts, customs or morals and arts or material productions that are indigenous to Africa, which have been transmitted over generations by African ancestors. This definition, which in a way reflects the mindset of Afrocentrists, gives the impression of cultural homogeneity in Africa, although Africa is manifestly culturally heterogeneous. Africa hosts diverse and varied cultures. In spite of these diversities, however, an Afrocentrist, Subairi 'B Nasseem (2002), argues that: variations in their phenomenal features notwithstanding, African societies share certain characteristics in common: those shared attributes constitute "the ontological unity beneath the phenomenal" (p.260) diversity among African societies. He believes this 'ontological unity' is basis for the univocal terms such as 'African epistemology', 'African traditional religion,' etc., and by extension 'African cultural heritage.

There appears need to point out, however, that it is highly probable that Nasseem's 'ontological unity beneath the phenomenal' diversity of African societies could be an outcome of past expansionist and hegemonic drives of Arab and European campaigns in Africa or of results of colonial, Islamic and Christian activities, all of which are exogenous to Africa. Should this thinking be confirmed to be true, it makes Nasseem's underlying "ontological unity" of African societies a false classification since the fact of exogeneity in origin disqualifies such "unity" for not deriving from Africa's noumenal nature. The noumenal order constitutes the substance and essence of a thing, not the phenomenal which belongs to the category of accidents. Thus, the Afrocentrists must be ready to ensure that whatever evidence of impressive cultural heritage they assign to Africa's past needs be accompanied with a corresponding evidence of its noumenal belongingness to Africa. This latter evidence is often missing out in the Afrocentrists' account. Consequent upon such fundamental errors of fact, Mary Lefkowitz (1996) criticises Afrocentrism as "an excuse to teach myth as history."

The implication of the query above is that certain acclaimed Africa's cultural heritages, for example, the moral senses of "brotherliness," "belongingness," "solidarity," "fellow feeling," etc., may not even ontologically, but, possibly, phenomenologically belong to Africa on account of exogenous Christian and Islamic activities in Africa. This makes the task of distilling all indigenous cultural heritages that belong to Africa pretty difficult for the Afrocentrists. Nevertheless, an attempt can be made to decipher certain indisputable cultural thoughts, values and practices as incontestably belonging to Africa's cultural heritage.

### **Content of Africa's Cultural Heritage and the Afrocentrists' Revivalist Project**

What is the content of Africa's cultural heritage? Here, Oruka's definition of culture provides a guide. By implication, the search for the content of a cultural heritage simply involves identification of its three essential elements of: ideas or thoughts, customs or morals and arts or material productions. Therefore, the effort to identify Africa's cultural heritage does require investigation into the following:

**1. Africa's cultural ideas or thought.** Thought is the greatest and finest of all heritages. Its content reflects the height reached by the human mind. The more advanced, sophisticated, elaborate, lucid, coherent and consistent thought is, the greater its contribution as a heritage. Ideas are the components of thought. In ordinary parlance, the saying goes thus: 'ideas rule the world.' This way, great ideas developed into great thoughts rule the world forever. Often, thoughts are developed by individual thinkers, reinforced, advanced and, or, modified or, even, contradicted by their pupils, members of a school of thought or opponents. Opponents usually generate rival thoughts. Thus, the existence of schools of thought such as: Platonism, Aristotelianism, Pythagoreanism, Scholasticism, Hegelianism, Kantianism, etc.; modifications such as: Neo-Platonism, Neo-Aristotelianism, etc.; counters such as: Idealism versus Realism, Rationalism versus Empiricism, Utilitarianism versus Rawlsianism, etc. These and several other thoughts, including: pragmatism, liberalism, neoliberalism, constitute western cultural thought. They provide for the prosperity, flourishing and world dominance of the west.

The list of great thinkers of the west is inexhaustible. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Darwin, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Hegel, Marx, Descartes, Smith, Hobbes, Locke, Popper, Rawls, etc. Does Africa parade such great thinkers? If there are, what are their distinctive thoughts or schools of thoughts? Does Africa own any established thoughts? Or, has Africa evolved spectacular thoughts comparable to established western thoughts? In a seminal work, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, edited by Kwasi Wiredu (2004), Africa's philosophical thought in Africa is divided into the following eras: Ancient History of African Philosophy, African Philosophers of the Greco-Roman era, Precolonial African Philosophy in Arabic, Nineteenth-century African Political thought, Post-Independence African Political Philosophy and Contemporary Anglophone African Philosophy (p. v). The above philosophical thoughts emanate, virtually, from every corner of Africa (North, South, East and West) with the earliest arising out of Egypt.

In his account of ancient African philosophy, Théophile Obenga (2004) names Imhotep, Hor-Djed-Ef, Kagemni, and Ptah-Hotep in the Old Kingdom of Egypt (2686 - 2181 BC) as pioneers in the establishment of the philosophical tradition in world history (p.36). They predate the first recorded western philosophers,



Thales (c.620 - ?540 B. C.), Anaximander (614 - 540 B. C.) and Anaximenes (about 585 - 528 B. C.). Similarly, D. A. Masolo (2004) lists the Christian apologists Origen (AD 185 - 253), Tertullian (AD c.155 - c.240), St. Augustine (AD 354 - 430), Plotinus, Africa's earliest female philosopher Hypatia (AD c. 370 - 415) as African philosophers of the Greco-Roman era. He adds the Jewish philosopher, Philo, (Philo Judaeus; c.20 BC - 40 AD), Cyprian, Arnobius, Lactantius, etc. to the list (p.50). Other African philosophers across several other generations include: (1) Diagne's list of pre-colonial African philosophers, who wrote in Arabic: Ahmad Bâbâ's, Muhammad Baghayogho, the Hausa poet from Kano, Malam Usuman and Ali Al Mazrui (1891 - 1947)(2004, p. 69); (2) Hensbroek's enumeration of Nineteenth-century African political thinkers, namely: Edward Wilmot Blyden, Africanus Horton, James Johnson, Alexander Crummell (2004, p. 79); (3) Hallen's account of originators of African philosophy, William Abraham, John S. Mbiti, Robin Horton, Peter Bodunrin, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, and Segun Gbadegesin (2004, p. 100 - 114).

The list includes: J. Olubi Sodipo, Barry Hallen, Godwin Sogolo, M. Akin Makinde, V. Y. Mudimbe, Anthony Appiah, Pauline Hountondji, H. Odera Oruka, Theophilus Okere and Okonda Okolo. Still others are: Tsenay Serequeberhan, Lewis Gordon, Lucius Outlaw, the Italian Robert Bernasconi, Oladipo Fashina, Olufemi Taiwo and D. A. Masolo (2004, pp.116 - 136).

Curiously, none of the aforementioned African philosophers distinguishes themselves with a sustained, advanced, sophisticated, elaborate, lucid, coherent and consistent thought as found in the western culture with thinkers like M. Heidegger, J. S. Mill, D. Hume, J. M. Keynes, R. Descartes, etc. Hence, although, several thoughts have emerged from Africa that can be classified as Africa's philosophical heritage, Africa's only, primary and recallable cultural thought remains what B. E. Nwigwe (2005) suggests as African socialism. African socialism, essentially, is a mixture of African cultural values and western Marxist ideology (p. 44). It is developed by Africa's foremost nationalist political thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Ahmed Sekou Tuore, Modibo Keita, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Kenneth Kaunda. The key tenets of African socialism, according to Nwigwe (2005), are: "African communitarian values, including socio-spiritual religious values and outlooks to life that

are authentically African" (p. 44). A closely related African cultural thought is African communitarianism. Yet, communitarianism is not exclusively African thought.

**2. Africa's customs or morals.** Certain morals are identified to be closely associated with the African way of life; although, they cannot be said to exclusively belong to Africa. They include: Wiredu's "sense of community," "fellow feeling" and "human sympathy" (Wiredu, 1998, 119). Others are: P. Iroegbu's "sense of belongingness," a "sense of respect," and "solidarity" (Iroegbu, 1995, p.350; Ejenam, 2005, 272-275). Those apart, there are a variety of customs attributed to Africans: kingship succession rites, traditional marriage rites, child naming ceremonies, rites of initiation into adulthood, polygamy, large family traditions, festivals, traditional dances, masquerade dances, traditional worship, ancestor worship, shrine cults, fertility rites, traditional dispute settlement systems, funeral ceremonies, etc. To this list may be added the esoteric practices of sorcery, magic and witchcraft. Yet, it may be pointed out that non-African cultures possess some of these so-called customs.

**3. Arts or material productions.** Here, Subairi 'B. Nasseem's insight may suffice. Referring to Africa's arts and material productions, Nasseem writes: "many achievements and failures 'have, however, been preserved through the remains of bones, tolls (sic), weapons, ... rock-paintings, the art of writing'" (2002, 259). Those aside, Africa's arts and material productions include: music, drama, various marketable commodities such as hoes, machetes, thatches, barter trading system, etc., These very basic cultural products lack splendor. Given the foregoing, it remains to be determined if there are any impressive, splendid or glorious cultural products in those listings that when authenticated to originate properly from Africa and revitalized and reinvented, promises to radically improve the fortunes of Africa? It is questionable whether any of the philosophical productions of the African philosophers acknowledged above promises to stimulate wealth production in Africa, flourishing and competitiveness with the rest of the world?

Apparently, the argument of the Afrocentrist scholars, first, tries to prove that Africa possesses unacknowledged cultural

heritages and, second, if excavated, revitalized and reinvented, these heritages and values promise to radically transform Africa's backwardness into forefront-ness. It is against this backdrop that Cheikh Anta Diop draws attention to Africa's glorious past. Diop (1955 and 1967) says that civilization is Africa's gift to the world. According to him, Africa is the cradle or source of civilization – not Europe as the Europeans want the modern world to believe (p. 230). In his book, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, Diop (1967) writes: "According to the unanimous testimony of the ancients, first Ethiopians and then the Egyptians created and raised to an extraordinary stage of development all the elements of civilization, while other peoples especially the Eurasians, were still deep in barbarism" (p. 230).

Furthermore, he writes... civilization ... existed in Black lands well before any historical contact with Europeans. Ethnically homogenous, the Negro peoples created all the elements of civilization by adapting to the favourable geographical conditions of their early homelands. From then on, their countries became magnets attracting the inhabitants of the ill-favored backward lands nearby, who tried to move there to improve their existence (Diop, 1967, p.152). In her letter to Onyewuenyi acknowledging Africa's cultural contribution to world heritage, the Jewish Professor, Hilde Hein (1990) remarked that: with hindsight, it is easy to see that even the documents of the canonic Greek tradition give ample room for inference that the "giants" of our Western culture openly exchanged with and learned from sages of an older society which they revered for its intellectual vitality (H. Hein, personal communication, November 1990).

Based on this fact, Hein (1990) urged that: "It is high time that" the African society "be understood and that its history be restored" (H. Hein, personal communication, November 1990) since Africa has produced a great deal of good. Besides, she (Hein, 1990) acknowledged that "present African thought is consistent with its ancient communitarian heritage" (H. Hein, personal communication, November 1990). The argument for revitalization of Africa's cultural heritage presented above can be said to be a psychologistic-artistic exercise aimed at painting an adorable Africa with a clear intent to soothe the feelings of Africans, particularly blacks. Where in concrete or tangible terms are Africa's impressive heritages? At best, they were assimilated into the Graeco-Roman

cultures and only survive today in the varieties of western cultural intellectual, moral and material productions, which claim is hard to authenticate. This is, however, doubtful: Africa's cultural thought may hardly have expanded beyond communitarianism. In that case, the great varieties of Greek and Roman thoughts could not have been borrowed from Africa. Lastly, during the European Renaissance, western philosophers and scientists revived the Greek and Roman thoughts they exhumed. Are there similar bodies of African thoughts that Afrocentrists may revive for African renaissance?

Can the thoughts of Imhotep, Ptah-Hotep, Origen, Tertullian, Plotinus, Ahmad Bâbâ's, Malam Usuman, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Kenneth Kaunda, Ali Al Mazrui, J. S. Mbiti, Kwasi Wiredu, J. Olubi Sodipo, M. Akin Makinde, V. Y. Mudimbe or any of the other African thinkers aforementioned translate Africa's backwardness to forefront-ness? To grow wealth, develop and compete, Africa must have to outgrow the stage of psychologistic-artisticism, i.e., the level of beautifully crafted words, intended to self-soothe and psychologically massage the African ego; consequently, the following arguments against the Afrocentrists' pursuit of radical cultural revitalization.

### **Arguments against Revitalization of Africa's Cultural Heritage**

Without, at least, an organised, systematic, coherent and distinctive corpus of intellectual heritage (such as Platonism, Hegelianism, utilitarianism, pragmatism, liberalism, neoliberalism, etc.) that Afrocentrists may present for Africa's renaissance, the remaining options become the customs or morals and the material productions listed above. The morals and material productions listed above are inadequate for developing Africa in the 21st century. This situation puts Afrocentrists in a difficult position. Besides, there are other strong reasons that suggest why revitalization, particularly fully-fledged or radical revitalization, of Africa's cultural heritage should be discountenanced. The task of making Africa globally competitiveness requires imbibing and application of certain values that are apparently missing out in Africa's cultural heritage. Development flourishes in cultures where reason, reasonableness, critical and creative thinking – at least, among a people's political and economic classes – sit on the throne.

These values are obviously absent in the larger part of Africa's cultural environment. For example, Africa's strong sense of respect for elders, besides any associated advantages to it, stymies criticality and innovations: for instance, in modern politics it breeds tyrants and despots who occupy the place of elders in traditional society and create docile political followers in the place of the youth of virgin Africa. Inquisitiveness, criticality and the explorative spirit among young Africans are often discouraged with beliefs in totems and taboos or sayings such as: "curiosity kills the cat," "the youngster that does not heed the counsel of the elders is wont to become victim of same circumstance that periled their parent's existence," "what an elder sees sitting on a stool, a youngster does not perceive standing on rooftop," etc. To be succinct, the question is: what, in the afore-listed cultural contents, suggest that with reinvention, revitalization and application, can catapult Africa from its backwardness to the forefront of global scientific, technological and industrial advancement and competitiveness with the rest of the world?

Revitalization and refinement of those aforementioned cultural contents and values actually stand little or no chance of taking Africa far into the journey of development and flourishing. Communitarianism, myths, folklores and divinations; "fellow feeling," "human sympathy," "sense of belongingness," a "sense of respect," and "solidarity;" kingship succession rites, traditional marriage rites, child naming ceremonies, music, traditional dances, wrestling, rock paintings, statuettes, etc., are not the values that promote infrastructural development. Neither are the ancient aphorisms, religious - Christian or Islamic or even, traditional philosophical discourses and counter discourses with western negative narrations about Africa, promise to radically stimulate Africa's growth, development and competitiveness. Rather, they, at best may mitigate the burden of poor development; but, in the long run, they portend to retain or reverse Africa's civilization holding down Africa at the base of the existence of mankind, where the human preoccupation concerns with the basic necessities of food, shelter, clothes, and sexual indulgence; procreation and population explosions open new paths to recreation and pleasure and provide antiquated sense of security. The key point here is that flight to the cultural values listed above is flight to regression

into antiquity; a slip into errors similar to the three religious characters of classical Greece.

The first, akin to that of Dionysian mystical escapism, will encourage a number of mental or reflective escapists in Africa. Here, the African indigenous churches would blossom as more irrational and unthinking adherents flock to them to take refuge in religious activities, some “working themselves into a frenzy of wild dances and song ... drink the blood of ... animals... in a state of intoxication ... and ... finally drop in complete exhaustion, convinced that at the height of their frenzy, their bodies had been entered by the spirit” (Stumpf, 1989, p.9) of God. More religious houses are wont to witness endless rows of visitors seeking out seers, pursuing prophecies and chasing miracles from spurious and mostly self-acclaimed ordained “men or women of God;” their chief desires, to achieve the good life, flourishing and happiness; yet, the more they chase, the more poverty ravages the land.

A second set of Africans portends to be akin to the epicurean indulgent gourmand or voluptuary. These ones typically fit the description of corrupt politicians, fraudulent business persons, idle gangsters and all kinds of economic predators, who as they devour their human victims motivate themselves with the uncritical triple formula of pleasure: “eat, drink, and be merry” (Stumpf, 1989, p.110). Then, a third likely set of Africans to emerge, the mental or intellectual retirees. These tire out of Africa’s stagnation, resigning to stoic indifference or apathy, they may pursue the state of *ataraxia* - i.e., of serenity of mind and happiness of life - in resignation to equanimity (“live and let live”), blind fate (“whatever today brings, tomorrow might be better”) and fatalism (“being alive is no better than being dead”). The crux of the above argument is that flight to Africa’s cultural heritage is flight to greater religious solace, which roots regardless of the faith, Christianity or Islam, derives from the religions of Dionysus, Epicureanism and Stoicism.

The successes of the western developed economies and other dominant races do not derive from mythic-religious consciousness and practices, but thrive on the reasonability, rationality and criticality of their ruling class and the industry, creativity or scientific and technological inventions of their intellectual and economic elites, especially.

When the material and physical development of states are hinged on mythico-religious and spiritual consciousness of the vast

population, the desired miracles never happen; rather, society only freely slides downwards until it is reduced to Glaucon's "city of pigs," (cited in Purshouse, 2006, p. 36) with its human equivalents in Plato's "human herds." Plato's 'human herds' live at the base of society. These 'herds' are seen, but not heard; commanded, but cannot command; ruled, but cannot rule. Why? They are adjudged as ignorant and so incapable of leadership. Leadership is the prerogative of the wise. In the global community, Africa lives at the base implying perception of Africans as the global "human herds-ship." The stoic's human drama and Plato's idealization of human stations in society remained useful resources in the hands of the west to assign Africa its role of human herd-ship and artisanship of the global community. Rather than provide a formidable counter-thought system to neutralize the adverse consequences of western thought and ideological outcome, the Afrocentrists' proposal inadvertently reinforces the combination of the stoic's equanimity and resignation of fate in the drama of life together with Plato's insistence on permanent placement, which thought systems were employed in assigning and retaining Africa in her station of economic and development doldrums.

### **The Reasonability and Rationality Necessity for Renaissance and Development**

The dominance of the west over Africa, which started after the 16th century and climaxed in the 19th century, occurred not by accident or coincidence, but by a long-term culture of reasonability, rationality, critical and inventive thinking developed in Athens - Greece. At Europe's renaissance, the urgency and necessity of its self-rescue from the impasse of mediaeval crossroads was at its peak. At that crucial moment, Europe resorted to, and reinvented the ancient Greek and Roman cultural heritages as solution. The Graeco-Roman heritage that Europe went after was not some self-soothing therapy or psychological massage of its ego. Rather, it pursued a cultural heritage and values founded on the rationalist tradition cultivated by Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas, which developed over time into rationalism. This rationalist tradition paved the way for wealth, growth and development.

The mundane details of that rationalist culture gave Europe all the advantages over Africa after their encounter and subsequent cultural clashes. Europe's rationalism bred such cultural values

as: free spirit (liberalism) with room for free science, casteless or classless religion (secularism), flight from mythic consciousness to philosophical consciousness, impartiality regarding the world about them, good sense of reality, power of abstraction, commitment to rule of law, love of life, yet ever-readiness 'to pass through the gates of death as speedily as may be,' love of moderation, yet a constant will to power (Copleston, 1946, pp. 16–18). With the use of reason, the Greeks established rational terms of social and international relations, which they buried in one word, "justice," that became enthroned in the 'heart' of the western culture. Justice was conceptually, methodically and carefully developed to structure, arrange and organize the social order so as to yield a stable, harmonious and flourishing society.

Once it worked for Athens, the idea is then adopted and applied with adaptation to every other society. Thrasymachus conceptualises justice as "the advantage of the stronger." Callicles defines it as "might is right." Both conceptions find harmonization in Plato's view of justice as: "the wise shall lead and rule, and the ignorant shall follow." Put otherwise, Plato says: "justice is produced by establishing in the mind a natural relation of control and subordination among its constituents, and injustice by establishing an unnatural one" (Plato, 1987, ...). Other western conceptions of justice include: Machiavelli's imperial expansionism or oversea-ism, Hegel's totalitarianism, Nietzsche's 'will to overpower' or 'master-morality.' These conceptions of justice make up part of western cultural values. They partly determine the west's external relation of subordination and control. An Africa without these intellectual arsenals was vulnerable; thus, its colossal defeat and domination to this time, because it observably still lacks a counter.

Does Africa seek an overcoming of its assigned dramatic role and station in the world place? Then Africa must adopt the rightful and workable values to exit its space 'behind others' and rise to take up a place in 'front of others.' Identification and rejection of the internal factors and cultural philosophies responsible for its condition is vital. Also, Africa needs to develop its counter-cultural philosophies, if possible; but where not possible, adoption and counter-application of the alien and invading cultural philosophies suffices. A critical comparison of western and African cultural values becomes a necessary launch pad.



### **A Critical Comparison of Western and Africa's Cultural Values**

Isaac E. Ukpokolo employs, in his monograph titled *Philosophy interrogates Culture*, certain relational concepts to summarise Western values. For westerners, he writes: the... concept of space is self-centred, the concept of time linear, knowledge is based on abstraction, reality is fragmented, the order of human relations vertical, the vision of relations between human beings, one of exploitation, the position of many subservient to that of the few, social groups are fragmented, the economic paradigm is one of more production for more consumption, and vice-versa, with the support of more science and more technology (Ukpokolo, 2004, 26). Africa's cultural values, comparably, contrast with the above. For instance, Africa's concept of space is communitarian; the concept of time is multi-valued and multi-tasked; knowledge is based on concreteness and down-to-earth; reality is perceived as a whole bound by God; the order of human relations horizontal; the vision of relations between human beings, one of sense of community, fellow-feeling and human sympathy or charity; social groups are unifying; the economic paradigm is one of subsistent production for mostly domestic consumption, with support of fertility gods and ancestors or the Christian God of the harvests.

While Europe's self-centred concept of space allows for a universalist and expansionist motion, Africa's communitarian concept of space, encourages localized and restricted motion; Europe's linear time consciousness is goal-oriented and develops personal attention, fosters expertise and eliminates distractions, while Africa's multi-layered, multi-valued and multi-tasked orientation to time advocates concurrent pursuit of too many values and commitment to multiple or crowded duties, cause distractions and breeds 'Jack of all trades, master of none' kind of personalities; Europe's power of abstraction permits comprehensive or holistic knowledge of ideas, mathematical principles and details of physics or materiality, while Africa's concrete or down-to-earth knowledge system supports sensory perception of matter and breeds a culture of senility; lastly, Europe's fragmented reality drives a piecemeal, step-by-step, procedural and scientific approach to life, while Africa's holistic reality permeated by Divine power or vital force is over-spiritualized and dipped into mysticism reinforced with mythic-consciousness.

Overall, while western values tend to be progressive, African values are retardant and so, do not successfully compete with those of the west. The contrast is accounted for by the key values each of them pursues. While Africa pursues emotion, sentimentality and regurgitative reasoning, Europe chases after reason, rationality and critical (inventive) reasoning or thinking. Again, while Africa's priority idolizes religion and encourages proliferation of religions, such that Africa becomes the world's dumping facility for religions, Europe's choice upholds science, technology and industrialization. This latter promotes wealth, development and competitiveness, while the former attracts poverty, underdevelopment and submissiveness. The Afrocentrists' arguments for Africa's renaissance, therefore, are tantamount to a psychologistic-artistic exercise of the mind. They soothe the African mind with pleasant aesthetic narrations and beautiful as well as impressive mental images of Africa in the distant past, but fail to present substance and essence to the claims. Consequently, they fail to offer any realistic solution to Africa's challenges in this age. An epistemological-scientific and technological cultural order is, therefore, the suggested alternative solution if Africa must make progress.

### **Renaissance and the Epistemological-Scientific and Technological Culture**

Western prosperity, development and global dominance intricately connect with Europe's renaissance - "i.e., rebirth," a period extending between late 14th and 16th centuries. In other words, renaissance improved the fortunes of Europe or the west, generally. Some western gains during this period include: awakening or revival of the learning and literature of the ancient world; organization of education such that men think for themselves as they got liberated from the intellectual slavery of the Middle Ages; discovery of new lands that opened up new sources of wealth; and fundamentally, the discovery of gun-powder which conferred an inestimable blessing upon Europe (Copleston, 2010, p. 17).

Wallace Matson (2000) outlines four overlapping epochs that climaxed in this order. They are: first, literary: the rediscovery of the Greek and Roman classics and the arousal of obsessive interest in them. Second, religious: the crisis of the Reformation and

Counter-Reformation, extending on to the middle of the seventeenth century. Third, in natural science: a spectacular burst of progress, especially in astronomy and physics: the Copernican Revolution. Fourth, in philosophy: only after all these does a comparable revolution in thinking about reason get under way (2000, p. 297).

Matson (2000) acknowledges that “concurrent with these movements and extending through the entire period (as well as before and after it) are the decline of the power of the Catholic church both politically and intellectually and correlative increase in efficiency and dominance of secular governments, in particular the great kingdoms of Spain, France, and England” (2000, p. 297). Ultimately, Europe’s renaissance comes as a reaction to dissatisfaction with an old, materially unprogressive order, regulated by a religious worldview, which promoted superstition, mass ignorance and illiteracy, and engendered poverty. It is for this reason that the renaissance threw overboard the existing Judeo-Christian culture fostered via the influence of medieval Christian scholars or the scholastics.

In fact, to express their distaste for this period of Christian cultural supremacy in its history, Europeans refer to it as the Dark Ages, while they ascribe fine names (Renaissance, Enlightenment, Modernity, Post Modernity) to the successive eras regulated by reason, rationality, critical and inventive thinking palpable in a scientific, technological and industrial culture. To buttress the above, note that following Europe’s renaissance is the French Enlightenment, which took place in the 18th century. This period also revolts against religion or the mediaeval culture and seek scientific knowledge based on reason for practical results and development benefits. According to Frederick Copleston (2010), the eighteenth-century French philosophers believed strongly in progress. That is, in the extension of the scientific outlook from physics to psychology, morality and human’s social life. If they tended to reject revealed religion and sometimes all religions, this was partly due to their conviction that religion, either revealed religion in particular or religion in general, is an enemy of intellectual progress and of the unimpeded and clear use of reason (p.3).

A vital implication here is the fact that if there must be realistic physical and material progress, it must be built on intellectual foundation; and not on primordial, cultural or religious sentiment,

emotions and authoritarianism. This means ethnicism, religious fundamentalism and extremism such as being perpetrated by Islamic terrorists such as ISIS in Somalia and Boko Haram in Nigeria are retrogressive activities. According to Copleston (2010), the French Enlightenment “expresses a marked change from the outlook of the mediaeval culture, and it represents a different cultural stage” (p. 3). The Afrocentrists’ invitation to Africa’s past for the purposes of revamping Africa’s cultural heritage is an attempt, no doubt, at ‘Africa’s renaissance.’ Clearly, much as Europe’s renaissance, the call for Africa’s renaissance is inspired by the desire to lift the continent out of wreckage of colonialism and imperialism unto the wellbeing of contemporary wealth. Now, when Europe took flight to its past, it returned to the Graeco-Roman cultural philosophies, where reason, rationality and critical thinking hold sway. The question is: What equivalent cultural thoughts does Africa present at its own renaissance? Does Africa possess cultural thoughts that rival or even surpass existing western thoughts? For example, does Africa hold an economic theory that matches or, even, promises to overcome western neocapitalism? Is Africa’s socialism or communitarianism a match or, even, superior to western neocapitalism? What confidence level does the Afrocentrist parade to show that the revival of Africa’s communitarianism is capable of offsetting western neocapitalism?

Interestingly, by the time of Europe’s renaissance, Greek and Roman cultural philosophies were replete or overflowing with several schools of thought (e.g., Idealism, Realism, Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Aristotelianism, Neo-Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Scholasticism, Augustinianism, Thomism, Ockhamism, etc.). Over time, Europe’s intellectually fertile ground was ready to expand: it produced many more schools of thought. Thus, added other schools of thought such as Kantianism, Hegelianism, rationalism, empiricism, intuitionism, utilitarianism, pragmatism, among others. In other words, pre-renaissance significant and impressive western philosophies distinctively existed and provided the foundation and springboard for post-renaissance continuation or furtherance of profound intellectual activities. Western prosperity, flourishing, development and global dominance stem from these intellectual exercises and not merely from its customs or morals and material production.

On the contrary, the dearth of indigenous cultural thoughts seems to greet Africa's renaissance. This explains the vague and abstract references to apparently nonexistent theories and philosophies that sustain the terms of the discussion. African discourses take on the character of wishful thinking or suggestions or proposals or postulations, rather than analysis or criticality or synthesis of existing ideas, theories or philosophies. There appear to be no ancient and mediaeval schools of thought in Africa to build upon. Take examples from Makgoba. He proposes that "it is the duty of academics and scholars to internationalise, articulate, shape, develop and project the image, the values, the culture, the history and vision of the African people and their innovations through the eyes of Africans" (Horsthemke, 2006, p.455).

Furthermore, he writes: "African people should develop, write, communicate and interpret their theories, philosophies, in their own ways rather [than allow these to be] construed from foreign culture and visions" (Horsthemke, 2006, p.455). The question is: what should Africans develop, write, communicate and interpret? In other words, where are the African equivalents of the Greek and Roman thoughts prior to Europe's Renaissance? That is, where are the equivalents, for example, of the Idealist, Realist, Platonist, Neo-Platonist, Aristotelian, Neo-Aristotelian, Stoic, Epicurean, Scholastic, Augustinian, Thomistic, Ockhamistschools of thought? Where are the ancient and mediaeval contents of Africa's cultural thought that can be enhanced to rival or offset the dominant western thoughts?

### **Conclusion**

Africa's development bankruptcy and global non-competitiveness is, indeed, a bane for the continent in the 21st century. It is, therefore, understandable why Afrocentrists propose flight to Africa's past to reawaken and reinvent its cultural heritage for the purpose of stimulating wealth, development and competitiveness in the world. The west, particularly, Europe presents a model of renaissance, where cultural revitalization inspired and generated prosperity, development and world dominance. The Afrocentrists' call to exhume and revamp Africa's cultural values is an invitation to Africa's renaissance – an imitation of Europe's renaissance. However, while Europe had established cultural thoughts, especially Greek philosophies, to revitalize,

Africa, arguably, has no such equivalents. Nevertheless, in the absence of established African thoughts to match, counter or offset oppressive and exploitative western thoughts, this article recommends the adoption and counter or reverse application of the same western values in relation to the external world. This strategy has been successfully adopted and used by some emerging Asian powers, especially; which, partially, accounts for their current successes and progress.

### References

- Copleston, F. (1960). *A history of philosophy: The enlightenment: Voltaire to Kant*. New York: Continuum.
- Culture (2011). In G. Breslin, L. Gilmour & P. Weber (Eds.), *Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language* (5th ed.). Glasgow: HarperCollins Pub.
- Diagne, S. B. (2004). Precolonial African philosophy in Arabic. In K. Wiredu (Ed.), *A Companion to African philosophy* (p. 69). MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Ejenem, S. (2005). Relevance of Iroegbu's communalism in our times. In G. U. Ukagba (Ed.), *Father kpim: Philosophy and theology of Pantaleon Iroegbu: Essays in honour of his priestly silver jubilee (1980-2005)* (pp. 272-275). Ibadan, Nigeria: Hope Publications Ltd.
- Hallen, B. (2004). Contemporary Anglophone African philosophy: A survey. In K. Wiredu (Ed.), *A companion to African philosophy* (pp. 116 - 136). MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Hensbroek, P. B. V. (2004). Nineteenth-century African political thinkers. In K. Wiredu (Ed.). *A companion to African philosophy* (p. 79). MA: Blackwell.
- Heritage (2011). In G. Breslin, L. Gilmour & P. Weber (Eds.), *Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language* (5th ed.). Glasgow: HarperCollins Pub.
- Horsthemke, K. (2006). The idea of the African university in the twenty first century: Some reflections on Afrocentrism and Afroscepticism. *SAJHE*, 20(4), 450-462. [https://journals.co.za/docserver/fulltext/high/20/4/high\\_v20\\_n4\\_a6](https://journals.co.za/docserver/fulltext/high/20/4/high_v20_n4_a6)
- Iroegbu, P. (1995). *Metaphysics: The kpim of philosophy*. Owerri: International Universities Press Ltd.
- Lefkowitz, M. R. (1996). Not out of Africa: How "Afrocentrism" became an excuse to teach myth as history. Retrieved 13 November 2020, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrocentrism>.

- Masolo, D. A. (2004). African philosophers in the Greco-Roman era. In K. Wiredu (Ed.), *A companion to African philosophy* (p. 50). MA: Blackwell.
- Matson, W. (2002). *A new history of philosophy: From Descartes to Searle* (2nd ed. vol. 2). Belmont: Thomson-Wadsworth.
- Nasseem, S. B. (2002). African heritage and contemporary life. In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Eds.), *The African philosophy reader* (2nd ed., p. 260). Cape Town: Oxford University Press of Southern Africa (Pty) Ltd.
- Nwigwe, B. E. (2005). In quest of an authentic theory of development for Africa. *Journal of the Department of Philosophy*, 11, 44-57.
- Obenga, T. (2004). Ancient history of African philosophy. In K. Wiredu (Ed.), *A companion to African philosophy* (p. 36). MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Okere, T. (2005). *Philosophy, culture and society in Africa*. Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publications Ltd.
- Oladipo, O. (2006). The issue of African self-definition in the contemporary world. In O. Oladipo (Ed.), *Core issues in African philosophy* (p. 60). Ibadan: Hope Publication Ltd.
- Onyewuenyi, I. C. (1993). *The African origin of Greek philosophy: An exercise in Afrocentrism*. Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Oruka, H. O. (2002). Ideology and culture: The African experience. In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Eds.), *The African philosophy reader* (2nd ed., p. 58). Cape Town: Oxford University Press of Southern Africa (Pty) Ltd.