

Destroy their Tongue and Identity so that they will Never build the House: Language, Identity and (Under)development of Africa.

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Abstract

This paper examines two main themes in Africa's culture-- Language and Identity and how the disarticulations of both have led to the underdevelopment of the continent. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, using the historical approach and post-colonial state thesis as the basis of analysis. It argued that the underdevelopment of Africa is hinged on bastardisation done to the twin of language and identity being two germane parts of its culture through the early contact between Africa and Europeans in the form of slave trade and colonialism which continued in the post-colonial state through neo-colonialism. The paper found that in spite of the interventions from stakeholders from the global, regional levels down to individual level in responding to these crises, these interventions are dictated by western powers, lack proper framework and atomistic as well as lack the political will. The paper recommends among other things that there is need for an Africa reinvention on what works for us, recalibration of our identity, cultural values and moors through conscientious education.

Journal of Policy and Development Studies (JPDS)

Vol. 15. Issue 2 (2024)

ISSN(p) 0189-5958

ISSN (e) 2814-1091

Home page

<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jpds>

ARTICLE INFO:

Keyword:

Culture, Identity, Language, Post-colonial, Underdevelopment
Article History

Received 29th March 2024

Accepted: 25th April 2024

DOI:

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v15i2.2>

1. Introduction

Language and identity are intrinsically important for cultural revival, nation building and development. No one knows for sure when language evolved (Pagel, 2017). There are both scientific and mythological description of language. Scientifically, it is believed to have evolved through the *Homo sapiens* who lived around 150,000 to 200,000 years ago in eastern or perhaps southern Africa (Poznik et al 2013).

The second school of thought is the mythology which can be traced to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. It was reported that a group of people wanted to build a big city different from others. After completing the task of the beautiful city which became the envy of other towns around and knowing that many people would one day achieve what they had built or even surpass them; they decided to do something remarkable which was to build a very tall tower that will touch the sky. This was at the backdrop that such feat would be unmatched. Within a short period, they had achieved a lot and the news of this edifice reached many places including the high heavens. The heavenly body decided to stop them on the basis that achieving such feat would lead to a snowball effect where others would also want to embark on such feats. But rather than attack destroy the edifice; the first point of destruction was their language and identity. With the destruction of these two cultural traits, all about the edifice except the myth and tales was lost. The reason why the heavens chose to destroy these two traits and not the edifice itself are among other things linked to the importance of culture and identity. It is believed that the division of these languages and identities have now metamorphosed into several nationalities today. For example, the languages metamorphosed into different identities and nations such as the French, the English, the Dutch, and the Germans etc. By this, it means that the act led to nationalism and nations. Some still hold the emergence of the variations in nations brought about conflict (Hutchinson, 2017; Gruffydd-Jones, 2017; Miller, 2022). Conflict breeds underdevelopment, war, pestilence. In other words, the world would have been better if we all understood one another.

The import of the Tower of Babel analogy is to affirm the importance of language and identity in building the house (development). While a lot of studies have examined different areas of language, identity and development: adequate attention has not been given to these two aspects of Africa's cultural lives (language and identity) and how they have snowballed into Africa's underdevelopment conundrum (Azuonye, 1979; Zeleza, 2006; Kanu, 2013), adequate attention has not been dedicated to how these factors hinder or promote development of the African continent. As UN (2024) affirms that 'Languages, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development, are of strategic importance for people and the planet.

Thus, this paper examines two main themes in Africa's culture--- Language and Identity and how the disarticulations of both have led to the underdevelopment of the continent. This paper answers the following research questions: What is the origin of Africa's identity and language crises? How has the language and identity crises led to underdevelopment? What has been the response to right the anomalies or crises created by language and identity crises? The paper is divided into seven parts: the introduction, language, identity and underdevelopment crises in Africa, theoretical explanations, distorted language and identity crises, the Implications of the Distortions on Africa's Developmental Crises, responses to the Crises and the Conclusion.

Language, Identity and (Under)Developmental Crises in Africa

Language is the means of identifying entities, categorising objects and concepts, perceiving ideas and things. Language separates man from every other animals (Pagel, 2017). As Azuonye (1979) notes that the study of any form of literature is naturally a study of the dialect or language in which that literature occurs. This is irrespective of any explicit analysis of linguistic structures. Simpson in an edited work examined the importance of history in the choice of official languages in Africa.

He noted that while language is important for nation building, its choice in countries with multi-ethnic groups is complicated especially where religion plays a part. Akinwale (2011) argues that the language dilemma is instrumental in the many challenges confronting Africa's development. Ayantayo (2021) argues that language and ethnicity cannot be diverged. Onyibor (2016) shares the view that enforcing a national identity and integration can be a tall order in a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria. Ogechi (2019) unravels the manipulation of language and nonlinguistic communication strategies in political and sports discourses to negotiate various identities in Kenya. He argues that negative identity and language create ethnic cleavages and thus advances the case for a positive use of language and identity.

Identity is a complex concept. Ordinarily, it means what something is or how it looks like or how a person answers the question of 'who are my?' It can also be seen as the distinguishing characteristic of a person or being. OED (1989) defines it as "The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality." (Kumari, 2022: 86). It can also mean, basis of which any African can be identified and associated-with appropriately and comfortably.

Many factors shape identity. These are society, friends, family, life experiences, self-expression, appearance, media, interests, opportunities, culture, location, and ethnicity and race. Speaking of race, one's identity could place him or her as a black, Asian, white, European, American or African. With emphasis on Africa identity which is the most complex and maligned; Kanu (2013) offers that the contact of slave trade and colonialism beclouded Africa's identity and he added that the age of globalisation may further put a blow to this already battered identity. As Zeleza (2006) argues that Africa is exceedingly difficult to define, which makes many academic and popular discourses of African identities and languages quite problematic. This is because Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct whose boundaries—geographical, historical, cultural, and representational—have shifted according to the prevailing conceptions and configurations of global racial identities and power, and African nationalism, including Pan- Africanism. National identity on the other hand is a person's identity or sense of belonging to one or more states or to one or more nations. Thus, Kehily (2009) argues that while identity plays a huge role in being, it can also be forged in the social sphere that is located within temporal relations. She opines that:

The inter-relationship between past, present and future in the on-going work of developing an identity suggests that who we are, what we do and what we become changes over the life course and furthermore, the work of identity remains fragile and unstable to the point where settlement is unachievable (2009:2)

By this, identity answers the questions, who am I? How should I live and who do I want to become? Ndubuisi (2013) went further to state that in spite of the complexity of what is termed African identity like the concept in itself, Africans must exhibit the 'we' or being that makes them different from others. There are different types of identities, these are cultural, national gender etc. Cultural identity is a part of a person's identity or their self-conception which is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own peculiar culture.

There is an intersection between language, culture, identity and development. Identity and language crises are linked to Africa's underdevelopment. Underdevelopment affects the being or

the individuals or the personality of Africa and African identity. Thus, in addressing the true meaning of African identity, we must resolve the development crises. But what is underdevelopment? While there is still a debate on what is to be used as yardstick for development whether in Gross Domestic Product or human capital development, or the definition arranged by the west (Anugwom, 2020); the paper adopts underdevelopment as low level of development characterised by low real per capita income, wide-spread poverty, little urbanisation, hunger and starvation, a high birth rate, poor and insufficient medical services, poor diet, high rate of illiteracy, lower level of literacy, low life expectancy, poor investment base, over dependence on raw material for exportation and underutilisation of resources (Falola, 1980). Bonner et al (2009) observe that identity play a huge role in the development and participation of gifted black or African American millennial. By this, the identity that the student bare will alter how well he or she cope or socialize or display his or her skills in the society. Language and identity sits at the centre of Africa's developmental crises (Ndhlovu, 2008; Pinxteren, 2021).

While a lot of studies have examined the aspects of languages, identifies and culture; there is still a paucity of scholarly work on how it affects the development of the African continent.

2. Theoretical Explanation

There are many theories that can be used to explain the place of language and identity crises in Africa and how they both contribute to the underdevelopment of the continent. The paper employs the post-colonial thesis. The continent has an abysmal record in terms of development. Some reasons have been specified as causes of Africa's development crises. These stem from the nature of the post-colonial state. Alavi (1972) states that because the post-colonial states were autonomous and overdeveloped, whoever captures the state controls the commonwealth. Thus, for the colonialists to control the commonwealth as well as the culture of the people, they needed to distort the being which is the culture. The state is important and the primary focus of international relations. But whatever its hues, colours, shape and size, the state is primarily the instrument of power and order as well as a mechanism for authoritative allocation of values and interventions in the society. Odukoya (2020) argues that the difference among and between states are not in terms of their overall properties, and attributes but in their origin and how they are formed, their power, capacities and autonomy. The import of his position is that the history and origin of the post-colonial state determines how well its language remains one and the house built.

Some of the earlier post-colonial scholars such as Onimode (1982), Amin (2012) and Rodney (1972) toe this line of thought. They all argue how the global north had under-developed the global south. For them, the relations that exist within the metropole have taken a global dimension such that the global north becomes the bourgeoisie while the south becomes the proletariats. They furthered that the continued dependence on the market of the global north for raw materials or extractive materials remains the underbelly factor in Africa's developmental crisis. For them, in such historically determined relations of production, the global south has to delink from global capitalist system before the global south will undergo development. Having understood the thesis, how did Africa get entangled in the language and identity crises and how has the language and identity crises led to Africa's underdevelopment?

Distorted Language and Identity Crises

Africa is still underdeveloped for many reasons. From political, economic to social: one aspect of the social aspect is Africa's culture including Africa's language and identity. Africa had a glorious past. Though, it may not have been an Eldorado as there were evidences of human sacrifices, desolate and depopulation; yet most of the empires attained some level of civilizations in which the early Europeans who came in contact with some of the towns and empires were marveled at what they found (Austin, 2008). How did this begin?

It is certain that the beginning of the distortion of Africa's language and identity started from the early contact between Africa and the Europeans and later the slave trade. With the enslavement, the slaves were first meant to be checked for basics such as dentition, wellness, by the time they got to the new world, their names were changed. Some of these slaves in the new world were not called by their indigenous names given from their roots, but rather given either a new name or identified by gender such as 'boy' or girl' 'woman'. From slavery, the next episode for Africa and Africans was colonialism. Colonialism is the physical presence and occupation of an external or powerful country (colonizer) in another country (colony). Its period in Africa varies but it was consummated by the 1884/1885 Berlin Conference. It had the most telling impact on the continent. Boahen (1991) notes "Of all the external traumas and influences that Africa has experienced---external invasions, the slave trade, Islam and Christianity---none proved as superficially evanescent and yet deeply profound as was European colonialism for Africa and Africans". Ndubuisi (2013) again states that it is objectively clear that African problems of persistent identity crisis and no meaningful development have serious link with pattered and truncated effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The discrimination based on skin color snowballed into the identity crises of African State. This attempt described as colourism is discrimination based on skin tone and phenotype.

All these were attempts to erase the African past. Later they were taught to learn the language of the master like Portuguese, English or French. Sibanda (2021) argues that the teaching of colonial languages was a calculated, racialised attempt to erase the language and humanity of the colonised. France introduced direct rule and assimilation, while Britain introduced indirect rule. Though the policy was supposed to maintain the Africa's past and culture and never to distort it; this changed through religion and education. These are other aspects of culture. Changing the Africa religion and education were also forms of eradicating the Africa's past. English became the language of the slave. And as Karl Marx stated, the substructure transcends into the superstructure.

The post-colonial state and its breed of leaders did not do much. Since they were mostly relics of the old guards, they continued the colonial mentality. In most of the countries, the colonial metropolitan languages were introduced as official languages while the indigenous languages known to these areas were jettisoned and downgraded as inferior. Thus, most of them went extinct and till date, many are still toeing such path. Over the years, most people travelling abroad particularly the United Kingdom and the United States and few countries abroad are required to take mandatory test of English. It is even abysmal that in spite of the years of struggling to comprehend and assimilate the language, Africans particularly Anglo-phone countries are still subjected to language tests. Examples are the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and Secure English Language Test (SELT) among others. Some applicants could also take them more than once before they pass them and they do not come cheap.

The United Kingdom response on why they allow these tests is for the applicants to achieve a level of competence required to integrate in the United Kingdom (Ogundare, 2022). Aside from the cost, it also does not help the Africans to comprehend educationally. Wolff (2018) refutes the cost myth by stating that:

From South Korea through Japan and China, to Russia, all of Europe and North America, schools' language of instruction is children's mother tongue (also known as first or home language). They also learn "global" languages like English and French so they can later function and communicate all over the world. Crucially in these countries, the mother tongue is not suddenly abandoned at university. That's because research has shown the level of a foreign language acquired at school is not enough for the required "Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency", or CALP.

Protests in recent times have seen some foreign universities and countries rethink their policies. And while Africans struggle to learn other people's languages or the language of the slave-master, its own indigenous languages are in extinction. United Nations education, Scientific Economic and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2022; Kamal, 2022) gave this shocking report on the extinction of indigenous languages in Africa. It stated that:

Every two weeks a language disappears taking with it an entire cultural and intellectual heritage. At least 43% of the estimated 6000 languages spoken in the world are endangered. Only a few hundred languages have genuinely been given a place in education systems and the public domain, and less than a hundred are used in the digital world (UNESCO 2022; Kamal, 2022).

No doubt that this is a ticking time-bomb. The report further stated that while 29 Nigerian minor languages have become extinct, the Nigerian major languages – Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa are also endangered (UNESCO, 2022). Identity could take the forms of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, physical attributes, personality, political affiliations, religious beliefs, values, citizenship and nationality, hobbies, skills, ancestry, professional identities, and so on.

Implications of Language and Identity Distortions on Africa's Developmental Crises

Many Africans have now been wired to believe that anything dark or black is evil including their skin colour. Thus, dark skins are now stereotypically associated with a life of economic disadvantage, ugliness, archaic and struggle. The implication of this is that many Africans and Nigerians alike now spend huge amount of monies to look like the white man. This is a phenomenology where Africans are no longer proud of their skin colour and want to imitate whites in all spheres of lives and it is what Fanon (1986) described as "black skin" and "white mask" While skin lightening or bleaching is seen as the pinnacle of beauty which affects self-esteem for women of color around the world as a way to enhance their attractiveness, marriageability, career opportunities and socioeconomic status; it is mostly as a form of disdain for one's blackness and overall identity as black, brown African American. In also trying to take another identity as being fair or white, it cost women of colour about \$8 billion worldwide (Hall, 2021). It is also estimated that bleaching products with which many contains mercury will make \$31.2 billion in profits by 2024 (Colbert, 2020). In Africa, the prevalence varies significantly, ranging from 25% in Mali to

77% in Nigeria, with other countries reporting intermediate rates: 31.15% in Zimbabwe, 32% in South Africa, 39% in Ghana, 50% in Senegal and 66% in Congo-Brazzaville (Thant et al, 2023). This is however not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. The famous afro beat musician, late Fela Anikulapo once dedicated a song against bleaching and the need to be proud of one's skin and identity.¹ Osei et al (2018) finds that in spite of the warnings of the dangers of persistence use of skin lightening (SL) products of its harmful health effects and the vulnerability of and that adolescents are at the risk of prolonged use of SL products as Over 60% of female high school students engaged in skin lightening and between 22% and 44% of students know female teachers who practice skin lightening. The persistent dangers of this craze have been well established (Pollock, 2021). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2019) warns that skin bleaching can cause liver and kidney damage, psychosis, brain damage in fetuses and cancer and that maternal patients who use them also endanger the foetus. Yet many Africans who engage in the act do not read too many meanings to this dark side.

One area where colonialism and neo-colonialism has penetrated is on the sexuality aspect of Africa culture. During colonial period, some of these acts were also condemned by the colonialists. One will then wonder why the condemnation of yesterday has now become the capstone. In fact, it has even become a yardstick for giving aid to third world. Worryingly, many Africans and Nigeria inclusive are adapting and adopting these ideas or identity indiscriminately. In what is now called Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual, Transsexual and Queer (LGBTQ), some have now begun to join the bandwagon of not wanting their God-given sexualities. A good number of youths popular for this are Bobrisky, Chukwueze Obialor (AKA James Brown) and Bisi Alimi. Bisi Alimi once stated that being gay is not new to Africans as he/she gave evidences from the Yoruba culture of *adofuro* (someone who usually has anal sex) and *yan daudu* (effeminate men who are considered to be wives to men) among Hausas; but Alimi forgets that these people were not accepted in the African traditional society. Following in Alimi's argument is a renowned African philosopher, Martin Ajei (2022) who argues that though homosexuality is criticized in most religious and African setting, there is a need for these views to accommodate other people's orientation and values including homosexuality, by proposing what he termed communitarianism or moderate communitarian since a moral person under his proposed philosophy is one who cherishes communal relationship and virtues and whose conduct adds to the communal stock of conduct. Some have also used it as an excuse to migrate (*japa*) to seek asylum abroad.

Few other areas where the identity has been bastardised are our religions, value system, and professional identities among others. On religion, while the advent of Christianity and Islam which are alien to Africa's Traditional Religion have done a lot for humanity by providing healthcare, schools and other fantabulous opportunities, they have as well done some harm. These religions are some of the causes of conflicts on the continent and Nigeria in particular apart from ethnicity. Hagg and Kagwanja (2007) acknowledge the impact of identity crises on the protracted inter-state conflicts across Africa. For Ugwu (2015), the early European writers did not leave any stone unturned in their condemnation of Africa and her religious culture. He argued that the colonialists used such depreciatory and opprobrious languages such as native, pagan, primitive, savage, heathen, idolatory, tribal, animism, juju, polytheism etc to describe African religion (Ugwu, 2015).

¹ See Fela Anikulapo's "Yellow Fever, (1971) and African Lady

Igboin (2011) clearly posits that since the pre-colonial past exudes values that are critical to African identity in a postcolonial, global community, there is the need to revisit some of them in order to keep pace with the history and identity in the face of current global challenges. Okolo (1999) describes the situation as powerlessness and helplessness pronounced on the continent.

The emergence of globalisation has further stalled Africans from building the house. With the rush for the internet use and western gadgets and apparatuses such as computers, smart phones, applications, keyboards, and even computer programmes and knowledge which are usually delivered in colonial languages, the road to building Africa's Eldorado may remain evasive. All these have in turn to some extent led to the underdevelopment of the African's continent. As Zeleza (2006:10) puts it:

The processes of European linguistic appropriation and domestication have continued in postcolonial Africa. It is true that this reflects the failure by African states to fully decolonize their educational systems rooted in the neo-colonial propensities of Africa's ruling elites, the weight of the unbroken chains of dependent development, and the authoritarian reflexes of the post colony in which, until the recent democratic wave, civil society had no room to flex its muscles and hold the state to account.

Acquiring foreign education, food, weapons, language tests, healthcare, and citizenship or travelling abroad to acquire all these foreign imposed identities cost the continent trillions of dollars. Nigeria alone spent a total of \$39.66 billion on foreign education and healthcare related services between 2010 and 2020. About \$28.65 billion was paid by parents and guardians for their wards to study abroad, while \$11.01 billion was for healthcare-related services in foreign countries (Popoola and Orjiude, 2022). The Consultancy Middle East (2022) reports that the global medical tourism market could rise to as much as \$180 billion by 2025 and Africa is likely to be the biggest spender or victim. Food importation by Africa is also around \$50 billion and could go up to \$110 billion by 2030 (Premium Times, 2022). The trade deficit between Africa and the west and international economic bloc like the European Union is not just discouraging but asymmetrical thereby under developing and mustering poverty on the continent. To be sure, Sub-Saharan Africa had a total export of 205,741,390.58 in thousands of US\$ and total imports of 249,727,773.41 in thousands of US\$ leading to a negative trade balance of -43,986,382.83 in thousands of US\$ (WITS, nd).

Responses to the Language and Identity Crises

The UNESCO has thrown the hat into the ring by promoting cultural heritages. This has also been followed by regional and sub-regional organisations such as the African Union and ECOWAS. On February 21, the UN celebrates International Mother Language Day the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, which began in early 2022, is based on the principle of self-determination and the right to use and transmit in their own languages, reflecting the ideas and values of indigenous peoples to future generations (UNESCO, 2022).

At the regional level, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which metamorphosed into the African Union has identified the importance of language as a very germane aspect of Africa's

cultural heritage. It has been championing this cause since inception. For instance, in 1969, the OAU organised a conference in Algiers, Algeria titled 'African cultural realities: the role of African culture in struggles for national liberation and the consolidation of African unity; the role of African culture in the social and economic development of Africa. At the end, the symposium it adopted the Pan-African Cultural Manifesto which constituted the first reference document on culture by the commission (OAU, 1987). Others are the Cultural Charter for Africa, with special reference to Part I Article 1 (a) and (b), Article 2 (a), Part III Article 6.1(a), 2(b) and Part V Articles 17-19; Lagos Plan of Action (1980) for the Economic Development of Africa, and Final Report (27th April, 1982) of UNESCO's Meeting of Experts on the "Definition of a Strategy for Promotion of African Languages" and the Language Plan of Action for Africa in 1987. The action of 1987 was supposed to among other things ensure that all the sectors of the political and socio-economic systems of each Member State is mobilised in such a manner that they play their due part in ensuring that the African language(s) prescribed as official language(s) assume their intended role in the shortest time possible; and to foster and promote national, regional and continental linguistic unity in Africa, in the context of the multilingualism prevailing in most African countries (OAU, 1987). In February 2022, the African Union adopted Swahili as one of its official languages. (CGTN Africa, 2022). In its 16 agenda flagship project of agenda 2063, the importance of culture and how it pays in mobilising and unifying people around common ideals and promoting African culture to build the ideals of Pan-Africanism as well as the production of an encyclopedia Africana were pursued. The Encyclopedia Africana provides an African worldview of the people, culture, literature and history of Africa and is a key tool to be used to educate, inform and set the records straight regarding the history, culture and contributions of African people throughout the world (African Union, nd).

The Economic Community of West Africa have not done much in harnessing the language and identity of the sub-region. Though most of the population of the sub-region speaks French and English, harmonising this remains a huge problem.

The federal government has continued with the colonial mentality of fostering foreign language on the people. English still remains the official language and state of origin is still required for both official and non-official transactions. However, in spite of the law against any form of unusual sexual orientation, culprits have not been arrested. There are allegations that some elite are involved in these acts. The involvement of some of their kits and kindred on these acts make it very hard to act. (Sahara Reporters, 2021). ² A popular cross dresser, Idris Okuneye (AKA bobrisky) also at one point revealed that his/her patrons are Nigerian big men (Agency Report, 2021; Vanguard, 2022).

However on language, a form of respite came at the later stage of 2022 when in November 2022, the federal government of Nigeria announced that a new National Language Policy which makes mother tongue a compulsory medium of instruction for public primary school pupils. The then Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu noted that government was prepared to preserve cultures and their peculiar idiosyncrasies, stressing that so much has been lost due to the extinction of some local language. The memo read "One of the highlights is that the government has now

² A onetime aide to the president, Doyin Okupe once confessed that he never knew his son was gay.

agreed that primary school instruction, for the first six years of learning, will be in the mother tongue (Angulu, 2022).” Although it is not a new phenomenon, it died on arrival. To be sure, just a month after the announcement, the same federal government stated that there were no teachers to implement the idea and that it requires a lot of planning (Punch Editorial Board, 2022). The question is why was it in a haste to announce without planning in the first instance?

Some state governments have also passed laws to make sure that pupils are taught in mother tongue or try to make them more African as they can be, but lack of political will and successive governments’ usually distort the plans. A case in point is Osun State who communicated in Yoruba language and even bore almost indigenous outlook. Lagos state government in 2017 passed the Yoruba preservation and promotion of law. This stipulates among others that Yoruba language was compulsory in both private and public schools and all tertiary institutions in the state must integrate the language in their General Nigeria Studies (GNS course) (Adeyemi, 2018). The Ooni of Ife in April 2022 commended the Lagos State House of Assembly for conducting the activities of the house in Yoruba and also urged other Yoruba states to follow suit (Iniobong, 2022). But again, most of these are usually show-off.³ Some States and private companies have also approved the wearing of native attire on some days to the office. While some traditional rulers and political elite have made their mark in addressing Africa identity crises in their own little ways, the actions of a few of them and the their lifestyle show their deceitful nature. Some of these elite and traditional rulers apart from desecrate the African culture which they are supposed to be a custodian of now have dual citizenships and reel of these colonial mentality which they pretend they speak against. A late traditional ruler apart from known for bleaching with his wife also travels on vacation abroad showing off and rubbing it off on the subjects on social media (Oladotun, 2022).

There have also been individual efforts by some concerned African and Africanists scholars. There is a debate on the workability of Africa’s multiple languages as a uniform form of communication. Wolff argued that Africa’s multilingual is a blessing for its development. As he puts it “Africa is the home of 2144 languages. Oddly, most development theoreticians consider this a barrier to economic and social growth. Sociolinguists and educationists know better: the African continent’s multilingualism is a powerful resource (Wolff, 2018).” Toyin Falola of the University of Texas, Texas, USA at a time usually invited Africa scholars to the USA for academic purposes on African history and culture. Recently some groups in Canada celebrated the New Yam festival where masquerade were also displayed. It is on this basis that Azuonye (1979:13) again posits that:

The study of African oral literature today is not merely an academic exercise but the process of discovering the authentic traditional roots from which I believe modern African writing, especially in African languages, must draw" in order to flower with a distinctive life of its own.

From the above, it means that Africa and Africans must carve a niche for themselves in all these areas rather than seeking approval from the same set of people that put us in this developmental crises. Thus in whatever one does to take Nigeria out of the underdevelopment conundrum, we must carve a niche for ourselves and our identity.

³ These political elite usually travel abroad to enjoy the best of the western culture which they publicly criticize.

3. Conclusion

The foregoing shows that language and identity are not only intrinsically part of culture but leverage to development. The paper shows that the distortion of these two important aspects of culture was intentionally distorted through the contacts that Africa had with the Europeans. These were in the forms of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. The post-colonial elite and leaders have done little as they continued the legacies of their paymasters---colonialists. This has in turn led to the underdevelopment of the continent as more people on the continent including the elite and even custodians of tradition jostle abroad to get a bite of the colonial culture. A lot of monies are spent on experiencing this culture. It is well established that most of the efforts made by local and international including private individuals to turn the tide around has failed as well.

What must then be done to salvage the situation as it may get worse? There is the need for the government and other stakeholders to show thorough genuineness in their efforts by rethinking on how to contribute its own part by re-empowering African languages in a way to contribute sustainably to societal transformation and economic progress by fully exploiting the cognitive and creative potential of all young Africans. But not only African languages but also identities; Agents of socialisation starting from home, society, institutions and agencies, traditional rulers and the media as well as the school must rise up to the challenges of restoring Africa's identities in morals, culture and values. These interventions must be tailored in Africanism, inclusiveness and be driven by political will. By this, African leaders must be able to resist the slavish and puppetry state they have taken over the years to create and reinvent what is truly is of African, for African and by Africans.

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