

Indigenous African Cultures and Relevance to Socio-economic Progress and Development: A Critical Review

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We could assimilate mathematics or the French language, but we could never strip off our black skins nor root out our black souls (Senghor 1963, quoted in English in Kalumba 1996: 50).

Introduction

This paper provides a critical review of a sample of scholarly literature on the role and the relevance (or lack thereof) of indigenous African cultures and value systems to progress and development. An interest to study and seek to understand the nature of the African cultures and/or value systems and their relationship and relevance to the economy grew in the period following the end of colonialism, a period in which intellectual energies were geared towards finding workable models and strategies for reconstruction and development of the formerly colonised African countries as well as for the ending of the legacy of colonial subjugation and exploitation. As Kwame Gyekye pointed out, the post-colonial era not only signified an end to

... the period of dictation, forcible imposition of a variety of alien values and institutions, ... (but also) a period of autonomous self-expressions on the part of the formerly colonized people, as well as

of self-assertion, sober reflection on values and goals, and the gradual weaning away from the self-flagellating aspects of colonial mentality acquired through decades of coloniality (Gyeke 1997: 25).

However, for Gyeke, this period does not only signify the total rejection of the entire colonial heritage by the formerly colonised, but also the voluntary selection of those aspects of the heritage considered worthwhile and conducive to development. As will be noticed from the review below, there are conflicting perspectives and accounts of African value systems and/or cultures and their relevance to economy and development. Notwithstanding this, however, I argue on the basis of the evidence yielded by the review that the indigenous African cultures and values are not intrinsically irrelevant and inhibitive to socio-economic progress and development.

A Review of Debates

Within the debates on indigenous African cultures, there is a perspective that, unlike Western cultures and values systems, African cultures are inhibitive to and incompatible with scientific, technological, economic, and philosophical development and progress (Gyeke 1997; Horton 1982 and 1997). Such incompatibility is attributed to the 'intensely religious and spiritual nature of African traditional life', which he argues, has discouraged an expansion of existing practical knowledge of crafts and technologies such as those used for food preservation and herbal therapeutics through scientific enquiry and analysis, which eventually stunted the growth of sciences (Gyeke 1997: p.27). Gyeke, for instance, argues that while African cultures appreciated the notion of causality, which is crucial in scientific inquiry and explanation of natural phenomena, their religiosity led to explaining causality in terms of spirits and mystical powers. This, he argues, resulted in empirical causal accounts being abandoned and neglected in favour of religious-inspired accounts¹. The latter accounts, Gyeke argues, tend to see spirits or mystical powers as causal factors.

¹ Gyeke (1997: 28) refers to empirical causal explanations as 'empirical causation' as they ask what—and how—questions, and religious-inspired accounts as 'agentive causation' which ask who—and why—questions.

Another stumbling block to the development of science and technology within the African cultures identified by Gyeke has been identified as the way in which knowledge of the external world was acquired. He argues that unlike in science, knowledge acquisition was not based on experimentation but was personalised through a strong element of secrecy. This resulted in such knowledge not being made available for further objective, public scrutiny and analysis in order to verify its conclusions. This veil of secrecy, Gyeke argues, results in the possessed knowledge simply vanishing on the death of its bearers due to its secretive nature, as is evidenced by the knowledge of the potencies of herbs and other medicinal plants possessed by indigenous African healers. Not only does Gyeke raise concerns with the secretive and personal nature of such knowledge but also the fact that it is not made available for scrutiny and verification by those outside of it. The result is stagnation and non-further development of knowledge (Gyeke 1997: 29).

Gyeke's criticism of this lack of drive to pursue sustained scientific enquiry into knowledge of the natural world and the lack of desire to pursue knowledge for its own sake does not however lead to his dismissal of the existence and presence of technological and scientific capacity within African societies and their cultures. Gyeke's view that African traditional cultures are inhibitive to scientific growth, development and progress is shared by Robin Horton. Horton (1997), drawing distinctions between traditional African cultures and Western scientific cultures, refers to the former as 'closed' cultures and the latter as 'open' cultures. By 'closed' cultures or thought systems, he is referring to those cultures in which there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the existing, established theories or beliefs. In contrast, the 'open' cultures are those that have a highly developed awareness of such alternatives (Horton 1997: 327). For him, an obstacle to progress within the African traditional cultures lies in their reluctance to question the established beliefs (Horton 1997: 333). This point was also echoed in Wiredu's comparative analysis of African (traditional/folk) thought and Western (traditional/folk) thought systems. Wiredu (1980) argues that any culture and/or thought system which is both non-scientific and non-literate (be it Western or African), is seriously handicapped. This, he argues, is so since scientific methods can only occur where there is a recording of precise measurements, calculations, and

observational data i.e. where there is what he calls the scientific spirit and/or the spirit of rational inquiry (Wiredu 1980:41).

He argues, based on his examination of the conception of a person by the Akan people of Ghana, which he found to be more interesting and imaginative than the Western philosopher's thesis, that while (such) folk thought may be comprehensive and interesting, the lack of discursive content in it remains a major drawback. Hence, unlike the modern Western philosopher, who argues for his/her thesis, clarifies meanings, and responds to objections, the believer in folk thought usually responds like this: 'this is what our ancestors said'. Such response, Wiredu argues, only serves to block opportunities for further development. It is however ironical and self-contradictory for Wiredu to make this kind of comparison between the Akans (traditional/folk people) and the modern Western philosophers, as he repeatedly condemns and dismisses tendencies by Western anthropologists to make similar kinds of comparisons. Note below his critique:

... instead of seeing the basic non-scientific characteristics of African traditional thought as typifying traditional thought in general, Western anthropologists and others besides have mistakenly tended to take them as defining a peculiarly African way of thinking, with unfortunate effects ... one such effects is that the really interesting cross-cultural comparisons of modes of thought have rarely been made. If one starts with the recognition that each nation has some background of traditional thought—and remember by *traditional* thought that here I mean pre-scientific thought of the type that tends to construct explanations of natural phenomena in terms of the activities of gods and spirits—then the interesting and anthropologically illuminating comparison will be to see in what different ways the belief in spirits is employed by various peoples in the attempt to achieve a coherent view of the world. In such specific differences will consist the real peculiarities of African traditional thought in contradiction to, say, Western traditional thought In the absence of any such realisation, what has generally happened is that not only the genuine distinguishing features of African traditional thought but also its basic non-scientific tendencies have been taken as a basis for contrasting Africans and Western peoples.

One consequence is that many Westerners have gone about with an exaggerated notion of the differences in nature between Africans and the people of the West

... my point is that they (i.e. *backward beliefs*) are not African in any intrinsic, inseparable sense; and the least that African philosophers and foreign well-wishers can do in this connection is to refrain ... from serving up the usual cogeries of unargued conceptions about gods, ghosts and witches in the name of African philosophy. Such a description is highly unfortunate. If at all deserving of the name 'philosophy', these ideas should be regarded not as a part of African philosophy simply, but rather as a part of *traditional* African philosophy (Wiredu 1980: 39,45f).

Notwithstanding this, Wiredu acknowledges that Africa lags behind the West in terms of the degree to which the scientific spirit and the rational spirit of inquiry has been developed. He argues that for Africa to develop this spirit in all spheres of thought and belief, Africans should rid themselves of those backward aspects of customs, retaining only progressive ones with relevance to development. He however notes that despite this lag in the spirit of rational inquiry in Africa when compared with the West, there is within the traditional African thinking, a presence of the principle of rational evidence (see Wiredu 1980: 41,43, 45).

Wiredu, like Gyeke (1997), proposes that for scientific and technological potential within African knowledge systems to be unlocked, it is necessary that Africans develop an understanding of scientific principles through the knowledge of physics, metallurgy, biology and chemistry. He sees this as being necessary for establishing a strong scientific base which would encourage the asking of what—and how—questions, and hence the use of empirical causation as opposed to agentive causation in explaining technological and natural processes. He argues that although African cultures display the presence of indigenous technological capacities within them, those capacities could not be fully developed and expanded due to the lack of understanding and application of scientific principles. To illustrate this point, he cites a few cases which include that of the Ghanaian motor mechanic and a female food technologist. The Ghanaian mechanic, who was working on the engine adjusting the contact breaker point in the car

distributor, was found to be doing so using only his sense of sight and refusing to use technical aids such as the feeler gauge. His refusal to use technical aids which was not peculiar to him but could also be found amongst other mechanists is rooted in the broader societal culture. This attitude towards technical aids, argues Gyeke, not only deprives mechanists the benefits of achieving precision measurement for proper maintenance of the machines but also impedes opportunities of further growth and improvement of technology. Similarly, the female food technologist in Ghana was found to be practicing technology with some limited insight of scientific principles. The woman in question was processing 'fante kenkey' which Gyeke describes as a fermented cereal dumpling made from maize dough. He argues that while this woman displayed a high level of competency and knowledge in handling the processing efficiently in terms of time and the material used to achieve desired outcomes, a knowledge clearly rooted in basic and applied scientific principles; she however could not explain and articulate those principles (Gyeke 1997: 35f).

Gyeke thus argues that this and what seems to be the thinking amongst African technology practitioners that the what—and how—questions do not matter in the application and practice of technology, whereby technology is meant to only resolve practical problems of survival, necessitate an urgent need for change in such an attitude towards knowledge. In his view, such a change in attitude would make the possessed knowledge of technology exoteric and accessible to the public for scrutiny, thus releasing knowledge from mysticism. For Gyeke, the significance of such scrutiny lies in the fact that it could result in the existing knowledge being rejected or amended or confirmed.

According to Gyeke the new intellectual attitude, together with the understanding of scientific principles and the resultant strong scientific base is necessary if African countries are to fully exploit and adapt transferred technologies from the developed world to their own local conditions as well as to meet their needs. Hence, this would enhance the *appropriation* of technology characterized by 'the active, adroit, and purposeful initiative and participation of the recipients in the pursuit and acquisition of a technology of foreign production' (Gyeke 1997: 41). This would, in his view, not only prevent Africans from becoming permanently dependent on technology transfer but also enable them to ensure that the choice and application of

technology transfer is guided by local principles and needs. His argument is based on the acknowledgement that technology is developed within specific cultural frameworks to meet certain needs. Hence, as a cultural product, technology transfer amounts to cultural borrowing, and therefore requires an active, adroit approach by the recipient in order to avoid a negative impact on local values and ways of life for maximum benefit (Gyeke 1997: 38-42). Thus, although he argues for the separation of cultural values and religious beliefs from scientific, technological world; Gyeke however believes that both can still co-exist to ensure that technology is socio-economically beneficial while not undermining highly-regarded cultural values.

While the above perspective on indigenous African cultures and value systems highlights some vital points and issues that need careful consideration when exploring their socio-economic role in the contemporary era of globalisation, it however leads to counter arguments which challenge and in some cases dismiss the views articulated in it. Counter arguments have also exposed some serious conceptual limits and dangers in the perspective's assertion that, unlike the Western knowledge systems, African traditional cultures and knowledge systems are pervasively mystical, nostalgic and lack dynamism as well as scientific and conceptual content, which in turn impede progress. Such critique was led by amongst others Jean-Marie Makang (1997) who challenged the view held by Placide Tempels, a Belgian missionary in the former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), of the indigenous African people and their traditional cultures. Makang was particularly critical of Tempels' 'philosophy of *Ntu*'/ 'ontology of participation'/ 'Bantu ontology', whereby Tempels advanced the view that the real authentic Bantu tradition is that which has not departed from its source but had kept its original purity and innocence. His perception of Bantu mentality as captured in the expression: 'the source is pure, but waters are polluted' (a quote from Eboussi in Makang 1997: 326). Informed by this perception, Tempels goes on to draw distinctions between the 'bush people' or 'authentic Bantu' and the 'Europeanized Bantu' or 'modern Bantu'. In that distinction, Tempels considers the latter as those Africans who have been corrupted by European materialism and have lost their authenticity and the sense of the old, ageless, wisdom of the ancestors as well as everything stable in Bantu tradition. In contrast, the former are

the real authentic Bantu as they are not spoiled by European modernity and are vital in preserving the authentic Bantu culture (see Makang 1997: 327).

Makang is critical of Tempels' failure to recognize the evolutionary, dynamic nature of African traditions. He argues that this discourse is unhistorical as it constantly regrets the disappearance of the past by reducing African traditions to a fixed past and to the nostalgia of an original state, thus stripping the African people of their historicity (Makang 1997:236f). He thus sees Tempels' praise of the 'bush people' or 'authentic Bantu' as amounting to nothing but the 'praise of the past over the present, of archaism ... and against progress, of the good soul over and against technical and material improvement'. Hence, Tempels' nostalgic tradition of 'what ceased to be is not a living reality, but a dead tradition' (Makang 1997:327). Rather, and in contrast to Tempels' and those upholding this ethnological discourse of African people and their traditions, Makang argues that what Tempels' saw as a degeneration of a 'true, authentic' African tradition, whereby irrelevant elements to the modern world were abandoned, was in fact a signal of the dynamic nature of those Africans and their ability to adapt their traditions to the changes in time and space or changing historical contexts. Such an ability to adapt to new situations is, for Makang, critical to the survival of traditions and their enrichment through learning from other traditions as well as assimilation of some relevant elements thereof. He sees it as a signifier of flexibility of the African people and their traditions (Makang 1997: 328).

A further criticism was directed at a tendency to draw dichotomies such as 'open/closed' and 'modern/traditional', whereby the West is seen as having open, modern societies and Africa as having closed, traditional societies. Peter Amato (1997) is one of those leading this criticism. In his article entitled 'African philosophy and modernity', he dismisses such dichotomies within the Western intellectual thought as simply rhetorical and having a tendency to undermine African philosophy while allowing Western culture to subsume others in a 'homogenous, self-serving narrative' (Amato 1997: 75). The main pitfall of this discourse, he argues, lies in its failure to acknowledge the role and contribution that different intellectual cultures play in producing overlapping conceptualizations of social reality and human nature. Hence, he sees a need for a shift from putative universal horizon to differentiated horizons of different cultures and writers which

allows for a mutually free discourse (Amato 1997: 75). Arguing for a multi-cultural or inter-cultural intellectual approach, Amato (1997) further dismisses the view that religious-inspired ideas and accounts of social reality are necessarily regressive. He thus sees this view as likely to perpetuate the stereotypes about other intellectual discourses, while simultaneously upholding the Western intellectual discourse's claims of understanding the direction that human history should take. Hence the tendency to measure the success of societies categorized as traditional or pre-modern on the basis of their ability to follow a similar path of development as the West i.e. scientific progress, technological administration, and capitalism as the advanced stage of human development, what he terms 'European self-described modernity' (see Amato 1997: 74). On the contrary, he argues that philosophical reason is not independent of the mythic or religious life of the people.

Amato's argument is reinforced by Barry Hallen's (1996) findings from an interview with the Nigerian Yoruba herbal doctor, whom he simply calls Chief Z. In his critique of Horton's claims, Hallen employs Karl Popper's thesis of the criteria which could be used to determine and assess whether or not the thought system is reflective and critical. According to Popper, whom, Hallen argues believes that traditional thoughts are essentially non-critical, the appropriate criterion would be to identify the following three aspects or stages within the thought system:

- People's ability to identify tradition simply as a tradition,
- Their awareness of the functional significance of the tradition to their day-to-day living and activities, and
- Awareness of at least one significant alternative to the tradition, and on some critical basis then can choose to reaffirm or not reject it (see Hallen 1996: 219).

Hallen found that Chief Z's responses to the interview on indigenous herbal practice satisfied all of these three stages, thus that there is criticality and reflectivity within traditional Yoruba thought. In his response, Chief Z told Hallen that although he and other herbalists know very well that patients are actually cured and healed by the potency of the medical herbs they prescribe to them based on their specialist knowledge, they are however

careful not to attribute the effectiveness of the herbs to their potencies and their own insight about the herb, but to some divine powers known as *orisa*. Hallen found out during his research that the Yoruba people believe strongly in the *orisa* as their protector and guardian as well as a source of power and wisdom, and thus have to show allegiance to this divine force. Hence in their *orisa* worship, the Yoruba believe that one's skill and successes should not be attributable to that individual but to divine agency i.e. *orisa* (Hallen 1996: 221). Failure to attribute the patients' recovery and healing to *orisa*, Chief Z argued, could have detrimental consequences for the herbalist such as the development of jealousy and envy amongst the members of the community as well as anger at the herbalist's perceived pride. Thus, making reference to *orisa* helps to deflect and discourage of all these.

Another advantage highlighted by Chief Z in response to Hallen's interview questions was that mentioning *orisa* in prescriptions helps to conceal common sense elements always associated with remedies and thus encourages patients to take the herbalist's advice and prescriptions seriously, with good outcomes in terms of recovery from ailments. These responses, Hallen argues, not only reveal Chief Z's recognition and appreciation of the functional significance of traditional beliefs to the herbal practice and to the community, but also satisfy all of Popper's three criteria. Contrary to Horton's claim that in traditional societies (which he characterizes as having no developed awareness of alternative world views) people are non-critical and non-reflective, Hallen argues that it is possible even in the contexts of a single world-view to have significant critical and reflective powers.

This view is shared by other later contributors to the debate on indigenous African cultures and value systems, whose analyses not only present a further challenge to the view that traditional African thought and cultural systems are incompatible with science and progress, but also introduced a different dimension to the debate. Note here the contribution by Sogolo (1998) in his examination of the nature and function of explanatory models and the notion of causality in traditional African thought systems in which he employed a qualified use of Horton's (1970) concepts of 'primary' and 'secondary' theories or levels of thought. For Horton, the 'primary theory' level of thought is characterized by the

common sense explanations of day-to-day events by lay people and the 'secondary theory' level of thought by theoretical explanations involving hidden mechanisms unsusceptible to observational language (quoted in Sogolo 1998: 178).

Subscribing to the view that a single event and phenomenon in society can invoke different but complementary and non-mutually exclusive explanations, Sogolo dismisses the tendencies by Horton and other theorists to classify African thought systems as constituting a primary theoretical level of thought and Western ones as constituting a secondary thought level. Rather, he argues, the explanatory models provided by both African and Western thought systems have common features in their approach. For instance, while there are tendencies to refer to conceptions of illnesses that appeal to supernatural forces as animistic, those with such tendencies fail to realize that conceptions like these are common in the history of every society. This, he argues, can be seen in the case of Scotland's early medical practice whereby 'healing lay in propitiating the powers (supernatural) against which the patient might have offended' (Sogolo 1998: 182 quoting from Clough 1981: 183). Such accounts, he argues, are improved when scientific principles are uncovered to provide scientifically-based accounts.

Sogolo thus argues, like Wiredu, that the accounts provided in traditional African thought fall into both primary and secondary categories just as is the case with the Western thought explanatory models. Hence accounts in these categories of thought levels, rather than being in conflict as Horton suggests, are complementary and non-mutually exclusive. He argues that this non-mutual exclusivity and complementary nature is often missed despite the fact that the connections between the accounts are often difficult to deny. He illustrates the complementary nature of the accounts (i.e. primary and secondary) provided in both traditional African thought explanatory models and Western thought explanatory models by citing an example of causes of illnesses and methods or approaches used to heal them. He argues that in traditional African thought, causes of illnesses fall into both the primary and secondary categories. To illustrate this, he makes specific reference to the relationship between stress and the human body's natural resistance to illnesses. He argues that while the traditional African thought and the Western thought have different conceptions of

stress², they however both acknowledge and agree that stress reduces the body's ability to resist illnesses. Hence in both thought systems, when seeking to heal such illnesses, priority will be given to the adoption of an integrated approach whereby both medication (e.g. herbs or drugs) and stress relieving techniques are used in order to facilitate healing and recovery from illness. Sogolo further illustrates the parallels in integrated approaches in both traditional African medical practice and Western medical practice in his argument that:

The well known *placebo* in orthodox medicine, in which confidence and positive belief—on the part either of the physician or the patient—produce a favourable effect, is well-nigh indistinguishable from the dual-approach of the African healer. Belief, here, must be distinguished from the mere unquestioning faith of the religious type. It has a psychological overtone which leads to physically effective results. Both in African and modern medicine, the patients' belief that the physician is competent, and that the drug works, helps to restore his/her body to a state of harmony with the applied drug. Psychological states, attitudes, and beliefs have been known to play significant roles in traditional African medicine; they now provide acceptable explanations for some of the ailments that have in the past been attributed mainly to supernatural forces (Sogolo 1998: 183f).

Sogolo's view that traditional African medical conceptions of illnesses are different from those in the Western but common in approach, and that the primary and secondary accounts are complementary and non-mutually exclusive, is shared by Sertima (1999). This can be noted when he argues that while African medical practice is characterized by knowledge of plant

² Sogolo (1998:183) argues that in traditional African thought, stress is attributed to factors such as strained relationship either with one's spiritual agents or with other persons within one's community. In contrast, in Western thought, he argues, a business executive for example, could suffer from stress due to the imminent collapse of business, a heavy load of a day's work, or anxiety over possible contingencies.

science, anaesthetics, antiseptics, vaccination, and advanced surgical techniques; it however also has an element of ritual and magic. Sertima's view is based on the observation by Finch, a medical doctor at the Morehouse School of Medicine, that:

Traditional medical practice is intimately acquainted with the psychic, social and cultural nuances of the patients' and that '... the traditional African doctor is often an expert psychotherapist, achieving results with his patients that conventional Western psychotherapy cannot' and that 'the use of suggestion and hypnosis and the placebo, in addition to internal and external treatment ... is becoming more and more appreciated in Western medicine (Sertima 1999: 326).

The view that African traditional cultures are not conducive to development and progress is also challengeable in the light of the research outcomes which point to the evidence of scientific and technological progress in pre-colonial Africa. One such example is presented by Sertima (1999) in his outline of a wide range of technologies developed in different parts of pre-colonial Africa. Those scientific technologies included amongst others the carbon steel-making industrial sites on the Western shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania and the neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda; the astronomical observatory in Kenya; a complex knowledge of astronomy amongst the Dogon people in West Africa—the Republic of Mali; the use of mathematical knowledge in the Congo (former Zaire) and amongst the Yoruba farmers and traders in the city of Benin in Nigeria; massive architectural stone structures such as the Great Zimbabwe and Egyptian pyramids; boat making technology in West and Central Africa and the use of nautical science in the Sahara desert; agricultural crop and cattle-rearing science; knowledge of medicines and herbs; and the systems of communication and writing (for details refer to Sertima 1999).

Not only does the evidence of these technologies present a challenge to the views held by Horton and others about indigenous African cultures, it also counters those accounts advanced to explain the historical failure and inability to further develop, expand and sustain these technologies. Those counter accounts effectively challenge Horton and

others' blaming of the 'regressive deeply religious, secretive and unscientific' nature of indigenous African cultures and thought systems for having inhibited the further expansion of the founded technologies. Central to those counter accounts is the argument that Africa's capacity to develop and progress was disrupted and interrupted by European colonial expansion which resulted in the subjugation and domination of indigenous traditional practices, economies and institutions of the colonized world. As Magubane (1999) remarks the destructive impact of European colonialism on the colonized world, has contributed significantly to the European Renaissance:

It was during the era of the high Renaissance that the pattern of the entire history of Europe's devastation and exploitation of the world was set through the Crusades and the so-called voyages of discovery in search of Eastern spices (Magubane 1999: 17).

...

To remember all this is to ponder the nature of Western civilisation ushered in by the Renaissance and celebrated by the Enlightenment philosophers. Unless we remember this, we shall understand very little of the contemporary world. How can we forget that European capitalists appropriated everything in Africa they could lay their greedy hands on—the continent's able-bodied labour, which they systematically drained away for their own purposes for the better part of 500 years, and, in the imperial period, Africa's natural and human resources which they still control? Who can forget the looted cultural resources of Africa, like the treasures of Egypt and Ife bronze sculptures, now scattered in their museums and priceless collections? Even worse, they stole our history and our humanity by propagating their racist ideas. The destruction of the humanity of the African, the European belief in white supremacy, was more degrading than anything else. Nothing is more injurious to human relationships than for one group of people to have absolute power over others, as the white world had over Africa and its people (Magubane 1999: 30).

To further emphasize the point, Magubane goes on to quote Churchill's statement on how Britain benefited from colonizing the West Indies:

Our possession of the West Indies ... gave us the strength, the support, but especially the capital, wealth, at a time when no other European nation possessed such a reserve, which enabled us to come through the great struggle of the Napoleonic Wars, the keen competition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and enabled us ... to lay the foundations of that commercial and financial leadership which enabled us to make our great position in the world (Magubane 1999: 30, quoted from Peter Fryer 1993: 11).

Another dimension to this debate on indigenous African cultures, which further supports Sogolo's analysis, arises from the creolist perspective advanced by, amongst others, Ulf Hannerz (1970). In terms of this perspective, the growing contact between people with different cultural experiences owing to movements around the globe under globalisation, has an impact that changes the previously self-contained national cultures. This contact, he argues, results in cultures ceasing to be stable and coherent systems and instead becoming cultural 'work' in progress (see Hannerz 1997:14). Hence, it would be misleading to treat culture/s within complex differentiated societies as simply homogenous and coherent. This process of change undergone by nationally-confined cultures has been described by Hannerz and others as 'creolization' and that it results in creole cultures i.e. those cultures that draw from two or more widely different historical sources (Hannerz 1997: 14).

This view that cultures are complex and diverse is shared by Appiah (1997) in his critique of Afrocentrism, a cultural movement led by African-Americans. Appiah's main criticism is directed at the claims by Afrocentrists that Africa has a single unitary culture with a common origin in ancient Egypt. He finds the major weak point of this view as lying not only in its overlooking of the rest of Africa and African history, but also in its failure to avoid similar pitfalls as that of the European prejudice against cultures without writing (Appiah 1997: 730). An example he cites is that of the nineteenth-century European curriculum which claimed that Western civilization's roots are traceable to the ancient Greece. This, he argues, failed to acknowledge the Egyptian influence on the Greeks, the Jewish contribution to Western culture and the Arabic intellectual influence of Plato's links with the Renaissance. Thus, for Appiah, Afrocentrism is

nothing but simply 'Eurocentrism turned upside-down' (see Appiah 1997: 730).

While Hannerz acknowledges that the third world cultures are to some degree influenced by first world cultures, he however dismisses the view that first world cultures necessarily pose a threat to third world cultures. He argues that rather than openness to foreign cultural influences being seen as necessarily leading to the impoverishment of local and national culture, it should be seen optimistically. That is, that it could provide people in other cultures with access to technological and symbolic resources which could enable them to deal with their own ideas and to manage their own culture in new ways (Hannerz 1997: 16). Furthermore, Hannerz sees the contact between the third world and first world cultures as being mutually beneficial to both worlds. In his own words, he says:

Along the entire creolizing spectrum, from First World metropolis to Third World village, through education and popular culture, by way of missionaries, consultants, critical intellectuals and small-town story tellers, a conversation between cultures goes on. One of the advantages of the creolist view ... is its suggestion that the different cultural streams can create a particular intensity in cultural process (Hannerz 1997: 16).

Hence, diversity is a source of cultural vitality and that rather than complexity and fluidity being seen as a threat to be avoided, they should be seen as an intellectual challenge (Hannerz 1997: 17).

Hannerz's viewpoint on creolism, cultural diversity and conversation between cultures would clearly be shared by Makgoba et al. (1999) who, in the introductory chapter of their edited text entitled *African Renaissance*, argue:

African culture is but one major contributor to the tapestry of world culture. While the process of creolisation has affected and impacted on all cultures, the histories, the consciousness of the bearers of a culture, the differing world views and the role of the intelligentsia and institutions in filtering the external or the influence of the other so-called cultures has been vital in maintaining distinctiveness

between the differing major cultures. We still today recognise European, Oriental, American and African cultures. So, *in the midst of complexity there is simplicity, in the midst of order there is chaos, just as there is distinctiveness in the midst of creolisation or blurring in cultures.* When European powers carved Africa up into small territories, tribes and nations and imposed their languages and cultures, they forgot that the roots and essence of African culture would largely remain in the consciousness of the people despite speaking different colonial languages. French-speaking, English-speaking, Spanish-speaking or Portuguese-speaking Africans are still able to relate, share the same world view and interpretation as Africans despite all these real, but artificial, colonial impositions. The roots, history and consciousness of our culture are the same (Makgoba et al. 1999: xi).

These views on cultural diversity and creolism in the context of growing contacts under globalisation also support Senghor's urgent appeal to Africans to re-cultivate African values so that they could make a positive, unique and rich contribution to what he calls *Civilization of the Universal*. Hence Senghor's (1963) concept of *Negritude* by which he means 'the awareness, defence and development of African cultural values' and defines it as '... the whole complex of civilized values—cultural, economic, social and political—which characterize the black peoples ...' (Senghor 1996: 46). In his defence of the idea of negritude against strong criticism that negritude is a myth, he argues that while indeed it is a myth, it is a true myth and the 'awareness by a particular social group or people of its own situation in the world, and the expression of it by means of the concrete image ...' (Senghor 1996: 49). Pointing to the real urgency for the need to cultivate negritude, he argues:

With us, or in spite of us, the Civilization of the Universal is growing up before our eyes, thanks to scientific discovery, technical progress, the increase in international exchanges ... It will be monstrous unless it is seasoned with the salt of *negritude* ... *[N]egritude* is the sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world You must agree that the *Civilization of the*

Universal will be brought about by the fusion of 'differing civilizations' But all these peoples and races must first re-discover the profundity of life; they must not only know it but ...be reborn with it Today our Negritude no longer expresses itself as an opposition to European values, but as a *complement* to them. Henceforth, its militants will be concerned ... *not to be assimilated, but to assimilate*. They will use European values to arouse the slumbering values of Negritude, which they will bring as their contribution to the Civilization of the Universal (Senghor 1996: 50).

Concluding Remarks

While the period prior to political independence in Africa, i.e. during colonialism, intellectual and political interest in indigenous African cultures and thought systems was informed by the liberation struggle priorities aimed at toppling the oppressive, exploitative Western colonial powers as well as at asserting an African identity, the post-colonial era saw a shift in that interest towards understanding and identifying the developmental role of those indigenous cultures and thought systems, in particular in the context of increasing globalisation and diversity. This point is better captured by English (1996) in his outline of the periodisation of Senghor's idea of negritude, the idea that partly represents intellectual interest shown in indigenous African thought and cultural value systems. According to English, Senghor's conception of negritude (the idea that was first introduced by Aimé Césaire in 1939), as was analysed by Spleth (1985), went through three main historical phases. Note here his remarks:

During the thirties and early forties, Senghor and other black intellectuals in Paris were feeling that their African ways of understanding were not fully compatible with their French ways of understanding Negritude became each individual's search for a personal identity that would sort out these incompatibilities. During the second period, from the end of Senghor's service in the French army of World War II to Senegal's independence in 1960, Senghor advocated more other-directed causes: independence and cultural

pride. He described negritude as an 'anti-racial racialism', aimed at European racism and colonialism. Since independence, the third period, Senghor has used negritude with calm self-affirmation as a constructive instrument of national and cultural growth. Now, negritude is not only 'the awareness, defence, and development of African cultural values,' but also it 'welcomes the contemporary values of Europe' (English 1996: 57f).

It was, however, noted from the above review that this shift in interest in indigenous African cultures and thought systems did not proceed without debate. The resultant debate is characterised by two main contrasting perspectives, which use mainly comparative analysis whereby African cultures and thought systems are compared and contrasted with those in the West, in an effort to examine and determine the role and the relevance of African cultures and thought to societal development and progress.

On the basis of my review of those two main perspectives, I wish to argue that the perspective led by, amongst others, Gyeke, Horton and Temples, which holds the view that indigenous African cultural values and thought systems are regressive and incompatible with development, is difficult to sustain in the light of the counter analysis provided by, amongst others, Amato, Sogolo, Wiredu, Hannerz and Hallen. Claims, for instance, that deep religiosity and reliance on spiritual powers by Africans are inhibitive to the development of the spirit of rational inquiry and scientific approach are strongly countered by the empirical evidence which shows that, in fact, reference to spiritual forces/ powers (e.g. ancestors) does not have such inhibitive effects. Rather, and as Hallen has shown with the study of the Yoruba herbal practitioners, the continual reference to the significance of spiritual and divine powers, is appreciated for its functional significance to the further growth and development of herbal practice and the community.

Another major weakness within this perspective lies in its tendency to present the traditional as peculiarly and intrinsically African and the modern as intrinsically Western. Wiredu, dismissing this tendency as misleading and incorrect, argues that when drawing useful distinctions between the traditional and the modern thought systems, cultural values and beliefs, it is imperative to note that in all societies there are both traditional

and modern practices. This, together with Sogolo's argument that traditional and modern values and practices are not mutually exclusive and incompatible, and Hallen's argument that even within the context of a single world view, it is possible to have significant levels of critical and reflective capacity, presents a serious challenge to Horton's dichotomous thesis i.e. traditional/modern and primary/secondary. Also challenged here is Gyeke's suggestion that, for scientific and technological progress to be achieved, both science and technology should be separated from culture.

This suggestion is also difficult to defend in view of creolist theory, whose implication is that such separation, especially in the era of increasing contacts between different cultures owing to globalisation processes, would inhibit the mutual benefits and cultural vitality that could emerge from Hannerz's conversation between cultures. This is particularly so as Gyeke himself, and contradictorily so, admits that technology is a cultural product and therefore that the benefits of technology transfer would best be enhanced where the recipients actively participate in the innovative integration of technologies to realise their specific needs. If indeed technology is a product of culture (which is the view I agree with^o, Amato is then correct to argue that religious-inspired ideas and accounts are not necessarily regressive as philosophical reason is not independent of the mythic, religious life of the people. This, together with Magubane's argument that the history of colonial disruption of indigenous African traditions and the evidence of scientific and technological developments and discoveries in pre-colonial Africa (see Sertima), further discredit the view that religiosity and mysticism in African cultures constitute major obstacles to socio-economic and technological progress and development. Both Gyeke and Wiredu, nonetheless, make a valid point that the West has made significant advances in the development of a strong scientific base and principles for rational inquiry, and that for Africa to achieve similar levels of scientific development, she has to rid herself of some of the inhibitive customs and practices.

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