

The “Monkeyism” Theory: On the Search for Common Humanity and the “De-Monkeyism” Answer

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Abstract

The "Monkeyism" theory explores the impact of colonialism on African identity and culture. It argues that Westerners, considering Africans inferior, sought to impose their ideas and erase the dignity of African cultures. Drawing on Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal, the theory claims that the white man labeled black men as animals with unreason, justifying conquest and enslavement. The author aims to debunk the theory, emphasizing the richness of African cultures and the shared humanity of all races. The text also critiques Western perspectives that undermine Africa's historical contributions. The author encourages Africans to move beyond blame and focus on self-improvement, decolonizing their mentality and fostering innovation for the continent's development.

Keywords: "Monkeyism" theory, African identity and culture, African cultures, African cultures

Introduction

Basically, Colonialism is best understood as the political and economic dependence of one people on another. (Ngamen, 2016a), it is very shocking to realize that even till date, after many decades of the so-called independence of the African continent, most Africans still rely on the "other" that is, the Western world to name, qualify, define and even classify them.

It is on record that Westerners came to Africa with the mandate to completely annex the mentality and concepts of the black people. In their own opinion, African people were of different race and culture. They were ugly and primitive (Ngamen, 2010: 192). Therefore, it was necessary for Westerners to expose black men to progress, development and to the light of civilization because to them, progress, development and civilization were their exclusive rights.

White men alleged that the black man intelligence quotient was low, his vocabulary had no abstract nouns, he was incapable of abstract thinking, he had no philosophy, he did not understand natural phenomena, he has no idea of causality. His mind was full of magical notions. (Ngamen, 2016: 11-16) Throughout the ages, evidences have been built up to show that the cultures of African peoples are inferior to those of the Whites and this must be so because Africans belong to an inferior race or species. No wonder General Norton de Matos, former Governor of Portuguese territory of Angola in 1953 had this to say about his mission in Africa:

In Africa our objectives has been to convert the blacks, to lift them from the moral and material misery they were in when

we encountered them, to clothe them, to give them human habitation, to make them rural proprietors, or to transform them into artisans. (Ngamen, 2016a: 14).

Moreso, Eurocentric historians have made the world to believe that Africa had no history (Adegbulu, 2011:17182). According to Trevor Roper, pre-colonial African continent is a little more than “the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe” (1966:a). And for Arnold Toynbee, one of the renowned British historians to conclude as follows: “when we classify mankind by colour the only one of the primary races. ...which has not made a creative contribution to any of our twenty one civilizations is the black race.

(1934:180)

From the forgoing, it is evident that white men refused to study and understand the Blacks, instead they categorically and blindly condemned everything black. One of the lines that the conquerors/white men drew is that between reason and unreason (Mogobe, 2003). White men borrowed Aristotle’s definition of man to justify their evil mission in Africa.

Aristotle, one of the major figures in ancient Western philosophy is credited with the definition of man as “a rational animal”. This implies that any animal whose being or nature includes reason as his/her distinctive characteristic is a “real” human being or a man. Besides, any other animal which might look like a “real” human being but without reason does not qualify as a human being. Rather it is simply an animal with unreason or a monkey! In white men understanding and interpretation of Aristotle’s definition of man, black men were animals with unreason. So the line between reason and unreason was drawn to differentiate between white and black. White men became animals with reason while black men remained animals with unreason or monkey-like. This line indicated not only the boundary between reason and unreason but it also assigned competences, rights and obligations in agreement with reason and unreason respectively. In this way, it also established the nature of the relationship between those inside the line of reason.

It is on record that the right to freedom and competence to exercise one’s will became the exclusive right of rational animals that is, white men. In their relationship with one another, rational animals

or white men had the obligation to recognize, respect and protect the right to freedom and freedom of the will.

However, it was out of place for animals with unreason that is, black men to claim the competences or the right that did not belong to them by nature. Therefore, in their relationship with reasonable animals, the animals with unreason that is, black people were disallowed in advance to demand obligation that befit only rational animals/white men. According to the whites, Aristotle's definition of man as a "rational animal" excluded the Africans. In essence, this philosophy denied humanity to all animals with unreason. By definition, such animals-black men included could not and did not qualify to be humans in the genuine sense of the word. Therefore, the black man was to be treated only as an animal because by nature he was an animal with unreason. Accordingly, it was necessary and proper to conquer and enslave the black man. The conquerors/ white men saw no distinction between the Cartesian Cogito and their so-called God given mission in Africa. In other words, "I think, therefore, I conquer and enslave" became the practical application by the conquerors white men of Rene Descartes "I think, therefore, I exist." (1998:160).

As stated earlier, the major business of this section is to demonstrate and invalidate the fallacious theory of "monkeyism". In other words, it is an opportunity for the author to prove that African cultures and traditions were and are still very sound and unique. Culture itself is dynamic and therefore, there is nothing like cultural hereditary. Moreso, human beings are one irrespective of their skin colour or geographical location, or to paraphrase an Akan proverb from Ghana: in human flesh there is no edge of cultivation. No boundary that is, all human flesh is of one kind, all mankind is one species (Busia, 1962). The consequence of the foregoing is that there is a "common humanity" and as long as black men are human beings, they cannot be excluded.

On the Search for Common Humanity

It is on record that many theories have been framed by Westerners in order to validate white man's superiority over the black man. Slavery, colonial subjection, the colour bar, second-class citizenship, segregation, discrimination, apartheid, that has been the black man's lot.

Shakespeare (1597) in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act IV, SC 3, describes the black man as follows:

Black is the badge of hell, the hue of dungeons and the scowl of night, black seems to be savage towards the object of their fear.

There is no doubt that slavery is a very old institution. It is not also news that whites enslaved whites and blacks have enslaved blacks as well, but when a blackman becomes the slave of a white man, added to the difference in status between slave and master is the difference in colour between white and black. The dark-skinned man becomes the subordinate of the pale skinned man, and black becomes the "badge of hell," of all that is dark, inferior and contemptible (Busia, 1962).

In addition to slavery, came the colonization of Africa and the subjection of its blacks to European rule. This again implied the domination of blacks by whites. We are told that white men tried anything they could do to justify colonialism and establish the supposed innate inferiority of the black man. For instance, they invoked the biological theory of the survival of the fitter race, they embarked on the measurements of craniums which they beautifully called "dolichocephalism." But the good news is that despite all efforts to prove that the black man belonged to a lower species than the white, it was too much of a man to be an ape. The evidence that the black man belonged to the one species of man that is, "Homo sapiens" was too over-whelming to be stopped. (Ngamen, 2016:13)

It is on record that latter anthropologists with more sophisticated empirical methods of research, convincingly demonstrated that some of the earlier writings about the blacks were based on incorrect or insufficient data and that there were respectable and intelligible elements in the beliefs, worship, and rituals of African people (Busia, 1962). For instance, no scientist has been able to convincingly prove the link between culture and race. Rather, it has been established that there is nothing such as cultural hereditary. In other words; there is no connection between culture and genetic qualities of racial types.

Cultures are learned and therefore, they could change according to circumstances. In present day Africa for instance, there are converts to Christianity and Islam. This was not the case in pre-colonial Africa! To paraphrase Busia (1962), there are trade unions and parliamentary institutions in Africa today, new techniques are being learned. Industrialization has begun. Illiteracy rates are high but there is a growing body of literate Africans. Schools, Colleges and Universities are

increasing in number. All of this is taking place without any changes in the biological or genetic constitution of African peoples. The implication of the foregoing is that, all human cultures and institutions undergo changes. So there is no scientific fact to prove the innate inferiority of the blacks vis-à-vis whites.

It is also on record that in 1953 under the auspices of UNESCO, anthropologists, archaeologists and sociologists gathered to discuss the question of race and they all consented that no race was “inferior” or “superior” to another. Lieris Michel, one of the eminent French anthropologists put it this way: “it is fruitless to seek in the biology of race an explanation of the difference observable between the cultural achievements of the various peoples.”

(2020:100)

Lieris further posited that cultural development is not uniform even within a single country. As a matter of fact, the cultural achievements of any country represent the combined efforts of many peoples. Taking Europe as a case study Lieris avers as follows:

The peoples of Europe whose overseas expansion be it remembered, is of very recent date, today restricted by the evolution of the very peoples they formerly surpassed in techniques- owed their cultural lead to the opportunities they have long had of frequent contacts among themselves and with contrasting peoplesThe truth is all cultures have their successes and failures, their faults and virtues. (2020: 122)

In Race and History: Levis-Strauss (1952) agrees with Lieris, for he too makes the point that the culture of any one country at any given time is the result of countless interactions, countless interchanges of ideas, and the cumulative experience of generations. The implication of the above submissions is the confirmation of the fact that when it comes to the issue of race relationships particularly as between black and white, it is not what science has to say that matters.

To paraphrase Busia (1962), race attitudes are not determined by the validity, or lack of validity of scientific data. This is evidenced in the fact that men did not stop to find a causal relation between cultural phenomena and biological or genetic data before they embarked on slavery or colonization or segregation. The race attitudes were arrived at before proper consideration of the facts. They are mere prejudices.

What the blacks, particularly the twenty first century Africans want from the whites is to set aside their unnecessary pride, their erroneous and biased scientific discoveries and genuinely acknowledge the common humanity of the blacks or to paraphrase John Masefield, (1903) one of the poet Laureates of England who says: it is time for blacks and whites to “Laugh and be merry

together, like brothers akin, guesting a while in the rooms of a beautiful inn". It is a fact that majority of white people do not wish to accept the blacks "like brothers akin" but unfortunately for them, there is no other option for those seeking for global peace. For happy race relations can be achieved only when mutual sympathy and respect are given expression in service to others, sincerely offered, gratefully accepted, and when possible, reciprocated.

Busia (1962).

The ball is on the court of white men, because throughout the ages, African peoples have been known for the acknowledgement and great respect for the common humanity. The study of Akan peoples of Ghana by Busia (1962) to illustrate African attitudes towards humanity is very educative and inspiring. According to Busia, the Akan peoples say *Honammunninhano* which means in human flesh there is no edge of cultivation –no boundary. This simply means that all human flesh is of one kind, all mankind is one species. An Akan child and by extension an African child is taught to greet all whom he meets even the stranger whom he may never meet again. This is more than courtesy. The greeting is considered to be an acknowledgment, a recognition of the other person as a fellow human being. If you passed him by without greeting him, you would be treating him as a thing-you would be implying that he may not share your humanity. Busia, (1962) History tells us that in pre- colonial Africa, a high value was placed on human relation. It was compulsory to recognize one whom you passed as a fellow human being. That is why according to Busia (1962), an Akan person is deeply hurt when he\she is given cause to say he behaved towards me as though I were not a human being. This simply shows how the basic equality of mankind, of the membership of men, all men, in just one species, is deeply rooted in the heart of an Akan person and by extension, to all Africans. The most important and urgent things to do now is the recognition that each race is like the other; that all men are equal in their humanity. The time has come, to paraphrase Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey (1920): you can play a tune of sorts on the white keys and you can play a tune of sorts on the black keys, but for harmony, you must use both the black and the white keys.

Brief account of African cultures and development in Pre-colonial Times.

This section is an attempt to draw our attention to the fact that the modern African mentality to ignore or neglect African cultural practices in favour of other cultures particularly Western in the name of modernism and development does not hold at all. Culture, being the way of life of a particular set of people can be self-sufficient and self-reliant. To develop does not necessarily mean to imitate or follow other cultures at the expense of one's own culture. Cultural practices if well managed constitute the bedrock of one's personality and development. As a matter of fact, before the coming of colonialism and imperialism, Africa was culturally more developed than she is today. African cultures were practised and cherished all over the continent as we shall see later.

Pre- Colonial African Social System and Education

The Gikuyu system of government as described by Kenyatha (1953) is a good representation of African social system in pre-colonial era. We are told that kinship system or family group constituted and still constitute the back bone of the Gikuyu system of government.

According to Kenyatha, the key to this culture is tribal system, and the bases of the tribal system are the family groups and age- groups which between them shape the character and determine the outlook of every man, woman and child in Gikuyu society.

It is recorded that in Gikuyu's philosophy, none is an isolated individual and everybody's life is founded on this fact economically, psychologically, physically and spiritually. The spirit of union and familyhood was so strong in Gikuyu social life to the extent that the word "individualism" was associated with black magic. Moreso, a man or woman was honoured by being addressed as somebody's parent, uncle or aunt. All this is to show how indispensable kinship was at the root of Gikuyu ideas of good and evil before the coming of colonialism and imperialism. The Gikuyu people were all at peace with their social system. The problem started when, to paraphrase Kenyatha, the average European observer, not being trained in comparative sociology, takes his own fundamental assumptions for granted without realizing that he is doing so.

The authority of the tribe for instance, is different in kind from that of the European national state. And this difference has nothing to do with degree or value. Each people according to their social system. The mistake is from the colonizer or white man of thinking of the tribe as if it must be analogous to the European sovereign state and draws the conclusion that the executive authority for that sovereignty must be vested in the Chief as if he were a Prime Minister or President. It is also on record that in Gikuyu Social system there was no master – and – man relationship in economic life, there was little or no argument about the division of labour. Moreso, people grew up to know what was expected of them and what were the limits of their obligations. And all these were working well for the Gikuyu people in particular and for Africans in general.

In line with the above, Molema (1969) studied the Bantu social system and drew almost the same conclusion. In his view, there is no doubt that in pre-colonial era the Bantu social system was well organized, logical, progressive and peaceful. Indeed, what we see in the Western world of today was already being practised in the old Bantu social system. According to Molema, any one acquainted with the Bantu social state will be struck by its approximation to Rausseau's conception of the ideal social compact. Anyone unacquainted by a tribe will get a good idea of it if he imagines it identical with Rausseau's conception. It is on record that the Bantu lived in a communitarian society. For instance, there was no individual titles existing and the land be longed to everyone in the community.

Molema (1969) quoted Mr. D. Kidd in *Kaffir Socialism* as follows: Complaints, party systems fighting for franchise, wars of capital versus labour, and passive resisters were entirely unknown. The unselfishness of the people was surprising. Among them there existed fairly uniform prosperity and rare social harmony. Paupers were unknown. The system controlled, very efficiently, the relations of sexes, and the unblushing abuses we tolerate in Piccadilly or Regent Street could never exist under Kaffir rule.” (1925:300)

One cannot but strongly emphasize that the various sides of the Bantu social system here described are parts of an integrated culture. According to Molema, Mr. Maurice Evans, commenting on the Bantu in his book titled, *Black and White in South State* had this to say: the extremes of poverty and wealth, hardship and soul-destroying luxury, prostitution, physical degeneration, group war, social unrests and nervous prostration from suicidal competition and emulation are unknown to our simpler and often happier brethren.” (2001:180)

From the above, it is evident that before the intrusion of colonialism and imperialism, African societies had their own ways of organizing themselves according to their conception of good and evil and it was working very well for them.

As far as education is concerned, it is also a fact that there existed informal educational apparatus in most precolonial African countries. Contrary to what is obtainable in Western cultures, history tells us that in traditional Africa, in most cases, youths rather learned in an “open air environment” and under the tutelage of an elderly family member. Market squares, streets and work places were known as places to acquire first-hand information. In his study of the Gikuyu system of government, Kenyatha (1953) draws some useful conclusions about their educational system. According to him, the Gikuyu child does not need Montessori exercises or classroom lesson in manual dexterity, for with plenty of space to tumble about in, and with older people around him doing interesting manual jobs, he will naturally learn by experiments.

Moreso, the Gikuyu culture being an integral one, the steps of any child’s education are not just exercises for his own improvement, but real contributions to the needs of group life. There was also no distinction between technical and cultural training. The modern understanding of school was alien and somehow unnecessary to the Gikuyu people. It is on record that it was not necessary either for the good of a young Gikuyu or for his parent’s convenience, to keep him in a special sheltered reservation before he acquires his tribal education. Initiation rites were the back bone and common ground in Gikuyu educational system. According to Kenyatha, those initiation rites are comparable with what is obtainable in modern Universities. To paraphrase him, by going through their initiation rites together, Gikuyu boys and girls are given an understanding in common, which in some ways is like that of English men who graduated from a College in the same year, though it is much more sacred and binding and is a vital element in Gikuyu government.

The difference between the Gikuyu or African and Western system of education is evident. For instance, while every English child is compelled by law to go through several years of schooling, after which he is expected to be able to read and write, the Gikuyu child does not use printed books; instead, his social education is imparted on him by image and rituals. The most important point here is that there existed a well-organized and sound educational system in Africa before the coming of colonialism and imperialism. And once again, the Gikuyu and by extension African peoples were satisfied and happy with it.

Pre- Colonial African Religion and Morality

Today, it is obvious that there is confusion between religion and Christianity in the minds of most African peoples especially when it comes to the interpretation and understanding of religious or spiritual life. Post-colonial Africans believe that their current spiritual life style is an imported or exotic one due to the incursion of colonialism and imperialism with Christianity as their direct consequence. For this reason, most Africans today find themselves at the cross road and thereafter, live a kind of mimetic life when it comes to spirituality. No doubt, this has resulted to the loss of African integrity and authenticity.

There is a growing consensus among some post-colonial African scholars that not only Christianity is a direct consequence of Colonialism and imperialism, it is unAfrican and should therefore be re-evaluated if modern Africans genuinely desire to regain their authenticity and dignity. There is also a push for post-colonial Africans to draw a line between religion and Christianity by reviewing their relationship with God or the supernatural. More and more modern African scholars are of the opinion that actually African Traditional Religion can lead us to “salvation” without the aid of Christianity. In other words, someone could be “saved” without necessarily being a Christian if not should we now infer that all pre-colonial dead were cursed or doomed?

Besides, Science and history teach us that the black race was the first race to appear on planet earth making Africa the cradle of humanity and civilization. We are also told that God is the creator of the universe, the Alpha and Omega of everything. We are again told that He created man to His own image! Now if the black race is the original and first creation then who would have been created first by God if not the black man? We are told as well that it is during colonization and imperialism that white men brought Christianity and Islam into Africa! Consequently, it means that God was neither a Christian nor a Muslim! Christianity and Islam have a birth certificate as far as Africa is concerned. It can be logically concluded that Westerners are the ones who Christianized and Islamized God. Before colonization and imperialism there was nothing like the God of Africa, Europe or America. We had only one God who was and is still Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent. As a matter of fact, the black people are the ones that are supposed to teach white men the original tenets and qualities of the Almighty God because they were created first. Again, we are told by science that even during the creation of man by God only two colours could be identified, that is black and brown colours. There was nothing like white colour, so the

current portrait of God or Jesus Christ in white is fallacious and misleading. According to Cheik Anta Diop (1974) one of the renowned Senegalese scientist, historian, anthropologist and archaeologist, black remains the unique and original colour, others such as white, yellow or red are mere derivations due to climate change and some circumstances beyond human understanding.

One of the salient points to note here is that even as far as the original religion is concerned, black men have nothing to learn from the white man. In fact till today, Africa remains the only continent where genuine spirituality or religion is being practised. So African traditional religion instead of being discarded and criticized today should rather be the leading model as far as authentic spirituality and genuine respect for God are concerned. Christianity and Islam are un-African and this poses serious problems in the ways and manners Africans go about their daily spiritual life.

This is one of the reasons why according to Udo (2012), there can be no denying the fact that African religion recognizes a plethora of divine beings and spirits alongside of the Supreme Being. Depending on their domains or scopes of influence, these divinities receive worship, such as sacrifices, regularly, or they are mentioned frequently as being implicated in the crises which dog individual and communal lives. Even today, Udo proceeds, it is correct to assert that there is hardly an African Christian who has never been faced with the serious challenge of deciding between the total claims of the God of the Christian religion, which says unequivocally “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve” and the claims of these divinities who demand some form of worship for one or another of life’s contingencies.

Udo (2012) further explains that even among the earliest and most outstanding monotheistic society, that is, the

Hebrews, the claims of Jehovah did not mean “a denial of the existence of other gods. In fact it was just because other gods existed, such as Baal, and somehow their worship seemed to pose an irresistible attraction to the Hebrews, that Jehovah insisted that they should worship Him and Him alone. Those who are familiar with the history of the Hebrews will recollect that this was their greatest national disaster that ever so often they would forsake the living God and turn to other gods where upon prophets would be sent to warn them and consequently, punishment would be visited on them.

Now if I may ask: of what use is it to be told that our religion is monotheistic, if that encourages us to worship Jehovah on Sundays but make sacrifices to the deity of the earth when we are planting and harvesting our farms: make another sacrifice to other deities in order that we may have fruitful marriages; sacrifices still some more in order to have health in the family and prosperity in business and so on? What kind of monotheism is that and how sincere is it? Sometimes it has been reported or rumored that even church dignitaries resort to rain doctors when they are holding church activities which they do not wish to be marred by rain, or that they resort to medicine men when they are seeking elective positions in their various churches which honestly

is an African reality! So the facts are there very glaringly for all to see. Now, if our religion is monotheistic as the West claims or maintains, then why do its claims conflict with the central claims and creed of the Christian religion, and why do we have the problem of “divided loyal ties”?

In fact according to Mphahlele, if we jump out of the Christian wagon, we are not going to land in the wagon of atheism or of irreligion, but in the wagon of our ancestral religion. While insisting on his critic of the alien nature of Christianity in Africa.

Mphahlele (1974) has this to say:

Christ’s death was plainly political, and need not be considered a mystical event, Africa was not involved. Why now should we be fed on the history, the folklore, the allegory and poetry of the Hebrews (However beautiful) who had no functional connection with Africa?

As Bassey Andah points out: the cultural heritage of Africans is pre-eminently religious and cannot be divorced from politics, philosophy, or economics. African religious concepts involve the African universe (1988:110) Religion provided a strict moral code for most traditional African communities. However, it is very important to note here that unlike western religion; most traditional African thought does not conceive the source of evil to be a fallen god or spirit like Satan or the devil. Rather traditional African people believed in the immortality of dead ancestors. Such belief helped to bind present living members of family and lineage together especially in time of crisis and difficulties. This function as it was believed, raised the ancestors above the transitory human level and invested them with social significance beyond all.

Besides, pre-colonial Africans believed that the source of evil was located in the human world among the ambitions and jealousies of men. To paraphrase Andah (1998), the source of evil in pre-colonial Africa is thus “demonic humanity: the witch or sorcerer” (106). This justifies why unlike Western religions, the rights and duties sanctioned by ancestors both defined and regulated basic social and political relations in traditional Africa.

In Nigeria for instance, as it were in most parts of precolonial Africa, gods and ancestors were perceived to play the “witnesses” and “guarantors”. They punished men in order to correct immoral behavior such as lie, stealing and sex-related offences. It is on records that in pre-colonial Nigeria, for someone to convince others that what he or she is saying is the truth, he/she had to swear by a god. The simple reason being that if it turned out not being the truth; the sanction was punishment by the gods within a stipulated period. This was the same with the case of stealing. History has it that if someone’s things were stolen, the person could invoke a curse publicly and if the stolen items were not returned within stipulated period, the culprit was expected to be punished in a specific way as requested. This could happen either through fatal accident, mishap or otherwise.

Moreso, the belief in punishment by the gods or ancestors made adultery or sexual recklessness almost in-existent in pre-colonial Africa. For instance, in traditional Africa, young girls were expected to remain virgin till marriage. Even after marriage, they were expected to be faithful to their husbands or else children would be impaired by the gods. The dignity of every family was dependent on the status of the young girl before and during marriage. The shame of being declared impure often acted as a serious deterrent to young girls.

In Onitsha society of the Eastern part of Nigeria for instance, religion remains a binding force. There is a strong connection between religion and kinship in the Igbo social system.

According to Andah, “the Igbo conception of the cosmos is essentially religious and through the idea of god (chi) man becomes a microcosm of the universe and the universe becomes moral in man’s image”. (1988:79-81). In Igbo traditional religion, Chukwu is the creator of the visible and invisible universe but the government of the world has been entrusted by him directly to the good spirits and sometimes partly to the bad spirits, and in-directly to the ancestors. In Igbo cosmology, all the necessary and indispensable benefits to their life or that of their families and villages come from Chukwu through the spirits and ancestors, in the form of a providential daily help, health, the fertility and fecundity of their children and so on.

An average Igbo person knows that every just desire rises up to Chukwu in the form of prayer and sacrifice, still through the spirits and ancestors, the Igbo society strongly believe that this continuous exchange between Chukwu and them through the spirits and ancestors, preserves the balance of the world which is however unstable.

Witchcraft was also believed by most traditional Africans. As it were, it is a supernatural power used to do evil and cause sickness. However, sequel to the nature of the belief system of pre-colonial Africans, witchcraft happened to play a positive role as far as social order and harmony are concerned. History has it that in some parts of pre-colonial Nigeria, in the Niger Delta region to be more precise, witchcraft was used as social check. It is on record that the belief and fear of witchcraft helped many communities to check selfishness and ensured for example that the rich shared wealth with others if not they would be victims. The belief in witchcraft also ensured that the poor were not oppressed by the rich and powerful. Witchcraft helped to restrain ostentation and related vices. It made people believe that the spirit of a person killed will torment and haunt the killer, that God or a god oversees everything people are doing and will mete out rewards and punishment accordingly. In such communities, there was no place for foul play and anti-social behavior or at best very limited.

While studying African manners and customs, Molema (1969) also draws some very important aspects of ethics and morality of the Bantu as representatives of Africa.

According to Molema's findings, the cultivation of good manners was greatly encouraged among the Bantu and every mother took the greatest pains in bringing up her children in accordance with the accepted laws of good breeding and politeness.

History also tells us that Bantu's language was full of titles of courtesy. Greetings for instance were an important ceremonial and signs of respect. It was compulsory for the inferior to recognize his superior and the visitor his host. Moreso, if you gave anybody food or drink, custom demanded that you should eat or drink a little of it first before handing it over to the stranger (Molema, 1969). Besides, when a person was given food or anything whatsoever, good manners required that he/she should receive it with both hands, regardless of its size. To use one hand was extremely bad form and was regarded as indicative of low birth and a discontented nature. Moreso, in Bantu's culture, everybody employed the words "father" and "mother" in talking to elderly people of his/her class or of higher social status. Rudeness to seniors was never accommodated by the Bantu community. This is why in Molema's view which the author subscribes to, it is unfortunate and fallacious to receive loud condemnations from the Western quarter, which state that the Bantu in common with other Negro are, among other things, cruel, devoid of the virtues of truth and honesty, possessed of strong animal passions and extremely lustful, hopelessly lazy, irresponsible as children, shameless and immodest (Molema, 1969).

It is unfortunate still, for us to notice that most of the time, Western scholars deliberately choose to describe the worst phases or the worst specimen of African life and compare it, to its disadvantage, with the so-called noblest ideals of Europeans society.

This misrepresentation and disproportionate picture of the Negro by the Westerner is purely fallacious and mischievous. Due to their imperialistic and racist penchant westerners have refused to genuinely study and understand the Negro. For instance, how fair and tenable would it be if we go into the slums of any European city and describe the inhabitants of the quarters as representing the nation? In Molema's words: "imagine, reader, a man or woman taken from the Cowcaddens. or Gallow gate in Glasgow, or the grass-market in Edinburgh, and show to the world as a representative and type of the Glasgow or Edinburgh (1969).

We should always bear in mind that there is no common yard stick in measuring the moral character of every nation. The people of one nation measure the moral character of the nation by their own ethical standard. As the case may be, the Bantu people have their own moral code which differs very much from those of other nations. Their ethical beliefs alone guide their conduct and behavior and their beliefs are peculiar to them only. And, to paraphrase Molema, the difference in the

conduct of nationalities should be one of degree rather than of kind. The first principles, the maxims are the same in a backward as in a so-called civilized race.

In his study of Africa and the Africans, Blyden (1967) posits that the western conception of African cultures as being inferior to theirs is due to their total ignorance of the African himself. According to Blyden, the outside world thinks it knows the man of Africa..... but it is beginning to be apprehended now by the thoughtful, that, after all, the man of Africa is not understood..... There is now more thinking, writing, learning and talking about Africa than ever before. Still the notions of Europeans are extremely vague about the man.

There is no doubt that Colonialism, Racism and Slave trade are the major reasons behind such attitude. These factors have introduced waste and disorder into Africa and prevented the progress of the people. For Blyden (1967)

“Nearly all other modern travelers have regarded the man of Africa with contempt, in comparison with the natural features.... of the country. What man has failed to understand is that the world is a global village and therefore the Negro race has yet its part to play in the history of humanity and the continent of Africa will be the principal scene of its activity.

It is striking and very funny to discover that till date an average white man considers the Negro as being the European in embryo. Blyden maintains that “the mistake which Europeans often make in considering questions of Negro improvement and the future of Africa is in supposing that the Negro is the European in embryo, in the underdeveloped stage- and that when, by and by he shall enjoy the advantages of civilization and culture, he will become like the European” The implication of this line of thought is that the Westerner considers the Negro as being on the same line of progress, in the same groove with him which should not be.

Each culture has its own peculiarity and conditioning. As for Blyden (1967) “it is not a question between the two races of inferiority or superiority. There is no absolute or essential superiority on the one side. It is a question of difference of endowment and difference of destiny. Again, “no amount of training or culture will make the Negro a European; on the other hand, no lack of training or deficiency of culture will make the European a Negro”. The Negro and the European races do not move in the same groove, on the contrary, they move on parallel lines with a limitless distance between them.

As far as progress and development are concerned, Negro and European races will never meet in the line of their activities. Black and White “are not identical, as some think, but unequal; they are distinct but equal. In the music of the universe each shall give a different sound, but necessary to the grand symphony. Blyden insists that “when the African shall come forward with his peculiar gifts, he will fill a place never before occupied but he must have a fair opportunity for his

development. It is on record that in traditional Africa, social system, education; ethics, morality etc. were well established and practised. Blyden (1967) does not hesitate to compare the pre-colonial Africa with the earlier ages of Greece and Rome. According to him: “we have ourselves visited remote and sequestered districts about the head-waters of the Niger, where we have found Negro Mohamedan and students devoting themselves to literature with an indifference to the outside world which reminded us of the habits of the monks in the

Middle ages and if the proceedings in Council which we have witnessed were written down plain, unadorned style, the account will read like description in Caesar’s commentaries of the doings of Celts in the days of their unsophisticated habitudes”. There are many instances as such all over traditional Africa. But instead of being perpetuated, they have been unfortunately destroyed by the hostile influences from without.

Blyden (1967) is reminiscent of Dr. Barth’s account in his book captioned *Travels in Central Africa*. Barth tells us about “the ruins of the ancient capital of Bornou. Gbareggomo..... Situated in the finest country of Bornou..... a country which formerly teemed with hundreds of villages But which is now almost deserted and covered with dense forest and impenetrable jungle, and has become the haunt of the monkey and the hog of the elephant and the lion (2011:230). This simply shows that there were social advancement and well-being in traditional Africa until the slave hunting Tawareks invaded the country and all progress was checked.

In this twenty first century of globalization, it is apparent that African are still not known or understood. Until that is done, one cannot talk of a genuine improvement and development of the continent of Africa. To paraphrase Blyden (1967), in order to bring about these results, those who from abroad assume to be teachers and guides should study the people of Africa so as to be able to deal with them scientifically and not empirically. It is in this direction that lies the hope of Africa’s future.

Pre-Colonial African Democracy, Nationhood and Development

It is common knowledge to note that today democracy has become a global hype and the Western-like democratic wind of change has swept like a hurricane across the length and breadth of Africa. This is simply because according to the Western school of thought, to be democratic is to be “civilized” and “politically decent”. (Ngamen, 2016:14) This idea has pushed many African states to waste a lot of resources on democratization processes in the western manners. In fact, more than seventy percent of African states have embraced or claim to be democratic because according to the West, their own brand of democracy is the only viable and sustainable mode of organizing society for development. However, despite the well-tailored advertisement for democracy by the West, the fact still remains that what is being witnessed in many modern African States for the past three decades or so, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Lybia, Burundi, Rwanda, Ivory Coast, Mali, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria just to mention a few, are anarchy, war and genocide. So, despite the

massive embrace of Western democracy by modern African States, there has been no significant improvement in the Socioeconomic situation or condition of most of their citizens.

What could be the problem? The problem as I argue (Ngamen, 2016) is that of the fundamental difference between the socio-political organization of the West and Africa.

There is this erroneous view by the West that democracy, as a form of government can be imported wholesale from one society to another, regardless of socio-cultural differences. As I argue, for the Western school of thought, genuine democracy is best practised within the ambit of the state. In other words, democracy and the state go hand in hand. And, the state as understood and accepted by modern political thinkers is alien to Africa or against African's societal values and politics. It is on record that before independence which triggered off the emergence of the so-called modern African states, the political and economic institutions were based on the intimate relationships of the members, and their group consciousness. Traditional African political system developed in the context of communities which were families or extensions of families, or ethnic groups. Moreso, traditional Africa was stateless yet democratic

(Ngamen, 2016:15)

Even though two types of democracy have evolved overtime, that is direct and indirect democracy, it is a fact that today the model of democracy that is in vogue and which is being foisted on Africa is liberal democracy. According to Offor (2011:123), this form of democracy has been described as a "historic product, ideally constituted as a political correlate of advanced capitalism and its salient characteristics" unlike the African traditional values which are based on the spirit of communal life, ethnicity and nationhood, liberal democracy pre-supposes a government whose organizing principles are formal freedom, formal equality, respect for private property. The rule of law, periodic elections and government by content. This is why in Offor's own words: Today, as the world celebrates the triumphant march to democracy in every part of the globe, Africa, despite her speedy rate of democratization, still relishes in various crises, thus warranting the conclusion that democracy is not only in crisis on the continent, but that the institution of liberal democracy in Africa and its adoption by most African states is altogether counterproductive and horrendous (123-124).

There is no doubt that Westerners have succeeded in making liberal democracy very popular in modern Africa, but the fact still remains that this system of government has not and it is not working well on the continent of Africa. Western and African political spheres are quite different and therefore, require different approaches. For instance, Western democracy is capitalistic and also operates within the ambit of the state which is formal, abstract and legalistic while African democracy is "Communocratic" and "Pantisocratic". (Ngamen, 2016:15). By pantisocratic, I mean equality of communities and ethnic groups

According to Offor, “going by several critical indicators, the average African is worse off today under democratic governments that he/she was many years ago before the advent of democratic regimes in Africa (2011:125). It is on record that for the past three decades of the so-called Western democracy, the continent of Africa has developed retrogressively. This is due to the fact that apart from the problems of poverty and corruption which have dire implications for the practice of democracy in Africa, more importantly the peculiar and unique nature of institutions in Africa as mentioned above also makes them unreceptive to western type of democracy. Besides, the crux of liberal democracy is about electoral competition involving multiparty elections. However, due to the peculiar nature of the socio-political organization of traditional Africa, state power is constituted in such a way that renders this aspect of democracy unrewarding.

Based on the organizational structures which characterized African public space as the clan, ethnic group, the tribe, kinship and nationality, democracy in the western way cannot be authentic on African soil. Compared with the West; authentic African democracy is peculiar and unique. I argue that the present effort by the west to make democracy amenable to the vagaries of the African condition will never yield positive result unless such a quest draws on the valuable assets in the indigenous practice of democracy in pre-colonial African societies. It is on record that African cultural heritage is rich in ideas, precepts and values that define good governance and that to lay the foundation for sustainable democratic politics and culture, these indigenous values and precepts must be taken into serious consideration.

According to Ramose (1992), without such a move “the praxis of politics in Africa will remain misguided and unsuccessful precisely because it will be unauthentic, a veritable expression of mimetic philosophy”. Contrary to what the west wants people to believe, the fact still remains that Africa has nothing to learn from them as far as the genuine practice of democracy is concerned. Western style democracy is the symbol of alien culture, which has been imposed upon the indigenous people of Africa. So, it is not an authentic expression of the political structures of Africa. It is on record that pre-colonial Africa systems of government were hospitable to all the values and principles that are today the hall marks of successful democracies. The puzzle therefore, according to Offor (2011) is that:

Instead of exploring these indigenous resources in devising creatively new institutional forms and practices that will be appropriate to our peculiar circumstances, African states adopted the western style of democracy, and in their characteristic manner, attempted to reproduce in the continent, those familiar institutions associated with this form of government in the west (128).

As for Oluwole, a true democracy, irrespective of the school of thought, transcends specific historical institutional forms. It has to do with certain defining values, principles, rules and precepts, according to which a good government, whatever its institutional form must be run. (2004:42)

And, as mentioned above, some of these values, such as participation, accountability, tolerance and human rights were the underlying principles of governance in most traditional African societies. In Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye's minds, there is no doubt that pre-colonial Africa thrived on attitudes and practices, all of which are today considered very essential to democratic practice. Both of them explain how in traditional Akan system of governance in Ghana for instance, decision making was as a rule, by consensus. In Gyekye's own words, consensus means taking into account, individual persons views and opinions before all important decisions, are made, the esteem and promotion of mutual tolerance and patience and an attitude of compromise (1993:78). Still in line with the analysis of the democratic spirit in pre-colonial Africa, Mogobe Ramose (1992) also studied the Shona language group of Zimbabwe. According to him, participation and deliberation in the Kgotla was free and open, and that any decision arrived at is, seen, not as the triumph of one group over another, but as the achievement of all concerned parties. A 'Kgotla' we are told, is a traditional parliament or forum for free and serious discussions aimed at making laws and finding communal solutions to the problems at hand.

The Chewa of Central Africa and the Gikuyu of Kenya are also known to have seriously used consensus in their mode of governance. According to Didier N. Kaphagawani (1993), consensus was so pronounced among the Chewa people to the extent that the following proverb became common knowledge in the community: 'Mutu Umodzi Susen Zadenga' that is 'one head never carries or lifts a roof' (104). The Bini, Igbo and Yoruba of pre-colonial Nigeria are not an exception. They are all known to have placed great importance on participation and consensus as principles of social organization. For instance, the Bini are known for their popular saying: 'Aghakugbe, Uduehiri Seaghae' which means 'with cooperation and compromise, the ant can be properly dissected and its heart shared among the people'. This simply means that in pre-colonial Africa, it was common knowledge that the individual mind is limited and therefore, any public decision or action should pass through consultation and consensus.

Even the Igbo who are known as acephalous or non- centralized communities, "it is on record that issues of social and political significance were discussed in several meetings involving citizens and decisions reached by consensus.

As for the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria, emphasis was more on human freedom and social responsibility. According to Sophie B. Oluwole (2004), in traditional Yoruba society, the biological mother of the Oba in conjunction with some chiefs, are said to constitute a team, which act not only as advisers, executive members, but also as opposition group which may disagree with the Oba and check his excesses (422-23). Moreso, the principles of accountability, tolerance and respect for human rights are other fundamental elements of traditional African constitutional thought. According to John Ekei (2004), accountability marked traditional governance. It was a duty done on behalf of the ancestors and the human community. (454). Referring to the traditional

Akan people. Gyekye (1987) also explains how the chief never acted without the advice and full concurrence of his councilors and representatives of the people, to whom he is accountable. Acting without the concurrence and advice of his council was a legitimate cause for his deposition.

From the foregoing, it is clear that although stateless, precolonial Africa was authentically democratic especially if we go by Adam Przeworski's definition of democracy as involving "the provision of means to pursue the representation of diverse interests, and the institutionalization of mechanisms to hold rulers accountable to the public" (1988:61-2).

CONCLUSION

Throughout this lecture I have attempted to show how it is very shocking to realize that even till date, after many decades of the so-called independence of the African Continent, most Africans still rely on the "Other" that is, the Western world to name, qualify, define and even classify them.

This is simply because during the period of colonization and imperialism, Eurocentric historians and missionaries managed to convince the world to believe that not only Africa had no history, more so, her inhabitants were primitive, irrational, uncultured and good for nothing whence, the "monkeyism" theory. Fortunately for Africa, with the help of modern anthropologists, sociologists and archaeologists alike, along with more sophisticated empirical methods of research, it has now become a fact that all the technical and scientific theories, all the analyses of cultures and races, all the attempts to establish the innate inferiority of the black man are vain efforts and there-after, fallacious. In other words, the good news is that despite all efforts to prove that the black man belonged to a lower species than the white, it was too much of a man to be an ape.

There is a common humanity all over the world, or to paraphrase an Akan proverb from Ghana: in human flesh there is no edge of cultivation- no boundary. This simply means that all human flesh is of one kind, all mankind is one species. Consequently, each culture has its own peculiarity and conditioning. It is not a question between the two races of inferiority or superiority, or reason and unreason. There is no absolute or essential superiority on the one side. It is a question of difference of endowment and difference of destiny.

It is obvious that no amount of training or culture will make the Negro a European, on the other hand, no lack of training or deficiency of culture will make the European a Negro. The Negro and the European races do not move in the same groove, on the contrary, they move on parallel lines with limitless distance between them. That is why as far as progress and development are concerned, Negro and European races will never meet in the line of their activities. To paraphrase

Blyden (1967) black and white are not identical as some think, but unequal, they are distinct but equal.

Now, according to a Chinese proverb: when you blame others you are nowhere, when you blame yourself you have done half journey and when you blame nobody then you have arrived.

In line with the fore going, I humbly submit that it is high time for present day Africans to go beyond the blame game attitude because Africa is not the only continent that has been colonized. The Koreans, Vietnamese, Chinese, French to mention just a few, were also colonized, but look at where they are today in term of genuine development! Why should our own case be different? Africa must wake up. The above mentioned countries dreamt and woke up to realize their dreams. It is high time for Africa to follow suit. We must re-decolonize our current mentality, invent and innovate according to our specific areas of specialization and strength because there lies the hope of Africa.

Yes, I anticipate that I will be accused of only talking and drawing attention, but as a matter of fact, some people have to talk and draw attention, some to hear or listen while some are to do or practicalize and some to reap the fruits of the action. We just have to genuinely start from somewhere may be by beginning to pay serious attention to African philosophers. Progress and development are inter-generational and Africa cannot and should not be an exception.

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