

## HOW LONG AGO IS NOT SUFFICIENT: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO AFRICA`S EXPERIENCE OF COLONIALISM

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### **Abstract**

*Colonialism by the westerners is a phenomenon which took place in the African continent. It left consequences in the continent. One of the consequences is that of two unblending cultures of tradition (the traditional culture of Africa) and modern (the culture colonialism introduced in Africa). Having two different cultures at the same time in a community is abnormal. Culture should be whole and systemic to confront challenges from the environment. As the African environment has these two unblending cultures, the result is weakness and lack of focus with the attendant misery and poverty in the continent. Applying the critical method of philosophy, the discourse, upon the strict conception of culture as human`s approach to challenges of existence to ensure the good life, submits that to overcome the unblending situation of culture in Africa, it is not enough to think that because colonialism took place long ago, by now Africa should overcome this effect of colonialism. The healing of the ailing African culture by virtue of being two unblending cultures has to be achieved by reducing the two to one systemic culture effective to tackle challenges to bring about the good life in Africa.*

**Keywords:** culture, africa, colonization, unblending culture, cultural healing

### **Introduction**

Sometime in 1884, the colonization of African nations took place by western nations. The colonization of Africa was basically western nations taking over the rein of powers in African nations and ruling them for the benefits of the western nations. The colonization was not only about the forceful taking of power from the African nations, it also involved the introduction of the cultures of the westerners in African nations. The introduction of these foreign cultures in African nations means that in the African nations, there will be more than one culture in these communities which is an abnormal situation.<sup>1</sup> This is because a normal culture of a people should be whole, systemic and effective in tackling the problems of the environment in order to make possible the decent life that is the aspiration of all humans.<sup>2</sup>

The presence of the foreign culture therefore, especially as Africans did not out of free volition desire it, will result in two unblending cultures in a community. As culture is meant to have been created whole, systemic and effective by a people to tackle challenges of existence, it will mean that African culture that is now unblending because of the presence of the traditional and modern introduced by the colonizers will be weak and lack focus to take on the challenges of existence. No wonder the misery and poverty consequences of weak and unfocused unblending culture that is supposed to be whole, systemic and effective in tackling challenges of existence. People keep pointing to the fact that it is now about thirty-three years since African nations got their independence, how come they have not been able to overcome the embarrassing situation of poverty and misery in the continent? The truth is that no matter the number of years that has passed since African nations got their independence, if the unblending culture is not perceived and resolved to produce a single, systemic, effective and adequate culture to tackle challenges in the African space, poverty and misery in Africa will drag on unendingly. This will especially be the case, as culture through cultural socialization usually orientate humans. This will mean that Africans over the years will have orientation in life from the unblending cultures of tradition and modernity. If humans are supposed to be agents of development, one can imagine how a weak and unfocused orientation will be the order of the day in Africa and producing the sorry state of existence in the continent. The normalization of the African unblending culture is desperately needed.

### **Culture**

What is culture? From the beginning, it is pertinent to note the very common definition of culture! The common definition is the one that says that culture is a people's way of life. This definition encompasses a people's worldview, traditions, economy, laws, social structure to mention but a few. Besides this common definition of culture, there is what is known as the strict definition of culture. By strict definition of culture, we mean the real definition of culture giving life and meaning to the common place view of culture. Without the strict definition, the common place view of culture will be empty. For instance, it could be asked, given the common definition of culture, "Why have a people chosen a particular way of life?" To this question, the common idea of culture, it must be stated, have to make further research to be able to rationally respond. The strict definition of culture, on the other hand, effortlessly and rationally responds: "People choose a particular culture because they find it sustains them better". So, the operating word is sustenance, sustenance of the people that have invented a culture. No wonder the strict conception of culture upon appreciation of human existence as a task and

problem states culture is the material and immaterial inventions by the human person to confront the challenges of his/her existence in order to live satisfactorily and comfortably. This is why Ortega Y Gasset holds that human life is a shipwreck and culture is the life boat or life jacket in the midst of the shipwreck. Thus, by this analogy of shipwreck and lifeboat/life jacket signalling the sustaining essence and function of culture.<sup>3</sup>

The strict definition of culture has three crucial stages of culture: The creator`s stage; the complication stage and the simplification stage.<sup>4</sup>

**The creator`s stage** refers to that stage of culture when humans who upon experiencing the challenges of life, invented culture to confront these challenges in order to ensure the good life. One main characteristic of this stage of culture is that the creators of culture happen to also be those living by the created culture.

**Complication stage** refers to that stage when because solutions to existence have been invented in form of culture to challenges of existence by preceding generations, succeeding generations do not have to create or invent culture, they merely inherit what has been created as solutions to their problem of existence. In essence they are free from the task of creating culture because they have an inherited one in their hands. This becomes an already made solution to their problem of existence even before they experience the problem. They have been socialized in this solution that is in form of inherited culture which they will use in confronting the challenges of their existence.

**Simplification Stage** is a response to one of the aspects of the complication stage. It thus happens that humans having inherited culture from their predecessors to confront challenges of existence, experience a time when the culture they have inherited is not understood how it is a solution to their problem of existence. They however must continue to live by it. As they did not create the culture to know how it is a solution, yet it is to be applied in the manner of routine in living, Ortega Y gasset observes in his book, **Man and Crisis**, that in a situation like this, that is, of complication involving desperation before an inherited culture as it is not understood how it is a solution to one`s experience of life, but must be lived by, one responds by simplification of the inherited culture. It is this Gasset expresses thus,

Now we must fix on our general blueprint the point at which that cultivated man with an overloaded culture arrives; the fact is that he is found within that culture in a situation analogous to that in which the inaugurator of the culture

found himself within his own spontaneous life. He is found smothered by his cultural environment as was the other by his cosmic environment. And the similarity of the situation forces him to similar reaction. The man in the forest reacts to his problem by creating a culture.<sup>5</sup>

Gasset continuing on the idea of simplification says,

There is no creation without withdraw into one`s self... the man who is too cultivated and socialized, who is living on top of culture which has already become false, is in urgent need of another culture, that is to say a culture which is genuine, but this can only start in the sincere and naked depths of his own personal self.... this cultivated self, the culture which has received from without, and which is now decrepit and devoid of evidence, prevents him from doing this. That which seems so simple- to be one`s self-becomes a terrible problem. Thanks to culture, man has gotten away from himself, separated from himself from himself; culture intervenes between the real world and his real person. So, he has no course other than to rise up against culture, to shake himself free of it, to rid himself of it, to retreat from it, so that he may once more face the universe in the flesh and return to living in very truth.<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately therefore, simplification stage of culture requires the human person to return to the condition of creators of culture; he /she is to create a new culture by way of simplification of the now complicated culture; by withdrawing into himself/herself, he/she is to create from the complicated culture based on ideas of a culture he/she has evidence for as what is capable of confronting challenges of his/her existence and ensuring the satisfactory and comfortable life.

We can quickly observe that in the strict conception of culture, culture has to be whole, systemic, consistent within itself and be able to adequately tackle human`s problem of existence and guarantee good existence. In the event of complication of culture, when culture is to be recreated, it has also to be whole, not fragmented in anyway; it is to be consistent within itself and with the aim of tackling challenges to the good life. This has to be so because, when you make a parameter for creating a new culture, the test of ideas, material and immaterial, the ability to

be able to tackle challenges to existence and ensure the good life, the resulting ideas to constitute the culture cannot but be whole, consistent and effective in confronting problems to existence and ensuring experience of the good life

### **African Culture and Experience of Colonialism**

Traditional African culture, like every normal culture was whole, systemic and effective in confronting challenges of living. It cuts across their social, economic, agricultural, educational, religious, political, laws and indeed over all life's constitution. The historical records on traditional African living were of a well organised living with everything in their proper places and woven into a well thought out response to challenges of living in traditional time with the result that everyone was well taken care of.<sup>7</sup> However, with invasion of the African community by colonialism, introducing its culture, there was an emergent condition of unblending cultures of tradition and modernity.

Obi Oguejiofor referring to traditional African life states that most spheres of life in traditional Africa were intertwined with each other, and created a sort of web, which lent support to every single aspect. Religion, work, economy, law and order, politics, family life, were not viewed as different compartments with independent existence of their own. He holds that with the supplanting of some of the spheres of life, the rest of life could not but cave in. He gives an example in African traditional life, that in politics, for instance, the chiefs and elders owed the respect and honor they enjoyed, not just to their political and social functions, but also and perhaps more, because they were viewed as direct links with the world of the ancestors. However, with the advent of a new religion, the ancestors gradually became less significant in day-to-day existence.<sup>8</sup> Oguejiofor also points out that the level of education the African acquired was based on the European environment rather than the African environment. He sees this as a seal of the African cultural alienation. That left in a state of uncertainty, with horrendous contempt of his own traditional heritage, and hamstrung in his patently undersized coat of modern education, the African in his state of cultural alienation became a sorry sight both to himself and his observers. Left in the lush of modernization, the alienated African is without a past, without a present and without a bright future.<sup>9</sup> This description of the African by Oguejiofor corresponds with Uroh's. For Uroh, cultural dislocation implies a disorientation or delinking of a people from their collective heritage in arts, sciences, politics, social norms, religion and so on. He advances that to lose one's culture is tantamount to suffering from amnesia. This is, in his words:

The situation that most Africans find themselves today....  
the African today is caught between a past s/he cannot  
recall, a present s/he is ill-equipped to comprehend and a  
future, s/he cannot contemplate.<sup>10</sup>

George Ehusani in his thinking, holds that decades after most African nations gained their independence, the socio-political and economic situation of the continent is simply chaotic. Western civilization, he holds, has succeeded in displacing the old order, but no new order seems to be in place. For him, as the African ego has suffered distortion, so has the African family. The young people, he says, have been liberated from the authority of their parents, and elders have lost their inspiration and respect. Changes on the level of morale and ethos have been so rapid and brutal that the wisdom of the father and the experience of the mother have become irrelevant for the aspiration of the son and the needs of the daughter. Ehusani, on the same axis with Oguejiofor, holds that the ancestors too have been dislodged from their position of honor and kept at a distance. Overall, for Ehusani, the white man has destroyed that that used to hold the Africans together and they are no longer united in tackling the task of human existence.<sup>11</sup>

The question, “How is the disorientation of the African community the cause of the Misery in the continent?” may be asked at this juncture. It is important for us to note that this disorientation is essentially a disorganization, a lack of focus on the task of human existence that involves inventions of ideas and materials to serve as a map on the direction that communal life must follow and ensure life lived in security and comfort. What we are saying is that the African is neither totally using the solution to human existence that the traditional system provides nor the one that the foreign social system makes available. So, which solution in form of culture is the African applying in tackling the problem of human existence in his environment? It is an unblending mixture of traditional and modern cultures by the fact of his disorientation involving his habitation of two worlds at the same time. Another name for this habitation of two unblending worlds at the same time is confusion. The African is thus a confused person.

It must be noted that no nation can tackle the human needs of decent living, shelter, feeding and clothing which will result from creation of transformative ideas and material inventions which the human task of existence involves, in the African manner of disorientation. To provide these needs require the organization of the nation concerned. The failure of African states<sup>12</sup> is their inability to provide these needs.<sup>13</sup> As there is the failure of the states to care for the needs of the

individuals,<sup>14</sup> we get these individuals who go into politics with the sole aim of fighting for their personal security that the states could not provide for them as ordinary citizens. To achieve this aim of personal security, they involve in all forms of corruptions. In this manner, contemporary African leaders are no longer interested in using the states to tackle the problem of human existence. The states are rather used as instruments of exploitation of the masses and provision of personal security and enrichment.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, as these states do not address themselves to the issues of common good, we have all kinds of crimes. For instance, as employments are not provided, we have people resorting to all forms of crimes in order to survive. Lack of confidence in the states leads to trust in ethnic enclaves for survival, with cases of ethnic clashes here and there.<sup>16</sup> These clashes no doubt further disorganize the community with resulting cases of refugees, malnourishment, diseases, destroyed homes, killings etcetera.<sup>17</sup> The African debt burden is not unconnected with this disorientation. This is because the African disorientation disposes one for poor planning. This poor planning has resulted in the initial borrowed money becoming a burden.<sup>18</sup> This burden is most evident in the fact that this borrowed funds rather than save us from misery, contributes to perpetuation of our misery as African states groan to service this debt.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the disorientation of the African community, which entails lack of proper focus<sup>20</sup> on the task of human existence arising from habitation of two unblending cultures, is the cause of the lot<sup>21</sup> of the African continent today. Worthy of note here then, is the fact that the disorientation in this context primarily means a disorganization of the essential order necessary to tackle the problem of human existence in its entire ramification.

### **The way forward**

To heal the ailing African culture of its two unblending cultures in order to experience the renaissance longed for in Africa, where poverty and misery will be a thing of the past, the issue to attend to is not how long since decolonization in Africa took place. How long-ago decolonization took place in Africa is no longer an issue in itself sufficient to bring about the beauty longed for in Africa. The question should rather be whether the fundamental issue of the ailing unblending culture, the root cause of misery and poverty in the continent, has been addressed!

Attending to the problem of unblending culture of traditional and modern is imperative if genuine progress is to be made in the African continent that will

eradicate poverty and misery in a significant way and ensure the good life. It is pertinent to note that there have been previous efforts at resolving the problem of unblending culture in Africa. However, each of the efforts has been associated with one problem or another.

We have the traditionalist effort<sup>22</sup> for instance, represented especially by Leopold Senghor who suggested a return to traditional culture as a way to resolve the problem of two unblending cultures in Africa. This proposal has a fundamental problem as there is no concrete traditional culture to return to as the introduced colonial culture fragmented the traditional culture in a manner that what remains is a shadow of the traditional culture. Consequently, a return to traditional culture is impossible as there is no longer true traditional African culture intact to return to.

The Professional effort<sup>23</sup> was another attempt at resolving the problem of unblending response to the problem posed by life in the African continent. In their attempt they propose we embark on selection of what is needed from the pool of unblending cultures inherited. In essence we are to select aspects of our culture we find useful for the formation of the new culture that we need in the continent to bring about the rebirth we long for. The one weakness of this approach is that it fails to provide a parameter that will determine what is to be picked and what is to be abandoned in our unblending culture. selection cannot be carried out without an identification of what influences our choices of what is thought valuable and unvaluable. Having a parameter<sup>24</sup> therefore is crucial.

Ortega Y Gasset in his book, "Man and Crisis" recommends that in the event of cultural crisis that we embark on evidential selection. This means we are to select from our old culture and all other cultures that we may know, based on the culture that provide better existence for the human person. Thus, there is a parameter in provision of better existence for the human person. Any culture and in where ever, that is able to provide better sustenance of the human person in existence surely becomes the worthy culture. We therefore have a dependable formular that can be applied to heal the ailing unblending condition of traditional and modern culture of Africa that has been a bane in the quest for development in the continent.

A critical look at the evidential selection,<sup>25</sup> that is to assemble a new culture to be carried into the future in Africa, reveals that reason which is at work in the evidential selection is also what is at the base of invention of all cultures; that is, the determinant of all cultures. Assembling a new culture from the pool of cultures



that we have in the continent on the ground of their demonstrability of how they will sustain African life better, becomes justifiable.

Note should particularly be taken of the fact that culture invented according the formular above will always have a reason for its pick. Its pick can be demonstrated! It is always on the ground that, its pick is because it provides better sustenance for Africans. Should there be a promise of even better existence by a new culture, the earlier is to be jettisoned and the new embraced. An application of this culture in the African continent surely ensures the renaissance that Africans have been longing for and makes poverty and misery a thing of the past in the continent that has become synonymous with poverty and misery.

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