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Postmodernism Vis-a-Vis African Traditional Cultures: Rethinking the Pathways to Authenticity

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Postmodernism Vis-a-Vis African Traditional Cultures: Rethinking the Pathways to Authenticity

Peter Takov [α] & Ngoran Mathew Banlanjo [σ]

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I. Introduction

The world of today is experiencing radical paradigm shifts in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics across the world's indigenous and regional cultures. These shifts, engineered by novel perceptions and interpretations of reality, have occasioned drastic modifications of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in human life in social relationships, sexuality, ethics and morality, religion, education, and politics. These general transformations are entrenched in and driven by the spirit and principles of what has been termed "Postmodernism." With western roots, postmodernism has spread to every area of the globe, shaping mentalities, redefining values, influencing every fabric of human life, and culture, and breeding a new spirit of humanism in human affairs. Its revolutionary style, its radical skepticism about truth, its rejection of traditional systems of beliefs, values, and knowledge, its denial of metaphysical essentialism, and its deconstruction of what had traditionally been construed as natural dichotomies between essentially distinct natural identities and purposes have often raised the critical question of whether postmodernism represents a civilization of human reason or a backslide on authentic human progress, whether it signifies a valorization of human worth or a false humanism founded on the corruption of authentic human values. Moreover, the present consideration focuses on exposing the effects of postmodernism on African traditional cultures and traditional cultural values.

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II. The Concept and Tenets of Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a concept that is difficult to capture fully in a single definition, not only because it encapsulates a variety of expressive forms but also because of its ambivalent character owed to the fleeting or fluid nature of the reality it signifies. The concept can at best be described in terms of its diverse and peculiar characteristics and fundamental tenets. These include denial cum deconstruction of ontology and ontological hierarchies, rejection of metaphysical essentialism, engagement with ambivalence, advocacy for the equality of all opinions, confusion of identities, dichotomization of sex and gender, rejection of value essentialism, and atheistic humanism. Azenabor (2004) has argued that postmodernism is driven by two fundamental assumptions, namely, that absolute or universal truths, knowledge, reality and morality do not exist, and that what exists are human interpretations of what exists and these interpretations are relative to or vary across race, class, and gender.

Postmodernism is deeply rooted in the perspective that metaphysics is dead and that both philosophy and metaphysics have outlived their usefulness. In its attack on traditional ontology, postmodernism challenges metaphysical foundations, denies the distinction between nature (the ontological

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given) and social convention (which is a product of cultural factors and personal choices). It argues for anti-essentialism (or anti-nature), non-identity, multiplicity and mutability, and relativism in how we perceive, understand, interpret and construct reality. Postmodernism, especially in the form advocated for by Derrida, accuses Metaphysics of creating dualistic oppositions such as good/evil, mind/body, male/female, center/margin, necessary/contingent, etc.) and installing a hierarchy that unfortunately privileges one term of each dichotomy (good before evil, mind before body, male before female, center before margin, necessary before contingent, presence before absence, speech before writing, and purity before the complicated (Derrida, 1976, 1978). The deconstructive strategy of postmodernism seeks to unravel and to reverse these supposed dichotomies as well as to corrupt them (Reynolds, 2015). It strives to blur and ultimately erase these ontological boundaries to facilitate existential shifts across deconstructed identities. Concerning its critique of metaphysical essentialism (the nature/nurture dichotomy), postmodernism pursues a rigorous deconstruction and reduction whose aim is not only to eliminate nature (the ontological given) but to make nurture (the conventional, the socially constructed, or the fleeting product of flexible personal choices) the norm and the only existential mode. For instance, in the postmodern worldview represented by the queer theory of gender, an individual is not male or female based on nature (the "is") but based on choice, that is, what one does (Peeters, 2013). Being is performative. According to Azenabor (2004), postmodernists do not believe in metaphysical essences and, they do not admit that human beings share some common properties by their humanity.

Strongly allied to postmodernism's disregard for metaphysics is its concern with ambivalence, which itself is the logical consequence of deconstructing metaphysical essentialism and blotting out identity boundaries. Deconstruction, which is the tool and strategy of postmodern, not only suspects but disallows stable truth, universals, and universal principles, and refuses all forms of engagement with reality as it "is." To this extent, postmodernism presents itself as a theory of ambivalence in which ontological identities and distinctions are construed as unreal and meaningless. Yin (2018) underscores this point in the observation that postmodernism is not only against the preservation of metaphysical identity boundaries but further proposes infinite possibilities through which individuals can distinguish and separate themselves from others; individuals can endlessly acquire new identities as they continuously seek meaning, identity, and belonging. The postmodern strategy of deconstruction is downright opposed to the principle of identity as the very purpose of deconstruction is to set in motion an endless process of dialectically creating and recreating identities. Paradoxically, the only identity it recognizable within the postmodern project of deconstruction is the "non-identity" of all things. The ambivalence which postmodernism promotes goes beyond being to include ambivalence in language since language is the channel and tool of the new significations engendered from the project of deconstruction. It is essential to deconstruction that terminologies that signify fleeting identities be characterized by equivocality and ambivalence. Butler, a leading proponent of postmodern ideology argues that whatever identity an individual attains is a result of performative language (Peeters, 2013). For her, the ambivalence in language is justified on the grounds that the realities which language signify, being a product of deconstruction, have no static identity and meaning but are rather in flux and as such, the identity and meaning which they portray must constantly be shifting and the language which conveys such meaning must itself be fluid and shifting. In the same light Derrida thinks that the defining principle of any "identity" is to be different, to constantly crave for difference, in a scheme wherein similarities do not exist but only differences and no constituting subjectivity (Happel, 2001). This ambivalence in postmodern diction has great implications for philosophy as it places philosophy in a predicamental situation. In fact, to deconstruct language with the intent to destabilize abiding meaning and to reconstruct meaning in a spontaneous, individualistic, relativist and fleeting manner is the hallmark of destruction which philosophy suffers in the postmodern agenda. Thanks to this deconstruction of language and the resultant ambivalence in signification, it is no longer possible to speak of absolute or universal truths, of knowledge, of principles, of identity, even of reality and morality. In the same light, under this postmodern dispensation, metaphysics, epistemology and ethics would be jeopardized and even destroyed. From this perspective, a rigorous pursuit of postmodern deconstruction of language is nothing else but the death of philosophy and the obsoleting of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and anthropology.

To the extent that postmodern deconstruction of language seeks to make meaning constantly shifting and relative, it is an offshoot of classical relativism which began with the ancient sophists especially Protagoras of Abdera. Ancient relativism began with the Protagorian declaration that "man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are, and of those that are not that they are not." By this, the sophist destroyed universal or absolute truths, made all knowledge relative and accorded all opinions equal importance. Postmodernism continues this project of denouncing the reality of absolute truths and even goes further than classical relativism to apply the rejection of absolutes to metaphysics, to restrict relativism to individual perspectives of reality, knowledge, truth, morality and

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values. Its emphasis on individual autonomy to act, its advocacy for constancy in difference, its destruction of static identities, its romance with shifting meanings and the endless search for meaning and belonging make postmodernism a veritable fabric of relativism to the extent that postmodernism itself could be termed postmodern relativism. Indeed postmodernism, as portrayed in its various theories and strategies, is a rigorous theory of both epistemological and ethical relativism in which the individual is the only standard and criterion of what is true and what is right. While classical relativism was both epistemological and moral, postmodernism re-founds relativism on absolute individualism and extends it beyond epistemology and ethics to include metaphysical relativism and even anthropological relativism. In the end, postmodernism deconstructs itself as its very denial of absolutes is contradicted by its advocacy for the absoluteness of individual autonomy.

Postmodernism rejects the idea of sameness, identity or immutable natures. The confusion of identities that characterizes postmodern ideology is a result of its rejection of essentialism (metaphysical boundaries) and its concern with ambivalence and difference. Postmodernism does not recognize the notion of a stable identity founded on being and which respects the metaphysical principle that a thing is what it is and nothing else. For postmodern ideologues, every essentialist and collective identity is the unacceptable outcome of a false notion of ontological boundaries, as well as the product of cultural formations (Fraser, 1997) and institutional impositions - whereby institution could be family, culture, community, government or technology (Yin, 2018). The postmodern ideal of identity is that it be nothing fixed or stable but rather malleable, fleeting, and subject to being produced and reproduced through the ceaseless interplay of discourse and language (Dissanayake 2013). Through deconstruction, postmodernism seeks to reduce all identities to a capacity to be different, to be "in flux", on the basis of individual autonomy. As Yin (2018) has observed, inherent in the postmodern agenda is a novel concept of authenticity defined by the tendency for individuals to ceaselessly acquire new identities, deconstruct previous ones and reconstruct new ones, thereby creating new universes of reality to satisfy their endless quest for meaning and belonging. With postmodernism, authenticity and integrity in being are no longer defined by staying faithful to a unique identity but rather by being open to an endless spectrum of diverse possible identities, what Yin refers to as "fragmented and incoherent identities" and shifting meanings.

The deconstruction which postmodernism applies to traditional ontological categories and to language that signifies these categories is strongly felt especially in gender feminism, in its radical deconstruction of the sex and gender dichotomy. In traditional western ontology, sex represents the ontologically given, nature, while gender represents nurture, the socially constructed, with sex being understood as the grounding that conditions the shaping or the social construction of gender. Gender theory (especially its queer model) denies this distinction between sex and gender on ontological basis, rejects the view that gender roles are ontologically founded, and seeks to conceptualize both sex, gender and gender roles as products of social conventions, as relative social constructs. It contends that there exists nothing in human nature to keep an individual fixated in a specific sexual orientation or in particularly defined gender roles. Instead, it tends to perceive human sexuality and gender roles as outcomes of conventions imposed on individuals through the channels of cultural expectations and human positive laws. Hence, in postmodern gender theory, sex, sexual orientation, gender and gender roles are nothing more than social constructions, which can changed at one's whims and free choices. In effect, for postmodernism, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender roles and any other identity that one can construe rest on one principle namely, the principle of free choice.

The foregoing analyses indicate that postmodernism stretches Western modernism's ideal of individualism even to extremes. Postmodernism argues for the sovereignty of the individual (Harootunian, 1999), widens the modernist dichotomy between the individual and the collective and prioritizes the personal autonomy of the individual over social or collective claims (Yin, 2018). This postmodern emphasis on individual autonomy has roots in Western philosophical traditions especially those of Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes, for whom to be a human being primarily is to possess a rational soul and an intellectual life. For Aristotle, although individuals are destined by nature for social life, they nonetheless come prior to social relations (Maruyama 1984 & Sardar, 1999 cited in Yin, 2018). In Western philosophy, the individual is autonomous or independent, free, self-drive, conscious, is the subject endowed with agency, and is the locus of free will, free choice, action, experience and emotion. Yin (2018), Hsu (1985), Johnson (1985) and Sardar (1998) opine that in the Western conception of the individual as opposed to the collective, the individual is not only perceived as having ontological and existential anteriority over the community but also as being in constant conflict with the community to preserve his or her identity unadulterated by separating from all others and preserving boundaries at all costs. However, post modernism departs from Western philosophical conceptions of the individual in the sense that whereas Western philosophy conceptualized the individual within fixed ontological identity limits, postmodernism deconstructs these ontological circumscriptions and stretches the conception of the individual beyond

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metaphysical limits, making it a relative concept. In postmodernism, the individual is at once the agent and product of radical self-made free choices, constant self-remaking and the subject of endless possible identities. Postmodernism claims to free the individual from the limitations imposed by a fixed identity and endow him with prospects and potentials for new and endless identities. In so doing, it claims to place at the disposal of individuals endless possibilities for them to separate themselves from the community, to be different, and to achieve the "ideal" of finding authenticity in difference.

A critical consequence of postmodern individualism, especially its emphasis on the antecedence of the individual to the community and the priority of individual autonomy over collective norms (such as cultural expectations) is the radical relativisation of ethics. The implication of prioritizing the individual and individual autonomy over the community and community norms, from an ethical perspective, is that individual freedom and rights have priority over any collective or community morality scheme, and that community morality is expected to reflect individual autonomy. Since the very idea of individual freedom and rights implies the lack of a common defining set of principles for moral action, it also means that under postmodernism, community morality is at risk of becoming extinct since its very foundation (individuals who exist in and through difference) is a foundation that is impossible to achieve. In the absence of a common community morality, there is bound to be a clash of individual freedoms, and a conflict of individual rights and interests. Yin (2018) concurs with this in stating that ethics founded exclusively on individual autonomy and rights leads individuals to regard others as rival rights claimants. Moreover, as Mouffe (2000) has observed, an exaggerated emphasis on individual autonomy undermines the principles of equity and justice because it has little concern for communal participation. It also destroys the possibilities for peaceful coexistence that rests on the foundations of social justice, as individualism means that concern for the common good of all is no longer a priority.

Finally, postmodernism has strong ties with atheistic existentialism, especially the existentialism of Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir, reason why its humanism is characteristically atheistic. Sartre removed God from existence, declared human freedom to be absolute and made the individual the absolute point of reference in evaluating existence. For Sartre, individual human beings, without exception, are endowed with abounding freedom and, it is through their exercise of freedom in choosing as they will that individuals construct and reconstruct their essences, determining their identities and continually defining and redefining themselves in being. In Sartre's view, everyone is the product of their own choices, a choice which one cannot escape since failing to choose in virtue of an identity that one wishes for is itself a choice. For Sartre, humanism is first and foremost to deny any pre-existing ontological fixations to human nature and to free human nature from every metaphysical attempt to limit both its conceptualization and possibilities of lived experiences within natural boundaries. Secondly, humanism for Sartre is a valorization of individual autonomy and freedom against the collective; it is a defense of the absolute freedom of the individual in which is included the freedom to use the limitless freedom at his disposal to explore the marvelous and seemingly limitless possibilities of choice that lie open to him to make and remake himself in whatever way he chooses (Satre, 1946). It is therefore a project of self-creation through self-made free choices, a project in which the individual is absolutely irreplaceable. Humanism, for Sartre is both education in and commitment to free choice with an imperative of responsibility for the choices one makes. Moreover, humanism for Sartre is the absence of divine morality, the absence of pre-existing norms to define the morality of human choices and actions. The concept of humanism for Sartre implies that the source and ultimate arbiter of value is the individual who, in exercising his free choice, defines what value is for him; it is thus a humanism in which values are individual values, not collective values, and the only principle that governs these values is relativism. In fact, Sartrean existentialist humanism can be described as anti-humanist humanism. Like Sartrean existentialism, postmodernism is aloof to God, and finds his existence unnecessary. It valorizes individual autonomy and glorifies subjectivism, promotes absolute individual freedom to achieve its ideal of celebrating difference, removes barriers to choice of multiplicity of individual's identities (the correlate of Sartre's endless self-made essences), deconstructs metaphysics and the metaphysical foundations of morality thereby making values (moral values included) relative to individuals. Like Sartrean existentialism, postmodernism holds only individual autonomy and freedom to choose to be absolute. Everything else is relative and subjective and there is no radical basis to define and necessitate objectivity. It has been said that like Sartrean humanism, postmodernism advances a false humanism that imposes a dark age of imperialism over values (Banlanjo, 2008). The humanism which it advocates for does not only destroy the metaphysical foundations that define human ideals, choices and sense of valuing, but it also has the potential to render the social platform on which individual engagement with difference is played out conflictual. Postmodern humanism, like Sartrean humanism, is anti-humanist.

III. The Impact of Postmodernism on African Culture

Postmodernism has left its mark across various world cultures and societies including Africa. In Africa,

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its influence has been subtle but rapid and radical, both on individuals and communities, resulting in drastic transformations within the fabrics of African traditional cultures and societies. The areas where its impacts have been significantly felt include communalism, religious consciousness and attitudes towards religion, individual identity, perceptive worldview, suspicion of traditional African paradigms, and stereotyping of natural and culturally normative gender roles. These will be examined in the subsequent paragraphs.

As already discussed in the first part of this article, postmodernism provides a very fertile abode for the offshoot and maturation of individualism. This is achieved through its defense of the autonomy and freedom of the individual as having chronological, existential, and legal primacy over the collective. In postmodernism, the individual comes before the community, exists before the community and does not live ultimately for the community; the community is accidental to individual existence. It is the exercise of individual autonomy and freedom that shapes or defines the character of the community. In African communalism on the contrary, the community has chronological, ontological and existential anteriority over the individual. The individual exists in the community, through the community and ultimately for the community. The freedom and autonomy of the individual are determined by interactive patterns antecedently existing within the community's deontological structuring; although individuals are born ontologically endowed with autonomy and freedom, the exercise of their individual autonomy and freedom is shaped by the community. Banlanjo (2014) has argued that Placid Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* provides one of the extant descriptions of the communitarian character of traditional African societies. According to Banlanjo (2014), Tempels contrasts the Western concept of the person as an individual, subsisting, rational being with the African conception of the person as a unit of the more fundamental community. For Tempels, embeddedness in a community (of vital forces) is the existential factor that defines a person in Bantu thought, rather than the mere fact of one subsisting individually in a rational nature. Tempels (1959) states:

> "This concept of separate beings, of substance … which find themselves side by side, entirely dependent one of another, is foreign to Bantu thought. Bantu hold that created beings preserve a bond with one another, an intimate ontological relationship, comparable with the causal tie which binds creature with Creator. For the Bantu, there is interaction of being with being, that is to say, of force with force" (p.28.)

Moreover, Tempels makes it explicit that the communitarian nature of the African Traditional Society is structured after the African's vision of the world as a community of dynamic and interacting forces. The inference from Tempels' analysis of the communitarian nature of traditional African societies based on the worldview of dynamic and ever interacting forces is that for the African the collective, the community is primary (Banlanjo, 2014). Just as a force is truly such only in the context of interaction and influence, so also for the African, a person is truly such only within a dynamic and interacting community of persons (Banlanjo, 2014). Mbiti confirms the authenticity of Tempels' thesis that the paradigm of traditional African societies is communalistic. Banlanjo (2014) has argued that for Mbiti, the communalistic outlook of life implies that in the African context, the individual does not merely subsist but is socially reproduced in the community, such that the community, in a sense, becomes the source of his or her being and whatever happens to the being of one affects the being of all. Indeed, for Mbiti, only corporate existence is possible in African traditional life, such that an individual can affirm, "I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969, p.109). Menkiti (2004) concurs with Mbiti by arguing that the only real grounds for one's standing as a person in African traditional societies is that one exists with others, not apart from others. Gyekye (1987) contends that the African concept of Ubuntu (which signifies personhood and humanness) portrays the African understanding of the self as a being-in-relation-with-others and Yin (2018) holds that to be human in the African sense means to relate to others in accordance with the principle of ubuntu. In the same light, Karenga (1999) holds that among the Kemites, human relatedness is among the most vital sources of self as a person acquires meaningful existence and a sense of self through interaction and exchanges with others in the community. Moreover, he explains that the emergence and development of self among the Kemites is a communal process of social priming which is shaped by (socially defined) tasks carried out in and for the community.

In the postmodern dispensation, this communalistic outlook of life in African traditional societies has become severely threatened by rising individualistic tendencies that cast suspicion on the traditional communalistic fabric as an unnecessary or excessive check on individual autonomy and freedom. Postmodern individualism is antithetical to the African communalistic lifestyle because it encourages dissension, group fragmentation, and individual shunning of social responsibilities for communal welfare. It encourages a lukewarm and an aloof attitude (including an "I-care-less" attitude) in individuals with respect to community-based common initiative tasks, community developmental projects, and community welfare endeavors. Thanks to it, individuals tend to perceive themselves as not connected to events and happenings (good or bad) in the lives of other members of the community. It inspires in individuals the tendency to visualize themselves first and even more in the "I"

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than in the "We", to value personal ethos above group culture, to posit self-existence over and above networks of social relations, to pursue their individual good to the neglect of community good, and to seek to exonerate themselves from community values and communitarian modes of being that are the very springboard of their social reproduction. Moreover, through its sub-culture of individualism, postmodernism seeks to destroy traditional African communal participation and since this communal participation is the means by which equity and justice are guaranteed to members, it implies that postmodern individualism has the further effect of negating the communal principles of equity and justice (Mouffe, 2000).

Postmodern culture has a destructive effect on traditional African ethics. Traditional African ethics is essentially communalistic, reflecting the radically communalistic lifestyle of traditional African societies. It also stems from traditional African anthropology – the social reproduction of individuals in the community networks of relationships with others. In traditional Africa, morality is primarily social. The community is the source and arbiter of values through which individuals are socialized, and with which individual personhood is constructed and measured. In the African cultural worldview, personhood is not something biologically given but rather something that is socially and morally constructed; it is something that is achieved and the parameter for its attainment is moral conduct or excellence in moral character (Banlanjo, 2014). Social doubts regarding a person's moral worth also calls into doubt his or her anthropological status as a person. Adhering faithfully to community ethics guarantees social approval both of the individual and his or her personhood attainment and the networks of community relationships within which the individual functions and continues to be socially reproduced are strengthened. However, in the face of the postmodern culture where the individual comes before the community, where personal autonomy and freedom come before communal ethics, and where personal values take precedence over community values, and where social relationships are accidental to individual personhood and existence, the African communalistic ethical fabric is at risk of disintegration. By positing the individual as primary to the community, and positing the individual as the source of values (values which are relative) over and above the community, postmodernism has the potential to corrupt the very fabric of African communalistic ethics by breeding a spirit of individual dissent of community values and inspiring in individuals the perception of communal ethics as an obstacle to their individual freedom, including the freedom to choose their own values and the freedom to exist in community without ontogenetical connection to the community. It weakens the African's sense of responsibility for the common good, his sense of participation in community building, his willingness and readiness to identify with the community, his sense of obligation to give back to the community and the possibility of his finding in his community the source of his being.

Another deleterious effect of postmodern culture on African culture is discernible in its destabilization of the religious consciousness of the African, his sense of religious reverence, and in its valorization of pragmatic attitudes towards religion in Africa. The thesis that the African is a notorious religious person, very conscious of his religious worldview and its religious network of vital forces, and endowed with a unique sense of reverence for the sacred has been defended by Mbiti (1969) and Opoku (1978). According to Mbiti (1969), traditional religion permeates all departments of an African's life and there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Opoku (1978) argues that for the African, religion is closely intertwined with other aspects of life (and this includes the secular) in such a way that it is inseparable from them. Postmodern culture on the other hand is distinctly secular in the sense that it promotes agnosticism and in its radical form it preaches atheism. It can promote attitudes of religious indifference among Africans with respect to their cultural religious beliefs, values, norms and practices. The pragmatic attitude to traditional religion which, according to Oladipo's (2004) critique of Mbiti, characterizes the African may not be held to have roots in postmodernist culture but the same pragmatic attitude, together with the religious relativism, both of which characterize African Christian's attitude to Christianity are arguably fallouts of postmodern cultural infiltration of indigenous African cultural societies. For many African Christians, desired personal gains are more important than loyalty and relationship with the Christian God and so long as they perceive God to answer their needs in the context of their worship communities, they are bound to those communities. However, there is also the tendency among many of them to shift between worship communities of faith insofar as they perceive that a given community of worship is delivering more of the gains they desire than their actual or present faith community. This pragmatic attitude has largely been promoted by the postmodern culture of individual autonomy and freedom of choice conceptualized as absolute.

Postmodern individualism has a deconstructive effect on the hierarchical worldview that characterizes the cosmology of the African. The African worldview is essentially hierarchical, with the Supreme Being and Creator Force, God, occupying the highest position in the hierarchy. Below God are the deities or divinities, then the ancestors, human beings, animals, plants and minerals. Within this hierarchical worldview, being is dynamic as the beings in the hierarchy interact with one

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another and exercise ontological influences on one another in a dialectical manner. It is this dynamic interaction that maintains the stability and harmony of the universe from the African point of view. It also lays the foundation for the communalistic social life that traditional African communities uphold and within which mutual dependence of each on all and all on each in a spirit of living together is the principle of existence, living and progress. No being can exist as an island in this worldview but can only exist in interconnectedness with others. Postmodernism on the contrary proposes a contrary and even contradictory cosmological paradigm, a world society in which to be individual is the first principle and interconnectedness has no special place. Imbibed in the African context, postmodernism tends to weaken and destabilize actual and vital ontological and ontogenetic connections that humans have with other vital forces in the universe. These connections (with God, divinities, ancestors and lower forces) are the channels through which human welfare is nourished and sustained. Cut off from these connections, the human being does not become the better version of himself but rather suffers a diminution in his vital force and experiences limitations in his earthly potentials. Postmodernism, from an African perspective, is not a philosophy of cosmic and human welfare but rather an ideology in service of cosmic and human cataclysm. Stretched to its limits, the individualism and absolute autonomy and freedom of the individual that postmodernism upholds is inimical to social peacebuilding as it provides favorable conditions for social confrontations among absolutely free and autonomous subjects seeking to exercise their freedom in total disregard for others. Peace can only be achieved and consolidated in relation, in mutual interaction and interdependence or as Martin Buber puts it, in dialogue and this is the prospect which the African cultural worldview furnishes.

Additionally, to destabilize the African conception of the universe as Postmodernism seeks to do by enthroning individualism and glorifying individual freedom and autonomy has the effect of deconstructing social hierarchies in human communities and jeopardizing the reverence given to natural and constituted authorities in the African traditional communities. It aims to produce African communities where the individual by virtue of his absolute autonomy is set in opposition to authority, communities in which the powers and prerogatives of authority (in every domain) decline sharply in the face of individuals' indifference to it. Deprived of its cultural and social significance, authority itself becomes less meaningful and loses its pride of place, and the values it incarnates may end up becoming trivialized or abandoned.

A further dimension in which postmodernism poses a serious challenge to African traditional culture is that of identity, precisely its capacity to promote an identity crises culture among Africans. This identity crisis has at least two forms. Firstly, through its theories postmodernism encourages a sexual identity crisis through its divorce of gender and gender roles from ontology and its categorization of gender roles based on ontology as mere stereotyping. In so doing it denies ontology (nature, the given), reduces all identities to social construction conventions and widens the spectrum of possibilities that can be arrived at through the exercise of free choice. Secondly, postmodernism promotes a deconstruction of native African cultural identities through its de-valorization of indigenous cultural identities, and the subtle but false claim that identity models of Western provenance are superior and more civilized than indigenous African identity models, a phenomenon which has made unsuspecting and gullible Africans to indiscriminately copy Western identity models with disdain for their indigenous African prototypes. Concerning the former, postmodernism contravenes traditional African cultural sexual anthropology. For the African, sex is an ontological given, it is nature and gives an individual an indelible sexual identity. In African cultural anthropology, being male or female is not something one can choose arbitrarily, it is what one is born with and the sex with which one is born carves one for sex-specific gender roles, some of which are dictated by nature itself (such as childbirth and motherhood for females) and others culture-specific. To be a woman in an African worldview implies an identity defined by the reproductive role of childbirth and motherhood, homecare and other related roles that vary across indigenous cultures. The postmodern denial of ontology and natural sexual ordination for specific ontological and anthropological functions tends to weaken the value which African cultures place on childbirth as the primary purpose of sex and also to weaken the strong taboos which exist in African cultures around sex and which help to define a uniquely strong African sexual identity. In the latter form of identity crisis, by giving the false impression that Western identity models are superior to and more civilized than indigenous African models, postmodernism helps to alienate Africans from their cultural heritage, making them agents in the de-valorization and deconstruction of their own cultural identities. Examples in this regard include the abhorrence for the black colour among some black people, the neglect of indigenous languages in favor of Western languages among some Africans, pursuit of Western education with the complete abandonment of traditional African education and prioritization of Western products over African ones. To deceive the African that he or his identity is inferior, that his culture and cultural practices are outdated and that moving into modernity implies copying Western ways to replace what is uniquely African, are the pathways by which

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postmodernism seeks to achieve its destruction of traditional African cultures.

IV. Return to Authenticity – The Contributions of African Indigenous Existentialism and African Communalism

Postmodernism has deconstructive and eroding consequences on African indigenous cultures, their belief systems and practices as well as the norms and values that these indigenous cultures uphold. Nonetheless, it is possible for African indigenous cultures to engage in a healthy co-existence with postmodernist tendencies. This can be achieved by these indigenous cultures affirming their values, valorizing their anthropological and ethical belief systems and rigidly defending the communalistic mode of life that is their unique defining characteristic. We argue that African indigenous existentialism and communalism constitute pathways by which Africans can combat the devastating effects of postmodernism on indigenous African cultures and ensure a return to authentic African identity and lifestyle. Indigenous African Existentialism will involve the affirmation and valorization of African indigenous ethical anthropology, an emphasis in the sex basis of individual identity, an accentuation on procreation as the normative and natural orientation of human sexuality, a valorization of group thinking as the model of individual thinking, and underscoring the importance of interconnectedness of religious implications with personal existential choices. Rethinking communalism as a pathway to redressing the error of postmodernism within the African indigenous cultural worldview would involve an emphasis on creating strong networks of community relationships, underscoring the communal origins of social values and the importance of individual internalization of community values and norms, firm stress on the primacy of the community over the individual and of community wellbeing over individual wellbeing, and a reaffirmation of the community as the source and destination of individual life.

Indigenous African anthropology has ethical foundations. Unlike Western and postmodern notions of the person that emphasize rationality, memory, consciousness and freedom, which are inborn capabilities, as the constitutive elements of personhood, in African cultural anthropology, personhood, without precluding biology, is not essentially something we are born with but rather something we achieve, something we become, and the parameters for attainment of personhood are set by the cultural context of the individual's socialization (that is, the relational community) and defined through cultural expectations. For the African, personhood is an achievement that can only come about in a social and cultural context of relatedness with others. The cultural norms/values and expectations that play key roles in the determination of personhood include respect of and submission to one's elders, dutifully and effectively fulfilling the responsibilities of one's stage of development, openness to the community, sharing and exchange with other family or community members, solidarity, and sexual modesty and integrity (Banlanjo, 2020). An individual judged by others in the community to exhibit excellence in any of these cultural virtues is usually affirmed as a person. Thus, from an Africentric perspective, becoming a person implies more of an ethical outcome than a biological or anthropological fact; it entails the recognition that the community exists prior to and above the individual, that the community dictates the expectations within which authentic individual personhood can be successfully molded, and the recognition that one's values should be shaped by the values and norms of the community, and that one cannot choose against the community's belief and value systems. In this context, Biology (the given or nature) only lays the foundation, provides the abilities, needed for successful personhood construction. We argue that a valorization of this ethical anthropological perspective has the potential to pre-empt and forestall the prevalence of exaggerated individualism in African contexts, to weaken its effects, and to minimize possibilities for the infiltration of individualistic ethical relativism which often accompanies the spirit of postmodern individualism.

An Africentric apologetics on sex as the basis for individual identity can be construed as one of the means by which postmodernism's effects on African traditional cultures can be stemmed and undermined. While postmodern theories such as gender queer theory and deconstruction argue for the perception of sex as a fluid and alterable phenomenon which facilitates the endless quest for ever new identities, sex from the perspective of indigenous African cultures is an ontological fact that guarantees a stable sexual identity. African cultural worldviews perceive sex as nature, not as a construct or product of individual choice. On the contrary, since sex in these cultural worldviews is expressive of ontological constitution, they perceive given sex as the determinant and substratum of authentic sexual choices. This perception is even more valorized if we consider the relationship between sex and gender roles from the perspective of indigenous African cultures. While postmodernism divorces sex and gender and goes to the extent of categorizing both sex and gender as social constructs, African indigenous cultures not only perceive sex as ontologically constituted but categorize certain gender roles as essentially and intimately grounded in sex and, therefore, as being naturally defined roles based on sex. Hence, from the Africentric perspective, not every gender role is a product of conventionalism or social

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constructivism. For instance, reproductive roles based on sex such as pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood and fatherhood are natural gender roles grounded in sex; neither can they be chosen arbitrarily nor are they mere social conventions. We argue that an affirmation of sex as the basis of sexual identity and the grounds for sexual gender roles in African cultures will help to mitigate the effects of postmodernism on African indigenous cultures and prevent the deconstruction of African sexual anthropology.

In line with the above, we contend that theoretical and practical valorization of African indigenous cultures' perception of procreation as the naturally normative and natural orientation of human sexuality is one way by which Africans can stand against the deconstructive tides of postmodernism and affirm their authenticity as Africans. Postmodern feminists regard motherhood with contempt because they negatively perceive the idea of the "natural predisposition of their sexed body to motherhood" as one of the factors that have socially determined women and kept them in an inferior position to men (Peeters, 2013). Postmodern feminism argues that motherhood is biological determinism, and that since determinism is opposed to freedom, motherhood constitutes a burden, and is a discriminatory and restrictive patriarchal stereotype that victimizes women and destroys their autonomy and limits their empowerment. They conclude that it is very necessary to emancipate women from this stereotype called "motherhood." Contrary to postmodern culture, African indigenous cultures view procreation as the fundamental raison d'être for conjugal sex. In African indigenous cultures, procreation is regarded as the primary reason for marriage and inability to procreate is sometimes construed as a justification for divorce. This is because in these cultures, children are considered as a blessing and a means for parents to immortalize themselves and increase their earthly lineage. Within these cultures, motherhood is not regarded as a burden but as an expression of the dignity of womanhood. We argue that safeguarding and promoting the African cultural values of procreative sex and the dignity attached to motherhood as the epitome of womanhood is a way to prevent the further corruption of African cultures by postmodern suspicions of motherhood roles, their stereotyping of motherhood as an unfair social burden imposed on women, and their consideration of sex and gender as tools or matter for the continuous, arbitrary and subjective reconstruction of individual identity.

Another dimension by which Africans can protect their cultural heritage and safeguard its authenticity against the corruptive influences of postmodernism is by re-asserting the understanding of the community as the source and destination of individual life as well as the communal origins of social values and the individual internalization of these community values. In African cultures as we have already argued above, the individual is not an island and one does not become a person on one's own terms or exclusively on one's own merits; rather it is in the community networks of relationships that the individual is socially reproduced, it is in the community, through social priming guided by community cultural expectations, that an individual's personhood emerges and it is ultimately for the community that the individual exists. In this context, the community exists before the individual and concern for the wellbeing of the community takes priority over concern for individual wellbeing. Since, the community is the source and destination of the individual's ontogenesis, it logically follows that the community is also the source of the values that individuals, as members of the community, are expected to internalize. While this does not discount the need for personally held beliefs, the ideal is that the personal values that individuals uphold should not contradict the values, norms and spirit of communityhood. We argue that building community networks that encourage cultural education, cultural community meeting and dialogue, will strengthen community consciousness among indigenous cultural communities and help diminish the rate at which communityhood values and principles are being undermined by postmodern tendencies.

Finally, we contend that Africans can contain the destructive influences of postmodernism within traditional African cultures by upholding the essential interconnectedness of personal existential choices with religious implications. Postmodernism thrives in part by divorcing personal life from religion, by grounding personal choices exclusively in individual autonomy without regard for the sanction of religious norms, and ultimately by declaring religion and its influence on personal life irrelevant and outdated. To this extent, it extends its secularism to indigenous cultures that it successfully penetrates. African indigenous cultures on the contrary are cultures that uphold the sacred and traditional religion has significant influence in shaping the choices that people make as individuals or as groups. In African indigenous cultures, people are aware that certain courses of action carry religious implications; there are taboos that define what choices are prohibited in accordance with religious norms and values. Breaking taboos carry cultural and religious sanctions and consciousness of these taboos and the existential sanctions they carry enables individuals to make personal choices responsibly and guided by the understanding that in view of authentic existence, the spectrum of choices they can make cannot be endless but is limited by social and cultural expectations. We therefore argue that upholding indigenous cultural taboos not only reinforces traditional communitarian ethics, and defines the limits of individual autonomy and freedom, but in doing so, it weakens the potential for

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postmodern cultural influences to corrupt the mind-sets and consciences of individuals to neglect their indigenous value systems in pursuit of postmodern ethical relativism and individualism.

V. Conclusion

Our task in this article has been to expose the effects of postmodernism on African traditional cultures. Our analysis of postmodernism has shown that it stands opposed to the values and principles of indigenous African cultures in most if not all of its fundamental tenets. Moreover our analysis has highlighted the fact that postmodern culture is not only antithetical to indigenous African cultures but has a deconstructive and destructive effect on the latter. We have examined some of the fundamental aspects in which African indigenous cultures come under the threat of postmodern influences in order to highlight the vulnerability of these indigenous cultures which, confronted by postmodern cultural imperialistic tendencies, appear as endangered cultures in need of being salvaged. In spite of this, these indigenous African cultures are not completely at a loss as they possess within their philosophical, normative and values systems resources that, if well harnessed and utilized, will enable these cultures survive the constant threats to their integrity and authenticity from postmodern imperialism.

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