

The Relevance of Cultural Heritage in Remaking a New Africa

by

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Abstract

Post-colonial African society is undeniably experiencing serious development problems. Analyses of the causes and the way out have been suggested by many African scholars. For instance, Kwame Nkrumah (1974) popularly attributes the causes to colonialism and suggests a cultural revivalist solution that will revive the African cultural values of the past. But, given that these problems seem endemic, a cultural anti-revivalist like Moses Oke (2006) rejected the revivalist analysis as an over-elaboration of the effects of colonialism and the appeal to a cultural past as counter-productive. This essay, however, argues that as long as Africa is not yet decolonized strictly, colonialism cannot be totally exonerated as a cause of African problems. To African problems, there is a need for total decolonization, and the tools for the total decolonization are rejected as African historical ideals on non-individualistic life. Hence, the objectives of this study involve unearthing the real nature of “development”, showing the relationship between African development problems and colonialism in examining the revivalist and anti-revivalist views to the problems and proffering a solution, as it adopts the methods of philosophical argumentation and conceptual analysis to investigate primary and secondary data.

Keywords: development and freedom, re-making Africa, decolonisation, communalism, individualism.

Introduction

Hardly any scholar, to a great extent, cannot deny the underdeveloped (or developing) state of present-day Africa. But there are, however, controversies and disagreements concerning the root of the underdevelopment, and the way forward. For instance, on the one hand, is the revivalist view which explains the causes in relation to colonialism and suggests that we need to revive the African cultural heritage like the non-individualistic life of “one for all, all for one” as entrenched in communalism. This view is shared by scholars like Nkrumah (1974), Nyerere (1968), Senghor (1995), Touré (1959), Rodney (1973), and Okere (2002). On the other hand, we have the cultural anti-revivalist view which is a rejection of the revivalist argument as an over-elaboration of the effects of colonialism and that the appeal to the cultural heritage as counter-productive. This anti-revivalist view can be found in the works of scholars like Niyi Osundare (1998), Moses Oke (2006), Jacob (2009), and Towa (1985).

In the light of these problems, the research questions that will guide this study and serve as its objectives include, what is development? How does the understanding of the true nature of development help in appreciating the problems of development in Africa? What relationship (if there is any) does an African problem have with colonialism? What is revivalism and anti-revivalism? How do these two schools approach African problems? Is it the case that to achieve any meaningful development in Africa, as it is in every other part of the world, the appeal to the historical African heritage remains the more plausible way compared to the refusal to do so? These and some other relevant questions shall guide this study. Hence, the study will use the method of conceptual analysis and philosophical argumentation, key concepts that will critically analyse: “development” in relation to “freedom”, “revivalism” in relation to “re-making Africa”, “post-colonialism” in relation to “decolonisation”, and “communalism” in relation to “individualism” in Africa.

This study will also work within the theoretical framework of the true form of what Kwame Gyekye refers to a “moderate cultural revivalism” which is neither a total rejection of African cultural heritage via anti-revivalism, nor its total acceptance in a strong revivalism. It is rather a call for reconsideration of the African traditional heritages to see which are still valuable and applicable to the present realities. The moderate revivalism is in line with Gyekye’s (1997:233) moderate cultural revivalism; however, it does not conform to his symbolism *Sankofa* meaning “to go back for it (cultural past).” Putting the issue this way can be misleading, as it has actually misled many (i.e., the anti-revivalists). “To go back for it (cultural heritage)” sounds like retrogression, it cannot be said that Africans should be retrogressive; what is asked of Africans is to be retrospective. So, the claim only tells us that Africans must be retrospective in order to remodel Africa into a developed society. This is because no human being, who lacks retrospection, can make any meaningful progress in his or her present situation. In other words, a key proposition generated from this study is that “retrospection is the key to progression”, because retrospection allows one to identify the good and bad steps taking in the past.

Moreover, since this study is a product of African social and political philosophy, the scope will focus on African political culture, which, as Nkrumah (1974) notes, is communalistic in nature. It is not within the scope of this study to engage in the entirety of African culture, because there are other dimensions to African culture like metaphysical, psychological, logical, religious and many others that have been examined. Also, while Nkrumah believed political culture (communalism) is common to virtually all African (especially in the traditional setting), thus our focus here is on how communalism is practised in the Yoruba traditional setting. This does not mean our focus will be limited to Yoruba culture *alone*, because we intend to also touch on other African cultural societies both inside and outside Nigeria. Thus, the first section shall examine what communalism and individualism are and which of the two is predominant in African culture. The second section is on colonialism, the process of decolonisation and how a postcolonial society ought to be. The third section is a look at the concept of development and the relationship it has with freedom. The fourth looks at the Africa situation and asks why it is considered to be facing development problems? The fifth and sixth sections consider the revivalist and anti-revivalist approaches to the Africa problems, and the last section presents our recommendations, and in conjunction with the preceding sections help in providing a plausible conclusion.

Communalism, Individualism and African Culture

Communalism is a social theory that encourages communal, shared and a collective way of life and discourages the belief in an individual determining what a good life at the expense of societal value. From a political viewpoint, it emphasises the need for societal resources to be owned by the public rather than an individual. By this, it shares similar principles with the present-day communitarianism which, while recognising individual dignity, also emphasises the social aspect of humanity. The two theories are both directed towards upholding in a society “ties of affection, kinship, and a sense of common purpose and tradition” (Ogunbanjo, 2014). The two theories equally stress the psycho-social and ethical significance of being part of a society. It is believed that the basis of our ethical judgements, for instance, lies in the fact that ethical reasoning has to proceed within the framework of societal traditions and cultural understanding (Bell, 1993).

Similarly, in their traditional, social and political life, Nkrumah (1974) believed that this type of communalistic way of life common is virtually all Africans. Nkrumah’s point has been further reiterated, although with a denigrating tone, by anthropologists like Levy-Bruhl and Levi-Strauss (as both cited in Coetzee & Roux, 2004) who believe that the mode of African thought is not of individual cognition but of communal generation which is transmitted by “collective representation.” However, for the purpose of this study, we shall focus more on how communalism is practise in the traditional Yoruba community. While Levy-Bruhl and Levi-Strauss speak of this form of communalism in African belief derogatorily, it is believed, like Nkrumah does, that it is rather a cultural value African people should be proud of. For example, the idea of “agbo-ilé” (family compound) in traditional Yorùbá culture is held with high importance.

Unlike in Western culture where nuclear is differentiated from extended family, the Yorùbá traditional family does not differentiate between one member and the other. When a man is grown he builds his house and starts his so-called nuclear family in the same “agbo-ilé with others in the family. This is why the Yorùbá believe that a woman must be virtuous, (in every sense of the word) because she will be living with all the members of her husband’s family in the same “agbo-ilé.” And that is why what the Yoruba practice “ìgbéyàwó” (taking wife) not “ìgbé-oko” (taking husband) or “ìféra” (marriage). The Yoruba’s “ìgbéyàwó” differs from Western “marriage” wherein two people taking each other and having full rights and liberties to stay or divorce. In the traditional Yoruba’s “ìgbéyàwó”, a woman does not see divorce as part of her option, never mind liberty. A woman goes to “ilé-oko” (husband’s family compound—a concept that does not exist in Western “marriage”) where she will stay till death, because it is believed that “ìbì orí dání sí làgbé” (wherever our — a woman in this context — destiny directs/leads/sends/made us, we must stay).

Individualism is the converse of communalism, for in it there is the advocacy for the right and interest of an individual (whether man or woman) in society rather than the common interest or the interest of the society at large. Alexis de Tocqueville (Gustavsson, 2008) was among the first social scientists to talk about individualism. He notes that the phenomenon among many the citizens of the U.S. has risen to the extent that it no more occurs to them that the direction each individual’s life take has anything to do with the common interest. To him, “each of them, standing aloof, thinks that he is reduced to care for himself alone” (Gustavsson, 2). This, for him, does not aid the course of public life and everything that depends on it—democracy, for instance, since individualism identifies with self-disregarding others. In his words, “...individualism, at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but in the long run it attacks and destroys all others and is at length absorbed in downright selfishness” (2008:3).

In a similar manner, despite having the value of developing the individual’s initiatives, individualism has not been as helpful in Africa political culture as Africans would desire. It has the tendency to destroy robust African communalism, because, as Rand (as cited in “the alternativist”, 2012) notes, it is conditioned on greed through which some objectives are achieved. In individualism, it is believed that the idea of “selfishness” to humans is the paramount of all rational ideas (2012). The idea of “humanity” is relegated, because it denotes serving others, instead of the idea of “human survival” it is considered to be watchword. It may be argued that, either in communalism or individualism, greed is a natural phenomenon in all humans. However, the elevation of greed and selfishness, as routed in individualism, is what is undeniably wrong and have led many African societies to their present predicament—underdevelopment. And thus, it needs a serious reconsideration.

It is imperative to ask whether Africa has to continue with individualism or revisit communalism as found in the well-ordered and rich traditional African culture. In fact, culture, from a general perspective, has been defined as “a shared symbol system, linking members of a group to each other and to history, thus providing them with an identity” (Wray, 2003:24). Thus, culture is the factor which determines how different people reacts to and understand symbols in life; this reaction and understanding of symbols, therefore, gives them their peculiar beliefs and practices that they are identified with.

The above definition is an example of an ecological theory of culture that, unlike the cultural evolution theory, see culture as how people become accustomed to their varying environment they find themselves in, rather than the level of evolution of their way of life (“Culture”, 2013). In our opinion, ecological theory seems a more plausible and more adequate theory of culture. For instance, the culture of wearing thick clothes on many other clothes called a suit is the Western world’s reaction to the extremely cold weather of their environment, rather than their level of evolution. If culture is determined by people’s level of evolution, then the Westerners should have evolved from wearing many clothes or a suit into probably one (hence, the type of suit may change, but it always remains a suit).

The ecological theory of culture shows that each society has a shared way of reacting to the environment, and this way it determines survival. For example, the hijab is a cultural wear covering for the hair and neck that is worn by Muslim women, a style that helps one survive the sand coming out of a desert-defined environment (like the ‘Middle East’). In other words, each society has a way of life that is common to every member of society. Even individualism, as Gustavsson (2008:1) argues, “both conceptually and empirically...is also a set of specific ideals, as opposed to the lack thereof.” In other words, no society can exist without what the communalist refer to as a shared belief system and a common tradition and history, which each member of society is fully conscious of and directs his or her life in conformity with which defines the identity of society. So, as the Americans and many other Westerners refer to their own political culture as “individualism”, what defines the identity of African political culture is communalism, as found in their “agbo-ilé”, “ìgbéyàwó” and many other elements of traditional African life.

Postcolonial and Decolonisation

The terms “postcolonial” and “decolonisation” suggest “colonialism” from which they are generated. Thus, to have an understanding of those derivative terms there is the need to understand the term they are derived from. Colonialism is the suppression and exploitation of the weaker group of people by a stronger group. It involves using the resources, livelihood, physical strength and reasoning of the weaker people to further fortify political power to enhance the economy and to further propagate the way of life (culture) of the stronger people (“Colonialism”, 2014). What colonialism is used for suggests that the suppression and exploitation from it is not only about physical, but also mental. The physical and psychology of the colonized is suppressed and exploited, and this results in taking away the identity of the colonized. For instance, African people before being colonized, as Fanon (McGregor, 2007) notes, have their own communalistic culture which tells who they really are and what they stand for. This tells how they will develop politically and economically. However, colonialism or the process of colonization kills their belief, while they inculcate the “colonial masters’ way of life, abandoning what they stand for. For Fanon (ibid), as expected of the colonized, Black people (Africans) were supposed to “prove themselves” by assimilating into the White world of the colonizers. They were expected to try to “become white” by forgetting their language, traditions, cultures, and the totality of their way of life.

The effect of the mental aspect of colonialism, as Fanon (Bulhan, 1985) notes, is not only limited to the colonial era, but also part of the post-colonial era. For instance, the African traditional beliefs and practices, even in the post-colonial era where Africans are believed to be free of colonialism, have been stripped of their fundamental roles in the lives of African people as they have been subjected to foreign cultures and traditions. The missionary activities brought the religion of Christianity and Western education, while contact with another stronger people from the Middle East, leads to Islam. These foreign cultures have lasting influences on the African worldview as the African traditional beliefs and practices have experienced drastic changes in all areas.

In modern day Africa, Christianity, Islam, and other foreign religions are adopted by many Africans in contrast to African indigenous religions. This has limited many indigenous religious practices such as the celebration of the deities (Yorùbá people's Ògún, Sango, etc, likewise Igbo people's Amadioha etc.), ritual performance, magic, divination and the roles of traditional priests and rainmakers. This is not to say that these traditional practices no longer exist, but that they have been subdued by foreign religious practices. Thus, the practitioners of African traditional religion are regarded as being backward, fetish, pagans and infidels and many other derogatory terms with the belief that they will all end up in hell. And even the marriage institution is not left out as modern day Africa reflects foreign influence. Living in "agbo-ilé" is now considered primitive, and today Africans are conscious of the difference between nuclear and extended family, and thus, wives do not have the traditional respect for husbands anymore. "Divorce", which is not part of traditional African marriage, is now part of the first resort which easily comes to mind anytime there is any issue in a marriage.

What the present African situation tells us is that "decolonization", which is the process of being free from colonialism, goes beyond the physical freedom Africans presently enjoy. "Decolonization," as Fanon (1963) characterizes it, is in three ways, namely: the total, complete, instantaneous substitution of one "species" of humankind with another; the bringing into being a new person, new language, and new humanity, with no supernatural forces wherein the production of the new person is solely a result of obtaining freedom.

"Total" substitution here does not mean mere physical disappearance of the colonizer and reappearance of the colonized like we have in the present African societies. It rather means total freedom, which, Fanon (1963) notes must be in two ways, namely: the physical act of freeing a territory from external control of a colonizer; and the psychological act of freeing the consciousness of the people from the alienation caused by colonization.

Only the first of Fanon's total freedom has taken place in the present day African societies. The second is undeniably absent. Africans' consciousness is still as alienated (if not more) as it is during the colonial era. This post-colonial view is equally evident in the analyses of more recent scholars like Joy Alemazung (2010) and Ndirangu Mwaura (2005), who refer to African post-colonial life as "neo-colonialism", that is, the continuity of socio-political and economic exploitation in Africa by the former colonial masters, even after independence.

Providing an empirical example of French troops who supported the Central African Republic government in May 1996 and shot at national soldiers who were protesting their government's non-payment of the salary, Alemazung (2010:69) notes that "neo-colonialism survived because the West had established a dependent economic and political structure on the continent which was inherited and never changed by the new leaders." The West's post-colonial development aids to Africa have proven to be counterproductive, if coupled with the unfriendly leadership, and that the continent seems to be in line with the colonizer's plans.

It is thus puzzling why anyone can believe that colonialism can be totally detached from the present predicaments Africans find themselves in. If our belief system, reasoning, politics, economics among many other elements of our culture are fashioned towards the former colonial masters life-styles and plans, then, whatever outcome—whether good or bad, although bad as the present African underdevelopment reveals—we find in it can as well be attributed to the colonial masters.

Next in this presentation, we will show the relationship between true freedom and true development, process which African people desire and deserve.

Development and Freedom

The term "development" has been defined in relation to one phenomenon or the other, like human development, animal development, plant development, environmental development, political development, economic development, energy development, among others. Thought is said to be worthless without practice (Nkrumah, 1974). This may sound like a pragmatist conception, but the truth about it is that every thought is a response to a human problem or the other. Even the most theoretical aspect of science that may seem far from human is aimed at satisfying (at least) the researcher's curiosity. So any conception or attachment to development will in the final analysis, have one thing or the other to do with humans. This may sound too anthropocentric, but every human effort (to self, animals or plants) is for human self-interest. Even the so-called animal rights proponent can only fight against the indiscriminate killing or malicious treatment of animals, because any attempt to introduce veganism will not only negate the most obvious natural arrangements of the interdependence of the natural inhabitants (Sir Tansley, 1990), but also, it will be self-contradictory—stating that one does not eat life (animal), but one eats life (plants). Therefore, development, here, is about society in relation to humans, and in our opinion, it must have in one way or the other has improved the life of concerned human being(s). In other words, we believe that development is a process through which human life is improved. This type of development is what we express in this study, which is in line with human development theory as it measures a societal development through human well-being.

Development may generally be conceived as an event causing change, that is, a phenomenon that causes a situation to change or progress. Or it can be seen as a process of change, the process of changing and becoming larger, stronger, or more impressive, successful, or advanced, or of causing somebody or something to change in this way (Thomas 2000).

This conception seems perfect for the conception of development, for there seem to be nothing that develops without it becoming larger or more advanced. However, such conception of development will not capture the importance of humankind, as pointed out earlier, that an adequate conception is supposed to have. This conception could confuse someone into believing that infrastructural enlargement, growth of gross national product (GNP), larger personal income, stronger industrialisation, and technological advancement are enough for a society to be seen as truly developed. All these, as Sen (1999) as pointed out, are nothing but means to development.

Development truly consists of advancement, but there is the need to specify the type of advancement talked about here, as such, specification will allow for adequate concentration on the goals of development rather than the means. And this is where “freedom” comes in as consisted in the view of a human development theorist like Sen (1999). Freedom, as earlier highlighted, is not just the condition of being able to act, speak but also to think and make decisions without any external influence (Wolff, 1970). African people act and speak freely, but their thinking, decisions and other mental states are not free in the strict sense of the word. Their psychological states are still influenced by a foreign way of life which they have inculcated and inherited from the colonial masters. Even the physical freedom is still incomplete, especially in the socio-economic aspect, where in Nigeria for instance, we concentrate on means (e.g. big transformers) of development, hence, lacking the goal of development—freedom (freedom from darkness, except with the aid of generators). This has led to nothing but the absence of a true development, thus, to actually experience development, Africans need freedom in its totality.

According to Sen (1999), the goal of development is human freedom, freedom from all unfreedoms. In his words, “freedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its principal means” (Sen, 1999:10). So, development, for him, is “a process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy” (1999:3). This is an endogenous form of development, as it considers that any internal resource a society has must as only being for humans in the society rather than being there just for the sake of it. And this is the type of view we consider as most plausible, at least for the purpose this study—how Africa can be free from its present predicaments. In other words, if development is a process of advancing human freedom, and every other thing is merely a means in this process, then it will be wrong, as we have in Nigeria for instance, to concentrate on means rather than end itself. Glamorous and big University structures in Nigerian are useless when Nigerian people are not free from ignorance; tarred roads that are useless when the potholes still do not give people freedom of movement, when people are still spending two hours (or more) on a seventy-kilometre journey.

So, we believe that the conception of development from free agency, if adopted, gives way to all other qualities of life we usually consider as paramount for development, it allows for not only food, clothes shelter, and other material things, but also the freedom of human consciousness, from which flows human self-development itself, political freedom — the ability to take some political decisions without any external influence or reliance on such influence, economic freedom — economic self-sufficiency, without any over-reliance on any one, and the ability to participate in market and production.

Someone who still relies on external force for economic or socio-political decision cannot be free or developed, such a person is like an adolescent who still relies on his or her parents for almost every decision. And an adolescent cannot be said to be free or developed in the strict sense of the term. Here freedom and development are used together, because the two are inseparable, as Sen (1999) notes, development must be assessed by how enhanced people's freedoms are.

“Underdevelopment” and the African Condition

The African state is in an undeniable underdeveloped state, the direct opposite of development. That is, if development is freedom, then, underdevelopment is unfreedom; it is a state of inadequate development that almost everyone can attest to. For instance, in Singer's (2000) categorisation of poverty, there is absolute poverty—“a condition of life so characterized by malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, squalor, high infant mortality, low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency...one's poverty and life conditions are so bad one would be considered living in poverty in any economic context” (2000:320). There is also relative poverty—a condition where the “poverty outlined in absolute poverty hold only within certain economic contexts...if placed in a differing economic context, one may not be living in poverty” (Singer 2000, p.320). If this categorisation is true and there seems to be no African writer who is satisfied with the current African condition, then, it seems that the African condition is one of underdeveloped or absolute poverty. African nations are inflicted with what Streeten (as cited in Todaro, 1989) would call the evils of the world—malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, slums, political and economic inequality, and unemployment. The questions to be asked then include: do the African countries not have similar infrastructure like their Western counterparts? Do they not have technological power at least in their own way? Do they not have big buildings and exotic and glamorous houses, cars and University buildings like their Western counterpart? If they do, what can be our reasons for thinking they belong to the category of absolute poverty? It means then that there is more to what makes a nation developed and rich than its infrastructures?

It cannot be the case that African countries do not have technological power or infrastructures to a certain extent, nor can it be the case that their University buildings are not big enough, that there are no tarred roads in the countries. But, as noted earlier, all these things are means to true development in a country. Development is only measured by the extent of people's freedom, that is, how much those technological power, infrastructures, and growth in the GNP enhances the freedom of the people in the society.

The instances of underdevelopment given above seem to be most evident in many African societies. There are glamorous and big university structures, yet, African people are not free from ignorance.

There is a saying that “If you want to hide something from an African, put it in a book,” this sounds denigrating, but Makinde (as cited in Jibueze, 2008) reaffirms this claim by expressing concern over the poor reading culture in Nigeria, especially among the leaders.

While discussing a freedom of information (FOI) bill, he is reported that “this intellectual indolence is not peculiar to our political leaders alone. It pervades the entire society where reading culture is so poor that it competes with bad governance in all its ramifications.” If we are intellectually indolent, it is difficult then to see how we intend to free ourselves of ignorance and become truly developed. We can blame individuals for not cultivating a reading habit, but the larger blame would be on the government for not providing an enabling environment for reading.

There are tarred roads in African societies, yet, the potholes on the roads do not give people freedom of movement; longer time is wasted on short distances. Most farms do not enjoy anything called free movement, which results in high cost for foods, which increase human hunger. There are big transformers (especially in Nigeria), thus generator dealers are becoming very rich. Given the presence of all these evils, Africa cannot be said to be truly developed. The question then is what is the way out of this unpleasant condition? But to actually get a way out there is need to know the cause of this unpleasant condition, because the best way a physician can cure a disease, is to address its cause.

Hence, there are two opposing schools of thought on the causes and solution to African problems, with a third school, which can be called “moderate cultural revivalism,” which has lately been generated by scholars like Segun Oladipo (2002) and Kwame Gyekye (1997). For the first school of cultural revivalism, the only way Africa can get out of its present precarious condition and achieve any worthwhile development is if it can remodel its ideology rooted in traditional values in an effort to remake Africa. This is important because no concrete progress can be made if Africans heavily rely on the ideologies of their colonial masters (Gyekye 1997). The second school of cultural anti-revivalism rejects the revivalist solution, arguing that African traditional values are too obsolete to meet the demands of a contemporary scientific world, or “the new world order” (Oke, 2006:337). The arguments between these two groups or theories and the emerging third will be examine next in order to see which is most plausible.

The Cultural Revivalist Theory of Remaking Africa

The debate between the two schools of thought concerning the appeal to the past has been variously characterised by different scholars. Messay Kebede (2004) characterises the first group as the ethno-philosopher, who advocate the restoration of the past cultural values for Africans to face the challenge of modernity, and the second is the professional philosophers who deny that the past is a forerunner of the future. Specifically, this characterisation seems misleading, because, for instance, the term “ethno-philosopher” has been characterised by Odera Oruka (1991:177) as designating those who “does not necessarily make a philosopher, some of the sages (ethno-philosophers) are simply moralists and the disciplined, die-hard faithful to a tradition. Others are merely historians and good interpreters of the history and customs of their people.” It cannot be said that many or all of those who advocate the restoration of the past cultural values are mere interpreters of history and customs.

Many of them, for instance, Nkrumah (1974), Nyerere (1968), Senghor (1995) and Touré (1959) fit into the description of professional philosophers through their rigorously and critically researched works on Africa's problems. So, it will be a contradiction to say that the advocates of restoration are professional philosophers and at the same time, not professional philosophers.

Seeing the two groups of scholars (the revivalists and the anti-revivalists) as both philosophical, Oladipo (2002) characterises the first group of scholars as the "traditionalists" who advocate for the reestablishment of African image through cultural identity rooted in African tradition, rather than mere interpreters of history and customs, thus he sees the second group of scholars as the modernists who advocate the transformation of African society through modern science and technology. This characterisation seems suitable, but it seems to have an undertone that the advocate of the reestablishment of African value is the only traditionalist in the world. And such assumption is false, because, as it has been pointed out "every society in our modern world is "traditional" inasmuch as it maintains and cherishes values, practices, outlooks, and institution bequeathed to it by previous generations and all or much of it on normative grounds that it takes pride in, boasts of, and builds on (Gyekye, 1997:217)".

In other words, any attempt to denigrate the African traditionalist view as primitive or non-philosophical will amount to denigrating the so-called modern world-view, which is itself a product of one tradition or the other. This is why Gyekye (1997) reminds us that modernity does not always mean the total rejection of the tradition or cultural heritage. For instance, the British marriage culture of monogamy which is still maintained today and adopted by many Africans is itself a product of the ancient Christian ideal of monogamy (Devlin, 2001). Also the empiricist tradition of grounding knowledge in "experience," as found in Lockean empiricism, is still maintained today, although in modified form — "naturalism". So, the polarity between tradition and modernity seems dubious at best, because it is based on the false assumption that modernity means the total rejection of the tradition. The so-called "traditional" society do experience a little change in their belief and practices (Gyekye 1997), a point also noted by Oladipo (2002) when noting that "tradition" itself is dynamic, thus, no tradition is dormant and passive, no matter how slow its evolution. Above all, modernity itself —the aspiration towards science and technology — is a tradition. Therefore, we opt for Gyekye's (1997) characterisation of the two opposing groups of scholars as cultural revivalists, and cultural anti-revivalist.

The revivalist calls for cultural retrospection, the revival of the African cultural past, whose process of development has been damaged by colonialism. Five of their reasons for this call are highlighted by Gyekye (1997). First is the claim that cultural revivalism is the basis for a true African cultural identity and pride that it provides Africans with a genuine contribution towards global civilisation, rather than merely following the rest. Second, cultural revivalism provides African people with mental liberation from the self-humiliation, self-demeaning garb of a colonial mentality. Third, cultural revivalism is the only way for regeneration from the present economic and political turmoil in Africa.

Fourth, anti-past—the attitude to operate in the alien system — is the cause of the failure in development, thus African cultural traditions ought to be the basis for any meaningful development. Fifth, cultural traditions contribute better and easier to national integration and nation-building (Gyekye, 1997:233-5).

These arguments are evident in some cultural revivalist theses. For instance, in *Consciencism*, Nkrumah (1974) suggests a way in which Africa can get out of its present predicaments. The only way suggested is the appeal to African pre-colonial conscience, which has been damaged by colonialism. Nkrumah defined his philosophical consciencism as the “map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest the western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality” (1974:79). Part of what can be deduced from his definition of consciencism is the acceptance of the reality of the deep contact and some elements of good in the Western, Islamic, Euro-Christian cultures which are worth emulating. However, this should be done with careful and meticulous intellectual precision so as to suit the African condition. The only way it can help the African condition is if it is adopted in the African spirit can only be traced in the pre-colonial cultural past, which is communal in nature (ibid).

Unlike Nkrumah (1974), Nyerere (1968), in his historical exposition of Africa’s past, takes a step further in his extreme version of revivalism as he attempts to justify African pre-colonial political life, which he believes was communalism. He made the case for communalism as the basis of African traditional society, because it was the way African society had been and it is better organized in that way. Africa’s family structure is basically extended. For this reason, decisions are usually on a consensual basis. In Nyerere’s (1968) African traditional setting, everyone is a worker. Also, for him, wealth in African communal setting, must be used to satisfy human fundamental needs, and to eradicate poverty. In African traditional setting, wealth is collectively owned rather than what is obtainable in a colonialist system, in which people accumulate wealth more than what they need (Nyerere 1968). In *Ujamaa* (1968), Nyerere argues for African communalism by claiming that it is not the amount of wealth in a country that makes the little segment of the society rich, as we have in African society now, but rather it is the unequal distribution of production, as introduced by the colonialist capitalist tradition (1968).

The belief in cultural revivalism is not only held by the pioneer post-independence African scholars alone, there has been recent support for this view concerning not only the cause of the African predicament, but also as a way forward. For instance, Gbadegesin (as cited in Oke, 2006) advocates a cultural approach to some philosophical problems like the problem of ultimate reality. He believes that the present African problem of underdevelopment is linked with the neglect, humiliation or undermining of pre-colonial cultural values (these values, as earlier highlighted include having a respectful and non-divorce-oriented marriage, living for each other rather than being greedy, insatiable and egotistic self in a communal life, among others). African people have incorporated the traditions and ideals of the colonialist, thereby operating in the colonial mentality. Serious havocs have been wrecked on African heritage by these cultural alienations, and the result is the precarious conditions Africa finds itself in today.

Similarly, Kanyandago (2003) expresses an extreme version of colonial pains and revivalism, he wholly attributes the present underdevelopment in Africa to the colonial era in the people's history. According to him, the major reason for the present African social, economic and political predicaments is the colonialists' denigration, deprivation and alienation of African people from their African identity. This denigration and deprivation is most evident during the colonial era. And, as he points out, this denigration and deprivation of "the African humanity," that is, "the relationship between people and the material need for sustaining their lives" is growing faster in post-colonial African life (Kanyandago, 2003:30). For him this situation still continues today, in the manner the West interacts with African societies: these damaging interactions include the enforcement of capitalist socio-economic policy which is alien to African communal tradition and in insulting Africans with injurious exports (2003:38-44). The way out of present problems, as suggested by Kanyandago (2003), is "Cultural Re-appropriation," by this, he means, a type of culture cure. In other words, a plan of action to re-appropriate and revalorize African culture, this will as well teach African people their culture, and redirect their love towards their cultures.

The Cultural Anti-Revivalist Theory of Remaking Africa

Despite what seem like legitimate and powerful arguments of the cultural revivalist, there are rejections of their arguments but also there is rejection of their suggestion, that is, the attribution of Africa problems to the colonialists as the architect, and the attempt to revive the consciousness of Africans to their cultural past. The anti-revivalist claims that the attribution of the present African problem to colonialism and the attempt to return Africa to the past are both unwarranted. For instance, Jacob (2009) argues that Africans are the source of African problems, that is, colonialism has long left Africa; the corrupt African leaders are to be held responsible for the present African predicaments. Oke (2006) equally argues that the African traditional values like "communalism" and "de-monetisation" are too obsolete and pre-scientific to be relevant, and be reconciled with the modern scientific culture. That is, the overfriendliness, informality and relaxedness embedded in the suggested African communalism, for instance, cannot fit into the current world socio-economy which is based on effective competition.

Jacob (2009), for instance, rejects any attribution of the African problem to colonialism. Using Nigeria as a model, he argues that pervasively corrupt leadership is the only thing responsible for Africa's continued underdevelopment. To him, African leaders are corrupt, visionless and slumbering. He argues that "the political elites that replaced or inherited power from the colonial masters proceeded to use their political power to acquire control over the means of production who made governmental office the road to economic self-advancement, and everybody invariably sought political power with passion and political competitiveness became more brutal" (Jacob, 2009:13).

Oke (2006) and Towa (as cited in Irele, 1995) expresses similar cultural anti-revivalist attitude. One common reason for their cynicism towards the resuscitation of African cultural heritage is that if its foundation could be so weak to resist the dominance of the colonialist culture, then, it is not likely going to be helpful or relevant in solving the present African problems let alone moving Africa forward.

To Towa (as cited in Irele, 1995), “an original African philosophy torn from the dark night of the past could not be...but the expression of a situation that was itself in the past” (p281). Similarly, for Oke (2006), “given the failure of our indigenous cultural arrangements...to repel the attack of other cultures in the past, there is no reason whatsoever to think that they will be able to bail the continent out of its present predicament” (2006:338).

Oke (2006) also expresses the general anti-revivalist claim that African traditional values like “trade by barter” (de-monetisation), “African communalism”, “de-centralised traditional African political system”, among other are too obsolete to meet the demands of a contemporary scientific world, or as he puts it “the new world order: they are thus best abandoned” (2006:337). Oke (2006) further argues that the intercultural contact with colonial culture has killed traditional culture, thus, there may not be anything like an African cultural past to return to. Unlike the revivalist, Oke (2006) is equally reluctant to blame African development problems on colonialism, rather he claims that the lazy and corrupt are responsible for African problems, thus, he suggests that we don’t need to return anywhere but to instead, change our attitude towards society for the better. This is because any return“ to the regimes of “de-centralisation”, “communalism” (“primitive communism”), “de-monetisation”, among many other African traditions will not only be counter-productive, but will further undermine the already weak and un-sustaining structures and institutions now in place” (Oke, 2006:341).

The Importance of Cultural Values: Moderate Cultural Revivalism

For someone to deny the link between colonialism and the present African development problem is to deny the effect of psychology in human life. But this would be a wrong conclusion, because the way of life itself is the people’s thought and beliefs, which are themselves psychological phenomena. While examining the effect of colonialism on people, Fanon (as cited in Fowale, 2009), as earlier noted, does not only examine the physical effects it has on the people, but on the psychological effect of colonial oppression had on the people even after independence, he emphasizes more on the “the psychiatric disorders emanating from colonialism” (p.11)

Colonialism, for him, kills the confidence of the people; their self-respect is dealt a blow since the aim of the settlers is to force their culture and ways of life on the people thereby alienating them from their culture, self-respect, and above all, on what the people stand for. In other words, the effect of oppression on the people is to absolutely kill the psychology of the people. So, decolonization is not simply the removal of colonial structures, but especially also in the deconstruction of colonial legacies in the mind-set of formerly colonized people (ibid).

Hardly can we find any scholar who will claim that colonialism does not have any effect on the colonized at least during colonization; what they only deny is the continuous effect of such colonization on the colonized after independence. In other words, those who reject the attribution of African predicaments to colonialism do not deny that colonialism has ever had any effect on Africa, what they only deny is the link between the present problem and the colonialism of yesteryears.

But if they agree that colonialism had once had an effect on Africa, the question they refuse to ask is was there a moment Africa was really decolonized, where decolonization, as noted earlier, would mean the deconstruction of colonial legacies in the mindset of formerly colonized African people? Was there a time Africa was liberated from the self-demeaning garb of colonial mentality? If they cannot answer yes to any of these questions, nor point out such time in African history, then, they do not have the right to deny that colonialism, in one way or the other, is responsible for the present conditions of African development problems. The best any doubter of the link between colonialism and the present African problem can point to is what Lindsay (as cited in Thame, 2011) calls symbolic rather than substantive independence that Africa had, hence, an independence or freedom that is nothing but a sham.

On the controversy between the cultural revivalist and cultural anti-revivalist, the position that does not seem defensible is that of an extreme revivalist which allows for cultural nostalgia by expressing unrestricted sentiment and praises for African cultural heritage, and a complete return to such heritage. Such “return” as Oke (2006) has rightly noted, is counter-productive, and nothing but a call for further retrogression in African life. Besides, such “return,” as Gyekye (1997) has noted, is too uncritical of African cultural heritage, and thus, oblivious of the fact that there are positive and negative aspect of such heritage itself. Part of the negative and unadoptable values in African cultural heritage is the level of its religiosity, and this is evident in their hurried allusion and attribution of all causal explanations of phenomena in the world of spirit and other unanalysable mystical powers (Gyekye 1997). This is pre-scientific in nature and needs proper amendment. This culture perhaps pushes Nkrumah (1974) to a contradictory conclusion, while explaining his philosophical consciencism which he claims to be holding a thorough materialist position, yet, while trying to satisfy his religious background as he brings into his materialism the ontology of soul (Nkrumah 1974), which he could not satisfactorily explain.

Nevertheless, the rejection of the extreme position of cultural revivalism does not leave one with the option of anti-revivalism. To promote scientific and technological spirit in Africa does not necessarily mean an inexorable repudiation of the totality of African cultural heritage.

This perhaps is what Towa (Gyekye 1997) realises by eventually admitting in his later work that some rational principles in African traditional folklores shows that something truly valuable can be adopted from African cultural heritage. A similar inconsistent repentance is also noted in an anti-revivalist like Hountondji (Gyekye 1997), who later expresses “our cultural renaissance,” a view inconsistent with his initial anti-revivalist denial of the criticality of African cultural heritage. Another person whose cultural repentance from his cultural anti-revivalism was expected, but not given until his untimely death is Oke. But before we can justifiably say he should have repented, there is the need to point out some of the problems in his arguments and show why anti-revivalism cannot be a consistent position to hold.

Like the general anti-revivalist claim, Oke (2006) equally argues that African traditional values like “African political de-centralisation”, “African communalism”, “African de-monetisation”, among others are too obsolete to meet the demands of the contemporary scientific world, and we should rather abandon those values.

The claim is itself not just an empirically aberrant, as Gyekye (1997) points out, but it is equally unwarranted. It is rather improbable to claim that there is nothing in African cultural heritage that is reconcilable with the present reality. Contrary to this claim, Gyekye (1997) points out that there are some worthwhile values of the past that we can actually reconcile with our present structure. After studying African culture (the then Gold Coast, Ghanaian culture especially) for more than twenty years, Robert Rattray (as cited in Gyekye, 1997), a British anthropologist, is quoted as saying “here (in Ghana) then we have a far more real equality than any which our (British) laws confer upon us. To the Ashanti, our (British) equality would seem or appear as a fictitious fellowship” (p.238). This takes us to another claim concerning whether those values have been “fatally weakened” by contact with colonialist culture.

On the claim that the intercultural contact with colonial culture has killed the African traditional culture, the truth of this claim may be called to question, because, despite the intercultural contact, we still have Yorùbá people who wear Yorùbá attires like *agbàdà*, *búbà* and *sòdrò*, speak Yorùbá fluently, and worship Yorùbá gods like *Ògún*, and recite *Ifá* passages very well. Hardly can one see the former Nigerian president Oluségun Obásanjó dress in Western attire, and this cannot be said to be a Western tradition. It may be argued that he uses English as a language of communication (an important element of culture), however, it must be noted that he is also a frequent and good user of Yoruba, an African language (he probably uses English merely because it’s Nigerian official language). Thus, the major point here is that there are still examples of African cultural values which are preserved by some African people today. For instance, even communal life is still practised hitherto among some people. We still have some existing “agbo-ilé” (communal living) like *seeru* and *ogbooru* in Ife, while we have *akèkàka* and *oloba* in Ibadan. Moreover, people hitherto can differentiate between borrowed culture and indigenous culture, this distinction cannot be possible if traditional culture has truly been *fatally* weakened, thus, these and many other existing African cultural values reveal that there are still cultural values, which are relevant in rebuilding a development-oriented identity for Africa.

On the claim that “given the failure of our indigenous cultural arrangements...to repel the attack of other cultures in the past, there is no reason whatsoever to think that they will be able to bail the continent out of its present predicament” (Oke 2006:338), the underlined assumption of the claim is questionable. The statement simply presupposes that whatever a group of people fail to utilise for their benefit is useless to another group of people. If Nigeria fails to utilise democracy, we cannot conclude from that to say democracy is inherently a failed system of government. One can say religion has so far produced disadvantages for the world than advantages, given the endless religious crises in the world and the innumerable terrorist attacks all in the name of religion, but one cannot from that conclude that religion is in itself destructive.

It is one thing for a phenomenon to be inherently good while it is another thing for people to know how to maximize its goodness. So, the African ideals that the people of the past failed to use in tackling domination cannot be concluded to be inherently weak, rather, it might have been the failure of African people of the past to properly utilise those ideals.

On the claim that lazy and corrupt Africans are responsible for African problems, as said earlier, as much as we can blame Africans for the present predicaments of Africa, we cannot totally exonerate colonialism from this blame. Colonialism, has a direct or indirect link to present African problems, insofar as parts of its aims is to create psychological disorder for the colonized, to kill the confidence of the people to deal a blow to their self-respect and to force the culture of the colonizers and ways of life on the colonized, thereby alienating the colonized from their culture, self-respect, above all, what they (colonized) stand for—their identity. Who knows whether it is part of their (the colonizers) initial plans to make the whole situation seem as if Africans are the cause of African problems, thereby blaming each other, we cannot underestimate the effect of “psychological disorder”. Maybe the destructive mentality some African leaders have is the end product of the “psychological disorder,” in that we keep destroying our society so as not to ever rise up to the colonizers developmental status; recognizing that no master will ever wish his/her slave to rise higher than him/her. What could then be the best way out of the present African problems?

Extreme cultural revivalism, as pointed out is not the way, because it is too uncritical of the African cultural heritage and could thus lead us to the same problem the people of the past were led into. Cultural anti-revivalism is also not the way, for it is too hasty in its repudiative conclusion about African cultural heritage, and, as pointed out earlier, there are still some ideals worth adopting in African cultural heritage. These include:

- the loving and respectful traditional African marriage institution;
- the communal life, which is lived for each other and in what lies the true equality we crave for, rather than the greedy, egoistic individualism and capitalism that have both led us (especially African leaders) into not respecting others’ interest (especially the common interest, which includes the poor) in whatever policy they make;
- the traditional African “de-monetisation”, since money appears to be the root of many evils. Something similar to this is the refined decimalisation successfully practised in Ghana and proposed by former Nigeria Central bank governor of a cashless policy which simply means I have a card which is equivalent to whatever amount of money I have, and money decimalisation means the overblown or inflated value money has is reduced to a bearable level;

- the traditional African de-centralised political system, as too much concentration of power in the central government has not helped the selfish and corrupt nature of many African leaders;
- the moral-filled African traditional folklores to revive the lost morals in many African youth, among many other African values, and among other values.

As a result of the failure of the two extreme positions (revivalist and anti-revivalist) of remaking Africa, the only position we are left with is moderate cultural revivalism. And our moderate revivalism will be a reflection of the values listed above among other values; and an attempt to see how these values can be harmonized with the present realities. One may want to ask what about moderate anti-revivalism? There cannot be any position like a moderate anti-revivalism, because any attempt to revive part of the cultural past is a kind of cultural revivalism, maybe moderate.

As suggested in the moderate cultural revivalism we propose in this study, there are some reasons and advantages of establishing our development plan on cultural values of the past. One reason for our moderate cultural revivalism is that every societal (Western society inclusive) development plan is built on a cultural value, the plan is never built on nothing, neither does it come out of the blue. No serious or genuine developmental plan can be built on another people's culture and thus, bring desired results. This is so because, as Oke (2006) rightly puts it, "the foreigners only came to find an environment conducive to serve their *own interests*, with the active cooperation of the people" (p339). If their (the foreigners) whole aim is to serve their own interest, it will do us no good to build our development plans on their culture or in remaking or redirecting our continent towards their aims. Besides, one cannot aim to achieve any meaningful success in life while trying to copy another person's ways of life. As Oke (2002) rightly quote Quine (Oke, 2002), the greatness of "a scholar is better known by the *individuality* of his problem" (2006:27). So, if our aim is to make Africa great, then there is need to remake its individuality, its identity as embedded in its cultural heritage, for it is in one's heritage that one can find identity.

The legacies of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* are still being reflected in contemporary Western politics. Plato's philosopher-king is still king, and no one in the Western society wants to make a fool the king (hence, presidential elections are won in presidential debates).

If Francois Hollande had displayed foolishness in the French presidential election, Nicolas Sarkozy would still be President now. If Barack Obama had been defeated in the American presidential debate, out of his foolishness, Mitt Romney would have been celebrating his victory now. The role civilization plays is to remove the negative aspects of those legacies and hold on to the positives, the same role our moderate cultural revivalism would play.

As we have earlier highlighted, paramount of the positive features of African cultural heritage, which would totally decolonize African from the garb of colonial mentality, is the non-individualistic, communitarian life, which is evident in Mbiti's statement of "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1970, p.141). Africans lay much emphasis on this non-atomistic relational life. The role of our moderate cultural revivalism is to remove the tendency of an extreme version of this culture, which might want to put individuals' interest as secondary to that of the community. The self-interest of every individual, as different from selfish interest is important, and it does not clash with the communal interest. Self is "one's personality", while selfishness has to do with "caring for one's own pleasure...to the exclusion of regard for others" (Oke 1988:85). The absence of this non-atomistic value is what has been responsible for what the anti-revivalist calls the lazy and corrupt negative effects on society. Also African cultural value shows much respect to the human person, the Yoruba saying of *éníyánl'aso mi* "human beings are my clothes" (here, cloth does not mean what one wears, but the social, political, harmonious and cultural living together to realize our collective potentials) shows how more valuable humans are to them than properties. There is no contemporary ideal that these values cannot be harmonized with. That is, there is no contemporary value that will deny the importance of shared ideals in a community, or that shows respect to properties more than humans and still continue to exist. Even individualism, as noted earlier, is equally "a set of specific ideals, as opposed to the lack thereof" (Gustavsson, 2008:1).

Conclusion

In an attempt to achieve its aim — showing the indispensability of African cultural heritage in remaking a new and developed Africa, this essay has shown why development can only be seen as an activity to expand human total freedom from all unfreedoms (societal evils and predicaments), and these unfreedoms include bad leadership, deprivation of rights, oppression, poverty, inequality, and unemployment. We have also shown that these human unfreedoms are not only consisted in physical, but also in mental, as evident in colonialism. It is also shown that Africa's unfreedoms are directly or indirectly connected to colonialism. Thus, there is need for total decolonization, which means being let loose of the alienation African people have experienced during colonialism; this will give them the true freedom they crave for from all unfreedoms. Next, we have shown that the tool for such total decolonization is finding a way to harmonised the positive values of traditional ideals which communalism is topmost with the present reality. Hence, there is a need to appeal to the positive and advantageous parts of African heritage in order to remodel Africa into a meaningful sphere of development.

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