

Identity in Africa: A Philosophical Perspective

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Abstract

Tradition and modernity has been almost always treated as two diametrically-opposed components of African identity. This study illustrates that contrary to this widely disseminated belief, tradition and modernity are two cronies that are simultaneously counterproductive and coercive for African communities. For when closely examined, tradition and modernity cannot foster any viable notion of self and identity, particularly in the current transitory circumstances. Through our discussion of the role of tradition and the interplay of negative tradition with deplete cultures, it becomes fairly evident that the poor performance of African communities in matters related to development can be answerable when shedding light on the interconnection between European modernity and African archaic traditions. The colonial legacy, the transitional context within which European modernity and African traditions met, according to this study, should not be overlooked for any forward-looking perspective.

Keywords: African tradition; European Modernity; Traditionality; colonialism; historicity; positive cultural transformation.

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Introduction

In this age of globalization, terms like 'structural readjustment' and 'cultural rehabilitation' can be synonymous with drastic changes to take place within communities. This situation might induce the question of how one can attain and acquire modernity without being totally consumed by it. This is related to the fundamental problem of what to do with local traditions, knowing that these traditions bear in varying degrees one's own defining features. As a result, doubts about where and how to belong are more than likely to arise. The present article seeks meticulous attention to, and with particular intensity, treats issues relating to African identity and self. Whether to consider tradition as a fossilized and largely inhibitive entity or, on the contrary, as an inspiring and progressive fund of knowledge is one major on-going subject of reflection. African intellectuals, it is understood, has been particularly attentive with Africa's apprehension of European modernity and its Cartesian premises.

This article considers the scope of any intellectual's process that could help such an intellectual to distinguish between genuine and illusory forms of self-knowledge. The impact of such propulsion is seeking an overall project that leads toward an African renaissance. For Antonio Gramsci, a solid and enduring critical mechanism has to start with "the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing himself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in him an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory."¹ One may wonder if such projection of identity with its Marxist nuisances can ever be helpful in finding ways out of the present general listlessness in the African continent. Such listlessness actually reflects a troubled self that is uncertain where and how to belong. Given the colonial heritage of the African reality, Albert Memmi observes that:

Colonization distorts relationships, destroys or petrifies institutions, and corrupts men, both colonizers and colonized. To live, the colonized needs to do away with colonization. To become a man, he must do away with the colonized being that he has become. If the European must annihilate the colonizer within himself, the colonized must rise above his colonized being.²

Debarred from assuming direct action and responsibility by long decades of colonialism and its aftermath, African local cultures have been severely impaired, and in some cases defaced. If we consider Albert Memmi's position

about the evils of colonialism, then we will not miss the fact that the planned and lengthy distancing of the African self from the management of daily domestic affairs has resulted in blurred perceptions about both self and other. Africans according to Memmi were forced out of history once they became passive agents of their own lives. Their embrace of past traditions is understood as an illusory refuge consisting in routinely, yet ineffectively perpetuating token activities of an erstwhile dynamic culture. Consequently, yesterday's traditions could not provide self-satisfaction or supply harmony inside the long-abused African self. Calls for assimilation and hence immersion in European modernity might have brought forth some kind of 'foreseen' happiness but they were flawed by the doublespeak of colonialism. It seems that the African intellectual elites' performance embodies the opinion that there is a long way to go before the picture of the colonized African fades out. The challenge lies in whether or not African elite members are convinced or not to address deeper questions, probably about what to read and to learn from the story of Africa (traditions) and in what way the imposed modernity (the western world) can serve to further this pursuit. A lucid treatment of the question could instead lead the paralyzed African to break these manacles and factually achieve a decolonization of the mind.

Modernity and Traditionality: Working out the Concepts

Kwame Anthony Appiah has articulated what seems like a constructive understanding of identity. For him identity "is a coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thoughts, and patterns of evaluation; in short, a coherent kind of human social psychology."³ As a result Appiah does not formulate the idea of a single African identity. Rather, he only discusses diverse and multiple African identities "to recall the variety of precolonial cultures" and the "differences in colonial experience". It is only after doing away with the effects of colonialism, Appiah says, that there can be a debate over an emerging African identity not yet fully apparent or tied as when it comes to the way in which it is composed. But certainly "race, a common historical experience, a shared metaphysics, ...[even] false presuppositions [like] errors and inaccuracies that courtesy calls 'myth', 'religion', 'heresy' and science 'magic'"⁴ can be included. In short, identity for Appiah is an amalgam of both rational and irrational considerations. That is what makes it always theoretically fraught with uncertainties and in the African case somewhat more challenging

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since, after all, it is yet to be formed. At the present moment as well as formerly, there have been cases of varied identities and what shapes this embryonic unifying picture that is emerging is perhaps more and more the swaying attitude of modernity of which colonialism, orientalism and imperialism are its best manifestations.⁵ In this regard we cannot adequately debate Africa's quest for identity without serious attendance to the conditions of the possibility of this emerging identity, if only to invoke Michel Foucault's ideas about episteme formations.⁶

Yet before underlining the conditions of possibility for this unique African experience, it is interesting to review some dissenting voices, thinkers who argue in favour of multiple African identities. For Kadiatu Kanneh, "it is vital to resist formulations of a holistic African world, culture or world-view which can be discovered, recovered or re-appropriated." For Kanneh, it is important to note that "Africa, with its plural cultures and influences has no paradigm and cannot be reduced to a single political aspiration or spiritual unity."⁷ While there may exist some relevance to this stand (for the book is extensively documented), one can still detect some postmodernist cases of de-centering narratives, additional fragmentations of meaning together with the erection of multiple truths. This suspicion is particularly valid when given the unilateral western power and domination all over the world. Even if there might have never been a single African identity, the call to set up one is understood as one necessary step in an enduring project to resist self-suppressing trends of globalization.

Other thinkers, however, are not at ease with these conditions regarding the theorization of the concept of Identity. Perhaps Appiah's previous idea regarding what he takes as an *emergent* African identity is after all profitless since in the end one has to do with what there is rather than what would exist. It is true that Appiah's designation can be more an "imagined"⁸ generalization fitting into a certain conciliatory tone only because one has got tired of the nowadays militant language, prevailing almost everywhere. Very possibly, not only the generalization that is thorny but, more deeply, the intellectual machinery that produces it reveals a certain predisposition in the Africanist academic discourse of postcoloniality that should not escape scrutiny, too. For D. A. Masolo, the very tendency to generalize and come out with wide claims *on* and *about* identity reveals a worldview made essentially possible by the politics of representation. Such a case could not take place without the postulation of some false

presumptions that "the universals (subjects or citizen of the world) exist" and deceptive presuppositions detailing that "individual unity [is] the centerpiece of the idea of progress."⁹ Reducing individual differences through disseminated notions about the well-being of certain idealistic opinions *vis-à-vis* individuality and subjecthood discloses a mind that still cannot break free from the shackles of Cartesianism. According to D. A. Masolo, Cartesianism as a philosophical school is methodologically unsafe (not to say, unsound) if only because it neither questions nor doubts "first person beliefs about the way things seem as the foundation of knowledge."¹⁰ What suited Descartes some five hundred years ago and made him come out with personal views or remarks about his own European crisis then, might not be necessarily suitable for contemporary Africans. Therefore, identities are contextually-conditioned. More specifically, identities vary simply because the individuals who seek them "are regulated by the range of their interactive relations. ... Identities change – because focus on them changes – as the individuals constantly move back and forth between multiple congregational communities in which such individuals participate regularly."¹¹ Masolo's perspective is perhaps more compelling since it enables us to investigate into the components of one's background without being affected and negatively influenced by the tribulations of another's.

Following this line of approach, it goes without saying that in the African case one constituent piece of identity is, of course, "Tradition". I begin with it because tradition has always been there, part of the self both in the metaphysical (ontological) and cultural sense. To start with, I mean by tradition several cultural elements, and all of them, in my opinion, are interdependent. Perhaps the most readily accepted definition is the etymological one '*traditio*'. Derived from Latin, the word stands for "delivery, surrender, a handing down". Little wonder, then, if it has been used in almost all languages as "a doublet of treason"¹² very possibly because it has to do with the 'untouchables' of a community. Even academically, the word suffers from vagueness when compared with words like 'culture' or 'knowledge'. In the modern usage of the term, the cultural Marxist critic Raymond Williams admits that "tradition in its most general modern sense is a particularly difficult word."¹³ He observes that the word's meaning "tends to move towards *age-old* and towards ceremony, duty and respect. Considering only how much has been handed down to us, and how various it actually is, this, in its own way, is both betrayal and surrender."¹⁴ As a matter of fact, this feeling of betrayal and surrender generated from tradition and motivated by some

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tradition-apologetics is responsible for the creation of a traditionalist's mind set. According to Williams, such a reaction develops very often into a tacit or hidden ideology called 'traditionalism' which "seems to be becoming specialized to a description of habits or beliefs inconvenient to virtually any innovation, and *traditionalist* is almost dismissive."¹⁵ Having stated that, however, we do not mean to overlook the progressivist and scientific premises of Williams from which he bases his definition and which I think is both firm and relevant to the scope of this article.

Edward Shils in a compelling sociological study entitled *Tradition* (1981) distinguishes between two types of tradition. For him there exists one that "influence[s] the production of works of intellect, imagination, and expression" and which Shils assesses as "acknowledged and [its] results appreciated." The second type, however, establishes "normative models of action and belief" and which is often seen as "useless and burdensome".¹⁶ The first type Edward Shils labels "Tradition of Change or of Reason", the second as "Tradition of Traditionality."¹⁷ In this regard and as to how tradition can be crucial for shaping the present state of affairs in Africa, one has to consider Willie Abraham's view on tradition: "[U]nless traditional cultures, which continue to be effective, can be accommodated as steadying influences, progress, instead of being continuous and rational, will be gibbous."¹⁸ The negative or at least the useless parts of tradition have to be dispensed with before an enhancing culture can be launched and development started.

Included in the second type mentioned before are 'tradition apologists', those people who are motivated by the fear of deracination due to what they think as 'overdoses of modernity'. But these people, while conscious of the importance of their efforts, can be considered gullible and passive agents living in a timeless and mythical Eden. This category of people cannot be considered as fostering 'critical minds'. For the same people do not possess a potential for a full critical attitude and analysis. Furthermore, we could consider to advantage Shils' conceptualization of both 'historical' and 'traditional' as two opposite reactions to the concept of 'Tradition' with all that this idea entails in terms of beliefs, customs and modes of action. Again, if tradition is that lore which is handed down from one generation to the next, then we are left actually with two sorts of convictions. One is to consider that traditionalists transmit their teachings (traditional materials) as they think they received them, insisting on these

teachings' 'abiding purity and quasi-piestic relevance'; the other is to think that they simply try to view the same teachings quite objectively as aspects of human experience, which are perhaps edifying, yet not necessarily free from reproach and criticism. The task of a student of tradition can be narrowly limited to the drawing of clear-cut distinctions between on the one hand, 'genuine', 'ratiocinated' traditions or habits of the mind, and by contrast, 'crippling', 'fossilized' and 'inhibitive' rites and practices.

In order to distinguish between the two parts of traditions, negative aspects of tradition, as discussed within the content of this article, are narrowed to the term of traditionality. Traditionality, hence, implies those grim conditions which fashion very crippling situations of ordinary life. Individuals and communities are, therefore, meant to suffer paralytic, helpless and unprogressive attitudes of mind in their milieu. We mean by traditionality that cast of mind that is dominantly mythical and hopelessly unprepared for rational appliance of the mind. In a sense, this case escalates to the extent that it can be qualified as ahistorical. Traditionality is most of the time in favour of *expecting* phenomena to take place, preferring to stay an object instead of acting as a subject. The individual, within such a system, is always helpless before the forces which he assumes are controlling him. For he can neither shape his own destiny nor anticipate it to fit into some rewarding outcome. In addition, Traditionality, when considered in depth, takes *ahistoricity* to the extreme till in the end it becomes anti-historical, absolute, frozen, totally inoperative and incapable of establishing links with its historical context except in the negative. In the end this traditional thinking (that is a person with such an inhibitive cast of mind) becomes incapable to discriminate between what is progressive and constructive and what is inhibitive and destructive. Eventually, he or she can be examined with a pathological, perhaps unconscious drive to deny the value of human experience. This rejection of human experience is often justified on mythical grounds about the greatness and uniqueness of one's past and the 'fabulous' achievements of the forefathers, hence the *raison d'être* of one's identity. In one word, despite the fact that Traditionality is very much dependent on history, because indeed it has a history, it is nevertheless not historical, that is critical and self-questioning. It is only the result of some unconscious selective accumulation of past ways and inconsistent behaviours that produce a questionable ethos.

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In tune with our understanding of tradition and traditionalist outlooks is Jean-Marie Makang's categorization of two inhibitive understandings of tradition as they are carried out: the first during and the second after colonialism. Placide Tempels' glorification, not to say glamorization, of ancient Bantu customs comes as a case in point. For Makang, Tempels' whole project is devious since for him tradition "asserts itself as nostalgia for the past or for the lost paradise, and as avoidance of the present."¹⁹ Sheer silence on present realities indicates that Tempels' opinions can be directly advantageous to Belgian colonial interests of subjugation. Senghor's stress on the particularity of African life made prevalent in his version of the philosophy of Negritude is equally spurious. J. M. Makang thinks that Senghor's appeal was "meant to cover the problem of political oppression and of economic injustice perpetuated by autocratic African regimes."²⁰ In both examples, tradition is reduced to an Egyptian Mummy; a fossilized or better still, a "*museumised*" entity that constitutes a value in itself rather than for itself. Again, by stressing some historical facts as unique, traditionalism becomes a value only in the sense that it starts to be a means of getting the contemporary African individual out of history by hideously and deliberately eliminating his or her interest in the present and future affairs.

Once more *traditionality* or more precisely the 'traditional mind' becomes interesting and directly substantial as a subject of study when touching on the question of its relation with 'culture.' Trusting his own observations as a colonized himself, Albert Memmi's distinction between dominating and dominated cultures is again helpful in the understanding of tradition and how traditional minds function. His thesis is that because dominated people have generally no living culture (this is due to the oppression of colonialism, whose impact on Africans extends to decades after decolonization)²¹, the only refuge left for its people is tradition²². Because this is generally the case in most parts of Africa, Memmi warns, "tradition is dangerous when it stands alone. The culture of the dominated group is affected and its tradition is maladjusted."²³ Despite being more theoretical, the answer, according to the same thinker, has to be handled through the creation of a living culture. At the same time tradition need not to be used as a substitute for action.²⁴

Perhaps a more impartial and relevant²⁵ than Memmi's is the position proposed by Homi Bhabha. Local cultures, for Bhabha, may at a certain historical moment witness some kind of vagueness as a result of their encounter with the

metropolitan (in this case, the dominating) culture. Such vagueness or rather 'ambivalence' can only be explained by the ideological ambivalence stemming from the contradictions inherent in the concept of 'Nationalism'. For Bhabha, the espousal of nationalism as an ideological model in the period following independence could not take place without the internalization of the Enlightenment as a universal project with almost a total discount of non-European experiences²⁶. Bhabha understands this disregard as an ill-attendance to "the temporality" dimension in the life of the nation. Culturally speaking, such ill-attendance is witnessed ever more closely in "the production of the nation as a narration." For there is always "a split between the continuity, accumulative, temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative." Consequently, Bhabha arrives at his definition of 'ambivalence' when saying that: "[I]t is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing* the nation."²⁷

In more practical terms, it is only when African communities start to fashion their everyday actions with symbols selectively amassed from their pasts that one can talk of an effective strategy for the shaping of an authentic identity drawn from a happy marriage between a live culture and its critical view of tradition. This same critical interest, according to Jean-Marie Makang, would be accountable for the derivation of "an ideology that makes a group of people a community of destiny..."²⁸ While waiting for this happy metamorphosis to take shape, we can still notice the centrality of tradition both as a field of investigation and a discourse both *of* and *about* the perception of human knowledge in general and therefore a basis for a theory of action. Traditionality, in the entire web of relationships it draws, justifies the need for a framework of writing with a plenty of signs, meanings and anxieties that are not easy to overlook or evade. Indeed, no sound study can afford to consciously disregard the element of tradition that, if only ironically (that is, without willing it) "enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence."²⁹

In the same line, too, we mean by 'historicism' that cast of mind which enjoys an ability to distinguish fact from illusion; perceive, understand and later react to human realities originally while being aware of situations that could look real but are not in actual fact. In other words, historicity as a concept would and should result always in a critical understanding of the lived historical moment. It can be realised by ascribing to the symbology of the metaphor rather than mere

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or rudimentary adherence to simple imageries. Authenticity of judgment should be in effect the equivalent word for historicity. In actual terms, historicity would result in minds, or rather intellectuals, who have, as Gramsci suggests, “critical self consciousness” striving from their positions as organic or 'traditionally-anchored' intellectuals in their traditionalist background to establish ideological hegemony:

Critical self-consciousness means historically and politically, the creation of an *élite* of intellectuals. A human mass does not “distinguish” itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders, in other words without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people “specialised” in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. But the process of creating intellectuals is long, difficult, full of contradictions, advances and retreats, dispersals and regroupings, in which the loyalty of the masses is often sorely tried. (And one must not forget that at this early stage loyalty and discipline are the ways in which the masses participate and collaborate in the development of the cultural movement as a whole.)³⁰

In case we query why Gramsci's intellectuals' path is “long, difficult, full of contradictions”, we are to think obviously of the traditionalist's resistance; a resistance which is often manifested in forms of suspicions or simply uneasiness about change. As far as Armah's novels go, one direct implication of the competition between *historicist* and *traditionalist* minds is, perhaps, more than a simple game or fantasy (that could have been the result of an unjustified curiosity) for complexity per se. There exists sufficient evidence to suggest that such mind patterns are actually at the heart of what might form the authentic African intellectual. For that intellectual, there has always been a debilitating effect of the traditionalist and the static whenever the historicist attempts to emerge and find power. Often the historicist, or rather, the would be historicist, that is authentic intellectuals, are handicapped from getting insights or adequate awareness of their situations due to the exigencies, the whims or simply the anti-historicity of the more 'retarded' individuals within African communities. For in the end, these two casts of mind live in the same world and pursue their activities from fairly the same physical space. Little wonder then that they both exercise a

mutual influence on each other. While the historicist looks ahead, progressively and actively, the traditionalist lays obstacles in the historicist's path and sets him into the world of utopia. Almost always the traditionalist looks down on the historicist; he inwardly derides him, makes him feel pitiable or out of time. In short, *Traditionality* creates a space that is locked and prison-like for the *historicist*. Therefore, the *traditionalist's* incapacity to look and behave otherwise with the *historicist* shocks the latter and pushes him further into an unhealthy dissent. One concrete example of this situation is that the *historicist* often retreats or withdraws into himself; he isolates himself in order to find his peace and sense of being.

What is more damaging for the historicist as a result of *traditionality* is the latter's blurring of priorities and agendas. Aimé Césaire defines an intellectual as "the conscience of [his] community". Part of standing to the obligations of having been his community's 'conscience', for Césaire, is the necessity to attend both to the 'universal' and the 'particular'. But this involves the historicist automatically in an identity emergency: how can this *historicist* come to make his community stand to advantage in the struggle between the universal and the particular? This is not easy knowing that "...we must be lucid: select what we need and follow our own road...To seek a particular African path, at the same time taking advantage of the contributions of the other worlds, but well knowing, fully realizing that in reality nobody has thought for us or can think for us."³¹ This is fine rhetoric that recalls Gramsci's, too. When it comes to practice, the historicist working in traditionalism-infected environment does not actually have the opportunity to enjoy the luxury of these noble thoughts. Torn between the fact of being a latecomer in the orientalist discourse he is never responsible for its creation in the first place, and largely inhibitive traditionalities, the historicist may not have the freedom of being 'lucid'

That is why Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) comes to acknowledge the difficulty caused by traditionalist minds disabled from transcending the simple image of colonialism as essentially wrong, hence not yet ready to capture the meaning of the metaphor of nationalism. Fanon devotes one central chapter in the book to *traditionality*: "Grandeur et faiblesses de la spontanéité". He deplores in many ways the debilitating effects resulting from the ill-attendance of some nationalist parties to the problem of inadequate and feudally organized masses in the rural areas with modern views and ways of

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those living in big towns and cities. Between the two sections of the same people there exists a deeply rooted 'distrust'. Fanon's projection of a solution was made in the form of a suggestion. The nationalist parties have to transcend their difficulties with the traditional authorities remaining back in villages. Only such transcendence, itself a result of a deep historical understanding or pacifying as to the well-being of the community as a state, could awaken the rural inhabitants to their role in the liberation of the country and ignite the necessary action in the form of violence. Interestingly, Fanon in another context had already acknowledged the debilitating effects resulting from the absence of ideology³². The presence of chiefs and the disputes they still create question the stick-in-the-mud condition consequential from *Traditionality* and its capacity to be renewed even in a context that looks at first sight accountable only by modernity: parliamentary rule, electoral system, representative governments...etc! *Traditionality* seems to be lucky in penetrating even the stiffest of modernity's measures and impose itself despite all the good will or high ideals of some African politicians.³³

Most inhibiting about *traditionalists* is the fact that their making of knowledge and the process through which they formulate judgments result almost mechanically in irrational derisions and groundless conclusions. One can witness such derisions when this *traditionalist* mind is confronted with vestiges or finished products of European modernity. People with a *traditionalist* outlook seem always to fail to draw just comparisons about how and why Europeans supersede Africans in this or that regard. Indeed, they never address the right questions; often they fail to put in any thoughtful questions. *Traditionalists'* concern remains focused on how to enjoy consumer products and how to make the most of one's time regardless of all things else. Under this logic, our understanding of *traditionality* and *traditionalist* minds takes a different way. Instead of treating European-oriented Modernity as a break from or another entity competing with local African *traditionality*, I am rather considering that this aspect of *modernity* adds to the legacy of *traditionality* and solidifies it. As European-oriented modernity is forced on African traditions through slaving commercial activities and later direct colonial control, African traditions in most cases become negatively influenced in as much as to conclude that African modernity is perceived primarily as inhibitive for true and meaningful development.

What supports this thesis as valid is our understanding of modernity in the ever changing African context. Modernity, according to Peter A. Redpath, is "[a] mythic tale of reason, a tale which hides *the will to power*, inaugurated the modern period and furnished it with the mental habits that form the attitudes and outlook called modernity." Such a myth has had an accumulative legacy (a history without being historical) that resulted in the *essentialization* of certain paths of inquiry at the expense of dispensing with good genuine others. In addition, "[t]hese habits of mind and heart turn not only away from but aggressively against objective reality, whether as nature, science, or history, and posit the introspective self's reflexive subjectivity as nothing less but the very fountain of truth."³⁴ For in order to escape the chaos of his times (Medieval religious wars), Descartes had had to transcend in the manner of ancient medieval sophists both the burgeoning practices of humanism (started in Italy and France with Petrarch, Dante, Machiavelli, Rabelais and other humanists) and the ideas of religious Reformation. What is problematic with the Cartesian premises, however, can be located in what had been at first intended as an attempt to bring peace to a war-torn Europe through compromises was later adopted as a *modus operandi* to solve all crises pertaining to non-Europeans, with an obstinate disregard to non-Europeans' histories and contexts. Being historically imperfect, European modernity, thus, cannot adequately account for non-European—in this context, African realities and experiences.

Conclusion

That is why the real concern has been, and still is, to show alternative ways and methods by which Africans can positively identify themselves with the time and space they presently occupy. Contrary to the Kantian presumptions intrinsic in European modernity, and which Tsenay Serequeberhan makes explicit, one's motive has never been to argue that "the non-European world is incapable of engaging in the self reflexive and self reflective project of enlightenment on its own terms, since it is beyond the *pale* of reason..."³⁵ More exactly, the core of this article has been to discuss how the non-European world, particularly the African, 'could start becoming' engaged in this self reflexive and self reflective project. The neocolonial reality is enmeshed in contradictions matching what can be adequately qualified as the reality of unreality or, to borrow from the twelfth century Andalusian Averroes, a descent into the incoherence of incoherence. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze qualifies such a self-

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defeating case as "the inflammation of the social imagery" where "[t]he transpositions of the actuality of our tortured and contorted existence and humanity to the plane of mythical enchantment and disenchantments [...] inevitably lead down a certain [inflammation]." ³⁶ There is a vast operation of brain-drain and public alienation which we think could only come from inflammations and bleeding fissures inside the self. Freedom, it is known, is central to engagement and positivist thinking on the part of all human beings, Africans included. It is worth noting that only by taking the questions rather than the certainties of this article one can aspire for some positive transformation with the African self. For only further approximations, examinations and re-immersions can crystallize such a better future Africans all look forward to.

Notes

¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Sélections from the Prison Notebooks*. éd., & trans., Quintin Hoaré & Gofféry Nowell Smith. London & New York. Lawrence and Wishart, and International Publishers, (1971), p. 324.

² Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. (1957), Trans. Howard Greenfield. Earthscan Publication, London (2003), p. 195

³ Kwamé Anthony Appiah, "African Identities" in: *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*. eds, Linda J. Nicholas, Steven Seidman, Jeffrey C. Alexander. Cambridge University Press, (1996), p. 105.

⁴ Kwamé Anthony Appiah, "Ibid.", p. 105.

⁵ In this regard I, perhaps, cannot advance my argument without the original remarks advanced by Edward Said whose *Culture and Imperialism* is fundamentally based on the idea that imperialism as a system and practice "integrated and fused things within it, and taken together it [...] made the world one." Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, (1994), p. 6.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. London: Tavistock, (1972)

⁷ Kadiatu Kanneh, *African Identities, Race, Nation and Culture in Ethnography, Pan-Africanism and Black Literatures*. Routledge, London and New York (1998), p. 43 In Kanneh's assessment, one single unitary African identity has been a European invention tailored to meet these latter's exploitative interests. For it is "The movements between African and European contexts reveals how Africa and its identities have been crucially informed by the impact of knowledge and interests from outside the continent.", p. 1 (Emphasis in the Original)

⁸ The word "Imagined" is used here in tone with Benedict Anderson's concept of "Imagined Communities" made clearly explicit in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, London, 1983)

⁹ D. A. Masolo, "African Philosophy and the Postcolonial: Some Misleading Abstractions about 'Identity'", in: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (éd.) *Post Colonial African Philosophy*, a

Critical Reading. Blackwell Publishers, (1997), p. 293-294.

¹⁰ D. A. Masolo, "Ibid." p. 295.

¹¹ D. A. Masolo, "Ibid." p. 297.

¹² Douglas Harper, Online Etymology Dictionary. (2001),
<<http://www.etymonline.com/idx.php?term=tradition>>

¹³ Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. Fontana (1976), p. 318.

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, Ibid., p. 319. (Italics in the original)

¹⁵ Raymond Williams, Ibid., pp. 319-320. (emphasis in the original)

¹⁶ Edward Shils, Tradition. The University of Chicago Press (1981), p. 3.

¹⁷ Edward Shils, Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁸ W. E. Abraham, The Mind of Africa. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (1962), p. 161

¹⁹ Jean-Marié Makang, "Of the Good Use of Tradition: Keeping the Critical Perspective in African Philosophy" in: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (ed.) Post Colonial African Philosophy, a Critical Reading. Blackwell Publishers, (1997), p. 329

²⁰ Jean-Marié Makang, "Ibid.", p. 331. Interestingly, recently Albert Memmi draws exactly the same point considering heads of states who ill-intentionally advocated a return to a mythic past in the history of a nation. Quoting Memmi: "The shortcomings of intellectuals, whether characterized as resignation or betrayal, play a part in national cultural lethargy, even though it can be partly justified and merely reflects a more general problem. For it leaves the field open for those who opt for mystic effusion in place of rationality, the straitjacket of strict membership to the openness of universalism; to those who, in place of a depressing or humiliating present, can dream only of a return to a golden age, a renewed fusion, the only productive kind in their view, of religion, culture, and politics, where the splendors of the past will flourish again in some new Andalusia, a resurgent caliphate similar to that of Baghdad, where tolerance, justice, and prosperity will reign." Albert Memmi, Decolonization and the Decolonized. (2006), pp.40-41

²¹ Memmi's attack on colonialism is incarnated so vibrantly and powerfully in his Portrait du colonisé. He thinks: "Colonization can only disfigure the colonized. It places him before an alternative having equally disastrous results; daily injustice accepted for his benefit on the one hand and necessary, but never consummated, self-sacrifice" Albert Memmi, Portrait du colonisé. (1957) Earthscan Publications (2003), p. 191.

²² Memmi believes: "Cut off from cultural effectiveness, he [the colonized] takes refuge in his past because he is sure of it, he knows it, he possesses it." Albert Memmi, "Culture and Tradition", African Culture, Algiers Symposium (1969), p. 262.

²³ Memmi, "Ibid.", p. 262

²⁴ According to Memmi, the solution out of this dead-end-alley caused by tradition in Islamic North African societies is more and more secularism taking form of a rupture with an inhibitive past. In a recent interview following his latest: Decolonization and the Decolonized (2005), he assumes that: "...the link between religion and society is rooted deeply in the Arabs' unconscious. It is a philosophy where the sacred and the profane

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coïncidé; something which creates obstacles for the critical spirit to arise..."

Albert Memmi, <[http : //livres.l'express.fr/écrivains/default.asp?idR=s](http://livres.l'express.fr/écrivains/default.asp?idR=s)> (translation is mine)

²⁵ Relevant because this approach adheres to realities found not in the mega polis (the case of minority-groups in the Center) but to different communities in Africa and peripheral localities since these communities remain relatively intact and conserve their collective distinctness from colonial occupiers.

²⁶ Bhabha refers for the universalisation of the Enlightenment as "the spatialization of historical time, 'a creative humanization' of this locality which transforms a part of terrestrial space into a place for historical life for people." Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, (1994), excerpts:

<<http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/bhabha/biblio.html>>

²⁷ Homi Bhabha, *Ibid.* (Italics in the original). In a paragraph that comes just afterward, Bhabha explains that "The tension between the pedagogical and the performative that I have identified in the narrative address of the nation, turns the reference to a 'people' – from whatever political or cultural position it is made – into a problem of knowledge that haunts the symbolic formation of modern authority." Bhabha, *Ibid.*

²⁸ Jean-Marié Makang, "Op.cit.", p. 336.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Op.cit.*, p. 23.

³⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Op.cit.*, p. 333.

³¹ Aimé Césaire, "The Essential and the Fundamental". Interview by E. J. Maunick, *Africa Development: A Quarterly Journal*. Vol. II, N° 4, (1977), pp.45-46

³² He expresses this more clearly in *For the African Revolution* where he notes: "As to me, the more I penetrated the cultures and the political circles, the more the certainty that the most dangerous risk that threatens Africa is the absence of ideology forced itself on me." Frantz Fanon, *Pour la révolution africaine*, Librairie François Maspéro. (1969) p. 184.

³³ In Ghana, the idea of the state, not as a governing institution with managerial responsibilities towards its subjects, but essentially as a "mere provider" of consumer durables is fostered by Yvonne M. Tsikata. The scholar discusses the idea of heads of state being reputed with self-flattering luminary names, of which Nkrumah's "Osagyefo" is one example, has been detrimental in setting up the traditionality that has been embraced almost with a religious fervor, that of a state which has a natural duty of providing goods and luxuries. Tsikata finds: "From the time of Ghana's independence until the 1981 coup d'etat, the state (and by extension the politicians who ruled the state) was viewed as a provider ... There was a general expectation that the state would provide jobs directly, provide subsidies for enterprises or even provide free social services", with a head of a state often approached as 'a provider-in-chief' or "Kalabulé" in Akan. Similarly, the same scholar discusses how Jerry Rawlings found fairly difficult to break this mantle among Ghanaians long reared and victimized in their gullibility to this traditionality. Yvonne M. Tsikata. "Successful Reforms". Economic and Social Research Foundation, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, (2001), p. 20

³⁴ Pétér A. Rédpath, *Cartésian Nightmaré*. Value Inquiry Book Series, Amsterdam –

Atlanta, GA, (1997), p. 151(Emphasis Added)

³⁵ Tsénay Séréquébérhan, "Thé Critiqué of Eurocéntrisk and thé Praçtiçé of Afriçan Philosophy", in: Emmanuél Chukwudi Ezé, (éd.) Post Colonial Afriçan Philosophy, a Critiçal Réadér. Blaçkwéll Publishérs, (1997), p. 151 (Italiçs in thé Original)

³⁶ Emmanuél Chukwudi Ezé, "Toward a Critiçal Théory of Postçolonial Afriçan Idéntitiés", in: Emmanuél Chukwudi Ezé, (éd.) Post Colonial Afriçan Philosophy, a Critiçal Réadér. Blaçkwéll Publishérs, (1997), p. 343.

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