

‘Down But Not Out’: Critical Insights in Traditional Shona Metaphysics

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Abstract

The paper provides a corrective to the Western gaze that modern medicine; science and Christianity are familiar parts of Western imagination. It shows the beauty of African indigenous science, medicine and worship. Colonialism transformed most African parts as a way of “modernizing traditional political, economic and social practices” as many scholars think. The paper is concerned with the socio-political and cultural dimensions of the new hegemonic tendencies in the world’s global affairs, which pose serious challenges to African social sciences.

It further discusses how the Shona perceive African metaphysics in the face of modernity global challenges and how they represent the interface of the three traditions namely: science, Christianity and African traditional culture. The Shona people being Africans represent the voice of Africans as a whole and Shona culture in particular. The paper brings out how Shona cultural beliefs specifically those that are metaphysical have demonstrated their resilience in the face of demonization and the onslaught from the West. This refraction of the new hegemonism into African culture and social sciences “still bears the methodological and epistemological hallmarks of the hegemonic dynamics” of the African colonial era that characterizes and continues to shape the discourses about Africa. The paper seeks to resist, dismantle and critique the inherited colonial social science research legacies, which have injured African social scientists’ consciousness.

Introduction

In his preface to *Images of Africa: Stereotypes and Realities* edited by Daniel M. Mengara (2001:xiii) Molefe Kete Asante, a renowned Africologist remarks:

At the top of the twentieth century Africa remains the most misunderstood of continents, crippled in our imagination by images rooted in the minds of imperial Europeans who attempted to shape and invent an Africa useful to their political ambitions.

By linking science, Christianity and a resilient traditional Shona metaphysics, this paper seeks to provide a more rounded and objective view of the African continent. It clearly reiterates that “Europe’s intervention in Africa [was] the beginning of the most nefarious images. An African invented for European purposes could no longer serve the interests of its own people” (Asante in Mengara, 2001:xiv) The paper further rekindles and explicates the African philosophy debate as an African response to demonization inherent in the western discourses on Africa. It is a rationality debate”, a deconstructionist effort reminiscent of the many aspects of the African people’s struggles to control their own identity. Masolo (1995:2) states that:

Historically, the call for a ‘return to the native land’ was only one of the many revolutionary expressions of the then rising black militantism, nationalism and Africanism...For many black people...Solidarity was their strength and a weapon with which to counter Westernism’s arrogant and aggressive Eurocentric culture.

Aime Césaire's clarion call to "*return to the native land*" was symbolic to all Black people to come together as a unified and formidable force in a struggle to defend their common stance, their identity tag and the rightful language of resistance to the stereotypical African '*savage*' who is even up-to today is alienated as "*the other*." This paper further examines how the Shona people have distinguished themselves well as true eclectics in the face of competing cultural references that have come to inform life in this postcolonial world. The work argues that despite the cultural onslaught on Shona metaphysics particularly their belief systems through the spread of the western scientific worldview and the Christian religious tradition, the Shona never completely lost touch with their traditional metaphysics.

The traditional belief system has continued to inform much of the life and activities of the Shona people. In times of adversity the Shona have demonstrated unique qualities of being able to call on their triple heritage in order to respond to the problem. This paper will also "*have to narrate in an exhaustive search for a specific mark, for an originality that will mark at all costs, the difference between our thought and that of the West*" (Masolo,19995:196). In responding to problems they have developed what may be described as a clear eclectic patchwork of solutions with ideas being drawn from modern science, the Christian tradition and their own traditional metaphysics. This work will draw on Shona responses to illness within the family to demonstrate the extent to which the Shona have harmonized the seemingly antagonistic worldviews as a way of survival. From this survival strategy, Christine Obbo's (2006:154) observation is apt:

As ever, power is key to ownership of the knowledge production process. Contemporary problems of development, health and indigenous knowledge demand that we define the theoretical agendas and practical issues those are of concern to us.

Rather than being passive assimilators of European modernity, the Shona have taken an active role in the selection and at times fusion of what they got from Europe and what they already had as a people. This in some way represents the way in which the Shona have responded to the installation of a Euro-specific modernity-tradition ideology in Africa, while at the same time, shaping their African modernity. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1981:103) sees the fruition of this possibility only if "the liberation of natural and human resources and the entire production forces of the nation, would be the beginning of Africa's real progress and development."

Thus, African indigenous knowledge systems mirror African intellectual genius, whereas most of the problems that haunt the continent of Africa are concentrated on and resonate around this chain of binary oppositions: poverty and riches, exploitation and domination, a dominant white minority over and against a marginalized Black majority, superiority complex versus inferiority complex.

Metaphysics Defined

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that deals with fundamental question about the nature of reality. The etymological definition of metaphysics holds that the term metaphysics is derived from the Greek words *meta-ta-physika* (Kim and Sosa, 1995), meaning after physics or transcending the physical. Among philosophers, from Descartes onwards, the term metaphysical has come to have the distinct sense of having to do with what lies beyond what is available to the senses, with what is not merely abstract but in some sense transcendent as well (Hamlyn, 1984). In its simplest form metaphysics represents a science that seeks ultimate understanding of reality that is existence and being. Hence, in the context of this work, it also deals with the nature of existence where Africa suffered serious cultural dislocations. Nzewi (2007:4) puts it that:

Irreverent and irresponsible abandonment as well as flippant change started when the human and cultural practices of the invaders from outside began to make insidious intrusions into the African's human and cultural psyche.

Metaphysics therefore involves a synthesis of all experiences in order to achieve a coherent whole, which gives a complete picture of reality. From time to time in the history of philosophical thought philosophers of a positivist tendency has produced a criterion of meaningfulness so metaphysics could be shown to be nonsense in one fell swoop, but this has not been the case, metaphysics has remained central and therefore constitutes an important element in defining the meaning of existence.

Traditional Shona Metaphysics

The Shona constitute one of the largest communal-cultural groups in Zimbabwe and this group is an aggregate of small ethnic groups who are all classified as Shona because they each speak a dialect of what the linguists call the Shona language (Gelfand, 1973). The distinction in the dialects was made more prominent and pronounced by the early missionaries and settlers working in different parts of the country and these are the reasons why Ranger (1985) has argued that these language differences are actually a colonial invention. There is so much horizontal similarity across the spectrum of the small ethnic groups that are classified as the Shona as they share a common culture. As pointed out by Ranger (1985) prior to the development of written Shona dialects there was a situation in which this whole group spoke a single, common language. The Shona constitute almost three quarters of the population of the Zimbabwe and were under British colonial rule for almost a century. Meki Nzewi (2007:4) strongly feels that:

Contemporary Africans must strive to rescue, resuscitate and advance our original intellectual legacy, or the onslaught of externally manipulated forces of mental and cultural dissociation now rampaging Africa will obliterate our original intellect and lore of life.

What is distinctively African in metaphysics in Africa today and by extrapolation among the Shona derives from African traditional thought. Ozumba (2003) defines African metaphysics as the African way of perceiving, interpreting and making meaning out of interactions, among beings, and reality in general. It is the totality of the African's perception of reality. The Africans have a pragmatic metaphysics meaning that if an idea, an explanation, a belief, works it is accepted even though it may not fulfill certain criteria of defining objective reality such as empirical validation. Africans have an important component to their conception of reality a domain whose existence is explained mystically. This is one of their strongest beliefs in their cosmology. This has also influenced even their understanding of the individual person. The person is seen as a composite of body (material) and spirit (immaterial) yielding a dualistic conception of the human being. The Shona have a hierarchy of existence with God at the top followed by the ancestors in their perking order of seniority and down to the living beings on earth. Among the Shona is there is ample evidence that the activities of these spirits affect people in various ways whether positively or adversely. They had their indigenous methods of respecting their environment, which necessitated coping with all natural diseases. Nzewi, (ibid:7), continues his argument through Touma:

If our ancestors had no sound intellectual mettle, how did they develop the scientific cultures of food, childbirth and mental nurture, also the musical arts genres that were non-sanctionable mediators in the indigenous societal polity and social-cultural practices, including the policing of egalitarian law and order, medical arts delivery, etc?

To the Africans in general, Shona included the concept of causality is central to their metaphysics. For the Africans everything has a cause, nothing happens without a cause. The question that is asked is why must a particular event happen to a particular person, at a particular place in a given time? Why to that specific individual and not any other? The puzzle of how the immaterial spiritual entities come to interact and continue to influence the activities of the living does not arise for the Africans as it does for those who subscribe to the mechanistic view of the world. The idea of causality is not difficult to understand once one has understood the fact that the Africans believe in immortality of the spiritual being. Spiritual beings are very much counted among the living as important participants in shaping everything that may happen and by their very nature they now occupy a better position in determining events and influencing them, as they are no longer subject to the limitations of space and time.

Because they are so versatile the spirits are treated with much caution, as their tamper cannot longer be determined easily and evil-minded people to turn against members of their own lineage can also easily manipulate them. Their very behavior is unpredictable hence they are treated with much respect among the Shona. African traditional orature provides powerful therapeutic and healing properties as the following epigram by Nzewi (ibid:55) from the *Forum Microbiologicum, Summer, 2000* calls for our reflections:

The history of medicine

- 2000BC - *Here, eat this root*
- 1000BC - *That root is heathen*
Here, say this prayer
- 850AD - *That prayer is superstitious*
Here, drink this portion
- 1940AD - *That portion is snake oil*
Here, swallow this pill.
- 1985AD - *That pill is ineffective*
Here, take this antibiotic
- 2000AD - *That antibiotic doesn't work anymore*
Here, eat this root !

There are similarities between the Shona and what Tempels noted about the Shaba Baluba, a group he studied in the Congo, which confirms the horizontal relationships between these Bantu people. The Shona also talk of their spirit (mweya) being troubled, their spirit being low or having lost their spirit or having their spirit revived and this is similar to what Tempels (1945) captures as vital force, that is *force vitale*. As annunciated by Tempels the Bantu believe that it is only by fortifying their vital force through the use of magical recipes and through praying to the ancestors and pouring libation that they acquire resistance to malevolent external forces. Failure to do so would be to expose oneself to danger by giving up on the security that is guaranteed by the ancestors. As a result of the colonial encounter and the cultural exchanges that have occurred and continue to occur across the world it may be prudent to talk of hybrid metaphysics. According to Ozumu (2003) hybrid metaphysics is becoming the order of the day in Africa with African traditional metaphysics merging with Christianity, Islam, religions from the East and the western mechanistic view of the world. Reflective of the above discourse on the usurpation of African indigenous knowledge systems is Nzewi's (2007:56) poetic recital that captures the discourse's real essence:

*Then --
When there was spiritual enlightenment
We were condemned for practicing humanness
Humans lived in manageable groups
Respecting cohered individualities
The principle of life was “ubuntu” – we-ness
Communalism coerced egalitarian longings
Live and respect other’s lives resolved conflicts
And human musical arts healed injured minds.*

*Now –
When there is material enlightenment
We have been commandeered into practicing modernism
Humans live in amorphous geopolitics
Dissonance stresses bonding rites
Communalism is supplanted by selfism – me-ness
Democracy enslaves the masses
Let us live and destroy them perpetuates conflicts
And plastic musical arts disable human-mindedness*

Throughout Africa sick or afflicted people go to consult diviners as to the causes of their troubles. Usually the answer they get involves some spiritual agency of some sort. Reference to theoretical entities is used to link events in the visible, tangible world (natural effects) to their antecedents in the same world (natural causes). The diviner is basically making use of theory to transcend the limited vision of natural causes provided by common sense (Robin Horton, 1998: 184). One cannot ignore the way the Shona look at the causal link between disturbed social relations and disease and misfortune, so frequently postulated by traditional religious thought. Robin Horton (ibid: 184) says:

Let us remind ourselves at this point that modern medicine, though long blinded to such things by the fantastic success of the germ theory of disease, are once more beginning to toy with the idea that disturbances in a person’s social life can in fact contribute to a whole series of sickness, ranging from those commonly thought of as bodily

This is exactly what African metaphysics has always held about disease. The traditional healer's efforts to cope with the situation by ferreting out and attempting to remedy stress-producing disturbances in the patient's social field are probably very relevant. While theories come and theories go, the world of common sense remains very little changed. As noted by Wiredu (1984) it is not uncommon to see a Western scientist fully apprised of the universal reign of law in natural phenomena, praying to god, a spirit, to grant rain and a good harvest and other things besides. The truth then is that rational knowledge is not the preserve of the modern West nor is superstition a peculiarity of the African peoples. African people's culture fits in very well in any developmental discourse. Culture is the driving force of development. Development policies and practices understand or engage with culture in a number of ways. The West perceives local and traditional cultures as a hindrance to development while international development agencies and their national counterparts regard themselves as culturally neutral if not superior. We concur with Mervyn Caxton's (cited in Eade 2002: xii-xiii) view that "[all] models of development are essentially cultural". Development becomes a cultural construct and the basis for inter-cultural engagement, albeit on generally unequal terms. Caxton (ibid) continues:

When a people faces challenges from the environment which require responses and solutions, one of the functions of culture is to provide criteria which would enable a selection to be made between alternative solutions. This essential role of culture is usurped, and its capacity to provide adequate responses to development challenges is impaired, if the criteria used are ones that are external to the culture itself. This is what happens when external development models are exclusively relied upon.

African people have strong memories of their local practices and this self-conscious knowledge motivates them as they rely heavily upon these concepts. They have mastered skills to adapt and transform local practices in order to suit the changing cultural and socio-economic needs of their immediate surroundings. The positive changes are then integrated gradually into the beliefs, norms and value systems of the indigenous people.

The Existence of African Philosophy

This section unveils the philosophy beneath African traditional culture and why it is "culture without time" to quote Mbiti (1969). African religions and philosophy are inseparably intertwined and its strong bond is supported by Mbiti (1975:12) who rightly points out that "religion is part and parcel of the African heritage which goes back many thousands of years". People vehemently oppose the rapid spread of Western values and lifestyles, which they see as detrimental to what they cherish in their culture, especially attitudes and customs related to their spiritual beliefs. Father Tempels rightly observed that those who refuse to acknowledge the existence of black thought exclude blacks from the group of human beings. Louis Vincent Thomas, on the question of African philosophy, writes:

But if, by philosophy, one means the original synthesis of knowledge, an attitude vis-à-vis the world and life's problems, even if the elaboration is only implicit, rather confusedly felt than a clearly expressed cosmology, there unquestionably exists a Diola [an African] philosophy inscribed not only in dogma, myth, rites and symbols, proverbs and enigmas, songs and dances, but also in the banal, daily gesture of the rice grower or the millet grinder, in the organization of the habitat or the curious division ...of the paddy fields.

Philosophy originates from nature and Africans are generally religious. It should not therefore be looked at with suspicion through the (Western gaze) foreign eyes but rather as an authentic people's culture. In undertaking the repossessing of its authentic African self, a Yoruba, E. Bolaji Idowu (cited in Laleye, 2002:88) rightfully asserts that:

The key note of their life is their religion. In all things, they are religious. To them, religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principle of life. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Diety.

African religion is the basis and the reflection of the African people's existence. It is their life. Encapsulated in their proverbs is a coherent theory that constructs and corresponds to African thought, expression and customs where people extract fundamental ideas from them. Africa knows how to philosophise. Through African languages that are full of figures of speech, Issiaka P.Laleye (ibid:91) is cognisant of the fact that “*all humanity vibrates like a gigantic spider web at the slightest jolts affecting it*”. This section establishes the pertinence of the existence of African philosophy by ascribing a war cry destined to regroup and urge African philosophers to continue philosophizing more than they were doing. The spirit of **ubuntu** is considered the most fundamental ontological and epistemological weapon inherent in the African thought. Mogobe B Ramose (2002:230) defines this mega idea as “*the root of African philosophy. The be-ing of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored upon ubuntu...Ubuntu then is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology*”. Religion or philosophy for Africans is embedded in their day to day practices and language that are crucial aspects of their lives that includes activities like birth occasions of a child, giving of names, marriage, funerals, harvesting festivals, rain making prayers, circumcision and other initiation ceremonies, to mention a few. As proof that religious objects, art, symbols, music and dance, proverbs, riddles and other wise sayings manifest religious expressions. Mbiti (1969:2) succinctly puts it that:

Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the field where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony....

During the Harlem Renaissance, the rediscovery of African philosophical arguments started and were developed in order to reclaim reason for Africa. Molefi Kete Asante (cited in Mengara, 2001:xiv) notes that it was against a certain socio-historic context that Hegel wrote in 1828, “*Let us forget Africa, for it is no part of human history*” The Diop-Olela tradition, opposed to the Hegelian bias quotes from George James’s *The Stolen Legacy* in Masolo (1995:21) who avers:

Now that it has been shown that philosophy and science were bequeathed to civilization by the people of...Africa and not by the people of Greece, the pedulum of praise and honour is due to shift from the people of Greece to the people of the African continent...that the Greeks were not the authors of Greek philosophy, but the people of ... Africa.

The above sentiments have been tested, tried and conclusively declared that Africa is the cradle of all civilization. This shatters the false Western pride that borders on arrogance.

Any society, Cabral would argue, is an “*evolving entity*” and the stage of its development is viewed in the level of its productive forces. These respond to nature where there is that interrelated among groups with nature and the relationships among individuals or collectives. History and culture encapsulated in these components. That is why it was best for imperialism to engage in cultural oppression. National liberation therefore aims at “*liberation of the process of development of national productive forces*” and then has the ability to determine the mode of production that is most appropriate to the evolution of the liberated people. Cultural development of a society comes as a result of a society’s capacity to create progress. National liberation, therefore, is “*necessarily an act of culture.*” (Cabral cited in Ishemo, 2002:27).

The African continent was viewed as a dark continent devoid of any history and the Eurocentric efforts were to bring the continent into history. Africa was denied a culture in the process and this served as an ideological licensing of exploitation. The issues of history and culture in the struggle for sovereignty became crucial. Amilcar, cabral, a revolutionary theorist and leader of the AIGC liberation movement in Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde, wrote:

Our countries are economically backward. Our peoples are at a specific historical stage, characterized by this backward condition of our economy. We must be conscious of this. We are African peoples, we have not invented many things...we have no big factories...but we do have our own hearts, our own heads and our own history. It is this history, which the colonialists have taken from us. The colonialists usually say that it is they who brought us into history: today we say that this is not so. They made us leave history, our history, to follow them, right at the back, to follow the progress of their history. (Cabral cited in Ishemo, 2002:26).

As an example, Zimbabwe's war of national liberation was a way "to return to our history, on our own feet, by our own means and through our own sacrifices." (Cabral, *ibid*, 26). The colonial domination was a result of "the negation of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violently usurping the free operation of the process of development of the productive forces." (*Ibid*, 26).

The Shona and their African Triple Heritage

Throughout history some people have sought, sometimes somewhat successfully, to transpose or even impose their own fallible conceptions of religion, morality and life in general upon others (Wiredu, 1996). As a result of some ingrained ethnocentrism the West has attempted to obliterate everything African and replace it with their conception of life. The colonialists and early missionaries appointed themselves the haste purveyors of the universal western culture, which for them represented a culture that every civilized society was to live by. Since the African encounter with Western modernity, indigenous African culture and everything African earned itself the designation tradition. Africa became the tradition *Other* or counterpart of the modern West. In the colloquial sense, tradition remains old-fashioned, attached to the past, and unchanging, while modernity claims constant renewal, movement towards the future and continuous change (Brodnicka, 2003). The West needed the tradition-modernity dichotomy more than the African for it served the interests of the west more than the African. As highlighted by Brodnick, (2003:1) :

The usefulness of tradition to Europe was at least twofold: the first one is that the concept of tradition allowed Africans to appear backward, childlike, and natural as compared to their European counterparts and therefore suitable for domination, and secondly the concept of tradition also created the notion of ethnicities as different and threatening to each other's traditions.

Because of this it was therefore necessary that one tradition particularly that which represented backwardness is buried for the harmonious existence of the seemingly antagonistic ethnicities. This explains why the African and in this case Shona traditional belief systems and their own worldview has been under threat since the advent of colonialism. A few bad things that were seen being practiced by the Shona in the name of culture were enough to brand the whole indigenous culture anti-modern and therefore retrogressive. This is what befell Shona metaphysics, which is the subject of this work. Growing up in Shona society of rural Zimbabwe the writer has witnessed how the Shona have developed coping mechanism to survive within an environment characterized by competing worldviews without neglecting any one of them. What is fascinating is that since the colonial encounter and within the Western tradition these competing worldviews have been taken as antagonistic and at times as mutually exclusive. To the Shona the three worldviews are viewed differently.

While the Shona indeed realize the extent to which these worldviews differ from each other and indeed acknowledge the distinction, they have instead come to regard the three worldviews as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. The Shona have developed this instinctive eclecticism as a way of coping with the different but competing models of understanding the world and explaining events in life. One's humanity is more than the mere fact of improving one's material conditions; this is why the scriptures advise that human beings do not live by bread alone. People should be the ones who should decide on what is positive or negative within any given actual context. The Nobel Prize-winning economist, Amartya Sen cited in Eade (2002:3) is un-ambivalent in categorically pointing out that people must set their own priorities :

If a traditional way of life has to be sacrificed to escape grinding poverty or minuscule longevity (as many traditional societies have had for thousands of years), then it is the people directly involved who must have the opportunity to participate in deciding what should be chosen.

There is no sane person who would defend living conditions which negate basic fundamental human freedom and dignity and which are offensive to social justice and equity. It is not acceptable culture if it discriminates on the basis of race, gender disability, or creed. The following anecdote which describes an incident the researchers witnessed in their village as young men may help to illustrate the extent to which the Shona have tried to harmonize the three worldviews in their existential circumstances:

Jack (not real name) dropped ill from a seemingly 'mysterious' disease while digging out manure from his cattle pen in preparation for the forthcoming rainy season. His wife quickly ran to inform the village elders. No one among the elders could make sense of the cause of his collapse. Before Jack was carried to the nearest clinic in a wheelbarrow a group of elders quickly put their heads together to come up with the way forward. Within no time three decisions had been arrived at. Two of the elders were to rush to a well-known faith healer to consult on what had befallen Jack. Another small team of three also left in a different direction to consult a nearby traditional healer. Whilst all this was happening the instruction was that one other team pushes the wheelbarrow to the nearest clinic so that Jack could be attended to. At the clinic Jack went on to be diagnosed of diabetes and had just suffered his first bout of attack from his previously unknown condition.

The mission of those who had gone to the traditional healer and the faith healer was to ascertain the cause of that 'mysterious' illness and to consult whether it was proper to take Jack to the clinic and if so be provided with alternative medicine to 'augment' what he would get from the clinic.

The traditional healer occupied a central position in the cosmology of the Shona and was an important cog in the whole traditional metaphysics and social ontology. In addition to being a medical practitioner, the traditional healer was a religious consultant, a legal and political adviser, a marriage counselor, a police detective and a social worker (Chavunduka, 1994). This view is supported by Nzewi's (2007:9) call, through Touma, for all Africans to respect their ancestors, their oral traditions and their indigenous institutions not to follow:

...the psychosis overwhelming the minds that control foreign religions, politics and economy will continue to foment and unleash avoidable modern conflicts and miseries in contemporary Africa, and indeed across the entire globe. The African mental and spiritual forces are surging back as the recourse that may yet save the entire human world from self-annihilation.

There is general belief in African traditional Shona culture that certain illnesses such as being attacked by spooks are not the domain of modern medicine and if someone like that is taken to the hospital their chances of survival are said to be slim unless traditional medicine is also administered alongside its Western counterpart. From the faith healer the idea is to get sacred water for drinking and smearing over the body to help fight off the evil spirits and help revive the vital force, that inward strength which Tempels (1945) calls the *force vitale* in the being in order to give Jack the strength that will allow even the modern medicine administered on him to work. Caxton (cited in Eade 2002:xii-xiii) adroitly puts it that:

A society's creative genius and its cultural identity are expressed in a tangible, practical manner by the way in which it addresses its problems in the various domains that are important to its proper functioning, and which, taken together, can be described as development action. Since a people's culture represents the totality of their framework for living, it incorporates all possible responses that they could make to the demands of their living environment.

Mystical thinking has remained central in African cosmology. Ideas about causality are most clearly manifested in the explanations given for the cases of misfortune, illness and death. Beliefs about the nature and operation of causal agents cease to be theoretical but must serve as the basis for practical remedial action. Significant events do not occur without reason and the cause can be determined if one investigates carefully. The causes most frequently cited to explain serious cases of misfortune and illness and to account for death are punishment by the ancestral spirits and the operation of witchcraft and sorcery. According to Minkus (1984) the ancestral spirits hold their descendants and successors responsible for the proper conduct of lineage affairs, maintenance of the customs they established and proffering the ritual attention they require.

The Shona have found it very difficult to disentangle them from this worldview. While modern medical institutions do not allow relatives to bring and administer the various concoctions prescribed to them by traditional medical practitioners and faith healers one sure thing is that these prescriptions have always found their way to their intended recipients who are the admitted patients regardless of the amount of inspection at the entrances to the wards. Even by the bedside the patient who is now in the custody of the modern health institution, will more often than not get some rubbing or massaging with traditional medicine from and a sip or two of the holy waters blessed by a faith healer without the hospital staff ever noticing it. As such the three different and often taken as antagonistic world views are brought in to kind of complement each other, the scientific represented by modern medicine, the Christian represented by the faith healer and the traditional African one represented by the traditional healer. Put together they constitute an eclectic patchwork, a hybrid that the Shona have come up with to negotiate their way and deal with the existential realities facing them in contemporary Africa. The socio-cultural aspects of development are established as key issue of the official development agenda. The United Nations and World Bank issued documents that speak of “*demand-driven assistance*” where “*history shows that uniformity is undesirable and that development is determined to a great extent by local conditions, including social institutions, social capability...*” (Verhelst in Eade, 2002:4) The president of the World Bank, James D. Wolfensohn, in his opening address to a conference on culture and development in October 1999, he repeated his often-stated belief in the significance of a focus on cultural issues, “*However you define culture...it is increasingly clear that those of us working in the field of sustainable development ignore it at our peril*” (Verhelst in Eade, *ibid*).

The anecdote above brings out the theoretical thinking at the bottom of Shona culture. Such a theoretical scheme is linked to the world of their everyday experience by statements linking the happenings within the metaphysical realm with happenings in the everyday world. It is culturally gratifying to note that after more than a century of concerted effort to obliterate Shona culture it has remained resilient. This is despite the onslaught from our own Shona disciples of Western modernity in the name of science and Christianity who have taken over as the heirs in the spread of what they take as modern thinking and practices. Wiredu’s caveat in evaluating our own culture may be important at this point. According to him: “*the process of sifting elements of our traditional thought and culture calls for a good measure of analytical circumspection lest we exchange the good as well as the bad in our traditional ways of life for dubious cultural imports*” (Wiredu, 1984:159). Partly through the influence of Western anthropology and partly through insufficient critical reflection on the contemporary African situation, many very well placed Africans have unfortunately bought into the Western ways of perceiving traditional African culture.

Case Studies on Usefulness of African Culture in Developmental Projects

Africa is experiencing rapid social change hence a renewed interest in rebuilding the continent in the name of African Renaissance. There are continued increases in ethnic, political and social conflicts, bedeviling the continent. Empowerment of African people is necessary for the understanding of the social forces that affect their lives.

The issue of cultural norms is at the heart of many current debates. The plurality of cultures in the world should not be viewed as a threat; rather it should be considered a source of enrichment. There are forces of globalization and modernization that pose challenges to the values and beliefs that provide the bedrock of the cultures of certain regions in Zimbabwe. In Namibia, a government proposed to build a dam project, which would have long-term effects on the Himba pastoral people, has created controversy that led some officials into scathing condemnation of those who defend “*bare breasted*” and “*primitive*” people who stand in the way of modernization. (The Observer, 29 January 1995 in Ishemo, *ibid*:33).

If the cultural dimension is integrated into development, this leads to the adoption of a less reductive and more all-embracing approach. Recent activities are of Michelin, the giant Western rubber conglomerate operating in Nigeria which has shown the top-down approach to “*development*.” Michelin expanded a rubber plantation into protected Okomu forest without concern for the environment and the culture of the local people. It destroyed medicinal trees, shrines and other symbols dear to the inhabitants. The company pleaded ignorance and its protest was:

“But we know the impact on the community can only be positive. We are providing employment, schools, clinics, electricity and water supplies.” (Financial Times, 8 March 1995, in Ishemo, *ibid*:33).

There is no local inhabitant of the African continent who objects to schools or clinics. The company had a different conception of “*development*” which involves destroying the symbols of the people’s identity. The company should have involved the local people in decision-making or incorporate their world-view into projects. In Guatemala, one important function of the “*traditional*” stove was to emit smoke, which, killed mosquitoes and pests in corn ears hung from rafters. This benefit was lost when the new stoves were introduced. To show that culture does not belong to the past, in a given cultural context, some elements are inherited, and others are adopted and created.

Culture is therefore defined as “*the complex whole of knowledge, wisdom, values, attitudes, customs and multiple resources which a community has inherited, adopted or created in order to flourish in the context of its social and natural environment*” (Verhelst and Tyndale in Eade, 2002:10). Technologies that are not specific to local techniques are not culturally familiar. Culture should not be relegated to a place of secondary importance. Cultural issues must of necessity be included in models for action, which set objectives at the beginning. When new technologies are to be introduced, Vandana Shiva (in Ishemo, 2002:35) has noted that all societies have “*ways of knowing*” and “*ways of doing*” and that:

... all societies, in all their diversity, have had science and technology systems on which their distinct and diverse development have been based. Technologies or systems of technologies bridge the gap between nature’s resources and human needs. Systems of knowledge and culture provide the perception and utilization of natural resources.

Science and technology without making cultural sense cannot achieve true development. Therefore technology is not culture-free. Since technology constitutes “*ways of doing*”, it is one of the principal elements of an African people’s identity. (Ishemo, *ibid*:35).

Conclusion

The paper’s thrust calls for the reversal of the Eurocentric paradigms of Africa where the perjured interpretations of Africa that have remained grafted on the mental processes and human aspirations of modern Africans thereby robbing them of their intellectual confidence and mental identity with regard to posterity. It is colonialism that has intimidated, but failed to conquer the African mind. Africa became conquered after gaining independence, only to become a true slave continent- mentally, politically, economically, religion-wise, educationally and social sub-culture-wise. (Nzewi, *ibid*: 276). It is our fervent hope, in the words of Nzewi (*ibid* :5), that:

After the bombardment of the invading tornados of fanciful knowledge, the indigenous lore of life will yet revive with innately refurbished shoots, and fulfill again the human mission of the musical arts in original Africa, and edify Africa’s mental and human posterity.

The present researchers have tried to give critical insights in showing that the negative “*images of Africa will not remain forever locked in the negative chambers of the past...[but] an Africa that is freed of the imposition of others and consequently an Africa that could rise at any occasion*” (Asante in Mengara, 2001:xv).

The absorption of Eurocentric sensibilities and values from the American worldview by Africans resulted in ill-conceived condescension towards their own norms, values and belief system. It is similar knowledge encapsulated in their culture that binds Africans together no wonder why Chancellor Williams cited by Springer (2003:4) has argued that; “*Africans comprise a single race, that this major theory and fact of black history, is one of the principal guidelines*”. There are several common cultural formations that are a pointer to similarities in tradition and speech patterns. This remarkable uniformity in the role of proverbs, of supernatural and religious beliefs permeated every facet of Africa life. (Springer, *ibid*: 4) In 1968, Dr Martin Luther King (Jnr) quoted by Nzewi (2007:202-3) gave a suggestion on what he called the “*world house*” when he stated that:

We have inherited a large house, a great “world house” in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu – a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.

The paper has shown that the time is now that African people’s worldview should assume a place as a global power through African organized cultural systems. We are faced with new challenges that have literally taken the continent by storm, what Meki Nzewi (*ibid*: 271) has called “the supersonic wizardry” which is an imperial encirclement and mental enslavement “from which the images of the African are marked absent except in negativity, a retreat into the culture and thus an Afrocentric worldview is mandatory” (Springer, *ibid*:7). Real authentic African history, the one about our essence, did not start with the twin process of enslavement and colonialism, because the daily cultural diet of African people existed before. It is this African spirituality that is inseparable from African philosophy, which continues to pervade, guide, illuminate and empower Africans’ existence into the unborn tomorrows with renewed vigor (*Ibid*: 8). Thus, we can conclusively acknowledge that Eurocentric notions on Africa misrepresent the African creative theory found in the indigenous sensibilities of human logic relevant to African communal living

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