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BETWEEN MODERNITY AND TRADITION:
AFRICAN IDENTITY IN A STATE OF TRANSITION

Abstract: *Tradition and modernity have been most of the time treated in scholarly debates as two diametrically-opposed apparatus 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. Through our discussion of the role of tradition and the interplay of negative tradition within 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 social context resultant from the contaminated interconnection between European modernity and African archaic traditions. The colonial legacy, the context within which European modernity and African traditions met, according to this study, should not be overlooked for any forward-looking perspective.*

Introduction

In this age of globalization, terms like "structural readjustment" and "cultural rehabilitation" can be synonymous with drastic changes to take place within communities. In the present African context, globalizing tendencies might induce the question of how one can attain and acquire modernity without being completely dominated 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. Therefore, doubts about where and how to belong are more than likely to arise. The present article seeks meticulous attention to issues relating to African identity and the self. Whether considering tradition as a fossilized and inhibitive entity or as an inspiring and progressive fund of knowledge is one major on-going subject of reflection. African intellectuals have been particularly attentive with Africa's apprehension of European Modernity and its Cartesian premises.

This article takes in consideration that intellectual activity which could be helpful to distinguish between genuine and illusory forms of self-knowledge. The impact of such propulsion is seeking the foundation of 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

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the historical process to date which has deposited in [him] an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory."(Gramsci 324) One may wonder if such projection of identity with its unmistaken Marxist nuisances can ever be useful in finding ways out of the present general listlessness in the African continent, particularly when knowing that such listlessness actually reflects a troubled self that is uncertain where to belong. Given the colonial heritage of the African reality, Albert Memmi (1957) observes that:

> La colonisation fausse les rapports humains, détruit ou sclérose les institutions, et corrompt les hommes, colonisateurs et colonisés. Pour vivre, le colonisé a besoin de supprimer la colonisation. Mais pour devenir un homme, il doit supprimer le colonisé qu'il est devenu. Si l'Européen doit annihiler en lui le colonisateur, le colonisé doit dépasser le colonisé. (Memmi, *Portrait* 125)

Debarred from assuming direct responsibility by long decades of colonialism, African local cultures have been severely impaired, and in some cases, defaced. When considering Albert Memmi's position about the evils of colonialism, then one cannot overlook how the calculated distancing of the African self from the management of daily domestic affairs has resulted in blurred perceptions about both the self and others. 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 and in Memmi's opinion, 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 such calls 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 to address deeper questions, probably about what to read and to learn from the story of Africa (traditions) and in which 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.

A Historical Review of the Issue: Identity Expressed through Violence

Some inherited ways and practices together with repressive, self-serving types of African nationalism predominating the postcolonial period have resulted in a context infected with *traditionality*. The qualifier "infected" is preferred here to underline the crippling conditions caused by traditionality. In this context, the absence of freedom can be seen as the first capital sin. One of the protagonists of Somali novelist, Nuruddin Farah in *Close Sesame* (the third novel in a trilogy entitled: *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*) avows: "…that confinement in prison opened to Deeriye a vista of a wider, larger world: detention compelled him to think of the history and contradictions which the neo-colonial person lives in; detention forced to see himself not only as a

spokesman of a clan, but made it obvious to him that he was a member of a world's oppressed." (Farah 113) Here the experience of prison, violent as it is, helps Deeriye bridge with his reasoning of identity from being *traditionally* limited by clan and blood to a larger and more enclosing one, based on coalitions of oppressor versus oppressed. Present-day Africans no longer trust their own neocolonial institutions. As a result, those Africans who are not as "privileged" as Farah's protagonist with the mind-opening experience of confinement show cases where they prove to be still overwhelmed with troubles inside their selves. Most of the time, these African individuals live under a seemingly permanent self-exile. Hence they cannot be expected to serve positively their states. They are characterized by stasis and lack of engagement when it comes to widely-acclaimed projects regarding genuine development. Half a century or so of neocolonial rule preceded by decades of colonial domination have produced a patent lack of trust in institutions, whatever the ideals these institutions may claim to offer. Cases about the loss of hope and negativity on the part of the African populace at large can be witnessed in the political studies like: Trevor Jones, *Ghana's First Republic 1960-1966*. This one evolves on the theme of corruption in politics, notably in Ghana. But more central than just the disappointment is the general unwillingness to believe in any rebirth or regeneration.

It is perfectly relevant in this connection to give a fairly round picture of how violence committed against the African self during the post-colonial period (and before) has materially threatened positive constructions of that same self. In this regard, it is important to take the state of affairs of Ghana as a case supporting this emphasis on the interplay between violence and identity formations. Even before the appearance of the European interests in the Gold Coast there existed a deep disharmony between hunting Ewe tribes and relatively sophisticated Akan farming communities. Slave trade and later colonial rule intensified this disharmony. The result is that after the official demise of the Asantehene in 1901, chiefs became more visible and chieftaincy as a shadow institution funded by colonial administrations started to be more and more powerful. It was for stipended-chiefs that domestic matters like the collection of taxes, jurisdiction, order and the regulation of other aspects of life were left. It was not easy for various ethnic-based movements to lead the struggle for self rule and later for total independence simply because of the divisions fuelled by those traditional chiefs. In those circumstances (in the late 1940's) Kwame Nkrumah's call for unity under the banner of the new idea of nationalism was successful to bring forth independence but only for a time. Soon the old disputes rose up again. Nkrumah banished his former political allies (K. M. Busia was ousted and Joseph B. Danquah was put in a top security prison where he finally died). The military coup that removed Nkrumah from office was not a surprise since it just gave voice to this deeply rooted distrust in anti-traditionalistic brand of rule. Before long, Busia (Nkrumah's former ally and later staunch enemy) was handed power in 1969, hypothetically at least, to "readjust" Nkrumah's ideological deviations. Between 1966 and 1982, Ghana witnessed four successful coups (other three unsuccessful ones took place during Rawlings' first two years only!) in which the intervention of the military was often violent, not to say, bloody. Ghana was thus split between two main political ideologies: on the one hand, the legacy of traditionalists or the Busia-Danquah style of thinking, and

on the other, the Nkrumahists. In this respect, Lieutenant—General Jerry Rawlings (here it is observed the fact of hijacking African polity by military men and what this implies in terms of violence and retardation of nation-building) found it almost impossible to break away from the influence of these two political mantles which, for him, seemed to ruin any prospects of moving ahead with progress in Ghana. Despite his peaceful stepping out of power in 2001 (through democratically organized elections), Rawlings is often remembered, if only in the western media, as a brutal dictator who executed three former heads of state. In a television show for the BBC *Hard Talk*, Jerry Rawlings rationalizes this execution as a necessary measure for saving the unity of the nation for which he is responsible. Given the entire circumstances of his rule together with the legacy of the violent history of Ghana (not necessarily the political only), Rawlings' deeds may look quite justified since there was no other way whereby a central and powerful government could make itself respected and its decisions functional. (Rawlings)

More adequately, political violence in Ghana only epitomizes the culture of violence instituted in the contemporary African self as a result of, what is termed below *Traditionality*. Suffice it to know that like elsewhere in Africa "party supporters [in Ghana] are motivated by ethnic considerations rather than by true and sophisticated ideology. The same source reports that today's Ghana is still swarmed with "over 100 chieftaincy disputes […], several of which have been complicated when politicians and political parties have supported one or other faction." (Tsikata, "Identities" 25) Still again, religious and ethnic differences continue to ignite resentment between police and communities and even between football teams' supporters. More recently, Ghanaian stadiums have become places where North-South hostile sentiments are violently expressed. Hence why a long way stretches before identity in Ghana, and perhaps in all Africa, can be apprehended along more positive lines than those of ethnicity, religion or geographical distribution of populations. Such a deplorable state of affairs may be due more to a failure of approximations and theorizations which, in their scarcity or impracticality, have given excuse to political, ethnic, religious and sectarian manifestations of violence. Similarly, Nigeria, Congo, and other parts of the continent have rarely escaped the same unhappy states of affairs. Observing multiple state-collapsed situations in the continent, Eghosa E. Osaghae similarly observes: "[I]ssues of contested identity, autonomy, citizenship, equity, power sharing and rights loomed larger than ever before, thanks to the contradictions of globalisation, democratization, liberalization and other simultaneous economic and social processes that gave vent and legitimacy to non-state and anti-state claims and demands." (Osaghae 164) This reveals the endurance and depth of the issue of identity and its centrality in the search for ways to sort out the ills of the continent.

Overwhelmed with the reduction of identity to expressions of violence by politicians, contemporary Ghanaian novelist, Ayi kwei Armah vows his disbelief in politicians and politics ever to find solutions for what he assesses as a cultural crisis of identity. He even goes so far to strip them from their African identity. In *The Eloquence of the Scribes* (2006), his autobiography, Armah declares:

> Our problem is that we think our politicians can lead us, *but politicians cannot be Africans*—yet. An African identity is not a five-year plan. It is a long-range necessity, requiring sustained, intelligent, determined planning. That is work for cultural workers, the kind of intellectuals who can spend twenty, forty years working on a problem, so systematically that after they die, their colleagues can continue the same work, at higher levels. (Armah 236)

True and progressive debates over identity have to find home among cultural workers or "healers", not politicians or, as Armah clarifies, "One root of our current structural and identity problems in Africa is that the continent entered a highly active phase of political agitations with very little time for cultural workers to do the necessary preparatory work." (Armah 238) In this respect, the need for "preparatory work" is neither illusory nor a way to obscure African realities. Concepts and principles which would shape the profile of a new African society to come are vital.

Modernity and Traditionality: Working out the Concepts

Kwame Anthony Appiah, one African-American scholar, has articulated 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." (Appiah 105) As a result Appiah does not formulate the idea of a single African identity. He discusses rather diverse and multiple African identities "to recall the variety of precolonial cultures" and the "differences in colonial experience". It is after doing away with the effects of colonialism, Appiah deliberates, that there can be a debate over an emerging African identity which is presently not fully apparent. 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'" (Appiah 105) can be included. In short, identity for Appiah is an amalgam of both rational and irrational considerations. Hence the reason why it is always theoretically fraught with uncertainties as it is after all yet to be formed. Presently as well as formerly, there have been cases of varied identities and what shapes this embryonic unifying identity project, which Appiah refers to as emerging, is more and more the swaying postures of modernity as manifested in cultural imperialism in Africa. This culture of imperialism is articulated by Edward Said as a system and practice "integrated and fused things within it, and taken together it […] made the world one." (Said 6) In this regard one cannot adequately debate Africa's quest for identity without serious attendance to the conditions of the possibility of this emerging identity.

Yet, before underlining the conditions of possibility for this exceptional African experience, it is interesting to review some dissenting voices, thinkers who argue in favor 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." (Kanneh 43) While there may exist some relevance to this outlook (for

117

the book is extensively documented), still some postmodernist trends of de-centering narratives can be detected. This suspicion is particularly valid when given the unilateral western power and domination all over the world. Even if there might never been a single African identity, the call to set up one presently 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 it is a future project refereeing to future possibility. It is true that Appiah's designation can be a little variation from "imagined" (Anderson) generalization fitting into a certain conciliatory tone only because he seems to have grown exhausted from the militant language, prevailing almost everywhere. Very possibly, not only is the generalization thorny but, more deeply, the intellectual activity 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 tendency to generalize and come out with unspecified claims *on* and *about* identity reveals a worldview made essentially possible by the politics of representation. Given this, such an outcome could not be possible 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." (Masolo 293-294) 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, a philosophical school, is methodologically unsound as it neither questions nor doubts "first person's beliefs about the way things seem as the foundation of knowledge." (Masolo 295) 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." (Masolo 297) Masolo's perspective is perhaps more compelling since it enables observers to investigate the components of one's background without being affected and negatively influenced by the tribulations of another's.

Following this line of approach, it cannot be mistaken that when given the African condition, one constituent piece of identity is, of course, "Tradition". For tradition has always been there, part of the self, both in the metaphysical (ontological) and cultural sense. To start with, tradition indicates several cultural elements, and all of them, in my opinion, are interdependent. Perhaps the most readily accepted definition is the etymological one *"tradition"*. Derived from Latin, the word stands for "delivery, surrender, a handing down". Little wonder, then, if it has not been used in almost all languages as "a doublet of treason" (Harper) 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." (Williams 318) He observes that the word's significance "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." (Williams 319) As a matter of a fact, this feeling of betrayal and surrender generated from tradition and motivated by some tradition-apologetics is responsible for the creation of a traditionalist's mind set. According to Williams, the feeling of surrender and betrayal 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." (Williams 319-320) Having reached that, however, the present study does overlook the progressivist and scientific premises of Williams from which he bases his definition and which I think are 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" (Shils 3). The first type Edward Shils labels as "Tradition of Change or of Reason", whereas the second as "Tradition of Traditionality." (Shils. 4) In this regard and considering how tradition can be crucial for shaping the present state of affairs in Africa, one has to consider Willie Abraham's view on tradition is not approving. For "[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." (Abraham 161) 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 above are "tradition apologists". These are people who are motivated by the fear of uprootedness due to what they think as "overdoses of modernity". While conscious of the importance of their efforts, these people 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, when approving Shils' conceptualization of both "historical" and "traditional" as two opposite reactions to the concept of "Tradition". 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 has to consider the fact 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" habits of the mind, and "crippling", "fossilized" or "inhibitive" rites and practices on the other.

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 respective milieu. By traditionality it is meant that cast of mind that is dominantly mythical and hopelessly unprepared for reasonable functioning of the mind. Put differently, this case escalates to the extent that it can be qualified as ahistorical. Traditionality is most of the time in favor of *expecting* phenomena to take place, preferring to stay an object instead of acting as a subject. Within such a system, the individual is always helpless before the forces which he thinks are in control of his fate. For he can neither shape his own destiny nor anticipate it to fit into some rewarding outcome. In addition, Traditionality takes ahistoricity beyond its limits so that 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 of discriminating between what is progressive and constructive and what is inhibitive and destructive. Eventually, they 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 *not* 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.

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 during two periods: during and after colonization. Placide Tempels' glorification, not to say glamorization, of ancient Bantu customs readily comes as the perfect case in point. For Makang, Tempels' entire 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." (Makang 329) 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." (Makang 333) 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, traditionality becomes a value only in as far as gets the contemporary African individual out of history by hideously and deliberately eliminating their 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 deliberating 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 (as a result of the oppression of colonialism, and whose impact on Africans extends to decades after formal decolinization) (Memmi, *Portrait* 130), the only alternative left for people in this situation is tradition. 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."(Memmi, "Culture and Tradition" 262) Despite being more theoretical, the answer, according to the same scholar, has to be handled through the creation of a living culture. Similarly, tradition should not be processed as a substitute for action (Memmi, *Decolonization* 54).

Perhaps a more impartial and relevant outlook 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", delineates 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 follwing independence could not take place without the internalization of the Enlightenment as a universal project with almost a total discount of non-European experiences (Bhabha). Bhabha understands this disregard as an ill-attendance to "the temporality" dimension in the life of the nation. Culturally speaking, such ill-attendance can be traced to "the production of the nation as a narration." For, there exists always "a split between the continuitist, accumulative, temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative." Consequently, Bhabha concludes with his definition of "ambivalence" as: "[I]t is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing* the nation." (Bhabha 26)

Knowing that only by the time African communities start to fashion their everyday actions with symbols selectively amassed from their pasts that one can aspire to a constructive shaping of an authentic identity and that can be principally 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…" (Makang 336) While waiting for this happy metamorphosis to take shape, one can still notice the centrality of tradition both as a field of investigation and a discourse both *of* the perception of human knowledge in general and a solid basis for a praxis. Traditionality, in the entire web of relationships it draws, justifies the need for a framework of writing with 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." (Foucault 23)

In the same line, too, it is meant by "historicist" that cast of mind which enjoys the ability to distinguish fact from illusion; perceives, understands and later reacts to human realities originally. In other words, historicity as a concept should result always in a critical understanding of the historical moment. It can be realised by ascribing to the symbology of the metaphor instead of adhering to simple imageries. Authenticity of judgment should be in effect the equivalent of historicity. In actual terms, historicity would result in minds, or rather in intellectuals having, 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.) (p. 333)

In case we query why Gramsci's intellectuals' path is "long, difficult, full of contradictions", we are to associate this with, quite obviously, the traditionalist's resistance; a reaction 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 for complexity *per se*. There exists sufficient evidence to suggest that such mind patterns are actually at the heart of what might constitute 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 sufficient levels of 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 background. Little wonder then that they both exercise a mutual influence on each other. While the historicist looks ahead, progressively and actively, the traditionalist, however, lays obstacles in the historicist's path and sets him into the world of utopia. Most of the time, the traditionalist looks down on the historicist; he inwardly derides him, makes him feel pitiable or out of time. In reflecting over situation from various contemporary African novels, it becomes easy to highlight that *Traditionality* creates a space that is reprehensibly locked and prison-like for the historicist. Therefore, the traditionalist's incapacity to look and behave constructively with the historicist shocks the latter and pushes him further into an unhealthy dissent. As a reaction to this situation, we read of protagonists (or historicists) who often retreat or withdraw into themselves; they isolate themselves in order to find their peace and sense of being.

What is more frustrating for the historicist as a result of *Traditionality* is the latter's blurring of priorities and agendas. The celebrated poet and scholar, Aimé Césaire defines an intellectual as "the conscience of [his] community". Part of remaining his community's "conscience", for Césaire, is the necessity to attend both to the "universal" and the "particular". Such focus involves the historicist automatically in an identity emergency, for how can this historicist come to make his community stand to advantage and draw a sharp demarcation between the universal and the particular? This is not easy knowing that "…we must be lucid: select what we need and follow out 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." (Césaire 45-46) This is a fine statement that recalls Gramsci's, too. But often the historicist working in traditionalism-infected environment does not enjoy the luxury of these noble thoughts. Torn between the fact of being a late comer 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".

Frantz Fanon relates the difficulty caused by traditionalists as such difficulty renders inoperative genuine attempts at transcending the simple image of colonialism as *inherently* wrong. That is why people remain confused and impaired from understanding the far-reaching implications from of the metaphor of nationalism. Fanon devotes one central chapter in his book to *Traditionality*: "Grandeur et faiblesses de la spontanéité". He constantly deplores 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. These people of the country generally do not tolerate modern views and way, contrary to 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 prioritizing the well-being of the community in the notion of a modern civil state, could awaken the rural inhabitants to their role in the liberation of the country and ignite the necessary liberating violence. Interestingly, Fanon in a similar context had already acknowledged the debilitating effects resulting from the absence of ideology (Fanon, *Les Damnés* 184). 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 (Tsikata, "Successful Reformers" 20).

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. Such derisions can be highlighted when this traditionalist mind is confronted with vestiges or finished products of European modernity. People with a traditionalist outlook seem to fail to draw correct comparisons about how and why Europeans supersede Africans regarding aspects of everyday life.

Indeed, they do not 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 from the scholars cited above. Instead of treating European-oriented Modernity as a break from or another entity competing with local African traditionality, rather this aspect of Modernity, that is consumerism, as exacerbating the legacy of *traditionality* and solidifing 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 shortsighted in as much as to enable observers to safely conclude that African modernity is perceived primarily as inhibitive for a meaningful and constructive approach of African identity.

In support of this thesis advanced in this article lies 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 numerous other paths that could be more fitting and genuine. 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." (Redpath 151) According to this scholar, it is historically verified that 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 Petrach, Dante, Machiavelli, Rabelais and other humanists) and the ideas of religious Reformation. What is problematic with the Cartesian premises is that what had been 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

Adding on what has been advanced so far, it is noticeable that putting in place alternative perspectives and methods by which Africans can positively identify themselves with the time and space can be exceptionally rewarding. The need to exercise caution from ready-made formulas and models is critical for true and functional self-understanding. In other words, Africans today need to explore original paths in order to postulate an identity tailored to meet the challenges that they face themselves, rather than rely on the experience of others. 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-

Cultures in/of Transition

reflexive and self-reflective project of enlightenment on its own terms, since it is beyond the *pale* of reason…"(1997, p. 151) 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-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]." (Eze 343) Probably, no one can deny the alarming scale of brain-drain and public alienation which we think could only result from inflammations and bleeding fissures inside the self. Perhaps it is not news that freedom is central to engagement and constructive thinking on the part of all human beings, Africans included. There remains a final plea, that of taking the questions rather than the certainties of this article as its central achievement. Only further approximations, examinations and re-immersions can crystallize such a better future Africans all look forward to.

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Cultures in/of Transition

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