

A Re-Interpretation of the Post-Modernist Tradition in the Discourse of African Philosophy

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Abstract: It is a truism in our world today that the effects of Post-Modernism have crept into many African societies and are already having impacts on the people's culture and philosophy. Many Africans are consciously or unconsciously exhibiting postmodern tendencies, some of which negate core African culture, values and philosophy. African philosophy is a unique philosophy with its own culture that may not agree many times with post-modern culture. This is because its concern is the promotion and preservation of fundamental African values and culture. The concern of this paper is the way post-modern culture is fast eroding the core existential values of the people of Africa. Some of these values are important to the livelihood and existence of the people. Sequel to this, this paper evaluates post modernism in the light of its effects on fundamental African culture and philosophy. Ultimately, the purpose is to find out how core African values can be protected in the midst of postmodern incursion. It is also to interrogate post-modernism in a manner that reveals its tenets and also exposes these tenets to African understanding.

Keywords: Post-Modernism, African Philosophy, Values, Culture

Introduction

The complexity of the world has given birth to the task of critical thinking about the world. The need to understand and resolve this complexity and the interaction of man with the trends in the cosmos leads to the emergence of theories and ideologies. Trending philosophies arrive with different effects on people's social, political, religious and economic lives. As part of this development, the world transited from the philosophical ideology of modernism along with its various postulations and prospects to herald a new epoch known as post-modernism. Post-modernism,

one of the most significant doctrines that the world has ever witnessed, is considered a rebellion against modernism.

Post-modernism is a Western philosophy that has influenced other cultures and philosophies, and African culture and philosophy are not insulated against it. It has brought a shift in the cultural beliefs of many African societies. It has placed question mark on the contents of African worldview. It is spreading so fast to the effect that the fundamental values of African culture are being eroded. The influence of music, social media, films, the internet, and indeed the World Wide Web also plays a catalyst role in the spread of postmodernism in Africa.

The concern of this paper is the effect of the spread of post-modernism on African philosophy and culture. This is because African philosophy comes with its on uniqueness that expresses the worldview of the people of Africa. It is this worldview that defines their existence, culture, belief, environment and their relationship with social institutions, nature, objects, other people and spirituality. Since postmodernism may not see these things the same way as Africans sees them, there is the need to interrogate the two concepts in a manner that gives postmodernism an African understanding.

The heart of this paper as a result is a re-interpretation of post-modern tradition in the light of African philosophy and culture. By this, the paper considers the benefits and dangers that postmodernism portends for African culture and posit an equilibrium that is safe for the African people, culture and philosophy.

An Analysis of Post-Modernism

The complexity of the term postmodernism is seen in the divergent ways it has been perceived by scholars. While proponents agree on some of its tenets, they are sharply divided in their consideration of it. Brann opines that the best way to handle its definition is to consider it as a construct. By this, the phenomenon would require a deconstruction of the word.¹ This will require breaking it down into pieces and thereafter expressing it by its contents, propositions, and central themes.

Postmodernism is conceived by some as an off-shoot of modernism. To this school of thought, it must be explained in relation to modernism. Though a new philosophical development,

¹ Eva T. H. Brann, "What is Postmodernism?" *Harvard Review of Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1992), 4.

it is an epoch that developed from modernism. Hence, postmodernism cannot be properly understood without an appropriate consideration of modernism.² The word “post” has its origin in Latin and it means “after this, or because of this.”³ This would suggest that the theory of postmodernism would be an enhanced version of modernism: a theory that arises after modernism.

Modernism represents the period of European thought that developed out of Renaissance (14th – 17th centuries) and flourishes in the Enlightenment (17th -19th centuries). Modernism is used to denote the type of society that is highly differentiated from a structural-functional point of view, dominated by a capitalist economy, with a complex division of labour, industrialization, urbanization, science and technology, political and ethical individualism. Modernism appreciates human intellect as the significant strength of humans and identifies this strength as the basis of scientific mentality. It stresses empiricism, objectivity and rejects superstition, veracity and religion.⁴

A contrary view sees postmodernism as a reactionary philosophy and a resentful projection against modernism and other dominant philosophies before it. Hicks corroboratively suggests that postmodernism is an activist plan against the coalition of reason and power, proposing that Western powers are the specific target of this philosophical thought.⁵ Its resentful attitude to modernism is further manifested in its cultural outlook that rejects meta-narratives and totalizing agenda. Its opposition to modernism is also reflected in its broad view as a movement that “represents a form of cultural realism about such things as reality, truth, reason, value, linguistic meaning and the self and other notions.”⁶

Lyotard, a prominent advocate of postmodernism, considers it as a sentiment, a bias, or a mood. It is like saying a

² Dewan Hossain & Sherifu Karim, “Postmodernism: Issues and Problems,” *Asian Journal of Science and Humanities* 2, no. 2 (May 2013): 173.

³ William Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought* (Calev Jersy: Humanities Press, 1980), 452.

⁴ David Lyon, *Postmodernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 27.

⁵ Stephen R. C. Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (Temple: Scholargy Publishing, 2004), 13.

⁶ J. P. Moreland & William Lane, *Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP Academics, 2003), 145.

particular philosophical mindset. Resultantly, all those whose mind is set against the status quo of tradition and the dogma of modernism can be said to be postmodern.⁷ It does not consist in a set of dogma but a state of mind that is non-conformist and set to oppose anything modern. The above expresses one of the challenges of postmodernism to African philosophy and culture. It suggests and promotes a mindset that is a deliberate opposition to African values and norms. It makes individuals aim at being non-conformist. It encourages individuals to refuse to abide by acceptable societal and cultural tradition.

To appropriately describe postmodernism, we will discuss the ideas that characterize it and its presuppositions. These ideas also describe its philosophical foundation. Akuul in this regard avers that postmodernism can be described by its characteristics, and he identifies three major features of the concept. First, postmodernism is skeptical about the ideas and ideals that make modernism, particularly the ideas of progress, objectivity, reason, certainty and grand narrative. Second, it represents the avowal that meaning and experience can only be fashioned by the individual.⁸ In essence, an author does not have an absolute objectivity to his or her writing. No one can claim to be original in matters of text interpretation and understanding of human experience. In relation to African philosophy and culture, it suggests that what is true of cultural analysis and interpretation is not the society's meta-narrative but the meaning the individual gives to it. By this, values, norms and practices are relativized. It also suggests that no African scholar can be said to be an expert on issues of African tradition. No African can claim exclusive knowledge of the African culture. A non-African can interpret the culture in a way that pleases him and will be assumed to be right. This promotes rebellion against a people's tradition, values and leadership. Some of these values and tradition are relevant to the people's existence.

Globalization is another veritable feature of postmodernism. This describes a culturally pluralistic and interconnected global society, lacking any single dominant center of political power, communication or intellectual production. The world in this sense is conceived as a global village where there is no discrimination but dominated by exchange of ideas. This also

⁷ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁸ Timbeee Akuul, "Postmodernism and Its Relevance to African Development," *Continental Journal of Sustainable Development* 1 (2010): 57-61.

allows for socio-cultural critique where one culture can learn and benefit from the other. It, however, portends the danger of making a society a dumping ground of cultures where the recipient culture loses the fundamental of her cultural values, and African culture is in danger of this.

Moreland corroborated Akuul with his six characteristics of postmodernism.⁹ His effort is a more specific and detailed analysis than that of Akuul. To him, the best way to describe postmodernism is to list the major ideas and mindset that propel the movement and also serve as its philosophical foundation. First is the rejection of correspondence theory of truth. There is no general or universal meaning for truth. Hence, truth, like writings and speeches, is relativized and pragmatized. The implication is that what is true to a Yoruba man in Nigeria may not be true to a Hausa, Igbo, Idoma or Itsekiri man, all in Nigeria. Postmodernism also rejects the mindset of an objective reality. By this, it rejects the idea of the existence of a world that is not subject to the individual's thought. The world cannot be said to exist without human thoughts, languages and theories. Hence, diversity is the reality of the world. The diversity of human culture and individual thoughts is what the world needs to grow.¹⁰

There is also the rejection of universally acceptable standards for determining epistemological status of belief. A valid implication of the above is that there is no single measure to determine whether an action is good or bad, whether something is true or false, or whether an action is rational or irrational. It became problematic to argue for a common value and ethics. Morality can only be discussed within the realm of individual thought, experience and feelings. Closely related to the above is the postmodern rejection of the existence of trans-cultural standards for determining value. No world dominant value is determined by individual culture. Postmodernism denies the existence of a standard that can be used to determine the true value of anything.

The fifth idea or mindset that propels postmodernism is the rejection of the idea of a unified objective real self. It believes that the self is a social phenomenal that is activated within a linguistic structure within which it exists. This basically means

⁹ J. P. Moreland, "Postmodernism and the Christian Life, Part 1," *Boundless*, July 8, 2004, <https://www.boundless.org/faith/postmodernism-and-the-christian-life-part-1/>.

¹⁰ Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, 13.

that the self is what a community, or a social structure says it is. This is contrary to some extant position that postmodernism entirely rejects the idea of a social community. Lastly, postmodernism rejects the idea of a fixed objective meaning of any texts, sentences, utterances and signs. It opposes the mindset of a grand narrative. This implies that authors and speakers do not have exclusive right to the meaning of what they say or write. This is entrenched in the idea that authors do not follow their text to where readers interpret them. Therefore, the meaning of any text, sentence, utterance or sign is subject to readers or listeners. Postmodernism is indeed a resentful projection.

Joseph Olagunju summarizes the propositions of postmodernism as follows.¹¹ Postmodernism proposes the denial of truth as absolute. Hence, every assertion can be questioned. It claims that all religions are valid but rejects exclusive faith. By implication, it believes in the vital role of God in human activities. Postmodernism is experience-based and not experiment or science-based. In relation to this, it rejects logic and objectivity but embraces self-conceptualization and rationalization. Postmodernism also proposes that leaders earn respect rather than get respect; audience participate in learning rather than passive listening and that everyone can critically reason. Further, it assumes that morality is personal and national boundaries hinder human development unlike globalization. It opines that every position is correct as long as the proponent can justify it.

Understanding African Philosophy from Its Theorists

The debate about the efficacy and existence of African philosophy has been laid to rest and African philosophy has since become an enterprise. This is because African brand of philosophy with its uniqueness reflected in its meaning and nature has been firmly established in epistemological discourse. As a result, many scholars have reflected on what constitutes African Philosophy. The inability of scholars to entirely agree on the nature of this enterprise is not to diminish its existence but that the philosophical enterprise in general is open to varieties of conceptions and possibilities.¹² The beauty of philosophy as a practical endeavor is in this diversity of opinions.

¹¹ Joseph O. Olagunju, "God and Hope in a Hopeless Postmodern World," Paper Presented at the 12th International Theological Education Conference at NBTS, Ogbomoso, 3rd-5th March, 2015.

¹² Sunday Layi Oladipupo, *African Philosophy: Whose Past and which Modernity?* (Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2021), 5.

Generally, African philosophy suggests the existence of a philosophy that is indigenous to the people of Africa. This philosophy has its foundation in the African worldview. However, the idea of African worldview should be understood in both general and restricted sense because what is called African worldview is not one shared by all Africans in its totality but rather some features of common elements of belief among the people of Africa. This worldview has been passed to the people from generation to generation.¹³ In the same sense, African philosophy must be understood as comprising philosophical elements and features that are common to the majority of people of Africa and not necessarily all the people of the continent. Consequently, African philosophy is not a suggestion that African societies have entirely the same culture or that Africans are not different in some regards. This is similar to the use of Western philosophy which does not connote that the people of the global North share an entirely similar philosophy.

The genesis of academic African philosophy can be traced to the pioneering efforts of African scholars such as J. S. Mbiti, Alexis Kagame, Placides Temple, Kwasi Wiredu, Odera Oruka, P. Hountondji and S. B. Oluwole. The works of these founders of African philosophy qualifies the existence of African philosophy as one that has fulfilled all necessary categories that qualify a cultural philosophy. Two different canons are used in classifying philosophes into cultural types. The first is the canon that determines or establishes universal similarities among philosophical literary pieces. African philosophy is qualified in this regard to be classified so because African societies share many central similarities though they may be different in some regards.

The second canon is the one that determines cultural characteristics that distinct philosophical work from general group.¹⁴ Obviously, African philosophy has distinct cultural characteristics that separate it from other groups like Western and Asian philosophies. Anyanwu on this opines that no

¹³ G. Tangwa, "African Philosophy: Appraisal of a Recurrent Problematics," in *Handbook of African Philosophy*, eds. Adesina Afolayan and Toyin Folola (New York: The Palgraic Springen Nature, 2017), 19-20.

¹⁴ S. B. Oluwole, "The Africanness of a Philosophy," in *Postkolonialities Philosophieren: African*, eds. Nagel-Docekul and Ita Winner (Wlen: Oldenburgverleg, 1991), 101-24.

philosophy can be detached from its original culture since every philosophy is a product of a culture that conditioned it.¹⁵

With the above clarification, it is imperative to discuss what constitutes and distinguishes African philosophy from other philosophies. There are two major schools of thought on what makes an African philosophy. They are the purists and the Western apologists. The attention of this paper will be devoted more to the purists because they gave the explanation of the founders and core apostles of African philosophy.

To the purists, the validity of African philosophy has its foundation in the critical reflection of the African worldview. To them, the philosophy of the people of Africa should not be subjected to the dogmatic imitation of Western philosophy.¹⁶ Resultantly, African philosophy is described by its cultural identity. It is the philosophy that is rooted and whose discourse arises mainly from the history, culture, and political experience of the people.¹⁷ Oke in this regard avers that African philosophy should be applied to discourse “that have the objective of ridding the African continent of cultural factors that could obstruct the continent’s march to modernity and development in learning, politics and other social relations.”¹⁸ This description is both apologetic and developmental. To him, African philosophy must match the cultural identity of the people of Africa, defend or contend their course, and also focus on the development of the people and land of Africa.

The ultimate purpose of any philosophy is to positively impact human existence and human environment. Oluwole asserts that the ultimate goal of any African literary piece should be humanism, a philosophy that gives priority to the improvement of human condition. Therefore, any philosophy that seeks to improve the human condition of the people of Africa can be characterized as African philosophy.¹⁹

¹⁵ K. C. Anyanwu, *The Atomistic and Holistic Philosopher: A Strife between the Analytic and Metaphysical Modes of Thought* (North Fork: Heartlad Publishers, 1981), 78.

¹⁶ Paulin J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), xiii.

¹⁷ Tangwa, “African Philosophy: Appraisal of a Recurrent Problematics.”

¹⁸ M. Oke, “Modelling the Contemporary African Philosophers: Kwasi Wiredu in Focus,” in *The Third Way in African Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Kwasi Wiredu*, ed. Oladipo Olusegun (Ibadan: Hope Publication, 2002), 23.

¹⁹ Oluwole, “The Africanness of a Philosophy,” 16.

Some have also characterized African philosophy as the one whose conceptual analysis is rooted in African realities. It means a philosophy that is original to the people of Africa. A distinguishing element is that it must be done by one that is an African and also versed in African culture. Bodunrin in this regard suggests that African philosophy is one that is “done by African philosophers whether it be in the area of logic, metaphysics, ethics, or history of philosophy. It is desirable that the works be set in some African context but is not necessary that they be so.”²⁰ However, being an African and being versed in African culture is not a cut and dry pre-requisite for African philosophy. The centrality of culture is a major yardstick.²¹ Hountondji also emphasizes the geographical habitation of the author as a condition for a philosophy to be regarded as African. A work is, therefore, qualified to be categorized as African philosophy if the writer resides or works in Africa.²² This has been criticized by many as not being a sufficient argument. It is more important for the work to satisfy the canon of Africaness of a literary piece. That is, it must be a critical reflection of the worldview of the people of Africa.

Hountondji in continuation of his argument of what makes a philosophy an African philosophy avers that the text of such a philosophy should be an oral or writing product of an African.²³ It appears that he rates documentary evidence above oral evidence. Oruka on the other hand argues that African philosophy must fulfill two important conditions. First, it must be authored by an African and it must address specific African issues. The point of African authorship has not been a point of general agreement as some opine that non-Africans can effectively write on an African specific issue.

It is also important for African philosophy to take into consideration the emotional and aesthetic aspects of life. This is different from a highly rational and scientific philosophy of the West. In agreement with this, some contemporary Western philosophies like existentialism and postmodernism have recognized the emotional part of humanity as an essential part of

²⁰ Peter O. Bodunrin, “The Question of African Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 56 (1981): 161-79.

²¹ Olaadipupo, *African Philosophy: Whose Past and which Modernity?*, 13.

²² P. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, 33.

²³ Ada Agada, “African Philosophy and the Challenge of Innovative Thinking,” *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK)* 5, no .1 (June 2013): 41.

philosophy.²⁴ Agada opines that the emotional aspect of man is imperative if a holistic understanding of man must be achieved – that man is naturally emotional, and that nature cannot be detached from his being. Agada was critical of some Western philosophies for “taking full account of man’s concrete situation which is interesting but failing to account for the fatality of the universe, thus preparing the way for the despair-laden post-modernist tradition.”²⁵

The second school of thought on what constitutes the African philosophy is the Western apologists who contend that African philosophy cannot be detached from Western ideas.²⁶ This has been generally regarded as colonialist, imperialistic and oppressive in nature, an attempt to keep the philosophy of the African people under the dictates of the Western world. Since the two cultures are sharply different in many regards, Western philosophy must give the people of Africa the opportunity to grow and promote their own philosophy in a manner that it becomes impactful to human condition.

A balanced school of thought is the social critique approach that takes a deep reflection of African culture, values, and norm but also opens to cross cultural critique of them with the aim of isolating positive things that can be learnt from other cultures. This cross cultural openness will not be limited to Western culture but to other cultures where positive criteria can be imbibed. The Western apologetic approach is, therefore, regarded by this paper as arrogant, oppressive and anti-African development.

It is important to conclude this section of the paper with the emphasis on the need for African philosophy to have universal application.²⁷ That is, other cultures and philosophies must be able to apply it to their needs and also learn from it. This will not only give opportunity for global development, it will also give African philosophy global recognition and accessibility. There is need, therefore, for the people of Africa to develop their philosophy in a manner that benefits other cultures and philosophies.

²⁴ Ademola K. Fayemi, “On the Africans of a Philosophy in African Philosophy,” in *African Philosophy: Whose Past and which Modernity?*, ed. S. Layi Oladipupo (Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2021).

²⁵ Irele, Introduction to *African Philosophy Myth and Reality*, 110.

²⁶ Jonathan Chinakonan, *Ezumezu: A System of Logic for African Philosophy and Studies* (Switzerland: Springer, 2019), 35

²⁷ Graeme Codrington, “Challenges Facing Youth Ministry in the 21st century,” *Future Church Now*, July 28, 2010, <https://www.futurechurchnow.com/2010/07/28/challenges-facing-youth-ministry-in-the-21st-century/>.

A Re-Interpretation of the Post-Modernist Tradition

The last section of this paper concludes on a rejection of the Western apologists attempt to impose her culture and philosophy on the people of Africa. It further argues for a universal application of African philosophy if it must receive global acceptability and recognition. A valid implication of this is that Western post-modernist tradition should be made to have an African understanding. Hence, the need to subject post-modernism to a re-interpretation rooted in African culture, norms, values and philosophy. This may result in a postulation of an African brand of postmodernism. The essence is the promotion and preservation of fundamental African values and culture that are germane to good human condition. It will also reveal the effect of postmodernist tradition on fundamental African culture and philosophy.

It is important at this point to state that the relationship between postmodernism and African philosophy is not all woes. There are few similarities shared by the two different philosophies. This confirms the fact that there are cross-cultural similarities all over the world and that a culture can positively impact on another. While Western philosophy like postmodernism can impact African philosophy, the latter can also have positive impact on the former. There is the need, therefore, for Western philosophy to stop its arrogance show of superiority over other philosophies. This also calls for the practitioners of African philosophy to develop their brand of philosophy in a manner that it can impact positively on other philosophies of the world.

The first similarity to be established is that the two philosophies are experiential and not experiment-based. Postmodernism criticism of rational knowledge is severe. It revolts against the Greek wisdom that rates scientific knowledge above experiential knowledge. It rejects modernism position that everything is rational, observable and repeatable.²⁸ It further denies the global transcultural standards, such as the law of logic or principles of inductive inference for determining whether a belief is true or false, rational or irrational, good or bad.²⁹

African worldview is also largely propelled by experience and not experiment. This is because philosophy itself is a

²⁸ “Dealing with Postmodern Ethics: The Christian watershed,” *The Christian Watershed*, December 21, 2018, <https://thechristianwatershed.com/2008/12/21/dealing-with-the-postmodernistic>.

²⁹ C. B. Okola, *African Philosophy: A Short Introduction* (Enugu: CECTA Nig. Ltd, 1993), 6.

reflection on human experiences and human beings themselves. From a critical evaluation of the facts of human experience, a philosophy attempts to come up with a coherent understanding of the universe. In the same vein, the experience of the African people from generation to generation has influenced their understanding of the universe and human beings. African philosophy is an inquiry about how Africans interpret and make sense of their experience in the world.³⁰ The main point here is that Africans are greatly influenced by their cosmological interpretation of reality. This has largely influenced African belief in the existence of both the material world and the spiritual world. They believe that the material world has an interface with the spiritual world, and that the material life on earthly sojourn is a preparatory step to joining the spirit world.

An important aspect of African philosophy propelled by experience and not scientific investigation is human intuition. Intuition is an important part of African experience that one may not be able to explain because it is not scientific-based. It is however important for Africa to reinvent her intuitive understanding of reality for development.

Postmodernism and African philosophy are also similar in their emphasis on the subjective nature of man. They both rate man as a subjective individual than an objective individual. This is why African philosophy never relegates the emotional part of man in the name of seeking to achieve objectivity. This is also reflected in the general belief of the African people about God. There is no question about the existence of God in many African societies. He is worshipped with passion, emotion, and total commitment. Religion is a matter of individual subjective passion and not characterised by objective truth. Religion, is therefore, made meaningful and relevant by passionate commitment to God, regardless of whether or not it can be rationally and mathematically described.

African philosophy also agrees with postmodernism in its epistemological status of belief that no knowledge can be said to be superior to the other. A long-time colonial gospel of the Western world that evangelized the superiority of her culture, ideologies and knowledge over other culture is nothing but a fallacy. African epistemological method of knowing is definitely not inferior to any other. African philosophy has come to be accepted as a valid form of philosophy to preach and promote African source of knowledge.

³⁰ Oladipupo, *African Philosophy: Whose Past and which Modernity?*, 180.

Despite these similarities, there are areas of sharp difference between postmodern idea and African philosophy. There is the need therefore for a re-interpretation of such tenets in order to put them in African perspective.

The first postmodern tenet to be put in African perspective is morality. Morality in Africa cannot be separated from the community and the people's conception of human existence. Morality is deeper in African discourse than in postmodernism. Morality is the foundation of good human existence and it regulates the social relations among people. Adherence to moral rules provides answers to complex questions of human existence. It is in fact the essence of being.

Ethical interpretation describes the features of a morally sound individual as one who has integrity, possesses good knowledge and wisdom, is self-disciplined, well matured, responsible, virtuous, and a paragon of excellent character.³¹ Hence, morality is a concept needed for individual happiness and good human condition. Sound morality has helped to shape and reshape the lives of many individuals for the attainment of self-realisation. So, morality in Africa is not just a theory but an integral part of African existentialism.

Essentially, morality in Africa cannot be discussed out of the context of the community. It does not end with the individual as postmodernism suggests. According to Kollman, "African morality and ethics...cannot be conceived outside the community."³² Glekye opines that communalism is an outstanding feature of African morality and morality cannot be defined without it. Traditional African society is, therefore, characterised not by one's own right as modernism suggests but also by duties towards others.³³ Wiredu is also of the opinion that African traditional morality is "quintessentially social." Individual image is judged upon how it benefits others rather than oneself.³⁴

³¹ Kazeem A. Fayemi, "Human Personality and the Yoruba Worldview: An Ethico- Sociological Interpretation," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2 (2009): 167.

³² P. Kollmann, "Tribalism and Justice," *African Christian studies* 4, no. 2 (1988): 49-70.

³³ K. Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought," in *Philosophy from Africa*, eds. P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (Johannesburg: International Thompson Publishing, 1998), 318.

³⁴ K. Wiredu, "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought," in *Hammered Swords into Plough: An Essay in Honour of Archbishop M. D. Tutu*, eds. B. Tihagale and I. Mosale (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1986), 85-99.

Postmodern argument for individual morality is in fact the beginning of the failure of its thesis. There will be clashes of morality if we all choose our own morality. Another serious concern is how and who is to adjudicate in the wake of conflict since everyone has their own morality. Hence, postmodern ethics will be difficult to administer in any society. In fact, no society is known to be practicing such ethical system. Postmodern presentation of morality as an all-permissible argument is also against African philosophy. Is everything really permissible in practical sense? It is like saying no one makes a bad decision. This argument is not obtainable in daily practical living. Hence, African morality is superior to that of postmodernism and well ahead in ensuring better human existence.

Closely related to the discussion of morality is the postmodern definition of the concept of truth and its understanding by the people of Africa. Postmodernism denies anything like absolute truth. It further rejects foundationalism as a theory of epistemic justification. One cannot justify any knowledge by what has been established since every truth is valid; hence, no need for belief justification. Without much ado, African concept of morality suggests that there are valid truths embedded in African culture, values and norms. There are acceptable ways of behavior and there are acts rejected by the people. The ethical - cultural interpretation of the concept of *Omoluabi* in Yoruba ontology presents it as a virtue needed for individual happiness and good human condition. *Omoluabi* is, therefore, used in absolute terms in discussion about moral truth. In fact, Fayemi opines that truth is an important feature of *Omoluabi*.³⁵

Postmodern extreme emphasis on the individual is another area that needs a re-interpretation from African worldview. It states that meaning and experience can only be fashioned by the individual and the individual is principal to meaning and experience, and not the society. It rejects the idea of the existence of a world that is not subject to the individual thought. It asserts that morality, values, knowledge, and interpretation of texts are dependent on the individual. In fact, individual opinion cannot be defeated though it is held that the self is a social phenomenon which only becomes what the community makes it; the individual is still rated above the society. On the contrary, Africans hold that the individual's existence is meaningless without the contributions of the community to his or her life. This is highlighted by the

³⁵ Fayemi, "Human Personality and the Yoruba Worldview: An Ethico-Sociological Interpretation," 170.

common saying “I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am and I am because we are related.”³⁶ It is in the community that the individual gets values, beliefs, identity and also finds purpose in life.³⁷ It is therefore, impossible for individuals to dictate morality, beliefs, values and knowledge. Resultantly, the best approach is to treat the relationship between the individual and the society as complementary and not competitive. Postmodernism charges Africa to focus on individuals, responding to their yearnings and aspirations, meeting their needs and addressing their problems.

Postmodern hermeneutics is another issue that requires African understanding. This is the principle of analysis of how to derive meaning from texts. It asserts that interpretation of text is essential because writings are constructed in human languages. Derrida’s idea of *deconstruction* encapsulates the entire idea of postmodern hermeneutics. It is a method of reading that aims to undermine the logic of opposition within texts.³⁸ All meanings are bound up irretrievably within the knower, not the text and no word has important meaning than the other words. By this, the users of the language can no longer be considered fully in control of the meaning of the language use.³⁹ Meaning and experience can only be fashioned by the individual and cannot be made objective by the author. No one can claim to be original in the interpretation of text. It, therefore, rejects the idea of a unified and fixed objective meaning for any text.

African philosophy agrees with postmodern hermeneutics on the necessity of interpretation of texts and statements. This is more so that many African societies express wisdom, values and cultural socialisation in proverbs and folktales. However, the entire concept of *deconstruction* by Derrida is strange to African culture and philosophy. While some African cultures are sometimes pragmatic in their interpretation of texts and statements, text interpretation in Africa is not subject to the feelings and thoughts of the individual. Meanings are bound up in

³⁶ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 113.

³⁷ Wilber O’Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in Africa Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 155-56.

³⁸ Noel Gough “Deconstruction,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research*, ed. Lisa M. Given (New York: Sage, 2008), 203.

³⁹ Hock Siew Lee, “Christianity and the Postmodern – A Critique of Postmodern Hermeneutics” (A Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of Master of Theology, South African Theological Seminary, May 2004), 31.

the texts and some words are more important than the others in many texts and statements.

The Yoruba proverbial saying: “*Ki lo ri l’obe to fi ga’run owo*” which when translated literally means “What object did you see in your plate of soup that made you suddenly suspend the hand after dipping your hand into it” or “What did you see in the soup that made you stop eating?” can be used to drive home our message. The idiomatic expression has two important words, *Obe* (soup) and *ga’run owo* (suspension of the hand) without which the expression cannot be meaningful. *Obe* is the noun while *ga’run owo* is the action which implies that the individual probably noticed a strange object in the soup that led to him/her to bring out the hand from the soup and suspend it for a moment in order to identify the strange object. It therefore, means that the message and the clarity of the idiom cannot be appreciated without the two most important expressions.

It is important to add that the idiomatic expression has a culturally accepted meaning that is not subject to the manipulation, thought or feeling of any individual. It is a cultural expression meant to pass a specific and powerful message, most times from an adult to a younger person to draw out certain life lessons. The expression is supposed to produce a deep and evaluative thought from the person being addressed to re-construct his/her future actions.

Implications for African Philosophy

The African re-interpretation of some postmodern tenets has implications for African philosophy and culture, and a few of them will be highlighted at this point.

(1) Implications for a balanced communal life.

Postmodern individual philosophy challenges African communal system to give room for individual self-actualization and self-realization. While the communal system is productive in its ability to give social security and identity to the individual, this argument must not be over stretched to the extent of it becoming an impediment to individual freedom to achieve potentials, be unique, and demonstrate self-distinctiveness. The society should assist the individual to be a productive member.

For Africa to develop and improve the quality of human existence, there must be a deliberate intention by individuals to positively activate their freedom to contribute to the growth of humanity. African countries must also be willing to free the people

from any form of chain that limits their capacity to achieve projects that can improve the quality of human existence. The individual must, however, know that individual existence attracts social responsibility. Freedom in this regard cannot be unfiltered and unrestrained. It is in the community that the individual gets values and beliefs, establishes the deepest and most enduring relationships, gets identity, and also finds purpose in life.

(2) Implication for Moral Revival

The idol of moral self can be said to be a principal spirit of postmodernism, a situation where moral truth has been exchanged for pragmatic truth. This undermines African moral values and system. African culture does not only emphasise religious commitment but also high in moral standard. The fallacies of postmodern morality have made the concept of African morality imperative for human development. The failure of postmodern morality is also in the fact that there is no standard that determines the true value of anything. There is need, therefore, for Africa to free herself from the absolute individual freedom that propels postmodern moral concept.

The truth remains that for Africa to develop, the existential aspect of her moral system must be revived. This paper, therefore, argues for the revival of moral values embedded in African culture. This is because sound morality has a direct relationship with Africa's quest to develop and improve human condition. Many of the African existential problems like corruption, greed, insecurity, and religious intolerance are essentially moral problems. Moral problems of corruption for example have direct effect on infrastructural decay, bad economy, poor educational standard, and so on.

(3) Implication for Sustainable Democratic and Political Structure.

Arguably, many African countries practice distorted democracy. Postmodernism challenges African countries to institutionalize proper democratic structure in their politics and governance. This is because postmodernism supports democratic values rather than autocracy. The need therefore arises for democracy to be enshrined in the politics and social life of African countries. It is important for Africans to fashion out a way of sensitizing leaders to the moral imperative of leadership, checking the abuse of power, tendency to intimidate people, and fostering the values of respect for the will of the people and human dignity. The entrenchment of

the rule of law is important because it guarantees the protection of human rights, ensures governmental predictability, creates a climate conducive to private sector activity, and helps to enforce adherence to formal rules of behavior. There is also the need to protect the judicial and legislative arms of government from executive recklessness. On a general note, participatory democracy is a means of benefiting from the critical reasoning and skills of the individual for the development of African nations. Lastly, African leaders in line with the value of postmodernism should seek to earn respect instead of demanding it from people. This underscores the need for leaders to work diligently to earn followers' respect.

(4) Implication for the Promotion of African Epistemology.

Postmodernism challenges Africans to utilize their indigenous source of knowledge, since there is no universal acceptable standard for defining epistemological status of belief. Though Western epistemology has helped many Africans in knowledge acquisition and development, it has, however, relegated the African traditional source of knowing to the background. This traditional means of knowledge has helped many African societies in the development of their environment and human condition before the advent of Western education. Egyptian civilization for example reigned before Western epistemology and some of its epistemological strengths are still valid till today. Africans are no longer vast in proverbs, and the use of folktales to pass knowledge and wisdom are being eroded. Development must be seen not so much as a process stimulated by external input but as a process of self-enhancement from within, building on material human resources available to the people.

(5) Implications for Practical Piety.

Postmodernism supports religion in a pluralistic way, and this finds expression in African culture and philosophy. African worldview permits the worship and service of God in the various ways God has been revealed to the different people of the continent. The critical question, however, is: how much of religion has helped Africa to achieve better human existence? There are nations of the world that are not religious or not as religious as African nations but have more meaningful human existence. The reasons for this are not that the values of religion cannot impact humanity but that African piety in recent times has been expressed in theory rather than practice. The intentions and

contents of the various religions are not translated into values profitable for human existence. Religious commitment should, therefore, be made productive.

Adherents of the various religions should act out the values of honesty, sincerity, love for one's country, love for others, sacrificial living, and selflessness. These values are presently in short supply in many African societies. Adherents of religions in contemporary Africa are the ones involved in large scale corruption, abuse of leadership position and practices that dehumanize humanity.

There is also the need to strike a balance between the spiritual and the physical dimensions of life. There is need for African religion to promote a better relationship between the people, their environment and the physical world in general. Religion should promote responsible stewardship of God's resources, emphasizing creature's care rather than reckless usage of the earth's resources. Religion in Africa should promote sound morality since God in Africa is responsible for moral order.

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