5

Exploring the Conflicts between Traditionalism and Modernity in Postcolonial Africa

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Introduction

Discourses of the evolution of African social structures and institutions have often been made in comparative longitudinal terms by juxtaposing and contrasting the various historical dispensations – pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial. In several respects, colonialism marked a turning point of revolutionary proportion in the collective evolution and structuring of African social systems. This is apparently because colonial rule had an extraverted agenda conceived to serve the overall interest of the colonizers at the expense of the colonized. Part of the necessity for maximizing the colonial agenda was the tendency towards a systematic obliteration of the entire African social structures and the imposition of their western equivalents or alternatives where such existed.

Although colonialism set out to displace indigenous African social institutions considered as primitive and consequently to replace them with European modern equivalents, the intended colonial destruction was not completely successful. The result is that there is today what are termed indigenous social systems (alternatively conceptualized in extant literature as traditionalism) and modernity in all spheres of African life (see Giddens 1992; Ellis & Haar 2004; Ross (ed.) 2011). A critical conundrum with regard to the intersection of traditionalism and modernity is about how the contradictions have played out in African post-colonial history, including their consequences for both the states and society.

The deliberate attempt at displacing traditional African institutions and social systems by western forces dating from colonial history finds contemporary expression in the imposition of Eurocentric institutions, values and traditions, which are parcelled out and exalted as the path to modernity for Africa. In the unfolding process, the whole idea of local inventiveness and cultural creativity are

increasingly jettisoned in response to modernism as propagated by the West (Hamelink 1983:25). This continuing encounter raises serious concerns about the extent to which Africa is prepared to protect its identity in an emerging civilization-based world order that is accelerated by forces of globalization, to the extent that the revival of cultural, ethnic and religious identities are increasingly gaining ground. In a civilization-driven world order cultural affinities cooperate with each other, while states group themselves around the lead or core states of their civilization (Huntington 1997:20). The theoretical articulation of differences between traditionalism and modernity, as they affect post-colonial African state and society, is no doubt an on-going discourse that seeks to construct what Bhabha (1994:2) labelled 'cultural hybridities', which emerge in moments of historical transformation. Hybridity in this sense constitutes the notion that the identities of the colonized and colonizers are constantly in flux and mutually constituted. Sections of postcolonial scholarship, especially the postmodernist school, are of the view that global hierarchies of subordination and control, past and present, are made possible through the social construction of racial, gendered and class differences (see Monga 1996). All of these variables have continued to uphold and define the relations of power and subordination between Africa and the West. Scholars such as Reader (1999) and Skalnik (2002) have argued that even though Africa is a victim of domination from powerful hegemony, the continent has witnessed counter-hegemonies of resistance.

The civilization of Africa has largely been shaped by a triangular formation of religious worldviews that are both competitive, contradictory and in some instances complementary – a convoluted history that Ali Mazrui (1986) dubbed 'the triple heritage.' These three religious worldviews are African Traditional Religion (ATR), Western Christianity, and Islam. It is pertinent to highlight that the conflict of Mazrui's triple heritage was originally adumbrated by Kwame Nkrumah (1970) in his classic study on *Consciencism*. Each of the three main religions in African heritage is embedded in diversity of beliefs, adherents and practices. The dominance of these three sets of religions in Africa has had far-reaching implications for intra and inter-civilization conflicts of varying intensities.

With the coming of colonial rule into Africa, the languages of imperialism – English, French, Portuguese and Spanish – were imposed on different parts of the continent, as part of the cultural tools for colonization. Consequently, the imposed imperial languages were intended to progressively displace the indigenous languages on the pretext that the latter were too 'primitive' to serve as the medium of communication and the production of scientific knowledge. In fact, attempts by colonialism to foist cultures that were alien to African civilization, value systems and traditions became a weapon of divisiveness that separated much of the African people from the reality of their histories, norms, traditions and religion. In order to overcome this challenge, the colonial authorities in some of the Districts

were required to become fluent in the native language of the territory so as to enhance communication between the colonial governments and colonized African societies (Reader 1999:611). In this sense, the twentieth and twenty-first century African societies have become significantly shaped and redefined by the twin concepts of globalization (i.e. the widening and intensification of linkages across cultures and civilizations) and modernity (literally, the transition from indigenous to modern). They are both critical because they are used to understand an era in the history and transitions that are part of Africa's distorted civilization.

The Conflict between Traditionalism versus Modernity in a Historical Perspective

In the aftermath of colonial rule, postcolonial African states inherited indigenous political institutions, which were variously mutilated, defaced and distorted by western colonizers. In fact, the arbitrary and self-serving intervention of the modern state system on indigenous political institutions has been a core feature in the majority of the post-colonial states. One of the consequences of this political interference is that local chiefs and indigenous political authorities have in most cases been reduced to sycophantic agents of the governing elites, helping them legitimize the political regimes and their policies before their grassroots subjects. Independent minded indigenous authorities and those with sympathy for opposition parties and groups are often considered confrontational and partisan by government – an indictment that could result in the deliberate persecution and sometimes ultimate removal of the traditional leader. As the distinguished Ghanaian monarch, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene (King) of Ghana's largest ethnic group, the Asante, aptly articulated the narrative (2005):

> During colonial rule, African kings and chiefs, who did not submit to the colonial administrators, were replaced or exiled. The onslaught against chiefs continued after independence, and they were betrayed along with the rest of the African population. Additional humiliation was inflicted upon the traditional rulers when they were stripped of much of their traditional authority and their powers severely curtailed.

Stoutly opposed to colonial imperialism, the legendary Ghanaian 'Asantehene Otumfuo Agyeman Prempeh I' and several elders of his kingdom were captured as war prisoners and banished to the Indian Ocean Island of Seychelles in 1896 when the British colonial authorities conquered Ashanti land and subsequently imposed colonial rule on the people. The banished king and his entourage were only allowed to return home in 1924, 28 years after the colonial authorities had overrun and assimilated his kingdom. Elsewhere in South Africa, Senegal, Rwanda, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, traditional rulers who were opposed to colonial rule were ignominiously dethroned and replaced. Some were ultimately killed or banished.

In postcolonial Sierra Leone, for instance, the governing elite that inherited state power in the aftermath of political independence seemed to have suspicion and misgivings about the traditional authorities and local chiefs, whom they perceived as collaborators of the defunct repressive colonial regime. Between the country's independence in 1961 and the outbreak of civil war in 1991, the governing elite in fundamental ways reinforced the arbitrary intervention in, and manipulation of, the traditional authorities as an appendage of the central political authority in line with the inherited colonial pattern (Richards 2005; Fanthorpe 2006). Comparable manipulation or attempts to whimsically use the traditional political authorities by various governing elites in post-colonial Africa to advance the political agenda of the government have predominantly occurred in countries like Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Ethiopia.

This paradigm of political manipulation is not markedly different from the way African traditional rulers were treated during colonial rule when the colonizers co-opted loyal traditional rulers as agents of indirect administration charged with the responsibility of extraction of tributes (taxes), labour, and deference towards the imperial regime. Traditional rulers opposed to the colonial authorities were dethroned and in extreme cases banished or killed. For instance, Lat Dior Diop, the defiant dethroned sovereign (*Damel*) of the Kingdom of Cayor in modern Senegal fled into asylum in Jolof (a nearby kingdom) from where he waged a guerrilla battle against French imperialism until he was killed by the invaders five years later in 1887; Samori Toure, who resisted French incursion into west Africa from 1891 to 1898 was captured and deported to Gabon where he later died (Reader 1999:584). Surrogate chiefs known as colonial warrant chiefs were appointed in their stead. Similarly, the colonial authorities arbitrarily created new chiefdoms and imposed warrant chiefs on them for the logistical and administrative convenience of metropolitan Europe.

Postcolonial Africa's Transformation: Towards a Synthesis between Traditionalism and Modernity

Post-colonial African states inherited ambivalent social formations that upset the balance of indigenous political institutions, to the extent that the indigenous systems were replaced with modern institutions as part of the colonial legacy bequeathed to Africans in the aftermath of de-colonisation. The colonial government established Western-oriented institutions and agencies of governance that usurped the sovereignty of traditional institutions and subordinated them to the control of colonial government. The reliance on force to impose colonial governance, among other things, provoked considerable resistance across Africa such as the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya, the Temne uprising in Sierra Leone and the Zulu resistance in South Africa. The transitional social formations inherited by post-colonial Africa are largely characterized by centralized political structures with different organs of government (the executive, legislature and judiciary more or less supposed to

maintain a measure of separation from one another), formal bureaucratic institutions of government staffed with career civil servants, the co-existence of traditional and modern political authorities and the subordination/co-option of the traditional by the modern. The colonial conquest that led to the unification of the different ethnic groups, chiefdoms, and feudal regimes into imperial protectorates also led to the birth of the colonial state, which at independence became an internationally recognized sovereign state (Mamdani 2006:2).

The new African states in the aftermath of independence were thus faced with the challenge of creating a balance between the heavily embattled indigenous political systems and the advancing modern systems they inherited. What we have witnessed in a number of post-colonial African states (e.g. South Africa, Uganda, Nigeria, Botswana, etc.) is an unbalanced structure of hybridization whereby traditional institutions as custodians of the people's culture and tradition are confined to local administration of some sort and advisory functions while the modern political institutions hold ultimate power acquired by either democratic or undemocratic means.

The issue of land tenure and land rights has also generated far-reaching conflicts and has become a controversial issue between modern and traditional political authorities in postcolonial Africa. This is for the understandable reason that land remains the primary means of economic production for the majority of the African people and states, thereby making land tenure a highly contested subject. To many Africans, land also has a spiritual value. In pre-colonial Africa, traditional land tenure systems varied from one community or ethnic group to another. Notwithstanding the variance, Cousins (2009:8) identified the basic features of indigenous precolonial land tenure systems as generally characterized by:

- An unregistered customary land tenure.
- An admixture of freehold and leasehold under the structural framework of the family, lineage or clan.
- Gender-based discrimination in which women largely gained secondary rights to land through male relatives or by virtue of their marriage relationship to men;
- The use of land primarily for subsistence agricultural production.

Commercial sale of land was a rarity. With the advent of colonialism, the colonial state introduced requirements of land titling and registration as the basis for establishing private ownership of land. This legal requirement was problematic because private ownership of land was non-existent in many local communities. In addition, colonialism also introduced forced alienation or expropriation, which was massively carried out in east and southern Africa where there were large settler communities of white colonizers. This action no doubt created population pressure and land scarcity for the local African populations that were confined to highly marginal and lessproductive land spaces.

The postcolonial reforms in the majority of the African states have tended to reinforce or expand the trajectory of inherited colonial land policies with their emphasis on land titling, registration, land privatization and development-oriented expropriation for large-scale commercial agricultural production. This has in a fundamental way aggravated the contradiction between customary land tenure and modern state-driven, individual/private sector-oriented land tenure. Rural women are the worst hit by the postcolonial land policies and scarcity as they increasingly find it difficult to access land for smallholder subsistence cultivation. Since women are almost completely dependent on men to access land, women who are childless, single, widowed, disabled, separated/divorced, or with only female children often have few or no resources because they may have no access to land except through a male relative in view of the divisions that take place along gender lines (Mamdani 2002:170; Tripp 2004:6).

In precolonial history, traditional African societies essentially provided the basis for cohesion and solidarity that held socio-political life together, established structures and identified characteristics that provided meaning and purpose to life. These features are anchored in belief systems, customs and history that are transferred from one generation to another. This accounts for the embeddedness of African life in deep and rigid cultural traditions. Fay (1987:162) argues that becoming a person in traditional African societies attempts to appropriate certain material of one's cultural tradition, and continuing to be a person means working through, developing, and extending this material, which to a large extent involves operating in terms of it. This notion of community in traditional Africa fits into what Ake (1996) termed 'the organic character of society'. Colonialism fundamentally unravelled this organic character of African societies in all its ramifications.

In appraising the dominant trend of transition from colonialism to post-colonialism in Africa, Okere *et al* (2005:4) observes that:

> African societies have since colonization and till today been marked by 'othering' from the North. Its great civilizational traditions, political, medical, biological, commercial, and religious ones, have been inferiorized and subdued, in particular, during the 19th and 20th centuries by the colonial and missionary enterprise. That jaundiced civilizing mission assumed that all traditional knowledge in Africa, where their very presence was acknowledged at all, was obsolete. In the colonial era, western enlightened knowledge and expertise was *a priori* proclaimed superior… In this othering, rather than genuinely being an enriching centre for the dialogue of civilizations, the colonial school turned out to be a rigid institutional setting for entrenching western civilization and knowledge against African endogenous knowledge.

The secularization thesis, which argues that with the coming of modernism, religion will wither away, has been deconstructed across Africa (Berger 2010:30). The rising wave of Islamic resistance, as well as Pentecostal and evangelical movements across the continent buttresses this argument. Africans have come to accept

modernization and the inevitability of science and technology and the changes immanent on the transformation. But they seem unreceptive to the idea of becoming Westernized (i.e. wholesale assimilation or imposition of the culture and value systems of the West), while in the countries of the West, the schism over the relationship between religion and modernity has heightened since the Enlightenment era (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 2009:9). This is a revival of some sort, as scholars attribute the apparent revival to the widespread collapse or failure of the state in Africa, which leaves the church, the mosque and other religious institutions to fill in the gaps created by the state's inability to fulfil its normal public functions of provision of basic social services and public order (Ellis & Haar 2004). It is still however debatable whether Africa and other postcolonial regions can achieve modernization independent of westernization.

Post-Traditionalism, Modernity and African Revivalism

Political Islam and various fundamentalist religious movements (notably within Islam but also in Christianity to a lesser extent) have emerged in different parts of Africa in recent decades as a reaction to western modernism and the globalizing and domineering tendency of the West in general. Islamic Court, Islamic Jihad, Islamic Combatant Group, Salifist Group, Al-Shabaab, Muslim Brotherhood and Boko Haram (to mention a few) are some of the Islamist groups known, among other things, for their resentment of Western modernism in places like Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Algeria, Morocco and northern Nigeria. Some of these Islamist groups or factions of them are reputed to exhibit marked ambivalence towards Western civilization and modernism – some are receptive to modernism and thus adopt Western technology and work ethics, but conversely exhibit a selective attitude towards Western civilization, with specific reference to aspects of secularism, individualism and materialism that are not in tandem with core Islamic tenets and traditions (Hansen & Mesoy 2010:16-17).

The emergence and upsurge of violent Islamic movements across the Horn and western part of Africa, as evident in Somalia's Al Shabaab, Nigeria's *Boko Haram*, Mali's Ansar Dine and MUJAO (Dowd 2012), represent groups that have declared war on the secularity of the state, with an uncompromising demand for the imposition of strict Sharia law in these countries (Campbell 2012). The use of violence as a tool for advancing these ideologies has been a dominant feature of their operations, with Nigeria having the highest number of documented cases of violent Islamist activities of 106 between 1997 and 2011 (Dowd 2012:3).

The upsurge in religious intolerance witnessed in the growth and resurgence of the *Boko Haram* sect in northern Nigeria is ostensibly driven by this Islamist group's quest to resist any attempt to modernize Islam, and where possible, to Islamize modernity (Kepel 1994:2). It represents what Huntington (1997:110) described as an acceptance of modernity, rejection of Western culture, and recommitment to Islam as the guide to life in the modern world. This has been

done in a highly coordinated manner that led to violent confrontation between the *Boko Haram* sect and the Nigerian government's claim to secularism, with grave humanitarian consequences in terms of the loss of human lives and property. The emergence of the *Boko Haram* sect is seen as a carryover of the *Maitasine* group that emerged in the 1980s in Nigeria, which also engaged the state in armed revolt (Danjibo 2010:18).

The changes brought about as a result of modernity and globalization led many Muslim sympathizers to view the West as hostile to the traditions and values of Islam, to the extent that Western values as represented by modernism contradict Islamic beliefs and traditions. Attempts to checkmate the influence of Western modernism in north Africa in the pre-colonial era partly deepened the Arabization of the local cultures and population, the establishment of Islamic sultanates and state structures over non-Arab ethno-cultural groups in the region. Møller (2006:11) described the phenomenon as 'Arab colonization'. It is pertinent to remark that Western modernist influence in north Africa (notably religion and social cultures) and Arab cultural penetration of Europe preceded colonial conquest by more than a thousand years and this was largely as a result of the geographical proximity of the two regions.

One of the features of postcolonial African history is the existence of structural conflicts between the three dominant religions in the continent (i.e. Christianity, Islam and African Indigenous Religion [AIR]) and these conflicts have taken diverse forms and twists. Other related features that somehow impact on the structural conflicts include the continued Africanization of both Christianity and Islam in most part of sub-Saharan Africa, and the formal acknowledgement of Islam as the state religion in some African countries regardless of the move towards secularism as is evident in North Africa (Singh 2006:2). It suffices to briefly highlight the nature of AIR in relation to other major religions on the content to help contextuate the discussion.

Broadly, AIR subsumes a hierarchy of Afro-deities, deified objects and spiritual forces that in various ways connect the people to the conceivably more decisive supernatural realm. Some of the spiritual forces and gods are believed to inhabit the cosmic system or some natural forces and creatures, including the sun, moon, virgin forests, mountains, rivers, lakes, caves and totems. There are also spirit forces associated with the deification of some dead legendary ancestors or fictive progenitors. From the perspective of adherents and worshippers (both 'pre-historic' and present), AIR is purposeful for a wide range of spiritual, secular and mundane concerns, including reverential worship and fellowship, individual/collective protection and security, material prosperity, therapeutic healing, explanation of the unknown, control of present and impending adversities, etc. (see Omeje 2005). The empirical content of ATR varies from one culture or community to another. Based on the classic works of noted experts like Mbiti

(1969), Ellis and Haar (2004, 2007) and Møller (2006), one can identify some of the defining structural and empirical characteristics of AIR as follows:

(a) Structural polytheism – a plurality of deities and gods: according to Mbiti (1969:1), 'Africans are notoriously religious, and each people have their own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it'. Ellis and Haar (2007:387) argue that in sub-Saharan Africa there is widespread belief that the immaterial forces perceived to be operating in the material world consist of, or are controlled by, individual spirits. Mbiti speaks of AIR in the plural (AIRs) because according to him, 'tribes' are the operational framework for AIRs, and each tribe has got its own religious system. However, one must hasten to add that there is also a mosaic of 'sub-tribal' – or perhaps more appropriately 'sub-ethnic' – and trans-ethnic deities in various communities of sub-Saharan Africa.

(b) A holistic approach to reality in which the spiritual and physical worlds are inseparable; the former preceding the latter. In African traditional religion and cosmology, the structural distinction between the sacred and the secular, the religious and non-religious, as well as the spiritual and material areas of life found in Judeo-Christian civilization is completely blurred. Ellis and Haar (2007) posit that the so-called structural separation between the sacred and secular reflects the specific historical experience of Europe, but not necessarily the rest of the world, not least Africa. Mbiti (1969) attributes the African holistic approach to reality and the pre-eminence of religious discourse to the fact that religion permeates all spheres of life in Africa – beliefs and worldview; farming, harvest and crop yield; marriage and child-bearing; stages and rituals of community socialisation; death and funerals; personal and collective security; defence and warfare; the environment and natural disasters, etc.

(c) Community-centeredness: AIR is a community-centred and community-driven religion, implying that the individual is religious by virtue of his membership of a closely-knit multi-functional community. In the traditional African societies, especially in pre-colonial history, everybody was so deeply and communally religious that there was no space for atheism or agnosticism. The advent of the two main Abrahamic religions (Christianity and Islam) has significantly vitiated the community spirit of AIR, especially in many urban areas where AIR has either, to a large extent, been displaced or where some measure of syncretism prevails. It is noteworthy that amongst many Africans oriented to syncretism (i.e. adhering to two or more religions, in most cases, AIR and one of the two dominant Abrahamic religions) there is the tendency for people to often conceal their involvement in, and practice of, AIR. This is most common among the educated elites and urban dwellers and the reason is clearly because of the legacy of demonization that AIR has inherited

from colonial times. With regard to the tendency of many Africans towards syncretism, Mbiti (1969:3) observes that: 'unless Christianity and Islam fully occupy the whole person as much as, if not more than, traditional religions do, most converts to these faiths will continue to revert to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and certainly in times of emergency and crisis'. Many neo-liberal scholars attribute the present and growing religious revival in many parts of Africa (i.e. radical Islam, neo-Pentecostalism and neo-traditionalism) to deepening economic hardship, state failure and the impact of globalisation (Møller 2006; Ellis & Haar 2007).

(d) Human embodiment of religious codes and non-scripturalization: AIR's codes are largely embodied by powerful personages and adherents, albeit the codes are believed to be inspired and sanctioned by the applicable god(s). There is an evident lack of codification and scripturalization of the religion into sacred texts. 'Religion in African societies is written not on paper but in people's hearts, minds, oral history, rituals and religious personages like priests, rainmakers, officiating elders and even kings … (Hence), to study AIRs, one has to, of necessity, study the people that embody the religion' (Mbiti 1969:4). Some critics have argued that the lack of sacred scriptures disposes AIR to the arbitrary manipulation of officiating priests and other powerful intermediaries. This is further seen as an indication of how underdeveloped AIR is as a religion. But it is evident that twisting of religious codes occurs in all religions and this is a phenomenon associated with the susceptibility of the belief systems (written or unwritten) to multiple subjective interpretations.

(e) Self-containment, non-proselytization and this-worldly utility: AIR does not have missionaries for the purpose of winning converts to expand its territorial reach. 'One does not preach his religion to another; you are born into it' (Mbiti 1969:4). This is a tendency that AIR shares with some oriental religions, such as Hinduism and Confucianism. Similarly, the religion lacks messianic pillars and founders comparable to Jesus Christ in Christianity or Mohammed in Islam, albeit many traditions of AIR incorporate certain legendary figures (in some cases, symbols of ancestor worship) into their belief systems (Mbiti 1969; Ranger 1992. By and large, AIR mostly has a this-worldly utilitarian approach to gods and deities. There is a great orientation of the religion to how divinity can help maintain or achieve a harmonious social order, and how spiritual power can be harnessed to solve real-life existential problems, including combating diverse forms of threats to security and social order. Without doubt, and as in most religions, human intermediaries often exploit and abuse these processes. The mystical and eschatological dimensions of AIR essentially help in explaining, rationalising and engaging the unknown and the seemingly mysterious. These include issues like unravelling past retributive atrocities, getting

a handle on complex oddities of the present, foretelling the future, as well as issues of after-death, incarnation, and eternity.

The apparent denigration and displacement of AIR by Christianity and Islam is derived from the notion that colonial missionaries and state officials constructed AIR as a satanic, primitive and pernicious religion that thrives on reprehensible practices like witchcraft, ancestor worship and human sacrifice. Colonial missionaries and agencies used a combination of persuasive and aggressive *proselytization*, as well as outlawing of some traditional religious institutions and destruction of their shrines, to convert many Africans from AIR to Christianity. The dangerous stigmatization of AIR and its discord with Christianity was a phenomenon inherited by the African postcolonial states, which has contributed to the indignity and disdain associated with the religion in most part of Africa, especially among the educated and urban-based segments of the populations. But notwithstanding the reality of continuing stigmatization, many Africans acknowledge the multi-functionality of AIR – an aspect of the African indigenous knowledge system - as a practical problem-solving oriented religion and as such continue to maintain a foothold on it (Amisi 2008:1).

For some of the Westernized urban-based classes, especially the political elites, whose religious worldviews and orientations are markedly ambivalent, AIR is considered invaluable inissue areas such as: divination and oath-taking to affirm political loyalty or establish official wrongdoing; bewitching and persecution of rivals using *juju* and mystical missiles; de-mining and repelling of evil darts; supernatural security of political regime and office holders; offensive defence and combating of threats by public office holders; and quite significantly, spiritual healing and alternative medicine (Omeje 2011).

Colonial legacy has been a crucial factor in the conflict between Christianity and Islam in some of the postcolonial African states. This was recently reinforced by a question raised by Mazrui (2010:1) in terms of whether Christianity and Islam, both growing in influence in post-colonial Africa, can co-exist. Using Nigeria as a prototype for divisiveness along religious fault-lines, he drew attention to the fact that Nigeria also has one of the largest populations of Muslims in Africa. In terms of the spread of the two religions (Islam and Christianity) among the three dominant ethnic group of Nigeria, Islam reinforces the Hausa identity in northern Nigeria while the Yoruba-dominated south-western part has a significant number of Christians and Muslims. Christianity is the dominant religion among the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria. Tensions between Christianity and Islam over the implementation of Sharia law in the northern part of the country have led to violent confrontations between the two religions culminating in killings and reprisals (Schwartz 2010:3).

In the case of Sudan, the country has a nexus of complicated conflict fault lines. Its forty-two million population is largely divided along lines of religion

(70% Muslim, 25% animist, 5% Christian), ethnicity (52% black African, 39% Arab, and others 9%), and economic activity at grassroots level (nomadic and sedentary) (ICG, International Crisis Group 2006). The majority of people often classified as animists in Sudan are mostly syncretic in that they simultaneously adhere to one of the two major religions, Islam or Christianity. Significantly, there is a major ethno-regional divide between the dominant Arab north and the minority Christian-Animist black African south, a divide that has historically been a conflict fault line. This north-south conflict fault line based on racial and religious identities has produced two instalments of civil wars between the south and the Khartoum-based central government in the north: the first between 1955 and 1972, and the second between 1983 and 2005. Another ethno-regional conflict fault line exists between the largely black African Muslim-dominated north-western region of Darfur and the hegemonic Arab Muslim populations of north-central Sudan. The civil war in the Darfur region of Sudan that started in February 2003 is a consequence of this conflict fault line (Omeje 2010:177).

'We will Modernize but We will not be You': The Continuing Debate between Traditionalism and Modernity in Africa

Postcolonial Africa's drive for modernity has inculcated a belief in the inferiority of its traditional values, and practice and knowledge systems. In this case, the will to assert the primacy of its traditions is undermined, with a strong will and tendency to be dependent on the West (Ake 1982:141). The implication of this is that modernity, which essentially reflects the transition from the pre-modern (e.g. feudal and semi-feudal) to modern (e.g. industrial and secular) way of life and knowledge system is translated to mean Westernization in thinking and practice. Huntington (1997:78) argued to the contrary, on the basis of the assumption that modernization is distinct, and does not necessarily mean Westernization (Huntington 1997:20).

In this case, non-western societies can modernize and have modernized without abandoning their own endogenous cultures and adopting Western values, institutions and practices. Huntington's claim reinforces the argument of this chapter that postcolonial civilizations in Africa and Asia, for instance, have embraced modernity, while in some fundamental respects contesting Western ideological standpoints.In essence, the triumph of the Western model of modernity would not lead to the end of the plurality of historic cultures. He argued further that the world is fast becoming modern and less Western, to the extent that while African societies have access to the technological advancements of the West, the culture and value systems of the West have faced some degree of resistance from some of the African societies.

One aspect of such a drive towards modernity is the question of individualism. In traditional African societies, individualism is a novel concept that is in conflict with the old notion of communalism, which puts emphasis on dependence on 'the collective or community' for the realization of one's identity and aspirations

in life. While this chapter does not argue that there are no historical structures of individualism in Africa, there is a sense in which individualism exists in various African cultures. For instance, this could be seen within the context of what is being referred to as *umuntu-ngumuntungabantu* in southern Africa, which connotes the fact that 'a person is only a person through his/her relationship with others'. Here, the success or advancement of an individual is predicated on the extent to which the community contributes to such an endeavour. Thus, an ethological discourse of African societies tends to be plagued by a pattern of generalization whereby African people are considered as forming one single tradition, and Africa is perceived as one village where all the African people come from (Makang 1997:328). As Mandela (1994:8) once observed:

> In African culture, the sons and daughters of one's aunts or uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins …We have no half-brothers or half-sisters. My mother's sister is my mother; my uncle's son is my brother; my brothers' child is my son, my daughter. Anyone who claims descent from a common ancestor is deemed part of the same family.

Modernization theory came under intense criticisms for its reductionist attempts at elevating Western European and North American development experiences and pedagogy to the level of universal truth. In fact, the attempt to present the western model as the most valid model puts into question the very concept of modernity, which has raised certain fundamental questions about whether the path to modernity followed by countries from the West is valid (Fukuyama 1992:69). While the global North is progressively becoming homogenous technologically, economically, and culturally under what is termed a global culture, African societies are on the verge of retrogression as the continent seems to be lagging behind largely due to its diverse cultural, political and religious value systems (Afolayan 2002:4).

The project of Western modernity, which made historical advances to various parts of Africa through colonialism, was met with a variant of African philosophy (e.g. *ubuntu* in southern Africa) that emphasizes communality as against Western individualism (Gianan 2010:86), while in North and Sahel Africa, western modernism has been largely checkmated through the solidarity, faith and resistance offered by Islam. Conversely, the reality of Africa's postcolonial experience is that the continent has encountered and been defeated by Western civilization to the extent that indigenous languages are fast withering, and giving way to English, French, Portuguese and Spanish languages, which were imported into Africa during colonial rule. The dressing and behavioural patterns of Africans have to a large extent changed to reflect those of the West (Graiouid 2007:2). Tradition in the African sense is criticized for maintaining a worldview based on patterns, customs, beliefs and rituals inherited from the past and orally transmitted through generations, as well as the existence of a type of social organization that places a greater

premium on group ties at the expense of the autonomy of individuals. Giddens (1992:36) asserts that the idea of modernity is hinged on a linear conception of time, a secularized form of the life-world, a differentiated interpretation of spheres of action and knowledge and the organization of social relations around individual rather than group interest.

The concept of post-traditionalism was used by Nabudere (2000:41) and Graiouid (2007:7) as a variant of traditionalism in explaining the shift from colonialism to post-colonialism in African societies. They view post-traditionalism as a composite of a coherent mix of traditionalism and modernism, which was adopted as a strategy for survival by the African modernists. In this sense, postcolonial Africa's shift from traditionalism to post-traditionalism is characterized by the emergence of new cultural identities as evident in the revival of religious fundamentalism that is concerned with the movement that calls for the emancipation of the historically marginalized. In the last two decades, the Horn of Africa has been a region in crisis, largely due to the emergence of Islamic revolt against modernity by Islamist movements, such as *Al-lttihad al-Islamiya* and the Islamic Court Union (ICU).

Notwithstanding the existence of countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia with Christianity as dominant religions, the goal of these Islamist movements is to impose strict Sharia laws in the entire Horn of Africa, as a way of resisting and displacing Western values as represented by the United States (Eshel 2007:1). In the case of Sudan, for instance, the indigenization policy that came into being during the decolonization years, under what was termed Sudanization or Arabization, was adopted as a way of replacing Western colonial officials with educated locals. This policy of Arabization and Islamization, as the case may be, was partly meant to checkmate or restrict the activities of Christian missions from the West but more fundamentally to control, dominate and exploit the non-Arab periphery of Sudan's southern region (Omeje 2010:173-176).

The resurgence of indigenous African conceptions of the role of women in society also reflects a cultural movement over the last decade, which is seen in the light of the shift from traditionalism to modernity, in view of the rising wave of agitation for the advancement of women's rights so as to enable them to achieve important recognition in the public sphere. This is aimed at creating space for multi-vocal debate. The phenomenon seems to have been achieved through what is regarded as contentious conversations between African indigenous cosmology and modernity. African indigenous beliefs and practices are essentially predicated on the sustaining faith held and transmitted by the fore-bearers of the present generation concerning the organic relationship between the spiritual and the mortal, a relationship that continues to bewidely professed and practiced in various forms by contemporary Africans, including people of African descent in the Diaspora (Awolalu 1976:1).

To a considerable extent, the cultural violence associated with women's rights is still being reinforced in postcolonial African societies of northern Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Somalia, and other Islamic states and regions of Africa where patriarchy and the practice of *purdah* still hold sway. This tension between indigenous notions of masculinity in Africa and modernity's recognition of the Western feminist struggle for equity (including the quest to displace the prevailing gender hierarchies in Africa) is firmly rooted in culture and religion (cf. Mohanty 1988:71; Kramer 2006:1).

In all, the notion of post-traditionalism is presented as a metaphorical site where people can reflect on the dynamics taking place in a society where politics, tradition, religion, secularism, modernity and post-modernity open an array of opportunities for people from different cultures and civilizations in a process of globalization that is restructuring the economic, political, social and cultural map of the world (Graiouid 2007:13-14). On the political front, postcolonial African states have created governance regimes through the harmonization of traditional political institutions with modern political and democratic practices, under an institutional duality (Mengisteab 2008:5). In the case of Uganda, for instance, the observed institutional duality was formalized by the President Museveni regime, which under the country's new constitution of 1995 recognized and consolidated the governance role of indigenous political institutions, a move that has emboldened indigenous rulers, often pitching them in conflict against the state (Nabudere 2000:43). Even in countries where there are no apparent constitutional roles for traditional political institutions, traditional chiefs and religious authorities continue to perform significant legitimate functions in community governance, dispute settlement and state-society relations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that colonial rule has had far-reaching distorting effects in the historical evolution of African societies, engendering a crisis of staggering proportion in the various institutions of the state and society. The contemporary conflict between traditionalism and modernity which creates deep-rooted confusion and ambivalence in the socio-economic, cultural, political, and ideological orientations and identities of the African people (both in their collectivities and individualities) seems to be the strongest expression of this postcolonial crisis. In the discourse of African social structures and ways of life, the boundaries between African indigenous heritage and imported external systems and influence are increasingly blurred, but also in conflict. Ideally, this should not be the case because in all practical purposes, civilizations are not insular.

African traditional values and Western civilizations can co-exist and aspire towards modernity in ways that do not seek to displace the other. Attempts toward displacement would amount to deliberate extinction of the history and

people of one against the other. What this chapter recommends is the constructive hybridization of African traditionalism and western modernity on the basis of mutual respect and reciprocity. More significantly, postcolonial African civilization rooted ina nexus of traditionalism and various models of modernity (especially western) is continually subjected to invention, re-invention, as well as mutual negotiation and infusion customs, values and beliefs as a result of the widening and intensification of the frontiers of communication and interaction. These have been made possible through the globalization process that is increasingly shrinking the traditional barriers of space and time.

Postcolonial Africa is no doubt at a crossroads. The transformation of the continent and its people is intrinsically linked to the transition from traditionalism to modernism, while struggling hard to defend its pan-African identity. Africa is not in conflict with modernity. Like any other continent or region of the world, what many African states, communities and peoples tend to resist is any attempt to foist unacceptable exogenous value systems on them, particularly from the West, under the guise of modernity. Since the modernization of the West went through a process of reinvention and unsettling contradictions, African transformation cannot be an exception.

In the final analysis, it could be argued that traditionalism and modernity are adaptable phases in the collective development of a people (Africa and the West included), and more importantly, modernism is an eternally evolving paradigm of human civilization that is not peculiar to any people, society or hemisphere. The Western model of modernity should not therefore be seen as the universal prototype of civilization. While this chapter endorses the notion of post-traditionalism, which recognizes the mix of indigenous African knowledge systems and modernity, scientific advancements and developments in Africa should be geared towards meeting the continent's specific needs, rather than imitating the West.

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