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**THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY
IN POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN
SITUATIONS**

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"The Critique of Modernity in Post-colonial African Situation"

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**A Critique of Modernity in Postcolonial African
Situation**

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Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore the post modern African conceptions of Modernity and how this understanding severely hampered its development in general and its identity in particular. Due to the impacts of colonialism, neo-colonialism and globalization, *modernization is conceived, by Africans, as synonymous with Westernization or Europeanization.* This in turn, led African countries, lose their identity and indigenous cultural values. Consequently, as the reconstruction and development programs (policy and strategy formulations in various aspects) did not take these indigenous values as their anchoring point, many African countries could not reach the level of development where they can feed their people, keep their health and facilitate the development of the infrastructure.

The thesis is developed following the line of argument of those African philosophers who argue for the critique of modernity. Kwame Gyekye is the first philosopher whose works, particularly, "Tradition and Modernity" is used in the development of my argument. In the first part of the thesis, I have discussed the notion of modernity. As the idea is too complex to define in few words, for it is closely tied with the concept culture, I also discuss the notion of culture and tradition in line with modernity. With regards to the conception of modernity, I tried to critically reflect on the controversies whether it true that the whole of Western societies are modern and, not traditional. Furthermore, fundamental questions, such as: "Is really the modern superior to the traditional? Is modernity the opposite of tradition? Are tradition and modernity mutually exclusive concepts? Is contemporary Africa modern or traditional? What are the criteria to distinguish between the modern and the traditional?" are also discussed.

In the second part, a special attention is given to the Western notion of modernity. This is because; the controversies and misappropriation of

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modernity are deeply rooted in the invention and development of the concept of modernity in Europe. Thus, I have critically analyzed and evaluated the origins, aspects and manifestations of modernity. Moreover, I have showed the logical relationship between modernity and rationality; and the colonial narratives of "civilizing mission of colonialism" that aimed at modernizing the "savage" people of Africa. Furthermore, the Western theorists' and philosophers' (such as: Kant, Hegel, Weber, Habermas) conceptions of modernity and its legacy on contemporary Africa is also discussed.

The third section comprises the critique of modernity in general, and in the post-colonial African situations, in particular. Although Ethiopia was exceptional to escape from colonization, she did not manage to free herself from impacts of the so called "modernizing mission of colonialism", for no African country was capable to avoid the mental hegemony of neocolonialism. Thus, some challenges and consequences of misappropriating modernity in contemporary Ethiopian situations are presented as substantiation to show the magnitude of the problem.

In the concluding part, I have critically pointed out the significance of using Tsenay's critical and Historico-Hermeneutical analysis of African realities as a method so as to detect the roots and magnitude of the misconception. Once the roots of the misconception have been clearly pointed out, I clearly argue that deconstruction of the misconceptions and reconstruction of the idea of "modernity" is essential. Indeed, this can not be possible with out awakening the society's consciousness; hence, I emphasized the role of philosophy to secure mental liberation in Africa. To this end, I tried to critically analyze, interpret and utilize the arguments of African philosophers (Such as: Messay, Tewodros, Tsenay, Sogolo) for the role that philosophy plays in bringing about mental decolonization, that consequently aims at an entire development of the continent.

Chapter I

The Notion of modernity

Modernity

Etymologically the concept modernity is derived from the Latin term "modernus". When the medieval scholars derived the term "modernus" from its root "modo" they want to mean "just now", or "recently".¹ At the dawn of its invention, the concept modernity (modernus) was used as the opposite of "antiquus vetus", and "priscus" which means "old".

The terms "modernus" ("man of today") and modernitas" ("modern times") were had in Medieval Latin throughout Europe from the fifth century AD and more frequently after the tenth century.²

Kwame Gyekye, outlined that it is Cassiodorus, a scholar and statesman who lived in CAD 485-580, who used the term for the first time to distinguish between the "ancients", the masters of the ancient classical culture, and the "modern", their present heirs.³ When Gyekye discussed the contemporary meaning of modernity, he pointed out that modernity is culture dependent and, indeed, is linked to Western culture; particularly from the seventeenth century on.

Modernity can be defined as the ideas, principles, and ideals covering a whole range of human activities that have underpinned Western life and thought since the seventeenth century.⁴

Messay Kebede argues that modernity is related to the idea of "progress" and, therefore should be conceived as "forward movement into the past".⁵ In addition, other philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists and theorists at

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different times understood the concept modernity in different and divergent ways.

Whether we examine modernity as it is explicated in its fifth century AD etymological Latin root, or as it is explicated by the seventeen century Western philosophers, or by the contemporary African philosophers, one can understand that it is not easy, for both the Western and non-Western scholars to define the concept modernity. As modernity is essentially a “cultural phenomenon” its meaning becomes controversial, contested and complex.⁶ Due to its complex nature, modernity has now been misconceived and misappropriated by both the Western and non Western philosophers and anthropologists; and still is confusing peoples across the world.

In order to clearly understand the concept modernity, we have to first clearly conceive “what traditional is” all about. The reason is both modernity and tradition are cultural phenomena and as we have seen earlier modernity is initially introduced to oppose the “antiquus vetus” the old cultural practices or traditions. Unless we (African) critically investigate and reflect on concepts like “modernity” we will be forced to conceive only as it had been forwarded and elucidated by the colonial anthropologists, and will continue to use the concept as an anchoring point for further analysis and evaluation of our present cultural phenomena. As Towa puts

Africa will not really attain its cultural [historic, political, and economic] maturity as long as it does not elevate itself resolutely to a profound thinking of its essential problems, that is to say, to philosophical reflections. ⁷

Tradition

Tradition is a broad concept that may cover a range of cultural elements including "modernity". Acton defines tradition as "a belief or practice transmitted from one generation to another and accepted as authoritative, or deferred to, without argument".⁸ For Acton, tradition is unchanging; it is unquestionable. However, Gyekye conceives tradition in a totally different way: "the fundamental and persistent meaning of 'tradition' is that which comes down or is inherited from the past and becomes an enduring element in the cultural life of a people".⁹ Gyekye insists that every tradition does experience a change. There is no "absolutely changeless" tradition; though the degree of change may vary from one society to the other.

The American sociologist Edward Shils defines tradition in a more simplistic way as "anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present".¹⁰ Although Samuel Fleischacker endorsed what Shills stated on defining tradition, Fleischacker's conception goes beyond a mere transmission of the set of beliefs and values. He believes that the existing generation should have the will to accept the beliefs and values as an essential element of its identity.¹¹ Despite other differences among the four definitions of tradition given above, they have one common conception; that is tradition is something that is handed down from the former generations.

Modernity, Tradition and Culture

As modernity is closely tied to the concept tradition; and tradition is the result of maturity of cultural values, understanding modernity is inconceivable without a critical investigation of the nature and relation of tradition and culture with modernity. Gyekye, in his book "Tradition and Modernity" clearly explicated the notion of tradition.¹² Tradition is created by people at some point in time. Thus, that particular generation is considered as the creator of some

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cultural values, and these values may or may not transcend across the next generations. At every stage across the generations, the people create some new cultural values in addition to what they have inherited from their ancestors. Those cultural values which manage to survive and transcend at least for three generations would be assumed to reach the maturity level of cultural values or cultural productions where they can be labeled as tradition.¹³ However, this does not mean that any cultural practice or institution that has lasted a mere three decades (generations) would be regarded as a tradition. Thus, Gyekye in his horizontal line represented the fate of cultural values as they pass from one generation to the other.¹⁴

Although tradition and culture are closely related, they are not the same, for cultural values may or may not evolve to traditions. Cultural values in one generation, as Shils expounded, are beliefs or practices that are created “based on some historical circumstances, certain conception of human society, social relations, certain metaphysical ideas, and other kinds of ideas, beliefs, or presuppositions”.¹⁵ Thus, they cannot continue to exist across all generations with out change. Gyekye’s definition of tradition is therefore, more accurate.

Tradition is any cultural product that was created or pursued by past generations and that, having been accepted and preserved, in whole or part, by successive generations, has been maintained to the present. (Note that “present” here means a certain, a particular present time, not necessarily our present, contemporary world.)¹⁶

Anthropologists also define culture as “a shared way of life that includes values, beliefs, and norms transmitted within a particular society from generation to generation”.¹⁷ Scupin’s and Decorse’s definition of culture is not far from what Gyekye proposed. The difference is, while Gyekye emphasizes on the role of critical assessment and the process of maturation of cultural values in view of identifying their fate of acceptance or rejection, anthropologists are

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more interested in explaining the component parts of culture and the way culture is learned. As my purpose, in this part, is expounding how modernity should be understood in the post-colonial African situations, it would be wise to see how culture is diffused from one society to the other. This, indeed, will help us internalize how Western cultural values particularly the notion of “modernity” was imported to Africa; and how we should appropriate it.

Culture can be learned or diffused in different ways. Enculturation, the first way of cultural transmission, is “the process of social interaction through which people learn and acquire their culture”.¹⁸ Enculturation usually takes place through diffusion and assimilation process. A cultural value or institution of one society may be diffused to another society through technological transition or as Scupin R. pointed out through situational or trial and error learning in which “an organism adjusts its behavior on the basis of direct experience”.¹⁹

Enculturation is the phenomenon of both material culture, which consists of the physical product of human society and, non-material culture: the intangible products of human society. Modernity is therefore the product of both aspects of enculturation.

The concept modernity entails a particular set of values that are, according to Scupin, “standards [Western] by which members of a society [Western] define what is good or bad, holy or unholy, beautiful or ugly ... are important, because they influence the behavior of a society”.²⁰ Modernity is also related to cultural conventions (beliefs) that concern true or false assumptions, specific descriptions of the nature of the universe and humanity’s place in it”.²¹

As a cultural element, modernity consists of various beliefs about the nature of reality and provides the society with a more or less consistent orientation towards the world. In other words, modernity is a world view. It is also an

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ideology. This is because, as Yengoyan expounded, “ideology consists of cultural symbols and beliefs that reflect and support the interests of specific groups within the society”.²² As modernity has its own (modern society) rules of right and wrong which can serve as guideline that define how people “ought” to behave under circumstances, it is normative. This could then represent the folkways- “guiding ordinary usages and conventions of everyday life”, or the mores “norms that are crucial for the maintenance of a decent and orderly way of life”.²³ This means that modernity has its own norms that can serve as a normative standard for a particular society.

If we accept the fact that modernity is a cultural product, and cultural elements could be diffused and learned, then we will undoubtedly conclude that the issue of cultural relativism and cultural universals is also the issue of modernity. The proponents of cultural relativism argue that “cultural traditions must be understood within the context of a particular society’s solutions to problems and opportunities”.²⁴ However, cultural universalists believe that cultural elements are essential behavioral characteristics of societies, and they are found all over the world”.²⁵ Thus, the question is “what is the position of modernity? Does modernity exclusively belong to the Western society or is it a universal culture that is found all over the world? If we answer this question in the affirmative, the question “how is it being understood in post-colonial African situations?” will logically follow. This in return substantiates the critique of modernity in our “enigmatic present”.

If, nevertheless, we answer the question in the negative, we must be able to explain how the ideological hegemony of the West (in the name of modernity) over the rest could be justified. This is because modernity is originally a Western concept which is disseminated to the rest of the world through urbanization, industrialization, colonization, neo-colonization, and currently through globalization.

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Since "culture is both a historical and a political concept", it follows that modernity is also historical and political. Staden, in his article "using culture in African contexts" showed the difference between cultures and culture. While "culture" is a more universalistic way, "cultures" elucidates the view of cultural relativists. Thus, "modernity" for Staden is a universal cultural element which is often equated with the concept of progress or civilization; this is, indeed, a Western concept.²⁶ He outlined that our historical realities reveal that both conceptions were harmful; and thus demands further critical investigation. For instance, as Mamdani indicated: "English colonial rule and the South African Apartheid State successfully employed both, to divide the inhabitants of colonial territories into tribal subjects, in order to constitute and entrench colonial system of "indirect rule".²⁷

As I have already mentioned earlier, the complexity of the concept modernity emerges from the complex nature of culture. Thornton argues that it is too difficult to understand culture (or modernity) by trying to explain "what culture is". The argument goes it is therefore recommended to critically analyze "what culture does and how it does it".²⁸

Although I do not argue against Thornton's claim that "there is not much point in trying to say 'what culture is', I do emphasize on the need for the conceptual clarity of culture, tradition and modernity; for the nature of these concepts are found repeatedly to relate, or ever to react against modernity. It is then that we accurately understand modernity in the present African context that we will be able to appropriate modernity.

Dichotomy: Tradition Vs Modernity

Sociologists and social anthropologists understand tradition as opposed to the modern. According to this distinction, while traditional societies are characterized by their mystical thinking, communal life, primitive mentality, extended family style, agrarian economy, and strong resistance to change; modern societies are characterized by their critical and rational thinking, individualism, advanced science and technology, industrialization and innovation. The contemporary distinction between tradition and modernity got its root from colonial anthropologists. Levi Bruhl, one of the leading ethnologists of his time, believes that the demarcation line between the West and the non-Western people lays on their thinking. In his books: “Primitive Mentality” and “How Natives Think”, he wrote that the notion of “mystic” or “prelogical” mental activity of the non-West is opposed to the logical thinking of the West. As Messay explicated Bruhl’s idea:

The social technological retardation of native peoples is wholly due to this inability to think physically and logically. Some such turn of mind is adamantly opposed to scientific thinking and technological orientation; it is only fit to wallow in magic.²⁹

Bruhl’s elucidation of the Western difference with the non-Western lay the foundation for the contemporary sociologists distinction between tradition and modernity. Just as the non-Western people are portrayed as savage, prelogical, non scientific and backward technological orientation, in Bruhl’s narrative, so do the current sociologists for traditional society. In other words, while Bruhl characterizes the Western society by their civilization, logical, scientific and technological advancement, sociologists also attribute these qualities for the modern society.

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Bruhl's narrative was not only limited to serve as a foundation for current conception of tradition and modernity, but also serve as a stepping stone to colonialism. This is because; he propounded the idea that due to their pre-logical mentality, the non-Western people (Africans) are inferior to the Western counter part. By the same token, sociologists argue that traditional societies are inferior to the modern one. As Messay pointed out, it is Lucien Levy Bruhl who is universally believed to have codified the colonial discourse.³¹ The argument goes, since the claim that Africans are inferior race justifies the need for a tutor, the so called "civilizing mission of colonialism" became evident. Thus, modernization, which is considered to be synonymous with civilization, came to be conceived as superior to tradition.

But is it true that the whole of Western societies are modern and, not traditional? Is really the modern superior to traditional? Is modernity the opposite of tradition? Are tradition and modernity mutually exclusive concepts? Is contemporary Africa modern or traditional? What are the criteria to distinguish between the modern and the traditional?

I believe that tradition and modernity are not mutually exclusive. As Gyekye stated: "from the point of view of a deep and fundamental conception of tradition, every society in our modern world is "traditional" in as much as it maintains and cherishes values, practices, outlooks and institutions".³² I agree with him; when we investigate the phrase, for instance, "Traditional religions"; which is usually used to refer to religions other than the dominant religions: such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, is by itself problematic. Because, is not Islamic religion a tradition or traditional in its own context? Are not Christianity, Buddhism or Hinduism traditions too? They are all traditions. The difference emerged out simply due to some historical circumstances. That is the so called modern religions became dominant only because of their historical opportunities and political power they had over the others, which are

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condemned to be traditional. If we claim that these religions are modern; simply because they are dominant, (as in the case of modern outlook) then we should conclude that modernity is nothing, but a phenomenon by which a relatively powerful society imposes its own traditions upon the less powerful societies in view of marginalizing, dominating and exploiting others. However, I believe that modernity should not be conceived as losing one's identity and indigenous values merely to replace it with the dominant value in the name of civilization and modernization. Some scholars, however, are skeptical about the possibility of indigenous (pre-colonial) tradition in modern Africa. Appiah, for instance, claims that:

...but the Fanti live on the cost of modern Ghana, and this case allows us to focus on the question, whether, in cultures that have exchanged goods, people and ideas with each other and with Europe (or, in East Africa, with middle and far East) for many centuries it makes sense to insist on the possibility of identifying some pre-colonial system of ideas as the Fanti tradition.³³

Indeed, this is a fundamental question. However, we should note that although cultural learning, enculturation and cultural borrowing are inevitable in any culture, particularly where the society is highly exposed to cultural exchange, we cannot assume that the entire cultural values are modified or mixed up with an alien culture. There would always be some indigenous (pre-colonial) values that are still intact for they are part of the core values of the society. These values may indeed pass through some form of modification or change, however, this change may not be necessarily attributed to an influence of a foreign culture; for it could be a modification took place within that particular society itself, and may be driven by some economic, social and political pressures.

In addition, though there exists cultural borrowing and appropriating in any culture, this alone cannot be the base for generalizing the whole culture as a product of cultural diffusion and assimilation process. As Appiah pointed out, business cities with a very high degree of cultural interaction, like the coast of modern Ghana might be highly dominated by a foreign culture; however, small towns, with few degree of interaction, are not usually exposed to such cultural hegemony. The problem here is that we cannot clearly demark areas with high and the low degree of interaction. Moreover, even we detect some of the value changes, which took place with in that particular society, it is difficult to quantify and articulate them; for cultural values are dynamic. When Gyekye responds to Appiah's skepticism of the possibility of a pre-colonial tradition, he claims that although there exists cultural borrowing and appropriating, since there are some steps for a foreign cultural value to be internalized as part of the recipients' tradition, we cannot doubt the possibility of pre-colonial traditions. That is, before a cultural value becomes a tradition of a borrower society, it might be "adopted, developed, maintained, modified or refined, and cherished by the recipients".³⁴

Modernity as opposed to Tradition

In answering to the question whether modernity is the exact opposite of tradition, Gyekye skillfully explicated that the polarity that exists between the two concepts is constructed by sociologists and anthropologists. He argued that modernity and tradition have various things in common. Although modernity got its origin and development in Europe, the impression that elements of modernity are wholly European and, are in opposition with the "traditional" is false. The reason is first, "modernity inevitably contains elements that are clearly traditional, inherited and appropriated from previous generations". For instance, the notion "modern religions" contains elements that are clearly traditional. Second, modernity in its evolution must have

appropriated elements from other (non-European) cultural traditions, simply because "no cultural tradition has historically been devoid of elements from other (alien) cultural tradition".³⁵ Shils, for instance, pointed out that the arrival of explorers and colonizers in Africa resulted in change of the European tradition of painting and sculpture. Just as the travelers diffused their cultural values in Africa, they also brought back to Europe and assimilated the African art tradition into theirs.³⁶

Modernity as Superior to Tradition

The claim that tradition and modernity are opposites entails the colonial narrative that modernity is superior to tradition, and "traditional societies" should take the cultural values of the so called modern societies as the only genuine model. This however is not acceptable. Gyekye, for instance, argued that:

*The fact that modernity [in its evolution] based in Europe... is appropriate to take on and assimilate elements from non-European sources seems to suggest that the non-European cultural elements were themselves modern or at least bore the tinge of modernity.*³⁷

In elucidating this claim Benjamin also argued that "there may indeed be elements of Chinese traditional thought which are similar to or compatible with elements of modern Western thought".³⁸

The belief that modernity is superior to tradition is based on the anthropologists' assumption that traditional elements, which are handed down from generation to generation, are unchanging and unquestioned. When defining the concept, Acton regards tradition as authoritative. This means that a practice or belief becomes a tradition when "it is not questioned by its adherents nor thought by them to need justification".³⁹ Fleischacker also argued in the same fashion. He believes that tradition is a practice or a

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standard of content that is accepted unquestioningly when transmitted from the past to the present generation. In his own words "traditions are first and for most the sum total of what is not argued in the transmission of knowledge and practice from parents to their children".⁴⁰

This is indeed, the legacy of the colonial discourse of rationality. For them primitive, (Traditional) undeveloped (African) societies are pre-logical and therefore cannot logically question or justify what is presented to them as tradition. Bruhl wrote that "the slightest mental effort involving abstract reasoning, however elementary it may be, is distasteful to them".⁴¹ In other words, this means that it is only the modern (Western) cultural values that are critical and can be questioned.

However, this cannot be true mainly for two reasons. First, the fact that culture is learned and any culture may borrow cultural values of others implies that culture is changing, and if we accept the changing feature of any culture, we must admit that any tradition would question its existing cultural values; for change demands critical investigation of the existing social realities which, indeed, cannot be possible without questioning. Gyekye puts the two factors that may cause change in tradition: "internal criticism of the tradition undertaken from time to time, and the adoption of worth while or appropriate non indigenous (or alien) ideas, values and practices".⁴² Under closer examination, we can therefore see both factors do involve questioning.

The second reason is associated with the question whether the forbears or the recipients of a particular tradition are the authorities of the tradition. On the one hand, Acton believed that traditions are unquestioning. This is because he held the belief that the forbears of that tradition are the authorities (generation who create it), and the subsequent generation has no power to question or change it.⁴³ On the other hand, Gyekye argued; I agree, that the current generation is equally important (has equal authority) with the founding

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generation of that tradition for, he believes that “much of the authority of an inherited tradition is said to have derived from the evaluative activities of recipient generations”.⁴⁴ Thus, if we follow Gyekye’s line of argument, since the current generation engages in evaluation of the inherited tradition, it follows that tradition is questionable; and this cannot be an anchoring point to put modernity as superior to tradition. He emphasizes that a critical look at culture is an important factor in preventing cultural sterility.

*Even though we can, I think, admit that traditions are not mere data for rational critique and they are often experienced as normatively, obligating as exerting an authoritative force, it nevertheless could not be entirely correct to say that a tradition may and often will have to rationally reground it by deploying fresh reasons or arguments, if it considers that tradition is worth while and so wants to maintain it.*⁴⁵

As I have discussed earlier, the intention of the colonial narrative of the anthropologists about primitiveness or civilization is clearing the route for colonization; the so called “civilization mission of colonialism”.⁴⁶ Colonization is justified as civilizing (modernizing) the “primitive” people of Africa. Thus, the continent was portrayed as inferior, undeveloped, primitive, prelogical, mystical unscientific, irrational and traditional. With regards to the impossibility of superiority of one tradition, Gyekye stated that

Modernity, then in the way it has developed in the Western societies, cannot claim or be proven to be superior in all of its manifestations to other cultural traditions; despite the fact that a number of its ideas, values, and institutions have assumed the states of a model for other non Western culture.⁴⁷

Although it seems that the rationality debate has got its end, colonialism became a dead history, and imperialism is a mere ideology, their legacy is still hot and demanding. At the dawn of colonialism, neo-imperialism took the

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place; supported with the passion of modern science and technology. Under the grand discourse of globalization, the distinction between the West and Africa became still evident. We, Africans are now, not only inferior in terms of our economic development, but also, as Tsenay stated, in subordinate status in all historic, cultural and political situations.⁴⁸

Colonization did not only distract African national resources, but also, its cultural values and traditions. The modernization movement in Africa was guided by the colonial narrative that the modern is superior to the traditional. Thus, all traditional (indigenous) practices were made to be replaced by the “modern” (Western) one. No one was considering indigenous African values to be the base for modernity. Thus modernization was conceived as synonymous with Westernization, in which all indigenous African values that are assumed to be inferior, mystical, irrational, unscientific, undeveloped should be replaced by modern (Western) values that are considered, otherwise, to be superior, rational, real, scientific and developed.

As a result, since modernity was not appropriated or made to emerge (developed) out of our own indigenous values, our post-colonial African situation became a time of mismatch, confusion, misunderstanding and dilemma. The people are in confusion of choosing whether we should make indigenous values that we inherited from our forbears or modern (Western) values as our dominant philosophy of life. As I will discuss this issue in greater depth in chapter three I will not go into the details here. The point that I would like to emphasize here is that due to some historico-political reasons, the concept “modernity” is not appropriated, it is misconceived or misunderstood. A great deal of critical investigation is therefore needed to critically analyze, interpret and appropriate the idea of modernity. The misunderstanding of modernity is therefore the starting point of my thesis. As Gadamer says

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"understanding becomes a special task when ... misunderstandings have arisen".⁴⁹

Notes

Chapter I

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Chapter II

A Critical Perspective of Modernity

In the first chapter I have discussed that modernity has its origin in the West. However, as modernity is a culture-laden concept, its implication widely varies not only from one society to the other, within the same or across different continents; but also from time to time. This is because, as Thomas Khun propounded when a paradigm changes, our world views change.¹ In order to find out the inner most conception of modernity by Africans, we need to engage in philosophical inquiries. The question of modernity is the question of culture; and cultural values evolve to the level of tradition through time across history. Thus, understanding modernity is inconceivable with out historical interpretation of the concept modernity and modern culture. This method of understanding, in Outlaw's terms, is called "hermeneutical understanding".

In short Hermeneutical understanding is experiential encounter with a heritage, a tradition, which speaks through a life praxis, forms of expression, a literary text, oral as well as written. ²

Tsenay suggested that "Historico-Hermeunitical" interpretation of our past should be a vital task of African intellectuals in bringing about progress.³ Thus, historico-hermeunitical interpretation is an essential part of the project towards the understanding of modernity; for conceptions may vary with differing of perspectives. Gyekye, for instance, argues that although modernity has originated in the West and articulated by Western scholars, it does not necessarily refer to a particular point of time; or it does not mean the same thing for the people who invented the concept, and who adapted or adopted it.

The latest generations of trajectory particular cultural tradition would claim the status of being "modern" not just in the medieval European

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sense of “people of today” or “people of now” (moderni), but in the sense that they see their times culturally different in contrast to earlier or “ancient times”.⁴

Hermeneutical understanding consists of historical and political interpretation of the phenomena. The interpretation of modernity has therefore both historical and political dimensions. It is historical in that, the concept emerged out in particular setting, and developed across time. It is political in the sense that a particular culture “may be used to further political enterprise to achieve certain political effect”.⁵

The historical dimension of modernity would tell us how the modernization process started in the West, how the culture of modernity developed and transmitted to Africa. By doing so, we can understand the promises and challenges of modernity in our post-colonial situations. The fact that we find the word “modern” as a prefix to almost every discipline such as: (modern history, modern art, modern philosophy, modern, religion, modern technology) implies that modernity also refers to a particular period of time in history. According to the historian Koenigsberger, the time 1789-1980 is classified as modern, and between 1500- 1789 as early modern in Europe.⁶ Similarly, Jeremy Black used the phrase “Early Modern” to refer to the time (1500-1800) in Africa.⁷ Nevertheless, the question is, are early modern and modern times for Europe and African the same? If so, does it mean that they represent the same, historical, social, economic, political and technological atmosphere both in Africa and the West? This confusion will lead us to the critical interpretation of the modernization process.

A. Modernity: The Western Perspective

The emergence of modernity, in Europe, is the result of a series of ideological, scientific and technological advancements. This is, indeed, the sociological perspective of modernity. This perspective portrayed modernity as unintended or unanticipated change that had occurred as a result of various social, political, and philosophical dissatisfactions.

The sociological and historical perspective of modernity represents a typical conception of Western modernity. This perspective, the front view of modernity, is conceived as a historical process of development. As Neal pointed out "Modernization may be regarded as a permanent revolution without a single goal or direction". He insists that modernization represents, an on going process and continuous departure from the past, and emphasizes on change or development. ⁸ As a process, Western modernity grew out of the convergence of many historical factors.

Dissatisfaction with the pre-modern way of life, particularly the medieval life style is the first ground upon which the concept of modernity flourished. The Religious worldview which attributes everything to the divine or the church was the most significant and central point of dissatisfaction. During the medieval period, the church was a dominant institution, and the Pope with an absolute power. The mass and the individual, however, were in a subordinate position. God or the divine was the center of everything. Every social, political and economic issue was analyzed and interpreted with reference to the divine will; whereas, the will and knowledge of human beings were given little emphasis. There was no freedom of thought; anyone who may think slightly in a different way from what the church has taught would be prosecuted. Kings were believed to be God's representative on earth, "Divine right of kings". A priori form of received knowledge, miracles, and religious beliefs were considered as

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the genuine source of knowledge. Scientific research and the empirical method were not developed. Even the dominant Aristotelean science and cosmology were in agreement with the religious faith of the medieval period. In general, the life style of the pre-modern era was not the secular one; it was highly spiritualistic; or religious. The system did not encourage the accumulation of wealth and contest for power; as it is common these days. Radical beliefs, particularly those which are found to contradict with the major principles of the church resulted in imprisonment and prosecution. For instance, Lecky stated that the imprisonment of Galileo on charge of heresy became symbol of the clash between scientific research and blind religious faith”⁹

The continuous clash between the religious faith and scientific research, among others, the exaggerated claim of the papal power with the increasing in number of prosecuted individuals, simply for their radical beliefs resulted in the movements of reformation, which indeed is the second major phenomenon that facilitates European modernity. The protestant reformation and Counter Reformation that gave rise to what is called “the protestant ethic” with its emphasis on individual responsibility plays a key role in shaping Western modernity. Unlike the medieval life style which is known for its emphasis on the role of the church in defining the individual’s responsibility, Luther, Calvin and other important figures of protestant reformation emphasized the importance of the individual in choosing and defining his worldly way of life and his or her salvation, in the religious realm. Both Luther and Calvin responded to the moral corruption of the church by promoting individualism in which salvation is primarily a relationship between the individual and God. As an agent of modernization, the protestant reformers were not only limited to the issue of salvation; but also, they were the accelerators of scientific method. As Neal pointed out, “the systematic, rational, empirical study of nature provided evidence for the glorification of God”¹⁰

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In addition, protestant reformation contributed significantly to capitalization, another typical feature of modernity. That is Calvin’s doctrine of predestination which held that individuals were either among “the elect” or “the damned” and the obligation of the individual is simply assuming that he or she was among the elect resulted in psychological stress for it is accompanied with uncertainty of salvation. “Success in the business enterprise was taken as empirical evidence of being in God’s favor.” Thus, individuals should keep on investing and reinvesting profits so that they could verify that they are among the elect.

The Renaissance movement is also accompanied by humanism, which is another feature of modernity. As Cahoon outlined:

*Humanism, the fundamental principle and the intellectual, perhaps, also ideological engine of modernity, placed the ultimate value in individual, humans, and in their rationality.*¹¹

Since it is the foundation of doctrines such as: individual rights, individual freedom, the need to allow and exercise of individual capabilities and the cult of reason, humanism can be regarded as the intellectual background of modernity.

The Enlightenment is another important phenomenon of modernity. As Kant defined it in 1784:

*Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding with out direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. ‘Have courage to use your own reason! This is the motto of enlightenment.’*¹²

It is evident from Kant’s definition that the use of reason is the central idea of modernity. His notion of “tutelage” represents the critique of medieval way of

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thought; that is the submission of individual rights and acts under the authority of the church and the papal power. Thus, as enlightenment is characterized by the move from ideological to the rational, modernization is the move from mystical to the rational. Although Kant emphasized the use of reason in his enlightenment discourse, and is still considered to be one of the major ideologies of modernity, the concept reason was not a new phenomenon in the Western philosophical discourse.

The application of human reason to political institutions, indeed, greatly contributed to the improvement of the form of government, which is namely "Modern form of government". This is because, first, the government form, which was previously known for its "divine rights of kings" is now transformed to the form of government that considers the "rights of all individuals". Rousseau's "social contract theory" in which power is legitimated with the consent of the people is the second impact of reason on the government form. As Neal explicated, "In a political democracy, it was argued, authority figures derive their legitimate power from the social group whose interest they represent." ¹³

The Western rationality discourse is not only criticized by the non-Western scholars for it overlooked the emotional aspect, but also by the Western scholars who emphasize the equal use of emotions. Albert Hirschman pointed out that "the faith in human rationality eventually broke under the weight of concerns for the impact of emotions in human affairs and through the pursuit of passions that are not necessarily the best interest of either individuals of society". ¹⁴

Apart from enlightenment emphasis on reason and rationality, the movement of empiricism is another great ideological move towards the emergence of Western modernity. The empirical study of John Locke (1623-1704), for instance, posed a direct attack on absolutism. "In the state of nature, that is a

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theoretical condition before the existence of organized society, men were all free, equal and independent.”¹⁵

The dissolution of medieval worldview and the introduction of scientific research and objective method are other important features of modernity. First, dissolving the existing geocentric Cosmology, Copernicus propounded the heliocentric view of the universe. “Copernicus cut through these problems by constructing a model with the sun at the center and the earth revolving both about the sun, in a year, and about its own axis, in a day.”¹⁶ The Copernican revolution therefore appeared as a new paradigm of modernity. Secondly, Galileo’s discovery of his telescope and other achievements in science signifies

*the rejection of the Aristotelian concept that the commonly noted characteristics of an object, its composition, qualities, color, smell, or value had any relevance to the problem of its motion in space. Only those qualities which were measurable, such as mass, weight, speed and acceleration could form the elements of a science of mechanics.*¹⁷

Darwin’s theory of evolution that the earth existed for billions of years is another typical claim of modernity that obviously clashes with the pre-modern concept of creation as it is literally explicated in the Bible-Genesis.¹⁸ Rene Descartes’ doctrine of dualism in which he represented ‘man as a thinking being and, matter as an extension motion’ also added up to the modern conception of the body and the soul which is apparently different from the pre-modern conceptions.¹⁹ David Hume’s skepticism of science, Newton’s finding of the law of nature are all important ideological factors which transformed the Western society into the modern world.

The Industrial revolution in England, as Neal elucidated, established the pattern for modern economic growth and development. The reason is “the application of rationality and efficient methods in industrial production,

freedom in the movement of labor, and incentives for investment of capital were all implicated in the development of the factory system".²⁰

B. Modernity: A Radical Perspective

Although modernization is believed to begin in the West as a result of certain philosophical, economic, scientific and technological changes, its definition and the time it represents is still a matter of controversy. As William Everdell expounded while some scholars presume that modernism needs no definition, others argue that we must attempt after all to define the concept; still others claim that they can define modernity with confidence.²¹ With regards to identifying the exact period of time and set of ideas that belongs to the modern period, he argued that "modernism requires uncomfortable leaps. What kind of biology, for example, is modernist (if any)? What kind of problems does a modern mathematician solve? Is there a modern style of sociology? –or is it simply modern to be a sociologist? And immodern to be a ballet dancer?"²²

Postmodernists' critique of modernity is one aspect of the radical perspective of modernity. Although I use the term "postmodern" here, simply to refer the time after modernity- as it is explicated in the Western discourse, it should be noted that the term itself is confusing and lacks clearly identifiable set of referents. "Some use the term to refer to an advanced stage of capitalism, to a post industrial society, or some other term to imply subsequent to the modern. Some draw up on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to indicate the critical event for making the transition from the modern to post modern era."²³ Though we talk of "postmodern", we are not certain what we are referring to. The reason is that all the ideas and practices of the so called modern era are still in use, and will definitely pass over the postmodern era. In addition, we should be skeptical to claim with certainty that we are distinctly in

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the post modern era. As Everdell remarked, “we should be cagy about calling our culture “post modern” until we know what ‘modernism’ means.”²⁴

Postmodernists’ critiques of modernity (rationality, science and objectivity) are based on their limitation, their relativity, their unintended consequences, and their exaggerated claims. That is modernity failed to fulfill its promises. There had been a contradiction between what the enlightenment thinkers expected to and what has actually occurred. Modernity had considered science as a solution for everything; and emphasizes on objectivity. However, post modernists argue that “we do not live in a world of solid fact of objective reality but in a symbolic world that we have created individually and collectively.”²⁵

In short, the critiques of postmodernists can be summarized in four pillars: the problem of universality and objectivity, incompleteness of the rational and scientific facts, uncertainty of scientific knowledge and fragmentation. They argue that since there are historical variations in perceptions of the physical world and the human environment, we cannot solely depend on objective method and universal knowledge. Thus, cultural relativity should be emphasized, and “the idea of multiculturalism elaborated to give recognition to the diversity of beliefs practices and experiences among groups that differ in terms of such variables as age, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and religion.”²⁶

Despite the critiques on Western modernity, the Western culture of modernity positively influenced the entire development of the humankind, and created better living conditions. Quite a large number of modern values are adopted, adapted and modeled by almost all non-Western societies since the beginning of modernity in the West. However, the problem, which calls for “Historico-Hermeneutical interpretation”, is the way the Western conceive their modern culture, the position they gave to it as compared to other “traditional” cultures, and the strategies the Western use to introduce modernity to Africa and the

rest. Universalism, a typical culture of modernity, assumes the possibility of universal knowledge (both in natural and social sciences), and a criterion for collection, analysis and interpretation of scientific data, is a key idea that characterizes modernity.²⁷ Due to the notion of universalism, the West came to believe that since modern Western culture is scientific and whatever scientific is universal; it follows that any Western culture is universal, and should be taken as a genuine model for the development of every non-Western society. This became the anchoring point for uni-centric or Eurocentric thinking. The unchecked development of this thought resulted in “the rationality discourse”; which in turn bears the so called “Civilizing Mission of colonialism” in the name of modernizing the “primitive” or “savage” people of Africa.

Modernity as Rationality

The concept rationality has been used in Western philosophical discourses since the earlier Greek philosophers. Plato, for instance, discussed that reason is one of the three components of human soul. Aristotle, who formulated the study of logic in a systematic way, also revealed that reason is the essential nature of human beings that distinguishes us from other animals. In *Alpha Major*, where he explicated the evolution of knowledge, Aristotle wrote that:

*But while other animals live by means of impressions, and memories, with only small amount of what can properly be called experience, the human race lives also by art and reasoning.*²⁸

Different medieval philosophers continued using reason as the main tool of philosophical and theological discourses. The catholic philosopher Saint Augustine, for instance, tried to reconcile the Greek emphasis on reason with the emphasis on religious emotion in the teaching of Christ.²⁹

Rene Descartes’ distinction between mind and body is also a continuation of the Western discourse on reason but slightly in a different way. In the second

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meditation he stated that: “What then did I formerly think I was? Undoubtedly I judged that I was a man. But what is a man? Shall I say a rational animal? Assuredly not; for it would be necessary forthwith to inquire in to what is meant by animal and what by rational...”.³⁰

Immanuel Kant, in his article “Was ist Aufklärung?” expounded the motto of enlightenment, “Have courage to use your own reason!”³¹ By saying this he propounded the modern conception of Western rationality. He also distinguished between the private and public use of reason. However, the question is “What is reason?” Is it all about what has been said by the Western philosophers? What do we mean by rationality?

Emmanuel Eze discussed the various kinds of rationality. He pointed out in that rationality can be identified as calculative, formal, Hermeneutical, practical as well as phenomenological. Apart from these categories, Eze introduced the notion of “Ordinary Historical Reason” as a new approach in understanding the meaning of reason through historical analysis of the concept of rationality.³²

Max Weber’s “occidental rationalism” is assumed to be the “rational” process that led in Europe to the disintegration of religious world views that issued in a secular culture.³³ According to Habermas, Weber explicated the relationship among modernity, secularization and rationalization. “The internal links between the concept of modernity and the self understanding of modernity gained within the horizon of Western reason...”³⁴

Habermas further discussed that Hegel was the first philosopher to develop a clear concept of modernity. He stated that one has to go back to Hegel if he or she wants to understand the internal relationship between modernity and rationality which until Max Weber remained self-evident and which today is being called in to question.³⁵

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Post modernists rejected the basic conceptual horizon with in which the self-understanding of European modernity has been formed.³⁶ As Mavea Cooke pointed out, the project of modernity that is based on rationality is criticized mainly for two reasons: the critique of the capitalist model of modernization and the critique of reason as the will to instrumental power. She further, remarked that the intellectual atmosphere of postmodernism and post structuralism reveals that the enlightenment conception of reason is repressive; and that was why Jurgen Habermas proposed the possibility of a non repressive conception of reason, as an alternative.³⁷

Habermas conceives societal rationalization as being divided in to two distinct modes: "system" and "life world". While "life world" refers to the rationalization of domains of cultural reproduction, social-integration and socialization, and takes the general form of increasing independent of procedures of justification from traditional normative contexts of validity and an increasing reliance of action oriented towards understanding ,the system, in contrast, refers to increasing complexity and increasing capacity to take on steering functions (including functions of material reproduction in society".³⁸

Habermas's concept of communicative rationality expresses a post-metaphysical conception of reason. That is a post conventional mode of argumentation in which "participant necessarily suppose not only that all taking part are using the same linguistic expressions, in the same way that no relevant opinions have been suppressed or excluded, that no force is exerted except that of better argument.³⁹

Rorty in his article "Different Kinds of Difference" insists that the use of different terms like "perspective", "dialectic," "conceptual framework," "historical epoc," "language," "redescription," "vocabulary " and "irony" needs to be redefined, clarified and given contextual definitions.⁴⁰ Thus, from Derrida's

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deconstructionist perspective of terms and concepts, we can conclude that reason, rationality and modernity need to be understood contextually.

Although it is claimed that the conceptions of rationality vary, across the paradigms, it does not entail that the non-Western conception of rationality is essentially different from the Western conception. However, some Western philosophers and anthropologists propounded the non-existence of rationality in the African thought pattern. Levy- Bruhl, for instance, in his theory of Pre-logical compares the systems of inferential practice and reached on the conclusion that first, Africans have primitive mentality, and thus unable to use reason. Second, the individual thinking pattern is influenced by the collective representation of his society, and therefore proposes a moral relativism. Third, this moral relativism has its correspondence and development in the epistemological relativism. Such relativism denies any identity in time of the human spirit and the unitary character of the logical form of thought. In addition to Bruhl, Hegel also believes that since there is no culture in Africa, there is no reason. ⁴¹

Like Hegel, Immanuel Kant, in his anthropology explained the emergence of different races in relation to the various natural causes bearing on them in different geographical regions of the world. Kant's conclusion is that indigenous (Americans) and blacks are spiritually decadent races and therefore, are different. ⁴²

According to Senghor, the confluence of geographical, historical, racial, and ethnic determinants make every race different in expression from another. In other words, he believes that every race has a fundamental ontological difference from all other races and therefore, there is epistemological difference between white and black people. For him, the black has emotive modes of thought and devoid of reason. On the contrary, the white has a logocentric mode of thought. That led to declare: "Emotion is black as reason is Greek". ⁴³

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As a response to the grand misunderstanding of rationality by Western scholars, many African philosophers argued that rationality and philosophy are not the sole properties of Western society. They argued that Africans have their own philosophy in which they rationally analyze and critically appropriate the existing Africa realities. Odera Oruka, for example, in his “sage philosophy” identified the two types of sages: Folk sages and philosophic sages. He argued that although both are wise individuals who serve their community as counselors, the philosophic sages, in particular, are individuals who represent a philosophical form of thinking, which is capable of criticizing the existing realities.⁴⁴

Lucius Outlaw understands rational in terms of providing justification for a particular ideology. Thus, unlike those Western thinkers who believe that Africans do not have “philosophy”, Outlaw argues that philosophy should not be understood as the enterprise “practiced by the dominant figures in the dominant traditions, throughout its Western history.” Rather, he insisted that philosophy should be understood as:

an enterprise more critically self conscious of its own historicity in ways that inform its practices and thus make it possible to identify other discursive modalities and traditions as appropriate instances of refined notion of what constitutes philosophy especially when these traditions and modalities are situated in non-European cultures.⁴⁵

The understanding of rationality demands clear concept of what irrationality means. The reason is if one conceives rationality as a direct opposite of irrationality the claim that “X is rational and “Y” is irrational will be groundless. Messay Kebede, in his “Western Discourses on Africa” discussed the problems of the Western discourses on Africa. He insisted that the Western discourse on “African otherness”, which assumes African: as pre-logical as opposed to the rational, the mythical as opposed to the realistic and

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the like is problematic. The reason is both Africans and the Western possess all these attributes. He argued that this is evident in that, first, civilization is the evolutionary stage of primitiveness and does not entail otherness. Second, the fact that the western Christians, based on the Holy Bible, believe that dreams are revelations of profound truths. As this belief represents the mystical aspect of western traditions, Africans could not be represented as primitive simply because they are mystical. The problem is if Africans are labeled as primitive and other for they are mystical, we must conclude that the western societies are also primitive for they share this mysticism.

*The tendency to minimize the part of the irrational to decorate the “white man” with the honors of rationality becomes obvious when we recall how little the affirmative is supported by facts. Whether we take the Bible, the foundation of European Christianity, or the ordinary belief of the Westerners, the role of dreams as revelation of profound truth is largely accepted.*⁴⁶

In their article “Epistemology and the Tradition in Africa” Kaphagawani and Malherbe clearly articulated the concept of rationality. For them, rationality encompasses the claims that are related to knowledge, justification, truth, belief, theories, ideas, intension, explanation, understanding, experience and human action. They argued that since the idea “rational” entails its converse “irrational” the concept has evaluative aspect. The fact that rationality has evaluative aspect means that:

*The rational is a kind of ideal representing the highest excellence in intellectual and epistemological mater. Because it is an ideal, we may not always be able to find it in the real world, or in the actual behavior and thinking, though we may recognize it as being present to a grater or lesser degree in particular cases, and we tend to make judgments that this theory, or action, or belief, or religion, or custom, or science, or even culture, is more or less rational.*⁴⁷

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Richard Bell in his book “Understanding African Philosophy” argued in support of the claim that “rational dialogue” is evident among the different communities in Africa in the form of “village palaver”. He believes that “The village palaver forms a foundation stone of African civil society, and is a very interesting form of local democracy. ⁴⁸ Since the very nature of village palaver involves critical dialogue, free discourse and give rise to human reflection, it can significantly influence our understanding of rationality from non-African point of views. ⁴⁹

So far, I have been discussing how the Western understanding of rationality differs from the non-Western (African) understanding of rationality. The rationality debate, which was ignited by Western anthropologists, philosophers and travelers, and that was later reached to its peak with the responses that the African philosophers gave has greatly contributed to the refinement of the concept rationality.

Once Western modernity is understood and popularized as rationality by the Western scholars, the concept became known in the same sense by all non-Western societies. The main reason is that the two concepts: modernity and rationality are usually presented in continuum. In other words, due to the West’s propaganda and discourse of rationality and the non-west confusion and misconception of modernity, many non-Western societies fall under the ideological and cultural hegemony of the West in the name of “modernity” and “rationality”. This can be better understood by elucidating the fact that both the West and the non-West conceive rationality as an absolute opposite of irrationality. This means that rationality and irrationality are mutually exclusive. Thus, while tradition, which is represented by irrationality, is considered as the exclusive feature of the African communities, modernity, which is represented by rationality, on the other hand, is wrongly attributed to the West.

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The consequence of this problematic conception of rationality is not limited to the destructions of the co-existence between rationality and irrationality, but it further goes to claim the impossibility of the co-existence between tradition and modernity, the bifurcation of religion and secularism as well as the notion of developed and undeveloped. What is worse, as modern science promotes rationality, and the idea “non-scientific” entails irrational, many Africans came to conceive that “whatever is not scientific is not rational and therefore, is irrational and inferior to the scientific and the rational. Due to the misconception of rationality, many Africans are now losing the identity in search for the “rational” “scientific” and “modern” way of life.

In Ethiopia, for instance, there is an overwhelming belief that whatever (rational) modern is is better and should replace the traditional (irrational) one. But the problem is “what do we mean by “rational? Are really the practices of modernity exclusively rational? Is whatever traditional irrational? Or, is it non-rational, or is it antirational? Is modern science absolutely rational and non scientific culture absolutely irrational? Are not the bases that constitute science mythical? Are there not rational justifications in religions (mythical) beliefs?

As we have seen earlier, I believe that unless this ideological hegemony, vagueness and confusion come to an end, it is impossible to clearly understand rationality from a non-Western perspective. Misunderstanding of the concept of rationality entails dilemmas and results in error in decision making. Grand errors in decision making bring about severe challenges in policy formulations, curriculum designs, health services and other socioeconomic and political issues of the country. If a country commits such kinds of error, it is obvious that its development will be hampered; and therefore should immediately be corrected. This is indeed possible through deconstruction and reconstruction of the concept rationality and its associates. By doing this, we can critically

evaluate our understanding of rationality and the concept of modernity for it is related to it. As Bell, pointed out, instead of marginalizing our own indigenous values in the name of "rationality" and "modernity", it is wise to re-evaluate our indigenous life styles in view of finding out relevant, even better values that will definitely contribute to our struggle against poverty and political instability. By critically evaluating and appropriating our conception of rationality, I believe that we can meet modernity with out losing our identity.

Modernization as Europeanization

The rationality discourse paved the way for colonization for the colonial powers propounded that the mission of colonialism was to modernize or civilize the primitive people of Africa. This was indeed, a European pretext to cover up their hidden agenda of resource exploitation and homogenization or Europeanization of the African culture. As Habermas indicated "modernity arises from the conceptual horizon of Western rationalism"⁵⁰ Once the Europeans diffused their Eurocentric discourse of cultural universalism that assumes the European culture as the only genuine culture which can serve as the model for Africa and the rest, they make use of the discourse for the purpose of colonization. Though Europeans attempted to justify colonization as "civilizing mission", it was obviously aimed at cultural homogenization and exploitation of African natural resources. This project, though partially started during the time of slavery, reached its climax after the Berlin conference of 1884-85 when the rival European powers officially agreed the "scramble" of Africa.

The Western discourse of civilization significantly facilitated the colonization process. The fact that some African countries themselves invited European colonizers⁵¹ signifies the impact and magnitude of the colonial discourse and propaganda about Western rationality, civilization and modernity. In addition,

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the use of commercial contacts, the influence of transnational corporations and the exploitation of local rivalries were as effective as brute force and machine gun. ⁵² In most cases, however, European political hegemony was directly imposed by conquest, in which most of the fighting personnel were African mercenaries, or militarily trained slaves. ⁵³

Since modernization has a double face, the claim “Modernization as Europeanization” can ironically be expounded in a dualistic way. The front view represents the conception of modernity in a totally positive and constructive way. All the promises of the enlightenment thinkers: the advancement of human rationality, science and technology made the modern societies believe that “history has a shape- ‘it goes somewhere’ and leads to progress.” ⁵⁴ Despite the critiques of postmodernists, in terms of the advancement of natural sciences and technological advancement, in most part, modern Western culture is believed to remarkably improve the human conditions through out the world.

My argument however, is the other face of modernity, the hidden agenda of modernization that is the mental colonization of Africans, should not be overlooked all together. Just as colonialism was the instrument of physical control over the African resources, neocolonialism, the rare view of modernization, is the instrument of mental hegemony. By the same token, while colonization, in most part, succeeded through military force, a “push” factor; colonization of Africans’ mind became possible through the “pull” factors that lures or attracts Africa towards the Western culture of modernity. While the physical colonization facilitates the transfer, exploitation and homogenization of the Western values of the natural sciences and other tangible cultures, including technological tools, the mental colonization focuses on the diffusion, internalization and homogenization of intangible cultural elements.

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Jeremy Black wrote that “by 1914 Africa was fully partitioned along lines that bore little relation to cultural or linguistic traditions.”⁵⁵ Ethiopia, the former Abyssinia was the only country which succeeded to defeat the colonial force of Italians at ‘*Adawa*’. Due to this, Ethiopia was not being physically exploited by the European colonial powers; nevertheless, she never escaped from the mental colonization of neo-imperialism. The reason is as Gidden explicated “while the industrialized states have withdrawn from direct administration of the colonized territories, they still maintained their control through their leading economic position in the world trade and through the influence of large transnational corporations.”⁵⁶ This can be substantiated not only by the fact that emperor Hailesilassie and Mengistu were highly dependent on Britain and the former USSR respectively,⁵⁷ but also, the current government still makes Western and other alien values and experiences as an anchoring point for its policy formulation, giving little or no emphasis on indigenous cultural values.

In general with the ever-increasing rate of urbanization, technological advancement, consumerism, mass society, communication technology and globalization, the rare view of modernization keeps on expanding and expanding; consequently, the alien culture succeeded to significantly marginalize our indigenous values. However, unless we dignify our identity and secure our mental freedom, genuine development is inconceivable in Africa. Amartya Sen pointed out that

The historical increase in personal freedom would simply mean that more and more people would have the option of choosing the values that they see as being in their interest.... This opportunity was seen as a prerequisite for maximizing the use of talent within a social system as well as a prerequisite for economic development.”⁵⁸

If we, Africans, left the apparent mental colonization unchecked, and keep on echoing and retelling the Western discourse of “modernity”, it will be difficult,

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in the near future, to bridge the gap between our indigenous (traditional) values, which are still active and working in the daily lives of our societies, and the Western modern values, which assume a superior position. In other words, the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, developing and developed, the relativistic and universalistic, as well as the common sense and scientific knowledge would be left uncompromised- that could probably lead us to anomie and other social pathologies.

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Chapter III

Appropriating Modernity

Appropriating Modernity

As a result of the legacy of colonization and the ever-increasing phenomena of neo-colonization and globalization, the "modern" situation of Africa became paradoxical. The more Africans strive to acquire modernity and civilization the more they lose their identity and indigenous values. This is because contemporary Africa is haunted by the spirit of confusion, and dilemma. This complexity arises mainly from the non-evolutionary radical imposition of alien cultural values by the West through the modernization process. As Subair pointed out, "Change and crises illustrate the problematic nature of epistemological continuum and call for serious negotiation in the exchange of philosophical ideas between the traditional and the modern minds." ¹

The impact of the modernization process in Africa has two layers: physical and mental destruction. This was indeed a consciously planned activity of the colonial powers. As Bell remarked "Europe ruled Africa for over one-and-a-half centuries; it bureaucratized and exploited natural and human resources; and even while consciously excluding its partnership in Western economic development." ² Apart from the international trade, central and equatorial Africa had been exploited in three different but interrelated ways. First, concessionary system, in which the colonial rulers delegate private concessionary companies in the name of "developing the wealth of African countries", resulted in high degree of natural resource destruction. When concessionary system was replaced by the colonial system, the environmental crises and losses of indigenous values even worsened than ever before. Subsistent farming which kept varieties of indigenous crop species was replaced by cash cropping;

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diamond and gold mining was expanded. Since this mining involving lodging, more hunting was done to feed laborers. In addition, large scale colonial development projects such as hydroelectric dams displaced thousands of people and many wild animals. Even after the colonial rule, postcolonial dilemma was still a threat to the environment. Since the then African leaders demand the economic advantages from the natural resource exploitation, they kept on doing what the colonizers had started.³

The intellectual impact of modernity is also significant in African situations. For example, although contemporary Ethiopia is the only African country that has never been colonized, the ongoing debate on the language of instruction signifies the magnitude of the problematic of postcolonial dilemma. The proponents of the idea that the medium of instruction in Ethiopia, at all levels, should be English argue that none of the Ethiopian languages, except Amharic which is relatively developed and could be used as a medium of instruction. The argument goes, since English is the language of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels, it is reasonable to start to use the language as early as possible, so that students could have a good command of the language. However, the proponents of native language argue that as Ethiopia is a multiethnic country with more than eighty languages, there is no way to use English, a language imposed through neocolonialism, as the medium of instruction; and thus we must start using all our indigenous languages as the medium, through which we can develop our languages. Due to this dilemma, while the federal government of Ethiopia declared the mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the primary level and implemented it in all the government and public schools, many economically privileged parents (including higher government officials and scholars) send their children to those private schools, where English or French is a medium of instruction.

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Due to the apparent misconception and misappropriation of modernity, most people tend to reject their past and all sorts of their indigenous values. The rejection indicates, according to Messay, the extent of the African alienation and the depth of internalization of the colonial discourse. "Basically, most Africans believe that their past culture was primitive and worthless. Crucial, therefore, is the association of African failure to modernize with poisoned relationship of elite with its own legacy." ⁴

It is the rejection of our past that put us under subordinate status. What makes us subordinate is not only the Eurocentric and universalistic standard of judging our economic, historical, political and cultural situation, but also the attitude we have towards our cultural past. Kaphagawani and Malherbe argue that "if we say that Africa is now in postcolonial period of history, it is because indigenous culture has come back in to its own." ⁵ In other words, if it is colonization, that resulted in lose of our indigenous culture, then our postcolonial situation must be characterized by return to the past. However, since an absolute return is impossible, appropriating the European culture of modernity to fit the African situation would be inevitable.

The idea of modernity and European modern cultural values are not evil by themselves. Just as any of our indigenous values could be constructive or destructive; so could be modern cultural values. They may speed up or hamper our development. What is evil though is the hidden agenda that came along with modernity- colonization of the African minds. Thus, appropriating modernity implies the adaptation and development of modern Western cultural values so as to serve the African purpose. As Kaphagawani and Malherbe put, as far as we accept the diffusion and development of European cultures here in Africa, we should not make it Eurocentrically, but Afrocentrically; that is, in response to Africa rather than Europe.⁶

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The task of appropriating modernity demands the clarity of the question whether modernity is a universal concept which is common to every society, or it is a particular cultural value that emerged and resides in the West only. Strong universalists argue that “if we call something knowledge, then it is true for all people, anywhere, at any time.”⁷ For them, since modern ideas are based on rational and scientific knowledge modernity is true for every society regardless of its historical rhetoric and cultural differentiation. This implies that if democratic political system is assumed as “knowledge” of politics then it must be applied everywhere, every time. However strong relativists believe that since every ethnic group’s knowledge is absolutely unique; its analysis will be unique too. Thus, although many people agree that the implied idea of progress is the intersection point of the wide varieties of conceptions of modernity, it does not mean that every cultural group understands modernity in the same way. In their “African Epistemology” Kaphagawani and Malherbe argue that “there is both some universality to the phenomenon of knowledge as well as local variations in it which different cultural contexts generate.”⁸ Thus, I believe that modernity should be conceived as it is explicated in this midway position. That is although modernity can be conceived as a universal concept, which entails progress as it originated and was shaped by the Western cultural experiences, it must be modified or adapted to the cultural contexts to which it is newly introduced. But it should never be copied and internalized as it appears in the European contexts. This is because the socio-historical conditions that resulted in Western modernization are not common to all other societies’ historical contexts. For instance, the individualistic way of life, a typical cultural value of modernity is a result of the dominant Western culture of formal rationality that gave birth to capitalism.

Individualism, however, cannot be considered as a common value of all societies, for the socio-historical conditions that facilitate the emergence of this value are inexistent in other cultural contexts. Whatever the historical period

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could be called modern; the Africans would hardly lose their communality and replace it with individualism with the absence of those factors for the cultural fibers of this tradition are as strong as individualism has in the Western circle. However, this does not imply that African societies are not modern at all. If we conceive modernity from the point of view of Western conception of modernity, we may conclude that Africans are not really modern.

Nevertheless, they are still modern from the philosophical perspective of modernity, in which modernity is conceived contextually. Failure in understanding modernity, in the midway position would result in social crises. For instance, since individualism is now internalized by few economically privileged urban dwellers in Africa, while communalism is still the dominant way of life of the vast majority; the society has missed the vital traditional value of cooperation, among relatives and neighborhoods, particularly, at a time of seasonal shortage of food. This alien culture of greed results in high degree of urban migration, internally and the claim of food aid, externally, which in turn widely opens the gates of subordination. Cultural contextualization, which holds the belief that all human understandings and knowledge become historical and are culture bound,⁹ should therefore be encouraged to be taken as the dominant philosophy of understanding modernity.

A better understanding of modernity is however given in Wimmer's account of inter-culturally oriented conception of philosophy. That is modernity or other modern cultural values are not the sole property of the West, nor are Africans devoid of modern values. Though modernity is first articulated by the West, non-Western societies also have modern values of their own. To understand this, one has to engage in a polylogue and try to listen and understand others in their own contexts. "Interculturally oriented philosophy provides clearly a broadening of horizon of reflection insofar, as conceptualizations from other than occidental traditions of thought can bring to consciousness, talent,

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presuppositions of occidental philosophy which then turn out not to be universally valid." ¹⁰

Tsenay illustrated the importance of contextual understanding, in his historico-hermuntical project. He argues that although both Zara Yocab and Rene Descartes are philosophers at the same period of the seventeen century, as they are from very different socio-historical backgrounds, their modern philosophy should be understood according to their own contexts. ¹¹ Nevertheless, we cannot claim that the former is traditional and the later modern. In the same way, Messay criticized the Eurocentric universalistic conception of modernity. He believes that it is only when we accept "the relativization of the West, not its normatively, open the African path to modernity. When the West is presented as the norm, Africans are reduced to imitators." ¹²

Philosophy plays a crucial role in enabling Africans to clearly conceptualize and appropriate modernity. Masolo argues that "philosophy is experience. It is a personal point of view insofar as it is mine, and because philosophy consists not in persuading others, but in making our minds clear."¹³ Tsenay also insisted that a philosophical reflection or a profound thinking is essential for Africa in order to attain its cultural maturity;¹⁴ this implies that rethinking our historical, political, social and economic past is a key to understand modernity. Professional philosophy, according to Oruka, if properly utilized, can play three important roles. First, it can be employed in analyzing and evaluating ideas raised in the nationalist-ideological philosophy, and thereby help to strengthen the current African search for cultural and political identity." ¹⁵

As a perspective in African philosophy, deconstruction could also be used to address the problem of modernity. Outlaw insists that, however, we must be conscious when using the concept "deconstruction" in African philosophy. This is because, the term "deconstruction" is directly taken from the West, and its

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meaning in the Western context is different from how we understand it in African philosophy. When he used the concept in African philosophy, Outlaw was already aware of the fact that deconstruction is associated with “the complex set of practices within the enterprise of Western philosophy that goes under the name”.¹⁶ Derrida, for instance associated his idea of deconstruction with violence and metaphysics. As Mouffe elucidated, deconstruction, for Derrida is an approach of philosophy which reveals “the impossibility of establishing a consensus without exclusion of fundamental importance for grasping what is at stake in democratic politics.”¹⁷ The concept of deconstruction is not only differing in its use in the Western and non-Western circles, but also, among philosophers within the West. Heidegger, for instance, conceives deconstruction as repetition or *wiederholung*. That is deconstruction is revitalizing the historicity of German existence. Still another scholar from the West uses the term deconstruction to refer the concept “return to primordial truth or some uncontaminated ‘*arche*’.”¹⁸

Although the very meaning of the concept deconstruction was explicated and popularized by the Western scholars, African philosophers did not bring the concept in to use without modification. In defining the idea, Tsenay takes Heidegger’s early conception of deconstruction: “repetition or *wiederholung* ” and adapt as “the reawakening of the vigor and vitality of African existence.”¹⁹ By vitality Tsenay refers to the “production of new concepts”. As far as Bernasconi’s explication of Tsenay’s idea of deconstruction is concerned, it is an approach in African Philosophy which concretely and precisely engages in working out new concepts. The production of new concepts, in fact, arises from the historico-Hermeneutical interpretation of the past which is indeed the source of our enigmatic present. His deconstruction, as elaborated in his hermeneutic involves “unmasking” and “undoing” of the Eurocentric residue inherited from colonialism. This means, it involves rethinking and redefining

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"the grounding parameters and cultural codes inscribed in these political, economic, educational and social organizations."²⁰

Lucius Outlaw's conception of deconstruction is not basically different from Tsenay's. In expounding the idea, he mentioned the Negritude movement and the National Ideological Philosophies as the typical deconstructive forms of African philosophy. The reason is, the Negritude movement, for example, demonstrates "its efforts directed at reconstructing and rehabilitating the 'African'; while forging in identity and authenticity thought to be appropriate to the exigencies of "modern existence."²¹

Freedom, Messay argued, "can return to Africa, only if Africans disengage from the Western definitions".²² This disengagement can not be possible without deconstruction. Thus, the merit of deconstructionist school is to have understood the extent to which the internalization of Western representations blocks the African initiatives. The argument goes, since disengagement is possible only when we accept relativism, and relativistic premises lack the sense of objectivity, it follows that decolonization will not be effective; for it lacks convention and power of objectivity. Thus Messay concludes "the relative premises of deconstruction theory prevent the recovery of the sense of wonder. To decenter the West so as to recenter Africa, much more than deconstruction is required."²³ One important point that makes Messay slightly different from Tsenay and Outlaw is his emphasis on the notion of "mental decolonization". "The deconstruction of Western paradigm must imply the rejection of the antinomy between modernity and tradition.... Mental decolonization is the key to Africa's numerous impediments and continuous marginality."²⁴

Despite their point of emphasis and other minor differences, the aforementioned African philosophers have something to share in common with regards to the definition of deconstruction. All agree that deconstruction is an

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approach in African philosophy which claims that due to colonization and neocolonization, much of the concepts we have now in Africa are those that are propounded and defined by the Western scholars and philosophers. These concepts, however, do not genuinely represent the African situations; therefore should go through the process of deconstruction and reconstruction to fit into their own context. Tsenay's phrase of "the production of new concepts", Outlaw's hermeneutics and his interest towards the Negritude movement and the National Ideological Philosophy, as well as Messay's emphasis on disengagement from the Western definition and the need for mental colonization all substantiated their unity on the conception of deconstruction. Since, modernity is a Western defined concept, it ought to be deconstructed and redefined contextually. As Richard Bell wrote "the understanding of anything is always tied to its surroundings, which include language, customs, geography, iconic traditions, and especially the ordinary practices of its people."²⁵

One of the fundamental assumptions of the deconstruction project is the idea that indigenous African values are rich enough to define themselves and should deserve sufficient credit in the reconstruction process. This idea is better elaborated by the renowned African writer, Wole Soyinka's notion of *revaluation*. He argued, the revaluation of traditional values "the selecting and lifting up of the deeper (viable) traditional values of a community and recasting them to meet today's realities."²⁶ I also agree that revaluation is a very essential concept that will really serve Africans' task of appropriating modernity. The reason is as it requires the selection and lifting up of the deeper traditional values; it enables us being critical of both the indigenous and alien values. This means that no strange culture would dominate and displace our viable cultural values unnoticed. The systematic incorporation of important Western values into our core traditional values would be a result of critical engagement and conscious choice; but not passive absorption of the Western

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imposition. Bell, in his “Narratives in African Philosophy” elucidated that Soyinka’s revaluation is a key element in appropriating modernity. “As each community reevaluates its life in terms of new external factors, it can critically evolve its traditions to meet modernity.”²⁷

Critical appreciation of one’s own culture should be considered as one of the important qualities that are needed for revaluation. Cultural appreciation, if it is critical, not blindly emotional, demands exposure to other alien cultural experiences. As Kaphagawani and Malherbe explicated, “People who have never experienced a culture other than their own, have no wider standard or more general background against which to think about and appreciate their own tradition”.²⁸ African exposures to the Western culture could therefore be considered as a privilege if we manage to think so. In this connection, Ujamma, Nyrere’s Essays on socialism,²⁹ could be considered as a good example for the advantage of alien cultural exposure in critically appreciating one’s own culture. His critical appreciation of the traditional African communalism: the spirit of family and society in traditional Africa is a result of his personal experience and exposure for the Western culture of Marxian revolutionary socialism.

Modernity, for Messay is “a forward movement into the past”.³⁰ This conception also illustrates the idea of revaluation of traditional values. Messay argues that Western philosophers conceive progress, the innermost meaning of modernity, as the forward movement in to the past. Plato’s movement in search for form, that is already given; Descartes’ defense of innate ideas, the Kantian’s notion of a priori knowledge, the Christian idea of the fall of humanity, the ancient Greek idea of golden age, and the renaissance idea of rebirth of Greek philosophy all substantiate the conception of modernity as the forward movement into the past.³¹ Thus, it is reasonable to conclude, at least, that modernization is not a

movement away from the past; and there can still be modernity in traditional African values as long as we critically appreciate them in view of revaluation.

Appropriating Traditional African Values

Critical appreciation and reflection on traditional African values will help us, of course, to revalue some of the workable traditional values and incorporate in the overwhelming adoption of Western values so as to meet genuine modernity. By doing so, I believe that this section will help readers to have a deeper insight on how modern Western values override our indigenous cultural values, and how critical appreciation will serve the purpose of modernity. The South African born Botswanan author Bessie Head indicated how the indigenous values of African humanism would serve as founding principles of peace in the situation where Africans were oppressed and exploited by the colonial powers. “It is to be hoped that great leaders will arise there who remember the suffering of radical hatred and out of it formulate a common language of human love for all people.”³² Bessie’s prophesy indeed came to be true when Nelson Mandela became the leader of South Africa. This happened because the value of forgiveness is the core value of traditional African society.

Traditional African values, I believe, not only should deserve appreciation for they served the interest of pre-colonial Africa, but also for the potential they possess in solving the problems we face in postcolonial Africa. Critical appreciation of our traditional values is a way to revive our vital values. Gyekye’s explication of the cultural revivalists claim reveals that “the failure and frustration in the attempts to make progress in efforts of development are attributable to the neglect of the values of the African people, and consequently their having to operate alien system to which they have no intellectual, ideological or emotional attachment”.³³ In addition, revivalists believe that reviving a culture will serve as a base for searching cultural identity and

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pride, as a base for unity, as base to mental liberation and national integration.³⁴

In the political sphere, for instance, traditional African values have tremendously contributed to the well being of the society, for instance, through its indigenous dispute settling management mechanism and democratic tradition of governance. As Kinfe Abraham stated “the various instruments of conflict resolution employed to arrive at some form of *modus vivendi* or consensus, leading to social balance and communal harmony.”³⁵ The “Gadaa system” which organizes the Oromo society of Ethiopia into groups or sets (about 7-11) and assigns different responsibilities in the society every eight years is a good instance of the traditional African democratic and egalitarian political system.³⁶ The Ashanti “consensual democracy” that is different from the “majoritarian democracy” of the West is also a traditional democracy that can serve as an indigenous base for the modern democratic system which is alien to the cultural experiences of Africans.³⁷ In the same way, Gyekye’s account of the “Akan political institution” further illustrates the outstanding features of the traditional political culture prior to the introduction of modern or Western democracy.³⁸ According to Bell, the “Village palaver” forms a foundation stone for African civil society, and is a very interesting form of local democracy.³⁹

The proponents of colonialism, for the sake of their hegemony, however, denied the very existence of democratic traditions in the pre-colonial Africa;⁴⁰ this is in fact far from the reality. Siegfried Pausewang argued that although it is often said that Ethiopia has no democratic traditions, one can really find numerous democratic elements if only he or she looks for it in the right place. In local affairs, people are capable of solving their problems without resorting to violence for they are aware of the democratic culture that discussion rather than force leads to better solutions.”⁴¹ Cureau Adolphe also indicated that

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democratic tradition in Africa is generally characterized by the very democratic features of: rule through popular consent, freedom of expression of one's opinion in the conduct of public affairs, the limited power of the chief in which “the chief's authority is valid insofar as it is the mouthpiece of the majority interests.”⁴²

Apart from the traditional democratic systems in Africa, there are other traditional social values that are developed within the communitarian life style of Africans. These core social values which have survived for centuries are still active today in most parts of the continent. In Ethiopia, for instance, ‘*Debo*’, and ‘*mahiber*’ are the well established social institutions that serve the community as mechanisms for economic and social cooperation. As Giday pointed out these social institutions are commonly shared by all ethnic groups.⁴³

Despite the existence in abundance of viable traditional African values, African countries hardly make use of them as a foundation for the existing Western oriented political and social systems. When introducing the Ethiopian traditional schools, Richard Pankhurst stated that “constitutes one of the oldest continuous system of learning in the world. These schools provide education at all levels: elementary, secondary and higher, and in a wide variety of fields, including reading and writing, and to a lesser extent, art, history, law and traditional medicine.”⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the “modern” Ethiopian curriculum did not make use of any one of the traditional educational values in any way. As Scanlon and Cowan indicated, there was an entire separation between the centuries long traditional education system and the modern “Ministry of Education” Curriculum, which is an imitation of the Western Education system;⁴⁵ consequently, the current problems and controversies on the quality of Education in Ethiopia became apparent.

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The failure of postcolonial Africa in harnessing traditional values to appropriate modernity is not limited to the social, political and educational areas; rather, it is evident in the development of modern science and technology. Instead of developing traditional scientific wisdom to meet the standard of modern science and technology, Africa rejected traditional values at all and strived to replace it totally with modern science for there is the belief that whatever is traditional is primitive and uncritical. Samuel, however, argued that “the scientific principles behind the various unit operations (of traditional wisdom: food preservation, *tella* /beer, *areke*, *tej*, /alcoholic beverages) may be the same as found in modern food technologies, but the mode of applications may be different.”⁴⁶ Traditional African herbal medicines those that are feasible and active today may result in a far better effect if they are critically appreciated and appropriated to meet modernity. As Helen Lauer indicated:

*African scientists of the 21st century are obliged to create conduits for the regional indigenous values and practices that determine implicitly their home, communities’ goals using the most efficient scientific means available for achieving these goals.*⁴⁷

Since critical appreciation of cultural values involves evaluation of the cultural elements, it remarkably facilitates the appropriation of modernity, particularly, if the appreciation aims at the evaluation of both the traditional and Western cultural elements. In the process of critical appreciation, any cultural element which is found to be a threat for the society would be subjected to expulsion. With regards to political values, Gyekye, for instance indicated that “some of the traditional African political institutions or practices will therefore have to be expunged.”⁴⁸

To sum up, while the first few pages of this chapter is dedicated to the explication of appropriating modernity, the last few pages do about appropriating traditional African values. The former demands the rejection of

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universalistic conceptions of modernity. However, the latter emphasizes the need for relativistic or contextual conception of modernity. The deconstructionist's claim of reconstruction and redefinition also aims at maintaining the balance between the western modern culture and the traditional African values.

As I have tried to elucidate so far, Africa cannot deny the importance of most of the essential modern western values. Similarly, the West should never overlook the authenticity of traditional African values. Thus, intercultural understanding of the concept modernity will be the mid-way and the only way out. This means, if African scholars argue, Afro-centrally, that traditional African values are the only genuine culture and consider the assimilation of important western values as contamination, they are problematizing the conception for modernization, particularly, in the area of science and technology, is impossible without cultural borrowing and adaptation. If, on the other hand, the Western scholars, Euro-centrally, argue that Western cultural values are the only genuine model of civilization and deny the possibility of modern ideas among the non-west, they are still complicating the issue. Instead, if both abandon their centric thinking and come to accept that they have to explore and come to know each other; they have influenced each other, or they have taken from and given to each other; then the task of appropriating modernity would be possible.

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Conclusion

If you ask anyone, in Ethiopia, the meaning of modernization, you will get an answer that may label modernization as synonymous with Westernization or Europeanization; which, indeed, implies the magnitude of the intellectual hegemony of the West on Africa. In general, postcolonial Africa is represented by the misconception and misappropriation of the idea of modernity due to the impacts of colonialism and neocolonialism. As mental colonization is the phenomenon of intellectual, not physical, hegemony, it is usually difficult to detect or identify it easily without having a deep philosophical outlook.

In other words, if we make use of our critical attitude, we can easily be aware of the fact that Africans conceive western modern values as an exact opposite of, and superior to the traditional African values. This resulted in uncritical rejection and replacement of these indigenous cultural elements with the alien western values. This, however, does not mean that there are no people in Africa who are aware of the apparent confusion. While few intellectuals and conservative groups have been striving to appropriate modernity in the postcolonial African situation, the majority seems unaware about the situation. This is because they are either doing nothing in response to the challenge, even though they are aware of the problem; or they keep on telling and retelling the Western discourse on modernity unintentionally. Policy formulation and decision making processes at the national level are not also free from the negative impacts of western modernity. Whoever could be the originator, wherever it might have emerged first, it is undeniable that modernity possesses essential values, without which betterment of human conditions is inconceivable.

Modernity is a vital element in the journey of human progress or development. Since development is the sum total of all aspects of human progress aimed at improving the human conditions, and modernity has the same end, it is

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obligatory to conceive modernity appropriately. Just as some aspects of modern western values speed up our economic development, there are some that weigh down the social and emotional wellbeing of the African people. Thus, critical investigation and modification of both the Western and the African values should be highly demanded so as to meet genuine modernity.

Philosophy plays a significant role in meeting this goal. This role ranges from awakening our citizens' consciousness, to enabling individuals to actively participate in the deconstruction of the imposed western identities so as to re-evaluate, to reconstruct or to modify where necessary. This sort of advanced critical engagement, indeed, is possible only when the education systems of African countries consciously include philosophy in their curriculum. The main objective of the inclusion would be developing critical attitude of the learners at all levels. This can be possible not only by introducing philosophy courses such as Logic and Critical thinking at the tertiary level curriculums; but also, by systematically including parts of these courses in other disciplines such as Language, Civics and ethical education at the primary and secondary levels; if possible starting from kindergarten. Unless Africa does so, with the ever-increasing phenomenon of globalization, I believe that the future of Africa will be a time of identity crises, confusion, dilemma and normlessness.

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Declaration

This thesis is my original work, which has not been presented for a degree in any other institution of higher education, and all sources of facts used for the thesis have been properly acknowledged.

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