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Author

Eze, Chielozona

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HATE YOUR ENEMY: THE ANATOMY OF RESENTMENT IN AFRICA'S
CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO THE WEST

Chielozona Eze
(Work in Progress)

"People in McDonald's countries don't like to fight wars anymore, they prefer to wait in line for burgers." Thomas Friedman.

"I would rather attend the burial ceremony of an African who died eating Big Macs than of that who died from not eating anything." Chielozona

Abstract

It is common knowledge that the relationship between Africa and the West has been marked on the one hand, by exploitation and on the other by resistance to this. Africa's resistance to the West has, in many instances muted into resentment that has in turn created some forms of moral delusions, and cultural relativisms. There is a parallel between African-American resentment of the dominant Anglo Saxon culture and African resentment of European culture. To some degree, the one has influenced the other, and this has had tremendous effects on Africa's perception of culture as homogenous whole.

In this paper, I explore the phenomenon of resentment in Africa's resistance to European expansionism. I suggest the idea of transculturality as a way of understanding global cultural phenomenon, and as a way of freeing African cultural discourse from the debilitating binary of colonized/colonizer discourse parameter. I argue that the presence of McDonald in Nigeria could trigger a new consciousness to reality, and indirectly to some form of economic growth, rather than be perceived as a symbol of Western hegemony.

Key Words: * *Ressentiment* * Moral Delusion * Relativism * Human Rights * McDonaldization * Transculturality

Resentment

One of the most profound, if somewhat disturbing, discoveries in the moral discourse of the past century and half is the idea that our judgment about good and bad is to some degree a product of *ressentiment*. Important in the understanding of *ressentiment* is the distinction Nietzsche makes between “Yes-Saying” and “No-Saying” sentiments, between pro-active and reactionary attitudes to life. The Yes-Saying, noble sentiment emerges from within a creative part of the individual, and allows the individual to affirm reality, while the No-Saying or slave sentiment agitates and negates.

For Nietzsche, the nobility of ancient times especially of Greece, best exemplified the “yes-saying” attitude, for the members were born noble; they did not have to toil and sweat and agitate against any authority. The noble or Master, as Richard White observes, is a person, who having no reason to agitate against anything, “celebrates all of the instinctual powers of life in the constant turmoil of ‘war, adventure, hunting, dancing [...] Such an individual, living ‘in complete trust and openness with himself,’ does not seek to preserve or justify his life.” The slave on the other hand is the victim of the other’s instinctual excesses, and because he “lacks every outlet, his suffering feeds upon itself as he is forced to experience his own weakness over and over again; until eventually, such re-sentiment is established as memory, which allows him to calculate his own revenge.”¹ It is in the will to revenge that we locate the slave revolt – which indeed has nothing to do with slaves, actual or historical. Slave revolt is to be understood as an attitude of “No-Saying,” and as Maudemarie points out in the introduction to *On the Genealogy of*

¹ Richard White. “The Return of the Master: An Interpretation of Nietzsche’s ‘Genealogy of Morals’.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol, XLVIII, No. 4 (June 1988), 686.

Morality, the slave revolt, “was led by priests, not slaves.”² The priestly class, we infer from the above, could not challenge the nobles directly and resorted to achieving control of society from the backdoor, through their definition of good and evil.³ This revolt according to Nietzsche “gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of beings denied the true reaction, that of the deed, who recover their losses only through an imaginary revenge.” In other words, values are born not out of a clear-headed judgment of reality and the desire to establish some binding moral or legal norms for society, but out of the wish to avenge oneself.⁴ What this implies is that this person (of slave morality) cannot act except in reaction to something, an offence, a hurt, an insult. His valuations are negative valuations, for he has, according to Nietzsche, mere “No-saying’ as his “creative deed”; he needs “external stimuli in order to be able to act at all.” The noble manner of valuation, on the contrary “acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks out its opposite only in order to say “yes” to itself still more gracefully and more jubilantly.”⁵ Even when the noble person feels hurt, he does not reserve reaction for the future, the anger “runs its course and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, therefore it does not poison when it appears in him.”⁶

Nietzsche’s view, of course, does not have the last word in moral discourse, for it does not explain the human person’s need to relate and to weave a community which

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Maudemarie Clark & Alain J. Swensen, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), xxix.

³ Compare this with the modern day use and misuse of value especially in regard to American society and the rise of Christian fundamentalism.

⁴ It can be argued that the recent bloated appreciation of value in America is nothing less than the smoldering wish to wreak vengeance on the enemy out there (members of the other tribe) wanting to demolish our being. Value therefore becomes a rallying war cry against the others.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. 19.

⁶ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 21.

demands differentiating between good and bad. It does not explain why human beings have innate desire for justice even when they are not victims.

To my mind, if the slave developed universal norms which could aid the flourishing of life in society, then his suffering must not have been in vain. But if he indulged in little games of deceit and lies, then, we would still be forced to look elsewhere for norms of societal co-existence of the weak and the powerful. If, for example, he translated his wish for vengeance into a norm that would punish whoever used his or her excessive instincts to the detriment of other persons, he would have transcended the natural instinct of vengeance resulting from hurt. That means that that norm would bind him if he eventually assumes the position of power.

In his discussion of phenomenology of *ressentiment*, Max Scheler retains the French word, for it rightly brings out the core feeling more than any other word can. *Ressentiment* simply means feeling once again.⁷ What counts in the process of “feeling again” is the attitude that is produced. Translating *ressentiment*, he points out that the word that comes closest to it in German is *Groll*, meaning rancor, or loosely translated, resentment.⁸ Rancor is just such a suppressed wrath independent of the ego’s activity, which moves obscurely through the mind. It finally takes shape through the repeated reliving of intentionalities of hatred or other hostile emotions. In itself it does not contain a specific hostile intention, but it nourishes any number of such intentions.⁹ He asserts that without the contradiction between the assumption of equality among all human beings on the one hand and the “factual differences in power, property, and education,”

⁷ The French etymology: *sentir*, to feel

⁸ In this project, I use “resentment” and *ressentiment* interchangeably.

⁹ Max Scheler. *Ressentiment*. W. Holdheim, trans. L. Coser, ed. (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 39-40.

on the other, *ressentiment* would not occur.¹⁰ *Ressentiment* therefore arises out of the desire for justice, albeit repressed because of one's weakness, and the fear of repercussions. If *ressentiment* can be qualified as a demand for justice there must be a person or a group against whom that very demand is directed, a person or group which the other recognizes as being directly responsible for his or her misery. *Ressentiment* therefore has to do with anger, feeling of hurt, a balled emotion of disappointment, "a movement of hostility."¹¹ This becomes pronounced when that emotional response is repeatedly relived. Reliving it, having the original feeling regurgitated,¹² "sinks it more deeply into the center of the personality, but concomitantly removes it from the person's zone of action and expression." But since this emotion cannot be expressed directly because of fear of repercussion it then turns inward to corrode the mind. When the mind is adequately poisoned, Scheler argues, it engages in "certain kinds of value delusions." There is a systematic devaluing of other's values, also resulting in an overwhelming "impulse to detract and spite."¹³ This is what Nietzsche means by the defiant act of "No-saying." The person of *ressentiment*, still feeling hurt, still engineered by the desire to exact justice, but crippled by fear of consequences, engages in little games of willfully distorting whatever the other stands for however good. According to Scheler,

the formal structure of *ressentiment* expression is always the same: A is affirmed, valued, and praised not for its own intrinsic quality, but with the un verbalized intention of denying, devaluing and denigrating B. A is played off against B.¹⁴

¹⁰ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 50.

¹¹ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 39.

¹² Nietzsche's favorite word for this is the German *wiederkäuen*. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he lashes against the cows of society; those who regurgitate and re-chew old hurts, and make living out of it.

¹³ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 46.

¹⁴ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 68.

In this, I suggest, is the root of some understanding of cultural or moral relativism. Summing the ideas on *ressentiment* discussed so far – at least hinting at its implication for Nietzsche’s idea on morality, it turns out that (1) the mind is negatively tuned on account of the experience of hurt. (2) There is the need to avenge, and because the injured cannot avenge for fear of aftermath, he or she invents a force that would do it for him or her: God, nemesis, heaven and hell. (3) Summarily, the other is condemned to hell. The person of *ressentiment* claims moral superiority, which according to Scheler, of course implies some “blindness” to [others’] qualities.”¹⁵

Ressentiment and Cultural Relativism

In the face of the above constellation, cultural relativism can be seen as a form of delusion resultant upon accumulated *ressentiment*. It comes to bear when a person affirms his or her culture A not for its intrinsic quality, but with the intention of devaluing the other’s culture B, especially if culture B is identified with a dominant group traditionally associated with oppressing the minority group. He generously asserts that the other person’s culture is good for him, and mine is good for me, therefore all cultures are good for the people to whom they apply. His aim is not to prove the inapplicability of the other’s cultural symbols in his own cultural setup, but to upgrade his own. But this behavior, according Scheler, is indeed engineered by an “oppressive sense of inferiority.” For him, value blindness or value delusion sets in most when we feel unable to attain certain high values. One therefore lowers all “values to the level of one’s own factual desire or ability.”¹⁶ Generally speaking, we have situations that induce the mind to

¹⁵ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 58.

¹⁶ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 59.

produce judgments and values it would otherwise not have. The issue here is not that the logic underlying such judgment is faulty, but more, because there is a will to produce such judgments or values. And it is reactionary.¹⁷

To be sure, cultural relativism could be succinctly defined as “a theory which asserts that there is no absolute truth, be it ethical, moral or cultural, and that there is no meaningful way to judge different cultures because all judgments are ethnocentric”¹⁸ It gained prominence in the second half of the twentieth century with the emergence of multiculturalism. Its earliest form was the “reaction to the ethnocentric assumptions of nineteenth-century science which glorified Western societies and diminished the achievements of non-Western cultures.”¹⁹ What however was thought of as a respect for the achievement, or in fact the being, of other cultures turned into forms of glorification of difference for the sake of it. In the US, for example, the discourse of civil right turned (in many sections) into Black cultural nationalism that transformed the more proactive, objective resistance to inhumanity into resentment of the dominant culture. Black culture was praised not merely because of some inherent uplifting qualities, but mainly as an oppositionary force. Ever since the anticolonial powers in the former British and French colonies, the relation between the West and the rest of the world has been governed on

¹⁷ To some degree, we are reminded of Nietzsche’s dependence on Schopenhauer’s idea: *Die Welt as Wille und Vorstellung*. – the World as Will and Imagination. What controls the world is not so much our rational choice as our psychological disposition, and which we in some sense do not wish to get rid of.

¹⁸ Elizabeth M. Zechenter, “In the Name of Culture: Cultural Relativism and the Abuse of the Individual.” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol.53, (1997), 232.

¹⁹ Zechenter, “In the Name of Culture,” 324. Cultural Relativism is considered as a hallmark of modern anthropological thought with names such as Boas and Herskovits. See Spencer Herbert, *Progress: Its Law and Cause*. Reprinted in *Essays, Scientific, Political and Speculative* (New York: Appleton 1904) See also August Comte on sociology, Hegel, Immanuel Kant etc. I am, however, more interested in its discussion in the philosophy of culture. See Eze, Emmanuel, ed. *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997) for a discussion of the image of Africa in Western discourse

the one hand by resistance to domination and on the other by a surge of relativism that end up enslaving those it was ostensibly aimed at liberating.

In many instances, the person of *ressentiment* cannot think bigger than the urge to exact some vengeance allows; he is hemmed in by the effects of a wrongly conceived idea of moral edge.

History of African Resentment of the West

African resentment of the West is closely related to the black resentment of Whites in Europe and in the US. While Western thinkers of the 19th century churned out several derogatory images of Africa, Africa's image of the West – Africa's response – was no less venomous. Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912) and W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) set the tune

Challenged by the enormous technological advancement in the West none of which had taken foothold in Africa, Blyden sought a way to justify the imbalance without implying that the African was lazy or less gifted than the European – a popular strain of 19th century racialist theory. For him, “Every nation and every people has its peculiar work to perform, and each for itself must find out the work to be done and the best methods and instrumentalities of prosecuting it.”²⁰

Blyden's thought goes thus: Every nation or people is an organism whose health (civilization) can only be determined by immanent principles. The nation's civilization or culture can only be judged to the degree it is able to realize its potentialities. If it achieves its goals it has achieved perfection; it has made its contribution. If not, then it has

²⁰ Cited in Wilson, Henry S. *Origins of West African Nationalism*. (London: Macmillan St. Martins Press, 1969), 96.

betrayed it. “A” can only be judged by rules evolved by and for A. The same applies to B. In line with this, therefore, it would be unfair to judge a nation or a people with standards that are not immanent to it, standards developed outside of it. According to Blyden, when the “Northern races take the raw material from Africa and bring them back in such forms as will contribute to the comfort” of life, and the “African in the simplicity and purity of rural enterprise”²¹ fails to process the raw materials abundant in his world, he after all, should never be blamed, for he did not receive any other injunction from God than being simple in a rural environment. Following the same logic, it would not be spectacular that the Northern races excel in technology. In the same vein, they should not dismiss the African, who in his docility just serves and serves humanity. Blyden, at the risk of belaboring the obvious, is engaged in the game of tactically playing off Western culture against that of Africa. It is in this petty game that I locate the core of his *ressentiment*.

It becomes clear therefore that Blyden had already internalized the humiliation of his race and succumbed to some kind of secondary role. He then interpreted this secondary role to assume superior stance. He compared material advancement of the White race against the spiritual (read moral) edge of the oppressed people, the black race. In claiming moral strength in physical weakness, he indulged in what Nietzsche characterized as value creation out of the spirit of *ressentiment*, a game masterfully played by St. Paul in his spread of Christianity. Strength of the crucified God! Blyden writes:

Science is not the last word for humanity. It cannot be. It is continually threatening the existence of the mighty offspring to which it gives birth. It keeps itself armed to

²¹ Blyden, Edward, W. *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*. (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994), 126.

the teeth against its neighbour. Its most popular and lucrative inventions are machinery for the destruction of life. It multiplies its armies and increases its navies; and men wonder when all this would end and where it will lead.²²

He would argue that in regard to “higher purposes of humanity,” science “is a dead organism of latent forces unless it is taken up by the moral nature, unless it is animated by earnest purpose and inspired by a great spiritual idea.”²³ Of course the African would provide that missing link. Technology, in his thinking, might not be the answer to human person’s quest for meaning. To me, however, it is acutely questionable whether the African in his peace with nature would be better equipped to redress what science has destroyed if he never truly understood how science destroyed that. It boils down to the fact, as Mudimbe observes, that Blyden dismissed Western culture and “ideology, not because it was wrong, but because it seemed to him irrelevant for African authenticity.”²⁴

Kwame Anthony Appiah would identify Blyden as an intrinsic racist in the sense that he implies that whites are incapable of doing moral service to the world; it equals denying them moral agency. It is this moral service that constitutes Africa’s message to the world. This idea would be taken up by W.E.B. Du Bois and applied strictly to the African-American condition. What determines that message, for Du Bois, is history; the history of Negroes as oppressed people. Du Bois’s idea of common history of Negroes is articulated in his “Conservation of Races,” a paper he delivered to the American Negro Academy. He established that the history of the world is the history “not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations but of races [... having] a common blood and language,

²² Cited in Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot*, 63.

²³ Cited in Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot*, 63. This strain of Blyden’s argument would re-emerge in different forms in my Africans’ defense of African community: words such as humanity, care, closeness to nature etc would be used to delineate the difference between the European and the African, implying of course that the European possesses the opposite of all these qualities.

²⁴ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 114.

always of common history, traditions and impulses.” The main ideas of the paper run thus: Race differences might follow along “mainly physical lines, yet no mere physical distinction would really ... explain the deeper differences – the cohesiveness and continuity of these groups. The deeper differences are spiritual, psychological.”²⁵

Appiah observes that Du Bois places emphasis on sociohistorical rather than on biological concepts to designate races. Sociohistorical circumstances attempt to weave together what a people had gone through in the course of time that had ultimately made them become a people. Appiah points out a contradiction in this: a people must have been a people in order to undergo an experience as a people, for experience alone suffices not to make disparate individuals become a people. If, for example a group of people underwent a harsh prison experience in, say, Sahara Desert, does that allow that group to become a people? “Sharing a common group history,” Appiah argues, “cannot be a criterion for being members of the same group, for we would have to be able to identify the group in order to identify its history.”²⁶ The unresolved contradiction in his conception of the Negro race suggests that Du Bois must have some other thing in mind. It is perhaps right to suggest that he, like Blyden could not escape the Herderian Romantic enclave his ideology forced him into. History therefore is history if it has a message. Alluding to Du Bois’s insistence on history and experience, Appiah infers that Du Bois’s ultimate goal is the achievement of some degree of “moral and metaphysical significance” for the race. This is part of the message and, it can only be justified if one had the typical Negro experience of slavery, hardship, a kind of biblical furnace in which

²⁵ Cited in Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29. My quote from the Conservation of Races is based on Appiah’s text for the relevance of his analysis to my overall consideration of the theme.

²⁶ Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, 32.

“souls of black folk” are refined. The experience of suffering offers a morally superior vantage point.

It could then be said that Blyden and Du Bois fell into the trap of some form of value delusion, an admixture of badly placed cultural relativism and illusion of moral superiority.²⁷ This would dictate the pattern of African response to reality which is predominantly defensive and justificatory.²⁸ One would have been tempted to ignore Blyden and Du Boisian claims as not relevant in the discourse of African personality if such claims were not to emerge in various forms of modern day Afrocentricism such as belligerent remarks by Leonard Jeffries, or claims by the psychologist Frances Cress Welsing²⁹, providing an “easy-to-learn dichotomy by which European culture can be understood. ‘Ice’ people (Europeans) are warlike and individualistic. ‘Sun’ people are communal and peaceful.”³⁰ It is most likely that she too would be re-echoing the ideologies of the Black Arts movement of the 1960s especially as articulated by Amiri Baraka.³¹

Leopold Sedar Senghor and the Philosophy of African Personality.

Toeing the line charted by Blyden and Du Bois, Leopold Sedar Senghor, the ex-president of Senegal argued that the European person is pure reason while the African is

²⁷ The moral superiority arising from cultural relativism is comparable to a popular German joke about a driver on the wrong way on the Autobahn. He heard over the radio that drivers should beware of a *Geisterfahrer*. Wondering why all the other cars were heading in the opposite direction, he said to the radio announcement: yes, it is not just one driver; they are many *geisterfahrers*.

²⁸ Of course there are equally strong voices that opposed this justificatory trend: Frederick Douglass, Alain Locke and Martin Luther King Jr.

²⁹ Frances Welsing Cress. *Isis Papers*. (Chicago: Third World Press, 1992).

³⁰ William Cobb, Jr. “Out of Africa: The Dilemma of Afrocentricity.” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 82, No.1 (Winter, 1997), 130.

³¹ I have discussed Amiri Baraka’s populist ideologies in my forthcoming book, *Alain Locke and the Vision of Transcultural Societies: Minority Cultures Between Integration and Separation*. (New York: Mellen Press, 2005).

emotion. “I think therefore I am,” wrote Descartes, the European par excellence. The African might say, “I smell, I dance the Other. I am.”³² Senghor is ready to grant the European pure reason in order to allow the African the exclusive right to real humanity *à la* Blyden. He has therefore to dismiss the European thus:

White men are cannibals,’ an old sage from my own country told me a few years ago. ‘They have no respect for life.’ It is this process of devouring which they call ‘humanizing nature’ or more exactly ‘domesticating nature.’³³

Senghor’s idea implies the belief that the African cannot be a cannibal because he feels; he is close to nature and he respects life.

Chinua Achebe – the Moral Culpability of the Colonizers

In “The Empire Fights Back,” a lecture delivered at Harvard University,³⁴ Chinua Achebe hinted that his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, was conceived, among other reasons, as a response to the misrepresentations of Africa in some Westerner’s stories. “What *Mister Johnson* did for me was not change my course in life [...]. But it did open my eyes to the fact that my home was under attack.”³⁵ *Things Fall Apart* came a few years after this realization, and probably as a response to the cultural attack carried on by the imperialists.

Things Fall Apart is essentially the (hi)story of a people whose disintegration was occasioned by the intrusion of an external force. The narrative revolves around Okonkwo, an important man in the Igbo tribe in the days when white men were first

³² Leopold Sedar Senghor. *Prose and Poetry*. John Reed and Clive Wake, trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 32.

³³ Senghor. *Prose and Poetry*, 29. We note how Senghor cleverly put this essentialist notion of the other in the mouth of an anonymous sage in his village.

³⁴ McMillan-Steward Lecture, Harvard University (1998).

³⁵ Achebe, *Home and Exile*, (Oxford University Press, 2000) 38.

appearing on the scene. The story is divided into three parts: 1) Life in Umuofia village free of foreign influence. Things work out well. 2) The White man comes and news of how he has wiped off a village trickles down to Umuofia. 3) Umuofia is invaded by the white man. Okonkwo, the hero of Umuofia arranges resistance. In the course, he commits suicide because the force of the white man cannot be overcome.

The turning point in the novel is captured in two scenes: the one in which the elders come together to talk about the devastations of the presence of the missionaries among them. The missionary, the white man “has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (127). Secondly in the scene in which Okonkwo commits suicide after attacking and killing the white man’s messenger. Obierieka, described as the wise person of the village, comes together with a white man to the scene of Okonkwo’s suicide and they see Okonkwo’s remains hanging from a tree branch. Obierieka turns to the white man and accuses: “That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself” (149).

Okonkwo’s death stands as the death of the otherwise well functioning society. Whoever drove Okonkwo to kill himself therefore drove the society to its downfall. It is true that *Things Fall Apart* is the quintessential postcolonial novel, which in the tradition of postcolonial studies challenges the dominant paradigm of Western, Eurocentric, universalist discourse. It is also true that it stands in the tradition championed by Edward Wilmot Blyden, Du Bois and Leopold Sedar Senghor. It cleverly turned the defensive position which the above mentioned thinkers held to an accusation. Since the white man is practically the sole cause of things falling apart in Umuofia (read Africa), he has lost every moral claim to culture. Chinua Achebe would later call for the word “universal” to

be banned from the discussion of African literature.³⁶ This is because of his suspicion of identification of the West with universalism. The white man, (the West) has no moral claim to truth, to culture, to life etc.

Consequences of Value Delusion on the Discourse of Culture in Africa

In a controversial study carried out at Capital High in Washington DC, Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu discovered that African-American students were found to mob one another if they suspected that the student acted White. Among the behaviors they interpreted as acting White were:

- (1) speaking standard English; (2) listening to white music and white radio stations;
- (3) going to the opera or ballet; (4) spending a lot of time in the library studying;
- (5) working hard to get good grades in school; (6) getting good grades in school (those who get good grades are labeled “brainiac”); (7) going to the Smithsonian;
- (16) reading and writing poetry.³⁷

Fordham and Ogbu’s observation about African-American students unarguably traces its ancestry to the long history of African American resentment of the dominant culture resultant upon the harsh experience of slavery and racism in America. On the other hand, their attitude could be seen as a microcosm of the dominant African discourse of culture and which in turn governs Africa’s relationship to the West. Since African-American resentment of Whites was historically justified, it only appears a matter of filial solidarity that Africa also established its own suspicion of the West in regurgitating the experience of colonialism in order to fend off faintest forms of cultural influence. It

³⁶ See Felix Ekechi. “The Future of the History of Ideas in Africa.” *African Studies Review*. 30, 2, African History Research Trends and Perspectives on the Future (June., 1987): 63-81

³⁷ Fordham, Signithia. & Ogbu, John. U. “Black Students’ School Success: Coping with the ‘Burden of Acting White.’” *Urban Review*, 18 (1986), 186.

becomes a very successful if clichéd way of dismissing the West by reference to one of the negatively nuanced isms: imperialism, colonialism, liberalism, individualism.

Africa is of course not alone in this type of offhanded dismissal of Western-influenced cultural forms. Radhika Coomaraswamy discussed the case of Roop Kanwar, an eighteen year old Indian girl, who was burnt alive when her husband died in 1987. The incident aroused condemnations from around the world, Indian feminists condemned it unequivocally. But the Rajasthanis, the ethnic group of the husband, demonstrated for the right to commit sati which they claimed “was part of their ethnic culture.” Some “Hindi-language newspapers pointed to how human rights consciousness was not an Indian norm,” rather it was the creation of “the urban Western intelligentsia.”³⁸

The culture of dismissing the West on account of the past (which by no means can be justified) has most disastrous consequences on Africa as it has practically halted a holistic discourse of reality. The ex-Nigerian military dictator, Sani Abacha, claimed that Africa has its own brand of democracy. When Ibrahim Babangida, another former Nigerian military dictator was accused of having misappropriated Nigeria’s 12.4 billion U.S\$ (Windfall from the Persian Gulf War, 1990-1991),³⁹ he quickly organized a conference in 1991 for National debate on the West and Reparations to Africa for slavery and colonialism. His words: “The truth is that the legacy of the past weights (sic) too

³⁸ Radhika Coomaraswamy, “To Bellow like Cow: Women, Ethnicity, and the Discourse of Rights” in Rebecca J. Cook, ed. *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 49.

³⁹ Sanya Osha, “Ethics and Revisionism in Nigerian Governance,” *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, XVI, 1-2 (2002):82-93, 90.

heavily on the present and casts a shadow on our future capacity to develop our economies.”⁴⁰ The same pattern could be seen in Robert Mugabe’s tactics in Zimbabwe.

The most far-reaching consequence of forms of delusion on African cultural discourse is that age-old cultural practices gain halos of impeccability once they are perceived that it is being attacked from without. Like in the case of the above cited case of sati practice in India, the critique of human rights abuse in Africa promptly attracts defiant, “No-Saying” attitude from most African defenders of culture.

Esther M. Kisaakye demonstrates that the predominant argument proffered for the justification of practice of polygamy in Africa is cultural: “the polygamy is natural to Africa and is deeply entrenched in African society. Underlying this argument is the notion that monogamy is a Western value and its ‘imposition’ on Africa would be an attempt to impose those values on the African community.”⁴¹ The same holds of the defense of female genital mutilation, otherwise known as female circumcision. “In any of the communities practicing FGM,” she writes, “proponents have argued that the practice is so deeply imbedded in the value system of the communities that its abolition is likely to be seen as an attack on the age-old respected cultural practices and believed f the communities.”⁴² Corinne Packer narrates: “In the words of one Somali woman, ‘If Somali

⁴⁰ General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, June 1991. Cited in Armstrong Matiu Adejor, “Reparation to Africa: An Argument for Equity and Alternative Financing Strategy in a Competitive World” www.codesria.org/links/conferences/Nepad/Adejo_Armstrong.pdf

⁴¹ Esther M. Kisaakye, “Women, Culture and Human Rights: Female Genital Mutilation, Polygamy and Bride Brice” in Wolfgang Benedek, Esther M. Kisaakye, Gernd Oberleitner, eds. *The Human Rights of Women: International Instruments and African Experiences.* London: Zed Books, 2002), 277-278.

⁴² Kisaakye, “Women, Culture and Human Rights: Female Genital Mutilation, Polygamy and Bride Brice,” 272.

women change, it will be a change done by us. When they order us to stop, it is offensive to the black person or Muslim person who believes in circumcision.”⁴³

Among a number of intellectuals, what is prominent is the protection of Africa from preying Western imperialists. In propounding what she calls African feminism, Oyeronka discusses what she terms “The White Woman’s Burden: African Woman in Western Feminist Discourse,” which challenges the dominance of White women in the discourse of African women’s right. For her, it is a continuation of Western imperialism that White women take up the discourse of African reality. She calls that “into question.”⁴⁴ In the same vein, Nkiru Nzegwu even takes up a ferocious attack of white women in her essay. Invited for a panel discussion, she had to think through what imperialism had done to her in North America: how it forced her to be other than what she was. Armed with the renewed consciousness of her being a racialized human person, she became reluctant to have some white interpreter present her reality. Therefore she had to present this to her audience. She addresses the predominantly white audience.

Many things are still painfully difficult in your white system. The pain derives from the forced mutilations, identity destructions, oppressive psychological manipulations that take place each time one functions in your system. Even in this mundane public act of sharing my experiences with you, I still undergo innumerable metamorphosis and translation. First, I have to sublimate my frustrations (*as stilted ‘civilizing’ voices harp: you cannot show your emotions in public, it’s unprofessional*). Next I have to suppress large parts of myself and familiar ways of speaking (*as I recall the stiletto whine: wait a minute, could you speak in English? Nobody here understands your language*). Then I have to switch languages and translate my visceral thoughts into cold foreign words that leave out the spirit of my talk (still I hear: oh, you have an accent. Where are you from?). The distortions drive me to the processing plant of inhuman, professional power-language (*because you have to write and speak in a ‘theoretical’ way, the way*

⁴³ Corinne Packer, “Understanding the Socio-Cultural and Traditional Context of Female Circumcision and the Impact of the Human Rights Discourse,” in Obioma Nnaemeka and Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, eds, *Engendering Human Rights: Cultural and Soci-economic Realities in Africa* (in the Press), 346.

⁴⁴ Oyeronke Oyewumi, ed. *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc, 2003), 27.

stuffy white males authorized). And as if all that isn't enough, I have to swallow my anger, and valiantly find some lessons that I could offer the sea of white faces to let you know that I value you, that you are blameless, and that somehow, I made sense of all these senseless mutilations and appreciate the insight it gave me of myself.⁴⁵

Reading this, one thinks that the writer does not want to discuss the issue concerning the African woman per se. Rather she has seized the opportunity to air her personal ill feelings toward a select group of people she has chosen to identify as essentially opposed to her (the innocent victim), by mere fact of their being what they are. In the deluge of her anger she ignored to challenge the traditional African man's perception of the African women – a cultural arrangement that must be analyzed, or deconstructed on its term and not on the strength of its relation to other (preying) culture. In what appears to be a dogged defense of polygamy and female circumcision in Africa, Obioma Nnaemeka blamed Western imperialism for seeing the African tradition as oppressive to women. “The perpetual casting of African women as powerless and downtrodden,” she said, “remains a *raison d'être* of imperialist discourse.”⁴⁶ She argued that

all African women who are in polygamous marriages are not powerless, exploited, downtrodden victims. Many of these women are intelligent, highly educated, successful, independent women who choose polygamous marriages as what is good for them.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Nkiru Nzegwu, “Oh Africa: Gender Imperialisms in Academia.” Oyeronke Oyewumi, ed, *African Women and Feminism*, 104.

⁴⁶ Obioma Nnaemeka, “Literary Criticism as Disciplinary Failure: Rereading Mariama Bâ's Novels” *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing*, 4, (1998), 41.

⁴⁷ Obioma Nnaemeka, *Ibid.*

It comes as no surprise when politicians such as the Gambian president, A.J. Jammeh, states publicly “that the Government would not ban FGM, and that FGM is a part of the country’s culture.”⁴⁸

In general, there is a “re-channeling of resentment.” Africans, instead of directing their dissatisfaction with their oppressive regimes and morally depraved rulers as well as against residues of primeval cultural forms that prevent the flourishing of life, turn their anger at concepts traditionally associated with the West, the sworn enemy: such as colonialism, imperialism, globalization etc. In this, they share a lot with the oppressed people of Middle East and the Arab World, who, failing to successfully challenge their oppressive regimes vent their anger on American flags and the effigies of whichever president was in power.

Thus in the African resistance to Western culture, we have a recital of the same form of critique: a) dismissal of the West; b) praise of the African. It is therefore replacing one model A with another model B in a multiculturalist style without a comparative analysis of either of the models. Implicit in this, like it is in various understandings of multiculturalisms, is the conception of cultures as bounded wholes, packages that could easily be replaced with one another.

⁴⁸ http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/wom005_fgm_norway.htm (Accessed on 12/12/03)

Globalization and its Discontent in Africa

Works on globalization abound.⁴⁹ It is generally agreed that it is the process by which the geographical boundaries that had hitherto divided the world into seemingly self-enclosed nations fall away allowing for free flow of information, market and cultural goods. The world becomes a “single place,”⁵⁰ held by a web of “interconnected system.”⁵¹ The old order, or the hitherto held ethnic or tribal identities, what Friedman designates as olive trees, is constantly challenged by Lexus, i.e., “anonymous, transnational, homogenizing, standardizing market forces and technologies that make up today’s globalizing economic system.”⁵² Friedman believes the US has the obligation to champion this, for the US is the bastion of individual autonomy, free market and democracy to the world. Culturally therefore, the world is becoming more American. While it is true that American capitalism has touched and indeed transformed the world in different ways, nothing guarantees that it is inevitable according to Friedman. Stanley Hoffman argues that globalization is largely an American post World War II creation and if anything in the magnitude of the Great Depression ever happens to the United States economy, globalization would be as good as dead.⁵³ Pointing at one of its pitfalls, Anthony Giddens links globalization with the rise of fundamentalism in the world.⁵⁴ This

⁴⁹ For this work I make use of Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, New York: Anchor Books, 2000); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2002. They provide a somewhat balanced introductory account of the phenomenon of globalization. The one celebrates globalization in a very lighthearted, optimistic mood while the other points out its discontents. See also Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives*. (London: Profile Books, 1999).

⁵⁰ Robertson, Roland and William R. Garrett, eds. “Globalization, Modernization and Postmodernization: The Ambiguous Position of Religion,” in *Religious and Global Order: Religion and the Political Order*, vol. iv. (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1991). 238.

⁵¹ Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, New York: Anchor Books, 2000), xvi.

⁵² Friedman, 34.

⁵³ Stanley Hoffman, “Clash of Globalizations,” *Foreign Affairs*, (July-August, 2002), 3. Thanks to Nikolay Marinov for pointing this out to me.

⁵⁴ See Giddens, Giddens, *Runaway World*, especially chapter 3.

can be explained with the simple reason that at the risk of losing grip on the world, people cling to what they see as uniquely theirs and instantly surround it with halos of impeccability. The whole world might fall apart but that thing which is holy for them (for some Americans, value) will never fall with the world. (You put your riches where neither moth will eat them nor will they rot)

Nonetheless, I do not see a viable alternative to fundamental freedom and openness to reality which the above described process has brought with it. This is why I believe that, besides the already discussed resentment, Africa stands to gain from this openness. Much of the African concern about globalization revolves around economy and culture. Peter J. Henriot, S.J laments that “Our once-flourishing textile industry has been wiped out by imports from Asia; several small industries such as tyre manufacturers and medical supply companies have folded in the face of competition from large South African firms.”⁵⁵ Believing that globalization is only the latest stage of European economic and cultural domination of the rest of the world which started with colonialism, Michael Maduagwu doubts that globalization is beneficial to African culture. “Given the reality of extreme poverty and technological underdevelopment of Third World countries, particularly Africa,” he argues, “how can their distinct cultural entities be preserved under the pressures of a one world concept in the economy?”⁵⁶ He then dishes out the time-tested if clichéd critique of Western culture.

The present-day extreme individualism of the West, the outcome of centuries of laissez-faire capitalism, is being transmitted across the world as the final stage of world civilisation to which all cultures must strive to attain. On the other hand, the age-long communal life of the Africans, which is generally known as extended-

⁵⁵ Peter J. Henriot, S.J., “Globalization: Implications for Africa.” www.sedos.org/english/global.html

⁵⁶ Michael O Maduagwu, “Globalization and Its Challenges to National Cultures and Values: A perspective from Sub-Saharan Africa,” www.i-o-p.org/Maduagwu.htm (accessed on 12/10/2004)

family system, is being looked down upon as primitive. Under the extended family system, everyone is intrinsically tied up with all members of the society.⁵⁷

In the same vein, Peter J. Henriot bemoans the eventual loss traditional African cultures which emphasize “values such as community, family, respect of life, hospitality.”⁵⁸ The above two concerns, economic devastations and fear of cultural erosion, are closely connected. By this, I mean that Africa is economically weak because it wants to preserve its cultural purity. The long history of resentment (*ressentiment*) of the West has merely occluded in Africa new ideas necessary for cultural and economic evolution of any group of people. You cannot have cultural purity, social and economic prosperity at the same time.

The Cultural Importance of McDonald in Nigeria

I agree with Thomas Friedman that “People in McDonald’s countries don’t like to fight wars anymore, they prefer to wait in line for burgers.”⁵⁹ Couching this thesis in what he calls “The Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention,” Friedman argues that “when a country reached the level of economic development where it had a middle class big enough to support a McDonald’s network, it becomes a McDonald’s country.”⁶⁰ It is not necessarily McDonald that prevents war, but the middle class already global minded enough to exploit the chances and competition symbolized by McDonald. Inherent in the middle class’s thought system and sentiments, is, besides the absence of *ressentiment*, the idea that McDonald is not reducible to American world hegemony or to ruthless

⁵⁷ Michael O Maduagwu, “Globalization and Its Challenges to National Cultures and Values.

⁵⁸ Henriot, “Globalization: Implications for Africa.”

⁵⁹ Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 253.

⁶⁰ Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 249.

exploitation of the weak and voiceless. On the contrary, it demonstrates opportunities to expand choice, and an explosion of options.⁶¹ In Friedman's thinking therefore, if there is no middle class ready to accommodate McDonald, McDonald would not stand. It is not certain that McDonald helps create such middle class. What is certain is that the existence of McDonald's network rather than stifling economic growth and indigenous initiative, could prompt them by signaling a new capitalist culture that is bound to set off ripples of change in the cultural "ecosystem" of the country. Clever entrepreneurs in the host countries might imitate.

What I hope the presence of McDonald would trigger off in Nigeria is nothing less than the shattering in people's consciousness the idea that reality has been and will always remain the same. What I mean is that a McDonald network will invariably break the complacent, conservative (traditional) attitude to reality resultant upon cultural relativism.⁶² It is possible that the presence and the success of a visible difference will stimulate imitation, and competition.

African Culture – A Case for Transculturality

As I have already pointed out, defenders of African culture make use of culture as if it were a monolithic clump of reality that could be used at will to solve matters of identity and resistance. It is my conviction that any attempt to retrieve authentic African culture at best betrays a refusal to acknowledge the reality of a global era which is that

⁶¹ Those who started off eating Big Mac in the early nineties of the past century might find Carl Jr's Pastrami \$6 burger more tasty and satisfying, or they might find other eateries that have imitated McDonald more satisfying than sticking on to McDonald. McDonald has proven to America and the world, that non-traditional eateries are also means of creating prosperity, providing jobs and cheap meals. I do not see why such experiments cannot be reproduced in Nigeria.

⁶² How this would contribute to bettering the Human rights condition by eliminating some traditional practices such as FGM or abrogating polygamy is a different question. It could however, be an additional argument that reality is no longer the same

every culture is already a mix, a blend of influences and can no longer be talked about in purist terms.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the people of Abame killed the first white man they saw and tied his bicycle, “iron horse to their sacred tree because it looked as if it would run away to call the man’s friends” (99). Around 1850, the time the story of *Things Fall Apart* was set, bicycle was a strange thing that, like its owner, the white man, deserved “to die.” In 1987 however, bicycle has already become a part of African Art exhibit in New York.

The description of the piece of art in the catalogue runs thus:

Man with a Bicycle
Yoruba, Nigeria 20th century
Wood and paint.
The Newark Museum.⁶³ (See picture)

Rendering a postmodern/postcolonial interpretation, Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that the sculpture

is produced by someone who does not care that the bicycle is the Whiteman’s invention – it is not there to be Other to the Yoruba Self; it is there because someone cared for its solidity; it is there because it will take us further than our feet will take us; it is there because machines are now as African as novelists ... and as fabricated as the kingdom of Nakem.⁶⁴

While the Africans of 1850 might have seen bicycle as a strange object that did not belong to their cultural and existential world, it is no longer the same in the mid 20th century. In the face of this, it would only seem ridiculous to seek to resuscitate the life pattern of the African of 1850 or even of the early 20th century. What can be said of the bicycle applies in equal measure to other aspects of life that had been touched by the

⁶³ Cited in Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. (London: Methuen, 1992), 225.

⁶⁴ Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, 254.

coming of the white man: production and dissemination of information, dressing and eating codes, language, architecture, religion, answers to existential or ontological questions. Nothing is any longer as pure as it had been before the contact of different worlds. In the same vein, the much praised African sense of community in which the individual supposedly lives not for him or herself but for others, is more a myth than reality.

Culture is a web of narratives constituted of different strains, oft complementing, oft competing, but in the end woven to answer questions raised by the narrator. For Seyla Benhabib, “human actions and relations are formed through a double hermeneutic: We identify what we do through an account of what we do.”⁶⁵ First is what we do; second is the recognition of what we have done. This means that what we do gains meaning through our act of interpretation. This interpretation is done in the act of remembering and reenacting. We remember through the symbolic acts of words, and through narratives. That is what she means by “the actors’ evaluative stances towards their doings.”⁶⁶ We locate the being of culture in the various instances of evaluation of the past, the experienced aspect of our being, for in evaluating we establish norms directly or indirectly. It is also in this sense that Alain Locke would collapse the difference between values and facts. Things become facts in our evaluative process.⁶⁷ Succinctly defined, culture for Benhabib is

the horizon formed by these evaluative stances, through which the infinite chain of space-time sequences is demarcated into “good” and “bad,” “holy” and “profane,”

⁶⁵ Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: University Press, 2002), 6.

⁶⁶ Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, 7.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between facts and values, see Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch eds, *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1949). I am grateful to Austin Harrington for drawing my attention to this.

“pure” and “impure.” Cultures are formed through binaries because human beings live in an evaluative universe.⁶⁸

Of course every group of people has the right to define and redefine their values. The point, however, is that these definitions are not a given; they are not something handed down from the Mt. Sinai of life. I locate transculturality in the strings of the narrative of a culture. This underlines the fact that the story is made of different ideas that the memory has preferentially selected. Even in the so-called primitive society, their narrative of culture is already a product of meshing of strands from other cultures unless they never came in contact with other peoples. If you took the ideas (or symbols bearing them) apart, you not only understood how the culture was constituted but also how it could be reconstituted to answer existential questions. Peeling off symbols after symbols, ideas after ideas, you come at nothing in particular. Benhabib’s idea that culture is not a given, to my mind, are confirmed by Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov’s reexamination of the concept of ethnicity. Ethnicity, they argue, is better conceptualized as “perspectives on the world rather than entities in the world” meaning that ethnicity as such has no life of its own that could be discovered out there.⁶⁹

Another way to understand the formation of culture as a web of narratives is through examination of Orland Patterson’s idea of universal culture. Universalism is built upon the firm principle of moral autonomy and the value of the individual; it presupposes the freedom and ingenuity of the individual and maintains that there is something common to all human beings irrespective of culture, time or place. This common attribute or quality does not imply that all human beings are equally talented, nor does it command

⁶⁸ Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, 7.

⁶⁹ Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov, “Ethnicity as Cognition,” *Theory and Society*, 33, (2004), 31-64.

every one with one authoritarian imperative. Freedom is common to all but cannot be commonly realized or carried out. In fact, it is because of the commonness of this freedom irrespective of time, place or culture that makes the individual the bastion of universalism. It is in the individual, as Orlando Patterson contends, that the “inward struggle of two great forces” which “underlies the progress of human culture” takes place. The individual, exploiting the principle of group life creates and sustains culture “which in turn accumulates and reinforces the group in an endless cycle of self-regeneration.”⁷⁰ There is therefore a symbiotic relationship between the individual and the group shared by all human societies. It is tantamount to suicide for a culture to become overtly prescriptive to individuals, for it automatically kills the creative tension, the “inward struggle” in the individual that accounts for the emergence of culture. But this is what happens when ethnic groups—living side by side—pronounce their difference to an obsessive degree. In a society where different ethnic groups live together, this corresponds to the demands of multiculturalists or the cultural pluralists. It is, however, “never possible,” Patterson argues, “for peoples to meet for any sustained period of time without mutually influencing each other.”⁷¹ This is the basis for his universal culture. Because universal culture encourages the “deviant individual” and continuously abrogates the perceived homogeneity of a culture, it works against disguised conservative or chauvinistic conception of the world. The chauvinists fight it by introducing terms that maintain strict separation of cultures: cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, melting pot. Melting pot, Patterson points out, is a wrong approach to consider nation building.

⁷⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Ethnic Chauvinism: The Reactionary Impulse* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), 13–14.

⁷¹ Patterson, *Ethnic Chauvinism*, 151.

As any good cook knows, the best way to ruin a stew is to throw everything into the pot indiscriminately. Having no control over the eventual outcome, there is no way of restraining the emergence of cultural emphases or of dominant cultural symbols which contradict the proclaimed idea of economic development.⁷²

Melting pot denies the creative ingenuity of individuals who consciously borrow influences from other peoples and cultures to create something new and enriching, something that, while appealing to other peoples, inspires them to further creation. Universal culture, on the other hand, builds upon the elements that affirm the individual irrespective of background. It affirms the individual because the cultural symbols have been shed of their ethnic

specificities in the price of being universalized. They become the property of everyone. And, as such, they are enriched and developed by all. American English owes as much to Norman Mailer and Saul Bellow as it does to Henry James. And the American music we call jazz owes as much to Benny Goodman and Dave Brubeck as it does to Duke Ellington.⁷³

The universal culture is never imposed on a group of people. Rather it is taken over by individuals in other cultural space and popularized there so that the members of that group enjoy it as if it had evolved among them. Even if that cultural symbol is imposed, the group upon which it is imposed deconstructs and adapts it to their use so that it loses its patent stamp—if ever it had one. An example, according to Patterson, is the English language, an Anglo-Saxon language that has become a universal one, and which the Anglo-Saxon can no longer claim as theirs. To speak English, for an Igbo for example, is not to become English; it implies, however, the process of adding something new, a new world to the already existing Igbo world. In this Igbo person, these two worlds and all

⁷² Patterson, *Ethnic Chauvinism*, 88.

⁷³ Patterson, *Ethnic Chauvinism*, 150.

they imply blend in such a way that every attempt to compartmentalize them would always meet with difficulty.

Whether as a group's narrative of self or a force that emerges when groups live together, culture is understood as a mesh of competing and complementing strains, meaning that it is an ongoing project that is best captured by the term, transculturality. It can be seen as a deconstructive project that exposes the substructure, or the backdrop against which modern cultures can adequately be grasped. According to Wolfgang Welsch, it is "a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures." It shows how life and culture "interpenetrate or emerge from one another." This is because cultures no longer lay claim to "homogeneity" and "separateness." The form of the modern cultures according to him is "*transcultural* insofar that it passes through classical cultural boundaries. Cultural conditions today are largely characterized by mixes and permeations."⁷⁴

The interpenetration into, or emergence from, one another is, according to Welsch, a result of "migratory processes, as well as of worldwide material and immaterial communications systems and economic interdependencies and dependencies." Migratory process is to be understood not only as people moving from one place to another, but also in their being involved in ideas or knowledge from other places. Thus a person from village A, say in Nigeria, who listens to CNN news about the events in village B, say in Afghanistan, is already "enmeshed" with the reality of that world albeit indirectly. This is the case with the consumer of world news, let alone the person who jets around the world. For these people, according to Welsch,

⁷⁴ Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today." Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash ed, *Spaces of Culture: City – Nation – World*. (London: Sage Publications Ltd. 1999) 197.

there is no longer anything absolutely foreign. Everything is within reach. Accordingly, there is no longer anything exclusively “own” either. Authenticity has become folklore, it is oneness simulated for others—to whom the indigene himself or herself belongs.⁷⁵

In sum, once an idea leaves its place of nativity, it no longer belongs exclusively to that place. In the light of the above I argue that there is nothing like African culture that is not already suffused with Western influence. Using “African Culture” as a banner either to fend off Western imperialism or to preserve African unity seems from the onset doomed in contradiction. It means using what is not homogenous to argue for some form of homogeneity

Conclusion

I began this essay with a rather provocative epigram. “I would rather attend the burial ceremony of an African who died eating Big Macs than of that who died from not eating anything.” I do not intend to trivialize the idea that there are values worth dying for. In the same vein, however, I believe that life is the highest of values and that all beliefs, norms, traditions, indeed, every understanding of culture should be geared towards making it worthwhile to live. Perhaps, I am in a way, reformulating Albert Camus’s famous saying thesis that all philosophical questions boil down to that of suicide, to asking whether life is or is not worth living.⁷⁶ Globalization to my mind is to be seen primarily as a way of allowing peoples from different cultural backgrounds to undertake a comparative analysis of different forms of life with the goal of enhancing theirs by multiplying options.

⁷⁵ Welsch, “Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today,” 198.

⁷⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 11.

Emphasizing the transcultural nature of modern African, indeed global, societies allows us to eliminate the debilitating effects of resentment and concentrate on the discussion of the human condition, on human beings who possess the infinite capacities to evolve new narratives that give meaning to their lives.