

Contemporary Youth Neo-culture, Cultural Integration, and African Social Development

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Abstract

The relationship between the older generation and the younger age bloc, in Africa, today, is being redefined. Such a redefinition is occasioned by the aesthetics of the culture of the latter age category. This is geared towards a redirection of the continent's development course. However, certain conditions are required for the attainment of the objectives of the new aesthetic cultural order. The paper, therefore, investigates the nature of the new youth attitudinal culture which conflicts with the older generational cultural codes. From the Russian dialectical materialism perspective, the paper analyses youth attitudinal shift as driven by huge proclivity for contrary moral view. The paper concludes that the youth rank in Africa is endowed with the cerebral capabilities to drive Africa's development in all ramifications if the psyche of the youth rank in Africa is emancipated from the controvertible African thought system and ethical stipulations.

Key Words: Aesthetics, Neo-culture, Youth, Africa, Development, Cultural Codes

Introduction

Aesthetics in relation to culture in this context is the conglomeration of the African cultural etiquette (s), which meets the approval of African cultural sensibility. It is strongly linked to moral behaviour. Thus, moral etiquette is the bedrock of African behavioural culture. In this regard, the passing decade has been different for the continent having witnessed unimaginable rebellious attitudinal shift in its youth rank. Within the

ambit of this paper, the youth rank in Africa would be situated in the age range between fifteen (15) and twenty-five (25) years. Individuals in this age range have not been dispelling known norms in African cultural consciousness and worldview. It is safe to assert that the African youth rank do act in utter violation of traditional African cultural norms, particularly, the ethical stipulations. Paramount among these cultural norms and practices is that the youth should obey instructions dogmatically as given by elders. Others include greetings the elders, being silent when elders are talking, running to collect personal effects that an elder is holding on arrival, not looking straight into an elder's eyes in the course of a conversation, parents choosing marriage partners for their children, elders taking larger share of things, and picking meat first and eating more meat when eating with younger persons, to mention but a few. Heeding all, or many, of these cultural stipulations in African culture is equated with good character.

Africa's Youth New Cultural Aesthetics

However, it has been noted that making obeisance to these socio-cultural values has been waning among the youth rank in Africa in the past decade signifying a new youth culture. The new cultural order, which emanates from abandoning an old cultural order due to contact with another culture, "brings about a social change" (Ugboajah 71). The departure of the African youth rank from traditional cultural norms has occasioned an outright onslaught on the African cultural system, especially the episteme and ethical ramifications.

The onslaught on the ethical development of Nigerian culture is profound in its manifestation considering that a substantial number of young adults in Nigeria today insinuate parity with older adults especially when it comes to privileges such as access to social right. Today, the Nigerian youth rank does not believe in vacating the seat for the older generation based on moral grounds. The regard (in fact, the fear) that children used to have for their teachers has disappeared; the myth of being a teacher has been ruptured by the youths in this category. The consciousness of self-worth in the Nigerian youths makes them see greeting elders first as subjugation of their pulsating ego to the supremacy of the older person. For instance, this set of youths would rather grunt, than greet outright. If greeting, in some parts of Nigeria is ethical, as ethics "refers to principles of conduct that are founded on a society's moral tenets" (Newman and Newman 47), then, this could be an indication that the moral of Nigeria's youth population is waning.

In North Africa, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is rebuilding the dwindling social ethics among the youths through the social advocacy: Promotion of a Culture of Non-Violence and Peace (CNV+P). Ostensibly, having to advocate for peace among the youths is a manifestation of conflict with existing norms constructed and nurtured by the older generation, or the consequence of the policy that the older generation do make. Youth violence is, therefore, a response to the waning youths' hostile disposition to conventional norms of social rectitude in that region of Africa.

It is a common feature of today's youth rank to ask the mighty question *why?* In Africa, it is strange to ask an older person *why?* This is considered an affront to the older generation. It was the norm in Africa that the student should not ask the teacher *why* or *how?* The child should not ask the parents *why?* The ward should not ask the guardian *why?* The patient should not ask the doctor *why?* There is a dichotomy; the youth erroneously considers this mutual relation one of supremacy rather than co-relational. This dichotomy has cost Africa the needed crossfertilisation of ideas capable of innovation and competitive development on the continent. The camaraderie that Athol Fugard creates between Anela Myalatya, (Mr M), Isabel Dyson and Thami Mbikwana in *My Children! My Africa!* is instructive at this juncture. Such is a vivid portrayal of Fugard's belief in the collapse of the imaginary wall, the barricade, between the teacher and the student. It is also a reflection of both the temporal and spatial cultural practices in South Africa, at least in Camdeboo, (one of its local administrative municipalities). The African society believes and holds that each of the latter elements of the pairs has higher sense of social issues than the former elements. For instance, it is believed that parents know more than their children do. This assumption, obviously, neglects the human fallibility.

However, in the past decade, the younger generation, as noted earlier, has been unreflectively attacking these norms and practices. This generational shift in Africa's youth social practice is an evolving timebomb that will eventuate in a revolution. That is, given a sustained cultural rebellion, there would be complete detachment from the current cultural superstitions. For them, this would be the desired emancipation. A new cognition and social culture will have emerged from the present cultural configuration. This would be re-jigging the African epistemology. However, this revolution emanating from sustained youth new culture in Africa portends no danger to the continent's social

system. Rather, it is a bold statement in Africa's quest for self-definition, determination, and actualization. This is because in the long run and in practical manifestation, the new youth cognition will be channeled towards innovation, and progress.

The Concept of New Juvenile Cultural Aesthetics for Africa There are different stages in the development of any given society. The manifesting youth *revolution* in Africa, though subtle and indirect, reflects Thomas Paine's Age of Enlightenment. It is the Age of Reason rather than dogma for Africa and Africans. In the course of advancing this position, Franz Boas's *cultural relativism*, which asserts, "behaviour in a particular culture should not be judged by the standards of another culture" (Godstein 25). This is in view of the overwhelming semblance between the pre-17th-century Europe and America before Thomas Paine wrote his "Common Sense" and *The Age of Reason*, applies to present-day Africa. The semblance is in dogma and ignorance, the latter, apparently, breeding and sustaining the former. Paine's *Age of Reason* was a rejection of dogma and superstitious beliefs, thereby promoting empirical rationalism (Masihyyen, 2017).

The result of the mass enlightenment was socio-political, industrial and scientific revolutions in Europe and America. Africa is still underdeveloped (irrespective of the mounting sense of cultural nationalism in the continent), hence in the quest for own and home technology, economic vibrancy and good leadership. There is urgent need for mass enlightenment among the youths, especially. The current affront to the established custom, tradition, myth, legends and norms in the African worldview is an indication of the manifestation of the semblance between Euro-American worldview of Paine's time and contemporary African worldview.

Aesthetics of traditional African Culture: A Deconstruction

In African cultural ramification, there are a number of norms or belief practices that inhibit the progress of the continent, which are in conflict with the new orientation of the youths. The first of such cultural anathema is the absolute tendency in the social status and role of the elderly person in Africa. Infallibility is suggested in the configuration of the social status of African elders. The African system assumes the elders have monopoly of knowledge. Therefore, whatever an elder says should be left uninterrogated. Yet, this dispels the fact that the older generation is part of humanity, which is vulnerable. Therefore, the African social

system shields the weaknesses of the older generation. This claim to generational supremacy, obviously, results in situations in which elders hide crucial information from younger ones. Such information may border on traditional spiritual power, which Africa needs desperately for the continent's technological advancement. But this has been lost to amnesia and senility or pure infirmity of humanity. Useful information, which should have been discussed with younger generation, written down and preserved, since memory is a defective archive in oral society, (that is, the illiterate Africa) is concealed and lost permanently (Misztal 2003).

Arguably, no other cultural practice represses the potential of the presence and essence of the younger generation than the practice whereby the parent(s) would seclude the children when visitors are with the family. The parents alone do not make the family. It is different when the young adult would not want to be present, otherwise their desire to be part of the company, requesting the young adult to leave the company is excluding and intimidating. This is a goodwill family. The practice is restrictive, just as the barring of children from watching television before 4pm (as was the practice in Nigeria in the pre-Millennial era). The government is an accomplice here. Government administrative policies fashioned along societal moral ethos forbade television stations from opening until 4pm. The assumption here is that the television is all about entertainment, whereas the television educates, enlightens and informs. Any child bred in an environment like this would certainly be deficient in abilities, slightly shy of autism. This is part of the reason African youths have not been able to take giant strides in Africa's quest for global prominence. This clearly antithetical because most of the technological products that redirect the way of life of the people are made by the young ones in the city of Austin, Texas, the United States of America (Falola, 2016). Africa youths are the products of the society that made them, thereby affirming observation that people living in a culture acquire and exhibit the characteristics of that culture (Oтите and Ogionwo, 2014).

African belief system could further be seen as controvertible and lagging, in the sphere of dietary culture. Most climes in Africa place more emphasis on carbohydrate than on protein. This becomes obvious in the cultural assumption that feeding children with meat induces thievery in them. Among the Yoruba, South West Nigeria, as a clime in Africa, it is traditionally believed that when a child eats egg, the child would become covetous. The implication of this in the generational succession in Africa

is that the upcoming generation is protein-deficient. The lack of emphasis on the dietary system among Nigerians as a symbol of Africa is noticeable in the hullabaloo that often accompanies the hike in the prices of carbohydrate foodstuffs as the case is in Nigeria currently (October, 2016). However, meat (beef, pork as well as mutton) and fish have been quite costly, yet this has been greeted with mild complaints, no uprising, nor any imbroglio. All that these point to is that the older generation in most parts of the African continent de-emphasized (and still do) protein in their diets. To this end, it is doubtful if our ligament, hair or muscles contain protein at adequate levels as they should do, whereas it has been proven that protein keeps the mind working. More importantly, the brain's neurons communicate through proteins. (Lawson, 2016) explains that "brain cells communicate with one another via chemical messengers called neurotransmitters which are usually made of amino acids, the building blocks of protein". The crux of the Lawson's declaration is that protein is crucial in the development and functioning of the brain. The lack of this class of food or a minimal inclusion of it in most African diets, therefore, translates into undeveloped brains or minimally developed brains in Africa. How could unhealthy brains bring forth landmark developments?

Evolutionary Response to Contemporary Africa's Juvenile Cultural Aesthetics

Evolution has put a halt to the stream of cerebral deficiency that the African episteme bequeathed its youth rank. Since the early part of the millennium, there has been a break of the generational shield that insulated the older generation from possible interrogation by the younger generation. This is noted in the practice of the youths of the era who interrogate and investigate the activities in the social relation with older generation. It should be stressed however, that this new proclivity in the juvenile rank to interrogate is unreflective, but spontaneous. It is then incontrovertible to state that the development is genetic and evolutionary. Brooker's description of Biological evolution as "... a heritable change in one or more characteristics of a population or species from one generation to the next" (730) is applicable to this discourse, at this juncture. The heritable change that Brooker mentions above may be due largely to the improved function of the human genes which function in protein production useable to the maximum after the transcription of DNA, thereby producing messenger DNA, the intermediate RNA (Jobling, Hurles and Tyler-Smith 410). If there is

possibility of improvement in the state and condition of the human gene as Jobling, Hurler, and Tyler-Smith have postulated, then it could be indubitable that evolution is in the process of instituting an improved humanity in Africa. The potential for an improved humanity in Africa would not be a strange phenomenon as (Ayala 1978). In *Ways of life*, Ayala's enunciation in the foregoing is suggestive of *social experience* specifically in humanity or human cultural values, experiences, situation or practices. It needs be stressed, however, that, the improvement in the African humanity would be cerebral rather than sartorial. To this extent, *homosupero* is intended for the designation of the cognitive prowess of Africa's new breed motivated by a civilising cultural aesthetics. This could be the process of attaining Africa's science and technology owing to a well-formed cerebral cortex in the African brain.

The Imperatives

It has been postulated that the manifesting unprecedented attitude in Africa's youth rank is not inimical to the social relation ramifications of Africa's worldview. It is innocuous in its advent and penetration of the generational space in Africa. It is no confrontation, or effrontery. It is no competition. It is neither an unreflective attempt at exterminating the existing order; nor a reasoned force intended to install a strange new ethos or a supersensible lore. Rather, to the extent that the manifesting attitude among the younger generation is marked by precocity (of the immensity that beats imagination), inquisitiveness, interrogation, innovation and know-how, then it is an establishment of a renewed age, Africa's manifestation of Paine's Age of Reason. If Paine's Age of Reason resulted in Enlightenment of a global dimension through a detachment from dogma: religious, moral or religio-moral; if dogma forbids debate, winning is shortterm (Tracinski, 2015), it then could be posited that at the centre of Paine's postulation and polemic in *The Age of Reason* was rationalism, the proclivity for reasoned thoughts, the positive effect of which is the great world of today. The disposition in Africa's younger generation to investigate or doubt is a tendency in the direction of rationalism.

To this end, the youths in Africa need to break loose from dogma in all ramifications in Africa's social experience, and imbibe (Inglis 41) recommendation of the Western idea that people should think not because of the personality involved, but because they are convinced of the rules and regulations there are. The youths of Africa should also ease

themselves off cultural ties that impede innovations. The detachment becomes unavoidable in view of the fact that the *truth* or *validity* in a dogmatic postulation (in a philosophical realm) is subjective and exclusive and in religion, rationalists have expressed counter disposition to dogma. (Coghlam, 1909/2016) asserts "... dogma checks investigation, antagonises independence of thought, and makes scientific theology impossible". Based on Coghlam's enunciation, it is affirmed that any social super-structure or belief system that "checks investigation or antagonises independence of thought" is repressive and will forever be stagnant if not relapsing. It is certain that *investigation* fosters innovation as *independence of thought* breaks many paths never trodden. Humanity is the better for this. But a society that resists or retards investigation, especially inter-generational investigation; that society that encourages the attitude of "that is how we do it" or "that is how our forefathers did it" is vulnerable to backwardness. Such is the case in Africa.

Africa must break away from the impediments and restraints of cultural ethics as manifested in cultural lore, moral tenets or ethos, all of which discourage or repel innovation. This is best attained when the older generation embraces the new sensibility, the new orientation and attitude, as has been exhibited by the younger generation since more than a decade ago. The older generation should relieve the younger generation of the burden of social interaction, servicing and maintenance and desist from shifting the burden of greeting to the younger generation. This excludes official interactions in which age is not the yardstick for coming into contact, but such factors as superiority or supremacy of academic qualifications, and years spent on the job. So, in civil, communal, or non-formal relationships, there should be a relaxation of rules governing greeting. A member of the youth rank who is at least fifteen (15) years old may have school work to contend with at such moments. Also, we are talking about a new breed of humanity; as such, unprecedented thoughts may be running in his or her mind. Therefore, when such a person meets an elder and does not greet, he or she should be given the benefit of the doubt. Greeting should not be an instrument of repression and oppression. Rather, it should be a means of promoting social affection and goodwill. There would always be a generational conflict so far as the older generation uses greeting, for example, as an instrument of generational supremacy in this context of the emerging improved humanity whose identity marks are precocity and innovation.

Again, why should a young person not ask clarifying question when being instructed by an elderly person? How many elders should a young person run towards daily to relieve them of their heavy loads, when the boy or girl, young man or young woman has his/her own heavy burden to contend with? Why should elders be offended when younger persons look into their eyes in the course of a conversation when such a practice guarantees affection and concentration, contrary to the misconception of arrogance about the act? Why should the younger one be *crucified* for picking meat first while eating with an elder in the same plate, when it has been medically established that younger ones need animal protein more than the older ones do, if the latter need it at all? Is it not repressive if an elderly person deemphasizes meat in his/her delicacy or eating culture by delaying the eating of it, and yet reprimands the one that needs it optimally? Only in a clime that places carbohydrate over protein would that kind of repression be encouraged.

In developed climes of Asia and Euro-America, the proportion of meat, fish or egg (or a combination of any two or all) is larger than or the same as the carbohydrate proportion. Or, from the filial perspective, does it not have a debilitating effect on a kid if his/her father sends him/her on multiple errands even within the home- *multiple* emphasized - when the child has homework to do or his or her health is not so sound? Yes, it does. If there is no justified basis for, or a superior argument sustaining the above ethical cultural practices, then the practices, the beliefs, and the mores should be jettisoned. Such extermination will release the younger ones from the manacles of cultural ethics, and the gains of this is that the youth rank of Africa's generational dichotomy will attain their potential in bringing the much-anticipated development on the continent.

Another imperative desirable in making the situation conducive to enabling the younger generation in Africa to herald the Age of Enlightenment and Development on the continent (which will irrevocably be the long-term result of the current attitudinal disposition of the youth) is the imperative of demystification of superstition in Africa's cultural system.

Superstition has been a stifling menace in development processes of Africa. It emanates from the different spheres of Africa's worldview - religion, politics, ethics and philosophy, to mention but a few. But of particular concern is the retardation, which this menace has done to the consciousness of Africans and their progress. The

intangibility and non-empiricist propensities of the nature of African superstitions (as is elsewhere), especially, in their application to societal functioning in the age of science and technology have engendered an outcome of nothingness. (Okpara, 234) bemoans such a non-empiricist cultural practice in the age of science and technology, which is in the domain of superstition. In her affirmation "Despite the advancement in knowledge, science and technology, there is a continued practice of persecuting individuals accused of witchcraft in diverse communities around the globe". Okpara's observation is a spontaneous reaction to a stereotype-induced view/belief about obstetric/ juvenile spiritualism. She could be seen as proposing a pragmatic approach to handling juvenile spiritualism in view of the practicality and empiricism of science and technology. Ayaan Hirsi Ali in *Nomad* maintains this disposition where she berates the age-long bloodline and gender superstition in Mogadishu. There, attachment to clannish succession is held hallowed, which denies coming generations of opportunities obtainable in diverseness. There in Mogadishu the male child is considered superior to the female child after all, Hirsi's grandma cherished mares and she-camels more than the daughters and granddaughters. But then the grandma "...smiled and with a burst of energy" asserts while addressing Hirsi, "you would weave impossible numbers of grass mats to give away as gifts" (86).

In addition, there was always ecstasy when a boy was born and it was irritation when a female was born. This dichotomy in child preference results in a state of frustration for Hirsi. She, therefore, vituperates, maintaining that the bloodline superstitions hamper the lives of so many of their people (92). Hirsi Ali's people here are Somalis who are Africans. As it is with the Somali Africa, so is it with the Nigerians. It is however averred that superstition of any form retards news thoughts, suppresses innovation, and debars advancement.

Conclusion

In closing, therefore, the mounting neo-culture among the youths in Africa is indicative of and announces the coming age of advancement on the continent. Such is capable of activating the psychic and cognitive potential of the continent. It needs be affirmed that the neo-culture among the African youths is unreflective. To this end, it is defensible that such is advent of a new humanity in Africa. The new humanity is cognitively sound and as such innovative. This is nature's endowment for the continent. The tremendous precocity (in a proportion, so great)

that the new generation is showcasing is a mark of evolutionary intervention in Africa's quest for self-definition and development. It is evolutionary because across Africa, East of West, youth onslaught on or ostensible revolution against established traditional practices was not orchestrated unanimity, yet jointly executed. It could only be evolution! Such signifies Africa's development. This is coming on the strength of the emancipation of the youth and the freedom accompanying. All these will result in the building of improved gumption in the youths as a result of independent thinking beyond the age-long restriction. A new epistemology that is competitive is therefore instituted in Africa. This is useful to Africa as the new generation of Africans (the *homosupro*) will be in the cognitive vantage point to explore the massive resources and potential of the continent's development.

That Africa may attain its capabilities a number of imperatives need be met, however: Africa should be willing to discard untoward social and cultural practices. There should also be an improvement in the relationship between the older and younger generations in Africa. The relationship terms between the generations as intended to herald progress on the continent should be driven by goodwill and understanding. This is a euphemism requesting that the older generation need to see the youths as a distinct age group in African humanity and not an extension or an appendage, because the youth rank as bequeathed Africa in the passing decade are evolutionary presentation of a new humanity in Africa.

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