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The **African and Diaspora Discourse, A-DD**, is a peer-reviewed academic journal that sets out to reconfigure African Studies through original and intellectually stimulating research papers that are capable of provoking new questions, theories and debates on Africa and her relationship with the world; and from multidisciplinary perspectives too. The **A-DD** annually publishes articles in both English and French languages, and is domiciled in the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos, Nigeria.

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Length: 5,000 to 8,000 words

Structure

- Title, Affiliation, Contact Email and Cell Phone Numbers
- Abstract of Between 150 and 200 Words
- 5 Key Words
- Introduction should, **in a flow - on format, contain** the problem statement and objectives cum questions raised by the manuscript; including arrangement of sections.
- Conclusion
- Figures and tables should be numbered consecutively in the order they appear in the manuscript.

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ARTS, IDENTITY, DISABILITIES AND OTHERNESS – TROPES OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine, first, the role of the arts, as a repository of personal and communal memory in the development of wholesome and unwholesome identity constructs in society. This is with a view to enabling African peoples globally appreciate the dangers of the abandonment of indigenous African heritage of inclusiveness of all human beings, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, differences and peculiarities under the false impression that are enshrined in the individualism and bipolarities of Western intellectual traditions at the expense of African culture. Second, I examine the processes by which, in certain instances in African traditions, what constitutes the means of creating positive cultural forces for inclusiveness of all have also been deployed in the creation and construction of otherness, leading to the marginalization of the members of vulnerable minorities, disabled persons, the elderly, women, and members of outside groups or foreigners because of their perceived differences. Finally, I examine how these tropes of inclusion and exclusion are not different from what happens in other societies, except that the African traditions often get demonized while the elements of intrinsic goodness are cloaked in garbs of religious misapprehension. I then conclude that there is no need to superimpose the various ideas of othering of others which have compounded and debilitated the understanding of disability, vulnerability and otherness in African societies. As art is an all pervasive phenomenon in African societies, it is through this prism I peruse issues here.

Introduction

Humans evolve various cultural resources to handle life, reality and the environment in which they live and humans are shaped by the cultures they develop; the kind of cultured people that members of society becomes in their respective eco-locations and the culture that is developed by their relational associations also make humans what they become as members of society. For these reasons, the relationships between cultures and human beings are complicated. Largely, the development of culture is both conscious and unconscious – conscious in the sense in which human beings in society deliberately choose to promote elements of human existence that is positive and to jettison elements considered, or contrariwise, they may deliberately seek to allow the negative aspects of our humanity to dominate, because of some tragic misperceptions of reality; while unconscious in the sense in which humans (adult and youth) internalize elements of culture that they experience in society, thereby making for the concretization of the culture into amorphous institutions for the ordering of existence. The United Kingdom government made deliberate efforts after the Windrush scandal broke, to cleanse the society of the odious consequences of bad and racist government policy and the Republic of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission; contrariwise, we may observe how people deliberately seek to allow the negative aspects of our humanity to dominate, because of some tragic misperceptions of reality, to dictate policy and attendant culture of intolerance of diversity, as continues to unfold in the case of the Trump Presidency in USA and his hardcore bigoted supporters who fail to appreciate the corrosive consequences of allowing for the death of truth and the substitution of alternative "facts" to determine policies and decisions. While unconsciously, culture may evolve in the sense in which humans (adult and youth) internalize elements of indigenous and foreign values that they experience in society, thereby making for the concretization of the culture into anonymous institutions for the ordering of existence.

Against this background, it seems clear that art is one of the cultural means through which humans express, codify, transmit, preserve and instruct subsequent generations in the ideas, cultural items and modes of existence

of society (Bewaji 2013). It is a means of documenting and preserving the memory of humans as cultural beings, deliberately itemizing the rarefied and often ineffable elements of existence. For this reason, civilizations take steps to preserve the arts of/about their existence, memorializing the experiences through words, sculptures, paintings, architecture, music, graves, graffiti, rituals, etc. However, interactions between cultures and societies often lead to irruptions, effacing, defacing and erasure of memory, thereby negatively affecting the cultures of the weaker group and denuding the civilizations they have created of often important elements of their memory and identity. The effacing, defacing, erasure and denial of these elements, whether deliberately, through the willful denigration and derogation of the arts, culture, civilization, religion, political institutions, science and others of particular peoples or cultures, or by means of epistemicide through the deliberate denial of the existence of indigenous knowledge in certain cultures, constitute deliberate or accidental processes of othering of others or deidentification and marginalization of others by minimizing their humanity through differentiation and thereby leading to memory loss, abrogation and abandonment on the part of the target person/group/society. The mechanism of effecting this process is what I describe as epistemicide (Bewaji 2012).

The effect of such loss is often identity anxiety, crises, loss of self-esteem, group corporate image or abrogation of values and virtues – individual and communal. Identity crises creates many ills and portend clear self-destructive consequences for society. The harbinger of such negative image is epistemic deficit, leading to complexes and pathologies among which are epistemic or intellectual disability on the part of society and its leadership, bringing about policies and decisions which are detrimental to the collective development of society, but especially inimical to the interests of the more vulnerable members of society (Bewaji 2017).

Art and Identity

The variations in the global ecologies have led the human inhabitants in the various eco-locations to devise peculiar modes of being in their various habitats. Though humans share a common humanity, having similar basic needs and proclivities, the expressions of our needs and devises for satisfying them are diverse and divergent – dietary, clothing, architecture, agriculture, filial, communal, art, among others. It is in this regard that it is meaningful to speak of African art, while being mindful of the heterogeneity of African peoples and their cultures, as there are arguably some common African cultural affinities and identities (Diop 1989), in spite of what has been dubbed the triple heritage of Islam, Christianity and indigenous African traditions (Mazrui, 1986).

African art encompasses the visual and the non-visual, the tangible and the intangible elements of artistic representation and presentation, such that virtually every aspect of life and living in society constitutes a veritable domain for the preservation and application of art. The two tropes, which facilitate the understanding of the content and meaning of African art and aesthetics, are beauty and culture, which combine to conduce to pleasantness of art writ large in an ethically edifying manner. Beauty, culture and ethical pleasantness make the object of art and the process, or the act, of creating worthy art on the one hand, use, application and appreciation of art, on the other hand, special, thereby distinguishing art objects from non-art objects, because these latter are not deliberately made by humans to be artistic.

At the times of their production, most art objects often have a multiplicity of intentions, purposes, utilities and once when finished, diverse possibilities of appreciation. In most cases, the makers of art, in both bits indigenous and contemporary African settings, set no monetary value on their effort or the product of such effort as the primary goal is depiction of the beauty and pleasantness of that which is produced, the truth and meaning it purveys, and the sentiment and social consciousness that is invested in the object of art which are usually beyond financial quantification. In this regard, the art object is more a gift to the person or community that has commissioned it, reflecting ideas of moral, social, spiritual and other values of society, thereby enriching individual and societies.

Some of the areas in which art is manifested, showing the twin consciousness of beauty and culture breeding ethical pleasantness, are: a) architecture of used or inhabited space; b) dressing, appearance, deportment and adornment of persons for various circumstances, occasions and vocations; c) content of speech and manner of speaking befitting audience and occasion; d) decorations to emphasize and enhance the beauty and pleasantness of homes, spaces and world; e) capacity to appreciate art in nature, such as when animals, trees, rivers, rocks, celestial appearance and behaviour become narratives underlining an architectonic of beauty and pleasure, leading to formation of cosmologies, cosmogonies, ontologies, metonyms, metaphors and mythologies; f) performance skills and display of talent with humility; g) efforts to observe the highest professional and moral standards in whatever is done to capture and enrich truth; h) display of good habits and respectful mannerisms in private and public spaces; i) caring to ensure the maintenance of equilibrium and moderation in the various modes of being of the living, the dead and the unborn in their different manifestations of talents, limitations and disabilities; j) maintenance of proper and edifying relationships within and without families; and k) efforts toward the development of future generations and filial bonding with family members and society.

There are three elements which contribute to African aesthetics – first, there is the skill, the dexterity, and the consciousness and the mental faculty that produces or leads to the production of true artistic forms; second, there is the final outcome of the effort, the extent to which it meets the remit that impelled it in terms of finesse, truth of representation, orientation and integration; and third, the perspective of appreciation of wholesomeness which is the moral or ethical element of art, whereby it becomes most important to determine how morally edifying, truthful and acceptable or denigrating and unacceptable is the effort, in terms of the content and the overall presentation to the society, in so far as it conduces to the interests of society as a whole in affirming and promoting harmony and cultural progress, or purveying discord in terms of social stress and upheaval. Elements of art that are sceptically oriented and infused with cynicism, as in carefully choreographed and intelligently orchestrated critiques of power and wealth, have to be beautiful, ethically meaningful and pleasant, even to the target of the insult, in order that the point be properly driven home without any form of alienation or communal disruption (Bewaji 2013).

Since art is the epitome of the culture and of the civilization of society, it represents the human capacity to enjoy the sublime aspects of life, regardless of the human situation. In fact, most African art functions in a borderless seam, disregarding artificial divides of social and economic or religious stratifications, catering to the different categories of needs. While artistic expressions record the scepticism of the critical members of society, raising issues with the epistemological, metaphysical, moral, religious, political, and the scientific beliefs and received knowledge of the society, such must be actualized in ways that does not compromise the corporate existence of society, or demean the individuality of even the most vulnerable, poor or disabled members of society.

The artists often find ingenious ways of expressing their alternative, contradictory or conflicting views to entertain, regardless of how arcane these views may seem at the time of their proposition. They may even record their defiance and non-conformity to the orthodox and popular positions embraced by majority or powerful members of society in various ways, making art not only a means of celebrating the patterns of cooperativeness of members of society, but also making art serve as medium of protest or distancing of communities from those regarded as “other”. For example, some ways of wearing the cap by men and tying the head-gear by women among the Yoruba people clearly show the status of both men and women, while in others they are deliberate attempts to antagonize the norm by way of protest, thereby showing that certain things need redressing in society. Yoruba artists also question the basis of the requirement of conformity in stories, practical jokes, songs, in sculpture, in bodily adornments, in hairstyles, in dressing, in music – for example, encompassing the language and the content of the musical output, using all sorts of musical instruments, to tell a story and to make a point - and even in the silence, as much as in the noise, generated at the appropriate and inappropriate periods in conversation and theatrical performance.

Essentially, art is an integral part of the conscience of any society. The way its practitioners carry out their trade will help to determine the epistemological and metaphysical engineering and re-engineering that social fabrics must undergo continuously. Even when there is borrowing from others, this kind of borrowing have to be done with as much faithfulness and honesty as possible, recognizing the debt, even while tongue-in-cheek, acknowledging the reason for the borrowing, in the face of the pride of the self and the community to attain independence. Thus, there is the tendency to speak of the original art work by comparison with copies, where one may even notice that there are no distinctions between the two, yet the original is preferred and attracts a higher accolade,

There is also, often, a clear distinction between art works and mere tools. One may have to use a very “ugly” tool to perform a task, and also one may always feel repelled every time one uses the tool, but being the best tool, or being the only one available or most suited for the job at hand, one may be foolhardy to bring in the matter of taste, instead of being clear-sighted about the effectiveness and efficiency of the tool in the performance of the task on hand, as no other consideration other than effectively and efficiently carrying out the task on hand is germane to the situation at issue. This will not be far from the Yoruba understanding of the difference between beauty in character and physical beauty; the wise Yoruba man or woman will recommend that one should not marry because of physical beauty only, but more importantly because of ethical or behavioural beauty, for the "lady may be beautiful in looks, but may spoil the beauty with bad character" (Bewaji 2003, 220). But in the absence of this combination (beauty of looks and character), it is better to marry someone who is not (so) beautiful but who is known to have been properly brought up by his or her parents and acknowledged to have good character (that is, an *omoluabi*, meaning a well cultured, highly respectful and morally upright person).

In all instances of comparison of things, places, beings and realities in Yoruba culture, for example, there is an acuity of observation that is emphasized. It is important to note that there is a combination of an epistemic discernment that has led to the noting and incorporation of the comparative ideas into the corpus of language, and the insistence on understanding the meaning of the message and the clarity with which the young are instructed in virtues which are worthy of embracing. Such respect for rigour instil discipline in the youth regarding attendance to details, and never taking for granted what may appear superficial, because such may turn out to be the crux of the issues at stake.

Order and responsibility are important and unavoidable requisites of all aspects of civilized life in any society and any attempt to compromise these twin requirements are always at a great human, cultural and material cost to society. Consequently, the arts to which the infant and other members of society are exposed reflect the values thought worthy of developing, maintaining, emulating and perpetuating by those immediately responsible for the development of the infants in society; this notwithstanding, the fact that often those so charged may represent only specific segments of such societies and may infuse into their wards ideas and values not altogether accepted or acceptable to majority members of the same society is recognized and effort made to ward off such aberrations. This (their performance of their moulding tasks on behalf of society) often constitutes a regulatory means and capacity, both for the leadership and the followers. The codes of conduct cover all aspects of life, from dress, eating, greeting, to games, and to work ethics, to political leadership, to relaxation, festival occasions; they extend to what can be exhibited in one’s private and public space, how they can be exhibited, where they can be exhibited, etc.

For many African societies, the art of child-rearing is suffused with person-affirming and individuality-developing orature, literature, songs, dance, paintings, and other cultural paraphernalia. Also, while the other-regarding aspect of social existence is emphasized, the need for the individual to acknowledge him/her-self as an individual, and as a person, with a name, a destiny and a calling, are ingrained in the consciousness of the child from youth, such that, while sharing a common destiny of being human and owing a responsibility for the survival of the species with other humans, his/her ability to make a difference is never disregarded or compromised. There are also clear efforts at recognition of difference – forms of aesthetics of othering, which deliberately infuse into the consciousness of the youth the markers of difference, thereby preparing them for full

appreciation of diversity in society. In Yoruba society, persons with disabilities or special talents are specially designated as being imbued with these special talents or limitations by the ancestors and divinities. For example, a midget (*arara b'ori pete*) is designated as someone bearing the insignia of the divinities – *eni orisa*. For that reason, they must not be derided, bullied or mistreated. The same goes for albinos, the blind, the lame or the deaf and dumb; they are believed to serve special purpose in society, because of the special talents and gifts that they possess. Their needs are well met, and in many instances they are the first to get any portions before other members of society.

There is a clear relationship between art, education and morality, as the different arts are educational media for the training of the young in society in the values of the society as well as in the representation of those values and norms; these values are clearly formulated not to disempower the weak, vulnerable, disabled, the old or elderly and women in society. In this regard, there is room for academic discourse to the extent that it will lead to an informed determination of the proper course of action that members of the society can reasonably embark upon, both for themselves as individuals and for others, as the obligation that individuals owe to society of which they are members and from which fountain they have derived sustenance to become who they now are. Such typologies are mastered to understand that while all things have life, may look the same, and have similar needs, there must never be failure to appreciate that even here there is need to expect good and bad. This happens for many factors: a) people can be deceived into false complacency that lures society to forget that uncritical acceptance of any religion becomes the opium of the people, b) it can be responsible for creating in the masses false euphoria, especially in untutored and uncultured minds, thereby leading to negative mass behaviour as in Rwanda genocide, c) such art can misrepresent reality which is why Plato was sceptical of the capacity of the masses to properly understand and appreciate art, thereby creating the impression of Platonic aesthetic elitism, and d) it can lead to people having false impressions of their capabilities, very much similar to people relating to their environment under the influence of drugs, and even propelling them to behaviours which are inimical to the wellbeing of members of society – indigenous and guest communities alike. In doing so, art destroys psychic harmony rather than reinforce it, thus wrongly stirring up our emotions and conjuring up false realities and confusing rather than clarifying reality.

We must also understand that it is not only art, as an end product, that needs appreciation to complete the process of aesthetics in society; it is equally important to recognize that every artist loves applause (Bewaji 2013). To this end, a consideration of African aesthetics cannot be complete without a brief mention of how artists, in all walks of life, are appreciated in various African societies. For, it is often recognized that praise begets further acts of excellence, while failure to appreciate creativity and sacrifice made by artists could stymie creativity if not totally destroy it. For this reason, while the members of society who are skilled, talented, and creative in various ways are also persons who have different vocations, such members of society are valued for the special abilities they bring to enrich society. Be they drummers, painters, sculptors, potters, dancers, singers, poets or actors, the society sees them as icons, who make life more valuable, meaningful, properly tethered and coded, and because of that their families are respected for helping to keep the traditions of the society propagated and perpetuated. The artists are showered with praise, rewards, titles and accolades which make them feel important, cherished and valued. In many instances, as the Yoruba wise saying goes, the value placed on their contribution cannot be measured in pecuniary terms, because *owo ko to eniyan* – there is no way money can replace family, friend or another human being!

While in the contemporary monetised global environment, everybody lives in/on cash/credit situation, which has made the placement of monetary value on virtually everything critical, and in which not having money means literal penury, the determination of the worth of art in money terms have created a serious paradox regarding African art and the artist. Because of slavery and colonialism, many traditions and values have been put in abeyance. Thus, while in the indigenous society an artist was not supposed to live on the product of art alone in many African societies, the division of labour has meant that there was no way the artist could combine a vocation with art in an either/or situation. Hence, the artist now must compete on the market place for income

for his/her effort. This situation has had the effect of making art and the artistic skills into tradable commodities, thereby limiting the value placed on the talent and skill now to what income they can generate. Even more critical is the element of amnesia that this has caused to capacity for respect for the weak and vulnerable in society. In architecture, for example, the designs of many concrete jungles called establishments seldom provide for disabled access – a stark example being venue for this Disabled Conference in Botswana, with poor access means, sharp edges and manholes all over the place; albeit a new University of Botswana Conference Centre that has yet to be fully commissioned into use.

Leaving aside that last issue of vision gone awry, the positive side of this is that artists are now getting due reward for their talent, skill and effort. And on the international arena, the accomplished African artist is highly valued, even when they may still be open to various forms of exploitation by middlemen and women. The negative side of this is that a consciousness of a primary need to earn income from creativity may demean creativity into a simple job to be lived on and not a means of expressing the best in the self and in the experiences of members of society and the world at large. It is this dual aspect that we need to factor into our understanding of the challenges of using art as educational tools in contemporary African society and universally.

Deriving from the above, we will note in this regard some of the various ways in which diverse genres of art have been manifested to appreciate some of the signal educational opportunities they provide for society, in the process of training the young, advertising the values and virtues of society and representing, for posterity, the beliefs which underwrite human consciousness of identity constructions of the ours/theirs, self/others, within/without dichotomies in society. For the sake of brevity, we may classify non-exhaustively the arts along the following heads:

1. Art relating to the human body, its decoration, presentation and preservation,
2. Art relating to the space inhabited, its decoration and preservation,
3. Art relating to the values, ideas, cognitions and beliefs of members of society, their presentation, preservation and propagation, and
4. Art relating to other aspects of human existence in society and the existence of other beings in nature and beyond nature – relationships with each other along age, gender, abilities, professions, disabilities, etc.

Thus, beginning with the first, in annotating the art relating to the self, the human body, its adornment and beautification, from head to toe, we may mention art of, i) hair decorations, haircuts, hair-dos braiding, plaiting, head-wraps, hats and caps, especially related to performances and rites in the religious and social/political environments; ii) facial marks, tattoos, scarification, piercing of ears, nose, lips, implantations for enhancement and plastic modifications to the face; iii) bodily decorations as in dresses, clothing, body painting and various tattoos and piercing of the navel and other bodily parts, extensions to finger nails and other organs of the body; iv) various ways of enhancing the presentation of the legs, feet, and toes, and v) developing and use of various artistically made bodily protective materials such as masks and body armour. Under the second one, we may mention, a) the architecture of inhabited space using the materials ecologically available to provide the most comfort and security for the human being and other beings living with humans and doing this in ways that are most efficiently in tune with the environment; b) representing the lived, perceived and imagined reality in the beautification of lived space through paintings, sculptures, drawings, engravings, and c) demarcating between the various forms and levels of lived space, through recognition, sanctification and depiction of orders, strata and classes in living environment; these are found in such domains of communal spaces (churches, mosques, parliaments, museums, parks, groves, gardens, etc. While relating to the third, we may mention how art is a vehicle for the development of values, ideas, cognitions and beliefs of members of society, its presentation, preservation and propagation of respect and disrespect, propaganda and fabrication of otherness. Under this category we may mention, a) the spoken word and sound in the development of tales, stories, fables and myths – often positive, sometimes negative, but also neutral at other time; b) the musical genres, instruments, and presentations developed to compliment life, lighten up experience by making people appreciate all the aspects of life; c) bodily motions, dancing and transitions of bodies, and d) sounds, tunes, lyrics, rhymes and rhythms as important elements in life, for life and to life. And last, but not least, art relating to other aspects of human

existence in society and the existence of other beings in nature and beyond nature. Here we may refer to the numerous other arts which are developed to showcase the ideas relating to origin, existence, final place of humans and beings in the universe, on the one hand, while on the other hand, such art relates to the apprehension, appreciation and representation of the cosmologies, ontologies, epistemologies and values of humans in society in relating to self and others.

Human life is about identifying, understanding and solving real and imaginary problems in the process of being in the world, for themselves and for/with others. The whole of what we call “existence” is about appreciating and facing real challenges and overcoming stark odds, difficulties, obstacles, and existential and subsistential threats to personal and corporate existence of humans. This is, at least, in a minimalist fashion, what adult life is about, and it is about what all culturing, educating, and training is geared toward attaining in society – producing adults who are responsible custodians of future generations. Consequently, what all education, culturing and training in the family, in groups and in various social organizations – including religion, schools and clubs – are about, is mainly preparing human beings, at various stages of life, to be able to cope with the challenges of existence, and solving problems related to these challenges. Many humans are blessed with fecund environment for a surfeit of such culturally and educationally enriching benefit, while some humans are not – simply growing up without support, education, culture, love, kindness and guidance. And many choose, of their own accord, not to subject themselves to the kind of discipline and fortitude that are educationally and culturally necessary to prepare them for this task of survival and thriving in the presence of the unavoidable natural and contrived odds of living that they and their progeny must face.

Going back to the supposition that human life is about solving problems, one could see that there is a direct correlation between the ways in which humans educate their young and the level of competence of humans in society to deal with problems of existence. The first critical component of success or failure relates to appreciating the existence of problems or challenges to successful attainment of goals. It is only fair to say that only recognized challenges receive the proper annotation of effort to resolve them. If one cannot appreciate an issue as a challenge, then to expect solution or even begin to make any effort to solve the problem that has not been appreciated as such would be impossible. If, and when, one has appreciated that a problem existed, the next stage is to figure out what is the nature of the problem, what kind of problem it is, what are the ramifications or dimensions of the problem. This, however, includes practical, conceptual, pragmatic and rationally understanding the origin, source, or cause of the problem. That is, when one has appreciated the existence of a problem, it is important to now analyse the problem, to gain a proper understanding of the nature of problem, why it is a problem, how it constitutes a problem, where it is coming from as a problem, and to identify clearly what causative factors are responsible for the problem.

If one is able to gain a foothold in the investigation indicated above, then it would not be very difficult to see what the solutions to the problem may be like. In this regard, it would become easy to diagnose the situation, envisage why it is the way it is, and ponder what appropriate measures would resolve the problem. If, in any step in the above, there is a block, then there would have to be a necessary retracing of steps, to see what was omitted in the search for proper understanding and analysis of the different components of the problem, otherwise no adequate or lasting solution would be available or found to the problem.

And it does not matter how much formal education (the cramming of numerous data and facts in a classroom setting, which is what obtains in the formal setting of Western system of education and how many degrees, certificates and diplomas) one has been through, or lack thereof, all humans must go through the above processes in living life. I would even conjecture that all living things must perform these basic operations in order to survive successfully, thrive and excel in the process of competing with other living things for the scarce resources available to support life. If there is a breakdown along the path to the understanding, appreciation and determination of problems and solution to problems, then, one is faced with great existential challenges, which may be a product of poor educational preparation for life or a result of limitations to the effort that one brings to bear on the existential challenges. Either way, the result may be failure, mediocrity or mendicancy.

What remains for us is to attempt to clearly exhibit the relationship between art and (in/is) education; that is, we will attempt to show that art is an integral part of education and that in education subsist art, and in art subsists education. This point needs careful noting, because, often there may be clandestine efforts to see education as distinct from the bearers and instruments of art. When this is done, an egregious error is foisted on society, suggesting that it is possible to separate the mechanisms of education from the modes of presentation of educational materials.

From the foregoing it would seem obvious that human societies have mastered the process of using their cognitive abilities to construct notions of self, group and community within the context of the environment. Having done that, mastering identity strictures, regardless of the effectiveness or otherwise of the tropes constructed, the critical next step is the preservation and dissemination of these ideas. But in some instances, targets have to be constructed as obstacles in the path of individual or group survival. And such targets are to be constantly borne in sight, for the purpose of avoidance or subjugation, in order that survival will not be threatened or terminated. One such effort that have captured the imagination of colonials – religious, metaphysical and educational – can be found in how the Jews managed to separate themselves from their sibling Semites in the desolate Arabian Desert, through various devices aimed at dispossessing their kith and kin of their common patrimony – land. Thus, they fabricated the bogus idea of the twin conspiracies about the chosen race and the promised land; these they wrote into the mythologies of their existence, to the extent that these attained the status of divine “truth” for them and those who have been mentally brainwashed to accepting their narrative.

This is where art, memory and identity lead to constructions of “otherness”, differentiation and targets of expropriation, avoidance or destruction. This narrative is not different from the ways in which modern mythologies are constructed – communists, terrorists, criminals, etc. But it takes a well thought out propaganda and indoctrination for these to become universal “truths” which are unquestioned and are transmitted to others, the youth and generations. Ignorance is also a critical ingredient, because the genetic factors that lead to albinism, dwarf-ness and other congenital factors that cause blindness, deafness or hunchback may not be readily available to members of society, there is the need to fill the epistemic gap with myths and narratives which may or may not favour the targets of such narratives. It is this we now consider.

Education and Otherness

All societies place great stock in the education (training, culturing, developing and moulding) of the young, and such stock that is placed on education by society is necessary if existence, as it is known, valued or anticipated by present members of any given society, is to be assured and preserved for the present generation and for posterity. To this end, all the civilized societies invest great resources in the upbringing, teaching and training of their young, over a very long period of time, to make them conversant with the values of the society, and to prepare them for carrying the burden of sustaining the society on a daily basis and into the future. But whether all societies are able to determine the educational processes and systems that would elevate their peoples is not that clear. In fact, it is beyond mere conjecture to aver that what has happened to education in African societies in recent past and today is embarrassing, to the point where even the understanding of what constitutes education is mired in confusion. This is why we suggest that African societies are recipients, rather than initiators, of educational parameters that determine their existence for good and ill; and this is a critical fact which indicates that what to understand by “education” or what being educated entailed is not clear to the education policy makers and professionals holding the responsibility of leading the educational challenges for African peoples. With epistemicide and the deliberate destruction of the educational resources of targeted African communities for colonization and enslavement was a dearth of properly trained teachers who understood not just the Western and the Arabian cultures from which the alien educational systems were imported, but also absent a clear appreciation of the indigenous cultures of African societies, in order to be sensitive to the indigenous traditions and values. This has had serious consequences for these societies in the deployment of indigenous narratives to shore up the values that society prefers to keep or jettison.

Deriving from what we have indicated in section one of this discussion, education is both a process and a system. In the first sense, it is the process of creating or acquiring knowledge and understanding, through study, training, teaching, instruction, observation, experience and apprenticeship; it is also the means by which we project from the known variables to the unknown ones, creating myths, metaphors and the like and ordering reality through approbations of the self and disapprobation of the other.

In this regard, to educate, then, is to consciously/ unconsciously/ subconsciously teach/train/indoctrinate someone over a short or long period of time about all aspects of reality and non-reality relevant to their existence and survival, so that the person acquires not only knowledge, but also clear understanding, of issues relating to all aspects of reality relevant to their existence and survival, including the specific contents, ideas, materials, skills and attitudes that facilitate the survival, prevent extinction and separate group members and selves from out groups and others. This is the sense in which to be educated, in very broad sense, is to have, to display, to acquire and to be able to show in clear ways knowledge, understanding, culture, taste and attitudes, in a fundamentally instrumental and functional ways that are self- and other-affirming or destroying in society. It is the sense in which humans (and probably other animals with the capacity to learn things) use their experiences and the experiences of others (members of their societies as well as outsiders) to benefit their existence, domination, subjugation and control of realities in the universe.

In the second sense, education is the totality of the systems, methodologies, structural institutions, instructional facilities and personnel that combine together to ensure, enhance and eventuate the educational goals of society. In this sense it would be important to not only appreciate the existence of levels and layers of educational attainment, but also the numerous details of curricular, measurement, certification and development through which the educational system must pass, in order for the end product to meet the first test that we observed in the definition above – learning and demonstrating competence in the content of the various issues that make up the curriculum (whether hidden or unhidden). To attain these objectives, educational systems are discriminatory, selectively determining what values and contents are worth noting, preserving or destroying; the systems deploy various mechanisms and instrumentations to carry out this objective. For this reason, education is always ideological, even when efforts are made to conceal the underbellies of these human cultural systems – this is why Yoruba wisdom teaches that *kekere ni Imole ti n ko omo re l'aso*, which translates literally that the Muslim teaches his/her child malice from infancy. And we find ways of rewarding those who excel within the determined parameters while punishing very severely those who for one reason or the other fail to attain the standards that are artificially but necessarily prescribed.

But, based on the above, this is where we could see education beginning from way before conception (or what is often regarded as the cradle) and ending beyond the grave; and it is where we are able to distinguish between formal, informal and non-formal education, such that we are able to identify some as antenatal, post-natal, early childhood, elementary, secondary, higher, tertiary, continuing education, and post-humus education, within the formal and informal systems of education. While in the colonial inherited of partial strictly formal system, contemporary African societies does not seem to adequately appreciate the position of family, relatives, community and society in the education of humans; thereby African societies have unintentionally created a disconnection between the formal, the informal and the non-formal systems of education, instead of coordinating/integrating the three to enhance the overall product of the process and system – a holistically cultured human being, with proper social, cultural, moral, spiritual and skills/professional preparation for taking a meaningful place in society.

Compounding the disconnection is the further failure to appreciate the growth of the informal and non-formal educational systems and how much these have impacted the overall development of the kinds of societies and humanity which has evolved in Western and non-Western climes over many millennia. In this regard, the unprotected youth in many African societies are now being left to the various unregulated sources of mis/dis/information as they contend with existential issues in a world in which resources have become more difficult to access for many in poorer societies, leading to the abandonment of filial responsibility for the informal

education of youth to faceless surrogates who have neither the sympathy for nor the appreciation of the values of the indigenous cultures and values. To this extent the forces that educate the youth now are cable, internet, and the other social media channels, whose goals and objectives need not necessarily be in consonance with the virtues and values that African societies may consider worthy of embrace and preservation.

A minor digression may be in order here. Indigenous medical practitioners in various African societies, especially Yoruba society, begin to take interest in unborn generations by giving clear instructions regarding life style and diet of newly-weds. And when there are issues about child conception – impotence, sterility or other matters – the first thing that is addressed relate to proper diet, to ensure there is a fertile body for conception and for healthy sperms and ovaries. Contemporary western medicine has not only confirmed this, but the knowledge of herbs is proving very profitable to the international conglomerates that goes everywhere stealing and profiting from the indigenous knowledge of these societies in Africa and the Diaspora. When our own peoples then go into medicine and pharmacy and nursing, they are told to forget about the “old wives tales”, as these could not contain any useful information, only later for their researchers to come and tap these ideas for profit. Consider the process that is now described as Kangaroo way of carrying babies – this was well understood in traditional societies that cribs are not the best place to isolate infants, as they expose the child to various challenges which may not be easily apprehended by adults until too late.

What makes the failure of this kind of education more poignant is the fact that the two aspects of what is officially regarded as education, the “process and system” conception, when embraced by any colonial society, not being mindful of the limitations of the two to transform knowledge into understanding, because attention is not paid to the culture that must underwrite education and the overall goal of education in terms of humanity and human society at large. What I mean here is quite simple: when you look at the conception of education in purely mechanical terms – process and system – then the nature of education as a necessary feature of human existence is compromised; that is, the fact that whether human beings like it or not, and whether they choose to embrace it or not, humans must continue to educate and be educated, as they go along in life, does not receive the proper appreciation, and the attendant space created is filled by unintended and nefarious information sources which in the long run undermine the coherence of social and cultural fabric. In this regard, the non-formal and the informal systems of education have proven to be the most critical elements of education in society, and no society that has any values to protect leaves the totality of education to forces beyond its control. The reason for this has been the fact that humans learn what they live and experience – either through imitation or avoidance, or through imposition or envy. This has accounted for the fact that humanity is tottering on the perilous verge of destructive homogenization – humans around the world are being forced to become consumerist robots, who go through life yearning for more and more of the most unhealthy and dangerous lifestyles.

It is very serious that, having been deceived that civilization began only 2600 years ago, when the Western male became human, and we were convincingly persuaded that all else before then was naught; having been enslaved or colonized by superior brutality; and having been dependent for so long on the pittance that the oppressive Western capitalism has ever been generous to drip and trickle down, the only thing that the African human being could aim to become is a clone of Western parody of humanity. We not only do this by wearing three piece suits in 35 degree Celsius weather, we also do it by buying into the adversarial political party contestations of greedy cabals, in the name of democracy, with symbolisms and gesticulations of pretended civility to match, topping it up by toning up (browning, which is a form of skin “yellow fever”) our skins so as to attain what is regarded as high colour (browning), or marrying up the colour line to gain acceptance for our humanity, within the group of those we consider superior on account of their complexion. To complicate matters, even when science tells us that there are no superior or inferior humans anywhere on account of skin complexion or eye colour (Bob Marley), even when apostles of freedom in the West celebrate equality of humans, African peoples, out of apparent self-hatred and strange inferiority complexes, continue to prefer the rejects of the foreign societies as expatriates in their own societies (Diop 1991, 2), persons who would not have been trusted with top of the line decision making positions in the countries of their origin become expatriates in our countries, earning colossal sums of money that are the dreams of their teachers in their countries of origin.

When we carefully examine the epistemology and metaphysics of otherness, we cannot but appreciate the relationship between education and the many ideas of separation, discrimination, prejudice and polarities that exist and which are ingrained in virtually every aspect of daily interface with reality and with other human beings. In the first instance, the language of instruction in colonial societies is European, with other indigenous languages being consigned to the dunghill of vernacular or gibberish. Those who master the master's tongue become megaphones of elitism and, as clones of Europeans, they become easy tools in the subjugation and degradation of local, indigenous and ancestral essences. In the process, those who have not been subjected to the vicious dehumanization called becoming educated are regarded as uneducated, illiterates and therefore, useless members of society. It is just an irony that the so-called educated to whom the societies have now been given to run have not only made a glorious mess of these African countries, they have in the process carted away all the resources of their hapless societies for securing in European societies where such resources are now only useful for the European morally bankrupt receivers of stolen property.

All of this add up to rank educational failure. The challenge that we pose in questioning the notion of education as narrated above is to enable us to pose certain questions of African leadership: How did we get to this sorry state so quickly, so that we not only loose our identity, but we also our humanity? Why is it that we, who were descendants of great ancestors with highly cultured pedigree, become foot-mats for barbarians of all likes; what happened to turn us to become collective beggars that no one wants to see? And probably then someone would do a more serious analysis of the diet of rubbish that we call education – Western/Arabian education – the purveyor of Western/Arabian barbarism, and then seek to redirect our modes of upbringing to more civilized and African paths, and probably then our humanity may be restored and the rest of the world may come back to learn from us again, as the masters and mistresses of knowledge, culture and value systems, who made civilized humanity possible in the first place through the generosity, kindness and hospitality which has made others to abuse our humanity.

The above misidentification of the theory and practice of education can be obvious when we again look at art and education in Africa and African Diaspora, to see whether we may not have lost elements of value in our educational system, by allowing our education to be soul-less, or to embrace an alien destructive soul which, hybrid and miscegenated as it is, has been inhibitive and pernicious to the African and African Diaspora development. Ali Mazrui (1986) has shown the nature of the consciousness we are trying to annotate here in his concept of triple heritage – the African being a product of indigenous (Paget Henry (2000) would say “embedded” as a qualification to the indigenous), enslaving Western and Islamic traditions – with a view to displaying the sources of the consciousness that have pervaded the African continent. My interest is purely focused on education and art in Africana context and how it is important to step back from the alien heritage and see how indigenous African art heritage must, and needs to, serve education in the contemporary global African society writ large. The critical point that becomes evident from the above is the need for Africa and its Diaspora to begin to take responsibility for the way our humanity is being debased and destroyed in the name of the monster of Western and Arabic/Islamic educational systems.

Disabilities, Inclusion and Exclusion, Differentiation and Alienation

There are many ways in which art has played important roles in the history, life and experience of societies. More important has been the role of art in the process of education, either in being part of the system or the outcome of education. In fact, the globalization of human interaction in contemporary society has meant that all societies of the world now have means of influencing the education of not only their own youth and adults, but also the youth and adults of far-away lands, totally alien to them and in no way of the same cultural proclivities, sensibilities and sensitivities (the same way that Jamaica's Marcus Garvey, Rastafari, Reggae and sprinting has influenced the world). It is for the above reasons that we have used various arts forms to show the connection between art and education and the influence of art on the educational system and process, while at the same time showing how education influences the art of society; and in a seminal way, we have introduced the role art plays

in the othering of others, to create myths of difference, alienation, exclusion, dissonance and negativities of projections to others as targets and scapegoats for all that ails us and our communities.

Thus, it is worth reiterating that African societies cannot be complacent in the way in which the arts of other societies and the cultures they purvey invade the educational processes and systems of their (African) youth and adults. The reasons have been noted, but we must emphasize the ways in which the identities, consciousness, consumption patterns, behavioural exhibitions and interests are influenced by art in contemporary society. The power of visual images, sounds and digital technology in the shaping of life, wants, dreams and outlook is beyond question. With the destructive effects of colonialism and slavery still fresh in the psyches of global African peoples, there is urgent factor to take in hand, which is the compelling need for the preservation of the good elements in African cultures and indigenous knowledge systems, while at the same time ensuring that humanity as a whole does not become ignorant of the contributions of global African peoples to human civilization. There is need to integrate African understandings of differences in human natures, capacities, abilities and disabilities in the educational processes and outcomes, so that the cultures of clear embrace and appreciation of the differently abled persons are not lost.

This is a challenge that is very daunting, especially in the light of the economic plights of African peoples globally, and the ease with which cheap culture, popular culture, and the fast-food, ready-made mentality of consumption, has made painstaking attention to quality almost impossible, whether in the field of intellectual pursuits or in artistic creativity – vide tourisms art and the digitized technologically manipulable and corruptible productions in the name of cultural materials inundating the mass media, airwaves and internet. The capacity of individuals to be originators of movies from the confines of their homes, and the ease for the replication of objects through forgeries and clones, all suggest that African art may be in danger of being privatized by foreign interests for pecuniary gain, without the original owners having any recourse to derive any benefit for themselves – either by way of emotional, psychological or material benefit!

The discussion of the relationship between art and education is indeed a necessary one, as African peoples, their cultures, ethos, religions, filial practices, dietary practices and values have been more in retreat in all areas of knowledge production, preservation and dissemination, thereby leading Africana peoples to be recipients of the arts and the cultural products of knowledge generation, technology development and civilizational configuration from other climes in recent years, by contrast with being the purveyors of art, culture, science and technology to peoples of other climes beyond the borders of Africa, apart from those physically related and popular culture deprecating aspects of humans existence. It is on this note that we need to indicate that Africana societies need to document the history of African art, culture, and knowledge, with a view to, first, claiming what is indigenous art to Africa, second, ensuring that the knowledge is not lost or denied, third, that such values are preserved for the educational purposes needed to develop wholesome identities and consciousness in Africana youth, and finally, ensuring that the best arts of Africana peoples are used to showcase African beliefs and values to posterity.

African societies did not only owe itself and posterity the obligation to preserve inherited artistic, axiological and cultural artifacts of her civilization, there is the additional obligation to preserve the technologies adapted for the production of these cultural heritage. It is through the process of education and research that members of society can begin to appreciate the fact that the technologies and epistemologies which allow peoples of indigenous societies to survive, deserve respect and understanding, in order that our heritage may be preserved and not allowed to fizzle out and die in the midst of the necessary effort to be made, in order to be successful in this consumerist society that humans now populate. We have come to the sorry state where many now believe that infants and children are only to be educated and humanized by members of immediate family, because of the dangers of abuse and identity assaulting methods that many may use, which harm the individual and society in the end. The significance of what we have been examining becomes clear when we look at the crisis of

identity that is evident in contemporary black/African existence, where the failure of leadership to ensure a culturally based educational engineering to redress the hundreds of years of European destruction, suppression and expropriation of Africana cultural capital leads to a situation where the typical black person suffers from self/group-hatred, suspicion of blackness, and a hankering over that which is Euro-American, even when it is clear that this is logically and practically unattainable, as your blackness is immediately visible (to appropriate Charles Mills). And also, it must be understood that it is when we value what we have, then we will begin to see the limitations of aspects of what we value and then deliberately go toward modification, excision or replacements of bad or weak elements.

Identity and Disability Constructs

“Identity” is (a) “the state of being a specified person, being, animal or thing” and hence, being different from other persons, beings, animals or things, either directly connected or totally unconnected. This supposes that there are (b) “individual characteristics, attributes or features by which a person, being, animal or thing can be recognized and distinguished”. It is the combination of (a) and (b) that leads to the two important factors that we need to understand here – (i) individuals, especially humans, have an ability, on the one hand, to understand the notion of identity, and on the other hand, to differentiate the identity of the self from that of others, in so far as this represents the requirement for demarcating the self for privileging and affirmation; and (ii) the fact that interactions must occur between the self and others of similar and dissimilar kinds means that the parameters for the interaction must be consciously and unconsciously determined to ensure as minimal friction and to expiate threats to existence of the self and self-survival as possible is allowed.

But it is very possible for confusion to arise with regard to the nature of identity, especially as a metaphysical concept which bears practical implications in all aspects of existence. The identity markers and bearers for differentiating individuals are determined from a number of sources – family, community, culture, art, society, language, religion, education and self. The family names the individual, in order to prevent confusions when references are important – either to know who did what, who deserves what, who is responsible for what, etc. Infants receive these identities without having much of a say in it – though at a later date, they may be able to reject such names and the identities they purvey. Communities and societies are aggregations of individuals and families, and as such there often arise identities, as languages, cultures, aesthetics and religions (among others) become markers of such aggregations of humans based on the ecological, economic and material aspects of daily existence. Because of these factors, individuals receive identity markers derived from communities and societies through upbringing, education, peer pressures, propaganda, socialization, indoctrination and vocational training. The markers that are received are important to the meaningful existence of humans in the world, and these are factors which help make sense of human life.

Some of the ways in which family, communal, society identity ideas, which are not fashioned by individuals as conscious selves, are foisted on individuals, are through the imposition of predetermined the norms of male, female, meaningfulness, meaninglessness, right, wrong, good evil, proper, improper, etc, on individuals. Those who abide by these rules, norms and values are regarded as good persons and are lauded and facilitated in attaining the best possible status in society, while those who reject these are branded as deviants, non-conformists and are treated as outcasts and are made to face severe consequences for rejecting the values of their societies. Clearly, the existential threats to survival has taught human beings over many millennia to privilege uniformity, conformity and order; this is not anything bad, but it has had important consequences for the human capacity to explore difference, alien, new and strange. The negative effect is that when opportunities then arise outside of the gaze of society and community, humans tend to go overboard in taking on strange, even pernicious explorations which may bode disaster for the self and the community of humanity if efforts are not made to curb such excesses.

As a member of families, communities and societies, humans do not question the various ways in which identities are foisted on one. In fact, there is a kind of sympathy with, and adherence to, what is known to one and with which one is comfortable or familiar, that one inadvertently becomes the advocate for and defender of the identity

of one's society, culture, religion, class, economic and social allies, family, ethnic group or even gender. Threats to one's innate and acquired identities often become perceived as threats of death, extinction and annihilation; thereby leading to triggering of defensive mechanisms in one or in one's group that is often as benign or as violent as the perceived threat or as serious as the consequences of the threat.

Having dealt with identities derived from one's immediate environment, it is not any easier to deal with exogenously affixed identities. This is where we recognize the fact that humans are social animals, both in the sense of having to relate to those who are within our immediate environs and those beyond. Relating does not take place in a vacuum, as humans must make sense of what they interact with, in order to define negotiation mechanisms for survival. It is in this sense that we must define the "other" in order to place them into categories of fiend or friend for proper understanding and determination of interaction tropes. Hence, we hear such statements as men like X, women like Y, white people are prone to P, black males are Q, Jamaicans are T, Nigerians are H, Africans are Z, Christians are C, Muslims are T, Albinos are A, Latinos are L and Americans are S, among many others. What these short-hands represent are coping taxonomies. And in many instances, it does not matter whether the persons, groups or people we so describe even see themselves through our eyes – the other!

Truly, this is quite interesting when we try to attend to it. How many people at my village, Esa-Oke, ever referred to themselves as Africans? What does being an African mean to them? Even, take it nearer home, how many of them even ask if it matters that they are Nigerians? In a nebulous way, they may see that the reason why their lives have become harder is because of this new animal which has invaded their space, called Nigeria! But, what does it mean for them to call themselves Nigerians or Africans?

But, let us shift the issues a bit. Let us consider someone from my village, meeting a person from Europe – a white woman. What would be his reaction to this person from the outside? Definitely, one could explore numerous equations and permutations – the simplest of which is to regard this person as a foreigner, an outsider, a non-member of the group. All of these connote various issues, all of which we cannot enter into here, for lack of space and time. But it would seem that such an interaction will be predicated on what can be regarded as known knowns, known unknowns and conjectures and speculations. On the known known side would be the fact that this other person is a human being like myself, though strangely complexioned. On the complexion, there would be nothing to say it is an aberration, except if there was textual discontinuity. It would also be presumed that this stranger has a language, family, needs for food, water, etc. However, there would be known unknowns, such as knowing that I don't know if this individual sleeps upside down, eats other human beings, uses the space for excretion for other purposes other than eliminating waste, or hates non-group members. This would lead to the realm of speculations, as to how he/she became bleached out from head to toe, what kind of human being he/she is, etc.

Scholars like Mazrui, Ben Jochanan, Diop, Asante, Van Sertima, Clarke, Wamba Dia Wamba, Masolo, Mudimbe, etc., have helped us reflect on how the idea of being African was externally generated, and how even the conceptualization of what it means to be African is not without problems derived from what the "other" says about the self. We may not explore the various reasons that have led to the development of the name African, Nubian, Aethiopean, Black, Negro or others that have been affixed to peoples of the continent of Africa historically. This is for the simple reason that we do not have the time or space to dilate on such issues here. But it is important that we understand the lesson of the above, which is that most Africans in Africa are never bothered about their African-ness, because they do not have to defend their identities or humanity before the other. It is we who have to interact with a self-interested other, who is constantly engaged in a calculus of oppression, who is eternally steeped in the consciousness of oppression and domination for economic and personal benefit, who have to deal with the issue of our identity. And this we have had to deal with in an environment of inequality – the playing field is not level!

Amartya Sen (2006), in *Identity and Violence* argued that humans are constantly negotiating identity choices, depending on their perceived interests and apprehension of reality at different times. I have argued that Sen is

elitist in this regard, and I have also suggested that his arguments seem superficial in the extreme, as he fails to understand that factors which constitute identity determination in society.

Given what we have indicated earlier about how humans are born into families and societies without having any choices in the matter, how humans received names and are introduced to religions, societies, cultures, languages, and communities without them having choices as infants, then it seems that Sen has misdirected his gaze in explaining the problems of clash of identities and how such clashes can be resolved through carefully negotiated mutually acceptable choices. What I am indicating is that choices must imply meaningful alternatives. If I was not consulted before I was named Tunde, or taken to Church, or registered at a particular school, or given toy guns and foot balls and not dollies, or for that matter, whether I was to be born in Kuala Lumpur or Siberia and not Esa-Oke, it is tame to indicate that “Oh, you have a choice whether to eat snakes and bats and not Acke”! And it would not do to say that God knows best why you have to be black and not yellow or a red neck! This kind of reaction would miss the point that Sen was trying to impose on how human identities breed separation and violence; especially when the other decides to impose their standards on us – denying us the right to have many wives, but telling us that it is civilized to be a man and be married to another man; or for that matter, telling us that we should not kill dogs the way Asians do for their delicacies because it is primitive and barbaric, while it is civilized to fish when we have no interest in eating or selling the fish but just to line up the fish, weigh it and measure its length before throwing it back in the water regardless of what agonies and trauma it must have endured in the process of being hooked and pulled away from its natural habitat!

Clearly, what I have done is not deny that humans, once they become adults have choices regarding their identities. And in exercising those choices, so many factors come into consideration. Most of those considerations relate to interest – economic, social, psychological, spiritual, moral, etc. And there are times when one may not be able to indicate which factor was dominant in the choice that is made – because there is an interaction of many factors, none of which can be underestimated!

This is where I come to the question of “connecting continental Africa to its Diaspora” in terms of identity configurations and choices. Let us consider a Japanese youth arriving in Jamaica for the 2010 under 12 Olympics. He arrives at the Norman Manley International Airport at 3.00 pm. He sees that all the equipment used at the airport were made in Japan, or Hong Kong, or Taiwan or Indonesia, or Malaysia – what is the difference between one and the other: all of them look Japanese, don’t it? He is drive by a Coaster Bus belonging to JUTA from the Airport, and all the vehicles on the road as he is driven to Pegasus, no the Hilton – as he is afraid of being mugged at the Pegasus – were Japanese. He gets to a nicely appointed room (bear in mind his competitor from Nigeria could only get a sleeping pad in Portmore, as all hotels in Kingston are full), with nice air conditioning unit made in Japan, a Internet-connected Computer on a desk waiting for him to chat with friends and family back home made in Japan, a plasma TV made in Japan, a refrigerator made in Japan, a coffee maker made in Japan, a shaving powder made in Japan, etc. Now it is difficult to see how this youth will not be proud of his ancestry. If there is any reason to want to contemplate identity issues and what affiliations are important to him, it is clear that it would not be difficult to claim being a Japanese ancestry or heritage.

On the other hand, consider the Nigerian youth, who probably this is the first time he is coming out of Nigeria. Everything we have indicated for the Japanese is the case up to getting to his run down pad in Port More for accommodation. There is no running water in the guest house, like in his village in Nigeria; there is no light, as the generator is only used in the night; there is no air conditioning, because there is no light; there is no internet, because the place does not provide such a service, etc. If by accident this youth becomes friend with the Japanese youth and follows him to his room after one game session, just imagine his consternation! And if he has a choice in the matter, why would he want to go back to Nigeria and not become a refugee in Jamaica or stow away to Japan even in the tire space for the Japanese air craft? What I have tried to indicate above represent the dilemma of identity choices when one has the ability, knowledge and interest of making such choices. It is clear that it has very little to do with an innate tendency as such, but much to do with the reality of existence and interest.

These are factors which determine what identity claims people make – whether in names like Leachim Semaj or in becoming born again or changing religious orientations from being Christian to Muslim or to Bahai!

Let us shift gear a bit and contemplate what factors play into relationships between Africa and its Diaspora with regard to identity. In the first place, most Africans who have lived under colonized countries or who have lived under independent countries are constantly made to be in awe of the white person – in terms of religion as only whites could have God, in terms of education as only the white formal system of schooling is education, in terms of class as only the white way of dressing, linguistic expression, dietary preferences and carriage is civilized, in terms of sexual behaviour as only gays and lesbian orientations are civilized, etc. In this regard, when the black person becomes conscious of identity issues, it is within the context of being the uncivilized other – even while retaining his sense of self and being, often surprising the other with defiance and audacity, it is with some trepidation.

When the same African meets a Diaspora brother or sister, the situation is often convoluted. In the first instance, the same person who has been defensive and prostrate in front of his colonizer suddenly finds his voice and gait in the presence of the Diaspora brethren. He now affects a swagger which was lacking in front of the awesome power of his oppressor. But he not only denigrates his Diaspora brethren, he assumes a posture of superiority. Instead of recognizing the violence and injustice of his ancestors in selling into slavery his brethren, he calls the brethren all kinds of names. Now, do not get me wrong; naturally humans find all kinds of coping concepts for dealing with the other whether out of necessity or ignorance. But there is hardly any justification for majority of the manner in which continental Africans have dealt with Diaspora Africans. Because of the inability of continental Africans to forge proper and effective solidarity with Diaspora Africans, it has been very difficult to effectively pursue the due redress for slavery and colonialism against the white person. For this, the first thing that I call for is apologies from continental Africans, based on a recognition of the oneness of the identity of Africans on the continent of Africa and the Africans dispersed all over the world.

Based on the above, it is no wonder that Africans of the Diaspora are diffident when they are pressed for identity constructs. It is understandable that some (indeed many) Jamaicans will claim to be Jamaicans and not Africans. Remember the analogy of the Japanese and Nigerian boys. Also, remember the ways in which continental Africans have related to Diaspora Africans whom they have met while studying or working in Europe and the Americas. This is to be combined with the image of Africa that Diaspora Africans see on CNN, CBS, BBC, Fox News, etc., on a daily basis. All that they see are the human disasters in Darfur, Nigeria, Somalia, Eritrea/Ethiopia, Rwanda, Congo, Zimbabwe and South Africa, etc. Success and wealth have many real, imaginary and potential relatives, but suffering, failure and poverty are reclusive loners! For this reason, it is clear to me that for African Identity to be meaningful, we must collectively make a positive difference in how we organize our lives, our affairs and our beings.

To conclude my discussion, I want to make some suggestion of how we can engage meaningfully this matter of identity of being African, and invite our brethren and sistren of the Diaspora to become joint owners of this identity. I could not have identified problems without at least suggestion some solutions and way forward. Over the years many of my students and Jamaican friends have suggested to me they want to visit Africa. But I have been very reticent in encouraging such efforts. Not because it is logistically impossible – after all, there are times in the year when round trip to South Africa is less than US\$2000.00 for two weeks. A number of factors have scuttled such thinking, not the least was the need to have an enabling official corridor that recognizes that their mission here is not complete if they do not encourage exchanges and trips by African and Diaspora youth and business community. Hence, there is no better way of bringing people together than through such efforts and exchanges, which serve better than occasional trade displays and jamborees. Also, I have been often concerned about the high probability of exposure to miscreants on such visits – not that this will be a serious concern to any one coming from Jamaica, as Jamaica is reputed to be one of the most violent places in the world outside of war zones.

Secondly, our leadership in the African and Diaspora communities must wake up and understand that we have wasted too much time on individual self-interest. We must wake up to the realization that we are descendants of great peoples all over Africa, who have built cities, civilizations and cultures before the white person ever because human. If we understand this, we will begin to think differently and understand that corporate interest must supersede self-interest, group welfare must trump personal wealth and African identity must subsume personal identity. When we do this, then we will have a new orientation, and we will not need to be begging Africans on the continent to affirm their African-ness, and there would no psychological impediments on the part of Diaspora Africans affirming their African-ness.

Conclusion

To harness the elements of our discussion in this chapter, we would have to be fair to the various components of our existence. We may seem to have suggested that Western and Arabia derived educational systems have had deleterious effects of Africa and its Diaspora. This will be stating the obvious. Can we go back and wipe out the totality of the interface and effects on African consciousness and existence? This is impossible. But can we begin the process of restitution and re-appreciating our African cultures, for the sake of global African posterity? Definitely, this is a necessity.

Let us unify the elements of our discussion here. We have examined art, memory, identity, disabilities and otherness, to show the tropes of inclusion and exclusion in contemporary African and Diaspora societies. What has fed into this has been the environment of Western education, which does not take cognizance of the indigenous values and appreciations of variations in human existence, either because the alien cultures were limited in their understanding of these, or because of their binary dispositions to reality, saw deformities and disabilities are consequences of evil behavior, curse or some other transgenerational Karma.

Let us bear in mind that the setting of the indigenous educational systems and structures were continuous with the home setting. So when a child that is disabled lives at home and is recognized to be differently abled, this is translated within the community as recognition of different ability, which will complement the abilities of others. Children and disabled persons are home empowered and society affirmed – albinos, deaf, mute, dwarfs, etc., are highly respected in indigenous societies and their contributions sought. What this means is that the “modern” educational systems and practices, the connected arts, the narratives of existence and myths, have a lot to learn from indigenous African traditions, so that the integration of persons who are differently abled, alien or other are not compromised. The traumatizing Christian and Islamic ideas of disability as products of sin, and the prognosis for healing, restitution from sin and deliverance are not particularly friendly to the identity of the targets of such disdain; and it is not altogether different from the condescension that emanate from both religions regarding those who are not members of each of these faiths – they are infidels, sinners, ignorant or lost souls. The moment we move away from this and embrace an African centered understanding of inclusiveness and oneness of humanity, then in everything we do – peace or war, wealth or poverty, piety or otherwise – we would be mindful of the consequences of our actions, policies and decisions on those who are different, either physiologically, psychologically or economically.

What we have not done in this essay is to engage malevolent forces within African indigenous metaphysics to explain causation of disabilities or negative differentiation. For instance, in many indigenous African communities (Yoruba included), deformities, poverty, leprosy, etc., are attributed to such forces. In the event that one suffers from such attack there are remediation mechanisms through sacrifices, fasting, deliverance, etc.

These are not the issues we have examined here for two reasons: first, the essay has become rather lengthy because of the need to expatiate many issues which cannot be ignored if sense was to be made of the ideas and conclusions reached in the essay. Second, the issues of malevolent forces as causative factors for disabilities and other challenges in human and community life do not constitute identity, artistic or educational construction tropes simpliciter; more significantly, they also do not lead to discriminations and disempowerment in the sense in which constructions of otherness determine the place of persons in Eurocentric/Arabocentric educational and

religious disempowerment polarities. In the end, it is evident that African traditions have much to teach humanity in how to handle difference and differently abled humanity. This would be the subject of another investigation into the ontology of difference within indigenous and colonial religio-metaphysical constructions in African societies. It would be interesting to see how this has fueled, for example the economics of religion investigated in an earlier essay, driving revivalism and Pentecostalism and the industries which this phenomenon has spawned.

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