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Gender, Democracy and Institutional Development in Africa



Njoki Nathani Wane

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Gender, Development and Social Change

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Gender, Development and Social Change

ISBN 978-3-030-11853-2 ISBN 978-3-030-11854-9 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11854-9>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019934989

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*To all those who believe that something good still exists in the continent
of Africa*

FOREWORD

This book is a refreshing treatise on Africa that captures the imagination of its readers and invites them to be more open minded and accepting of the historical realities and contributions of Africa to the world. Its eight chapters take us through pulsating historical analyses that outline the incalculable political and economic challenges disrupting this vast continent's development agenda today. This analysis is not however steeped in a pitiful depiction of events that romanticize a troubled past. Rather, the authors of the eight informative chapters of this book passionately locate Africa's true contribution to world civilization, demystifying the often deliberate and conscious attempts by international organizations, institutions of learning, and the intellectual opinion-setter community to denude, denigrate, and mitigate its rich and powerful contributions to the world civilization today.

The book therefore highlights what existed in Africa's past and laments the underrepresentation of the impact of the creative genius of Africa on the global cultural and political landscape. It presents an irresistible argument that the development project of the nations of Africa cannot proceed without this acknowledgment that is so critical to both Africans and non-Africans. The destiny of Africa, it contends, is all wrapped up in the lessons it takes from its past into its future. For the authors of this book, no analysis would be complete if those who carry Africa's destiny in their hands do not tap into a vision that considers the importance of strategic foresight.

The authors further contend that there is a need for both Africans and their descendants to engage in some degree of introspection to take stock of their place in the world as having emerged from a truly great and

thriving civilization and the potential to walk this path again in the future. Africa's young sons and daughters must take their place in the world and feel that vital connection to their past and to humanity in general. They must see themselves as initiators, creators, inventors, and shapers of civilizations destined to craft a new existence. Part of this realization will have to be an acceptance of the history of slavery and colonization, neo-colonialism, and imperialism that rid African nations of their pride, dignity, and self-worth. The book sounds the clarion call for Africa to transit to a new and bright outlook, steeped in the reality of its historical ghosts which are proving difficult to exorcise but also its vision of restoration of its humanity, its love, and a better future. The book starts off with an examination and analysis of the indigenous philosophies of Africa and their ubiquitous influence touching every aspect of society. It calls for frank and brutal discussion of these philosophies and the surmounting of the old stance of these philosophies as less significant even in intellectual and academic circles. Further calls are made for the merging of indigence and conventional world views which could well be the fountainhead to a new and viable dispensation. African philosophies are the total embodiment of the way of life of Africans—their religion, their source of liberation, their source of transformation. These philosophies cannot therefore be divorced from everyday existence nor a vision of the future.

This seminal work also explains the dilemma of Africa in relation to its development thrust. As the nations of Africa continue to battle their slave and colonial past, their wounds continue to fester in the face of social, economic, and political battles from an inequitable world. To add insult to injury, there is the ever-pervasive media which continues to depict Africa as the jaundiced child. The second chapter therefore argues that there is a continuing saga of negativity which has historically condemned Africa to its portrayal as a second-class citizen. There is however acknowledgment that internal squabbles—political and otherwise—have contributed to Africa's share of its developmental afflictions.

The book also advances that Africa made its contribution to vibrant trade and travelling activities both by land and by water. This very development facilitated several dimensions of Africa's creative economic and cultural genius located in its empire building, business and profit-making, commodity transactions, and its settlements. In this context, Africa's science does not only form a part of its culture but, as illustrated in the book, is the very embodiment of its culture.

In its developmental drive, the states of Africa need to acknowledge the impact of a Eurocentric curriculum as inimical to its progress. Therefore, this inspiring work calls for an indigenization of teaching and learning and its criticality in education. Against the backdrop of African nation-states' history of colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, post-colonial, and anti-colonial struggles, the book demands a discussion on the cultural diversity and ethnicity of Africa which it perceives as an asset to its program of development. It therefore claims that on-going research into the African past must remain a frontline and continuing pursuit as this vast continent journeys to a bright and prosperous future. The volume vividly conveys the role of women in Africa and invites its readers to ruminate on women's historic role in Africa. In this context, it brings to light stories of pride, industry, self-defense, and leadership. The book does not ignore the significance of virtue in the lives of both men and women. Rooted in their profound spirituality, Africans' everyday existence is grounded in the quality of relationships they nurture between individuals, in communities, in the world, and in the environment. This was the foundation of the cultivation of ideals of caring, respect, and harmony which were tacitly deduced, if not ostensibly manifest.

The book ends with an invitation to the reader to imbibe African philosophy in this ultramodern period and examine its pertinence in a rather Eurocentric setting. Imminent, prospective actors through their youthful lenses can hopefully transform the current intellectual disequilibrium by deconstructing and validating African philosophical underpinnings of collectivism, intergenerational interdependence, and the added value of competition and opposition as necessary ingredients for the nurturing of successful leadership preparation as Africa marches on to its inevitable, practicable destiny.

St. George, Grenada

Damian E. Greaves

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have been written without the hard work of all the contributors to this volume who were all my graduate assistants and who have now completed their PhDs and are working in Canada or outside Canada. To all of you: Alberta, Erick, Akena, Ahmed, and Bailey. I sincerely thank all each one of you for your commitment and dedication to this project. I still remember with fond memories the many Saturdays that we met during the initial stages of this book. Your interest on various aspects of the African past has made this edited book a reality. I would also like to thank all the numerous people who have read different drafts of this book, your comments and suggestions strengthened the final arguments presented in the book. And to my family, Amadou, Koyiet, Nairesiae, Sein, Aziz, and Moodi, asante sana for your love.

To my Creator, thank you for your guidance at every step of the journey.

2019

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Osholene Oshobugie is in her final year of graduate studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Indigenous African education gives African/Black children roots in the knowledge of their past and their future, and prepares them to be well equipped for the solutions of their indigenous societies, at home and in the diaspora. It is in this form of education that Oshobugie has dedicated her scholarship and research. She is using an African storytelling methodology for her self-study research into the knowledge of self which is the goal for African-centred education. She has worked in the field of community development and social services for over seven years, and has experience working with community members to foster an appropriate indigenous African-centred education for African/Black children. She is a recent recipient of the University of Toronto Graduate Community Development Award and is committed to community initiatives that enhance the lives of community members.

Njoki Nathani Wane is a recognized scholar in the areas of Black feminisms in Canada and Africa, African indigenous knowledges, African women, and spirituality. One of her most recent publications is *Indigenous African Knowledge Production: Food Processing Practices Among Kenyan Rural Women*. She has co-authored an anti-racist training manual, *Equity in Practice: Transformational Training Resource*, with Larissa Cairncross; *Ruptures: Anti-colonial & Anti-racist Feminist Theorizing* with Jennifer Jagire and Zahra Murad; and *A Handbook on African Traditional Healing Approaches & Research Practices* with Erica Neeganagwedín. She has also co-edited *Spirituality, Education & Society: An Integrated Approach* with Energy Manyimo and Eric Ritskes and *The Politics of Cultural Knowledge* with Arlo Kempf and Marlon Simmons. Wane headed the Office of Teaching Support in 2009–2012. She has been nominated TVO Best Lecturer and is the recipient of the Harry Jerome Professional Excellence Award (2008) and of the African Women Achievement Award (2007). She is also a recipient of the prestigious David E. Hunt Award for Excellence in Graduate Education for 2016, University of Toronto, and the President of Toronto Teaching Award, 2017.



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Njoki Nathani Wane

Abstract Most foreigners who set foot on African soil fall in love with the continent. They are spellbound by the natural beauty of Africa and its deep tradition. Though currently besieged by innumerable political and economic challenges, Africa is a proud continent that contributed to the rise of civilizations. Colonialism in Africa was like a nuclear war or a holocaust. It devastated the continent and continues to linger, becoming the worst nightmare in the history of Africa. Despite some sincere efforts by international organizations and foreign countries to mitigate its woes, Africa continues to stutter in the quagmire of poverty, and her voice remains underrepresented in the international political landscape. Regardless, the true picture of Africa is not lost. This book is one more effort to carry forward the viable past into the future. If Africa has to be launched in a meaningful development endeavor, both Africans and foreigners need to understand what existed in the past and what lessons we can take for the future. The introduction provides highlights of the book such as the fundamentals of African traditional philosophies and the current upheavals in governance of post-colonial African states.

INTRODUCTION

Most foreigners who set foot on African soil fall in love with the continent. They are spellbound by the natural beauty of Africa and its deep tradition. Though currently besieged by innumerable political and economic

challenges, Africa is a proud continent that contributed to the rise of civilizations. Colonialism in Africa is like a nuclear war or a holocaust. It devastated the continent and continues to linger, becoming the worst nightmare in the history of Africa. The direct colonialism that disrupted the “life-as-usual” situation in Africa persisted in its corroding effect through educational, cultural, economic, and political colonization. Despite some sincere efforts by international organizations and foreign countries to mitigate its woes, Africa continues to stutter in the quagmire of poverty, and her voice remains underrepresented in the international political landscape. Epistemologically, Africa’s contribution to a universal generation and application of knowledge is not acknowledged or well taken.

Regardless, the true picture of Africa is not lost. African and other concerned scholars are articulating their resolution to see this bleak picture shine brighter and brighter. Ours is one more effort to carry forward the viable past into the future. If Africa has to be launched in a meaningful development endeavor, both Africans and foreigners need to understand what existed in the past and what lessons we can take for the future. Many have contempt when Africa’s proud past is retold. However, for Africans, understanding and glorifying the past are the beginning of regaining dignity and indicative of possible comeback. It is important for everyone to realize that Africans had once enjoyed a peaceful and thriving civilization in the past, which also shows that they have the potential to do so now and in the future. This knowledge boosts the self-worth and self-confidence of young people of African descent, which are very vital in their learning.

When African people and their descendants around the world start to see themselves as part of a long history of civilization in which they have been part, they will be awakened to the fact that they are where they are for a reason. They can still feel the connection to their ancestors, to the next generation, and to humanity in general. They can continue to see themselves as originators and fashioners of civilization. The history of slavery and colonialism is a challenge set to test our humanity, and we can overcome it by reclaiming our humanness, our love, and our vision to a better future. This book was written to help everyone see Africa and Africans in a new light, to embrace Africa and Africans as an asset, and to seek their knowledge and wisdom in the new world order. In order to take the readers through a different mental and physical map of Africa, in each chapter, we raise different issues and explain facts and perspectives.

In the second chapter, Ahmed examines the fundamentals of African traditional philosophies. He argues that “African philosophies are the foundations of African societies in as much as they are overarching principles governing everyday life of the African ... [they] are the common thread which connects African peoples with their African roots”.

In the third chapter, Akena explains that the social, political, and economic spectrum of the modern global era is deeply manufactured in favor of the more developed countries. With reference to Africa, he continues to explain, the media has largely contributed significantly in portraying the continent of Africa with cynicism. Consequently, facets such as preventative diseases wrecking mayhem, famine, wars, HIV/AIDS, illiteracy, piracy, and failed states have become common features through which Africa is portrayed. The objective of his chapter is to lay bare the motives behind the negative depictions by arguing that such negativity in depiction needs to be situated within a historical context. This however is not to negate the fact that there are challenges with which the continent is struggling. To debunk the biased depiction therefore, the chapter acknowledges the current upheavals in governance of post-colonial African states and argues for the emulation of some forms of ancient government practices not only to show African potentials but also to create a roadmap for a strong united states of Africa to usher in peace, stability, and sustainable development.

In the fourth chapter, Alberta Akrong advances the position that the continent of Africa cannot be discussed without mentioning its historical travel and trading activities. Trade has been and is still an integral part of the people of the land dating back to pre-colonial times and even to the period of medieval Europe. Trading activities were conducted both on land and by water ways, and these events contributed to making the continent accessible to reach resources—both human and material. She argues that on the one hand this historical pursuit seems to be the genesis to access creation into Africa’s hinterland through the support of livelihood creation, business and profit-making, commodity exchanges, settlements formation, and empire building, while on the other hand it somehow facilitated the further success of European domination of Africa. It was obvious that the European success of penetration and eventual take-over of Africa were because they could easily access the trade route passes for the slave raid activities and raw materials collection to the trading ports for eventual shipment from out of the continent.

In Chap. 5, Njoki Wane provides an overview of African indigenous knowledge and its centrality in indigenizing education. She argues that a discussion of African indigenous knowledge as a transformational project does not take place in a vacuum but rather within the context of a history of colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonial, post-colonial, and anti-colonial discursive frameworks. In this discussion, she acknowledges the ethnic and cultural diversity and the historical contingencies and specificities of African peoples. She also acknowledges that some common elements in African indigenous knowledge systems can be found in diverse or variant forms among indigenous peoples of the world. The chapter is based on an on-going research into African past. The project opens a window onto African peoples, their educational and philosophical thought. Often misrepresented, seldom understood, and frequently ignored, the land mass of 12 million square miles or 31 million square kilometers is one of the largest continents on planet Earth. Its peoples, comprising many hundred ethnic groups, speak more than 2000 languages and regional varieties of a language or dialect. One major conclusion of this work is the need to acknowledge and recognize the multiple and collective origins of knowledge. Her research indicates that this conversation is critical, as it impacts on the forms of knowledge, which are legitimated within the academy. Therefore, for any meaningful learning and teaching to take place, it is necessary for educators to rethink or reimagine how indigeneity may be infused within the Eurocentric curriculum.

In the sixth chapter, Solomon discusses what science is in the African context. He says not only science is part of a cultural activity but also science itself is an African culture. He gives examples of the different African sciences to drive home the point that Africa has primacy in the scientific world and has a lot of potential to shape its future.

In the seventh chapter, Fabris and Wane search literature to consider the lives of women in ancient Africa. An Internet search for women in Africa uncovers the usual litany of despair in Africa, but what of the herstories of African women? Black feminists, all women of color, have started to recover stories of pride, hard work, self-defense, and rulership. As usual they have also been met with skepticism from Westerners, especially men. As women around the world push for a better society, we welcome stories that show ways in which ancient women often had a more central role in society. What would a world with many women in positions of power look like?

The purpose of Chap. 8 is to unearth the centrality of spirituality in the lives of African peoples. Spirituality has been one of the main pillars for

Africans. As Wane et al. (2007) have stated elsewhere, the culture of African people was rooted in their spirituality, and they saw their spirituality as a springboard to everything that they did. African people's spirituality was nourished through their everyday practice and in particular the evocation of the Creator's name. For instance, Wane recalls while growing up in a rural area, her mother used to call on the name of the Creator, Mwene Nyaga, at dawn and later in the evening as the last frames burnt out and everyone was in their beds ready to sleep. According to Wane, the morning evocation was to give thanks to the Creator for having protected the family throughout the night and for having given every member of the family another day to witness the wonders of the world. In the evening, Wane states, her mother would give thanks for the day's blessings. The chance to witness spiritual rituals is a unique phenomenon found throughout ancient African societies. Throughout these rituals, what was emphasized was the quality of relationship developed between communities and the relationship between individuals and the world or environment. The need to cultivate an attitude of caring, respect, and harmony was not spoken but implicitly inferred.

Chapter 9 frames a discussion on the application of ancient African philosophy in a twenty-first-century classroom and its relevance to curriculum on leadership training in a Eurocentric institution. The students discuss the transformative value of the course on classroom relations and perceptions of leadership skills and practice. The course validates communalism and intergenerational interdependence and concurrently deconstructs competition and opposition as endemic to successful leadership practice.

The contributors have revisited existing sources of knowledge and through robust analyses have shed new light on earlier findings. They have drawn on previously unwritten sources of proverbs, everyday practices, and common sense to deliver untapped knowledge. Knowing ancient Africa through the lens of conscious Africans delivers on the objectives of this project.



CHAPTER 2

African Traditional Philosophies

Ahmed Ali Ilmi

Abstract African traditional philosophies are multiple bodies of living comprehensive knowledges which encapsulate holistic ways of knowing. In its cosmological sense, it's the common thread which connects African peoples with their African roots. It encompasses an intergenerational ancestral connection between the living, the dead, and the unborn. It is a moral and ethical communal existence which is built upon notions of collective social responsibility to one's clan, family, and community, their ancestors, and the Creator. From a spiritual point of view, it is about giving thanks to the Creator, to the ancestors, and to the environment. In essence, African philosophies are an everyday embodiment of Wisdom as a being who is connected to a greater purpose in life. In this chapter, I will articulate my understanding of what constitutes African philosophies as well as provide synopses of the current contemporary debates on Africa philosophies. I will then highlight the dis-positioning of African philosophies within Eurocentric institutions. I will conceptualize the foundation of African philosophies. After that I will engage in a discussion about African communalism.

INTRODUCTION

African traditional philosophies are multiple bodies of living comprehensive knowledges which encapsulate holistic ways of knowing. As such, they are social constructs which enable members of a community to think in