

The Conflate of Modernization and Westernization and Africa's Quest for Authentic Civilization and Development

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Abstract: Africa's two quests – the need for development and the desire to maintain African civilization – seem mutually exclusive and incompatible. Development entails a process of modernization which for the non-western world is conflated with westernization. It is arguably impossible for non-western world to modernize without westernizing. It is in this dilemma that Africa is stalled: How can Africa embrace development while remaining culturally intact as a civilization? This paper gave a critical appraisal of modernization and westernization and suggested that reformism is the only paradigmatic option available to Africa. It concluded that only a conscious compromise between western and African values can guarantee the dual quests of Africa.

Key words: Africa, Development, Civilization, Westernization and Modernization

I. INTRODUCTION

If scholars ever agreed on an issue, it is that Africa is in dire need of development. The level of underdevelopment in the continent has become a source of grave concern to all. That Africa is unable to develop, despite the enormous human and natural resource it parades, is to say the least, perplexing. After more than half a century of independence of most African countries, the heaping of the culpability of Africa's backwardness in terms of development on colonization is now untenable.

Conflation of westernization and modernization is not helping matters as it seems that every step Africa takes to develop, leaves the continent more westernized and modernized. This conceptual conflation of westernization and modernization has led to the conclusion that non-western countries cannot modernize without Westernizing.

Africa is truly at crossroad because modernization is the shortcut to development which Africa aspires to get at all cost. But how can the continent modernize without being more westernized taking into cognizance that there is serious struggle to rebuild African civilization decrepitated by centuries of racism, colonization and neo-colonization?

This text critically analyzes the relationship between westernization and modernization vis-à-vis the quest for African civilization and opines that Africa can still modernize and maintain its civilization. However, this cannot happen without Africa shedding off some of its values and adopting some western values without going thoroughly Western.

Conceptual Conflation of Westernization and Modernization

The correlation between modernization and Westernization raises polemics whenever discussed in the context of civilization. Ordinarily, the two are equated and compacted such that people perceive no dichotomy between them. Before the emergence of the advocates of multi-civilizational world, to be modernized meant to be civilized which implied to be westernized. [1] The association of modernization with westernization has led to the convergence theories which argue that despite national and regional differences the road to modernization is basically unilinear. Francis Fukuyama in his *The End of History* represents this tenet, as he argues not only that modernizing societies are passing fundamentally the same process, they are also inevitably heading towards political democracy. He avers, "it makes sense for us... to speak of a coherent and directional history of mankind that will eventually lead a greater part of humanity to liberal democracy." [2] He sees modernization as a fundamental process at work that dictates a common evolutionary pattern for all human societies – in short something like a 'Universal History of Mankind' in the direction of liberal democracy. [3] This idea is propped on the premise that:

The unfolding of modern natural science has had a uniform effect on all societies that have experienced it This process guarantees an increasing homogenization of all human societies, regardless of the historical origins or cultural inheritances. All countries undergoing economic modernization must unify nationally on the basis of a centralized state, urbanize, replace traditional forms of social organization like tribe, sect, and family with economically rational ones based on function and efficiency, and provide universal education for their

citizens. Such societies have become increasingly linked with one another through global markets and the spread of universal consumer culture. [4]

The process of modernization, according to him, requires reconfiguration of societies into Western lifestyle epitomized in free market, liberal democracy and consumer culture, which Ali Shariati argues, is what the West bequeathed non-Europeans in the name of civilization. [5]

By this stand, Fukuyama implicitly maintains that Westernization equals modernization and by portraying liberal democracy which has basis and origin in Western civilization as the end product of the process, he portrays Western civilization as the model and universal civilization on which all other civilizations must be configured into as long as they desire to modernize. This "concept of universal civilization helps justify Western cultural dominance of other societies and the need for those societies to ape western practices and institutions" [6].

This equation did not just happen. There are reasons for the so much conceptual conflation of modernization and westernization, the illusion that modernization is westernization. The West was the first to modernize and became the emissaries of modernization process in other civilizations where modernization and Western values were sold together or the latter imposed on the people as a sine qua non for the acquisition of the former. [7] The origin of the process of modernization in the "West, and its global character constitute the civilization as a universal paradigm. It is in this sense that Westernization can be said to be synonymous with modernization in relation to the impact of West on Africa" and the rest of non-Western world. [8] In that early stage, the recipients of modernization or westernization either had no conceptual and practical framework to differentiate what was modern from what was western or actually made such discrepancy but lacked the audacity to reject the Western and accept the modern. In fact, even when such courage rarely existed; Western military dominance would force them to open up. For example, Japan formerly isolated itself from the influence of the external world but was coerced into it by military might of the Western world. [9]

Chinese civilization was also badly affected by the conceptual confusion of modernization with Westernization [10]. Writing on this, Marie Anthony says, "They made the mistake of believing that western culture and standard were superior to theirs. They confused modernization with Westernization." [11] This was, according to her, the aftermath of China's effort to catch up with modernization in the West. She claims that China, an old civilization was behind times for having isolated herself from outside influence for centuries. Sequel to that, China entered the 20th century a cheated country, having suffered a great deal in the hand of the West. This sad event became a motivator for Chinese in their march towards modernization. Western education was massively acquired; its science, technology and the democratic political system were studied and adopted. The concomitant improvement of standard of living made China to derail. Before long, the Chinese "lost self-confidence, and began not only to enjoy but also to imitate Western music...." [12]

The illusion of the equation of modernization with Westernization or the exchange of the former with the latter was a different story in connection with African civilization. The racist approach to slavery and colonization in Africa made it a prerequisite that everything the continent exhibited in the name of civilization would be dismantled and destroyed in the process of civilizing the African who was considered 'primitive' and 'barbaric'. As a result, the imperialistic occupation of Africa left the continent more Westernized and less modernized than any other civilization. Consequently:

The colonial factor was essential to the process of westernization in Africa itself. The comprehensive reorganization of African societies in every sphere of life signaled a new dispensation that functioned as the comprehensive framework of the African experience under colonialism The colonial powers ... undertook a systematic dismantling of indigenous institutions in order to establish colonial rule as the primary source of legitimacy in the territories they controlled. [13]

In this wise, the value of everything became its relationship or relevance to colonial interest and Western culture.

The efforts of the colonizers in Westernizing Africa were complemented by Western Christian missionaries and African returnees from Diaspora who dissipated their energy propagating Western civilization in the name of salvation and modernization.

It is against this background of the disaggregation of African life that the impact of Christianity has to be considered, for this has been the most important single factor in the process of Westernization in Africa. Western education, involving literacy and the mastery of a European language, became the condition for entry into the modern sector. [14]

This is a major antagonistic trend to the possibility of a civilization that is distinctly African. Consequent upon the West being the first to modernize is the West's use of its modern apparatus to subject the rest of mankind to its civilization. Till date, Western powers are still prevalent resulting in the definition of the global institutions of the modern world, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), arms control regimes, and even most of the time the UN in relation to the West.

So many contemporary international institutions are not only modern but Western in origin, design, and practices. Western power has allowed the West to shape many of the current global institutions in its image, although there is no logical or sociological necessity to this. [15]

This explains why many non-westerners view these institutions as Western agendas. In addition to the above reasons, the equation of modernization with Westernization emanates also from Western self-image of superior and perhaps universal civilization and the acceptance of the same belief by many non-westerners. [16] Majority of Westerners think of themselves as superior beings and their civilization as the prototype of what it implies to be civilized. This has informed the claims that non-Western civilizations cannot modernize until they become westernized. But the question remains, is modernization a synonym for Westernization, or, is westernization equal to modernization? [17] Does modernization require westernization? [18]

The closeness of the concepts notwithstanding, they stand apart in their meaning. For Deepak Lal, “modernization entails a change in belief about the way material world operates while Westernization entails a change in cosmological beliefs about the way that one should live.” [19] He argues that material belief which forms the foundation of modernization is more malleable than cosmological belief – the basis of civilization. As a result, material belief can change rapidly with changes in the material environment without a concomitant change in the cosmological belief. [20] Thus, he concludes that to promote the modernization, there is no need for non-Western world to accept Western cosmological beliefs. Therefore, “societies can modernize without westernizing” [21]

D. Florig agrees with Lal's distinction, arguing that: While modernization is an imperative if a nation is to be a force in the global system, Westernization is to some degree a choice, whether conscious or unconscious. There is a tendency for modernizing nations to adopt Western institutions and values in the modernization process, but there are also countervailing tendencies to resist equating Western institutions and values with modernity. Later modernizers have knowledge of the path the West has taken and thus some choice about what to emulate and what not to emulate, or at least what to try to emulate and what to try not to emulate. [22]

He calls the views separating Westernization from modernization the divergent theories. From all indications, he is quite aware of the fact that modernization often results in Westernization consequent upon the West having held monopoly of the process for centuries. However, he maintains that with rational separation of the two processes, societies can modernize and still maintain their civilization identity. Japan is often given as an example of a country that has modernized without Westernizing. China has successfully halted the Westernization process and is making effort to revive her civilization values lost during modernization. In fact, the increasing antagonistic of the non-western world to Westernization, thought to be the follow up of modernization, has produced the animosity referred to as “clash of civilizations” [23]. Many non-Western countries have tried without success to resist modernization solely because of fear of being westernized.

Paradigmatic Options for Non-western World in the Dilemma of Westernization and Modernization

Huntington has delineated the reactions to universalization of Western values and the use of modernization as bait to attract non-Western world into three groups – rejectionism, Kemalism and reformism. [24] Rejectionists think that “both modernization and Westernization are undesirable and it is possible to reject both.” [25] Japan, for a good number of centuries followed a rejectionist course by permitting only limited modernization and even expelled Westerners in mid-seventeenth century. However, the West forcefully ended Japan's isolation in 1854 through the instrumentality of commodore Perry. [26] Similarly, China for several centuries attempted to bar both modernization and westernization. “China's rejectionist policy was in large part rooted in the Chinese image of itself as the Middle kingdom and the firm belief in the superiority of Chinese culture to those of all other peoples.” [27] But western military might also brought China's isolationism to an end in the opium war of 1839-1842.

The exigencies of modern time coupled with the rise of free market economy and globalization through information technology have rendered the rejectionist stance untenable. Consequently, it is, to say the least, hard to get a society that takes the rejectionist posture as Daniel Pipes writes concerning Islam:

Only the very most extreme fundamentalists reject modernization as well as Westernization. They threw television set into rivers, ban wrist watches, and reject the internal combustion engine. The impracticability of their program severely limits the appeal of such groups, however, and in several cases – such as the Yen Izala of Kano, Sadat's assassins, the Mecca mosque attacks, and some Malaysian dakwah groups – their defeats in violent encounters with the authorities caused them then to disappear with few traces. [28]

But not to be neglected is the sympathy or supports such fundamentalist Islamic rejectionists nowadays received from religious and sometimes state authorities. This makes it doubtful if fundamentalist groups like al Qaeda and Boko Haram (Western education is sin) can be routed anytime soon judging from their modus operandi. Despite this, Pipes maintains that Islam has no alternative means of escaping the anomy of primitivity than to modernize, which attracts inevitably secularism. His argument is quite similar to Francis Fukuyama's, namely:

Modern science and technology requires an absorption of the thought processes which accompany them: so too with political institutions. Because content must be emulated no less than form, the predominance of Western civilization must be acknowledged so as being able to learn from it. [29]

Therefore, acquisition of European languages and Western education is prerequisite conditions for freethinking and easy living. So, "only when Muslims explicitly accept the Western model will they be in a position to technicalize and then to develop". [30]

The above idea of the non-feasibility of modernization without Westernization informed the next group of non-Western reactions to the Westernization and modernization – Kemalism, which holds that both modernization and Westernization are both desirable and possible and that Westernization is indispensable to the achievement of modernization. [31] The underlying assumption of kemalism is that the indigenous culture is incompatible with modernization and must be replaced with Western culture to ensure successful modernization. The term kemalism can be traced to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who attempted to redefine Turkey as Western society. Huntington laments that Ataturk by rejecting Turkey's Islamic past and redefining it as Western state has made it a "torn country, a society which was Muslim in its religious heritage, customs and institutions but has a ruling elite determined to make it modern, Western, and at one with the West." [32] Till this 2019, Turkey is still aspiring to join European Union but for reasons which include Turkey's Islamic heritage, the West has consistently rebuffed the attempts.

Kemalism looked very attractive to several countries in the late twentieth century. They tried to substitute a Western identity for non-Western identity. Many non-Western political leaders tried redefining their countries as Western and attempted joining organizations that were exclusively Western in their purposes and origin but could not succeed because of cultural barriers. Rather they turned their countries into "torn countries". In this regard, Russia, Mexico and Turkey stand out. [33] Huntington spells out the conditions a torn country must meet to redefine itself thus:

For a torn country successfully to redefine its civilizational identity at least three requirements must be met. First, the political and economic elite of the country has to be generally supportive of and enthusiastic about this move. Second, the public has to approve of the redefinition of identity. Third, the dominant elements in the host civilization, in most cases the West, have to be willing to embrace the converts. [34]

The second and third condition have been the most difficult to meet in the quest for redefinition of civilizations. Sequel to this, no country has successfully redefined its civilization identity, though Turkey is still aspiring to join the European Union. Huntington, therefore, maintains that "the process of identity redefinition will be prolonged, interrupted and painful, politically, socially, institutionally, and culturally. It also to date has failed." [35]

Kemalism has been the worst reaction to the dominance of Western civilization, culturally speaking. Its failure results from the fact that, it does not make the differences between Westernization and modernization. Authors have delineated the two terms. Specifically, the minimal requirements of modernization are industrialization, urbanization, complex and diverse occupational structures; economic enterprises based on rationality and efficiency; technically rational modes of thought; mass education, mass communication, a centralized nation state and institutions that participate in global systems while Western values and institution include: individualism, liberty, equality, constitutionalism, Human rights, free markets, secularization and democracy. [36] Conversely, civilizations are differentiated by history, language, culture, tradition, and most importantly religion. The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views on the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. [37]

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Western values are attributes of a particular civilization. Any civilization can take up the attributes of modernization; however, attempts to replace the attributes of one civilization with those of another as canvassed in kemalism are often detrimental to the people's civilizational identity.

The above view distinguishing Westernization, modernization and civilization informs the third reaction to the Westernization and modernization – reformism. The tenet holds that "modernization is desirable and possible without substantial Westernization which is undesirable" [38] Therefore, reformism is an "attempt to combine modernization with the preservation of the central values, practices, and institutions of the society's indigenous culture." [39] Reformism is a go-between rejectionism and Kemalism, its major conflict with Kemalism is on the desirability of Westernization and possibility of modernization without Westernization. To the question, can a non-Western society modernize without westernizing, which kemalism would answer in negative, reformism answers in affirmative. A society need not abandon its cultural heritage and embrace that of the West in order to modernize.

On the issue of co-relation between modernization process and Westernization, there is, no doubt, a close link between the processes as well as the fact of non-Western society absorbing substantial elements of

Western culture and making slow progress in modernization. However, increase in modernization retards the rate of Westernization and reinvigorates the indigenous culture. Accordingly, "in the early phases of change, Westernization thus promotes modernization. In the later phases, modernization promotes de-Westernization and the resurgence of indigenization culture." [40] This happens at both societal and individual levels. Modernization having boosted, at the societal level, economic, political and military powers, instills in the people confidence in their culture and makes them culturally assertive. Similar revolution takes place at the individual level. Feelings of alienation generated by modernization process break traditional bonds and social relations creating crises of identity that are only resolved or cushioned by religion. [41]

In a nutshell, it is believed that non-Western societies need not westernize in order to modernize. However, non-Western societies whose indigenous values pose great threat to modernization process have no option than to replace such values with Western culture if modernization is to occur. In such a case, "society, the state, authority and the like are all part of an elaborated, sustained, high solidarity system in which religion as a cognitive guide is pervasive such systems have been hostile to innovation". [42]

Reformism: the only Paradigmatic Option for Africa

Culturally speaking, reformism is the best option, but its feasibility is largely an issue of debate especially in relation to Africa. Ali Mazrui has already recommended reformism to Africa with doubts when he says that "Egypt's destiny was not a Japanese fate of technical modernization without cultural Westernization nor was it an Atatürk fate of technical modernization through cultural westernization." [43] This remains so because, as Mazrui observes, Egypt and Africa have passed through "a painful process of cultural Westernization without technical modernization" [44] through the instrumentality of Western imperialism in Africa.

Africa is perhaps a perfect example of a place whose indigenous cultures obstruct modernization. Common metaphysical values underlying African cultures are highly spiritual and their epistemic values magico-religious which frown at experimentation with nature and make knowledge acquisition an esoteric exercise exclusively reserved for the initiated few. In the same vein, African ethical values are very particularistic with highly limited horizon of consistence that partly explains the alarming rate of corruption bedeviling African societies even today. P. O. Bodunrin has long ago observed that African cultural and cognitive attitudes are largely grounded in magical religious worldview as opposed to sciento-technical rationality that is the engine behind modernization. He, therefore, advised that efforts be made to replace those attitudes and cultivate sciento-technical rationality if Africa is to modernize. [45]

Now, if Africa must make changes in its cultural values in order to modernize, where lies the hope of revitalizing and maintaining cultural identity that can be presented as an authentic African civilization. For Kwasi Wiredu, this was the crisis of identity that pervaded the immediate post-colonial Africa. [46]

African political nationalism aimed at regaining national independence and building viable modern states after that, while cultural nationalism aimed to restore to Africans their confidence in their own culture. This latter was particularly urgent as colonial racism had succeeded to alienate many Africans from their own culture. [47]

Consequently, "a tension develops between cultural nationalism and the quest for modernization in post-independence times" [48]. However, Wiredu does not see real incompatibility between modernization and cultural conservatism which cultural nationalism entails. Hence, he opts for cultural adaptability which makes allowance for changes in certain aspects of culture, in place of cultural conservatism. He insists that changes must accompany modernization but "it needs not involve the indiscriminate jettisoning of the elements of such a culture." [49] That is to say, the changes can be deliberately made as to pave way for modernization without really distorting the cultural identity. To prove the possibility of such endeavour, Wiredu applies the paradox of culture change.

By the paradox of culture change Wiredu means that unlike other situation in which change in the fundamental features results in alternation of identity, it is rather the loss of contingent elements of culture that brings deformation of cultural identity. [50] This implies that the replacement of the fundamental elements of culture which are firmly anchored on truth value such as philosophy and religion with foreign ones may not alter the original cultural identity provided such replacement is deliberately made with rational plan. What rather constitutes loss of cultural identity is indiscriminate jettisoning of the contingent elements of culture such as language, dance, music, recreation, style of courtship, mode of dressing etc. He, therefore, recommends rationally planned modification of African culture to give way to modernization without losing authentic cultural identity. He, however, laments the difficulty of the task as the conceptual framework which should have been instrumental to the realization of the lofty motive has been eclipsed through suppression of African language.

II. CONCLUSION

Investigation reveals that the opposite of Wiredu's recommendation is actually sweeping across Africa. While the fundamental features of most African cultures are held to consciously but much more unconsciously, the contingent elements are almost completely replaced. The only hope for reviving authentic African culture, that is develop African civilization, lies in Huntington's postulation that increase in modernization compels de-Westernization. It is hoped that some traces of modernization in Africa today will continue to increase and would lead to thorough de-Westernization and rejuvenation of African indigenous culture. By being more conscious of what it gives and takes in the process of modernization, Africa would develop and maintain its civilization simultaneously.

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