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by

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ABSTRACT

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Narratives pertaining to the cultural inferiority of Africans have plagued the mindsets and

consequently, the actions of millions around the world. The undermining beliefs of societies

globally towards the African continent and its people has historically created opportunities for

colonialism, imperialism and various other forms of exploitation. Various educational, political

and socio-cultural gaps have manifested themselves in disguise of fundamentally/intrinsically

poor African management. Examples range from more educational and socio-cultural issues such

as cultural rejection/dissociation to everyday manifestations of identity displacement which can

be understood as western cultural mimicry. Throughout this thesis, I shall argue that the core of

the reason for these seemingly superficial developmental gaps in contemporary African society

can be answered with a deeply socio-cultural issue: The lack of reinforcement in the

empowerment of the African identity as worthy, capable and certainly inferior to none other. All

of this directly influencing the potential of true and active African agency. I will also argue for

the use of various cultural tools such as African music, fashion and media as a means of

empowering the African identity.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: The lack of identity empowerment in Africa

The continent of Africa, from its humble beginnings to its intricate contemporary societies has always possessed an unimaginable variety of cultural, spiritual and physical diversity. The wide range of culturally different populations and communities across Africa has left no doubt about the presence of various identity formations in the region.

Notably, however, due to a number of collectively experienced histories, the concept of an 'African identity' does emerge. Without negating the evident diversity inherent within African peoples, certain impactful histories have led many scholars to discuss the realities pertaining to an 'African Identity'. The major one of these defining histories in African culture being that of colonialism, imperialism and contemporarily neo-colonialism.

The need for the empowerment of African identity can further be understood in the perspective of its absence. It is vital to understand and consider the extent to which harmful colonial repercussions have had in the daily lives and wellness of Africans today. From the ineffective maintenance of colonial government structures and the psychological displacement of using colonial languages as the dominant form of communication to the romanticization of Western beauty standards, it is clear to see the disruption that occurs in the African's sense of self.

As the fight continues to dismantle the physical neocolonial and oppressive systems that plague Africans, a shift towards healing the communities' spirits from these traumas is equally essential. Several African scholars have taken to these issues and advocated for this need to empower Africanness unapologetically to counter the dominating effects of the colonial enterprise. This essay will explore the reasons why the empowerment of African identity is not

only important, but necessary for the transformation of the African self. Drawing on the Black feminist intellectual traditions and various definitions of authentic Black expressive culture, namely that of 'Negritude' by Senegalese politician Leopold Senghor this essay will reveal the inherent necessity for a process of identity reclamation.

The thesis of this paper comes out of my overarching research interests which speak to the way that empowering the African identity and exposing it in a powerful light can influence and transform various aspects of the society. In this paper, I will refer to significant aspects of African society as examples of social phenomena that can transform through the intentional empowerment of the African identity. Using the lens of critical theories such as Black Feminism and Negritude, I will delve into impactful examples of empowerment that have positively improved the progression of a powerful collective African identity. These facets of African society that I will be analyzing in the context of African identity empowerment include the education system, language, music, fashion/media and political philosophies at the core of the organization known as the African Union.

The conversations revolving around the term 'African identity' across African centered literature includes a breadth of critiques regarding questions of homogenization, for example. For the sake of certain disciplinary contexts, discussing an African identity generally may not fit to encompass such a diverse body of people. However, in the way that I am formulating my argument philosophically, a discipline which engages in the metaphysical, specific understandings of big questions, such a term can be useful.

The practice of empowerment at its core necessitates an effort towards love of one's identity and overall self. Love as an intellectual conversation/pillar, is not often taken seriously. Dating back to the ancient Greek periods, scholars philosophized about love in such a significant

aspect of understanding society and how it works. In this essay, I argue the fundamental need for love in the form of empowerment in African identity as an irreplaceable method of social development in African societies.

Furthermore, this essay will incorporate conversations surrounding decoloniality and Afrocentricity of the African education system by analyzing the works of Kenyan author Ngugi Wa Thiong'O. He argues for the reclamation of the African self through education and literature while also discussing the dangers of remaining comfortable with African narratives being dictated by the wider Western world.

As an attempt to use philosophical methods and reasoning styles to explicate the need for African identity empowerment in society, it seems fitting to draw on the works of Senegalese philosopher Leopold Senghor, specifically, the Negritude movement. He discusses major themes in African studies including Pan-Africanism, Black cultural nationalism and political stakes of Black identity generally. His arguments will serve to support the idea of an African identity or personality which needs to be empowered within its own context as a result of the repercussions of the colonial enterprise.

Throughout the paper, I will be drawing on psychological arguments which speak to the need for identity empowerment and other disciplines to encompass a wider framework of ideas as well. However, an important aspect of this project to note is that it is a mainly philosophical argument which has proven to be useful in understanding the practicality of academic theories. This question of practicality in this case, is monumentally significant in the sense that this argument is challenging the availability of praxis in conversations surrounding African identity empowerment.

In a philosophical essay, the arguments presented must be free of all fallacies and logically constructed to convey a truthful and coherent analysis. The broken-down construction of my philosophical argument including the premises, inference and conclusion is as follows:

Premise: Africans have a colonial history that subjugates their identity

The reverse of demeaning African identity is empowering it

This implies, the African identity needs to experience healing to thrive.

Therefore,

Conclusion: African identity must be empowered from colonial ideologies to restore a necessary love for Africa, its people and its continued survival.

Literature Review: What have others said?

A preliminary review of the literature reveals a focus on topics related to the historical degradative effects to African identity. Topics ranging from identity reclamation, the dangers of Eurocentricity in wider media, decoloniality, Afrocentric education to issues in foreign dependence related to development and infrastructure projects map out the conversation that subtly calls for the necessity of empowering African identity.

While all of these topics are essential in understanding various repercussions of disempowering African identity, this thesis specifically aims at tying together these ideas and advocating for the absolute necessity of empowering African identity as the core and central potential of African advancement in all aspects of society.

In order to understand the deeply rooted causes and reasons for the issue of African self-esteem and identity development, many scholars have highlighted the tendency towards using

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historical insight to understand these effects. Throughout the ages, various empires stole the attention on the global stage and held the power to influence and promote their own lifestyles, languages and culture across regions. Within the last few centuries, European powers like Britain, France and Portugal were able to harness this power through massive economic achievements.

Sadly, studies have found a direct link between Eurocentrism and a lack of representation which purports that Black individuals are not happy with their features. "Many participants reported at one point wishing that they did not have features attributable to their race: 78% had thought this about their hair texture, 64% about their skin complexion, and 60% about their facial features (wishes for smaller lips and noses were a resounding response to this question)" (Olayinka, Gohara, Ruffin, 2021). The dangers of over-glorifying Eurocentric features has caused countless women and men of color to feel uncomfortable in the own skin and lack confidence to tackle the world. Although this speaks to the importance empowering the African identity, most authors have imply focussed on the effects of Eurocentricity in an African contexts rather than also supplying practical solutions.

Very many scholars have spoken to the issue of representation in the media and how this affects the Black identity, more generally. In order to establish their power and assert themselves as rightful leaders of the world, Europeans had to instill a sense of inferiority in others. Unfortunately for Africans, this is what happened during colonial times where Europeans asserted their superiority from their whiteness. "Early film and television shows featured White actors in blackface whose character portrayals were exaggerated or distorted representations of Black people as uncivilized, illiterate, and/or unintelligent" (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, Kotzin 2014, 368).

Scholars like Dorothy L. Hurley and others assert the dangers of a lack of representation for minorities and the constant glorification of white bodies and images.

A UNESCO conference brief regarding the Pan-African High-Level conference of Nairobi in 2018 is an example of a document that highlights the importance of African empowerment in all aspects of society. "An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children. This is based on a vision that all the citizens of Africa will be actively involved in decision making in all aspects including social, economic, political and environmental and where Africa shall be an inclusive continent where no child, woman or man will be left behind or excluded, on the basis of gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic affiliation, locality, age or other factors."(20) Strikingly, the document does not lay out many real time programs or activities to take place, simply 'strong calls to action'. This is a commonality in the extant literature where the research gap is defined by the lack of practicality in calls for change.

Throughout this scholarly analysis of the effects that various forms of media have on the development and progression of a positive identity and self-esteem in Africans, it is clear to see that the vast inequalities and disproportionate number of factors makes this a pressing issue. Not only do these effects impact the potential for future success of African children but it affects the society as a whole to continue generations lacking pride from years of Eurocentric domination.

Furthermore, the literature that does focus on black representation in the media often connects to the educational aspect of these consumptions as well. The issue of not prioritizing the inclusion of powerful, beautiful and positive images of black individuals in dominant media poses real dangers for children's racial development and life outcomes generally. Authors Martin and Harrison explain that "Research has shown that high self-esteem is correlated with student

motivation, persistence, and academic achievement" (339). This quote makes it clear to see the sense in which the lack of positive portrayals of black and African individuals can affect children's chance at success in the future.

Another aspect of the literature related to decoloniality is the massive focus on the African American experience, and not so much the African one. The following quote goes to show the importance of why this issue should be addressed. "Those media stereotypes subconsciously come to the fore whenever people have to face African Americans who are seeking an education, housing, goods or serv- ices, or jobs or promotions" (Martin and Harrison, 123). This is another example of real-life consequences that negative stereotypes can have on the future of black individuals.

All in all, what the extant literature seems to lack is research on the specific nexus between understanding the unwavering importance of empowering the African identity, while also focusing on the praxical implications of these theories. In order to effect real social change these critical theories, as important as they are, must be challenged and understood on a more practical scale as well.

Chapter 2: Negritude and Black Feminism: Using these critical theories as a lens of analysis for the need to empower African identity in all aspects of society

Negritude

In order to highlight the deep relevance and importance of empowering the African identity, it is useful to draw on critical theories which analyze the potentials and threats inherent to the concept of identity. In light of this, the first critical theory I would like to draw on is that of Negritude which began as a collective Pan-African movement and specifically in response to the 'assimilation' culture of the French colonial enterprise in Western Africa.

Senegalese philosopher and anti-colonialist Leopold Senghor is one of many African scholars who have analyzed the effects of colonialism and its narratives on the African identity. Like others, he essentially argues for the empowerment and reclamation of the African identity in a Eurocentric world. As a philosopher, Senghor's arguments are in line with the thesis of this essay which I will continue to unpack in this section.

In one of his most studied works titled 'Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century', Senghor lays out a concept known as Negritude and arguments pertaining to the empowerment of the African identity against its colonial subjugation. As he describes it, Negritude is 'the sum of the cultural values of the black world; that is a certain active presence in the world, or better, in the universe.". He goes on to say "Yes, it is essentially relations with others, an opening out to the world, contact and participation with others." (196). His description here of an active presence in the world and the added dynamic of human relations, maps on to the ideals of a practical effort in empowering Africans to take a more intentional and participatory stand against the historical subjugation of their inherent worth.

The power in Senghors' definition of Negritude as the 'sum of the cultural values of the black world' further speaks to the irrefutable importance of Africans choosing to ground

themselves in the values that have held their communities together for centuries which include empowering the importance of unity and culture for example. In doing so, this kind of movement is calling for the rejection of colonial structures and ideals which force Africans to mold themselves to fit certain Eurocentric standards which can range from government structures to everyday conceptions of beauty and worth.

Given the evidence that pre-colonial political and leadership structures lead to the massive achievement of historically impactful empires across the continent, it is safe to assume that Afrocentric solutions to African issues have always proved to serve the needs of the people. Other post-colonial theorists have also spoken to the issue of a mimicry of European standards which stem from colonial regimes. Nigerian author Foluke Adebisi writes:

"Postcolonial theory recognizes that the incompetence and dependence of Africa's contemporary political and intellectual elite on external approval and assistance result from hybridity of supposed African authenticity and the attempted replication of colonial character, all carried out within an inherited colonial structure." (436)

There are global implications to African nations mimicking Western ideologies, both in societal and political structures directly affecting their relationships with other nations outside of the continent. His ideas emphasize the longer-term challenges of ridding the continent of the vestiges of colonialism and neocolonialism.

A handful of francophone Western Sub-Saharan countries, for example, are currently undergoing multiple political turmoil's that largely involve their colonial counterparts. Thousands of West African citizens are taking to the streets to protest the presence of their former colonizer nation, France. Many people feel that the European countries' implication is beneficial to them and harmful to the local people. Many other people however, support Frances'

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implication despite the colonial history. A headline by Africa news reads: 'Activists in Mali stage protest against French military presence in Bamako, calling for the total withdrawal of French troops from the country.' (Africa news). The tensions between Africans from colonial narratives and its domino effects also become clear through Senghor's analyses.

Nigerian Author Abiola Irele takes a critical look at Senghor's ideas and defines, "The rehabilitation of Africa which stands out as the central project of Negritude thus represents a movement towards the recovery of a certain sense of spiritual integrity by the Black man, as the definition of a Black collective identity, as well as of a new world view, derived from a new feeling for the African heritage of values and of experience" (204). Irele's use of the word rehabilitation and spiritual integrity speaks to the healing power of love and its ability to mend the wounds of oppression and open a gateway to progress and the creation of pride to be found within the African experience.

Similarly, Senghor writes "we [Africans] reinforce ourselves at the same time, both as independent forces and as beings whose being consists in revitalizing ourselves in the re-creation of art." (202). This call for self-love through intentional immersion of one's Africanness supports my arguments for using empowerment as an applicable and constructive framework in discussing decolonialization of the African mind. This, to me, is using the force of empowerment to immerse oneself as an active agent of a historically oppressive environment.

Black Feminism

Black feminism and the ideals of negritude laid out by Senghor are similar in their take on empowerment as a tool towards social change. Taking a closer look at Black feminism as an intellectual tradition that emerged out of the struggle for Black power and freedom, it is evident

that it roots itself in compassion and respect for everyday experience. The most striking feature that different branches of this intellectual tradition, such as African womanism, Black feminism and womanism have in common is the inherent need for an intellectual framework which allows the Black woman to flourish in the context of her environment, in consideration of social features such as racism, sexism, economics, and politics.

The 'Black feminist statement' in the Combahee River collective is a powerfully written piece which highlights the history, realities, and problems related to Black feminist issues and practice. "The fact that racial politics and indeed racism are pervasive factors in our lives did not allow us, and still does not allow most Black women, to look more deeply into our own experiences and, from that sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives" (6). Here, she is echoing the ideas of 'the problem of blackness' wherein an individual's experience is so highly defined by their Blackness in relation to their glorified white counterparts in society. This social reality of racially biased existences necessitates a counter ideology which redefines the Black woman's experience in an empowering and productive light. The intentional empowerment of an intersectional identity transforms social realities. This to me, is Black feminism.

In my understanding of Black feminist theories, there exists a fundamental priority of love and nurture for the Black female identity and in turn the Black community holistically. A famous ideology that comes out of Black feminism is the notion that the emancipation of Black women necessarily defines the emancipation of all oppressed peoples. "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression." (8, Combahee River Collective). Such an

assertion highlights the genuine compassion for an identity group which serves as the motivation for social transformation.

The Combahee River Collective article also reads: "Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work." (7). This essays interests speak to the need to empower the African identity in order to inform transformation in varying aspects of the society through such a kind of meaningful and purposeful self-love that serves to advance the community forward. In this way, I feel Black feminism grasps the importance of conversations surrounding identity and the way that it needs to be nurtured in order to create societies with fully agent, fulfilled and growing selves.

This phenomenon directly relates to the history of Black feminism which fights for the equal treatment and empowerment of Black women in consideration of colonial, patriarchal, economic and social realities that subjugate their experiences daily. Such painful injustices that inflict the identity of Black and African people globally requires a kind of healing that can only come from the opposing force of love. *Black love is a transformative and necessary force in the empowerment and reclamation of Black and African people's lives*.

Drawing on Black feminist conceptions of self-love and its importance in affecting necessary change, I argue this can transform the conversation surrounding African identity as well. In her article titled, 'Practicing Love, Black Feminism, Love Politics, and Post-Intersectionality', author Jennifer C. Nash demonstrates the irrevocable value of using love as an intellectual pillar and framework needed to heal the wounds inflicted on Black identities globally.

Nash writes, "Collins captures this reading of black self-love, arguing that "Loving Black people . . . in a society that is so dependent on hating Blackness constitutes a highly rebellious

act" (Collins 2004, 250). According to this scholarly tradition, love is a politics of claiming, embracing, and restoring the wounded Black female self." (3, Nash). Here, she describes this dualistic relationship between hatred or destruction and love's intrinsic power of healing. Describing the act of loving Black people as 'a highly rebellious act' is powerful in the sense that it reinforces empowerment as an *applicable* and *constructive* force that must be used to counter the trauma caused by the history of the European domination against Black populations.

Africans still today face the impact and repercussions of the European colonial enterprise on their identities and social realities as well. The intentional subjugation of Africans as beings who are incapable of self-governance, adequate education and countless other things that led to the neocolonial domination of colonial structures still today. Colonial languages, educational and political systems prevail on the continent today and a large aspect of this domination is *spiritual*.

"The politics of womanism is an active working on the self, preparing it for the labor of social engagement, and for the task of advocating for the "survival and wholeness of entire people." To put it another way: womanist politics requires subjects to work on their selves in order to transcend their selves; it is, then, a radical articulation of the political limitations of selfhood."

(10)

In her article, Jennifer C. Nash explains the connection between self and societal transformations which aim to be achieved through the politics of love. This framework of thinking about empowerment as a means to social change, which I argue is vital in African societies on a pan-African level.

Chapter 3 Societal manifestations: Music, fashion, language and media as tools to meaningful empowerment

After understanding the deep relevance and importance of empowering the African identity as a productive means of reversing the mental, physical and spiritual scars of its colonial histories one might then ask the question: How might we effectively enact social change through empowerment? Although there are countless political or economic means by which change might be enacted, I argue there needs to be a deeply cultural shifting the collective African psyche about their own agency, power, beauty and worth which has so been questioned in historic as well as contemporary narratives. For this reason, I will discuss a few cultural empowerment tools which have proven to have deeply meaningful potential to enact social change. These tools include but are not limited to music, fashion and media.

Afrobeats

Creativity and the act of creation have made an impact on understanding, defining, and representing the kaleidoscopic aspects of human identity. Music, fashion design and various other forms of art have ignited feelings of passion, empowerment, community and overall generated positivity. The genre known as Afrobeats today which is an infusion of Western African traditional tunes and modern jazz/hip-hop. "As is often the case with Afrocentric genres of music, politics play a role in the subject matter of many Afrobeat songs, which in turn serve as part musical expression and part social commentary." (New World Encyclopedia). The inherent power that the genre holds comes from its empowering nature of African identity. Its reach and ability to spread impactful messages about Africans makes it the perfect tool for cultural empowerment in African identity.

A notable example of an Afrobeats artist who has recently used music as a catalyst for change is the Nigerian singer popularly known as Burna Boy. His 2019 album titled 'African Giant' sent shock waves through the African youth globally thus creating a trend of people calling themselves "African Giants". The pride that it instilled in the youth was particularly impactful in the community as it rejected a necessity for Eurocentric ideals and preference. "It's a symbol of strength. That's what I want my people to feel like, to realize that they are" (AppleMusic). The gift that Burna Boys music has given the African community is a priceless one that widely contributed to the work of Afrobeats as a genre in empowering the African identity to help African people realize their worth and necessary presence on the global scale.

A book titled 'Africas Futures' which is a compilation of chapters about the potentials of Africa's future includes a chapter on Afrobeats and its impact on Africans today. The authors write:

"Culturally and politically, Afrobeats' success is a source of pride for many young Africans, and especially so for those of an African background in the diaspora. Echoing Davido's statement above that being African was not cool when he lived in the USA, a young Surinamese-Dutchman said that "A lot of dark [skin] youth are ashamed of their roots; you see that in how they present themselves: in the past they looked down upon Ghanaians and Nigerians. But now with Afrobeats, Afrodance, Azonto … everybody feels attracted to Africa". (291)

Afrobeats artists today have accomplished the important task of reclaiming and empowering the love of African culture while encouraging a sense of unity among Africans on the continent and the diaspora alike. Additionally, the phenomenon of Afrobeats has created spaces such as music festivals that have attracted the attention of citizens everywhere to African countries in order to promote tourism and consequently increase economic activity in the area.

Festivals like Afronation in Ghana have served as the perfect example of a deeply cultural phenomena creating social change by improving economic and political realities through empowerment of the African identity. Undeniably, this mix of qualities including Pan-Africanism, African empowerment and globalization explains what makes Afrobeats a great catalyst for social change and ultimately transformation.

Art, in the form of music, occupies the media category in large. In recent times, healing tunes accompanied by empowering lyrics have played irrevocably valuable roles in deconstructing colonial ideologies in healing manners. R&B icon Beyonce Knowles released a song that spoke to the hearts of millions of young black girls. The song melodiously expresses the value and beauty of darkskin girls. Where mainstream music never fails to uphold and glorify the European beauty standards, 'Brown skin girl' represented a breath of fresh air for this historically marginalized population. An entertainment news site says "Standout songs such as "SPIRIT``and "BIGGER" are like cocoa butter for the soul — smooth, soft, healing — but one track has especially been receiving a lot of buzz from the Beyhive: "Brown Skin Girl."(popsugar). The article continues to read "We often hear these songs with the general 'you're beautiful' message, but 'Brown Skin Girl' is a direct love song to us. Beyoncé's affirming anthem makes me feel detached from all the insecurities that racism and misogynoir tend to bring. It feels like I'm singing love over myself and young Black and Brown women. There is so much power behind that alone." Sometimes the solution to an issue is as simple as reaffirming something's value. By simply reaffirming and reclaiming the value of Afrocentrism/features, Beyonce was able to prompt a collective conscientization of the shackles of colonial ideologies that plague Afro-peoples globally.

Fashion and Media

Even more so than the way Afrobeats as a music genre is able to help individuals identify themselves with a particular community or racial group; in this case Africans, fashion and the way one presents themselves is able to do the same. Pinther Kerstin co-author in the book *African Futures* says "Fashion's reputation as superficial and anti-fashion discourses have also likely left their mark on African studies "(21). It is important that the cultural sphere in academia take fashion as a relevant aspect of conversations surrounding the African identity, for the following reasons. Racism as a social factor is able to exist and thrive by means of physical judgement of other persons being. The issues of racial profiling at airports, medical racism and even racism on the level of humanitarian aid to suffering countries is sustained by a racial bias that primarily concerns the issue of appearance.

Major colonial structures and histories of slavery stand upon a narrative of African phenotypic features. By subjugating the initial appearance of Africans, Europeans and others were able to justify the mental subjugation that soon followed. These justifications were understood to be 'civilizing' and 'assimilatory' missions in hopes of indoctrinating their own 'superior culture'.

By positing the idea that the African way of being was inherently backwards and needed to be civilized, educational and eventually socially acceptable beauty standards were imposed. In order to be taken with the utmost seriousness and respect, the finest African would be one who spoke, behaved and of course, looked like the typical European man. The value of culturally rich

fabric and traditional garments slowly fell down the ranks of acceptable everyday attire in most African societies, even today.

For this reason, I argue, fashion can be a powerful cultural tool for the empowerment of African identity. "Only recently has fashion been taken more seriously within academia and acknowledged as an essential part of contemporary culture and public life" (21, African Futures). The ideas rooted in African philosophical notions of emancipation and identity reclamation all stand for the intentional existence of an African in their most authentic Afrocentricity. By taking a stand against Eurocentric beauty standards and presenting oneself to the world as unapologetically African through their most evident symbol, the body, fashion then becomes a movement in itself and most importantly, a culturally empowering tool for African identity.

Within the African culture, there are many cultural expressions that symbolize beauty and empowerment within an individual. Clothing choice is one of the first things a person perceives upon analysis of another. In the same way, children learning about race pick up on unique styles of fashion expressions that symbolize and empower a culture or tradition.

Another important example of positive expression through physical properties is through hairstyles. The versatility in black and African hair is kaleidoscopic. From braids, to bantu knots and curls to cornrows, Africans represent such a beautiful aspect of their culture and uniqueness through their hair and how they choose to wear it. In a world where hair relaxing and skin bleaching are a reality, rocking an Afro stylishly in the media can be a beautiful and powerful statement for natural hair and Africans globally.

Lastly, cultural expressions of beauty are a perfect way of physically portraying African beauty as it is a deeply cultural way of honoring oneself. Throughout the continent, various

cultures use various physical expressions such as dark markings on the lip for the Fulani people and white dots for culture across East Africa. These unique symbols of beauty are what can differentiate and ground an African persons' perspective of beauty from only being limited to a Eurocentric understanding.

Through these expressions, Africans all over the world who are overwhelmed with images of people with Eurocentric features will not feel outcasted but rather proud of their differences. Incorporating one's true ethnic heritage in their physical expression to the world allows them to build a self-esteem that is tied to a community, which after all is an African's most grounding physical and internal feature.

Chapter 4 Discussion on Praxis: Where can these empowerment tools most effectively impact social, economic and political development?

The Cambridge dictionary defines the term "praxis" as "the process of using a theory or something that you have learned in a practical way". As a scholar, one important critique that I share with many others is the concern that many academic theories including those about African identity reclamation, remain just that, theories. In order to effect real and lasting change intellectual leaders must call to other agents of the society to create real social change.

Barbara Christian famously stated, "I, for one, am tired of being asked to produce a Black feminist literary theory as if I were a mechanical man. For I believe such theory is prescriptive-it ought to have some relationship to practice." (350, Christian). Her adamant cry for humane intellectual practices is central to the argument that love should be used as a framework when discussing the empowerment of African identity. In the quote, Christian expresses her deep desire for a kind of work which is influential on a human level and not merely produced for scholars in an ivory tower.

The African Education system: Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, language and Paulo Freire on praxis in the education system and beyond

The conversations surrounding spiritual and mental subjugation is prominent in scholarly circles in which the effects of colonialism on Africans are studied. Kenyan author Ngugi Wa Thiong'O who writes 'The Language of African Literature' powerfully asserts the dangers in the lack of pride and love of one's own African identity. The self-rejection that follows derogatory colonial narratives, is highly discussed and illustrated in Thiong'O's work.

The level of trauma that emerged from the colonial enterprise without a doubt has had repercussions on all African peoples and on Africa as a continent itself. The reality of the effects

of these repercussions is virtually a taboo conversation in most African communities. Due to the mainstream ideals that were historically indoctrinated by European officials, many Africans defend and even praise the colonizers for the 'development' they brought to the continent. Thiong'O writes "The final triumph of a system of domination is when the dominated start singing its virtues." (296). This quote is powerful and symbolic as it conveys the distortion and self-hatred of Africans as a result of the glorification of European ideals over that of Africans.

From the time of our birth to the end of our life cycle, human beings and especially school-aged children learn through the absorption of knowledge from their environment and experiences. The majority of African parents who have the means of inscribing knowledge into their children within the predominantly British or French education systems choose to do so. African children often begin their educational journeys in pre-schools where the language of instruction and curriculum structure reflects their former colonial powers' socio-cultural realities and importantly, historical perspectives. Such an experience arguably creates a form of cognitive dissonance which exists within African children educated in a colonial system, as they attempt to continually reconcile their tribal language with the colonial one in the educational system.

Nigerian Author Chimamanda Ngozi who is renowned for her work in African literature highlights these ideas in her TedTalk titled 'The danger of a single story'. Ngozi discusses the way she had to read in Western fairytales, for example, about snow and apples, while she saw more African people, foods, and landscapes in her physical environment. As she describes, her entire concept of reality was shaped by this disconnect. "Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Now, things changed when I discovered African books." (85). The psychological and intellectual

conflict that occurs in contemporary African education lies in this set of tensions that can follow African children far into their educational processes.

Entire Western educational models in African contexts demand their learners to adopt mindsets, learning techniques, and linguistic cues that do not reflect lived experiences in their communities. A famous notion of Eurocentric knowledge systems which forces knowledge into learners from only one direction by Brazilian Educator Paulo Freire is known as the Banking concept of Education. As he explains,

"In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who

consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing.

Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of

oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry." (2)

The direct implications of a narrative that dictates the superiority of a western education system that is embedded in curricula leads to the continued lack of agency on the part of African students.

The result of these 'banking systems' of education that Freire describes consequently produces African learners who have not been taught to question, analyze or relate their educational material to the realities of their own world. In order to cultivate a collective consciousness in African communities that are able to enact change and get to the root of issues in order to produce African solutions. The necessity of empowering the African identity through, in this case, Afrocentric education becomes clear in any further attempts to ameliorate the political, economic and social conditions on the African continent.

Through his analysis of African literature and the use of colonial languages over local indigenous ones, Thiong'O reveals a need for the empowerment, and I argue, love of Africans

for their own conceptions, traditions, languages and above all, their selves. He reveals the connection between internal and social transformations as he explains "Thus, language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds'" (291) and "How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings." (293). Thiong'O is speaking to the dangers of allowing the experience of Africans and their realities to be determined by colonial ideologies.

The overall thesis of this essay which calls for the necessity of using African identity empowerment as a means of transforming the direct realities of African peoples is essentially also an argument for empowerment being revolutionary or in other words, transformative. "African languages addressing themselves to the lives of the people become the enemy of the colonial state" (303). Here it is evident that Thiong'O is calling for the *intentional* reclamation of African identity. The love of one's Indigenous language is a means by which the society can transform through internal practices of self-love. Movements across the globe that were ignited through passion of one's identity and need for resistance against oppressive powers is what successfully classified them as revolutionary and transformative. This is intentional reclamation as a result of empowerment.

"Fanon, like Simone de Beauvoir, conceives of humanity as reaching beyond basic animal needs through a creative and transformative engagement with the world. Humanity is not simply trapped in immanence, in negation, but has the possibility of affirmatively projecting toward the future." (77, Seccomb). This quote by philosopher Linnell Seccomb beautifully highlights the deep sense in which humans are meant to positively transform their communities

through realization of their own power. This notion I, argue is deeply rooted in the concept of self-love and especially in the context of empowering the African identity.

The African Union as a case study: Ideologies into practice?

The organization we know today as the African Union (AU) was originally named the organization of African Unity (OAU). Since its inception in 1963, the organization was meant to stand as the representative political body of Africa. With member states participating from all across the continent to work towards the advancement of agendas for the good of the continent.

Infamous independence and Pan-Africanist leaders from the likes of Ghanian president Kwame Nkrumah, to Ethiopian political leader Haile Selassie come together on the 25th of May, 1963 to establish the organizations official headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to inaugurate and establish the headquarters. Nkrumah asserted "By creating a true political union of all the independent states of Africa, we can tackle hopefully every emergency, every enemy, and every complexity." (49). The speeches presented at this conference exuded an air of empowerment, inspiration and promises for a more sovereign and united Africa.

Decades down the line, today, the African Union has been criticized in its practicality in realizing its initial theoretical hopes and aspirations. This organization exemplifies the question of praxis where it stands to represent powerful intellectual and ideological concepts for Africa's future, however, struggles in its execution.

Today, African political structures continue to be criticized for their lack of both efficiency and morality in maintaining power and adequate leadership in African nations. Looking in from the outside, it becomes easy to assume that internal forms of greed and

corruption are the driving forces to blame for such inefficient political structures. However, it is important to understand the severe impact of the colonial wedge in Africa's political and historical development. Given the evidence that pre-colonial political and leadership structures lead to the massive achievement of historically impactful empires across the continent, it is safe to assume that Afrocentric solutions to African issues have always proved to serve the needs of the people. Nigerian author Foluke Adebisi writes "Postcolonial theory recognises that the incompetence and dependence of Africa's contemporary political and intellectual elite on external approval and assistance result from hybridity of supposed African authenticity and the attempted replication of colonial character, all carried out within an inherited colonial structure." (436). There are global implications to African nations mimicking Western ideologies, both in societal and political structures directly affecting their relationships with other nations outside of the continent. His ideas emphasize the longer-term challenges of ridding the continent of the vestiges of colonialism and neocolonialism.

Amongst the variety of methods by which colonial ideologies have manifested themselves in African political structures, foreign aid becomes an important discussion. The concept of foreign aid theoretically signifies international cooperation and genuine altruism in an effort to bring about equitable distributions of wealth. In the context of international aid in Africa and many other regions, unfortunately, the concept of aid cannot be understood without an acknowledgement of underlying interests of donor countries. A quote by the pan-African leader Kwame Nkrumah from his book 'The Negro' reads:

"The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. [...] The result of neo-

colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world." (Nkrumah, ix).

Whether fueled by political motivations or long-term economic incentives, many of the present foreign aid structures carry with them an intimate relationship with the colonial past. Throughout the continent of Africa, many countries have been pushed to the margins as a result of the dependency of their political and economic structures on their former European colonizers. Through the earlier mentioned French colonial ideals of assimilation, the relationship between France and African nations has remained surprisingly entangled. Due to economic and political incentives provided by France, African leaders today place enormous emphasis on fostering what is purportedly a 'mutually beneficial' relationship between the two regions but which in fact keeps former French colonies dependent on France. This grip was held by African leaders to uphold and maintain the pre-established colonial political structures in order to ensure their continued survival as independent African states.

Perhaps in our initial understanding of the close relationship between France and its former African territories, we may simply commend the financial support given to these developing countries. However, given the framing of the historical and social phenomena exhibited in France's economic support, the relationship begins to reveal itself as systematically more beneficial to the colonial power than its former territories. "...although France accepted decolonisation, the relationships with their former colonies was something that they did not want to dissolve, using social, economic, and security agreements to maintain close ties. Some would argue that the break up of the French colonies into their own independent states made them more reliant on France as they were when they were all unified under French rule" (S. Sozinha).

Economically, the largest concern attached to aid from France is the fact that such 'monetary donations' would push the vision for African self-sufficiency farther away from grasp.

The issue of reliance and excessive dependence of the former colonial power is a concern raised by several experts on the topic of international aid and cooperation. This dependence is evidenced by numerous African nations which presently struggle to maintain themselves economically. Hayter explains, "The feature of French aid which has the greatest potential for good or for ill is the exceptional closeness of institutional and personal links between France and the states. France still provides most of the investment funds, and part of the current expenses, of most of the states; it controls their monetary policies and in part also their commercial policies." (247) A keyword in her analysis is 'control'. The level of economic and financial dependence to which a number of African countries have grown accustomed leads to a situation where its former colonial power remains a major influence in decisions made by their administrations.

At the time of independence in Francophone West African states, France ensured its continued control and influence in the region through a series of systematically organized deals. As Douglas Yates explains, "An ingenious system of bilateral agreements between France and former African colonies was installed through a series of cooperation accords, covering trade, education, natural resources, currency, finance, security, defence, and so on." (4). A great sum of administrative positions was still to be occupied by Frenchmen who would uphold the values of the French political systems in the region. The unwavering French presence in African political systems stunts progress towards the reconstruction of these systems to reflect African values and power structures that are better suited to govern Africans.

Through this analysis, we are able to more fully understand the extent to which colonial ideologies have manifested themselves in African political systems and thus a call for reclamation of African identity is justified. As a consequence of African leaders' inability to relinquish the financial benefits of maintaining amicable relations with France, deals were signed to attach strings to aid in exchange for decision-making authority. Hayter described the relevant authoritarian freedom accorded to France as she writes "Aid for investment is now allocated in the form of grants for specific projects. The idea of general aid, untied to projects, was rejected, because the French Government wanted freedom to pick and choose between projects." (244) Perhaps the most concerning authority France maintains is tied to its history of military control: attached to the aid is the invisible protection of French interests in the region as France continues to maintain hundreds of military bases in former colonies (Sun & Zoubir, 2011).

Consequently, African nations and communities are subject to reduced agency in a wide range of their political and social endeavors. This is an example of the way colonial ideologies have directly manifested themselves in African political systems. To incorporate the contemporary relevance of colonial efforts at foreign aid in Africa, it is important to note a recent controversy which exists between Namibia and its former colonial power, Germany. As of May 2021, the German officials have offered to allocate aid in the form of development assistance in recognition of the genocide perpetuated by them during the colonial era. This aid however, has come with much controversy as the members of the implicated Namibian tribes express their disappointment in the lack of representation present at the talks regarding the aid. A BBC article written by Namibian analyst Emsie Erastus describes these sentiments;

"In the colonial era, Africans were regarded as "barbarians" who lacked the abilities to bring about economic and technological change, justifying the intervention of the imperial

powers. This view defined how the West perceived and presented Africa in the past, and the echoes of that view may be found today. Development aid can still be presented in a patronising way, maintaining an unequal relationship. If it is being seen as an alternative to reparations, with fewer legal ramifications, it does not dismantle the relationship that allowed the genocide to happen in the first place." (bbcnews).

It becomes evident that the effects of colonial ideologies still carry significant implications in the way that the Western view of Africans directly impacts the political, social and economic realms in African society. In our understanding of the nature of colonial imposition of its ideologies in African political systems, we are able to see the importance of African reclamation and striving towards reconstructing these systems to reflect local values. As Hayter concludes, "The next generation of leaders will presumably be more confident of African values, will have been less involved in French politics, and may feel less sympathy with France. The magnitude of the French presence in Africa both makes rupture slightly more likely to occur and would make it more serious if it did occur" (Hayter, 251). These are the dangers of fostering a situation in which African political systems can only exist where neocolonial interests are prioritized. This framework must be revised in order to reclaim an autonomous African identity which serves to promote the values of its people.

To sum up, as a political body, the African Union carries a responsibility of practically prioritizing the growth of sovereign African nations while upholding the values of African Unity and Pan-Africanism. It must do this by creating more effective programs and allocating resources appropriately to truly tackle the political and economic issues the plague the continent from its exploitation filled past. At the inaugural conference of the OAU, Kwame Nkrumah reminded the

leaders of the organization of their responsibility to the African people of ridding them of colonial vestiges and empowering true African agency.

"We have been charged with this sacred task by our own people, and we cannot betray their trust by failing them. We will be mocking the hopes of our people if we show the slightest hesitation or delay in tackling realistically this question of African Unity." (49) – Kwame Nkrumah

Chapter 5: Conclusion

There exists a narrative that views the African continent facing social, political, and economic hardships which stem from its people's incompetency and inability to govern themselves. This narrative, which drove the machine of the colonial empire, has comfortably embedded itself in the various aspects of African society. It has found itself causing regressive effects in the society through various channels such as education, societal values and politics. These narratives rooted in colonial ideologies, catalyze and sustain the disconnects in African identity that have been discussed.

Throughout this essay, I have illustrated the various methods by which colonial ideologies have manifested themselves in various aspects of society. These effects directly impact African identity through the continued diminishment and devaluing of Africa and its people. Through my analysis of its impacts, I argue for the irrevocable importance of reaffirming and redefining the African identity to deconstruct the anchoring colonial ideologies attached to it.

Given the arguments made throughout this essay, I argue that there is a deep need for the cultural empowerment in African identity which will thus allow a different level of social change on the African continent and beyond. An important aspect of this thesis is the challenging of theories related to the empowerment of African identity and the call for practical action, or in other words praxis, of these theories in real-time society. There exists a deep power in using cultural tools to heal and transform the collective understanding of African identity in order for Africans to be in touch with their identities in a positively impactful way. Africa/ns have an untapped potential to use their own culture and value systems to become a truly united, flourishing and globally impactful people.

As a dynamic concept, the African identity is ever changing and necessitates reaffirmation to restore an important pride in African identity. "In an interview granted to Kwame Anthony Appiah, Chinua Achebe explained his understanding of African identity thus: It is, of course true that the African identity is still in the making. There isn't a final identity that is African. But, at the same time, there is an identity coming into existence. And it has a certain context and a certain meaning" (236). As we have seen, there can come great value in reaffirming the African identity in the social, political and educational structures. This will serve to promote fully sustainable autonomy and flourishing of African peoples under the blanket of its values and belief systems.

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