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Article

An Existentialist Reconciliation of African (Yoruba) Cultural Canons and Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

The paper examines how the African (Yoruba) cultural canons and belief system are in collision with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. The collision has been born out of the non-linear temporal divergence in the emergence of the Yoruba cultural beliefs and the conception of the Sustainable Development Goals. The inconsistencies have been explored through an existentialist lens as the theoretical guide for this paper. This is because existentialism exalts the individual will in an irrational world. Among the Yoruba, there are beliefs and practices that offend individual Goals of the SDGs. For example, the current *s'ogbedi'gboro* (urbanization for modernization) philosophy needs be discarded as it offends Goal 13-Climate Actions as a result of inordinate deforestation. In the same vein, *the okobeer-el'oyegomina* (the governor deserves a large fleet of cars as convoy) philosophy and the *ololajulo* needs be jettisoned as it widens economic inequality in Africa. This is pertinent because it is in contravention of SDGs Goal 10-Reduced Inequalities. The Yoruba attitude to female children, judicial philosophy, subservient disposition to the West, and the aboriginal knowledge system are not in consonance with the spirit of the overall principles of the SDGs. To this end, the Yoruba (African) native belief system as well as cultural practices need be modified in order that the essence of the SDGs will be accomplished in the Yoruba region and in the entirety of Africa.

Keywords : Yoruba beliefs, SDGs, Africa, existentialism, United Nations, west

Introduction

The belief systems of a given society are the assertive perceptions of life that the people of the society hold. Such assertive cultural perceptions regulate the relationship between the people of the society itself. They also condition the relationship of each of the people or the totality of the people with people from other societies. The inclusion of the relation between the individual people of the society and the society itself, as an identifiable body, emanates from the substantial influence that the custodians of the indigenous community, the monarchs and the divinities, wield over the people. To this end, the monarchs and deities constitute an essential part of the society. Among the Yoruba, it is worth nothing that monarchs are assumed to be the humanization of the deities and, as such, will ultimately return to the Yoruba pantheon. These perceptions, which are commonly-held beliefs among people in Africa, often encapsulate the behavioral pattern and attitude of the indigenes to causes, dealings, undertakings and norms which the people take as the law. This means that there is a link between a belief system and the culture in the African society. The link is instituted by the situation that the belief system of the peoples of Africa forms their ways of life—that is, culture, which has been identified as critical to the existence of the people (Yerima, 2015).

Among the Yoruba in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, a belief system manifests, and is codified, in a number of culture-influenced elements of the episteme of the society. Such elements of the Yoruba episteme include, but are not restricted to, sayings, proverbs, or idioms, as well as folkloric narratives and chants. These elements of cultural expression characteristically hint at the capabilities of the Yoruba within a specified cultural geography. The cultural elements indicate the quality of the knowledge endowment of the Yoruba people. In this Yoruba situation, the epistemological signification of these cultural knowledge indicators could be adjudged insufficient to drive the development agenda of that society. It is imperative to affirm that social development in this

paper is defined in the yardstick of Western advancement. In the same vein, the stipulations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are of fundamental significance in situating the development within a guiding frame.

The objective, therefore, is the evaluation of the Yoruba cultural belief system within the SDGs frame and how these propel the society's West-centered development agenda. That is, the paper x-rays how the Yoruba perception of life as expressed in their cultural pronouncements, portrays their knowledge system and models; and how this may make or mar the development of the Yoruba society as an African society. Today, in the world, the advancement that has been (and is being) made in and by the West primarily has, to say the least, been phenomenal. This advancement has been placed on such an unprecedented pedestal in the Eastern hemisphere that development capabilities, potential, and attainments have become causes for competition among the countries in these regions of the world. The areas of the contemporary life that have witnessed such vaunted attainments include technology, science, economy, diplomacy, commerce, agriculture and governance. In order that such development occurs globally, the United Nations have provided a framework for the nations of the world to operate within. The framework is codified in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The SDGs serve to regulate, in suggestive capacities, the official undertakings of the countries that are signatories to the United Nations Charter. With regards to Nigeria, however, how does the Yoruba belief system fit in the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations? Or how does the Yoruba knowledge system relate to the possibilities of development in Africa using the Sustainable Development Goals principles as guidelines? A critical scrutiny of the Yoruba belief system through elements of the Yoruba cultural expressions such as, for example, philosophical concepts, sayings, idioms, and proverbs, reveals that Yoruba social attitudes and practices are not in consonance with the SDGs. To this end, the Yoruba cultural beliefs may be assumed to be counter-productive to the spirit of this initiative of the United Nations.

This paper will provide many instances to substantiate this perception.

The Significance of the Yoruba Society

The Yoruba society located in the Southwestern part of Nigeria is significant in Africa and, by extension, in the global society. And to this end, any failure of the SDGs among the Yoruba will have a remarkable negative effect on the essence of the global initiative on the continent of Africa. There are many matrixes of such significance. To begin with, the Yoruba region in Nigeria has a population of about 32 million people. Aoav and Nwgav (2013) assert that this estimated population constitutes about 21% of Nigeria's overall national population. Indeed, the Yoruba population is larger than the population of Romania and quite a number of other European countries. This means that if the SDGs initiative were to fail among the Yoruba in the Southwest Nigeria, the initiative would have failed in a region capable of constituting a whole country elsewhere. And this does not augur well for the program in the process of attaining its objectives globally. Furthermore, the Yoruba community in Nigeria, of which Lagos is a part, is port community. In Lagos, there is an international airport (Murtalar Muhammed International Airport), and there are also seaports: the Apapa Ports and the Tin Can Island Ports. This makes the Yoruba community a critical part of Nigeria's link to the rest of the world. The community is therefore a pathway for globalization. In addition to this, the Yoruba community in the Southwest Nigeria is heterogeneous. All the other ethnic groups in Nigeria reside in the region because of the massive industrial potential of Lagos which has extended to the other parts of the Yoruba States such as Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti. This heterogeneity of the Yoruba community indicates that the aboriginal cultural practices of the Yoruba could be (are indeed being) imbibed by other ethnic groups in the country. The implication of this situation is that the Yoruba culture could be transmitted to other parts of Nigeria. In addition to this, the Yoruba community has had an impact in global affairs, as can be adduced from the outstanding attainments

of some of the illustrious personalities from the region. These personalities include former President Olusegun Obasanjo who is the chairman of the Council of World Ex Presidents (Okon, 2019) and Professor Woke Soyinka who was the winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature. The emergence of these influential members of the Yoruba community on the world stage suggestively asserts the prowess of the Yoruba people in political administration, intellectual pursuit, and, indeed, other walks of life. As a result of this, it may be seen as counterproductive if the SDGs initiative does not achieve its goals in such a formidable society as the Yoruba society as a result of cultural factors.

Instances of the *Agb'okoda'ko* (rural development) Philosophy and the *So'gbedi'gboro* (urbanization) Practice

Agb'okoda'ko is a Yoruba expression which means “he who stays in the village to farm” while *So'gbedi'gboro* means “urbanization for modernization.” These two conceptual philosophies generate lot of tension and confusion in the attainment of social advancement in the Yoruba society as an African community. At this juncture, it needs be stressed that the African society is desirous of the improvement in the contemporary living and lifestyle which Western (and Eastern) genius has brought about through globalization. And the fact remains that everywhere in the world cities centers tend to look the same (Mowforth & Munt, 2009), a situation that makes the urban center in Nigeria desirable to typical rural dwellers. As a result of this desirability, there has been an upsurge in rural-to-urban migration. The situation has on one hand confirmed the popularity and preference of the *So'gbedi'gboro* (urbanization) Practice and on the other has led to the ridicule and the jettisoning of the *Agb'okoda'ko* (rural development) philosophy. This clearly establishes that the Yoruba people favor urbanization as opposed to maintaining the pristine conditions of the rural setting for agrarian purposes. This social attitude or practice is at variance with the Sustainable Development Goals and objectives. The *So'gbedi'gboro*

(urbanization) practice is seen by the people in the Yoruba society as a mark of civilization. Indeed, it is seen as the yardstick for empowerment and development. Its ideological principles have led to bush being cleared and replaced by sprawling mansions and the pathways in the bush being replaced by wide streets and highways paved with bitumen. And the horizon is filled with electrical towers and antennas, while the honking of automobiles rends the atmosphere. This can be seen in the aggressive disposition of real estate developers who buy arable land at ridiculously low rates to be sold as plots to the general populace. However, a lot of concerns are raised within the purview of Sustainable Development Goals. The first is deforestation, that is, the extraction of forest resources which include the flora and the fauna—the trees and the animals. Such extermination of the forest and its resources run against the SDGs Goal 15, which is concerned with life on land. It also ruptures Goal 13, which focuses on climate actions. A further pertinent observation that may be made is how sustainable the cities that are created through urbanization or conurbation are. One may conclude that the cities may not be sustainable because infrastructural development is essential to the sustainability of a city. Presently, Nigeria, as a whole, is still grappling with nano-technology as a means of meeting her energy requirements (Sadik, 2015). As a result of this, the So'gbedi'gboro practice among the Yoruba is counter-productive to Goal 13 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations which advocates the sustainability of cities and communities through human actions, such as deforestation, that affect the climate.

In the Context of Governance and Public Administration

In the area of governance, the Yoruba people believe that *Erotiil'ogun; okobeerel'o ye gomina*. That is, “A large army wins the war, and a large convoy or fleet of cars befits a governor.” This is the belief of the people in Western Nigeria. When one, however, critically examines the assertion above, the initial proclamation, which is intended as the

correlate to the second proclamation is absolutely obtainable or could be true—innumerable armed fighters are resilient in war. However, the idea of *largeness* or *massiveness* now transferred to the scenario of governance is incongruous. That a governor who lives on tax payers' money should go around with a large convoy or fleet of cars is a promotion or corruption and economic wastage.

Such is not ideal in a country like Nigeria which has been described as the capital of poverty in the world, and this manifests in the slipping of the Nigerian people into poverty (Toromade, 2018). Maintaining a large fleet of automobiles can be unbearably capital-intensive. The saying can equally be considered metaphorically. To that extent, the large fleet of cars could be seen as a symbol for the massive trappings of office for the public office holders as the case is in Nigeria today. A situation like this is in opposite direction to the SDGs philosophy of reduced inequality as the 10th goal of the program. This is so because a larger percentage of the government income is expended on servicing political structures; yet the people are impoverished as government does not have funds to provide an enabling economic environment through provision of infrastructures. As the Nigerian people are impoverished, the aim of the SDGs to reduce poverty, which is spelled out in Goal 10 is hampered. The *okobeerel'o ye gomina* philosophy as above is borne out of the utmost veneration (to the extent of subservience) by the common people for the public office holders in Nigeria. This is a well-known situation by the people occupying political offices in the Yoruba region of Nigeria, as is also the case in the entire country. Consequently, the people in government see themselves as superior to the masses. As such, they exhibit the tendency of not being responsible and accountable to the people.

Given this situation, one may wonder how occupational decency and economic growth, which is the inspiration of Goal 8 of the SDGs, would be accomplished in view of the undue subservience of the Yoruba people toward public office holders. This is portrayed in the *Ololajulo* (His/Her Excellency) phenomenon as a titular nomenclature for addressing the governor of a state or the president of the nation. This is related to the

okobeerel’o ye gomina theory. The expression Ololajulo is the Yoruba description for the governor of a Nigerian state or Mr. President as a public officer of an incomparable eminence and riches. And this betrays the Yoruba people’s belief that a public office is a conduit pipe through which public funds go into private purses. That is, the governor (representing public office holders) should be stupendous in riches and power. As the case is currently in Nigeria, the governors do portray such tendencies. And this has accounted for why governors in Nigeria amass enormous wealth, as the people have instilled in them the consciousness of being eminent in riches and power. They would want to meet the people’s philosophical beliefs and socio-cultural assumption about the personalities and positions of the governors as public office holders. And the more the people still hold the belief that a public office holder such as the governor is Ololajulo, the more the essence of the SDGs Goal 8 would be jeopardized. There are consequent implications of the massive eminence that the Yoruba people ascribe to the governors and the corruption that attends this undue sycophancy, and this is that the people are thrown into perpetual abject poverty. This, however, negates and consequently frustrates the SDGs Goal 1-Zero poverty.

The Naming Philosophy

The harm that is done to the macro economy of the Yoruba (and the entirety of Nigeria) as a result of the corruption-promoting subservient disposition of the Yoruba people to public office holders is aggravated by the disruption done to the micro economy of the people themselves. The Yoruba traditional belief system about handling money, in a certain respect, may be considered as inducing wastage. This is looked at from the onomastic philosophy of the Yoruba people across the different ethnicities in the region. The naming system of the Yoruba reflects the disposition of the traditional Yoruba to epicurean indulgence. And such leaning to enjoyment is still sustained in the present day because such names have formed the surnames of many Yoruba families. Examples of such

names which are heard constantly in the day-to-day activities of the people include *Ninalowo* (the essence of money is to spend it), *Ajinase* (he who wakes up in the morning and does nothing), *Ajisafe* (he who wakes up in the morning and engages in fashion), *Ajisefini* (he who wakes up in the morning and engages in fashion), *Arowosegbe* (he who has money to spend on social gatherings), and *Fowosere* (he who plays with money or spends money lavishly). These names were conceived in the past, but are still borne by many Yoruba people in contemporary times. However, the implication of the philosophies behind these names is not in consonance with the spirits of the SDGs Goal 1-No poverty, Goal 2-Zero Hunger and Goal 8-Decent work and Economic growth. This is because all of the names above do not signify economic productivity. First of all, among the Yoruba, naming is culturally strategic; names are indicative of the capabilities, potential, or influence of the people in the Yoruba society. Names extol the virtues, gallantry, and accomplishments of the people. Names are eulogies, epithets, or edifying nomenclatures which motivate or prompt the Yoruba people into actions. Each of these names listed above describes the character-trait of the person that bears it. And often times, people that bear such names do pride themselves in the underlying philosophies and cultural principles in the names. The link which the bearing of the names has with economic productivity is that none of the names portends the bearer as engaging in viable productions or productivity. Rather, the names betray non-productiveness and wastage. When somebody wakes up and engages in fashion (like *Ajisafe* and *Ajisefini*) early in the morning, fashion is placed over productive undertaking in this context. Again when somebody believes the essence of money is spending it (like *Ninalowo*), there is an undertone of recklessness, or profligacy, and thrift becomes difficult, if indeed possible at all. Such recklessness in spending is seen perpetrated in the characteristic habit of those who bear another of such names, that is *Agboworin* (he who carries/takes money around). And unarguably, the essence of such a habit is to prove to others, especially peers, of the person's much stronger spending capabilities.

Again, when we look at the name *Sanwoolu*, a notable Yoruba name, and the name of the present governor of Lagos, it becomes arguably clear that some Yoruba names, especially the aboriginal surnames, have contributory input on the cultural decadence that may stand in the way of the objectives of the SDGs among the Yoruba in the South West of Nigeria. The name *Sanwoolu* literally means “pay the money on *Olu*”. In this case, *Olu* becomes a metaphor for any circumstance of gratification or inducement in the political climate among the Yoruba. Today, in the political realm among the Yoruba, the slogan *Sanwo e*, as has been derived from *Sanwoolu* is often uttered by political followers to induce a political bigwig or stalwart into giving them (the followers) their share of the sleaze. The consequence of this practice is the sustenance of the sleaze culture in the political arena in the Yoruba society. Yet, this is contrary to the SDGs Goal 1 Zero Poverty as the sleaze in a financial corruption which has always impoverished the common people in Africa, as a whole.

The consequences of all of these tendencies are weak financial growth and bankruptcy at the micro (individual) level and in society at large. What the financial weakness and bankruptcy as the consequence of the exhibition of the philosophical character traits of these names point to, is the elevation of poverty. This is however in direct contradiction to the SDGs battle against poverty and hunger; and the SDGs promotion of decency of work and economic growth. And if the future’s (the future of Africa as represented in the future of the Yoruba society) evolution is conditioned by certain and possible ways, one of which is “will” (Jouvenel, 2001, p. 12), then there should be a look-back on the cultural onomastics of the Yoruba people in order to pave the way for the workability of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations in the Yoruba (Nigerian) society.

The Gender Question

The United Nations, through the Sustainable Development Goals,

seeks or advocates the equality of the sexes in Goal 5-Gender Equality. This is the reflection of the global perception that the global gender space is patriarchal. This means that men dominate the social space. Such gender dominance is palpable in the Yoruba society. Perhaps Goal 5 of the SDGs aims to advance the feminist/womanist advocacy in Africa. But the Yoruba belief system concerning the female sex and about the status of the womenfolk may be described as unsavory. This could be seen representatively in the Yoruba benediction: *Wabi'sun, wa'bi'wale* (that is, literally, you will give birth to the child that will cry for your death and the one that will dig the grave). “Sun” in Yoruba means “weep” or “sob”, while “*iwale*” means “dig the earth” or the act of digging the earth. “*Isun*” in this context consequently means the one that cries which further translate to mean the one that cries on the occasion of the death of a parent. The *isun/iwale* binary construct is borne out of the female/male binary construct in the consecutive asymmetry among the Yoruba. The traditional Yoruba system holds that all that a woman can do when a parent dies is to cry. This is in reference to and a portrayal of the inferiority attached to the female child. The Yoruba (African) traditional way of life is still being advocated by the custodians of the Yoruba (African) culture. And as such, such a cultural belief system still runs even in the 21st century. It still runs in the age of civilization and globalization even as the latter spreads around the world with the force and effects that are indefatigable (Rigg, 2007, p. 11). The *Iwale* (the male child), however, does the important thing, which is to make preparation for the burial rites. Committing the dead to the mother earth is perceived among the Yoruba to be of the essence as opposed to crying, which the Yoruba believe the female child is only capable of. However, advocates of the rights of the female sex find such a perception and disposition to women in relation to their social worth and capabilities repulsive. They have argued that women can do more than the male assumptions. This accounts for the action plan of the United Nations for the equality of the sexes in defense of women whom a society like the Yoruba (African) society tends to have a low opinion of.

The Yoruba Jurisprudence and SDGs

The justice delivery system of the Yoruba is not in the spirit of global best practices of jurisprudence. This is seen in the context of the principle of SDGs on law, peace and justice as spelt out in Goal 16-Peace and Justice strong institution. Through this Goal, the United Nations aims to ensure that justice is served to the parties involved in a dispute. This is expected to be practiced across the world. However, the justice delivery system in the traditional Yoruba social setting hampers the SDGs modeled recommendation on justice and peace. We see this in the assumptions and conclusions the Yoruba exhibit in their adages. For example, the Yoruba believe that *bielejobamoejo e l'ebi, konipel'oriikunle* (that is, if the accused/defendant pleads guilty, he/she needs not be detained hence should be acquitted). In effect, if after the commission of a crime the culprit afterwards realizes the wrongness of the crime, further prosecution should be stalled. This is sentimental, and as such, it has been seen as a loophole, a despicable lacuna in the judicial system of the Yoruba, and many have hidden behind this to commit flagrant crimes. The consequence of this is that the victims of the crimes committed lose and suffer perpetually. This judicial code should not be employed in public administration in the age of the 21st century advancement. Additionally, the traditional Yoruba belief system may be seen as promoting oppression through monarchical brutality. This is because the traditional Yoruba believe that monarchs are semi-gods. They therefore say *iyil'obanfioribibe se, oba o nim'eje* (that is, the kings only takes glory by ordering the beheading of an offender, the king would not drink blood). The impression that this creates is that the kings in the Yoruba society can act according to their whim and caprices. This gives them a super-human status. How would there be peace and justice in this setting where the masses are treated like animals (even animals do have rights and worth). Therefore, for the SDGs Goal 16 to work in the Yoruba society, as a global community, such age-long beliefs need be obliterated.

The Racial Dichotomy

The SDGs Goal 17 promotes partnership among the member-nations of the United Nations for the accomplishment of this SDGs goal, Goal 17. Such partnership is expected to be predicated on certain principles such as, as this paper conceives it, mutuality rather than exclusivity. However, the condition of mutuality is negated by the Yoruba social-philosophical concept of *Ajanle'kooko*; this literally means a dog is chasing a tiger. This is the denotation. Connotatively, the dog-tiger construct exudes the imagery of the dog's awe and inferiority compared to the tiger. The awe manifesting in the conceptual term *Ajanle'kooko* is borne out of the perception of the Yoruba that it is inconceivable for a dog to pursue a tiger because the latter is stronger and fiercer than the former. That is, the dog is a weaker and less ferocious animal than the tiger. How then, dare a dog chase the master, the tiger? That is the perceptive aura that the *Ajanle'kooko* philosophy signifies in the Yoruba worldview. However such a seemingly subservient cultural disposition is inconsistent with the equal rights and the dare-to-do orientation and principle of the United Nations as enshrined in the 17th goal of the SDGs. The dog-tiger circumstance is metaphorical and symbolic, as the dog stands for the inferior social classes or the Blacks in the global community, while the tiger is symbolic of the great exploits of the superior social classes or the White people. The segregation as a result of the belief that the master is the master and he or she cannot and should not be dared or rattled, which the Yoruba social attitude emphasizes is a dichotomy. This engenders exclusivity rather than mutuality and partnership which Goal 17 echoes.

The Yoruba Knowledge System and SDGs

In the same vein, in order to foster the partnership that the SDGs Goal 17 stipulates for the workability of other goals of the Sustainable Development Goals, there needs to be a reconciliation of the Yoruba thought system and epistemology with the global reasoning. This is in line with the irresistible (at least, that is the current state of affairs on

the African continent) penetration of the Western ideas and ideals that govern the perspectives of the active population of the African society, especially the Yoruba society. As such there is the need for social inclusivity, interdependence, and togetherness that the SDGs aspire to attain in Goal 17 which preaches partnership in global affairs.

Proverbs are significant in the socio-cultural system of the Yoruba society in the Southwest of Nigeria. In fact, proverbs dominantly constitute the cultural sensibilities and social actions of the Yoruba people. This is because the traditional Yoruba people believe that the Yoruba proverbs do exhibit the wisdom of the people which they are immensely glued to and proud of. Such strong ties and cultural significance make it necessary that a good number of the Yoruba proverbs should be reconstituted, because they tend to have contrary effects on the modern worldview. This is particularly so because such proverbs have evolved an attitudinal consciousness and practice among the Yoruba. The attitude tends to negate standard social and cultural universals. For example, the Yoruba people believe that *anu'mokiif'owonu'le* (that is, an adult who is feeding a child should and does not go hungry). This situation of believing that an adult who is feeding a child should not go hungry has been constantly applied to the political administration by politicians in public offices among the Yoruba. This, consequently, motivates and results in the massive financial corruption in the region and the entire country, Nigeria. The feeding undertaking has been metaphorically interpreted such that the feeding adult stands for the political administrator; the child is the society while the food is the commonwealth of the people. The ready or default response as justification and motivation for stealing in government even in the execution of community projects or services among the Yoruba is that *anu'mokiif'o'wonu'le*. By this, the perpetrator and, indeed, the generality of the Yoruba world are of the view and perception that anyone in charge of common resources, especially, money, must justifiably have their share of the resources through the backdoor. And this is irrespective of the legitimate entitlements accruing to them. This perception, culture and practice, among other factors, have

resulted in multiple financial crimes in the region. And such is so pervasive that the illegitimate actions have become a legitimate way of life as the Yoruba believe that *ojukiit'ere* (a statue feels no shame). As a statue does not feel shame, so also are the people resistant to public shame that come with perpetrating corruption in public offices and private capacities. However, social and economic backwardness in the Yoruba society is attributable to the consequences of defective proverbs. The fact that the proverbs are capable of bringing about economic backwardness and social stagnation is inconsistent with the SDGs Goal 1 which frowns at poverty.

In addition to this, the Yoruba philosophy as expressed in the proverbial saying *a ji se bi Oyo laari, Oyo o ni se bi enikankan* (Other people can emulate Oyo but Oyo will never emulate anyone) must necessarily become obsolete. It is in contravention of and as such inconsistent with the spirit of social inclusivity through partnership that SDGs advocate. In addition to this, quite a number of views, enunciations and beliefs as contained in certain Yoruba adages or proverbs need be adjusted. After all, there is the possibility of the perfection of human nature and history through knowledge diffusion (Rosenthal, 2010). And the question of knowledge diffusion further calls for the elimination of the exclusion of youths from the mainstream African knowledge system. The assumption that the youths are not knowledgeable should be revisited. For instance, the Yoruba require a young person to say *toto se bi owe o* (I apologize for displaying knowledge by speaking proverbially) each time that the young person uses a proverb in a conversation with an elder. This is because the Yoruba people (and Africans, in general) believe a proverb or an adage is a mark of knowledge and experience. This is true. However, the assumption that the young ones should not demonstrate knowledge or that they know something hurts a generation and the SDGs Goal 4 which centers on quality education. Again, undermining, and consequently, limiting the cerebral capabilities of the young ones, is a denial of the global current trends in knowledge products such as technological inventions that drive the world today. The Yoruba

(Africans) need to align with the rest of the world through the SDGs-compliant attitudes to education and knowledge of the younger generation.

Given that the proverbs of the Yoruba people (perhaps, Africans in general) are unique and important, there is however the need for some readjustment to be made on the corpus of the proverbs. The paper observes that some strands of the Yoruba (perhaps also the African) socio-cultural system have been (and therefore, are) predicated on a questionable logic asymmetry due to the defects of the literal levels of a number of the proverbs that constitute the thought system of the society. This is conspicuous in the logic (or reverse) of the Yoruba episteme as informed by the proverbs and sayings in use in among the Yoruba. In establishing the veracity of this claim, it is to be stated clearly that it is the literal sphere of the selected proverbs that is relevant to the discourse. The inner/deeper meanings of the proverbs are for another discourse on the subject. If a proverb is a terse and charming expression that conveys the wisdom of a folk community (Okpewho, 1992), then the advancement of Yoruba (Africa) should not be hinged on African culture through its episteme as the cultural products and productions to rely on for technological and scientific advancement. Some of the African proverbs are more of a rhetorical resource than a viable element of knowledge. Wisdom is central to the essence of a proverb, yet the wisdom contained in a substantial number of African proverbs could be said to be controvertible as they derived from a questionable literal construct. It needs be stated one more time that this study is not concerned with the figurative contents of the proverbs, only the pristine nature of the literal level. We are certainly aware that a proverb sustains its meaning on connotation, yet it needs be said that a proverb whose veracity is controvertible (whatever the nuances) at the literal level, tends (if not specifically) to make a defective connotation. Hence, such a proverb loses substantial gravity, and consequently, contributes to an unsound episteme.

The argument at this juncture is that since the literal level of a proverb is not the essence of the proverb, and that the figurative domain of the proverb is hidden, and in the process there is a disconnection

between the literal and figurative domains, drudgery, confusion, and, controversy ensue. The concern of the study is that the literal level of the proverbs twists empirical standards, and hence, cannot achieve the level of empiricism that drives contemporary humanity. The literal level of a proverb is also important because it evinces practicality and plausibility —and a number of Yoruba (South-West of Nigeria) proverbs align with the plausibility poetics. That is, they are justified, reasonable, and therefore, essential to the sound knowledge system of the Yoruba (African) society. An instance is *eniti o se bi alaarul'Oyigbo, koni se bi Adegborol'Oja Oba*. (This is translated as *a person who cannot carry loads at the Oyigbo market in Lagos would not be able to display riches like Adegboro once did at Oja Oba in Ibadan*). This proverb is practical and realistic and does not offend the practical episteme and consequently confuse the younger generation. Anyone who does not work would not be able to amass wealth. However, not all the Yoruba proverbs exude such practicality, reason, and sense of plausibility. For example, the Yoruba, believe that *Obetibaaleilekii je, Iyaleilekii se e*: That is, the soup/delicacy that the husband does not eat, the wife does not or should not cook. This saying/proverb depicts the Yoruba society and its overriding sensibilities as patriarchal and gerontocracy and as such, it subjugates the presence of the wife (and children) in the social scheme of things. The assumption, here, is that the feeding system, the taste buds of everybody in the family should conform to those of the husband/father. That is, everyone is the same, having the same preferences, whereas in reality, everybody has different gustatory cells. The assumption in the proverbial postulation, however, runs contrary to Bittles and Black's (2010) perception that there is variation in human beings. In their words:

From anthropometric and craniometrical measurements to current, large-scale microarray studies of gene structure and expression has resulted in continued revision of opinions and ideas relating to the factors and forces that drive human variation.
(p. 2)

This given, it cannot, then, be sustained that the wife and the children should not eat something else apart from what the father eats. This could be seen as oppressive and therefore reprehensible

Again, who can argue that *the soup* that the husband/father/man does not eat today, he cannot eat tomorrow? The aversion to eating a delicacy today may be the result of upbringing or past experiences or lack of exposure. It could even be physiological, as Conner and Armitage (p. 13) opine. In their view, “not eating a particular food may be due to sensory influences such as taste and odor [...] important sensory factors in determining food choice.” Furthermore, the epistemological essence of the proverb neglects intertribal contact and relationship, especially in the marital form, in which case the influence of one partner becomes visible on the other. The insensitivity inherent in this saying could but match the fallacy exuded in another Yoruba saying thus: *Iyan Ogun odun-maa n gbona*, that is, the pounded yam (a local delicacy among the Yoruba people) made twenty years earlier could still be hot. What the Yoruba philosophy does not tell us is how the hotness is sustained for that length of time because pounded yam is a delicacy that loses much heat even in the process of making it. It should be recalled that attention is not on the figurative contents of the proverb. The focus is the sustainability of truth in the literal construction. Therefore, the proverb defies veracity. It takes a child who is not bred with a philosophy that makes unsubstantiated claims to realize the trauma and confusion caused in the formative intelligence of an individual who is not part of the unsubstantiated episteme. To this end, a saying formed from a sound denotation makes a sound connotation and episteme. That is, if the literal domain is tenable, realistic, and empirical with peculiar emphasis on empirical, the knowledge base formed or showcased is sound and productive. At this juncture, it needs to be stressed that the Yoruba proverbs that rupture the plausibility theory are many more, and such impractical proverbs contravene the attempt the United Nations’ efforts at achieving quality education, globally as enshrined in SDGs Goal 4-Quality Education. This is because the indigenous knowledge is by this standard intangible and

inapplicable, unlike the global knowledge system that is practical and evidence-based.

Conclusion

The African (Yoruba) aboriginal cultural beliefs, it could be inferred, are in sharp contravention to the spirit and principles of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. To this end, for this initiative to apply in the Yoruba (African) socio-cultural setting, as originally conceived by the United Nations, the beliefs and practices in the Yoruba worldview, as an African society, need be modified if not jettisoned, outright. As a result of this, the Yoruba people need to develop a new attitude to the environment. That signifies that the *agbokoda'ko* principle should supersede the *so'gbedi'gboro* principle in order to discourage deforestation. Also, the Yoruba society should not put an end to the beliefs that encourage public officers to steal from the treasury, a practice which the *okobeerel'o ye gomina* theory promotes. This will make the commonwealth go round to all the people. In the same vein, the people in the Yoruba society should realize that their family names (cognomens) were conceived in a different social setting in development of the Yoruba society. Therefore, beliefs in the applicability of the names in the contemporary society, especially those that are money-related as above could be misleading. The world is productivity-driven, so eulogizing names that boast of profligacy such as *Ninalowo*, impede productivity but encourage wastage. The contemporary world has witnessed women make giant stride in all walks of life. As a result of this, the preference that the Yoruba ascribe to the male child seems retrogressive. Instead, therefore of the *isun* and *iwale* dichotomy, as above, *omo* (child) which is gender-sensitive should have been used in order to guarantee parity, that is, gender equality. From the cultural jurisprudence, the native Yoruba law-custodians need to eliminate sentiment from the judicial process, so that age, religion, personality, affinity, as well as stratagems would not impede the process of delivering justice fairly. Therefore, pleading guilty

or showing self-remorse should not be adequate to acquit an offender. The Yoruba people are known to be respectful. In fact this is true to the extent of subservience. This is why they, like most Africans, accord profound awe to the white race. This has, however, been contributory to their complacency and restricted daring-do as seen in the awe betrayed in the ajanlekooko philosophy which expresses the awkwardness that the Yoruba people perceive when a dog pursues or chases a tiger. The lofty aspiration of the United Nations to ensure quality education globally through SDGs may not easily be accomplished among the Yoruba in Nigeria. This is because in Nigeria, the educational system is poor and there is massive brain drain which has led to non availability of qualified professionals who can initiate the required technologies for the implementation of SDGs (Akintoye & Opeyemi, 2014) gain, in the Nigerian context, the SDGs are capable of affording legislators immeasurable gains, while the Nigerian citizens will benefit the most (Saraki, 2017). However, all these advantages of the SDGs are predicated on the successful implementation of the global initiative, and a step towards achieving a successful implementation is the liberalization of the knowledge space. This is imperative because, to a substantial extent, the Yoruba indigenous knowledge base excludes the youth by downplaying the intelligence of the younger generation. Again, the Yoruba (African) knowledge base does not completely align with the global evidence-based knowledge system. And this requires that the Yoruba proverbs that originate from an impractical literal level be adjusted or discarded outright.

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