
“Healing the World”: The Divine Role of Africa-Centered Metaphysics

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Abstract

This paper argues that Africa is the cradle of civilization. That civilization evolved out of an understanding of the cosmos as well as the valorization of the metaphysical author of cosmogony. The paper asserts that appreciation of metaphysics created a stable and balanced cosmos. Civilization then meant living in harmony with fellow mankind, with the environment and with the cosmos as a whole. The paper suggests this was based on a clear understanding of the interdependence between the departed as well as the organic relationship between man, animal and nature. Now there is a gap between civilization and technological advancement. The metaphysics of *unhu/Ubuntu* as enshrined in the living law of *Ma’at* sank under the weight of capitalism; that pursuit of profit regardless of any moral price. Universal politics is now dictated by the desires of a few who stop at nothing to create a world order where humanity is reduced to a commodity. Wars and more wars have become the order of the day, threatening the whole world with extinction. This paper traces how Africa in particular has lost its metaphysical locus as a result of several foreign –induced imperial interventions culminating in the present intellectual, moral and cultural cacophonies that tear Africans apart. The paper argues that Africa can restore its glory as the citadel of civilization by returning to the “the way”. It is hoped that the whole world would also take a leaf, as it has done before, from Africa’s return to “the way”. The paper contends that the metaphysics of *unhu/Ubuntu* has this divine role to heal the world of various types of sickness: social, cultural, spiritual, intellectual, psychological and material.

Key Words: Africans, Metaphysics, *Unhu/Ubuntu*, Triangle

Introduction

There is no little literature that challenges the fact that Africa is the cradle of civilization. The latest discovery of stone tools dating back to 3.3 million years in Kenya boosts this fact further. . Herodotus, one of the earliest Greek historians confirms that the Egyptian civilization that gave birth to the Great pyramids was authored by

Africans. George James (1954) also clearly explains how African philosophy which was the metaphysical force behind that creativity was stolen by Greeks and later shared by their kinsmen: the Romans and the British among others in their successive empires. Earlier conquests did not only retard African development but that these disruptions of the African social, cultural, economic, intellectual and metaphysical trajectories were further lacerated by more systematic imperialist processes such as (in order of time) slavery, colonialism and globalization (James 1954). The exponential effect of these iniquities left Africa in continuous states of dislocation. This article begins by summarizing the pillars of global imperialism which are responsible for the persistent fracture of African consciousness. After these come an explanation of the centrality of the metaphysics of *unhu/Ubuntu* which suggests how a return to this ethic can raise not only Africa but the rest of the world to a moral pedestal once again.

Africa Centred Metaphysics

At face value one would be persuaded to think both terms “African metaphysics’ and ‘Africa-centred metaphysics’ refer to a type or branch of metaphysics, but in truth they do not. In the words of Taylor (1903 p.7)

Metaphysics deals with the ultimate problems of existence in a purely scientific spirit; its object is intellectual satisfaction, and its method is not one of appeal to immediate intuition or unanalyzed feeling, but of critical and systematic analysis of our conceptions. Thus it clearly belongs, in virtue of its spirit and method, to the realm of science. Yet it differs widely in method from other types of science with which most of us are more familiar. It differs from the mathematical sciences in being non-quantitative and non-numerical in its methods. For we cannot employ the numerical and quantitative methods . . . except on things and processes which admit of measurement....

In fact, metaphysics is metaphysics but his reality is perceived and conceived from various standpoints one of which sees Africa as a physical and metaphysical space (Achebe, 1990). ‘African’ in this case is an adjective meaning ‘of or belonging to Africa or having qualities of Africa’. “Africa-centred” on the other denotes ‘positionality or terms of reference’, that is to say, arising or perceived from Africa as a vantage point. Africa-centredness therefore denotes and dictates a particular worldview, a sensibility and a way of knowing. There is no contradiction between African and Africa-centred. Both unite at the level of sensibility. That is to say Africans do not separate the living from the departed. Africa-centred metaphysics is all about understanding the relationship between the Supreme Force (*Mwari*), the world of spirits and the world of the living. In fact Africa-centred metaphysics recognizes the organic connection between the spiritual and the material in everyday experience. This is as it was in the very first civilization, the African civilization.

James (1954) makes the point that ancient Egyptians had developed a very complex religious system, called the Mysteries, which was regarded as the first system of salvation. He argues that the religion regarded the human body as a prison-house of the

soul, which could be liberated from its bodily impediments. James' thesis proves that this African religion and philosophy later became the basis of Greek civilization through copying and pilferage.

James further claims that the Greeks initially made the best of their chance to learn all they could about Egyptian culture as most students received instructions directly from the Egyptian priests, and later they plundered and pillaged the Royal temples and libraries during the invasion of Egypt by Alexander the Great after which Aristotle converted the library at Alexandria into a research centre. Herodotus is credited with being "the first Greek European to use prose as the medium of a work of art" (Rieu, 1963 p.8).

He is estimated to have been born between 490 and 480 BC at Halicarnassus, South-West coast of Asia Minor. He spent some of his early manhood travelling over the greater part of the then known world (i.e. to Europeans); visiting Egypt, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Russia and Northern parts of the African continent (as it is known today). He categorically admits that the Egyptians "discovered the solar year and were the first to divide it into twelve parts ..."

Herodotus further admits that "their method of calculation [was] better than the Greek" (Ibid, p.103). He also admits that the Africans were the first to bring into use the names of the twelve gods, which the Greeks took over from them. Herodotus reports that the Egypt of his voyages had two sorts of writing: "the sacred and the common". He further acknowledges that the people [were] religious to excess, beyond any other nation in the world ..." (Ibid, p.116).

The following quotation sums up the inseparability of religion from the day to day life of the African:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. . . to be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community (Mbiti, 1991 p. 2).

Unfortunately, imperialism has made sure that Africans remained ignorant of their organic connection with the infinite spirit of the Universe by controlling what is taught in schools and universities; controlling institutions of 'science', the media and what the media considers possible in its arrogant dismissal of anything perceived as challenging the 'norm'.

Surely, up to now humanity spends all their time living movie-style lives while the real world remains hidden from their view, all because of conditioned psyches. Below are examples of western institutions which continue to fracture the African consciousness.

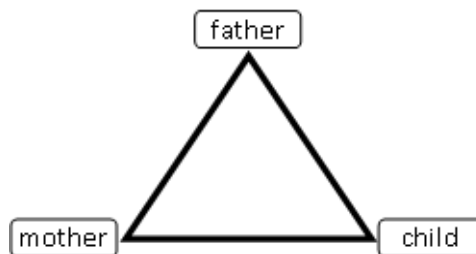
Pillars of Global Imperialism

Hegemonic Institutions	Coercive Institutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religion • Education • Media • Technology • Foreign-styled Constitutions • Foreign-styled political ideologies and configurations • Food • Sex • Foreign-styled Music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cartography • Political manipulations • War

Discussing each one of these would require a full paper for each; but suffice to stress that the first set are part of the ‘soft power’ approach to manipulating a conquered people while the second set comprises the ‘hard power’ approach to conquest. These are either used separately or combined for optimal effectiveness. As a result of these the oppressed people who are often in a state of fear and powerlessness switch off and become the sheep they are encouraged to be and thus remain in thankful subservience to their cold and mindless aggressors. The only way to a true return to ourselves as sovereign Africans is to bust this veil of imperialist mind manipulation as the African adage counsels: ‘man [Africa] know thyself’.

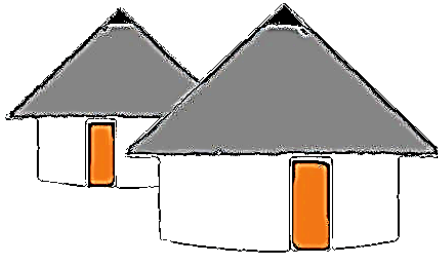
The Metaphysics of Unhu/Ubuntu

Knowing oneself is recognizing that you are *munhu ane unhu/ubuntu*. The triangle is the metaphysical symbol that sums up the African interconnectivity. The choice of the triangle is by no means accidental. In African philosophy, it represents the strongest and most enduring bond between the Father, Mother and the Child as illustrated below:



The triangle represents the smallest social unit in African worldview. In Shona cosmology it is symbolised by *mapfihwa* (hearthstones). The fireplace is where life is cooked and the person responsible for the fireplace is the mother. That is why women are holy in African worldview. Any tempering with *mapfihwa* amounts to extreme violation of taboo and may result in metaphysical reprisals on the perpetrator. This is how important this Trinity is which explains why I have chosen it as a key to interpretation and analysis of any text.

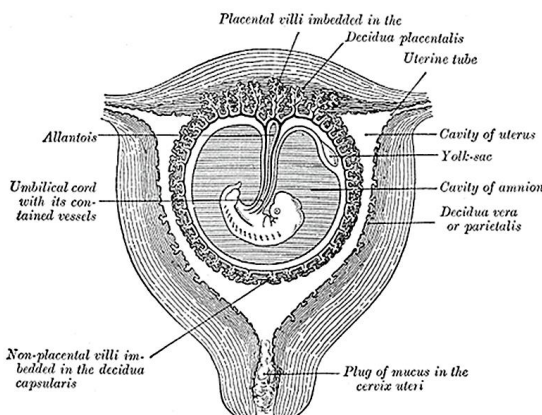
The African kitchen which you find everywhere in African settlements captures this enduring philosophy. Culture defines the habits and activities of a group of people within a spatial, historical and ideological setting which has its roots in the metaphysical. It is culture that differentiates social groupings around the world. This part explores how African culture is integrated into the spatial design of historic settlements, with particular reference to the anatomical formation of the African “hut” /“kitchen”.



This part demonstrates the ubiquitousness of African metaphysics by exploring the sacred geometry of the African hut (*imba yokubikira*), so chosen because, of all the African infrastructural architectures, the African hut or “kitchen” embodies both physical and metaphysical worldviews of the African/Shona people. This unique architecture reflects the core of the African/Shona identity and being. The sacred anatomy/geometry and symbolic significance of this architecture cannot be overstated.

The round structure symbolizes a woman’s womb. Just as in the woman’s womb, in this other belly all life is cooked and dispatched through an opening (the door) facing a direction away from the wind and usually facing the main house. When you explore this shape further you unearth another hidden sexual symbolism.

The conical shape with a round base is essentially triangular. The triangle is the shape of the woman’s reproductive organs, especially the vulva and the uterus.



www.webmd.com/women/picture-of-the-vagina: visited 20 April 2015.

The triangle reflects the pelvic structure of the woman. This shape is metaphysically and symbolically loaded. As a metaphysical cosmic code, it reflects sacred geometry. While

the circle is the most enduring shape, the triangle is the strongest of all shapes. It symbolizes the strongest bond. This is the bond that Western capitalism targets to destroy using such ideologies as rights (gender and women’s rights and children’s rights). We need to go back to *unhu/Ubuntu* as enshrined in the 42 principles of Maat below:

1. I have not committed sin.
2. I have not committed robbery with violence.
3. I have not stolen.
4. I have not slain men or women.
5. I have not stolen food.
6. I have not swindled offerings.
7. I have not stolen from God/Goddess.
8. I have not told lies.
9. I have not carried away food.
10. I have not cursed.
11. I have not closed my ears to truth.
12. I have not committed adultery.
13. I have not made anyone cry.
14. I have not felt sorrow without reason.
15. I have not assaulted anyone.
16. I am not deceitful.
17. I have not stolen anyone’s land.
18. I have not been an eavesdropper.
19. I have not falsely accused anyone.
20. I have not been angry without reason.
21. I have not seduced anyone’s wife.
22. I have not polluted myself.
23. I have not terrorized anyone.
24. I have not disobeyed the Law.
25. I have not been exclusively angry.
26. I have not cursed God/Goddess.
27. I have not behaved with violence.
28. I have not caused disruption of peace.
29. I have not acted hastily or without thought.
30. I have not overstepped my boundaries of concern.
31. I have not exaggerated my words when speaking.
32. I have not worked evil.
33. I have not used evil thoughts, words or deeds.
34. I have not polluted the water.
35. I have not spoken angrily or arrogantly.
36. I have not cursed anyone in thought, word or deeds.
37. I have not placed myself on a pedestal.
38. I have not stolen what belongs to God/Goddess.
39. I have not stolen from or disrespected the deceased.
40. I have not taken food from a child.
41. I have not acted with insolence.
42. I have not destroyed property belonging to God/Goddess

<https://xenophilus.wordpress.com/2008/03/11/42-principles-of-maat-2000-years-before-ten-commandments/> visited 20 April 2015.

Written at least 2,000 years before the Ten Commandments of Moses, the 42 Principles of Ma’at are one of Africa’s, and the world’s oldest sources of moral and spiritual instruction. Ma’at, the Ancient Egyptian divine Principle of Truth, Justice, and Righteousness, is the foundation of natural and social order and unity. Ancient Africans developed a humane system of thought and conduct which has been recorded in volumes of African wisdom literature such as the declarations from the Book of Coming Forth by Day (the so-called Book of the Dead), The Teachings of Ptah-Hotep, The Writings of Ani and Amenemope among others.

These laws (the 42 principles of Ma’at) are captured by the moral constitution of *unhu/Ubuntu/botho* which categorically states, ‘I am because we are’ (p’ Bitek, 1986 p.18) clarifies that the human person is intrinsically a communal being embedded in a

context of social relationships with fellow beings; and that the human society is not a mere association of individual persons pursuing different personal interests; but a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds (biological and social) defined primarily by common interests, goals and values enshrined in their shared culture.

In African philosophy, p' Bitek further observes, before and even after birth, man is “in chains”; chains which constitute a bundle of social obligations. He captures this point in the following way:

Man is not born free. He cannot be free. He is incapable of being free. For only by being in chains can he be and remain ‘human’... Man has a bundle of duties which are expected from him by society, as well as a bundle of rights and privileges that the society owes him. In African belief, even death does not free him. If he had been an important member of society while he lived, his ghost continues to be revered and fed: and he, in turn, is expected to guide and protect the living (p.19).

This is what constitutes *unhu/ubuntu* as understood in the context of African metaphysics and culture.

Nelson Mandela (cited in Mbigi, 2006 p.22) has described traditional African governance as embedded in the ancient philosophy of *ubuntu (unhu)* which bestowed rights and privileges to individuals as follows:

When our people lived peacefully, under the democratic rule of their kings . . . then the country was ours in name and right . . . All men were free and equal. This was the foundation of government. The council of elders was so completely democratic that all members of the tribe could participate in its deliberations. Chief, subject, warrior and medicine man all took part and endeavoured to influence decisions.

The above quote shows that *unhu* is essentially an unwritten constitution which encourages participatory democracy. *Unhu* is tied up with *zviito zvakonaka* (good deeds). Comprehensively understood, *munhu* is a person who expresses and displays this good and moral ideal.

Conclusion

In the final analysis if we abolish the ‘individual’ together with the western philosophy of ‘individualism’, we live for each other and when we do so we cease to be capable of iniquity. *Unhu/Ubuntu* is an African moral code which if nationalized, regionalized, continentalized and globalized can lead all mankind back to righteousness and thus heal the world.

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