Higher Knowledge and Global Good:
Reconceptualizing and Envisioning Higher Education in Africa for
Shared and Enhanced Humanity

by

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**Introduction**

Education, in any society at any of the historical moments since ancient human settlements which provided the foundation for cultural and social reproduction and civilization, has been characterized by its various complementary informal, non-formal and formal components that are dynamically related. While in some historical moments and social contexts one or two of these three dimensions may appear more prominent than others, they are always simultaneously present at every stage. Thus, education in African societies has historically and consistently reflected all these dimensions. Indeed, without the presence of these three intrinsic and philosophical elements of education, societal and human actions would be burdened by a perpetual need for improvisation. Ad hoc improvisation is not to be confused with the essentially fruitful innovative impulse in human agency.

Human settlements are defined and redefined by constant migratory movements that explain "inward stretch, outward reach" Nettleford (1993). These migrations are dynamics that influence the making of cultures and educational systems. In this context, and given the enormous span of the African continent and the diversity of its population despite the common foundation of cultural unity, the educational experiences of different African societies have been impacted by regional specificities and their respective "inward stretch" and "outward reach" defined by demographic factors, history and geography.

The scientific discoveries of human settlements have consistently confirmed that Africa is the birthplace of humanity. That is to say that there has been continuous human agency that has been exercised in the struggle for sheer survival and organization of social institutions for thousands of years including education. The mere thought of such a uniquely long journey of human and social formations since *Zamani*, or the recording of history, is in itself an invitation to examine the path and stamina of such people. Deep in its layers of history, if taken critically,

Africa can provide multi-faceted pluralistic perspectives on education, learning, and higher level of knowledge, which cannot be reduced to the conventional schooling.

Because of the experience of Africa with the Transatlantic enslavement that started in the 15th Century and was followed by the brief but equally destructive colonial domination and its aftermath, and the constant official global discourses of sympathy and solidarity to "help", "assist", etc., Africa is not portrayed having much to offer rather being in constant need of assistance.

In spite of social contradictions and their destructive capacity, there has been a history of cumulative knowledge that constitutes an asset that could be used for collective well-being on a global scale. In the triumphant catalyst mode, any social endeavors or institutions that do not yield visible financial returns are deemed void of value. Yet, the recent and still unfolding global capitalist crisis suggests that great human and social values have higher values and importance than mere material accumulation. The human dimension is central.

When analyzing the educational experiences in Africa since the colonial intrusion, even after the massive independence movements, especially in the second half of the 20th Century, there has been a tendency to focus on the type of formal education that resulted from the colonial experience. Generally, the analysis of African contemporary education has been marked by a widespread habit to consider solely the recent and received educational component that was the product of the formal colonial experience, especially in studies that deal with African higher education. Yet, in spite of the profound and sweeping changes that were introduced into the African societies *manu military* or by deceptive methods, the foundation and critical dimensions of Africa's institutions and culture remain.

The thrust of this paper is to problematize knowledge in Africa as it is defined in relation to the conventional/received education system and engage the conception of a more

encompassing construction that reflects a long-standing African basis. Higher knowledge is analyzed for its intrinsic value and, at the same time, as a tool for tapping into accumulated assets in addressing challenges of the 21st Century and building a new system of knowledge production and utilization beyond the immediate predicaments and long-term contingencies.

This topic of higher knowledge as social inquiry is addressed from a historical and conceptual perspective. Parts of this paper draw from earlier works that have examined various dimensions of education and knowledge in Africa (Assié-Lumumba 2004b, 2005). However, new perspectives related specifically to the notion of higher knowledge are explored in the paper. Here I argue for the need of re-conceptualization of the classical higher education knowledge for a shared and sustainable, also global, good in which African contribution to the search for solutions to her specific predicaments and global quandaries can be recognized, appreciated, utilized more coherently.

This reflection is in line with earlier work that I undertook in the quest for some answers to questions, in my efforts to contribute in filling in the gaps between European depictions of Africans. Part of the previous works focused, for instance, on refuting Europeans' erroneous perception ad description of African women and shedding light on the latter's actual location in the social sphere and gender relations in Africa. Some of my earlier research (Assié 1974; Assié-Lumumba 1996) led to later articulation, using an Akan case study as an illustration, of the profound changes in the participation of African women in politics, from their critical position in a model of empowering and positive complementarity in the pre-colonial period to the drastic decline in their power and their increasing marginalization following the male-centered political restructuring of African systems of governance and all the other social institutions, including education, under European colonial rule. My findings led to my articulation and conclusion of the existence of positive and empowering complementarity in the pre-colonial period, in contrast

to the negative homogenization and consistent marginalization of African women under the respective administration of different European colonial powers. Some of my further works (Assie-Lumumba 2000, 2007) and those of other African women scholars (Steady 1981; Amadiume 1987; Oyewumi 1997) on gender equity and access to education, politics and in society at large have been guided by the framework that came out of this earlier research. An increasing body of knowledge, mostly produced by African women, confirms the considerable waste that African societies have suffered since the colonial era by constructing stumbling blocks that have deprived African societies of the benefits of African women's full rights and agency.

I would also like to acknowledge here a discussion that I had with the late Eul Yong Park[1]. We had a discussion on the concept of social capital in different societal living contexts. He indicated then that one of his dearest dreams was to spend time in Africa in a community among the ones that have been the least transformed by colonial and Western-inspired post-colonial policies and lifestyle. He wanted to travel to Africa in his quest for a better understanding of the heart, the thoughts, and social organizations of a people so predominantly deprived of some of the basic material necessities and comforts in the contemporary period. He argued that the Africans must have something more profound and of far-reaching relevance than Africa's contemporary image and global standing suggest. He argued with conviction that Africans must have some wisdom which, if appropriately harnessed and used, will help trigger a new process of enduring social progress. I told him that while the game of the contemporary world had been unfairly set and played to the disadvantage and detriment of Africa and the Africans, as social agents, they definitely had something more to offer for their own

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[1] Professor of Economics and Management at Handong University in South Korea who passed away in 2004. We had several enriching discussions while we were both serving on the United Nations Committee on Development Policy (CDP). I recall specifically one such discussion, during the CDP meeting in April 2002 at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York City.

advancement and to the world.  They would have disappeared from the face of the earth without the ability to negotiate the challenges of nature and centuries of external aggression of unprecedented magnitude and intensity in human history.

This paper is articulated under three major headings.  The first section presents the contemporary African educational scene with its main characteristics of the predominance of recently received systems alongside pre-existing/continuing endogenous systems. The second part focuses on a definition of what is referred to in this paper as higher knowledge, what is not and what it is.  The third part examines the necessary convergence and purposeful integration of the different components of African education on African foundation, for a fusion towards higher knowledge as local, regional and global good.

## 1. Main Features of Contemporary African Higher Education

African higher education in the twenty-first century is characterized by the predominance of the organization and production of knowledge that derives from European colonial legacy and its unfolding new developments that have been dominated by the Information and Communication Technologies (Assié-Lumumba 2004a).  As already recalled, education in any society, including in Africa, has three components which are formal, non-formal, and informal education. However, education in Africa since European colonial rule has been heavily influenced by Western formal education traditions, particularly at the higher education level. European education was transmitted either through the missionaries (in British and Belgian colonies) or the state (in French colonies).  No matter the specific administrative style and mechanisms of transmitting education of the specific colonial powers and their extensions of which the United States is the most powerful, they all naturally reflect the stages of cumulative European history and culture.

A common characteristic of the various versions of Western colonial and contemporary powers is the heavy influence of the Judeo-Christian civilization and culture which shaped the institutions of higher learning in the West. Through colonization and various forms of imperial projects of domination, these traditions have emerged as a global model of reverence and reference with extraordinary capacity of transfer and reproduction.

In his book entitled, *Universities: British, Indian, and African*: *A Study in the Ecology of Higher Education*, Ashby (1966:3) pointed out that:

> An institution is the embodiment of an ideal. In order to survive, an institution must fulfill two conditions: it must be sufficiently stable to sustain the ideal which gave it birth and sufficiently responsive to remain relevant to the society which supports it. The university is a medieval institution which fulfils both these conditions. The ideal—the disinterested pursuit of learning—which drew scholars to Oxford seven centuries ago still unites a guild of scholars in that city, and similar guilds flourish in hundreds of other cities. Yet the university has kept pace with the mutations of society; a college in California is as relevant to modern American society as the *studium generale* in ancient Paris was relevant to church and state in the Middle Ages.

The ideal is historical, cultural, civilization-specific, and the result of societal evolution. In sub-regions of the African continent since its own medieval period, as it has been well documented (Cheikh Anta Diop 1974, 1987), specifically North Africa, West Africa, and the Eastern coast, Islam made earlier expansions and developments with a significant breakthrough in the organization of schooling at the higher formal education level.

Before Medieval time, older institutional traditions, specifically Ancient Egypt, which can be analyzed in the encompassing framework of the Nile Valley Civilization (Yosef ben-Jochannan and John Henrik 1991), which produced complex and sophisticated spaces for the organization of higher level of formal education. As Lulat (2005) argues:

> To be sure, the Egyptians may not have had exact replicas of the modern university or college, but it is certainly true that they did possess an institution that, from their perspective, fulfilled some of the roles of higher

education institution. One such institution dating from around c. 2000 BC E was the per-ankh (or the House of Life). It was located within the Egyptian temples, which usually took the form of huge campuses, with many buildings, and thousands of employees (p. 44).

Ajayi et al. (1996:5) articulate that "the roots of the University as a community of scholars, with an international outlook but also with responsibilities within particular cultures, can be traced back to two institutions that developed in Egypt in the last two or three centuries BC and AD," with the Alexandria model and the monastic system with sophisticated knowledge production.

By the Middle Ages, when European institutions of contemporary Western traditions were emerging and evolving in Europe, in Africa major institutional histories had already been written and others were in the making, with ancient and indigenous roots and a long experience of institutionalized higher learning in various societal settings. This contradicted earlier and simplistic arguments advanced by European colonists that rejected the existence of systematized organization of higher learning in Africa before European colonial rule "It is now clear that indigenous education involved far more than an inward-looking process of socialization", and composed elementary, secondary, and higher levels (Ajayi *et al*. 1996:4) and "indigenous higher education produced and transmitted new knowledge necessary for understanding the world, the nature of man (sic), society, God and various divinities, the promotion of agriculture and health, literature and philosophy" (Ajayi *et al*. 1996:5). The roots of Islam in North and West Africa constitute the foundation of institutions of higher learning that emerged and functioned several centuries before colonial rule. The most known among them are: Karawiyyinn in Fez (Morocco) created in 859 AD, Al-Azhar in Cairo (Egypt) in 970, which is considered to be the 'oldest continuously operating University in the world' (Arab Information Centre 1966:282), and Sankore in Timbuktu from the twelfth century.

Higher education institutions and the cultural context in which they were created then have evolved with dialectical relations. Indeed, in any society, the function of educational institutions include the accumulation of collective memories, the building of a common reference in terms of societal ethos, and the formation, consolidation, and reproduction of the means of transferring and conferring the sense of belonging. Whether entirely systematized or not, African forms of producing and utilizing knowledge created their specific character in addition to shared universals.

With Europeans' unabashed goal for total and blind control of the colonized people and their resources, there was neither room nor interest or any tangible direct benefit for honest recognition of any value in the social systems of reference of the colonized even when they were used by the colonial systems to advance the colonial project. In this paper it is argued that for the Africans and the world, it is time to make room for the possibilities to put to positive use the suppressed wealth of African values for the benefice of the Africans and humanity.

Despite nationalisms, African educational policies of the immediate post-independence period have essentially been designed by the Western and a few Eastern European technical assistants in the context of bilateral relations that maintained the ties between newly independent African countries and their former colonial masters, and, more generally, external powers. Furthermore, in the context of multilateral relations, African national and domestic policies were, and continue to be (albeit more subtly and through remote-control instruments), systematically conceptualized and designed by "experts" of international organizations such as the World Bank and other proxies of Western powers. Their recommendations have been de facto prescriptions, within the legacy of colonial links. Did/do they all really/consistently understand, or care to understand, the Africans needs?

During the same period of the immediate post-independence era, bolstered by the popularity of human capital theory the Western technical experts and the African leaders agreed on the argument of the predominance of "technological functionalism" amidst the real needs for high-level human resources in societies following decades of neglect and abject exploitative policies under colonial rule.

Thus, the African political elite and educational leaders embraced blind and unqualified human capital theory founded on Western conception of formal education, adopted a preference for European-style education which they declared the "priority of priorities."  Few leaders seriously questioned the appropriateness, relevance, and effectiveness of this form of education and the wisdom of its wholesale transfer to Africa at the request of the Africans to the delight of the Western powers securing their immortality and pressing quest for control in the context of the Cold War and the East v. West from of scramble of the world.

In this context of acquiring the skills by means of European educational traditions, models of development shaped by the colonial framework of external transfer of cultural reference, African educational needs were conceptualized in either-or terms assumed "realistic" framework whereby the European colonial legacy indisputably reigned supreme in hierarchical values and policies.

The emphasis on inherited systems since the 1950s constitutes part of the logical manifestation of this juxtaposition of the two systems in the same societies with the received system overpowering everything with a built-in engine for its reproduction.  Because of its origin and its instrumentality in colonial domination, European education could not ensure automatic ownership, critical reflection, and serious social endeavor related the African systems. Yet, post-colonial educational reform documents have routinely highlighted the issues of lack of relevance and ownership, even decades after independence.

## 2. The Concept and Practical Implications of Higher Knowledge

In spite of the economic, political, and health crises of unprecedented magnitude in African countries that emerged or worsened at the end of the 20th century, a critical reading of the history of Africa and the world leads to the conclusion of the potential of African wisdom with a template for a human-centered advancement of the world. This call for a necessary revisiting of ideas which were promoted several decades back, especially in the immediate post-colonial context that emulated the notion of the caring state and national projects, aimed at closing the widening social gaps that the colonial systems created or exacerbated. Kenneth Kaunda's idea of African humanism, various brands of African socialism from Modibo Kéita of Mali to the self-reliance of Julius Nyerere, consciencism of Kwame Nkrumah, to name these political thinkers, among the prominent political figures need to be revisited. From West to East and Central to Southern Africa, as articulated by the leaders and thinkers, there is a common cultural foundation around the idea of a communal ideal, which, in spite of practical shortcomings, does not hinder the perpetual quest for a better world looking up to this ideal as a moral compass.

Fundamental questions must continue to be asked in this effort. For instance: Where does Africa stand in her systematic use of her socio-cultural and historical assets? Why have there been skewed evaluations in which Africa's actual or perceived detrimental cultural traditions and shortcomings have been critically examined living out the empowering parts? Experience of bi-polarity and the uni-polar and multi-polar tendencies and tensions, extreme materialistic build-up and concentration of economic power on a global scale and its accompanying excessive greed can constitute a humbling meeting ground in the search for humanistic solutions. I have been of the view that in spite of, and perhaps because of,

globalization, there is a possibility for learning from overlooked African social systems of which higher knowledge is an important component worth investigating to at least explore its potential.

A phenomenon can be defined by what it is not as well as what it is. To provide some clarification about the notion of higher knowledge in this paper, what is not is first addressed to articulate the assumptions. Given African recent history and the nature of its contemporary official formal education system with its external roots and continued dependency links, and considering the reality of the globalization process and its impact on this education system, it is important to first locate the articulation of higher knowledge in the contemporary globalizing context. It is also important to recall some among the prominent features of global discourses on global dimensions of the globalization and its implications for the emphasis on "knowledge society" or "knowledge economy."

In his book entitled *Reclaiming Knowledge: Social Theory, Curriculum and Education Policy,* Johan Muller (2000:41) writes:

> What knowledge is of most worth for the millennial citizen? The question is frequently asked, but the answers are far from unequivocal. What is most striking about them is that they invariably fall into two mutually exclusive categories. The first category provides answers to the question in terms of *cultural* knowledge and skills …, *political* knowledge or *moral* knowledge and skills … The second category, growing increasingly vociferous, provides an answer in terms of skills and knowledge for *economic* productivity. … Both clearly salient to changes in the global world, the two citizenships are rarely, if ever, discussed together within a common framework.

Muller raises fundamental questions about "cognitive skills" that are assumed to constitute the tools for "cultural", "political" and "economic" "participation". However, his assumption, which represents the predominant view, is that knowledge is produced in the sphere of formal higher education as he inquires further: "Why is it then considered so unseemly to ask:

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what will the educated graduate *do* with what school or higher education has made available" (Muller:42).

Nelly Stromquist (2002:xiii) criticizes the assumptions that globalization will yield across-the-board benefits through "education—as advanced and sophisticated knowledge (heavily weighted in favor of science and technology) are deemed essential to the construction of the 'knowledge society'" (Stromquist 2002:xiii). The emphasis on "science and technology" blurs the distinction between technology as a tool for education and the content areas of education and downplays the importance of raising fundamental, critical and philosophical questions such as the nature of higher education, the social-focused quality of the knowledge acquired, knowledge for what kind of society, and for whose actual well-being. In addressing the question of the actual autonomy of universities to pursue the various dimensions of their mission, Stromquist (2002:103) points out that while universities have been treated as "independent communities", in reality "external forces wielding a substantial impact on the university are clearly linked to economic globalization" supported by "neoliberal economic ideologies." This issue of unilinear/one-way influence becomes even more critical in African countries and their institutions of higher learning and knowledge production as they have been, at their inception, products of colonial and neo-colonial powers, from the direct impact of formal colonial policies to their contemporary global proxies, especially the Bretton Woods institutions, namely the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Ali Mazrui (1992:96), for instance, has referred to a "new international cultural order" characterized by this structural inequality in which Africa is located at the margin of the global world and depends on the former colonial powers that remain the centers of decisions that consistently apply to African higher education institutions with disadvantaged conditions.

Indeed, in the context of globalization, international organizations and programs such as the World Bank through its interventionist Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS), and more recently the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), have emerged as global proxies of the old colonial powers with the same goal and even emboldened power to influence policies that define or shape higher education in African countries.

Faced with such relentless aggression, key constituencies of African universities, namely students and teaching staff, have resisted infringement on Africans' rights to higher education and autonomy in determining domestic policies of African states with actual domestic benefits for various social categories.

Higher knowledge is not specifically equivalent or synonymous of knowledge that derives from the classical higher education system as it was designed by European societies at a particular point in their historical development and currently reproduced in Africa. While the notion of knowledge and structural levels of its production and value are universal, the social context, pedagogies and actual value attached to its beneficiaries are social and, as such, they bear the marks of the historical moments of the culture that define them.

Thus, inevitably, the received conception of higher level of knowledge produced was heavily determined by the critical historical moment of the formation of what led to European nation-states in the making during the Middle ages with hitherto indelible print of the powerful social classes of the time: the Judeo-Christian Religious Congregations with the Jesuits and the Oratorians as self-appointed enlightened leaders paved the way.

An important aspect of my key arguments is to go beyond resistance within the parameters that have been designed by the same actors whose premises are to hold the command and unshared control of a global system that is essentially unequal, thrives on the reproduction

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and deepening of global gaps, and is mercilessly exploitative and, thus, cannot provide a realistic basis for the African countries to catch up. The African countries can better position themselves by offering what Nkrumah referred to as alternative world vision for peace and social development. It requires internal power that is acquired through higher knowledge and a recognition of shared existence. The current dominant social paradigm in Africa has a weak social development and peace base and further entrenching individualistic and exclusive values at the levels of the individual, the community and state[2].

Another aspect of my arguments is that beyond the search for solution to Africa's own predicaments, Africans can, and should, more vigorously engage in the promotion of such an alternative beyond its physical/state borders which, in reality, is related to global space, encompassing global location and taking into account Africa's recent and artificial national borders, past, recent and ongoing formation of Diaspora members and communities. Education, and more particularly universities constitute a channel of global cultural transfer. However, the premise of the current universities and institutions oh higher education is rooted in a different philosophy. There is a need for internally grounded search. Although there is no claim of pure African cultural and philosophical tradition, there is still an African specific foundation with potential potency.

With the consistent concern for the need to search for solutions, Mazrui (1975) proposed three strategies for development: domestication, diversification, and counter-penetration. The argument is for Africa to assert its power and authority to promote solutions for herself and the

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[2] The Bretton Woods institutions, for instance, have attacked the notion of caring state when they promoted their poverty-induced policies of Structural Adjustment Programs later euphemistically renamed reforms.

world from a position of strength, determining its comparative advantage, not by trying to imitate and catch up, which is a mirage. This is where the notion of higher knowledge comes in.

Higher knowledge is defined as the sum of collective wisdom acquired throughout history and enriched with new information and which serves as societal compass. The idea of higher knowledge reflects the development of human capabilities for the advancement of human development and social progress within socio-historical and socio-spatial contexts that include the human community and its global ecology as a whole. Higher knowledge does not imply hierarchy. The term higher is used to reflect the search for a grand ideal.

Higher knowledge is characterized by learning and research output that promotes the real prospect for the person as inevitably connected to a group and as essentially social and member of the global world community. It provides the enlightenment to treat others' rights with respect, and to also see the interconnectedness in the needs, rights, obligations and well-being of all the members. It frees the individuals and groups from the bad destructive effects of seemingly natural, but in fact artificially constructed, or simply imagined, barriers. These created barriers constitute the ground for building, maintaining, reproducing, and justifying an unequal world in which exploitation, greed, deceptive and violent methods, and powerful means of destruction and manipulation alienate with the purpose of accumulating material wealth with no reasonable or humanly healthy rationale.[3] Dimensions of the conception of higher knowledge are captured in Abdou Moumouni's *l'Éducation en Afrique* (1968:193):

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[3] In N'Dri Assié-Lumumba, "Growth, Poverty, and Resource Distribution" in Habib Sy (ed.) *Budget Transparency in West Africa*, Dakar: Aid Transparency, 2007, pp. 437- 472, I have argued that the three Gs, gems (which includes all resources from the soil—minerals and fuel), greed, and guns, are the political and economic factors that constitute the most absolute and tragic roadblock in the growth and development paths. In basic conventional economic terms, resources, be they natural, physical, financial, or human, are assets for economic endeavor that may lead to growth and, as the ultimate goal, to development.

Education should at the same time make the individual feel his (sic) solidarity with other men (sic) fully, in the first place with those who live in the society to which he belongs, whether they belong to his own generation or to earlier or later generations. More particularly, it should put within reach of the individual, at the price of his own personal effort, knowledge of the cultural and scientific wealth accumulated by humanity during the course of history, making him thus aware of the heritage that he must safeguard, enrich and transmit to future generations. In this way, education helps to enlarge in man the knowledge of man, nature and society. At the same time it develops respect and esteem for other men and other peoples, the essential basis for real and fruitful rapprochement and effective solidarity and for co-operation on a worldwide scale.

In spite of the external technological/military might that facilitated the Transatlantic enslavement and the imposition of colonial rule, the resistance, survival, and a daring will not disappear forever prevailed throughout the African world. The benefiting power and potential of the humanist vision and wisdom accumulated should not be discarded in front of sheer arrogance of continued technological use for the same goal of control, accumulation of destructive means with sheer military might and continued build-up, and purposeless materialism that originated in historical contexts with the use of violent means of subjugation to control material resources (Walter Rodney 1972). This vision cannot be emulated in a mutually-exclusive model. Rather, a new or a renewed humanist perspective can be emulated globally to re-energize the world and give hope to all.

In "African Wisdom and Modern Philosophy" M. A. Kissi (1970:179) stated:

The Akans of Ghana [and also Côte d'Ivoire] have a symbol representing wisdom and knowledge; attached to this symbol is the saying: "In the depth of wisdom abounds knowledg211e and thought". The truth expressed here may be taken to mean either that wisdom, knowledge and thought are one integrated fund of cognitive richness. Either way, to be wise, to attain wisdom demands thought and the effort to know. Or wisdom implies reflection.

The main point is that there is no assumption or pretense to have African recipes ready to be applied at both the local level (after lifting external forces of negative legacy) or at the global level to save humanity.  But rather, the idea is that through collective reflection, hard work, and inspiration, elements of guiding lights can be learned from and, if emulated, they can contribute to collective efforts to take the Global Village to another level of human possibilities since the invention and use of the gun and later the industrial revolution and acquisition of powerful technological means to accumulate material production of unprecedented magnitude and volume.

In his book *Essai d'analyse de l'éducation africaine* Boubou Hama (1968:376), wrote:

> Old Africa offers, especially, her communal life loaded with humanism which must not be rejected but rather engaged toward the modern development of our continent which should not refuse to take in any positive contribution that Africa can incorporate.  … This change will flush out, in the process, the old bottlenecks that are imbedded in our old society.

While conducting research on educational systems, in elementary schools, secondary schools, and universities, in different countries and social contexts [4] or when I am just visiting an educational unit, I love to ask young people some basic and simple questions (similar to the UNICEF Question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and the child replies, "I want to be alive"). I am always struck, but not surprised, and encouraged by how positive and similar the aspirations of the young people of various socio-economic backgrounds from across the globe are. That is to say that they share the same human dream of a world of equality of

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[4] For instance, in different secondary schools in Côte d'Ivoire  in 1979, while conducting a research on educational selection and social inequality (for my Ph. D. thesis) collecting data on ruralized schools such is Molobala in Mali for  research on the relationship between education and employment in 1985 while I was working in the Ministry of Education, gender and equality of educational opportunity in São Tomé and Príncipe in 1997 conducting a research for FAWE (Forum for African Women Educatonalists), in visiting elementary and secondary schools in Higashi-Hiroshima in Japan in 2003 for a better understanding of how Japanese, or  in research on community schools in Senegal focusing  Coli Senghor Pulaar in Guédiawaye and Kalasans in Thiaroye in 2006.

opportunities to unleash their potential. However, there are striking differences only when the young people are asked about their expectations. Indeed, when they objectively assess the actual opportunities or real barriers of various sources, their real worlds set them apart in terms of real possibilities for equality and self-realization toward a greater common good for a better world.

Higher knowledge is conceptualized to provide learning possibilities and use of learned thoughts and skills guided by a value of common collective well-being. It provides vision for a shared world of peace and justice. To a certain extent, the African notion of *Ubuntu* that applies to the members of extended family encompassing both ascriptive membership within relations of consanguinity and selected membership defined by affinity captures the essence of the concept of higher knowledge. Indeed, it encompasses wisdom for a collective ethos that is global. Like in the African extended family which considers the ancestors and future descendants as full members of the family with equal rights, the global family would include all the members of the human family with respect for, and connection to, the entire social and physical ecology. Like in the extended family, the production and consumption of the wealth will be determined by the sense of the permanent interconnectedness, generosity, and caring. The ideal of caring would guide a modern morally compassionate and practically enabling state.

## 3. Higher Education and Higher Knowledge: Towards Guided Convergence and Purposeful Fusion

Mudimbe (1988:1) in contrasting the Western and African modes of thinking and defining themselves in society wrote:

> Western philosophy accepts as its starting point the notion of
> unconstrained and uncontextualized "I" -that is, an "I" defined in relation
> to the self and its inner being, rather than in relation to others. The

African mode, however, seems more communal and emphasizes an "I" that is always connected to and in relationship with others.

In the general African ethos, "to be is necessarily to be in relation" to others and the "center is a human being who is free and at the same time highly dependent upon others, on the memory of the past, and on emphasizing the balance between nature and culture" Mudimbe (1988:1). This perception is different from the anthropocentric and individualistic dimensions of human beings as perceived by the dominant social paradigm. In the African ethos and practical life, this connection with others is essential. The connection transits through the common culture. The connection to others is not a mere juxtaposition of individuals living side by side, who only draw resources from the same cultural source and have the same reference. Rather, they experience their cultural expression together as a community.

Pieter Coetzee (1998:277-278) refers to the "typification of a communitarian morality … in terms of the idea of social meanings rather than in terms of the moral codes…" He further argues, in his analysis of "dialogical relation" as one of the key "social conditions which unite a community's social and moral identity" (Pieter Coetzee 1998:278) refers to "a community of mutuality" in which the

> members recognise that since the (personal) projects they pursue—through which they give meaning to their lives—are projects made available by a cultural structure, they have 'all other things being equal' a duty to sustain these structures. Insofar as the recognition of the need to preserve a cultural context is the prerequisite of a meaningful life, it derives from the social meaning of a socially embedded notion of obligation. … Moral differentiations are embedded in social meanings: primary obligations, as distinct from secondary obligations (which are owed only to strangers), rest on correlation between distributive patterns of social goods and filial relations which determine that distribution proceeds in accordance with what kin and kinship groups owe one another (loyalty, respect, honour, etc. (P. 279)

In the case of the Akans, for instance, as articulated in his article entitled "The Moral Foundation of an African culture," Kwasi Wiredu (1998:311) identifies a typology and continuum of "human sociality" and argues that

> in the consciousness of moral humankind there is a finely graduated continuum of the intensity … [and] which ranges, in an ascending order, from the austerely delimited social sympathies of rigorous individualism to the pervasive commitment social involvement characteristic of communalism. It is a commonplace of anthropological wisdom that African social organisation manifests the latter type of outlook. Akan society is eminently true to this typology … [and] of a type in which the greatest value is attached to communal belonging.

In this characterization, it is worth noting the idea of a continuum as opposed to a dichotomy or mutually exclusive sets. Thus, the criticism of essentialism that may be articulated against the idea of African cultural reference loses at least part of its legitimacy. Wiredu (1998) also stresses the notion of "the essential dependency of the human condition." This realization as sine qua non for global well-being requires a recognition of the need to widen the circle of those who are connected by crossing ethnic, national and regional boundaries towards an ultimate single circle on the world scale. This will open new possibilities in reaffirming and strengthening the powerful message of the collective ethos, *ubuntu*, thus removing the need to create or feed the roots of the "Other" on negative premise. The notion of Global Village is to be a guiding light for individual and collective action. Kenneth Kaunda articulated African humanism and "metaphysical principle" which according to his analysis reject "hypocrisy, greed, self-centredness, and the like."

Generally, these ideas have been implemented yet within the context of contemporary African states with their artificial borders that separate social cultural groups and pre-colonial political and administrative units and are in the process building new nations. Thus, there is legitimacy in skepticism expressed by policymakers and scholars (Paul A. Mwaipaya 1981).

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However, this African-centered philosophy and policy guide is not presented as a recipe that is ready to be used uniformly across the continent. Rather, the foundation may, or ought to, be used to conceptualize, design, and implement policies factoring in new social and unfolding realities. Indeed, the point is that there is a theoretical and cultural framework which, if applied, both in Africa and globally, can be deemed universally acceptable and beneficial.

Infusing into the globalization, that hitherto feeds on dependency, marginalization and "greed", a notion of either nurturing collective well-being or sow the seeds the real possibility of collective collapse appears crucial. As referred to earlier, these ideas have been strongly articulated by leaders such Nkrumah in his pursuit of global alliance that would provide an alternative theory and policy base for world peace.

Contemporary African education has suffered from two fundamental problems, out of which a multitude of others have emerged including the forced juxtaposition of the European and the African systems of education on a hierarchical basis with the European on the top. Individuals and groups are forced to resolve the tension between the two without the benefit of systematic, consistent, and sustained policy that attempts to create constructive dialogue between them. Another major problem is the lack of systematized and appropriated mechanisms to permanently inject new energies into the indigenous system as the foundation in using it with confidence and by unfreezing the Africa's empowering and positive cultural reference which was denied free agency for the purpose of justifying the Transatlantic Enslavement and colonial domination.

The task before the Africans is to conceive a new space where the creative power and scientific inquiry will simultaneously:

1) re-energize the lines between the contemporary realities and needs with the African repository of knowledge and ways of doing things;
2) appropriate the received knowledge, dissect it, and make a selective choice;

3) proceed with a fusion that entails linking past to present and that incorporates hitherto disparate elements to create a new cultural whole with a common reference; and
4) positioning themselves to provide a ground for solving world problems.

If, as Toni Blair stated, the African situation is truly accepted as a scar on humanity's conscience, then the first step toward a solution consists of the Africans being free to hold new positions of strength based on a collective ethos addressing, beside their own problems, those of the global community. It is not only Africa that needs help. The global system of savage and compulsive exploitation needs help too, to learn to see the good of collective well-being, rather than seeking always opportunities for further senseless exploitation and accumulation. The 2008/2009 economic and financial crises have revealed lifted the veil over just a corner of the anti-social face of greed-driven and jungle-law based the system.

In order to succeed, a serious study with a new method and perspective to fully identify the actual hindering factors and the assets is needed. An African philosophy of education, a redefinition of the content, and a new curriculum require immediate attention to clearly set the parameters for an education policy toward higher knowledge.

In "Indigenous African Education," Ndembwe Hillman Ngunangwa (1988:2) refers to a Tanzanian case where the country "introduced the subject of political education and development studies to create awareness and commitment to cooperative endeavor, and social goals of living and working together for the common good." Nyerere articulated in the specific case of Tanzania when he stated (Ndembwe Hillman Ngunangwa 1988:3):

> The education provided by Tanzania for the students of Tanzania must serve the purposes of Tanzania. It must encourage the growth of the socialist values we aspire to. It must encourage the development of a proud, independent, and free citizenry which relies upon itself for its own development, and which knows the advantages and problems of cooperation. It must ensure that the educated know themselves to be an

integral part of the nation and recognize the responsibility to give greater service for the greater opportunities they have had. ... Let our students be educated to be members and servants of the kind of just and egalitarian future to which the country aspires. (Nyerere 1968- 410–414).

This aspiration could be, and ought to be, that of citizenry of the Global Village.

**Conclusion**

The idea of higher knowledge from an African perspective is not to pursue the identification of a uniquely or strictly African system. Rather, the effort is to use Africa's cultural heritage to identify, given the particular historical juncture and challenges of the 21st Century, a contribution to the collective search for solutions to Africa's own and humanity's woes. The idea that Africans participate in the global production of knowledge from a position of strength in shaping the framework and guiding the world with their special contribution is timely. The integration of African cultural content as a sine qua non for the successfully and positively impacting the direction of the collective journey provided room for leadership role on the world scale. The ground for higher knowledge of global stature is to provide a socially recognizable contribution of Africans beyond the African continent toward this goal.

Higher knowledge is the effort of taming the spirit of achievable shared and sustainable collective well-being on the global scale. It is a conceptualization for envisioning a greater level of knowledge beyond sheer force.

The critical thinking and actions on the ground articulated and led by scholars and activists like Samir Amin (2008) in conjunction with popular movements of World Forum for Alternatives reflect the direction for human-centered futures.

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