

# THE SENSE OF « RECOURS A L'AUTHENTICITE » AND « RETOURS A L'AUTHENTICITE » AS APPROACHES OF DECOLONIZATION Models of Return to authenticity

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## Abstract

*This paper examines two approaches to decolonization by two prominent leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo. One of the leaders was a clergyman and the other a state's man. They may not have been conscious that their actions and attitudes were all processes of decolonization, but our interpretations of what motivated the events by which they left indelible marks and memories in the hearts of Congolese are evidence of their passion to make their compatriots fully independent. That is why this work interrogates the sense of « recours à l'authenticité » and « retours à l'authenticité » as approaches of decolonization. It proposes models of return to authenticity and reveals the inadequacies of choosing a single approach as a valuable way of returning to authenticity.*

**Keywords :** « L'authenticité », Decolonization, « Recours à l'authenticité », « Retours à l'authenticité », Zaïrianization,

## Introduction

There is a feeling that the coming of foreign explorers, colonial administrators, and missionaries disoriented the African man, his culture and traditional systems. The independence of many African States, the end of apartheid, and the end of slavery gave rise to a search for a development model in economics ; education, governance/politics, social life/organization of the society, including religious life. In line with this search for a model, this work proposes to examine two approaches: « recours à l'authenticité » and « retours à l'authenticité ». These two perspectives came into use with the idea of « zaïrianisation » associated with two personalities (President Mobutu and Joseph-Albert Cardinal Malula) in the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo. They embody a unique philosophy about the archetypal system of integral human development and means of decolonization.

However, the two characters differ in terms of style. « Recours à l'authenticité » and « retours à l'authenticité » are two modes of action which seem to be mutually exclusive. On the one hand, « recours à l'authenticité » could mean, in terms of governance, taking

what is important from traditional sources or other cultures in so far as they are good to improve the cultural lifestyle today. For example, the adoption of democracy as a system of government in Africa. However, critics say that it is an illusion to think that futile and empty imported systems like democracy can work in the African context. On the other hand, « retours à l'authenticité » is a total return to the ancient and traditional way and organization of society. It appears to cling to the past in an evolving society and recalls the "dark side of Africa's history". In this sense, it could mean the rejection of the Western system of constitutional democracy in Africa. Each perspective is considered an authentic way of decolonization and reinstating Africa to the noble state it once enjoyed. Instead of validating the claims of each approach (that is, « recours à l'authenticité » and « retours à l'authenticité »), the purpose of this paper consists in elucidating the sense proposed by President Mobutu and Malula with regards to return to authenticity. This research proceeds by explaining, first of all, the use of some terms that would help to understand why they were employed in the development of this work. Secondly, this work examines the contexts of the emergence of the question of return to authenticity. Thirdly, a critique and prospects of « recours à l'authenticité » or « retours à l'authenticité » are presented. Lastly, four models of return to authenticity are proposed to show the consequences of each choice.

### **The Use of Terms**

This work has chosen to retain the original phrases and terms such as « recours à l'authenticité », « retour à l'authenticité », « l'authenticité » in order not to lose the sense of their emergence. It is important to know that "the use of ideas and concepts in the ideological approach is not gratuitous, but refers to a universe that is sometimes fictitious, to the organization and mobilization of the masses. To break down a concept, an idea or a theme is to purify it, to free it from bad connotations, to retain only the appropriate meaning and to determine its relevance in the socio-cultural context." . Meanwhile, it is important to say that inasmuch as this first part attempts to explain a few expressions, concepts and terms, the meaning will be fully understood as this work develops. It suffices to know that:

**Decolonization** designates specific historical moments in the life of a people that are characterized by a desire for autonomy, self-affirmation, refusal of exaggerated conception, and use of anything associated with the colonial master. In Africa, it presupposes the feeling and imagination that the African in itself has no dignity and values and that whatever is imposed on Africans as the style of living, governance, and norms should be replaced. Decolonization can be described as an «irreversible delegitimization of any kind of political rule that is experienced as a relationship of subjugation to a power elite considered by a broad majority of the population as alien occupants» .

« **Recours à l'authenticité** » (recourse to authenticity) is associated with Malula. He was a clergyman and the Archbishop of the Diocese of Kinshasa between 1964- 1989. «

Recours à l'authenticité » simply "a return to traditional values (both cultural and religious) that are positive for our times" . It is recourse to traditional sources that could remedy a challenging situation. The intention is not a total reversal to the ancient but a selective approach of taking from what is considered old/ancient, and from what is noble from the ancestral practices. In this sense, « the philosophy of recourse to authenticity was presented as an ideology of otherness, the aim of which was to counter cultural xenophilia and allow ancestral cultural values to assert themselves » . The clergyman began the Africanization of Catholicism's way of worship through a program he called «authenticity».

« **Retour à l'authenticité** » (return to authenticity) is associated with President Mobutu Sese Seko. He was a State's man and the President of the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo from 1965-1986. « Retour à l'authenticité » means taking whole and entire everything from traditional sources. It was also an effort to create a national identity that could take precedence over the ideological imposition of the colonial master. If the "colonization of Africans was based on their removal from the category of the human » , the return to authenticity is a visible assertion of Africans of their indispensable place in the group of human beings. Briefly, it was a procedure used for decolonization in different aspects of the life of the African person.

« **L'authenticité** » is "the state or quality of being authentic, authoritative, or genuine". It is a claim that something is trustworthy and should be accepted. Authenticity seems to be the point of convergence between Malula and President Mobutu. Both are in support of a return to traditional sources as a means of decolonization and enriching the human person. However, they differ concerning what should be taken from traditional sources. On the one hand, Malula seemed to be influenced by his ecclesiastical studies and prompted by the Vatican II document like the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* n. 37-40 and *Gaudium et Spes* n. 53-58. On the other hand, President Mobutu appeared to be so much affected by his African traditional background and believed that a total return and going back to African culture became the focal point.

Nevertheless, this work has deliberately left out the word "African" while talking about traditional sources. This is because, as Jared Diamond suggests, "every modern society is a transition from traditional society". It does not necessarily have to be "African tradition". The return to tradition is founded on the claim that tradition addresses concrete situations of a given age, but what aspect of tradition should be taken – a part or the entire tradition?

**Tradition** in this work encompasses the whole idea of culture, religion, and traditional institutions. In Africa, for example, traditional institutions are governed by traditional rulers whose established empires and kingdoms sometimes exceed geo-political territories. As rulers of a community, they are called "fathers", custodians of the variegated culture. However, the importance of traditional institutions in Africa was greatly undermined with the advent of European administrators, industrialists, and missionaries who used some of them to accomplish the system of indirect rule and as catechists . Contrary to the belief that the independence of each African State would restore the noble image of traditional institutions and culture, military administrators used the guardians of African traditional

religion and culture "in the political administration of these newly independent states" . To this day, the once revered African traditional institution is being denigrated by the practice whereby the government now plays the functions of employer and paymaster of traditional rulers – and by extension, using them as "errand-boys" . Again, some traditional rulers today are influenced by capitalist tendencies and the chase of material wealth. The roles of traditional rulers as described above do not help the process of decolonization.

### **Context of the Emergence of the Approaches « Recours à l'Authenticité » and « Retour à l'Authenticité »**

The two major contexts of the emergence of the approaches under review are religious and political on the one hand, and then historical and nationalist on the other hand. In either of them, there are some kinds of external and internal forces serving as motives and agents of change. Although the word decolonization was not used, but the actions of the principal proponents of these approaches are so much revealing and express the desire to free the former Belgian colony from dependent "cultural imposition". Considering that the central point of argument is heavily founded on the need to return to cultural and ancestral values, it is, however, important to state that the context of the emergence of the phrase « recours à l'authenticité » and « retours à l'authenticité » will help in explaining the term "authenticity".

#### **Religious and Political context**

On the global level, the Church needs to evangelize the modern society. This implies a strategy that would "liberate" the people from sin. Hence, the call for the *Third General Assembly* in 1974 and Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi" of 8 December 1975. From within, the local Church in Africa and Zaïre, in particular, was driven by the passion to create "a new balance between fidelity to our cultural heritage and the desire to build a future that guarantees human advancement" . The political scene at the time of the emergence of « recours à l'authenticité » and « retours à l'authenticité » was characterized by the emergence of the people from political, economic and cultural domination and which called for absolute respect of the autonomy of the people after the declaration of independence.

Following the line of thought of Malula, it was a kind of revolution that implied total decolonization. This state of things reveals "the first dialectical moment of Africa's awareness of the problem of their autonomy" . This consciousness provoked the desire to renounce what seemed to have been imposed on Africans during the colonial period and to return to the ancestral way of life, values, and significant objects (sacred). Malula's effort in Africanizing the Roman liturgy could be interpreted as a substitution of object but it is more profound. It was probably a form of renunciation of some aspects of exotic religious culture to replace them with their African equivalent.

Considering the feelings Africans had namely, of the privation and de-evaluation of her

cultural and religious values during the period of colonialization, it would be normal to say that her independence introduced the breath of "authenticity" that should be accompanied by action. In the words of Malula (1997, p. 198): "Africa that wants to be itself, free from all forms of mental alienation... This obliges the Church in Africa to indigenize itself, to 'localize' itself to authentically bear witness to Jesus Christ". In other words, the process of indigenizing the Gospel message was characterized by decolonization. This development subtly gave way to an increased number of African Bishops and clerics on the continent.

If the works of Malula cannot be called decolonization (to use the modern interpretation of describing what he did), then it is a practical response to the call to make the Good News Incarnate – that is, to create the possibility for the people to receive the Divine message according to their pattern of living, life-situation, and belief. Concretely, Malula wanted to bring to fruition the words of Pope Paul VI at Kampala in 1969: Africans, you can, you must have an African Christianity. This is what we call the authenticity of local churches in Africa . For the mundane man, this was a decolonization, but for those who are knowledgeable on the operation of spiritual realities, this was a medium of bringing divine realities closer to the understanding of the ordinary man and woman.

The political context of the emergence of the terms « recours à l'authenticité » and « retours à l'authenticité » began in 1971 through the formation of the party 'Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution' (MPR). Actually, "MPR was not a party in the proper sense of the word,... the overall goal of the MPR was defined as the mobilization of the masses to educate them politically, inform them of government programs and policies" .

The professed doctrine of the MPR was 'authentic zairian nationalism and condemnation of regionalism and tribalism,' out of which emerged the official ideology of authenticity as spelled out in a 1971 brochures called "Objectif 80 Salongo". (...) It is being conscious of one's personality and one's own values and of being at home in one's own culture.

This above ideology was pushed further and that gave rise to radical changes such as:« the Democratic Republic of the Congo became the Republic of Zaïre. This followed several other geographical name changes". The capital which was formerly known as Leopoldville became Kinshasa. In May 1972, "the National Assembly passed a law requiring that personal names should be exclusively African". On a personal note, Mobutu took the name Sese Seko Kuru Ngbendu Wa Za Banga by removing his English name – Joseph-Désiré and ordered his compatriot to take ancestral names and be baptized again. However, this political ambition of the President with regards to the change of name went against the teaching of the Catholic Church namely, that a person who has been validly baptized cannot be baptized for a second time.

The entire political return to authenticity was worked out in what could be termed i) Zaïrianization = "an attempt to transfer control of economic resources from non-African

into African hands", ii) Nationalization = the taking over of zaïrianized enterprises by the State due to mismanagement, and iii) "Retrocession" = the giving back of 40 nationalized properties to the former foreign owners. Nevertheless, the confiscation of properties and enterprises which belonged to foreign nationals was a complete failure. This is because the desire to make up for what the colonial masters had taken from the country did not pay well. Besides, the nationalization policy was interpreted as a means of settling those who were close to the President and that policy did not contribute significantly to the development of the country. From the political perspective, decolonization robbed the indigenous people of Africa and even foreigners of valuables that could have been used to develop Africa.

The actualization of authenticity led to the abolition of Belgian terms such as 'commune' and 'burgomaster' and the introduction of *chefferies* (traditional kingdom), *secteurs* (heterogenous groups of small kingdoms). The analysis of the political emergence of « retour à l'authenticité » indicates that “decolonization as a constituting political event could hardly forgo the use of violence”. Like Cardinal Malula, Mobutu called this program "authenticity". Historically, the above objectives characterized the works and themes such as Négritude, consciencism, and ujamaa.

### **Historical and Nationalistic Context**

#### **a) The Philosophy of Négritude**

According to Odimegwu, "Négritude is one of the most popular philosophies of the African person and world". Aimé Césaire coined this word in his poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* in 1939. Négritude indicates the dignity or personhood of Black people. This term celebrates the endowment of the Black race. Négritude is therefore a movement of all black people aimed at fighting against the prejudice of the West both politically and culturally.

This philosophical thought was promoted by Aimé Césaire, Leon Damas, and Leopold Sedar Senghor. Having been exposed to the West, there is a tendency to imitate, take, and appropriate what is foreign to the detriment of ancestral values and neglect of tradition. In summary, this philosophical thought promoted sympathy among Africans, despite their cultural diversity. The motive was for Africans to look inward and consider themselves as people who share common pains, suffering, and anguish and who should valorize what is theirs. Unfortunately, the négritude took a shallow root in Nigeria, and it soon withered with the criticism of Wole Soyinka .

#### **b) The Philosophy of Consciencism**

Kwame Nkrumah is the proponent of this philosophical ideology. Nkrumah was conscious of the transformation taking place in Africa in the area of civilization, ethics, communalism, and their impacts on African traditional values and principles. This aroused in him the need to advocate for the reconstruction of traditional African values in light of the continuing scientific and technological advancement of mankind. It is a philosophical thought which affirms that Africans, irrespective of their diversity should look back at traditional values despite the rapid scientific progress and changes in the world.

#### **c) The Philosophy of Ujamaa**

Ujamaa is the Swahili word for "extended family". This is a philosophical thought developed by the former President of Tanzania, Julius Kambarage Nyerere. The

philosophy of ujamaa is founded on already existing social values and principles, such as communism. Based on those existing values and principles, Nyerere envisaged what could be termed "primary democracy", collective work, and ownership. Certainly, those traditional African values and principles are contrary to Western individualism.

The Ujamaa philosophical idea holds that the realization of man takes place within the family context. In other words, familyhood is the foundation of the realization of man and his auto-determination.

### **Critique/Prospects of « Recours à l'Authenticité » and « Retours à l'Authenticité »**

It is important to state that it is not easy to choose between « recours à l'authenticité » and « retours à l'authenticité ». This is because "traditional societies are far more diverse in many of their cultural practices than modern industrial societies". The call to return to authenticity may not be a rejection of everything that was introduced by the colonialists but rather an effort to Africanize, for instance: democracy, foreign religions, and other values. In other words, decoloniality in Africa should be understood as « a search for completeness through the recovery, restoration and recognition of the equal belonging of black people to the world ».

My critique of the political movements discussed in this work is based on the fact that ideologically, it is easy to apprehend the goal of négritude, consciencism, and Ujamaa. But concretely, the goals of each of them are only applicable to a small group. Each of these political movements which envisaged the whole of Africa was only applicable to a few African nations and even geographical regions in particular African States. In some African countries, the nationalist ideologies were reduced to tribal values. The limitation of these political movements in conceiving an authentic moral, political, religious, and socio-economic society makes me think of the prospects of holding on to either « recours à l'authenticité » or « retours à l'authenticité ».

To the objections that modern democracy is not the best form of governance in Africa and that modernity in all its sense (globalization) has destroyed African identity and values, or even that the introduction of the White man's religion has caused Africans to neglect her ancestral way of worship are therefore responsible for the deplorable state of the being of the African person, I wish to ask the following questions: what can African traditional and religious institutions offer the world that is radically changing? Can the aforementioned institutions guarantee the integral realization of the human person in today's world?

The motive which led us to examine this theme was to show that traditional societies "have preserved features of the way our ancestors lived for tens of thousands of years, until almost yesterday". For instance, mediation as a means of settling conflicts in traditional society, the philosophy of collective responsibility which increases the victim's chances of obtaining compensation, and many more. Further research could be done and propositions are welcomed on the modern equivalent of those traditional values.

The idea of « recours à l'authenticite » is beneficial in the following aspects: «It regulates

quarrels in such a way as to re-establish relationships and make those in relationship tolerable because everyone would be living together for the rest of their lives ». This was how African traditional institutions served their purpose in the past and recourse could be made to them to give the human being a dignified place in the world and before his Creator. In this sense, the effort of Malula could be interpreted as a sincere attempt to retrieve from ancestral traditions what could be adapted to the modern way of living in society.

But that was different with regards to « retours à l'authenticité » which suggested returning to ancestral customs. The implementation of the return to authenticity was a top priority for President Mobutu because he wanted to increase the consciousness of indigenous values. However, this was interpreted as his way of creating his brand of leadership which did not follow the autochthon's way of consultation to arrive at a consensus. It was brutal to ask people to change their dress code, Christian names, and even the legal tender with immediate effect. Even the intention to create an egalitarian society by insisting that *monsieur* and *madame* should be replaced with *citoyen* did not make any difference. This is because hierarchies were not abolished: there were Ministers, Governors, Legislators, etc. Political authorities wielded much power in the State; the President was also considered a dictator. African society always had a society that was hierarchical with *Igwe* (the name of the Igbo traditional ruler in Nigeria and members of his cabinet comprising *Ndichie*). Therefore, the change in nomenclature did not signify that all peoples were equal in African traditional society. Therefore, choosing new names for things or taking the equivalent meaning from the colonial master was not a true means of realizing decolonization.

Furthermore, the « recours à l'authenticité » implies that irrespective of the radical changes in the world today, which are mostly characterized by deviations of all kinds and even the perversion of morals, human beings still have a deep sense of morals, of what is good and noble and worthy of pursuit. Decolonization in this sense would mean the rejection of ideas and principles that oriented Africans and still influence their willingness to keep to ancestral norms. Considering the contest for superiority and supremacy between the values that were introduced by the colonialists and the traditional African ones, and the need to withdraw and be independent from external cultural, political, and religious control, decolonization could be an opportunity to re-affirm and assert the importance of what is inherited from ancestors.

From the above discussions, I subscribe to the guiding imperative proposed by Olarewaju for humanity: "The good must be pursued and the bad must be rejected". In other words, not every "culture" or "cultural value" can contribute positively to the development of human beings. In other words, total decolonization is not possible. In Africa, for example, the practice of killing twins among the Igbo people of Nigeria or the burial of young people alive during the internment of kings and queens should not be considered when talking about decolonization as « retours à l'authenticité ». This means that there is an obligation to learn from foreign cultures things and way of life that exalt human dignity. While this can change the attitude and pattern of living in human society it could be a step towards reducing criminality in any human society and even promote cohesion.

While modern man pursues development at an astronomic speed, there is a need to be conscious of the transition from traditional societies and observe what has remained persistent and unchanging in terms of human values. This is because there is something to learn from traditional sources, something that can rekindle the dignity of the human person and spark off processes of authentic human progress.

I recommend the recourse to some traditional norms and a constant evaluation of what is modern to preserve the dignity of human beings. This is because a complete return to ancient tradition inevitably suggests a regression of humanity. It behooves every society to examine what it could take from tradition to promote the fundamental principle of the human person. Considering the possible negative effects of the economic, technological, and scientific revolution concerning the description of man, it is understandable why « recours à l'authenticité » is the best option. This is because it recognizes man's effort to rise from the dehumanizing situation towards that which modern society is proposing. This point of view is not intended to exalt « recours à l'authenticité » over « retours à l'authenticité ». There is always something to gain or to lose by choosing one over the other.

#### **Models of Return to Authenticity**

I am presenting these models of return to authenticity to show that the choice of an approach for decolonization is not easy. There are implications of taking entirely from traditional sources or taking some parts from traditional sources.

**a) New wine, old wineskin:** Looking at today's democratic structure in Africa, it is evident that there is some kind of superimposition of what is new on the old. What is new is the democratic norm, principle and style of governance. What is old reflects the ancestral figures personified by traditional rulers such as Eze, Igwe, Oba, Sarki, etc The new govern according to the construction of modern states while the old ruled according to the division of empires and kingdoms. The introduction and adoption of modern styles of governance by the sovereign African States, especially after independence, seems like pouring new wine into an old wineskin. This is because, after many decades, the significant personalities used to administer empires and kingdoms operate within the modern system of governance.

**b) New wine, new wineskin:** This model does not advocate for a return to traditional sources. It is characterized by a conscious or unconscious eradication of traditions and customs and pretending to have no idea of them because they carry memories of a man who has not yet attained an accomplished state. The paradigm shift in modern science and the theories of knowledge speak little about the processes of transition from traditional societies to modern society; from traditional science and technology to modern science and technology. This state of things appears as if science and scientific development is a recent development that has no history.

However, concerning the above line of thought, it will be good to remember the words of Jomo Kenyatta which says: "It is important for a European teacher to realize that he is not pouring new wine into new bottles, but into very old bottles indeed". This means that modern scientific progress has its precursors in traditional societies. This awareness is very essential

to keep track of the evolution of human society and the development of man.

**c) Old wineskin, old wine:** This model proposes a complete reversal to the old. As the world tends towards becoming a global village, and human activities are structured in line with the spirit of globalization and modernization, this model theoretically rejects such development. It condemns new developments and human progress as deviations and distortions of the original course, meaning, or state of accomplishment. Its argument retards scientific progress in different areas such as medicine, technology, etc.

Conceptually, this model can be identified with people like Mobutu, Laurent Kabila, and many African nationalists and presidents. Concretely, this model reflects the style of living of the primitive people of Koma, in Adamawa State of Nigeria. The point of difference is that the Koma people do not advocate nor do they condemn the trend towards globalization or modernization, but the fact that they remain in their natural state of life and practices until recently signifies that the old wine is better in the old wineskin. If this is what Mobutu means by "retours à l'authenticité", then it may not be possible in the 21st century.

**d) Old wine into new wineskin:** In this model, a return could be likened to pouring old wine into new wineskin. This model could be identified with "retour à l'authenticité". It is a model that suggests that everything ancient should be embraced. However, it does not propose or is silent about abandoning the new. For instance, President Mobutu who suggested a complete return to the old did not recommend the restoration of ancient empires and kingdoms such as the Luba empire and the kingdom of Kongo. Besides, he was not ready to relinquish power to traditional rulers so that they could govern according to the ancestral ways. Instead, Mobutu tried to perpetuate himself as President of the Democratic Republic of Congo for over three decades like a monarch and at the same time was conducting elections through which he re-elected himself to political office according to the requirements of modern States.

This model begets multiple crises: personality, political, social, etc. It is eclectic in nature and may not be efficacious in governing a people so vast in landmass, and diverse in culture, tradition, and history. This could burst the wineskin and everything lost. This is because the old cannot accommodate what is new and what is new cannot contain the old.

## Conclusion

The process of "decolonization" was intended to lead to an authentic African model of economic, political, and religious development. One of its primary objectives was to affirm African values. The selective use of phrases, terms, and expressions in this work showed two approaches that were used in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The perspectives examined emerged almost simultaneously and were to be experimented on the same group of people at the same time. This makes it difficult to evaluate the result of the experimentation. However, some indices of success concerning « recours à l'authenticité » are evident in the Zairian liturgical celebration of the Holy Mass today. This is an aspect of the entire project of Africanization of the Liturgy.

The « retours à l'authenticité » which was enforced (through Zairianization, nationalization and retrocession) might not have been the best way to affirm Africa's authenticity. The limits of the historical and nationalistic contexts of the emergence of decolonization indicate that “decolonization as a constituting political event could hardly forgo the use of violence”. Considering the shortcomings of decolonization in the Democratic Republic of Congo, this work proposes that further research on this theme should focus on specific areas that could express forcefully African dignity and values.

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