

Museum 700% Total

Ramy, this is an exercise in close reading. What you do here is frequently impose your values & opinion on the text rather than investigate what a text yields & the strategies used to convey meaning

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ENGH 362-002

Professor Zakiyyah Jackson

Spirituality and Genius—Marks of the African's Culture

Hegel, in his *Race, History, and Imperialism*, has maintained that the African is an "Animal Man." This is so, he argues, because the African man worships himself and objects of nature (Eze 109). Hegel is living in a Christian environment and where he thinks that the African lacks the true knowledge about God, he may be reflecting on his own short sight while perusing his religion because of not searching its intricacies faithfully, or not being honest and faithful in pursuing its doctrines. He, also, likely identified with only the groups of Africans who are fighting against each other. This paper will first illustrate the African's spirituality and dispute the African's absolute bondage to nature and lack of self-conscious through reflecting on the testimony of indigenous Africans, like Achebe and Appiah, whose description of the African tradition, like the use of masks and staffs indicate the African's belief in intersessions and eternal life. It will also present the testimony of Western witnesses about Africa testifying to the African's genius and spirituality altogether. Lastly, it will show how Dubois, in contrast to Hegel, has realized his own weaknesses and is open to exposing them to change for the better, and he also acts in a humble manner wishing for his people to change as well and hoping that unity will envelope all the environment he is living in; and that it is us when we disobey the doctrine of our beliefs and forsake faithfulness in searching its intricacies who become like the "animal man."

Verse

Why testimony?

What do you mean by tradition

why the definite article?

what does this mean here?

(figure) Firstly, the masks testify to the African's spirituality because they are meant to bring back to life "the [spirits of the] ancestors [on whose image the mask has been created and who are coming] on a brief mission to the living" (Achebe, "Foreword" 3). The face mask (Ngil) is used in creation ceremonies and to mediate disputes as well as punishing the wrong-doers. The masks have not been created as "art for art's sake" but rather have spiritual meaning pertaining to the African's religion (Appiah 7). The African's strong belief in intersessions and in the coming back to life of those who have died shows their spirituality. They would not believe in the dead person's eternal life if they were not spiritual in their understanding.

(figure 2) The Staffs point also to the African's spirituality because the Africans carve them with geometric perfection (Appiah 6) that marks the level of perfection they want to attain through their relationship with God in whom they have strong faith and belief. This goes to the extent that if a gold piece had an extra piece it would be cut off and the gold weight remodeled (Appiah 5). "After all, [the gold]weight is [just that—a depiction of a higher symbolical meaning pertaining to God and the relationship with him]... if only [could anyone unravel the message that is being conveyed]" (Appiah 5). When Obika was getting introduced to his bride, he refrained from "touching [her] before they got married" (Achebe, *Arrow* 115). This exemplifies that they have a belief system that they are grounded on along with the setting of a spiritual paradigm, for which they are longing. The Congo's Staff finial depicts a man curved with such smooth texture and perfect geometric arrangement of a semicircular head and a smooth and long outfit (fig 2). This staff is used to resemble the Congo ruler's power and wealth. The Africans, likewise, take up such an "extreme elaborat[ion]" (Appiah 5) and attention to detail from their



grounded belief system in the perfection of God in whom they have faith and seek to please. When Christianity came to Umuaro, the missionary Goodcountry “told [the villagers] to kill the python[,]... [which they] address[ed] as Father” and take up the belief in Christianity (Achebe, *Arrow* 47).

(TED Talk) ← Secondly, the research of Western scientists who have studied Africa testifies to the African’s genius. Ron Eglash’s research in Africa has shown that Africans organize their villages in fractals, which provides them with highly arranged organizations, and therefore adds to their solidarity as a unified body. In the conclusion, he maintains that capitalism has had great disadvantages and that the West should look to Africa for how to set a sustainable rule of law—without any grudges, priority of the rich over the poor and increasing monopoly of large corporations as well as rise of prices. The African’s genius in forming fractals structures for government is also restated in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, as God Ulu “restores unity among the disputing tribes and chooses the “weakest among [the tribes to become a leader] so that none... would be too powerful” and the power would be clearly seen as that of God alone (15).

Thirdly, with the advent of African-Americans in whom the spirituality and the genius have been evident, the west has been able to testify to the African’s weight in epistemological discourse (Gikandi <sup>456</sup>) as well as their self-conscience through time. Dubois was faithful and sought knowledge earnestly through his medical career in the United States of America. He resolved to not look at himself through the Western lens because he believed this has hindered him and made him half-hearted in pursuing his career (3). In a down to earth manner, he also advises the West to take on the African’s humility (7). Hegel, on the other hand, did not look at his own weaknesses but had set himself at the top of the racial hierarchy. This exposes Hegel’s thought weakness: he is reflecting his own weaknesses in not pleasing God or doing what is confirming to his religion so he claims that others do not know God. Whereas Dubois was able to locate his own weakness and also point out in a humane sound that humaneness is needed in the West, Hegel was only able to criticize the African, overseeing his own weakness.

The Africans are spiritual because of their strong belief in intersessions, eternal life, and the power as well as the perfection of God and their having to attain that perfection through their relationship with Him. Initially the West had not been able to identify and relate to the African’s spirituality and genius because these art forms were not meant to be as art for art’s sake (Appiah 7). Rather, they had spiritual meanings. On the other hand, the African’s identity can be approached with constructivism, that is, to accept different interpretations based on the historical situation for which they account (Trouillot 13). Africans can be described, as such, as being fleshly on account of the fights they hailed against each other (Hegel 126; Achebe, *Arrow* 27). The Gods, however, never wished for these fights to happen. Rather they emanate only from the people’s weaknesses. This is evident from Ezeulu testimony that God Ulu’s interference had ended the fight between the six villages (Achebe, *Arrow* 15). So these fights were based on human weaknesses, just like in the West, here in the United States, and everywhere around the world people act against their belief system and the doctrines on which their belief-system is grounded. Such contentions between Africans gave the West impression that the African is a savage (Achebe, *Arrow* 56-57; Mudimbe 47). The West was involved in “direct rule... of the elite among the conquered population” and gaining European territory in Africa (Pierre 15; Mudimbe 46)—which all pertain to political and fleshly ambitions—rather than upholding the belief in Christianity as the sole purpose of their missions. The West deviated from having their

standards set on following the Christian doctrines alone—which mainly state to “love your neighbor as yourself” and “whoever takes with the sword, with the sword shall be taken”. Hegel likewise could be falling in terms of following the doctrines of his Christian faith, and he is thus able to see the weaknesses on the African culture alone, like their fighting, without seeing their spirituality exemplified in their cultural practices and strong faith. Dubois was able to spot his own weakness—that is double consciousness—and also to point out—in a down to earth manner—that the West needs to uphold the African’s humility (6). This goes on to say that it is not the people who are enclosed to themselves and worship objects of nature and themselves who are the “animal man,” but it is him or her who does not search their faith diligently, and having done that, does not follow his or her faith’s doctrines completely and honestly.

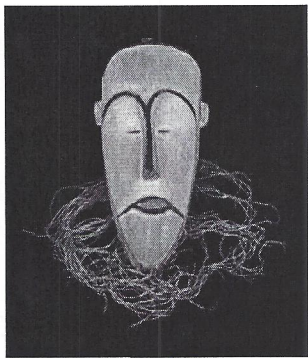


Figure 1 <sup>face</sup> MASK (Nigil)



Figure 2 staff. Finial



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This one is stronger than the other but you are still having a problem with the retention of argument to evidence. We will go over this in class.

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Thursday, October 22, 2015

Prejudging Africa

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* shows the Nigerian culture being faced with European colonialism. The Africans use their sense of community to preserve their culture and long-held tradition. On the other hand, G.W. Hegel's "Race, History, and Imperialism" maintains that the African is an animal man. He supports his view of the African's animality by saying that Africans are cannibalistic and have no love or respect for each other (133). He adds that they see no injustice in slavery and exhibit barbarous ferocity against Europeans (125). Moreover, he asserts that they have arbitrary will over God, that is acknowledge and rejected Him at will, do not invoke Him, and have no spiritual adoration (129). Lastly, he pinpoints that they are not capable of unity among themselves unless they are ruled by an autocrat (134). Achebe answers the controversial behaviors that Hegel holds against the African by proving that the African has a sense of time consciousness and community. This paper will first show that Achebe exposes the bloody battles in a new light, showing that they emanate from the Africans' prioritizing the tribal relationships as well as their respect and love between each other. Second he exposes slavery in a new light, showing that the youth age group and the chief priest are not content with it. Third, he exposes the African's giving up their Igbo religion and converting to a new God in a new light, showing how their religion is characterized with spirituality and is likened to Christianity.

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First, Achebe exposes the African's bloody battles in a new light, because they are not cannibalistic or lacking in respect for self or others as Hegel maintains. Neither do they lack love, which Hegel calls the "feeling of [oneself] in [someone else,]" (136) for each other because the reason of the fight in Achebe's novel is that the people of one tribe care about their tradition and unity. They cannot sit and see another tribe, which is part of their alliance, break that agreement. They doubt that that other tribe is forsaking their tradition and being tempted to ally with the west instead. Akukalia from Umunneora goes to visit his Uncle Uduezue in Okperi with main intention to assemble Okperi's occupants. He wants to understand from them why they associated with the white man? (Achebe, *Arrow* 17) However, the ensuing events, where Akukalia is killed and Umuchala villagers try to avenge his death by killing men from Okperi as well, are all starting by a misunderstanding: Akukalia's uncle cannot see the urgency in submitting to his request and beating the *ikolo* to gather the occupants on the sacred Eke market day. Also, Ebo, Uduezue's friend, sarcastically makes fun of Akukalia, calling him "castrated bull." Akukalia is impotent and is sensitive towards this matter (Achebe, *Arrow* 23). Therefore, this fight is utterly personal and is not indicating that the African's true identity is inclined to disrespect, cannibalism, or lack of love. But it is indicating, however, that the collection of six villages are stressing on unity, love, and mutual respect for one another; when doubting that their neighboring village is proving to violate their sense of unity and tradition, are sending messengers to inquire about it. Achebe's "Foreword: Igbo Art and Culture," indicates that African's art is the source of the African's energy and dynamism. They pass it along generations and gather around it (ix). So any threat to that tradition, will affect their art, which will greatly portend their sense of self and community. The tradition is tied to unity, respect, and love for each other and those are taken at high standards and cannot be compromised.



Second, Achebe shows the African in the instances of slavery in a new light, because the youth age group, Otakagu, are not satisfied with the injustice imposed on them while building the white man's road. They arrange with each other to take their oppressor, the white man, down by being obedient to him and resilient at the same time (Achebe, *Arrow* 85). If they protest, one youth wisely and rhetorically suggests to his companions, their parents will have to "take up the hoes and... work [for the white man] themselves" (85). The youth eventually resolve to take the white man down slowly, as if sipping a hot soup slowly from a bowl (85). They furthermore ask to receive wages for their effort in making the white man's new road, as has happened with their neighboring clans (86). The youth age group's collective assembly testifies against Hegel's opinion; they take a mature decision to oppose the slavery and colonialism facing them. They are not indifferent towards slavery and injustice, but rather "demonstrate... calculated foresight and calm intelligence" (Scott 85). The new road's construction is a central part of the plot. It is a major endeavor by which the colonizers abstract the riches of the country and transfer them to their own nation. By showing the Otakagu taking role in building the road, Achebe points out the African's resilience in being resistant, even to the last breath while their country is being exploited in front of them. If they were enclosed to themselves and cut off from the rest of the world, however, like Hegel points out, they would not be taking the decision to fight for their rights in such resilience, keeping up with the white man. Achebe points out the Otakagu's resilience through the dialogue between them: "we must [obey the white man and] give him no cause to say that we did this or failed to do that. For if we give him cause..., the... house that he has been seeking to [destroy] will have caught fire [by itself]" (86).

The chief priest, Ezeulu, resists also to be a chief for the west because he refuses to be an arrow for anyone except for his God Ulu (174). The confidence in the priest's tone and the significance of the chief's role in the west's strategy to indirectly rule Africa indicates how Achebe is shifting our minds. The African's discontent with slavery and injustice contrasts to Hegel's claims. Furthermore, he does not isolate from the rest of the world, or incline to barbarous ferocity towards the Europeans. Rather, he is faithful to his God, sense of community, and tradition. This makes him fight colonialism through opposing the indirect rule that threatens his tradition and tribal unity. The African's indirect opposition of colonialism is seen as romantic because the Africans vindicate their humanity by acting collectively to oppose "despotism and tyranny." (Scott 63-66; 86).

<sup>Hegel</sup> Third, Achebe serves to expose the African's frenzy during religions ceremonies and their converting of religion in a new light by showing how the Igbo religion is like the Old Testament while Christianity is like the New Testament; Africans eventually turn to Christianity. The African's belief in sacrificial redemption of sins draws the link between Igbo religion and Christianity. Ezeulu's frenzy during the Pumpkin Feast festival, running into the assembly who are throwing leaves at him serves to "cleanse them and all their kinsfolk... from all defilement... they spoke,... heard,... or stepped on with their foot" (Achebe, *Arrow* 66-75; ch. 7). The women's voice while imploring God to cleanse them and their kinsfolk marks their spiritual adoration to God. The Igbo people eventually find spirituality similar to that of the Igbo religion in Christianity. In a sense of community they decide to follow the Christian God. Therefore, contrary to Hegel's opinion, they are not giving up their God and taking up new religions because of their superficiality. Rather, they are more driven by a sense of community to pursue spirituality through Christianity.

Likewise, during the New Yam Feast, the people bring yams before harvesting their crop to exemplify their gratefulness for God Ulu (202). Without launching the New Yam Feast and thanking Ulu for his mercies, they are not going to gather their harvest to feed their families. The children have been threatened with death as a result of the chief priest's delay in announcing the New Yam Feast. The missionary Goodcountry takes this festival and converts it into a Christian ceremony. He welcomes everyone to bring their yam to the church as a sacrifice. This way the people convert to Christianity and forsake the Igbo religion. Indeed, they give up their



Igbo God but with looking at Christianity as the New Testament. They would not hold the crops in the land until some of their children are dying (217) unless they are relying on a higher power. Therefore, contrary to Hegel's claims, the Africans are faithful to God rather than having "arbitrary will over him" (Hegel 129). By making the African's converting to Christianity as a central part of the plot and ending his novel with it, Achebe pinpoints to this controversial topic of the Africans' spirituality challenged by their giving up their God. Achebe shows that the Africans do not simply give up their Igbo religion because Ulu is not fulfilling their desires. But rather Christianity is like the New Testament to them. They are still offering sacrifices and relying on God's power. However, in a collectivistic manner, they decide to join Christianity to save their children. So the conversion of Africans to Christianity is based on the "Africanization of Christianity" and the linking between the African heritage and experience and between Christianity (Mudimbe 58-59). Thus the African's soul longs for more spirituality through Christianity.

Hegel does not see the subtlety and sense of community between the Africans because, as he himself has indicated, the African's "character... is totally different from [his] own culture" (126). He takes the bloody battles, instances of slavery, and conversion of religion as support to his claim of the African's animality. Had he seen their oral and collectivistic culture, these instances would be appearing to him in a new light, indicating the African's sense of time consciousness. Jealousy, however, is common to both cultures. The "Love of [fame is] a universal human failing" (Achebe, *Arrow*, 108). For example, Mr. Goodcountry is jealous because the pope orders him to put away the notion of killing pythons. He writes a review to one of the magazines to indicate the success he has achieved in Africa to reinforce his position (215). Captain Wintterbottom is shown also worrying about his promotion and jealous that others are being promoted over him (55). Moreover, Clarke is shown worrying when he goes to visit the lieutenant-governor. The narrator describes the most frightening moment for Clarke as that when his name is not present on the list (34). This description contrasts with Ezeulu's behavior when Wintterbottom summons him to "ally with the administration," but he refuses the offer coldly. On the other hand, Nweke is jealous also of Ezeulu because the priesthood has been given to Ezeulu, and so he opposes him. He teases him, telling him to go with the white man, his "friend" (144). Achebe puts the comparison between the African and European character in a new light. Africans and Europeans, alike, become jealous when a high status is not given to them. But Africans are less concerned with reading and meditating, like Clarke who borrowed a book from Winterbottom to learn about African's tradition (32). Africans, on the other hand, are more inclined to oral culture: "a man does not speak a lie to his son," Ezeulu tells Nwafo (93). "We know more than you and want to impart to you our knowledge," says Akuebue to Edogo and Nwafo when Obika deems to be resistant to his father's advice (100). Obika does not want to give up his friendship with Ofeudo. As a result of their drinking, Obika goes late to work and gets whipped by the white man. As a result of Obika's digress, the whole clan becomes disturbed. The Africans, therefore, worry when a matter affects their whole clan, culture, or tradition. This explains why they go to speak with Okperi, assemble to oppose slavery, and change their religion. Hegel fails to see the African's oral and collectivistic culture and how much this means to the African. Therefore he characterizes the African as lacking time consciousness. Hegel's way of prejudging resonates with conflicts heard today going on in Africa, like burning of churches in Egypt. The question before prejudging any side would be, what is the background of the conflict? How are the cultural beliefs dictating the course of the events? Maybe the evidence one uses against one group may be an indication of the opposite had more knowledge been known about the people's cultural beliefs and traditions.

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