

The necessity of traditional values to the modern educational system, the case of the Kôngo people of the democratic republic of Congo

Abstract

No society has been developed without ensconcing the values imbedded in its tradition. One of the failures of the educational system of the Kôngo people of the Democratic republic of Congo is in not capitalizing on traditional educational values as an indispensable basis for a better development of Africans. At the core of this botch lies a seeming impossibility to seize the superior epistemological and religious scientific paradigm on which these values are anchored. Based on the demonstrated scientific nature of African traditional religion, on a *posteriori* nature of the epistemological bases of African traditional knowledge, and on the fact that a scientific religion shaped traditional Kôngo society including its values, this paper contends that the new educational system of the Kôngo people of the DRC, like for all south-Saharan ethnics, must integrate the values cherished in the traditional system. These values include the development of intuitive or revelatory faculties and an anthropological perception that seizes the human being in a double nature identifying him to his environment and society. This new approach will lead to a more efficient academic output due to the superior ability of intuition to break epistemological obstacles, and to the development of citizens anchored in the necessity of caring for their society and environment.

Keywords: developed, ensconcing, capitalizing, traditional, society, environment, epistemological

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Introduction

The Kôngo people comprise the descendants of the ethnic groups that inhabited the ancient Kingdom of Kôngo. A kingdom that spread over the areas partly occupied by nowadays Angola, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Gabon. The Kingdom of Kôngo should better be described as an empire, or a federal nation, that extended over the territories of Loango, Anzico (Teke), Matamba, and Ndongo.¹ In the DRC, the Kôngo people are found in the provinces of Kôngo-Central, Kwango, Kwilu, Kinshasa, as well as in Kasai-Occidental. This being the case, to speak of the modern educational system of these Kôngo people of DRC is to examine the Congolese system in which they evolve. Like all its institutions, the modern educational system of the DRC is a colonial inheritance. Its history is anchored in the colonial rule where, according to Silumpunisa, its development was first dictated by the need to meet “religious and military needs” (p. 176). This was later followed by the “necessity of training workers for the building of different stations” (p. 176) of the colony. The last phase of the development of this colonial educational system was impelled by the “need to have auxiliaries of the administration” (p. 176). In this last stage the Congolese people will witness a diversification in the training offered by the colonial schools. However, this colonial system was conceived in accordance with the depiction of the Blacks as inferior beings devoid of scientific values. Thus, this perception resulted in a *tabula rasa* where the traditional values cherished in the initiatory educational system that characterized traditional African societies were bedeviled.^{2,3} In this way, the educational system of the newly formed African state, the DRC, was cut from the old values that used to frame its societies and that are still cherished in many traditional settings. Such an educational system can only be at loggerhead with many aspects of the social order still sustained in traditional societies. Even though, as seen in the controversial inaugural discourse of Patrice E. Lumumba, the first Prime Minister, the new African authorities of DRC could not accept

the doctrine of the inferiority of the Blacks developed by the Western colonial rule, the intellectual community was thus far unable to demonstrate the scientific nature of the religion and the epistemology which underpin traditional social and educational systems. Therefore, despite the fact that no society can develop without ensconcing inherited traditional values, the modern educational system of DRC remains unable to wholly conciliate the African with the essential of these values. Thus, the Kôngo people are deprived of the educational principles bequeathed by their ancestors. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the scientific bases of traditional educational values and the necessity of their inclusion in the new Kôngo educational system. These traditional values include the development of intuitive or revelatory faculties and an anthropological perception where the human being is identified with his society and necessarily cares for his environment and society. We are doing this study by keeping in mind its possible application to other ethnics of Africa, continental or diasporan, *mutatis mutandis*. Otherwise, we at least hope that our study will incite other researchers to lean of the various educational system of Africa and try to bring in corrective solutions.

Methodology

According to Gilombe,⁴ “One of the most prominent features of the Black-African humanism is that it bathes completely in sacredness” (p. 88). In this context, the values in traditional Kôngo society are underpinned by religion. Therefore, to attain our purpose, we will resort to a methodology which will be based on the use of a cosmological argument to state the fundamental doctrines of Kôngo religion, Bukôngo. This will be a means of demonstrating the scientific import of this religion and the scientific nature of the values it dictates to society. Our rationale will thus be the following:

The parallel correlation established between the kemetic cosmological argument (KCA), as a systematic natural theology,

and the religion of ancient Egypt and Sumer evidences the scientific nature of the religion of these civilizations.

- a) A parallel correlation of religious doctrines can be established between ancient Egypt, Sumer and Kongo culture.
- b) It follows from this correlation that Bukongo is a scientific religion and so are the values imbedded in it.
- c) The southward migrations of south-Saharan ethnics from the confines of ancient Egypt and Sumer, coupled to the demonstrated theological unity of this ancient world, implies that the KCA depicts the original nature of African traditional religion (ATR) which has been preserved in Bukongo.
- d) Thanks to the KCA, the superior nature of posterior bases of African traditional knowledge (ATK) can be demonstrated.
- e) Thus, the development of intuition or revelatory potentials, which is the acme of traditional educational system and the conception of human being as identified to his society and necessarily caring for his environment are values that have solid scientific settings.
- f) Therefore, it is indispensable for the modern educational system of the Kongo people of DRC, as of all south-Saharan states and diasporan Blacks, to integrate these values because they lead to a more efficient scientific community and to a social system where people care about their society and environment.

The KCA and the scientific nature of Bukongo

As we said above, one of the bad legacy of the colonial system is the depiction of African values, including religion, as devilish superstitions.^{2,5} Speaking of religion, Steve Biko⁶ contended that "By some strange and twisted logic, [the Western missionaries] argued that theirs was a scientific religion and ours a superstition--- all this in spite of the biological discrepancy which is at the base of their religion".⁵ Fortunately, thanks to the KCA, the fallacy of this colonial doctrine can be today demonstrated. A cosmological argument is a demonstration of the existence of the first cause of this temporal universe by starting from the existence of our cosmos. However, the KCA differs from the various Western cosmological arguments developed since Plato because it extends to the essential doctrines of a religion; it constitutes a natural systematic theology. As developed thus far, it covers the following domains of theology: theology proper, the doctrine of the Word, anthropology, pneumatology, theodicy, cosmology, soteriology, etc.⁷ For the purpose of this paper, the KCA can be summarily introduced this way:

- 1) As an aggregate of individual entities, our universe has individuality.
- 2) According to the law of causality, there is a necessary cause which includes this universe, by hypothesis, and explains its individual nature.
- 3) The individual nature of this necessary cause implies the existence of other ones. These later are at least potentially causative.
- 4) A necessary entity exists which includes all the above relative necessary causes and is causative of their individual natures.
- 5) Since by hypothesis any universe is included in the consciousness of its creator, the last deduced necessary cause is the greatest possible being.

- 6) Being the ultimate cause, this greatest possible being is God, the Supreme Being. Thus, the Most-high is transcendent, absolutely infinite, immutable and indivisible, because any lesser nature invites a cause greater than the greatest possible being, which is impossible.
- 7) Therefore, as a manifestation of the nature of the indivisible Most-high, each relative necessary being expresses the completeness of God, completeness that we call the Word.
- 8) It follows that, due to the above doctrine of indivisibility, the Most-high, the Creator and the Word are inseparable in their substance, existence and activity.
- 9) This trinity, coupled to the absolute transcendence of the Most-high, implies that two principles directly and consciously participated in the creation of this universe: the Creator and the Word.
- 10) Since, the relative necessary beings taken around any one of them constitute a relative necessary being, this one manifests the Word. Thus, the Word, the true nature of heavenly beings, is the completeness of God in and around each relative necessary being.
- 11) The Most-high God is absolutely transcendent and includes all reality; any additional "reality" would deny this absolute nature. Therefore, the temporal universe is only an appearance of the celestial realm; thus, its limitation of reality can only be illusory, this is the case inasmuch as all reality is already included in God.

On the parallel correlation between the KCA and the religion of ancient Egypt and Sumer

A parallel correlation can be established between the KCA and the religion of ancient Egypt and Sumer. This sameness can be seen in the following:

1. Monotheism is still perceived by many scholars as the preserve of Western religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism).⁸ However, the existence of a Most-high God in Egypt, within the settings of hierarchical monotheism defined above through the KCA, is affirmed by the Egyptian Pyramid text of Unas which explicitly speaks of a "Sole Lord",⁹ while the Egyptian book of the dead implicitly alludes to him when it speaks of the creator Ra as Child of Nut (the heaven). In Sumer the Most-high was known as An.¹⁰
2. Being not "represented by any material, even symbolical, form",¹¹ the Most-high in Egypt was transcendent. Thus, prayers, as seen in the iconography, were addressed always to the Creator through lower divinities. In Sumer, the transcendence of An is seen in the fact that he "retreated" living power to his son Enlil¹² and by the fact that prayers were often addressed to Enlil.¹⁰
3. According to James,¹³ creation in Egypt, precisely in Memphite theology, was the work of the Creator (Atom) and the Word (Ptah). While in Sumer the Creator was Enkai aided by Enlil, the Word.¹⁰
4. As seen in figure 1, the iconography of ancient Egypt affirms that creation, represented by reeds in the body of Geb, happens in the consciousness of the Creator (represented by Geb) as in the celestial realm the relative necessary beings, each depicted as a star (Ra), appear in the consciousness of the Most-high represented as the body of Nut (the heaven); while the Word, represented by Shu, sustains in every Ra the consciousness of his divinity.



Figure 1 The Nut, Shu, and Geb scene.

Convergence of the KCA with Bukôngo

The divinities of Bukôngo are known thanks to a prayer of the great Kôngo prophet Simon Kimbangu.¹⁴ As the Table 1 indicates their convergence with the Egyptian theology of Memphis and with the theology of Sumer is obvious. Nzâmbi Ampûngu, the Most-high, is perceived in Kôngo tradition as being transcendent.^{15,16} The creator is Mbumba Lowa; like in Sumer, the third divinity is God the governor, called Mpina Nza.

Table 1 Comparative of the hierarchies of divinities

| KCA | Egypt (Memphis) | Sumer | Kongo |
|------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Most-high | Unnamed | An | Nzambi Ampungu |
| Creator | Atom | Enkai | Mbumba Lowa |
| The Word | Ptah , God of order | Enlil, the governor | Mpina Nza, the governor |
| Lower Gods | “dead” Gods | “dead” Gods | Kongo et al |

On the scientific validity of the KCA

The scientific validity of the KCA is dictated firstly by its deductive approach, an approach where “it is not possible for the premises all to be true while the conclusion is false”.¹⁷ Secondly, this scientific validity is confirmed by the mathematical justification of the cosmology that evolves from it as the simplest explanation of the dynamics of the universe (gravitation, rotation and translation) at the astronomic and subatomic levels, i.e., a “theory of everything”.¹⁸ The scientific nature of the KCA and its parallel correlation with the theologies of Memphis, Sumer and Kôngo imply the scientific nature of the religion of these civilizations. This scientificity provides a solid and universal nature to the values infused into the social system by this religion. As we will see later, in the field of Kôngo traditional education, two of these values are the development of intuitive or revelatory faculties and a concept of human being as necessarily caring for his society and environment.

The scientific bases of ATR

For a long time, Blacks have been seen as having not contributed to the development of science, a perception of things that Mabika¹⁹ labelled as the ideology of the “zero contribution” of Africans. As

Horton affirms, cited by Ngara⁵ a false dichotomy has been established between African and Western knowledge which distinguishes both paradigms through the following divide: “Intellectual versus emotional; rational versus mystical; reality-oriented versus fantasy-oriented; causally oriented versus supernaturally oriented; empirical versus non-empirical; abstract versus concrete; analytical versus non-analytical”.⁵ Thanks to the KCA, it can be demonstrated now that the main reasons that led to the wrong perception of African lore entertained in the West is the inability to provide the statement of the naturalized epistemology of the ATK, inability felt by Western and Western-trained philosophers and other scholars who studied African culture. This failure is justified by the fact that, due to the nature of the scientific lore of the West, the statement of the naturalized epistemology of Westerner’s science required the descriptive study of its textual discourses. Therefore, when it comes to ATK the difficulty of undertaking the descriptive study of its science resided in the fact that, outside of ancient Egypt and Ethiopia,²⁰ the texts stating this knowledge do not exist. However, recent studies done by the Institut des Sciences Animiques have demonstrated that, due to its different configuration from Western knowledge, for the statement of the naturalized epistemology of the ATK one must be focused on the descriptive study of the initiatory frames and their curriculums. Thus, undertaken this study reveals that the ATK is a scientific lore based on the following truths:

- 1) Reality is ultimately spiritual
- 2) True knowledge is included in the knowledge of God
- 3) Truth is revelation
- 4) Matter is only a limited perception of spiritual realities.²¹

It should be stressed that while the epistemological bases, the presuppositions, of Western science, the main of which is that reality is ultimately material, can never demonstrated, the bases of ATK can be stated a posteriori thanks to the KCA. As we have seen above, this cosmological argument shows that all reality is included in God, who is the sum total of the celestial realm. Thus, any true knowledge is included in knowledge of God, the All-in-all. Since, due to his absolute non-contingence, God does not deprive his manifestations of the Word, and thanks to trinity, truth is a revelation from God through the Word. It has been demonstrated also that the phenomena of this universe are only appearances of the celestial realities: thus, any true study describes divine reality. The apparent nature of phenomena was known of the Grecian philosopher Plato who certainly learned it from Egypt; this truth implies that matter is only limited perception of spiritual realities. This demonstration of the scientific nature of the foundations of ATK implies the existence of two approaches to science: the one advocated by the West and the African’s traditional science, an approach which was also used in ancient Egypt and Sumer. Thus, it is false to sustain that “Africa cannot talk of education in the true sense of the word but knowledge in its simple form”,³ or to opine that it had no intellectual content.²² The demonstration of the scientific nature of the ATR justifies the necessity felt by Mosweunyane of more research “to be done to unearth important knowledge that belong to Africa, which can be utilized in the economic, political and social advancement of the continent.”²³ This demonstration implies that the educational system of Kôngo people, like that of other south-Saharan ethnics and diasporan Blacks, should not be any more cornered to the model bequeathed by the colonial social system. Hence, it is time for the values that made the fame of the Africa of yester-time to inspire nowadays educational systems of the Blacks and be included in them.^{5,24}

Toward a new educational system for Kongo people of DRC

Speaking of the settings of the Westerner, Ballester²⁵ insists that, “his culture flourished for centuries in an environment where (reason) exercised its totalitarian influence.” Thus, about the mentality used in the West, this author adds: “The Western is in a pronounced manner, logical, rationalist, voluntarist, critical, intellectual... [He is inclined to the reason rather than to the soul].” This mental configuration of the Western resulted in an educational system which, according to the description of Ballester, “escapes more or less to accurate and precise explanation, which seemed shrouded in mystery draperies, aesthetic or religious intuition will immediately be put aside and labeled as belonging to the world [of the soul].”²⁵ This attitude of the educational system of the West vis-à-vis religious intuition is understandable as religion in the West is only a “system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith”.²⁶ Due to this nature of divine doctrines in the West, a clear divide finally settled between science and religion as perceived its materialistic civilization. According to the setting of the Westerner, two concepts are enconced in his educational system; these concepts were developed by two famous French scientists. Rabelais sustained the notion of a “well filled head” while Montaigne advocated the idea of a “well done head”. Being inherited from the colonial society, the educational system of DRC gravitates naturally around these two Western approaches of pedagogy. Contrary to the Western’s perception of the training of reason, which finally rejects any direct contribution (other than heuristic) of religion (seen as a mere belief) in the search for scientific truth, the essential doctrines of ATR, at least in its original configuration preserved in Bukongo, are deductive truths, i.e., a science. Moreover, the freedom of the soul was the biggest tenet of Egyptian epistemology. This freedom is also advocated in Kongo tradition, where it is affirmed through its corollary which is its immortality.¹⁵ It naturally follows that, contrary to the Western paradigm, the educational system of Kongo traditional society was first and foremost concerned with the abilities to be receptive to the revelations coming from higher planes of existence, with the ability to develop intuitive qualities.

Nature of reason in Kongo traditional educational system

As we have seen above, the concept of education in the West is contingent to the perception of reason as an activity of cerebral cortex.²⁷ The African perception of reason reaches beyond the limits dictated by this Western philosophical approach. The Kongo people conceive reason not as an activity of the cerebral cortex, but as the result of the activity of the soul. It is usual to hear a Kongo say, “A thought came to me”. This implies that reason is rather perceived by him as a revelatory activity, a series of direct and/or indirect revelations coming from higher planes. This perception of reason is also confirmed of the Yoruba of Nigeria by Abioje.²⁸ This revelatory perception of reason, coupled to the doctrine of the freedom of the soul, implies that the aim of the educational system, in the context of Kongo traditional society, is to liberate the soul from the shackles that the body constitutes. This liberation was obtained in initiatory societies through the purification of thought.²⁹ Therefore, an educational system that neglect the freedom of the soul, i.e., a pedagogical approach that fails to include incentives and approaches for the development for the intuitive or revelatory faculties of the Kongo people, works contrary to the direction indicated by their doctrine of reason, it works counter their deep and more scientific epistemological convictions.

Kongo initiatory system and the freedom of the soul

Thanks to the informal conversations we had with an initiate of Kimpasi, the Kongo school of divine mystery teachings, we can affirm that Kongo initiation involved three stages: death, resurrection in the beyond, and rebirth in this plane of existence. The first stage, death, is only the departure of the candidate from the community. Thus, this symbolical death marked the entrance into the world of the initiates. Death was immediately followed by the resurrection in the beyond, in the initiatory milieu, supposed to be at mpemba, the world of holy ancestors. After resurrection ensued a period of testing during which the candidate was encouraged to abandon the vile personality he had before his introduction into the world of the initiates. At the end of this second stage, the initiate, having a new individuality, received the secret teachings. He was supposed to be in contact with holy ancestors whose presence, during the imitation, was symbolized by the initiators. This third stage ends by the rebirth of the new initiate, or his return, into the community. The new initiate, like his predecessors, is now aware of the accompanying presence of the holy ancestors that will never fail him (as long as his acquired purity is preserved). As we will see it bellow, this accompanying presence of the nkukunyungu (illuminated ancestors) expresses the concept of the Word as the completeness of God around the human being and constitutes the highest justification of the saying “a thought came to me”.

The academic contribution of the freedom of the soul

History of science teaches us that the evolution of knowledge can be cumulative or revolutionary. While the first scheme is the usual one and implies peripheral changes in the scientific paradigm, the second scheme involves overcoming what Gaston Bachelard calls “epistemological obstacles” a process that result in a “spiritual revolution necessitated by scientific invention.”³⁰ That intuition, or revelatory faculties, is a powerful tool to vanquish epistemological obstacle is seen in the revolutionary discovery of the circular structure of benzene by Friedrich August Kekule thanks to a dream he had during a nap where he saw a snake biting his tail! This intuitive discovery brought the development of organic chemistry. This ability of intuition or revelatory faculties illustrates the fact that the integration of the incentives and approaches for the development of these faculties in the modern educational system of Kongo people will enhance their contribution in the development of science and will even enable them to bring new revolutionary discoveries as prophesized by the great prophet Simon Kimbangu.¹⁴

The unique contribution of Kongo anthropology to the educational system

According to Sall,³¹ “to meet the demand for quality, the revitalization of education in sub-Saharan Africa must take into consideration six major constraints” among which they include, “The design of indigenous programs in line with the local characteristics of the learners.” (p. 112). One of these “local characteristics that traditional values can make to the modern educational system of the Kongo people in DRC is in the domain of anthropology. As we have seen above, the KCA demonstrates that:

- a) The Word is the true identity of the relative necessary being.
- b) The Word is the completeness of God in and around the relative necessary being.

- c) The phenomena of the temporal realm are only appearances of celestial realities.
- d) It then follows that the muntu is only a limited manifestation of his celestial reality as a relative necessary being.
- e) Thanks to the KCA, it is thus established that the true nature of the muntu is the Word.
- f) Therefore, the double nature of the Word implies that the muntu is in reality the divinity which is in him, but also the divinity which surrounds him. Both dimensions are spiritually identical.

That the inner muntu is identical to the spiritual reality that surrounds him is the scientific demonstrable basis of the philosophy of the Ubuntu. Thus illuminated by the natural theology of Bukongo, the deductive and a posteriori ethics of Ubuntu calls for the muntu, the human being seen as a spiritual reality rather than corporeality,³² to care for his society and environment as he does for his inner being; the love for the last must be reflected in the care for the former. This anthropology diverges totally from the individualistic and materialistic perception of human being that the Western-tailored educational system tries to inculcate the Kongo people.³³ To incorporate this scientific, loving and environmental-friendly anthropological value in the modern educational system will result in a more cohesive society, a society where every human being cares about the environment in which he lives.

Conclusion

Starting from the conviction that no society has been developed without ensconcing the values imbedded in its tradition. We explained in this paper that one of the failures of the modern educational system of the Kongo people of the Democratic republic of Congo is its failure to capitalize on traditional educational values as an indispensable basis for a better development of Africans. We demonstrated that at the core of this botch lies a seeming impossibility for Western-minded scholars to seize the superior epistemological and religious scientific paradigm on which these values are anchored. Based on the demonstrated scientific nature of African traditional religion (whose original nature preserved in Kongo religion has been shown to be the continuity of the religion of ancient Egypt and Sumer), on a posteriori nature of the epistemological bases of African traditional knowledge, and on the fact that a scientific religion shaped traditional Kongo society including its values, this paper has established that the new educational system of the Kongo people of the DRC must integrate the values cherished in the traditional system. These values include the development of intuitive or revelatory faculties and an anthropological perception that seizes the human being in a double nature that identifies him to the divinity which abides in him as well as to the divinity that surrounds him; this last dimension implies the necessity of taking care of his society and environment. The inception of the quest for intuitive or revelatory faculties in the modern educational system of the Kongo people will result in a more efficient academic output due to the power of this value in breaking epistemological obstacles. While the inception of the superior Kongo traditional anthropology will result in the formation of new citizens in who will be imbedded the necessity of caring for society and environment. Since the Kongo religion has been demonstrated to be the continuity of the religion that characterized the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Sumer, a religion which is the original form of African traditional religion, this research has been undertaken by keeping in mind its possible application to other ethnics of Africa, and

to the Black of the diaspora, mutatis mutandis. Otherwise, we at least hope that the study thus done will incite other researchers to lean of the various modern educational systems of the Blacks and try to bring in indispensable corrective solutions.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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