

AFRICAN IMAGINATIONS ON FREEDOM

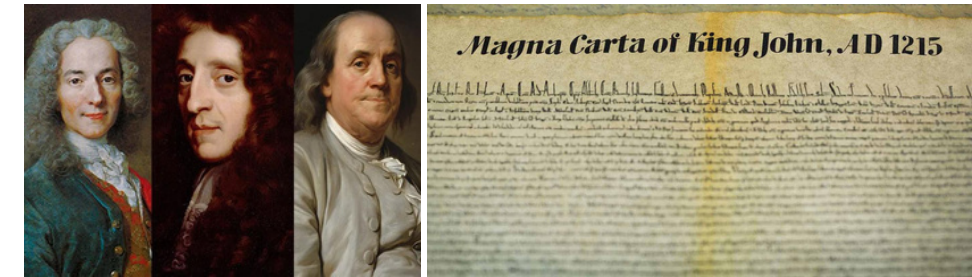
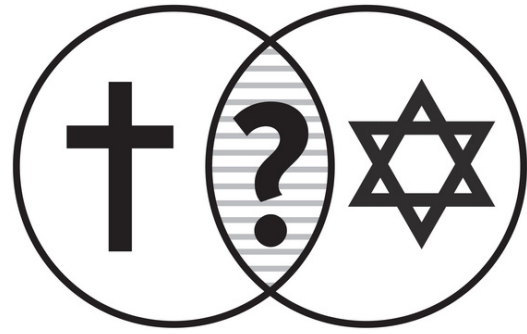


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Problem: Sources of Modern Conception of Freedom



Judeo-Christian canons

- gracefulness
- last day
- divine rights and spiritual morality

Greek philosophy

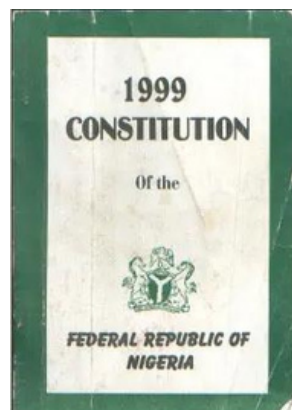
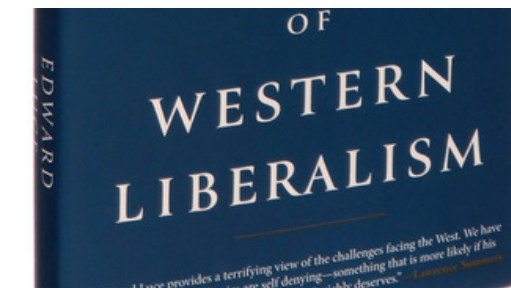
- virtue as practice- Aristotle
- harmony in the state
- goodness as wealth of the soul

Roman philosophy

- evil of tyranny- Ceaser
- monarch and the subjects the state- Cisero
- feeding the soul with pleasure, calm- Seneca

Enlightenment, Magna Carta

- religious tolerance- Locke
- reasoning over religion- Descartes
- common good, democracy- Rousseau
- subjectivity of the ruler-Magna Carta



SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ARE



Consequences of the Westernization of Freedom

1. Imposition of Western experiences and priorities as global agenda on freedom
2. Epistemic othering of Africa
3. Perpetuation of colonization in the application of justice
4. Demonization of contravening African laws and modes of performing of freedom

Themes in indigenous African conceptions of Freedom

1. Body agency
2. Property ownership
3. The individual is not at the center, but the collective (\neq communist)
4. Ubuntu — wanting for the self as wanted for others

Neglected African conceptions



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Tomb hieroglyphics (Ancient Egypt)

Ifá corpus (Yorùbá)

=

African cautionary imaginations/texts on freedom

1. Elaborate treatment of diverse categories of rights
2. Freedom is grounded on property, justice, and dignity of others, not only the self
3. Illustrates potent spiritual ramifications for contravening grounds listed in 2
4. Evocation of ancestor as freedom philosophers/guardians

Ancient Egypt

Property right | Justice | Dignity

Passage case of Harwa

For I am an excellent noble,
Equipped with his blessings,
One whose virtue the Two Lands know;
A refuge for the wretched,
A float for the drowning,
A ladder for him who is in the abyss.
One who speaks for the unhappy, unfortunate,
Who assists the Who helps the oppressed by his good deed;
The one honored by the King, Harwa.

The prince, count, honored by his lord, in favor with his lady;
kind of speech, sweet of words, well disposed to great and
small; who gives advice to the timid in trouble, when his
witnesses stand up to accuse.

...
Every mission on which their majesties sent me,
I accomplished it correctly,
And never told a lie about it.
I did not rob, I did no wrong,
I maligned no one before them.
I entered the Presence to resolve difficulties,
To assist the unfortunate.⁷

Kamose lamentation

“To what end do I know my (own) strength? One chief is in Avaris, another in Kush, and I sit (here) associated with an Asiatic and a Nubian! Each man has his slice in this Egypt and so the land is partitioned with me! None can pass through it as far as Memphis (although it is) Egyptian water! See he (even) has Hermopolis! No one can be at ease when they are milked by the taxes of the Asiatics [the Hyksos]. I shall grapple with him that I might crush his belly, (for) my desire is to rescue Egypt which the Asiatics have destroyed.”²⁵

Instructions of Ashoshenq

Do not rely on the property of another, saying, “I will live on it”;
acquire your own.

Do not rely on the property of an idiot.

Do not say “Here is my brother’s acre”; look to your own.

Every man acquires property; it is a wise man who knows how to
protect it.

Do not hand over your property to your younger brother and thereby
make him act as your elder brother.

He who steals from the property of another will not profit by it.

Do not cast glances at another’s property lest you become poor.

Do not trespass on the territory of another.

If you have reached your prime and gained much property let your
brothers be great with you.

Do not commit theft; you will be found out.

Passage case of Shisu, father of Petosiris

I have come here to the city of eternity,
Having done the good upon earth,
Having filled my heart (5) with god’s way,
From my youth until this day!
I lay down with his might in my heart,
I rose up doing his ka’ s wish;
I did justice, abhorred falsehood,
Knowing he lives by it (justice), is contented by it.
I was pure as his ka desires,
I joined not with him who ignores god’s might,
Relying on him who was loyal to him.
I seized no goods from any man,
I did no wrong to anyone,
All citizens praised god for me.
I did this remembering I would reach god after death,
Knowing the day of the lords of justice,
When they separate in judgment!
One praises god for him who loves god,
He will reach his tomb without grief.

Instructions of Ashoshenq (cont.)

The wealth of a town is a lord who does justice.

The wealth of a temple is the priest.

The wealth of a field is the time when it is worked.

The wealth of a storehouse is in stocking it.

The wealth of a treasury is in (being in) a single hand.

The wealth of property is a wise woman.

The wealth of a wise man is his speech.

The wealth of an army is its [leader].

The wealth of a town is not taking sides.

The wealth of a craftsman is his equipment.

Passage case of Wennefer

I was true-of-heart, impartial, trusted,

One who walked on the water of god.⁵

I was one who protected the weak from the strong,

So as to be a ferryboat for everyone.

I was a worthy noble who did the gods’ wish,

I was one gracious to his companions.

I was open-handed to the have-not,

My heart did not say, “Give me!”

I was one who loved justice,

Who hated wrongdoing, For I knew the god abhors it.

Ifá corpus (Yorùbá)

Just | Equity | Virtue | Right to property

Puró-puró kú, ó kú s'igbo iná
Şika-şika kú, ó kú s'òdan òòrùn.
Şòótó-şòótó kú, ó kú gbẹdemuke,
Ó fẹhinti àmù ilẹké [ilẹkẹ].

The liar dies, and dies in a forest of fire.
The wicked dies and dies on a sun-scorded savannah
But the righteous dies and dies peacefully,
Leaning back against a water jar decorated with jewels.'

Ogbè Ọsá

Ìwà, iwà l'a nńwá o, iwà.
B'á a nílẹ, tá à níwà,
Ilẹ onílẹ [onílẹ] ni.⁵¹

Virtue, virtue is what we are seeking, virtue.
If one owns a house, without being virtuous,
The house belongs to someone else. (translation is mine)

Ogbè Ọtúrá

Gba ohun iyè; dáníi.
Gbàa láiléwu.
Bí a bá bi ẹni,
K'á fí ohun nàà fún ọlọhun.
Ire ni àìgbá fún ara ẹni.⁶⁰

Accept a valuable thing; hold it.
Accept it without danger.
If one is asked,
One should give the thing to its owner.
Goodness is not keeping such for oneself.

Ọwórin Ọdí

Bí iwajú ikà bá dára,
Èyín [Èyìn] ikà kò ní sunwọ̀n.
A kii fi ikà di ẹrù kó gún gégé [gégé]...
Olódumarè ló ní ilẹ.
Olódumarè ló ní idájọ [idájọ].
Èsan ní ti Olódumarè.
Ọba [Oba] yòò san-án fún onikálukú
Gégé bí isẹ ọwọ wọn.⁴⁴

If the immediate future of the wicked is promising,
The eventuality of the wicked shall not be pleasant.
One does not build with wickedness for it to be balanced
Olódumarè is the owner of land.
Olódumarè is the master of judgement.
Retribution belongs to Olódumarè.
The King [Olódumarè?] shall reward each person,
In accordance with their deeds. (translation is mine)

Ogbè Iretẹ

Ọsán pọn wéréwéré;
Eni ó fín 'dan á rí 'dan.⁵³

The noon quickly brights up;
The one who looks for trouble shall see trouble. (Translation is mine)

Irosun Méji

È kúnlẹ' o; ẹ kúnlẹ f'óbìnrin, o. Bow!; Bow to the woman!
Obìnrin l'ó bí wa, It is the woman that gave birth to us,
K'áwa tó d'èniyàn. Before we become human.
Ogbón ayé t'óbìnrin ni. The wisdom of the world belongs to the woman.
È kúnlẹ f'óbìnrin. Bow to the woman.
Obìnrin l'ó bí wa, It is the woman that gave birth to us,
K'áwa tó d'èniyàn.⁷² Before we become human. (Translation is mine.)

Ọsá Méji

Ñjẹ s'òtító; ẹ ọ̀dodo.
Şoore; má şika.
Òtító a bọ̀nà tóóró.
Ọ̀sikà a bọ̀nà gbàràrà.
Şọ ọ̀tító; ẹ ọ̀dodo.
Şòdodo; sòtító.
Ènití sòtító ni imólé [imólẹ?] nńbè.

So, speak truth; do justice
Be kind and do not do evil.
Truth travels on a narrow path
But the wicked wander on a wide road.
Speak truth; do justice
Do iustice and sneak truth.

Ogbè Ọsá

If the eyes does not see things as taunting as being bounded by a rope
It cannot see things as beautiful as brass
Cast divination for Wobúwobú Oloko
Wobúwobú saw an expansive lake
But he had not an Ọgbún calabash
Gbónbúgbónbú on his own
He has an Ọgbún calabash
When they both arrived at the bank of Ọjámọ river
Wobúwobú had studied the lake.....10
He noticed the lake with its current moving up and down
Wobúwobú exclaimed excited
There are so many fishes in this lake!
Gbónbúgbónbú moved near him
He has a calabash handy
What are we going to do? They asked each other
'Let us drain it with this calabash' Gbónbúgbónbú said
They then drained the lake.
But on evacuating the water
They could only find a single fish to kill.....20
As soon as they got out of the swamp
They exploded into a fight
Gbónbúgbónbú said he owns the fish
Wobúwobú said he is the one to take away the fish
They continued to argue
Meanwhile Ọgún had gone on hunting spree
He was returning home
He met the two of them exchanging fisticuffs
P.....29
Wobúwobú said it is he that saw the expanse of water

Although I have no calabash
Gbónbúgbónbú said he was the one that has Ọgbún
The Ọgbún that gave them the advantage of scooping the river
'If we don't have Ọgbún'
'How would we have been able to drain the lake.'
Gbónbúgbónbú said?
'But if I did not see the lake'
'Can we fish in the air'? Countered Wobúwobú
'Do not fight again', Ọgún said, amused
'Close your eyes' he ordered
They obliged and closed their eyes.....40
He asked one to hold tightly the head of the fish
And the other to hold the tail
Ọgún brought out his sharp cutlass from its sheath
In a flash, he cut the fish into two equal halves
To him that held the head side
Another tail miraculously became attached to it
He that held the tail end also
A new head became attached to it
The fish became two
They said 'Ọgún dá ẹja sí méjì!.....50
They were dancing and rejoicing
They were praising their Babaláwos
Their Babaláwos was praising Ifá
They said it was as their Babaláwos said
If the eyes does not see things as taunting as being bounded by a rope
It cannot see things as beautiful as brass
Cast divination for he that has a deep lake but has no Ọgbún
Also cast divination for the man that has an Ọgbún but could not locate a fish pond
On the day they were going to drain one specific river
Life became easier for us.....60
Life actually became easier for us
It was when Ọgún divided the fish into two
That life became easier for us

Ọgúndá Méjì

Conclusion

1. Globalized freedom tenants are almost exclusively Western-made
2. African invocations/alternatives — virtually similar philosophical tropes on freedom, just like the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and Enlightenment sources
3. Justice, dignity, and virtue for others are strongly emphasized
4. In Africa, the ability to protect the freedom of others is tied to spiritual consciousness and the afterlife
5. There is a case to be made to recognize African sources as worthy contributors to our understanding of freedom

***Thank
you!***



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