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LEAD ARTICLE



Beyond postmodernism: a non-western perspective on identity

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critique of the Eurocentric nature of postmodernism and argues that it is necessary for non-Western peoples and cultures to go beyond postmodernism in their quest for their own identity in the globalization era. Non-Western ideas and ideals of personhood are important and valuable alternatives to the Western individualistic self-concept when it comes to reconsidering and reconceptualizing what it means to be fully human in the world. The article, therefore, aims to theorize the nature and dimensions of identity from a non-Western perspective. This article first contends that the conception of self in Eurocentric traditions of modernism and postmodernism are not apt to accurately and adequately capture selfhood in non-Western societies, which is predicated on radically different ontological and epistemological assumptions. By using a culture-as-living-tradition approach, then, the article delineates the Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) and Confucian modes of selfhood as an example of non-Western theorization of identity. More specifically, this article identifies five common dimensions of these African and Asian ways of being human: (1) collectivity, (2) morality, (3) sensitivity, (4) transformability and (5) inclusivity.

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The notion of self, or identity, is one of the most fundamental questions in all human cultures and societies. A person does not gain a sense of self alone. It is through a myriad of social relations grounded in concrete cultural particularities that a person develops a sense of what it means to be a human person.

The focus of identity research in the fields of intercultural communication and multicultural relations, nevertheless, was concentrated on the multi-dimensional individual identity as opposed to shared collective identity. It is mostly about how the individual person expresses, asserts, negotiates, or resists certain identity in a particular (inter)cultural environment. Dynamic and fluid multicultural identity is often considered as the most desirable stage of identity development (e.g. multicultural person [Adler, 1977], cultural marginality [Bennett, 1993], intercultural personhood [Kim, 2008], third space [Bhabha, interviewed by Rutherford, 1990], hybridity [Bhabha, 1994] and double-swing in-between-ness [Yoshikawa, 1987]).

Dynamic and fluid multicultural identity is essentially a person's mental capacity to detach himself or herself from social realities and transcend culturally rooted identities

(Sparrow 2014). The preference for this particular form of multicultural identity is based on the individualistic assumption that the autonomy of the self can be achieved through a process of separation from all 'constraining' social relations (i.e. freeing the self from any external forces, social/cultural structures or collective identities) (Hsu 1981, 1985; Yin 2006, 2009, 2014). Oftentimes, social claims are viewed as antithetical to individual desire and will.

Notwithstanding the fact that postmodernist theories have made significant strides in disrupting the notion of the static and sovereign self in Western traditions of thought,¹ they are premised on uniquely Western values and derived from the methodology of the very tradition that they are trying to deconstruct (Ho 1995). They still uphold the supremacy of the individual in their anti-essentialism thesis (Harootunian 1999) and further advance the dichotomy of personal autonomy vs. social claims. In their view, no collective identities are innocent because they were produced by cultural formations (Fraser 1997). The deconstructionist tenet and the extreme appropriation of difference in postmodernist theories make it impossible for non-Western people to use their own cultural traditions as cultural groundings for self-understanding and self-assertion because no cultural and collective identity is allowed other than in a very temporary and fluid 'strategic essentialism'. McQuail (2005) laments that non-Western reality has unfortunately been even more alienated philosophically by the postmodernist paradigm.

Miike (Asante and Miike 2013) pondered about the *raison d'être* of the intercultural communication field in his Afrocentric-Asiacentric dialogue with Asante:

Indeed, the sustainability of local community, let alone global society, through humanistic connection is the paradigmatic problematique of contemporary intercultural communication scholarship. We are so much into multicultural individuality, cosmopolitan mobility, social change, and material progress. We have rarely considered ecological issues in culture and communication. Whereas "intersectionalities" of individual identity, "intercultural personhood" through individuation and universalization, the "third space" through cultural hybridization, and creative "in-between-ness" of marginality may shed light on complex realities in which we all live, they can offer very few insights into actual community building and concrete collective solidarity. (10)

As the advancement of communication technology shrinks the world into a 'global village' and brings people from different cultures into more contact than ever before, it paradoxically highlights cultural differences and social disparities and heightens the fundamental need for human connection beyond technological connectivity. Whereas the global system has demonstrated its capability to touch every corner of the world through the relentless promotion of uniformity, it has witnessed the resurgence of cultural identities (grounded in ethnicity, gender, land, language, race and religion) as the most potent force of domestic and international affairs (M. Tehranian 2014).

It is impossible for us to ignore cultural identities or primordial ties as they define our current living conditions and give meanings to our daily existence and thus make us concrete cultural human beings. Nor is it reasonable and desirable to erase our cultural differences and abandon our cultural identities in order to become global citizens, or in Miike's (2014) words, 'to create a monolingual and monocultural world wherein concrete differences are effaced, and wherein every global citizen is accepted as an abstract individual "just like us"' (114). It is more fruitful to seek for an approach that allows us to theorize cultural identities in their full complexity as rooted as well as open, indigenous as well as

hybrid, uniting as well as dividing and oppressing as well as liberating. As Majid Tehranian (1995) eloquently argued:

what the new age requires is not an escapist strategy to return to one's own cultural fortress but a confrontation with all of the other global cultural flows and an earnest search for finding in one's traditions of civility the responses that are at once ecumenical in spirit and indigenous in roots. (189)

The self in non-Western societies is predicated on ontological and epistemological assumptions radically different from individualism in Western traditions of thought including postmodernism. It is necessary for non-Western peoples and cultures to go beyond Western paradigms and embrace their own cultural traditions in their quest for self-understanding, self-definition and self-assertion (Karenga 2003, 2006).

The present article aims to expand the range of the conception of self by exploring the possibility for theorizing selfhood from a non-Western perspective as important and valuable alternative to the Western individualistic idea of self when it comes to understanding what it means to be human in the world. More specifically, the article (1) offers a critique of Western modernist and postmodernist conception of self; (2) expounds on a non-Western perspective on identity through embracing a culture-as-living-tradition approach; and (3) analyzes the Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) and Confucian modes of selfhood as an example of the line of inquiry into non-Western theorization of identity.

Through a critical examination of Western modernist and postmodernist notions of self, the present project challenges Eurocentrism and Western domination in the studies of communication and discourse (Shi-xu 2013).² The study of non-Western self-concepts also offers new insights into the importance and necessity of communication and discourse in the realization of the self.³ Finally, this comparative analysis of non-Western cultures illustrates the possibility for non-Western cultures to engage in exchange and dialogue with one another in order to articulate commonalities and form solidarities in their shared struggles over identity and self-determination.

Western individualistic self

The notion of self has long been conceived as the autonomous, sovereign and sole locus or origin of experience, emotion and action in Western cultures (Dissanayake 2013). This concept of self is based on the Aristotelian ontology and logic that assumes that individuals, who are distinct from one another, come prior to social relations (Maruyama 1984; Sardar 1999).

The autonomy of the individual is, thus, at the very center of Western philosophical conceptualization and popular consciousness of personal identity. Solomon (1994) maintains that Western philosophy has placed 'great importance and perhaps impossible weight on the notion of individual autonomy' (12). The famous dictum of Descartes, 'I think, therefore I am', is often credited for laying the foundation for the inquiry into the self or subject as the central locus of experience (the site of rationality, imagination and consciousness) (Dissanayake 2013). Western philosophers, such as Immanuel Descartes, John Locke, David Hume and René Kant insist, albeit in different ways, that it is only in personal thought and experience that genuine knowledge could be found (Solomon 1994).

In this Western tradition, the notion of self is often conceptualized as a static or immutable internal mental structure of 'self-as-subject' that makes decisions and controls external behaviors (Johnson 1985). The immutable or static conception of self is exemplified in Kant who insists that 'any philosophically-acceptable *self* must be the *transcendental subject* of any possible experience' (Toulmin 1977, 302). In the Kantian view, the self is the inert core or entity that ties all the individual's senses and perceptions over time (Johnson 1985). That is, regardless of constant changes in the environment, the self remains the same. The idea of self-as-subject emphasizes the individual's active experience and willful control over social relationships and environments through making different choices (Johnson 1985). Therefore, the individual in Western cultures often expects his or her environment to be sensitive to him or her (Hsu 1981). The incongruity or inconsistency between the internal state (one's heart, true feelings) and external objects or practices (social relations) can cause deep anxiety within the individual.

Social relations, in effect, are considered in opposition to individual autonomy. They are seen as external forces that would constrict the independence of the experiencing self and the active mind. Consequently, Western philosophers, represented by Descartes, Locke, Hume and Kant, were anxious to defend the autonomy of the individual against any authorities (social relations and formations) (Solomon 1994). They aver that the realization of the unique and independent self can be achieved through a process of separation from all 'constraining' social relations (Hsu 1981, 1985; Yin 2006, 2011, 2017).

The view of the self as stable or persistent inner structure that controls outer behaviors across diverse situations has become the foundation of psychological literature and the basis of popular consciousness and individual self-expressions in Western cultures (Johnson 1985). However, the Cartesian model of introspective self-identification is not shared by all Western thinkers and theorists. Some postulate that the self is the object (product) of experience as opposed to the subject of experience.

Hegel, for instance, recognizes that self-consciousness involves other human beings and is mediated through social value systems (Solomon 1994). Symbolic interactionists and phenomenologists, such as George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, John Dewey, Harold Garfinkel and Erving Goffman, and critics of orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis, such as Carl Jung, advocate the self as a product of interactions with other human beings and the environment (DeVos 1985). Clifford Geertz (1973), a cultural anthropologist, underscores culture as the constitutive force of the self.

Critical scholars have also accepted the assumption of the self as a product, but they lay great stress on the contradictions of the social and/or value system. Soren Kierkegaard was the first one to question the Hegelian 'vision of the harmony of the value spheres and of the modalities of self-expression that resonate with them' (D. L. Hall 1994, 222). Karl Marx's materialism inverts idealism in Hegel's work by attributing the production of identity to the economic base. Marxist theory of ideology associates the notions of consciousness and identity with social classes. It focuses on the dominant class's production of their ideas as ruling ideology and dominated class's acceptance of the ruling ideology as their own ideas (i.e. 'false consciousness').

Neo-Marxist scholars, such as Adorno (1991), Horkheimer and Adorno (1979) and Marcuse (1991) of the Frankfurt School, continue the critique of the production of 'false' identities for the public (e.g. the mass or the one-dimensional identity) by the dominant group in capitalist societies. The Frankfurt school, however, locates the production of

identity in the cultural sphere (the culture industry), as opposed to the superstructure in classical Marxist theories. British Cultural Studies scholars, such as Raymond Williams (1976) and Stuart Hall (2007a, 2007b) further emphasize the significance of cultural practices in shaping various identities (dominant, negotiated, or oppositional identities).

Postmodernism emerged as a challenge of the dominant Western view of the fixed, coherent and volitional self. It recognizes the fragmented, incoherent and pluralistic nature of the self. The paradigm of self-understanding has changed in postmodernism from the modernist ego-based, substance view to that of the self as process (D. L. Hall 1994). The postmodernist self, or rather subjectivity, is constantly produced and reproduced by the incessant interplay of discourse and language (Dissanayake 2013).

Postmodernism offers valuable critique of the excesses of suffocating modernity, instrumental rationality and authoritarian traditionalism. However, it is not a complete rupture from modernity as postmodernists claim. While postmodernism forgoes reason, pattern and structure in modernity for the temporal and processive experience of the self, it is rooted in uniquely Western values and grounded on the methodology from the very tradition that it strives to dismantle (Ho 1995; Sardar 1998). Consequently, granted that postmodernism has thoroughly deconstructed the Western notion of the sovereign and volitional self, it is unable to envisage any new epistemology capable of authorizing a methodology devoted to elucidating alternative forms of self-understanding.

The Eurocentric nature of postmodernism

Although it rose as a radical challenge to modernity, postmodernism is ironically as Eurocentric as modernity itself. Even with its privilege of the cultural in theorizing, postmodernism has limited the conception of culture strictly to Western cultures. Just like modernity, postmodernism is essentially a form of universalism that projects European and European-American cultures as the normal and universal, while all other cultures are deemed 'archaic' or 'backward' (Slemon 1991). Also like modernity, postmodernism has managed to fix a standard of measurement within which actions and events are subject to a single putative epistemological and methodological system (see Asante 2008, 2014; Asante & Miike 2013; Miike 2004, 2007, 2010a, for detailed analyses of Eurocentrism in cross-cultural and intercultural research). Sardar (1998) forcefully argues that postmodernism, in effect, sustains and perpetuates the Eurocentric hegemony of modernity:

For despite its claims to be pluralistic, postmodernism is ravenously monolithic. Its surface pluralism masks a monolithic matrix at its core. Its language, logic, analytical grammar, are intrinsically Eurocentric and shameless cannibalistic of Others. Postmodernism does not mark a break, discontinuity from oppressive modernity; rather, it represents an underlying continuity of thought and actions about Other cultures, which formed the bedrock of colonialism, was the foundation of modernity and is now housed in postmodernism. (20)

Epitome of individualism

Individualism is the underlying assumption and defining characteristic of Western philosophy and modernity. In the Western framework, the individual is constantly at war with the society (community). The individual's main concern is to keep his or her identity intact by separating from all others and preserving boundaries at all costs (Hsu

1985; Johnson 1985; Sardar 1998). Solomon (1994) raised the compelling question: 'To what extent, however, is this much celebrated angst [identity crisis] the product of a uniquely Western view, the painful consequence of an excessive emphasis on individual autonomy' (12)?

Postmodernism set off to eliminate the notion of the sovereign self in Western modern thought. Nevertheless, it is nurtured by individualism as the older paradigm it has held up for derision. Following the Marxist tradition, postmodernism underlines the contradiction and irreconcilability between social systems and individual experiences and expressions. The postmodernist anti-essentialism tenet and perpetual search for difference have further reinforced the individual-social binary. Whereas Marxist theory assumes false consciousness is manufactured for the dominated class, postmodernist theories aver that all forms of identity or subjectivity are produced (and/or imposed) by institutions, or in Foucault's (1991) term, 'regimes' (e.g. family, culture, community, government, technology, etc.).

Postmodernism furthermore takes individualism to a new level. Rather than merely relying on preserving boundaries as in modern Western philosophy, postmodernism offers seemingly infinite options for individuals to distinguish and separate themselves from others: individuals can forever acquire new identities and create new universes of reality to satisfy their insatiable quest for meaning, identity and belonging. Yet the postmodernist endeavor of constantly creating and playing with new identities is often driven by the individual's desire and pursuit for authenticity (i.e. the internal feeling of the individual), which paradoxically restores the very idea of the sovereign subject that postmodernism strives to eradicate.

The postmodernist aspiration for ever-changing identities seems to appeal more to racially, culturally, socially and economically privileged individuals in Western societies (e.g. identity politics among academics in the U.S.) (K.K. Tehranian 1999). Indeed, the opportunity for freely reinventing identities was not available to the underprivileged people in the West and the vast majority in the non-West. For example, African Americans would not be able to easily claim a racially neutral identity in U.S. society.

The ultimate emphasis on individual autonomy and the individual-social binary in Western philosophy (both modern and postmodern) have made it impossible to conceptualize a self-concept that is sensitive to social solidarity, communal good, equity and justice. Chantal Mouffe (2000) asseverates that individualism indeed poses the eternal paradox of the West: because the doctrine of individual autonomy does not have much concern for communal participation, it thus negates the principles of equity and justice.

The assumption that the individual is prior to society is unique to Western cultures (Bellah et al. 1985, Maruyama 1984). Rooted in individualism, Western identity theories (postmodernist theories included) do not allow an accurate and adequate understanding of the self in non-Western cultures where the person is thought to be born into a network of human relationships (Cheng 1998; Karenga 1999; Maruyama 1984; Sardar 1998; L.T. Smith 2012, Solomon 1994; Tu 1985; Yin 2017). To the Western individual, fragmented and incoherent identities, the prized notion in postmodernism, may mean newly found freedom or enjoyment. But to the vast majority of non-Western people, they are the painful aftermath of colonialism, something they badly need to get away from (Asante 2005; Fanon 1990, 2008; Smith 2012).

A world of discourse

What marks postmodernism different from not only modernity but also other critical theories is its exclusive emphasis on language and discourse. Postmodernism represents a shift from Marxist materialism to the discursive in the critical tradition. Neo-Marxist and British Cultural Studies scholars trace the production of identity and ideology to social structures as well as cultural practices (e.g. language use and media representation). Postmodernist theorists, such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, assert that social practices are discursive since no social practice can take place outside the domain of meaning (semiotics) (S. Hall 1985). Thus, postmodernist theories have dissolved the social entirely into the cultural (Grossberg 1984). In postmodernism, the self, or more precisely subjectivity, is seen as constantly produced and reproduced by the incessant interplay of discourse and language (Dissanayake 2013).

The postmodernist contention that all reality is socially constructed promotes a world of simulacrum or representation, which renders unjust, unequal and inhuman social conditions as merely represented, thus unreal (Sardar 1998). Consequently, the pain, suffering and even death of oppressed and colonized people are trivialized and desensitized.

The strategies offered by postmodernist theorists to remedy social inequality are deconstruction, irony, ridicule and parody. Deconstruction certainly can shed light on how specific oppressive relationships or subordinated identities are produced as normal and inscribed into the public consciousness. However, deconstruction does not necessarily help to change the actual suppressive social structure, which is perpetuating and perpetuated by those oppressive ideas and ideologies, and to alleviate concrete detrimental consequences of injustice and discrimination. According to Richard Rorty (1989), a principal postmodernist theorist, the oppressed can overcome their suffering through taking comfort, seeking solace, or even rejoicing in the endless re-description of irony. Nonetheless, irony, ridicule and parody do not offer any real possibilities of resisting oppressions other than reinventing a new reality or identity in discourse.

The postmodernist fixation on language and imagery also abandoned all sense of historical continuity and memory in favor of the present and the immediate only. While modernity relegated cultural tradition to the background as merely a distant past, postmodernism, in rejecting Enlightenment metanarratives, has transformed history into a kaleidoscope, the co-existence of all possibilities, by converting all temporal sequence into simultaneity (Sardar 1998). Whether fossilized in modernity or dissolved into atemporality in postmodernism, non-Western cultural traditions are colonized and rendered futile and irrelevant. Without its historic identity, a non-Western culture will lose the possibility for a future as that particular culture. As a result, the future of non-Western cultures will also be colonized.

The postmodernist denunciation of historical continuity and memory indeed deprives non-Western cultures of the very oxygen that sustains and nourishes them. For non-Western cultures, historical memory provides a source of cultural identity, social cohesion, a sense of permanence amid change and a means of invigorating the present and shaping the future. Sardar (1999) persuasively argues that by displacing and dislocating non-Western cultures out of their historical contexts, postmodernism robs non-West cultures

of resources for identity and future that are alternative to the postmodern metanarrative and future: a universe of fractured identities.

[P]ostmodernism's overriding concern with the demolition of grand narratives such as Religion, Tradition and History are detrimental to the very existence of the non-West for it is these very narratives that make the non-West what it is: not West. The insistence that everything is meaningless and that nothing can give meaning and direction to our lives is a distinctively Western view that finds no echo whatsoever in non-Western cultures, societies and civilizations. Moreover, the postmodernism's obsession with irony, ridicule and cynicism becomes an instrument for further marginalizing and hence writing off the non-West. A discourse that seeks to give representation to the Other, to give a voice to the voiceless, paradoxically seeks to absorb the non-West in 'bourgeoisie liberalism' and the secular history of the West. It is not that postmodernism continues the Eurocentric journey of modernity and colonialism: we get higher, more sophisticated forms of Eurocentrism as we move towards the future. (45)

Plurality as hegemony

Postmodernism is premised on plurality and difference. The postmodernist conception recognizes the incompleteness and incoherence of self-experiences and self-expressions (D.L. Hall 1994). Postmodernism attempts to demolish all privileges and seeks a more equal representation for gender, race, class, sexual orientation, culture, etc.

As noble as the postmodernist mission sounds, its celebration of difference does not necessarily lead to the empowerment of the marginalized. Plurality is only meaningful when participants have equivalent representation, access to resources and opportunities and a modicum of equality in terms of power. However, the postmodernist celebration of difference and plurality takes place only in the discursive and leaves actual power structure and inequality intact. For example, Patria Hill Collins (1986) observes that the U.S. academia has accepted the writings of certain black female scholars, but U.S. universities are reluctant to hire and grant tenure to black female faculty members.

While it seeks for a fairer representation for all, postmodernist plurality dictates the content and form of acceptable expressions. When it comes to representations of non-Western cultures, postmodernist plurality (e.g. Western cinema) operates in the same Orientalist voyeurism as modernity (Shaheen 2001). Rather than leading to an appreciation, or even an understanding of difference, it fulfills the worst desires of the West. Self-assertions and self-expressions embracing non-Western cultures can hardly find a place in postmodernist plurality because they do not necessarily cater to the curiosity or meet the expectation of the Western spectator. Indigenous forms of self-expressions in non-Western societies are not considered of equivalent valence for they are not in the form sanctioned by postmodernism: (Western) novels. Moreover, non-Western collective memories, cultural concepts, categories and theories are ruthlessly dismissed as essentialism – the first sin in postmodernism.

For example, unity or holism is a concept central to the understanding of the self, human relations and social organizations in non-Western cultures. This non-Western ontology assumes a totality (or cosmos) in which diverse and distinct human, natural and spiritual beings are interconnected and interrelated (Cheng 1987; Miike 2004, 2007, 2015; Tu 1994, 2014a). The person does not define himself/herself by separating himself/herself from others but in a network of relations in the totality (Karenga 1999, 2003; Maruyama

1984; Sardar 1998). This non-Western self is not constantly at war with the community in which it is embedded (Yin 2017). Rather, the unique quality of the person is endowed by the uniqueness of the network of relations. This non-Western notion of self is inconceivable and unacceptable to the postmodernist plurality.

Stuart Hall (1985, 1986) maintains that the emphasis on difference, on plurality of discourses, on the perpetuate slippage of meaning, on the endless sliding of the signifier in postmodernism has made it a hostage to difference. According to him, the recognition of difference ought to be thought 'with' and 'in' unity, albeit complex and uneven. The ultimate emphasis on individual difference and anti-essentialist and deconstructionist tenets in postmodernist theories unfortunately render them incapable of theorizing the whole complex or the 'unity in difference' (Hall 1985, 92).

Consequently, far from giving voices to marginalized Others, Stephen Slemon (1991) contends that postmodernism paradoxically deprives the voice, and particularly the theoretical authority, of cultural Others:

Euro-American Western hegemony, whose global appropriation of time-and-space inevitably proscribes certain cultures as backward, and marginal while co-opting to itself certain of their 'raw' materials. Postmodernism is then projected onto these margins as normative, as neo-universalism to which 'marginal' cultures may aspire, and from which certain of their more forward-looking products might be appropriated and 'authorized' ... Postmodernism thus acts a way of depriving the formerly colonized of 'voice', of specifically, any theoretical authority, and locking post-colonial texts which it does not appropriate firmly within the European episteme. Postmodernism as a mode is thus exported from Europe to the formerly colonized, and the local 'character' it acquires there frequently replicates and reflects contemporary cultural hegemony. (viii)

Lack of ethics

In Western cultures, ethics has often been overshadowed by the belief that individual liberty takes priority over the moral order (Christians 2014). Tu Weiming (1998, 2014b) notes that the ethics prevailing in Western societies is a form of rights consciousness. Rights consciousness based on individualism makes the conflict between liberty and equality irreconcilable (Tu 1998). Mouffe (2000) points out that the eternal paradox of the modern West is that the doctrine of individual autonomy negates the principles of equity and justice as it does not have much concern for communal participation.

Rights-conscious ethics also leads individuals to view others as rival rights claimants. When talking about affirmative action, White men often feel angry because their rights are 'trumped' by the rights of women and minorities (Rosemont 1998). As a result, there is no motivation to address social justice, which is perceived by many people as advocating the rights of others. This mentality of rivalry also results in indifference to other people's suffering (Hsu 1983).

The rival mentality associated with rights-conscious ethics has been extended to the relations between humans and nature or spiritual beings. The sense of entitlement endowed by individualism and the lack of respect for the rights of others justify and naturalize the overexploitation of nature. The rights-conscious mentality hinders a genuine concern for environmental issues because such concern is taken as giving up one's rights for nature.

The postmodernist celebration of plurality and difference takes individualism to the extreme by eroding all necessary bases for morality. In the postmodernist view, all social claims and relations need to be deconstructed to liberate the individual. Moreover, the constant slippage of discourse and infinite self-expression make everything equally valid, and thus 'anything goes' (D.L. Hall 1994).

Postmodernism in this sense deprives people of their conscience and breeds apathy toward injustice and inequality. Rorty's (1989) idea that nothing is absolutely bad or inhuman can also justify oppression and domination. Indeed, the postmodernist celebration of plurality and hybridity has often been used to undermine critical theories such as cultural imperialism (e.g. Iwabuchi 2002).

Ethics, however, is the necessary precondition for the existence of any human community (Johannesen 2002). The complete erosion of moral grounds in postmodernism in effect precludes the possibility for social solidarity, community building and human flourishing. Asante (2005) eloquently articulates the destructive effects of postmodernist theories:

The forms of deconstruction often suggested by many postmodernist thinkers leave nothing in the process but unadulterated individualistic narcissism that undermines the human capacity to feel solidarity with others. ... Life as a random collage or free association of images may invoke an isolationist individuality, but it is never cohesive enough to deal with the reality of community and communities, that is, groups of people who are bound together by similar historical experiences and who are developed by common phenomenological responses. (11)

Absence of agency

As postmodernists abolished the sovereign subject in Western classical traditions of thought, they have also discarded the notion of agency entirely. Ignoring history and materiality in the work of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, the postmodernist project concentrates exclusively on discourse or the unconsciousness as the process of constituting the subject or subjectivity (e.g. Foucault 1991; Lacan 1977).

By treating the subject or subjectivity as a mere product of language or the unconsciousness, postmodernists have been evading the question about agency (Dissanayake 2013). According to the postmodernist formulation, regardless of individual will and difference, anyone will be constituted in a particular subjective position as long as one is placed in a particular discursive location or unconsciousness process. Thus, it seems impossible for individuals to resist the constitutive power of discourse or the unconsciousness. Foucault (1991) conveniently finds resistance everywhere and anywhere power exists as he maintains that no power can achieve complete domination. In a similar vein, Homi Bhabha's (1994) postcolonialist acclamation of the 'third space' relies on the slippage of dominant discourse for the possibility of resistance. What is missing and impossible in the postmodernist and postcolonialist theorization is the notion of agency, the very basis necessary for resistance.

While postmodernists challenged traditional and modern Western thought, they sustain and reinforce the Western individualist ontology that assumes the irreconcilability between the individual and the social. Postmodernism continues the structuralist thesis that structures (social, language, the unconsciousness) are intrinsically oppressive in the

production of the self. It thus rejects the culturalist assumption that culture could be a positive source of self-formation (e.g. S. Hall 1980). Consequently, the postmodernist conception of resistance has no origin, locus, or source: it is everywhere but it comes from nowhere.

The Eurocentric nature of postmodernism furthermore forecloses the possibility for discovering sources of resistance and alternatives in non-Western cultural traditions. Rather, postmodernism renders non-Western cultural traditions as the inflexible imposition, thus essentialism. Even postcolonialist theorists, such as Bhabha, unfortunately look for resistance only within Eurocentric discourse and refuse to embrace the cultures of the colonized as viable sources of inspiration, strength and self-determination.

In search for non-western self-concepts beyond postmodernism⁴

Mauland Karenga (1999), Founder of Kawaïda philosophy, contends that the Western individualistic notion of self is neither the only nor necessarily the best conceptualization for the entire human race. Tu Weiming (1985), a leading Confucian scholar, declares that non-Western peoples and cultures can undoubtedly articulate their senses of self without subscribing to the Eurocentric paradigm:

Historically, the emergence of individualism as a motivating force in Western society may have been intertwined with highly particularized political, economic, ethical and religious traditions. It seems reasonable that one can endorse an insight into self as a basis for equality and liberty without accepting Locke's idea of private property, Adam Smith's and Hobbes's idea of private interest, John Stuart Mill's idea of privacy, Kierkegaard's idea of loneliness or the early Sartre's idea of freedom. (78)

For non-Western persons and cultures, in order to construct, articulate, express and assert an identity without being consigned to deficiency or deviancy by the Eurocentric framework, it is vitally important and necessary to return to their own cultural traditions for paradigmatic and pragmatic resources. Returning to one's own cultural tradition does not mean (re)building a cultural fortress through isolationist strategies or going back to the 'authentic' past, a point prior to contact with other cultures and/or Western encroachment. Rather, it entails the recovery of a cultural grounding through critically engaging and dialoguing with cultural traditions in constant interaction with other cultures for an ongoing project of human flourishing.

Stuart Hall, perhaps the most well-known critic of national identity in Great Britain (i.e. the English identity or Englishness), advocates a cultural grounding for the marginalized to gain a voice and identity. He elaborates:

Discourse, in that sense, is always placed. So the moment of the rediscovery of a place, a past, of one's roots, of one's context, seems to me a necessary moment of enunciation. I do not think the margins could speak up without first grounding themselves somewhere. (S. Hall 2007b, 36)

Cultural traditions here are not defined in a fixed, ancient, or pure sense. Cultural traditions are by no means static and stagnant. They are 'living traditions' that are continuously being invented and reinvented and proactively blending the old and the new (Asante 2014; Karenga 2008a; Miike 2014; Mowlana 2014; Tu 2014b). No culture can exist without any influence from the outside in the long run. Cultural traditions are both

preserved and enriched through constant intracultural and intercultural communication (Miike 2014, 2017). Rather than attempting to return to the secluded past, the culture-as-living-tradition approach is a contemporary and ongoing intervention into historical cultural discourses in continuous exchange with other peoples, other cultures and the world for the purpose of articulating new forms of philosophy or ethics that enable and encourage us to form solidarities, address current problematics and enhance future possibilities in a concrete sense.

From this perspective, the cultural traditions of the marginalized need to be treated as their resources for self-understanding, self-expression and self-assertion. Viewing cultures as resources do not prescribe the wholesale acceptance of one's own culture uncritically. Rather, it empowers the marginalized to 'embrace the positive elements of their cultural heritage and transform negative practices according to their ethical ideals' (Miike & Yin 2015, 452). Returning to one's cultural tradition is captured by the African concept of *sankofa*: a self-conscious return to the source to (re)discover knowledge through 'rigorous research, critical comprehension, and culturally centered interpretation' (Karenga 1999, 37).

A case of non-western identity: Kemetic and Confucian self

Following the culture-as-living-tradition approach, the present study examines Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) and Confucian philosophies as rich resources for non-Western understandings of the self and visions of humanity. An analysis of assumptions, expressions, ideas and ideals pertinent to self-concept and related issues in these two non-Western traditions suggests that, in diametric opposition to the dominant Western individualistic notion of the isolated, unembedded, contingent and ultimately alone self (Heller 1989/1990), the Kemetic and Confucian traditions view the self as a center of relationships, individual-in-relationship, or the person-in-community. A further comparison demonstrates significant similarities and commonalities between these two non-Western conceptions of the self. More specifically, both the Kemetic and Confucian selfhood is characterized by five dimensions: (1) collectivity, (2) morality, (3) sensitivity, (4) transformability and (5) inclusivity.

Collectivity

When it comes to the issue of personal identity, Western philosophy has placed 'great importance and perhaps impossible weight on the notion of individual autonomy' (Solomon 1994, 12). The postmodernist challenge of the sovereign self in modern Western thought paradoxically preserves and enhances the individual-social dichotomy.

In sharp contrast to the Western individualistic concept of the self, the Kemetic and Confucian notions of personhood are embedded in collectivity or community. From the Kemetic perspective, rather than an isolated or isolable entity, the self is defined as an individual-in-relationship or person-in-community. The self here is not an abstraction but always located in a community. One comes into meaningful existence, gains a sense of self and develops oneself through exchanges with others in the community.

Kemetic thought regards 'sociality' or human relatedness as one of the most fundamental sources of self (Karenga 1999). In the Kemetic view, a person's sense of self is predicated on his or her relations with others in the community and his or her sense of moral

responsibility and social obligation (Gyekye 1987). Contrary to the Western individualistic belief of liberating the self from external authorities as part of personal growth (DeVos 1985), the Kemetic philosophy envisages self-understanding and self-development as a communal process defined by activities in and for community (Karenga 1999).

The pan-African concept of *ubuntu* (personhood, humanness) epitomizes the African understanding of the self as relating to and being-with others in the community (Gyekye 1987). *Ubuntu* is morphologically a Nguni term, but it can be found in many African languages (Kamwangamalu 2014). *Ubuntu* is a polysemic word involving some of the most basic principles of being human in the African sense. Among many other things, it means 'respect for human dignity and human life', 'collective consciousness', 'solidarity', 'interdependence' and 'communalism' (Kamwangamalu 2014, 227). Being human in the African sense is in essence relating to others in accordance with the principle of *ubuntu*.

If the Cartesian notion of the self is premised on individual experience or contemplation, (I think, therefore I am), the ancient Egyptian and contemporary African understanding of personhood is first and foremost grounded in human relatedness ('I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am') (Mbiti cited in Karenga 2008a, 39).

Similar to the Kemetic tradition, Confucian teaching conceives of the self as a center of relationships (Tu 1985, 1994, 2014b) and person-in-relations (Ho 1995; Hsu 1981, 1985; Hwang 2000). In the Confucian tradition, *Ren* (仁) [humanness, rightness and benevolence] is conceptualized as the ultimate form of humanity and the ideal human being (Cheng 1998). To learn to be humane or to be fully human is to learn and practice the cardinal principle of *ren*. *Ren* can be attained through self-cultivation (Chang 1998). Self-cultivation is the process of transforming the private ego into an all-encompassing self (Tu 1985, 1994). It is essentially to extend our bonding with our parents and immediate family to larger networks of human relationships – from respecting our parents to respecting all elderly, from caring for our own children to caring for all children in the world.

Self-actualization, the process for a person to become a cultural being, in the Confucian sense, is never a solitary quest for, or exploration of, one's inner experience. Rather, it is a social act that entails the participation of others (Cheng 1998). Opposite to the Western individualistic assumption of social relations as inherently constraining, Confucianism views human relations as not only absolutely necessary but also highly desirable for personal growth (Tu 1985, 1994). For the person, self-actualization is essentially the recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings in the universe. It is a way for the person to make herself or himself available to the society – to contribute to the human relations that make the development of others possible (Cheng 1998). The actualization of the self thus necessitates the realizations of others. The *Analects* of Confucius (6:30) explicates: 'If you wish to establish yourself, you have to help others to establish themselves; if you wish to enlarge yourself, you have to help others to enlarge themselves'.

The similarity in the conception of self between Kemetic and Confucian philosophies is remarkable. They both embrace the idea of collectivity in the self-concept. The irreconcilability of the personal and the social, an eternal paradox of the modern West, does not exist in the Kemetic and Confucian traditions. Unlike their Western counterpart, the Kemetic and Confucian self is not constantly at war with itself or with the community in which it is rooted. Rather, the distinctiveness or uniqueness of one's personhood is constituted by the balanced blending of the personal and social claims. Tu Weiming's (2001)

synthesis of the reciprocal self-other relationship in Confucianism also perfectly captures the essence of human relations in Kemetic philosophical anthropology.

The self cultivates roots in the family, village, nation, and the world. The feeling of belonging is predicated on a ceaseless spiritual exercise to transcend egotism, nepotism, parochialism, ethnocentrism, and anthropocentrism. The reciprocal interplay between self as center and self for others enables the self to become a center of relationships. As a center, personal dignity can never be marginalized and, as relationships, the spirit of consideration is never suppressed. (Tu 2001, 26)

Defining our selfhood in terms of our relations with others does not necessarily emasculate our individuality or sense of agency. It is precisely through social relations that a person becomes a cultural subject and gains a sense of agency. In the Kemetic and Confucian traditions, the self is not an abstract concept or isolated entity standing against its constitutive context. It is a concretely lived reality that is keenly and deeply aware of the surrounding beings as inseparable from, and indispensable to, its own existence. The notion of self-cultivation, central to both the Kemetic and Confucian perspectives, indicates the active participation of the self in the formation and transformation of the condition of its own coming into being. Self-actualization further contributes to the context of human relations that is necessary and desirable for the development of others. It is the interpenetrated and reciprocal relationship between the self and social relations that makes the quest for the unique and authentic self and the creating/sustaining/transforming of the social order concomitant and mutually beneficial.

Morality

If the notion of the self in the modern West is characterized by instrumental rationality that defends calculated individual interests, the Kemetic and Confucian ideas of personhood are predicated on moral reasoning. Whereas instrumental rationality is a detached mode of reasoning that can be used for any purpose, moral reasoning is a mode of reasoning that aims at establishing, preserving and enriching the common good in the community, society and humanity.

Kemetic philosophy associates self-cultivation, self-development and the quest for self-knowledge to the search for the good (i.e. *Maat*). *Maat* is the moral ideal of rightness or righteousness in the realms of the divine, natural and social (Karenga 2006). In the Kemetic view, self-realization is to transcend the bodily self to the full humanity as the divine image, which demands human activities that preserve, restore and enrich the right order in the community, society, nature, and divinity. Karenga (1999) maintains

One is, of necessity, concerned with the concept of self and its uniqueness in moral terms and the self's capacity to realize and fulfill itself in ways which, while original and unique, do not undermine community or the ethical imperatives for pursuing a full and meaningful life rooted in *Maat*. (47–48)

The Kemetic form of self-cultivation is in effect the learning of *Maat*. Learning in Maatian ethics is directed toward wisdom, or more precisely, moral wisdom in the service of the social and human good (Karenga 1990). Self-cultivation hence requires listening, learning

and doing what is right (righteous thought, emotion and behavior) in the concrete context in which one is embedded (Karenga 1990).

By privileging righteous social practice as its ultimate goal, the Kemetic communitarian model of self-cultivation can, and can only, be achieved with others. Self-realization through the practice of *Maat*, in turn, creates a moral culture, the right social order for righteous human and organizational practices to take root and thrive in.

Parallel with the notion of *Maat* is the concept of *Dao/Tao* (道), the root metaphor of the *Analects* of Confucius, which also prescribes the Way of Heaven as a harmonious unity of *tian di wan wu* (天地万物) [Heaven, Earth and the myriad things] (Tu 1985). Human relations are seen as a manifestation of cosmic unity. To learn to be human or a humane person (a person of *ren*), in the Confucian sense, is to strive to fulfill relational obligations through self-cultivation. The primary concern of self-cultivation is *de* (德) [virtue], the ability to achieve harmony both within oneself and with others (Cheng 1998). Self-actualization thus ultimately entails a ceaseless process of realizing humanity in its all-encompassing fullness – embodying the great unity with Heaven.

Also similar to the Kemetic philosophy is the central role of learning in the Confucian ethical system. For Confucians, learning is essential for self-realization. Learning to be human is the learning of *ren*. As a center of relationships, the self acquires self-knowledge in open communication with others. The quest for *ren* demands meaningful communal inquiry for self-reflection and self-examination. A sense of community thus is absolutely indispensable for the moral and spiritual development of the self (Tu 1985).

Rather than a quest for pure intellectual knowledge, Confucian learning is moral learning with unwavering devotion to the good (Ho 1995). Moral learning, with the Confucian altruistic tendency, is primarily concerned with the well-being of others and the entire humanity. Moral and spiritual self-development can be understood as ever-deepening subjectivity and sensitivity to humanize and harmonize the ever-expanding network of relationships.

Both Kemetic and Confucian philosophies emphasize the centrality of morality in the conception of the self. The realization of one's humanity is intrinsically linked to the moral imperative to create a context which is righteous and mutually beneficial for the realizations of the self and others. Counter to the Western axiology that privileges the rights of the individual (Rosemont 1998), the Kemetic and Confucian ethos accentuates an ethics rooted in duty and responsibility. If the Western rights consciousness prioritizes the person who claims rights, the ethics of duty consciousness places weight on the human practices that make the claimed rights possible (Chang 1998; Karenga 2006). Thus, self-cultivation in both the Kemetic and Confucian traditions is not only the right to enrich one's humanity but also the moral responsibility to partake in the communal project of improving the human condition and enhancing the human prospect (Yin 2011, 2014).

Sensitivity

The Greek tradition of rationality and the Enlightenment commitment to Cartesian metaphysics in Western moral philosophy have privileged the view of moral imperatives derived from disembodied reason that is devoid of any emotional content (Christians 2014). The notions of self in the Kemetic and Confucian ontology are, by contrast,

grounded in the certitude of human sensitivity, our ability to feel and sense the emotional dynamics in our existential realities (Miike 2006, 2007, 2015).

In Maatian ethics, one strives to realize one's full humanity through disciplining the body (i.e. resisting temptations) and cultivating the *ib*. The Kemetic conception of *ib* means both the heart and the mind, conscience and consciousness, and signifies the human capacity for rationality and moral sensitivity (Bilolo 1988, cited in Karenga 1999). By recognizing the *ib* as 'the organizing center of the person', the Kemetic tradition encourages 'an ethic of reciprocal responsiveness' based on *merut* (love) and care in addition to rational reasoning (Karenga 1999, 50).

Being sensitive and responsive to others and the community is a significant element of the Kemetic measure of self. It is believed that 'one who acts (for others) is acting for himself [herself]' (Hodjash and Berlev 1982, 199). The community, in turn, reciprocates similar sensitivity to its members. The practice of reciprocal responsiveness is expressed in the Kemetic concept of the *sedjemu* (sdmw), the one who listens, hears and acts, particularly for others, in accordance with *Maat* (Karenga 1999, 42).

The Confucian ontological claim of 'humanity as sensitivity' is premised on the capacity of *xin* (心) [heart-mind] to have the sensibility to establish an internal resonance with other beings (Tu 1994). Like the Kemetic concept of *ib*, the notion of *xin* also involves both conscience and consciousness, the affective and cognitive aspects of human awareness. For Confucians, it is the heart-mind that makes us truly human and distinguishes the human body from the physical nature of birds and beasts.

Ren, the Confucian ideal of humanity, is based on human feelings, love and altruistic concerns for others. The defining characteristic of true humanity is *buren* or *burenren zhixin* (不忍 or 不忍人之心) [sympathy or the sympathetic heart-mind]. It emphasizes a person's emotional ability to feel the suffering of others or his or her inability to endure their suffering. The centrality of sympathy in defining true humanity grounds the Confucian epistemology first and foremost in feelings. The Chinese term of sympathy, *tongqing* (同情), means 'feelings in common' (Miike 2015). Humans are therefore 'defined primarily by their sensitivity and only secondary by their rationality, volition, or intelligence' (Tu 1994, 180). Here we see the Confucian communitarian understanding of self that 'We feel, therefore we are' (Tu 2014b, 509), in stark contrast to the Cartesian dictum that 'I think, therefore I am'.

The Confucian vision of self-cultivation thus requires the self to expand human sensitivity; allow the private ego to communicate openly and to establish connections with other beings in the universe; and ultimately realize great harmony with Heaven. In other words, the self needs to transcend all forms of human insensitivity (e.g. egoism, nepotism, parochialism, ethnocentrism and chauvinistic nationalism) that divest us of our all-embracing moral nature (Tu 1998, 2001).

Human beings, in the Confucian conceptualization, are not merely creatures (created by a creator) without any understanding of, or possibility for understanding, their own ontological existence. The ontological assumption of humans as morally sensitive beings in Confucianism allows for the possibility that humans are capable of understanding their true nature and obtain knowledge through intuition without the sensory perceptions of seeing and hearing. This possibility is inconceivable in Western philosophy (e.g. Kant) founded on the metaphysics of objectivity (Tu 1998).

The primacy of human feelings in both Kemetic and Confucian epistemologies provides a great resource for the realization of human nature. Our feelings for others empower and encourage us to establish and expand experiential connections with them and to learn to develop ourselves in communication, not in isolation. Furthermore, whereas Western moral claims of duty based solely on reason can easily be taken as demands for self-denial on elusive grounds or even for conflicts of personal interests, the Kemetic and Confucian views of human feelings as the basis for moral action is more solid and compelling. The unifying power of emotional bonds with other human beings can help us overcome the rivalry mentality that prevails in Western societies and that divides individuals and groups through social differentiators such as class, gender, race and ethnicity (Yin 2006, 2009). Because emotional connections can transcend social categorizations, the cultivation of human sensitivity can offer the possibility for organizing and governing human community and society on the principles of inclusion, equality and diversity rather than on the principles of exclusion, hierarchy and uniformity.

Transformability

The Kemetic and Confucian insistence on morality as the primary and ultimate concern for self-development is premised on the fundamental faith in the human capacity for self-transformation. However, the perfectibility of the human person is neither conceived nor conceivable in the Western individualistic tradition, whether it is the Kantian notion of the thinking subject or the postmodernist idea of the product of discourse.

The Kemetic tradition genuinely commits to the position that the human person is 'teachable, malleable, capable of moral cultivation that leads to one's higher self' (Karenga 1999, 49). Kemetic philosophical anthropology posits that human beings are created by Ra (God) in his likeness (the divine image). As a result, human nature is endowed by Ra and is essentially good. Being in the image of God, thus, gives humans the ontological potential for perfectibility, the potentiality of becoming the embodiment of *Maat* (Karenga 1999).

The Maatian sense of self-cultivation, therefore, does not require a process of ontological conversion such as redemption or salvation (Karenga 1990). All humans are divinely created with a lifetime mission: to bring good into the world (Karenga 2006, 2008a). The Kemetic concept of *serudi ta* means the obligation for humans to 'constantly repair and restore the world, to make it more beautiful and beneficial than it was when they inherited it' (Karenga 2006, 257).

Self-discipline, which is often seen as impulse control in the West, in the Kemetic sense, is aimed at becoming 'the *geru maa*, the truly self-mastered person whose approach to life is balanced, *Maat*-infused and manifold' (Karenga 1999, 51). The optimistic belief in the efficacy of the human person to understand her or his transformability insists that it is possible for every ordinary person to achieve the *geru maa*.

Confucian ontology presumes that the human perfectibility is bestowed by Heaven (Tu 1985). As sons and daughters of Heaven and Earth, humans are receivers and therefore embodiments of the creative forces of the cosmos in its highest excellence (Tu 1985, 1994). Inherent in the very existence of the human person is the infinite potential for moral and spiritual growth and self-development. Therefore, the main concern of

Confucian learning is the process through which we realize ourselves by transforming and perfecting what we were born with.

For Mencius, the human person, as the embodiment of cosmic creative forces in their finest form, is endowed with moral sensitivity, the sensibility of the *xin* (heart-mind). The moral capacity of the *xin* is the crucial constitutive component of humanity as it differentiates us from birds and beasts. However, the gift of moral sensitivity does not necessarily allow human beings to claim a sense of superiority over other beings in the universe to which human beings are an integral and inseparable part. Humans are Heavenly bestowed with the obligation to extend their moral sensitivity in order to realize and embrace their natural and intrinsic ties with all other beings. For Confucians, Heaven endowment is inevitably linked to and expressed in terms of duty or responsibility (Cheng 1998). For example, a ruler is mandated by Heaven precisely because she or he is given more responsibilities than the governed.

Human beings, in the Confucian view, are potentially co-creators of the universe rather than mere creatures created by a creator. For Confucians, the creative forces of the cosmos brought human and other beings into existence in their ontological entirety without the need for ontological conversion. But the creation process is never completed or finished and can always be refined and transformed by communal human effort. The Confucian credence in the transformability and perfectibility of the human condition through communal self-effort can be seen in the idea of *tiansheng rencheng* (天生人成) [Heaven gives birth to it, humans complete it].

Comparable to the Kemetic belief in human transformability without conversion or salvation is the Confucian idea of humans as self-perfectible beings in common ordinary existence without the intervention of transcendent God. Akin to the Kemetic ideal person, the *geru maa*, the Confucian *junzi* (君子) [the exemplary person] and even *sheng* (聖) [sagehood] can be attained by anyone who is committed to ceaseless moral learning and continuous enlargement of the self (Tu 1985).

The Kemetic and Confucian conviction of the transformability and perfectibility of the human person emphasizes and affirms a sense of human agency. Diametrically opposite to the static notion of selfhood in modern Western thought, the Kemetic and Confucian forms of self are capable of improving and expanding themselves through self-conscious effort. The focus on moral self-cultivation allows the person to realize the unique self within and alongside, not outside or against, the community, in her or his own mode at her or his own pace (i.e. achieving individuality without individualism).

The Kemetic idea of humans as active participants in the process of constantly making the world better and the Confucian notion of humans as co-creators of the universe provide the possibility for the self to consciously transform its constitutive cultural and social structures through collective human effort, a possibility that is inconceivable in post-modernist theories.

Inclusivity

In his discussion of individualism, Sampson (1988) identified two different forms: self-contained and ensembled individualism. Self-contained individualism, a psychology prevailing in Western societies, is characterized by the firm self-nonsel self boundary, the strong sense of personal control and the exclusionary self-conception. Ensembled individualism,

a psychology with a greater presence in the world, has the fluid self-nonself boundary, the weak sense of person control and the inclusionary self-conception. Ensembled individualism, though termed as 'individualism', seems similar to the ideas of self in both Kemetic and Confucian philosophies. Compared to the Western individualistic self that emphasizes boundary, control and exclusiveness, the Kemetic and Confucian visions of selfhood accentuate interrelatedness, harmony and inclusiveness.

The Kemetic ontological assumption of the self as a divine entity makes it an inclusive conception. The Kemetic notion of the human being as the image of God, which predated the Jewish and Christian claims by centuries, designates all humans as bearers of divinity and dignity (Karenga 1999). The understanding of the human being as the image of God is 'the grounding for the concept of human dignity, which posits that human beings and human life are of transcendent value and worth independent of social status or achievements or other attributes' (Karenga 1999, 45).

Unlike Judaism and Christianity, the Kemetic tradition does not have the notion of 'chosen people' (Karenga 1990). The absence of the chosen people in ancient Egypt attests to the egalitarian principle in understanding the sacredness of human life and human dignity. Only in the *Odu Ifa*, the sacred text of ancient Yorubaland (South Africa), can the concept of 'chosenness' be found. The *Odu Ifa* stipulates that '*all humans are divinely chosen*' not over or against anyone, but *with everyone* (Karenga 2006, 257, emphasis in the original). Whereas the covenant idea of chosen people in Judaism and Christianity connotes one specially favored people chosen over others, the inclusive concept in the *Odu Ifa* affirms the equally valued dignity and divinity of each and every human being. Whereas the Judaism and Christian notions of 'chosen people' are based on a certain human attribute (i.e. ethnicity) or a promise, the belief in 'chosenness' in the *Odu Ifa* is rooted in the moral reason, or the obligation, for all humans to bring good into the world.

In Confucianism, the principle of inclusiveness lies in the ontological postulate of humanity as all-encompassing sensitivity and the understanding of interrelatedness of all beings in the universe. The Confucian mode of self-cultivation is a lifetime process of constantly expanding our network of relationships and enlarging our sensitivity to become more and more inclusive and all-encompassing. In other words, self-cultivation is the process by which the self-transcends all forms of insensitivities to embrace all beings in the universe and ultimately to achieve *tianrenheyi* (天人合一) [the unity of Heaven and humanity], an idea that goes beyond the anthropocentrism in Eurocentric humanist discourse.

In his comparative study of U.S. American and Chinese cultures, Francis L. K. Hsu (1981) demonstrated three differences between the biblical flood narrative and the Chinese flood legend. First, the biblical narrative has the idea of 'chosen people' (i.e. Noah and his family), while the Chinese story portrays collective human effort, under the leadership of Hero Yu, to save all Chinese people. Hsu noted with interest that Noah's mother, who was possibly alive at the time of the flood, was not included in the Ark or mentioned in the biblical tale. Secondly, the biblical narrative focuses on religious faith, whereas the Chinese story underscores morality (the devotion and dedication of Yu not only saved all Chinese people but also earned him the throne). And finally, the biblical narrative represents separation and discontinuity in human relationships (Noah and his sons went separate ways some time after the flood). The Chinese story signifies the unity and continuity of humanity (Yu

vindicated his father's name⁵ and brought honor to his ancestors). The Chinese flood legend indeed reflects a cultural ethos akin to the *Odu Ifa's* idea of 'chosenness': the inclusionary understanding of the human person, the interrelatedness in self-other relations and the moral nature of humanity.

Critical scholars, who have challenged certain socially constructed identities, are largely motivated by their dissatisfaction with the exclusionary mechanism used in the production and naturalization of those identities (e.g. the critique of the English national identity by British Cultural Studies scholars) (Bromley 2014). The Kemetic and Confucian philosophical traditions can provide rich resources for understanding, asserting and expressing identities based on the principle of inclusion as opposed to exclusion. The Kemetic belief of humans as the image of God and the Confucian conviction of humanity as all-encompassing sensitivity can offer ethical grounding for articulating and asserting cultural identities that affirm the dignity of both the self and others. The Kemetic and Confucian certitude of the human potentiality and responsibility to transform the social order through communal self-effort can contribute meaningfully to the formulation and articulation of 'a new and expanded public philosophy and discourse on a just and good society and a good and sustainable world' (Karenga 2003, 161).

Conclusion

The intellectual universe in which we are dwelling is marked by undeniable Eurocentrism where the European knowledge and value system (one cultural particularity) is projected as universal and normative, while all other cultural particularities are deemed 'abnormal' or 'deficient' (Asante 2005, Miike 2010a, 2010b, Shi-xu 2013, 2014; Stam 2001). In public consciousness and academic studies, the Western individualistic notion of self has become the unmarked standard of self-concept against which all non-Western understandings of self are gauged and evaluated. The Eurocentric enterprise in fact functions as a self-perpetuating rhetoric and ritual to demand that all other cultures be improved or reformed in accordance with certain 'universal' criteria (i.e. assimilating into the Eurocentric value system). In commenting on early culture and communication research, Weaver (2013) observes: 'In many ways, culture was viewed as an obstacle to overcome as the Western world helped the non-West to become more Westernized' (14).

Although postmodernism offers valuable critique of the excess of suffocating modernity and instrumental rationality, paradoxically, it is as Eurocentric as modernity itself. The postmodernist aspiration for ever-changing, fractured, incoherent identities reinforces ontological and epistemological individualism in modernity. The void of ethics and the absence of agency has made postmodernism incapable of theorizing any new epistemology and methodology devoted to elucidating alternative forms of self-understanding. The ultimate emphasis on discourse and the privilege of individual difference in postmodernism deprives non-Western people of using their own cultural traditions as cultural groundings for self-understanding and self-assertion. Thus, it is vitally important and necessary for non-Western persons and cultures to go beyond postmodernism in their quest for an identity without being consigned to deficiency or deviancy by the Eurocentric framework.

The present article aimed to expand the theoretical and conceptual horizons of the concept of self by exploring non-Western perspectives on identity as important alternative visions of self and humanity. Following the culture-as-living-tradition, this research

examined the ideas and ideals of self in two non-Western cultural traditions, namely, the Kemetic and Confucian traditions. This comparative study illustrated that the modes of self in Kemetic and Confucian philosophies are strikingly similar to each other. In contrast to the Western individualistic idea of the isolated, static and rational self, both the Kemetic and Confucian traditions conceive selfhood as a center of relationships engaging in a never-ending process of moral cultivation and transformation through constant interactions with other human, natural and spiritual beings. Both of these two non-Western visions accentuate collectivity, morality, sensitivity, transformability and inclusivity.

The Kemetic and Confucian models of the self provide the possibility for conceptualizing the uniqueness of the person or the self without falling into the debased forms of individualism and for embracing culture or community as a unifying and empowering force for human flourishing without sacrificing human diversity.

The refreshing insights offered by these two non-Western traditions can complement Western theories and thus enlarge the range of useful concepts of the self. Karenga's lucid account of the meaningful and significant contribution that Kemetic philosophy makes to our dialogue and discourse on the notion of the self can be applied to Confucianism as well:

This is clearly an important alternative way of understanding humanity and humanness. For in the Maatian [and Confucian] ethics one is human not simply by reason and free will, but also thru the quality of relations one has, builds, sustains with others and the world thru rightful reasoning, moral and human sensitivity and resultant practice. (Karenga 2008b, 119)

Notes

1. The term 'Western' in this article refers to cultural traditions, values and practices that are rooted in European and European-American experiences and philosophies. This term does not refer to indigenous cultures such as Inuit, Native Hawaiian, Native American cultures, nor to African American, Asian American and Latino cultures that are geographically located in the Western Hemisphere. Those cultures are subordinated, marginalized, or excluded by European and European-American cultures. Indeed they are non-Western peoples in the West. Just like cultures and peoples in the non-West, they are also struggling to (re)claim their identities and (re)assert their self-determination (Laeui 2000; Little Bear 2000).
2. Shi-xu (2013) correctly pointed out that, in the discipline of discourse studies, Western concepts, values and theories are considered as the standard and universal. When not completely ignored, Non-Western cultures remain targets of analyses and critiques based on Western theories and methods (Miike 2010b). Even though a variety of Western critical theories (e.g., Marxism, neo-Marxism, Cultural Studies, postmodernism and poststructuralism, etc.) question the objective and value free nature of the study of discourse and communication, they maintain the cultural hierarchy by subsuming non-Western cultures to their own universalism, as the older paradigm that they are criticizing. Non-Western cultural traditions are interrogated and deconstructed to reinforce Western supremacy (Sardar 1999). Certain non-Western cultural elements are sometimes abstracted from their own cultural contexts and appropriated within the Western frame which simultaneously insists on their otherness (e.g., Foucault's 1994 fascination with the impossible Chinese classification of animals described in Jorge Luis Borge's imaginary Chinese encyclopedia 'Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge'). Occasionally, non-Western individuals or communication practices are celebrated as rare exceptions of non-Western cultures--defying their own cultural traditions and affirming Western values (e.g., bikini wearing Indian pageant participants as courageous feminists). Worse still, research on hybridized non-Western communication practices are frequently

employed as evidences to dismiss the indictment for Western cultural imperialism (e.g., Iwabuchi 2002; Kraidy 1999).

3. Western philosophies deem communication as unnecessary to self-actualization or as a constitutive force that oftentimes produces subjectivities and identities incongruent or even contradict to the authentic self (e.g., ascribed vs. avowed identity). Most non-Western cultures, however, embrace the bright (positive) side of communication as the affirmative, transformative and emancipatory power that can unite, challenge and expand our awareness (Miike and Yin 2015; Aluli-Meyer 2014).
4. It is mistaken to assume that the present project is seeking for one global non-Western notion of the self. Rather, this project advocates an approach that encourages the quest for self-understanding in non-Western cultures to be located in their own cultural systems and traditions as opposed to in the Eurocentric framework. Furthermore, this article strives to promote interactions and dialogues among non-Western cultures through comparative research on non-Western cultures. One can easily find common themes among diverse and culturally specific non-Western visions and versions of the self. Indeed, many African cultures, Asian cultures, Islamic cultures, indigenous cultures of Pacific Islands and the Americas share the Kemetic and Confucian notions of holism and interconnectedness and understandings of the self in terms of collectivity, sensitivity, morality and perfectibility (see Gyekye's 1987 theorization of Akan philosophy; Asante's 2011 and Karanga's 1990 elaboration of the Kemet (Egyptian) concept of Maat; Kamwangamalu's 2014 research on the pan-African idea of ubuntu; Maruyama's 1984 study of Japanese culture and Mandenka culture in Africa; Cheng's 1987 synthesis of Confucian and Taoism/Daoism philosophies; Shi-xu's 2013 insights into Chinese discourse; Babbili's 2008 elucidation of Indian culture and ethics; Dissanayake's 2013 analysis of Buddhist self-concept; Mowlana's 2014 delineation of the principle of tawhid (unity, coherence and harmony) in Islamic cultures; Little Bear's 2000 enunciation of the Plains Indian philosophy; de la Garza's 2014 ontological and methodological reflection on ethnography; Graham Smith's 2000 and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's 2012 commitment to protect and reconstruct Mori indigenous knowledge through Kaupapa research; and Aluli-Meyer's 2014 articulation of Hawaiian seistemology, for examples).
5. Yu's father, Gun/Kun, was exiled by Emperor Shun for his failure in controlling the flood.

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