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## From Cultural Differences in Africa to Cultural Divides: The Search for an African Ethics of Managing Cultural Diversity

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### Abstract

*Contemporary African states are faced with the task of governing the many separate ethnic groups within their borders. This ethnic diversity has for the most part been transformed into divides, polarizing African states into the 'we' and the 'they,' our side and their side, the insiders and the outsiders. These divides have occasioned a litany of violent and callous intrastate conflicts in most African states, resulting to millions of deaths, millions displaced, millions maimed, and to an endless awful suffering on the civilian populations. This paper diagnoses how and why cultural differences are transformed into cultural divides and attempts a search for an African ethics that can be used to foster trust and the virtues that a cultural diversity society requires. I argue in this paper that the virtues of cultural diversity must be built on deeply rooted African traditions if they are to guarantee sustainable peace. The deeply rooted African traditions in an African eco-bio-communitarian ethics can provide an avenue for fostering the management of cultural diversity in African states. I am offering an empirical analysis of the eco-bio-communitarian ethics within the Nso' outlook, in the North West Region of Cameroon to show the virtues required to foster the management of diversity and forestall cultural divides entrenched in African states. I use Cameroon to exemplify cultural divides in Africa because Cameroon is often defined as African in miniature. I argue that an imported approach to the management of diversity in Africa could be too tight or loose like the Biblical Saul's armour on David that did not fit on David properly. Hence, deeply rooted traditions in an African eco-bio-communitarian ethics can provide an avenue for fostering a political atmosphere within which cultural diversity can flourish.*

**Keywords:** Eco-bio-communitarian ethics, Heterogeneous states, Deconstruction or Partitioning

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### Introduction

The overall objective of this paper is to show how cultural divisions entrenched in colonial and postcolonial African states can be managed within the African eco-bio-communitarian ethics. I argue that African states are in nature culturally diverse and that in most cases cultural diversity has been transformed into cultural divisions which have fomented hatred, frustration and callous violent intrastate conflicts in most African states as experienced in Rwanda in 1994 and in the extant Anglophone conflict in Cameroon to mention but these. The paper aims at showing that the eco-bio-communitarian ethics if appropriated could bridge the cultural divides and manage cultural diversity in Africa.

According to the UNESCO report of 2009 on cultural diversity, the existence of a wide range of distinct cultures in every human society is a visible and undeniable fact.<sup>1</sup> Although cultural diversity is a global phenomenon inferring from the report above it is more pronounced in Africa and has

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<sup>1</sup>UNESCO, (2009). *Investing in cultural diversity and dialogue across cultures*: Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org> accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

considerable influence in African states because it is both a uniting and a disuniting force, a source of peace and violence, of development and underdevelopment within many African states. This is because as mentioned already African states are by some historical making multicultural or heterogeneous states. The European partition of Africa in 1884 contributed to the construction of new cultural identities and to the deconstruction or partitioning of old ones. It witnessed the forceful bringing together of people to co-exist without their consent, in other words it was like a marriage without the consent of the partners. This compounds the cultural diversity situation all over Africa. Paul Biya in *Communal Liberalism* describes this cultural complexity and the ensuing implications as follows:

The arbitrary boundaries resulting from the partitioning of our continent by colonial powers never took into account the ethnic or socio-cultural homogeneity of the people concerned. As a result, some of them found themselves in distinct territories whereas others, with no particular affinity, were placed under the same political authority. Having inherited this legacy, most of independent Africa today is comprised not of nation states as is the case in the other three continents, but of multi-ethnic ones.<sup>2</sup>

The arbitrary boundaries created in Africa “set in motion new forms of competitions for prestige, power and positions among communities, as well as new forms of co-operation.”<sup>3</sup> Such interactions make cultural diversity a thorny issue. The task of managing a “multiethnic and multicultural population”<sup>4</sup> brought together without their consent is a herculean task. The co-existence of diverse cultural groups within African states has for the most part been considered as a misfortune rather than a blessing. This is why Paul Biya in the case of Cameroon advocates for the transformation of a mosaic of ethnic groups that define Cameroon into what he calls “a new ethnic group.”<sup>5</sup> To him, a multi-ethnic country like Cameroon can easily be destabilized from within and without. While Biya is suspicious of cultural diversity and the ethnicization of politics he takes recourse in ethnic politics to secure political gains as expressed by Yvette Monga:

The ethnicization and ruralization of politics in Cameroon have led political entrepreneurs not only to redefine the geo-cultural boundaries of their ethnic labels and “villages”, but also to display their cultural differences as a way of marking their cultural space, distinguishing themselves from potential or actual “enemy” groups, and “recruiting” allies. Thus, depending on the circumstances, ethno-cultural space and to some extent villages themselves have been depicted either as “territories” to be defended against “invasion” by “strangers” from other parts of Cameroon, or “battlefields” in the political game of give and take with the regime.<sup>6</sup>

This shows the gravity and the centrality of cultural diversity in influencing issues within African states. The culturalization of politics<sup>7</sup> in Africa has fomented hatred and in some cases generated violent and merciless intrastate conflicts in most postcolonial African states. To Gerald Hagg “colonial legacies of division of cultural groups in different states...use of ethnic and cultural differences for political support by the elite in power and the recruitment of soldiers, the high

<sup>2</sup>Paul Biya, (1987). *Communal liberalism*, London, Macmillan Publishers, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Emmanuel Yenshu Vubo and George A. Nkwa, (2004). “*Changing intercommunity relations and the politics of identity in the northern mezzam area, cameroon*” in Cahiers d’Etudes africaines (online), 161/2001, <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafricaines/70>

<sup>4</sup>Will Kymlicka, (2007). *Multicultural odysseys: navigating the new international politics of diversity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p.4.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Biya, (1987). *Communal liberalism*, p.30.

<sup>6</sup>Yvette Monga, (2000). “*Au village!*” *space, culture and politics in cameroon*, in Cahiers d’ Etudes africaines, 160, XL-4, pp. 723 – 749.

<sup>7</sup>UNESCO, (2009). *Investing in cultural diversity and dialogue across cultures*: Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org> accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

prevalence of the use of cultural identity as emotional mobilizing instrument in civil wars”<sup>8</sup> often characterize conflicts in postcolonial Africa. Ali Mazrui opines that since independence “about a third” of Africa’s 54 countries “have experienced large-scale political violence or war.” He explains that in postcolonial Africa, most conflicts between the blacks against the whites have largely been conflicts over resources, while a good number of intrastate conflicts in postcolonial Africa, that is, between the blacks against the blacks have been conflicts generated by the management of diversity.<sup>9</sup>

Given the persistent nature of cultural divides and the intensity and gravity of the ensuing ethno-cultural conflicts with accompanying consequences such as “millions of people dead, millions displaced, millions maimed, and endless unspeakable suffering,”<sup>10</sup> and given that these conflicts have occasioned “state collapse, genocide, entrenched xenophobia, and gross human rights violations, including gruesome mutilations of large numbers of people in several countries.”<sup>11</sup> This paper attempts a search for an African ethics that can navigate these divides and redress the trend from cultural divisions to cultural diversity.<sup>12</sup> I particularly argue that the African eco-bio-communitarian ethics can be used to build trust and foster the virtues required by communities that are culturally diverse.

To attain this end I am offering an empirical analysis of the situation of Cameroon in general to x-ray the politics around cultural diversity and to show how cultural diversity often degenerates into cultural divides on the one hand, and on the other hand, I carry out a descriptive analysis of the eco-bio-communitarian ethics of the Nso’ people in the grass-field regions of Cameroon in particular to show how cultural differences can be managed and had been managed in Nso. I argue in this paper that the Nso’ eco-bio-communitarian ethics, which governed interactions between the diverse community and even the natural environment can be appropriated in contemporary Africa as an antidote to the deepening cultural divides observed in African states.

This paper is divided into three main sections. In section one we define and clarify the basic terms employed in the paper; that is cultural diversity, cultural divides and an eco-bio-communitarian ethics. Section two tackles the relationship between cultural diversity and cultural divides and shows how the former is easily manipulated to create the later. This is done using the example of Cameroon to contextualize the discussion. In section three we give a descriptive analysis of the eco-bio-communitarian ethics appropriated from Nso’ Kingdom in the grass-field region of Cameroon to show how such an ethics can serve as an antidote to cultural divides and help manage cultural diversity.

## 1. Definition of Terms

### 1.1. Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity according to the UN is first and foremost a fact, because there “exists a wide range of distinct cultures”<sup>13</sup> in the human society. Cultural differences/cultural diversity thus refer to the existence of “ethnically or racially diverse segments in the population of a society or state.”<sup>14</sup> According to the UN “Cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.”<sup>15</sup> In this way the UN affirms and recognizes cultural diversity as a benediction to the human race.

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<sup>8</sup>Gerald Hagg, *Cultural diversity in conflict and peace making in africa: enhancing south africa’s contribution to conflict resolution, peace-making and peace building in africa*. Available at: [www.hrsc.ac.za](http://www.hrsc.ac.za) accessed on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>9</sup>A. A. Mazrui, “Nationalism, Ethnicity and Violence,” in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.) (2004) *The companion to african philosophy*, Black Well Publishing, Oxford, 480.

<sup>10</sup>Francoise Nduwimana, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) On Women Peace and Security: Understanding the Implications, Fulfilling the Obligations available at <https://www.un.org/womenwatch>

<sup>11</sup>Gerald Hagg, *Cultural Diversity in Conflict and Peace Making in Africa: Enhancing South Africa’s Contribution to Conflict Resolution, Peace-Making and Peace Building in Africa*. Available at: [www.hrsc.ac.za](http://www.hrsc.ac.za) accessed on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>12</sup>UNESCO, (2009). *Investing in cultural diversity and dialogue across cultures*: Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org> accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Multiculturalism, Available at [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org) accessed, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2019

<sup>15</sup>UNESCO, *Universal declaration on cultural diversity*, available at: [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org) accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

## 1.2. Cultural Divides

Cultural divides are generated from cultural differences. These divides begin with an awareness of the other groups' existence and the tagging of each group.<sup>16</sup> The consciousness of the existence of the other group results in the polarization of society creating the "us-them" syndrome (Connor, 1994). These divides have fomented hate and generated callous intrastate violent conflicts in many culturally diverse countries.

## 1.3. Eco-Bio-Communitarian Ethics

As the name suggests, Eco-Bio-Communitarian ethics, is an ethics that recognizes and takes into its moral sphere the wellbeing of the ecology, biology and the human community. It is an ethics which imbibes "the three evolutionary levels: floral, faunal, and human". Tangwa describes this ethics in the following words:

African cultures, worldviews, systems of thought, religions and philosophies are characterized by diversity and, left to themselves, united in their tolerance and liberalism, live and let live attitude, non aggressivity, non-proselytizing character and in their accommodation of the most varied diversities and peaceful cohabitation of the most apparently contradictory elements. In many African households you would find, peacefully cohabiting under the same roof, advocates and practitioners of modern science, traditional medicine, doctrinaire Marxism, Capitalism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Bornagainism, Islam.<sup>17</sup>

Entrenched or deep-seated in this ethics as described by Tangwa is the 'live and let live attitude,' the virtue of tolerance and liberalism, which we shall expatiate on later as relevant values in management of cultural diversity.

## 2. From Cultural Differences to Cultural Divisions: the case of Cameroon

Before considering cultural diversity and cultural divisions in Cameroon this section primarily shows how and why cultural diversity could easily be transformed into cultural divides and secondly we use Cameroon to exemplify this argument. The choice of Cameroon is because Cameroon is often defined as 'Africa in miniature' because of her geographical, historical and ethnic configuration.<sup>18</sup> Based on this understanding, some of the issues in Cameroon like that of cultural diversity and divisions are relevant in other African countries.

To some scholars culture has the potentiality to unite and to divide people. For instance, Samuel Huntington argues that "culture is both a divisive and a unifying force."<sup>19</sup> This is why to him culture is a rallying force as people use culture not only to advance their interests but also to define their identity. Huntington maintains that "we know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against."<sup>20</sup> And these distinctions to Huntington are often made using culture as the determinant. Arguing on similar premises Anthony Appiah sees culture in itself as being divisive. To him "every culture represents not only difference but the elimination of difference."<sup>21</sup> Hence, while culture unifies those within a given cultural group, at the same time, it excludes outsiders as well. On another dimension Dighambong in her study on the Rwanda genocide argues that "different identities, ethnic or otherwise, do not in themselves cause division or conflict." Rather, she maintains that "it is the behavior of unscrupulous governing elites

<sup>16</sup>Kwame A. Appiah, (2005), *The ethics of identity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>N.R. Fru, (2017). *A comparative analysis of reunification discourses in selected Cameroonian history textbooks*, PhD Thesis, University of Kwazulu-Natal, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Samuel Huntington, (1996), *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, New York, Simon and Schuster, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, 21

<sup>21</sup>Kwame A. Appiah, (2005), *The ethics of identity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 152.

that transform differences into divisions.”<sup>22</sup> The above views imply that a culturally diverse society is like a boiling volcano that can explode at any time if not managed properly. For instance, the challenges faced in a culturally diverse state as a result of diversity are absent in a homogeneous state. Thus, there is a certain degree to which diversity is problematic as argued by Huntington and Appiah above. The relationship between different cultural groups in a culturally diverse society is often characterized by strife. It is in this regard that Axel Honnet holds that the struggle for recognition in a multicultural society is often the driving force behind cultural divides.<sup>23</sup> Thus, while cultural diversity has the ability to procure peace, stability and development<sup>24</sup> it equally could become a dangerous tool in the society.

## 2.1. Cultural Diversity in Cameroon

Cameroon because of its historical background is a configuration of a mosaic of ethnic groups with over two hundred ethnic groups and “two hundred and thirty six languages.”<sup>25</sup> Fru Raymond describes this rich cultural diversity in Cameroon as follows:

Cameroon is the meeting, if not melting pot of the colonial legacies of leading ex-colonial nations of the world such as Germany, Britain and France. This implies that, it is one of few countries that witnessed the official colonisation of three European powers at different times in its history. It is also one of only two countries in the world that presently use both English and French as national official languages, the other country being Canada also a product of a colonial tussle. The country has two sub systems of education and a bi-jural legal system amongst other colonial legacies to accommodate its Anglophone and Francophone populations.<sup>26</sup>

This means that besides ethnic labels such as Nso’, Mankon, Bamileke, Beti, Bassa, Ewondo or Douala, Cameroon colonial history has equally constructed cultural diversity around the following labels: ‘Anglophone’ and ‘Francophone,’ ‘Christians’ and ‘Muslims.’ And Yvette Monga argues that new identities have continued to be constructed by politicians in Cameroon such as “Nordists” and “Sudists” “Bonasawa” (*sawa* meaning coast and *bona* people of). “Sawa” subsumes all the ethnic groups dwelling in the Cameroonian littoral zones and includes the Bakossi, the Bakweri, the Balong, the Abo, the Bassa-Bakoko, the Babimbi, the Batenga, the Bodiman, the Yabassi, the Banen, the Duala, the Bojongo, and the Jebale,” and these identities have some quasi ethnic labels.<sup>27</sup> The inheritance of old identities as a result of colonial activities in Cameroon and the continuous construction of new identities with cultural labels, by politicians have made Cameroon ideal in cultural diversity and in cultural divides.

## 2.2. Cultural Divisions in Cameroon

As observed from the information above, Cameroon is described as ‘Africa in miniature’ from lots of perspectives. Of interest in this paper is its rich and diverse cultural heritage which has become a thorny aspect in Cameroon from our observation. Scholars are divided on how cultural diversity can be transformed into cultural divisions.<sup>28</sup> On the one hand there are scholars who argue that the mere fact of the existence of cultural differences is a contributing factor to divisions. For instance, Appiah

<sup>22</sup>Mih, B.M. Dighambong, (2018), *Rwanda horrors of genocide: prevention is possible in our world today*, Beau Bassin, OmniScriptum Publishing Group.

<sup>23</sup>Axel Honnet, (1995), *The struggle for recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts*, Polity Press, Massachusetts.

<sup>24</sup>UNESCO,(2009). *Investing in cultural diversity and dialogue across cultures*: Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org> accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

<sup>25</sup>Paul Biya, (1987). *Communal liberalism*, p.104.

<sup>26</sup>Fru Raymond, p.2

<sup>27</sup>Yvette Monga, (2000). *Au village!*” *space, culture and politics in cameroon*, in Cahiers d’ Etudes Africaines, 160, XL-4, p. 733.

<sup>28</sup>Kwame A. Appiah, (2005), *The ethics of identity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 62.

remarks that the mere awareness of the existence of another cultural group is the debut of cultural division. This awareness result to the construction of group identity as Appiah further argues,<sup>29</sup> which is used as a rallying point to compete or to demand for group rights. Falola points out that:

Ethnicity is one of the most effective and least costly means of uniting a group to fight for their rights and demand privileges and justice. From wars to secession crises, ethnicity has been the most potent agency for seeking freedom and autonomy from rival political leaders and ethnic groups. Ethnicity is an agency of self-assertion, allowing members of a group to stand for their rights or even to complain that their share of the economic and political resources of a state are grossly inadequate compared to those of other groups. A group mobilizes ethnic nationalism to protect itself from other groups: it seeks equality and parity with other ethnic groups in access to modern education, contracts, jobs, and other opportunities.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, some scholars are of the opinion that cultural diversity in and by itself do not generate cultural divisions. According to Dighambong cultural divides are created “when ethnic identities are politicized or manipulated to generate political and socio-economic advantages for an ethnic group.”<sup>31</sup> By this it can be inferred that in a culturally diverse society the instrumentalists use ethnic differences to mobilize and rally people so as to gain support, and thus they establish the ‘we’ and ‘they’ within a given society using cultural diversity. Huntington is of this school of thought when he highlights the role of instrumentalists in creating and escalating conflict. He remarks that “as violence increases, the initial issues at stake tend to get redefined more exclusively as “us” against “them” and group cohesion and commitment are enhanced. Political leaders expand and deepen their appeals to ethnic and religious loyalties, and civilization consciousness strengthens in relation to other identities.”<sup>32</sup>

In the case of Cameroon there seems to be an interplay of the two schools of thought each contributing in sharpening and deepening cultural divisions. In Cameroon cultural diversity is like a farm that politicians exploit to secure political capital or like Monga observes, cultural differences in Cameroon are “battlefields” where politicians clash for capital. She writes that:

Economic inequalities and social injustice in the country have provided fertile ground for politicians to exploit cultural differences by engaging in a political discourse that emphasizes ethnic particularities and the importance of localities, with a recent focus on village affiliation and rural constituencies. The ethnicization and ruralization of politics in Cameroon have led political entrepreneurs not only to redefine the geo-cultural boundaries of their ethnic labels and “villages”, but also to display their cultural differences as a way of marking their cultural space, distinguishing themselves from potential or actual “enemy” groups, and “recruiting” allies. Thus, depending on the circumstances, ethno-cultural space and to some extent villages themselves have been depicted either as “territories” to be defended against “invasion” by “strangers” from other parts of Cameroon, or “battlefields” in the political game of give and take with the regime.<sup>33</sup>

From another dimension cultural diversity has been described by Konnings and Nyamnjoh as a tool that the government uses to divide and subdue the people. Discussing this within the context of the ‘Anglophone problem,’<sup>34</sup> Konnings and Nyamnjoh remarks that one of the ways that the government

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p.64.

<sup>30</sup>Toyin Falola (2003). *The power of african cultures*, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, p.129.

<sup>31</sup>Mih, B.M. Dighambong, (2018), *Rwanda Horrors of Genocide: Prevention is Possible in our World Today*, Beau Bassin, OmniScriptum Publishing Group, , p.31.

<sup>32</sup>Samuel Huntington, (1996), *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, New York, Simon and Schuster, p. 266

<sup>33</sup>Yvette Monga, (2000). “*Au village!*” *space, culture and politics in cameroon*, in Cahiers d’ Etudes Africaines, 160, XL-4, p. 723.

<sup>34</sup>Piet Konnings & Francis Nyamnjoh, (1997). *The anglophone problem*, in the Journal of modern African studies, 35, 2 pp. 207 – 229.

has been using to manage the Anglophone problem is through the manipulation of ethnic and regional rivalries between the North Westerners and the South Westerners of Cameroon to divide and rule the Anglophones.<sup>35</sup> It is within this understanding that politicians created the “Bonasawa ethnic identity “Bonasawa” (sawa meaning coast and bona people of) or “Sawa” subsumes all the ethnic groups dwelling in the Cameroonian littoral zones, and as Monga holds their ethnic labels were created in opposition to the people of the “grass field”. The grass field region constitute another ethnic label taking into consideration the Anglophones of the north west region and the Bamilekes of the west regions of Cameroon, or what Monga calls the “Anglo-Bamis.”<sup>36</sup>

From the above description it can be inferred that cultural diversity is like a bittersweet fruit. On the one hand it is a uniting force and on the other hand a force of division. In the Cameroon situation it is like a metal given various shapes by political entrepreneurs as seen above for selfish motives. This has widened and deepened cultural divisions in Cameroon and has transformed cultural diversity into a potential source of conflict in Cameroon.

The polarization of the Cameroonian society between “our side” and “their side” and a sense of “we-ness” and “they-ness”<sup>37</sup> has nursed the ground for conflict in Cameroon. Pillay is of the opinion that cultural divides often lead to the dehumanization of the other group, and sooner than later generate acts such as ethnic cleansing, genocides and other gruesome acts against humanity. For instance, the violent armed conflict in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon (Anglophone Cameroon) is an effect of the manipulation of cultural diversity by politicians in Cameroon as seen above. Cameroon is a bicultural country. British West Cameroon and French East Cameroon united in 1961 to form the present state of Cameroon. The Republic of Cameroon is a combination of two Cameroons with two different histories, cultural and linguistic identities. These cultural differences in Cameroon have been transformed into cultural divides, with the exclusion, attempts to assimilate and francophonize the Anglophone culture.<sup>38</sup> The outcome has been an armed conflict with untold human casualties.<sup>39</sup> This suggests that if these divides continue to be nurtured Cameroon could explode like a volcano in a near future. This warrants an investigation into an African traditional way of life and into an indigenous ethics of diversity in the search for an African approach to managing diversity.

### 3. The African Perspective to Managing Diversity as experienced from Nso’ Outlook

The recognition and management of differences, incompatibilities, incoherence and contradictions in general is not a new phenomenon in Africa. It is entrenched in the traditional African way of life and indigenous political cultures. The examples that shall be used here to project the African outlook are mostly drawn from Nso’ where I hail from. Nso’ is one of the Kingdoms found in the grassy highlands of Bamenda, in Bui Division, North West Region of Cameroon. The Nso’ people belong to the Bantu group of sub-Saharan Africa. The language of the Nso’ people is known as Lamnso’. Based on the Nso’ outlook I shall make a good number of generalizations based on the reasoning that “something could not be correctly described as being Nso,” without necessarily also being Cameroonian, and “a fortiori, African.”<sup>40</sup> Hence, in spite of the remarkable cultural diversities in Africa Africans do have a common outlook, with similar philosophies and practices as J. S Mbiti observes.<sup>41</sup> This is the reason why some of the findings from Nso’ on diversity management are generalized.

<sup>35</sup>Piet Konnings & Francis Nyamnjoh, (2000) *Construction and deconstruction: anglophones or autochthones?* The African Anthropologist, vol. 7. No. 1.

<sup>36</sup>Yvette Monga, (2000). “*Au village!*” *space, culture and politics in cameroon*, in Cahiers d’ Etudes Africaines, 160, XL-4, p. 733.

<sup>37</sup>Michelle LaBaron, Venashri Pillay, (2006), *Conflict across cultures: a unique experience of bridging differences*, London, Intercultural Press, p. 89.

<sup>38</sup>Memorandum Presented to the Head of State, His Excellency President Paul Biya, by the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda on the Current Situation of Unrest in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon: Available at: [westcamassoc.org](http://westcamassoc.org), accessed 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2019.

<sup>39</sup>Available at: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org) accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2019.

<sup>40</sup>G.B. TANGWA, (1996), “*Bioethics: an african perspective*,” in *Bioethics*, 10, 3. p. 186.

<sup>41</sup>J. S. Mbiti, (1975). *Introduction to african religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers, p. 8.

According to Tangwe, Africa presents a remarkable diversity and variety, not only ecologically, biologically but also culturally. This diversity is what informs and shapes the African social systems, ethical, religious and metaphysical ideas. Within the Nso' worldview this is embodied in an "eco-bio-communitarian ethics,"<sup>42</sup> an ethics that acknowledges the interdependence between the three evolutionary levels that is the floral, faunal and humans, and works for the well being of these. For instance in the Nso' worldview, there are taboos which are effective deterrent against human activities towards non humans. The practice of shifting cultivation within this worldview is one of the ways of ensuring that the soil, vegetation and the fauna recovered from human activity. Also strict taboos, as Tangwa remarks, on the eating and killing of some insects, reptiles, birds and mammals also ensure the survival of the fauna.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the Nso' people have some respect for floral and faunal. The respect for the flora and fauna is because the Nso' ethics is not anthropocentric, but it is an ethics of interdependence. Within this ethics:

Humans are more humble and more cautious, epistemologically more skeptical of their own capabilities and, therefore practically more conciliatory and respectful of other people, animals, plants, inanimate things and the invisible tangible forces of nature. There are more timorous with tampering with nature and more disposed to an attitude of live and let live.<sup>44</sup>

I argue that the co-values of this ethics could be appropriated by policy makers in contemporary African states to safeguarding diversity. The people of Nso' as indicated belong to the Tikar ethnic group. Generally there are several other clans found in Nso, like Noni, Mbororos, Bamunka and Wimbum. These people from different ethnic backgrounds, co-exist and interact in many domains like social groups, professional groups, etc and they also inter marry. When interests clash, and they often do, Ajume Wingo remarks that "deliberation takes over until the voices of all have received a hearing and a reconciliation of interests has led to a consensus."<sup>45</sup> Thus in Nso' like many other African cultures it is possible to have "peaceful cohabitation of the most apparently contradictory elements."<sup>46</sup> Tangwa writes that: "in many African households you would find, peacefully cohabitating under the same roof, advocates and practitioners of modern science, traditional medicine...Catholicism, Protestantism, Bornagainism and Islam."<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, there exist co-values of managing diversity in eco-bio-communitarian ethics that cannot be disregarded in the search for mechanisms of managing cultural diversity. These are the "live and let live," attitude "tolerance" and "liberalism" which characterize and define this ethics as shown below.

### 3.1. Live and Let Live

When two cultures with different values meet the tendency is often for the dominant cultural to assimilate the minority culture, or for one culture to be judgmental over the other. This has created more cultural gaps and conflicts. Bhangoo and Pillay exemplify this in the following experience from South Africa:

Lebo was a recent university graduate in South Africa, pleased that she would soon be embarking on her journey as a successful, independent career woman. Her first job as a community social worker brought her in contact with a rural community in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. Lebo grew up and was educated in the city,

<sup>42</sup>G.B Tangwa, (1996), "Bioethics: an african perspective," in Bioethics, 10, 3, p, 186

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>G. B. Tangwa, (1999). *Globalisation or westernisation? ethical concerns in the whole bio-business*, Oxford, Blackwell publishers, p. 233.

<sup>45</sup>Ajume H. Wingo, (2004). *Fellowship associations as a foundation for liberal democracy in africa*, in K. Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Malden, Blackwell publishing.

<sup>46</sup>G.B Tangwa, (1996), "Bioethics: an african perspective," in Bioethics, 10, 3.

<sup>47</sup>ibid

removed from many traditional African practices observed in rural parts of the country.

One of her first clients was the young boy whose mother was the third wife to his father. Even though the mother was not Lebo's client officially, she felt it as her duty as a young woman to help this mother get out of what Lebo believed was an oppressive, polygamous marriage. She felt this poor woman definitely needed to be empowered to leave her sexist husband. Armed with strong feminist beliefs, Lebo started to talk to the mother about women's rights, letting her know that no matter how desperate she felt she did not have to suffer the dominance the dominance of any man.... She suggested to this mother that polygamy enables men to continue the oppression of women, and offered to help the mother extricate herself from this situation.

Imagine Lebo's surprise when the woman burst out laughing. Lebo was shocked, angered, and insulted by the mother's strange reaction. At this, the mother ceased laughter, and shocked her head in disgust. "Women like you keep other women disempowered, not their husbands," She resorted. Lebo was confused and outraged.<sup>48</sup>

The attitude of Lebo equally describes the attitude of the westerners towards African cultures in colonial history. When the colonizer encountered cultural differences, they attempted to either uproot, erode and to assimilate. They considered their cultures superior<sup>49</sup> and used them as the standard to measure right and wrong for other cultures. "The live and let live' attitude embedded in the Eco-bio-communitarian ethics calls for flexibility which as Bhangoo and Pillay describe demands that "we remain open to difference as we encounter others. The capacity for flexibility means suspending judgment with a spirit of inquiry. Suspending judgment is not to abandon our beliefs or values, but to create a space for curiosity inside ourselves and between us and others."<sup>50</sup> Eco-bio-communitarian ethics is open to "accommodate some incompatibilities, incoherence and contradictions." This as Tangwa holds fosters tolerance.<sup>51</sup>

### 3.2. Tolerance and Liberalism

Embedded in an eco-bio-communitarian ethics drawing from its "live and let live" principle is the spirit of tolerance and liberalism. Kymlicka maintains that "tolerance is itself a fundamental liberal value"<sup>52</sup> and as a core value in managing diversity.<sup>53</sup>

However, the tolerance in eco-bio-communitarian ethics has communal dimensions. This is because the African worldview to Tangwa is "first and foremost communitarian."<sup>54</sup> Kwame Nkrumah highlights that "in the traditional African society, no sectional interest could be regarded as supreme; nor did legislative and executive powers aid the interests of any particular group. The welfare of the people was supreme."<sup>55</sup> What Nkrumah is saying is that where there is a clash between the interest of an individual or group against that of the community, the good and wellbeing of the community was protected. Chinua Achebe captures this well when he writes that "no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgment against his clan."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>48</sup>M. lebaron, V. Pillay, (2006), *Conflict across cultures: a unique experience of bridging differences*, London, Intercultural Press, p. 155.

<sup>49</sup>Kwame, Nkrumah, (1963), *Africa must unite*, New York, International Publishers, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup>M. lebaron, V. Pillay, (2006), *Conflict Across Cultures: A Unique experience of Bridging Differences*, London, Intercultural Press, p. 155

<sup>51</sup>G.B Tangwa, (1996), "bioethics: an african perspective," in *Bioethics*, 10, 3.

<sup>52</sup>Will Kymlicka, (1995) *Multicultural citizenship: a liberal theory of minority rights*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 152.

<sup>53</sup>Kymlicka, (2007) *Multicultural odysseys: navigating new international politics of diversity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

<sup>54</sup>G.B Tangwa, (1996), "Bioethics: an african perspective," in *Bioethics*, 10, 3.

<sup>55</sup>Kwame Nkrumah, (1964), *Consciencism: philosophy and ideology for de-colonisation*, London, Panaf Book Ltd, p. 69.

<sup>56</sup>Chinua, Achebe. (1989). *Arrow of god*, Nairobi, Heinemann, p.230.

The “cultural starting point”<sup>57</sup> in the eco-bio-communitarian ethics is communitarian not individualistic. The individual finds meaning and identity only in the “they,” expressed in the Nso worldview as *wir dze wir bi wir* (a human being is a human being, because of and thanks to other human beings). Pillay explains this interdependence and communitarian worldview in the following conception of self and identity:

I am a bright, shiny thread in the rainbow blanket. As I weave in and out with other equally bright threads, I stand out for I am a unique color and composition. In the same time I am also subsumed into this vivid, loud display of color in this magnificent creation that blankets all. My complementary relationship with the other unique threads allows me to be noticed and to be cloaked all at once. We come together in a beautiful, knitted rhythm of patterns and yet this very joining

is what makes our unique lines and individual patterned routes more visible. I am because we are – in this beautiful rainbow blanket.<sup>58</sup>

The contrast with this worldview and the Western outlook is that the western perspective is more individualistic. Kymlicka makes this clear when he maintains that liberal tolerance protects the right of an individual “to question and possibly revise the traditional practices of their community, should they come to see them as no longer worthy of their allegiance.”<sup>59</sup> This is not to say that the African eco-bio communitarian outlook does not entertain questions and possible revision of its traditions, rather it emphasizes on communal dimension as opposed to the western individualism.

#### 4. Conclusion

Every culture has a way of managing diversity because “there are many ways of seeing, being, and doing in the world.”<sup>60</sup> Machiavelli makes use of an allegory from the Old Testament that is quite apt in the argument we have raised in this paper:

David offered Saul to go and fight Goliath, the Philistine Champion, and Saul, to inspire him with courage, gave him his own weapons and armour. Having tried these on, David rejected them, saying that he would be unable to fight well with them and therefore he wanted to face the enemy with his sling and his knife. In short, armour belonging to someone else either drops off you or weighs you down or is too tight.<sup>61</sup>

Hence, an African ethics can better address African realities. Paul Mangwana (1993) as quoted by Kashim I. Talla (2013) has remarked that:

Our traditional and cultural heritage is so clear to us because it protects our customs, beliefs and worldviews. This heritage is relevant to us because our contemporary problems are better solved within the perspectives of such old cultural patterns. It is necessary to reason and reflect upon these time honoured values for inspiration and guidance.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup>M. LeBaron, V. Pillay, (2006), *Conflict across cultures: a unique experience of bridging differences*, London, Intercultural Press, p. 32.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup>Will Kymlicka, (1995), *Multicultural citizenship: a liberal theory of minority rights*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, p. 152.

<sup>60</sup>Michelle LaBaron, Venashri Pillay, (2006), *conflict across cultures: a unique experience of bridging differences*, london, Intercultural Press, p. 137.

<sup>61</sup>Niccolo Machiavelli, (1505), *The prince*. (trs.), George Bull, London, Penguin Books.

<sup>62</sup>Paul N. Mbangwana, (1993). *Cameroon oral tale in Ngeмба: A Study in Language and Social Setting*, Doctorat D’Etat Thesis, University of Yaounde, p. 250.

Eco-bio-communitarian ethics depicts the relationship of interdependence in the human community and stretches beyond the human community to include the floral and the faunal. It advocates for a symbiotic relationship where there is cultural diversity. Where there are differences, contradictions and incompatibilities, its 'live and let live' attitude, tolerance and liberalism can be therapeutic. If imbibed by policy makers in postcolonial African, eco-bio-communitarian ethics could rehabilitate cultural divides and help curtail diversity conflicts. What I have tried to demonstrate is that it is not only possible but also legitimate to build mechanism of managing diversity in Africa on grassroot resources that have the co-values of diversity, such as tolerance, liberalism, and the 'live and let live' virtues of an eco-bio-communitarian ethics.

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