

Neither Parochial nor Cosmopolitan: Cultural Instruction in the Light of an African Communal Ethic

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Abstract

What should be the aim when teaching matters of culture to students in public high schools and universities in Africa? One approach, which is parochial, would focus exclusively on imparting local culture, leaving students unfamiliar with, or perhaps contemptuous of, other cultures around the world. A second, cosmopolitan approach would educate students about a wide variety of cultures in Africa and beyond it, leaving it up to them which interpretations, values, and aesthetics they will adopt. A third way, in between these two, would be to give some priority to understanding and enriching local culture, while being open to and not remaining ignorant of other cultures. In this article, a work of moral philosophy, I argue for this third alternative by rebutting arguments for the other two approaches and by showing that it uniquely follows from a plausible African ethic informed by indigenous ideals of communion.

Keywords: African ethics; communalism; cosmopolitanism; culture; curriculum; higher education; parochialism

Introduction

What should be the aim when teaching matters of culture to students in public schools, ranging from at least secondary to tertiary education, particularly in Africa? For many traditional African societies (by which I mean those relatively uninfluenced by the East or the West), and according to some philosophers inspired by them, the point of education in regard to culture should be to enable young adults to help sustain a local way of life. In contrast to this parochial approach, an influential view in the West is the cosmopolitan one that such students should be informed about a wide variety of cultures, with it left up to them which one(s) they will adopt on the basis of their own choices or interests.



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These two views are at the opposite ends of a spectrum. From a parochial perspective, only one culture matters for its own sake in the classroom, while, from a cosmopolitan one, all cultures merit equal consideration there (at least insofar as they are not unjust). In contrast to both perspectives, in this article I articulate and advocate a third alternative, at least given an African context. By this middle path, it would be right for schools to give priority to understanding and enriching local culture, while also informing students of many other cultures.

I expect this “priority” approach, roughly of making the local first and the global second, will be intuitively attractive to many readers. However, I do not rest content with that, and provide a moral defence of the approach. Other types of arguments in respect of cultural instruction are possible; for instance, one could appeal to the non-moral values of authenticity or beauty to determine which culture(s) should be imparted. However, it is widely accepted that moral considerations are particularly weighty, such that if pursuing some non-moral value incurred serious wrongdoing such as a human rights violation, it would usually be reasonable, all things considered, not to do so. Supposing that morality is central to (even if not exhaustive of) what one should consider when determining how public schools should instruct culture, in this article I advance some reasons both to doubt arguments for rivals of the priority approach and to think that it follows from an attractive ethic.¹

In particular, I show that teaching the global while emphasising the local is prescribed by a moral theory that articulates relational ideas from the sub-Saharan philosophical tradition in a way that should be of interest to a global audience, in part because it includes both impartial and partial dimensions. This ethic is the principle that actions and policies are right if and only if they treat people as having dignity in virtue of their capacity to relate communally, where an agent ought to prioritise communal relationships of which she is already a part. I spell out what a communal relationship amounts to and show that respecting people as capable of it means teaching students in a way that supports a local way of life, while taking care to ensure that they are not ignorant of the rest of the world.

In order to make headway, I assume for much of the article that a given society has a single culture, loosening this restriction in the conclusion, where I acknowledge the reality of multicultural societies in Africa and elsewhere. There are complications in multicultural societies that I do not try to address here, saving them for another occasion. My aim is to show that the local should receive priority relative to the global, which nonetheless also merits a place in cultural instruction, leaving for another occasion the distinct issue of how to balance the instruction of different local cultures.

1 My approach to cultural instruction is broadly similar to what Appiah (2006) advances, but my defences of this approach differ from his, particularly by virtue of my appeal to a communal ethic.

In addressing cultural instruction, I take up just about everything intuitively relevant to culture except for moral education.² I exclude it because morality probably admits of norms that are universally applicable and binding, unlike, say, those for making music or participating in rituals. In addition, there is already a large literature on moral education that deserves its own treatment.³ In the rest of the article I proceed by first spelling out more of what I mean by “cultural instruction,” the familiar parochial and cosmopolitan approaches to it, the salient arguments for these approaches, and some *prima facie* reasons to doubt these arguments. Then, I articulate the alternate, prioritarian approach that I favour, spell out an Afro-communal ethic and show that its combination of impartial and partial relationality provides support for my favoured view. I conclude by noting some complexities that I will have glossed over in this article, especially regarding moral education and multiculturalism, and that merit further discussion elsewhere.

Influential African and Western Approaches to Cultural Instruction

In this section I sketch the basics of the debate between parochialism, specifically that in the African philosophical tradition, and cosmopolitanism, which is characteristic of contemporary Western philosophy of education. Beyond setting the stage for an approach to cultural instruction that differs from both, I also aim to cast doubt on the salient rationales for parochialism and cosmopolitanism.

In describing cultural instruction I do not provide a rigorous analysis of what culture is, which is unnecessary in order to clarify which kinds of teaching I am addressing in this article. The concept of culture is well known for being heavily contested (for a taste of recent debates, see Birukou et al. 2013; Rathje 2009; Spencer-Oatey 2012). For my purposes it will suffice to point out that by “culture” I include things such as languages, values, belief systems, social relationships, aesthetics, and knowledge. For example, what counts as Chinese culture would include (but hardly be exhausted by) the written language of Mandarin, the value of harmony, Confucianism and other non-theist worldviews, the norm of saving face, the practice of calligraphy, and the tendency to be pragmatic and holist when seeking to understand the world. In contrast, European culture includes (amongst other things) written Romance and Germanic languages, the value of autonomy, monotheism and especially Christianity, the commonness of a nuclear family, the prizing of abstract visual arts, and a theoretical and analytic orientation towards the pursuit of knowledge.

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- 2 One might suspect there is some tension in making a moral argument for a certain way to teach culture while setting aside issues of moral instruction, but there is not; arguing that it would be wrong, say, to keep students ignorant of lifestyles around the world is compatible with setting aside discussion of which conception(s) of wrongness students ought to be taught (even if the former would naturally have some implications for the latter), so as to focus on, e.g., the arts.
 - 3 For just a sample of the literature, see Kiss and Euben (2010).

So construed, culture in this article excludes large facets of medicine, technology, engineering, economics, domestic politics, international relations, chemistry, and physics, if only for the sake of focus. There can of course be cultural dimensions to these fields, but the suggestion is that there would be something substantial to them that would remain if one abstracted from those. In any event, in order to make the discussion tractable, I mainly address what should be taught in university departments such as music, visual art, architecture, literature, languages, sociology, religion, and philosophy. Insofar as culture is indeed relevant to the study of other fields, say, medicine and economics, the kinds of suggestions made here in principle apply to them. In addition, if a university or high school were to take the advice of this article, it could make sense to devote an entire, interdisciplinary course to the local culture, in order to obtain a big picture of many of its dimensions and their relationships.

In traditional African societies, and in philosophical work inspired by them, when it has come to teaching young adults about culture, the dominant theme has been the need to enable them to sustain and participate in the local way of life. In an article that surveys the major aims of education in pre-colonial Africa, a leading scholar of it, Augustus Adeyinka, and a colleague remark (Adeyinka and Ndwapi 2002, 18–19),⁴

Children developed a sense of obligation towards the community and grew to appreciate its history, language, customs and values. This is perhaps one of the greatest attributes of indigenous education as opposed to Western education which has been rightly accused of alienating young Africans from their cultural heritage. ... Most traditional communities in Africa perceived education as a vehicle for maintaining or preserving the cultural heritage and *status quo*. This partly accounts for why traditional teachers discouraged their pupils from probing into the unknown and imposed heavy sanctions on those who tried to do so.

Notice how the descriptive and prescriptive are interwoven in the quotation. On the one hand, the authors are recounting how traditional African societies have typically educated so as to sustain their respective cultures, while, on the other hand, the authors express support for such an approach.

One finds something similar in an additional paper by Adeyinka, co-authored with another colleague. Here, they favourably quote the first Nigerian professor of education, Aliu Babatunde Fafunwa, on the “cardinal goals of African traditional education,” the sixth and seventh ones being the following (Adeyemi and Adeyinka 2002, 228; see also 229):

(6) To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs; (7) To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the

4 For a similar analysis, but largely in the context of moral education in traditional African societies, see Pearce (1990) and Ikuenobe (2006, 135–255).

community at large. The identified principles listed above have far reaching implications for the formal education of today.

Again, the suggestion is that contemporary education in Africa has something to learn from the traditional form of it when it comes to how to teach culture.⁵

What would make sense of this narrow sort of approach to cultural instruction, one that does not consider it essential to teach young adults about cultures from other parts of the world? An armchair anthropology suggests that many indigenous sub-Saharan peoples formed small-scale societies that did not routinely come into contact with cultures radically different from their own (e.g., Busia 1962, 80; cf. Appiah 2006, xii–xiii). If there were little prospect of interacting with those from alien cultures, let alone ever leaving your society for one, then there would be little incentive to learn about them.

However, as is well known, in the 21st century globalisation is in full swing. Rural villagers often access the internet and see their livelihoods depend on decisions made in other societies.

It could also be that some underlying moral values have been taken to prescribe parochialism when it comes to culture. For example, the principle of “family first,” common in traditional African societies (on which see, e.g., Appiah 1998), might have been interpreted to mean that only the folkways of one’s people matter. For another example, consider the idea that one’s foremost goal in life should be to become a real person, i.e., to exhibit virtue, which one can do, according to one influential interpretation of the sub-Saharan tradition, insofar as one accepts “the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives” (Menkiti 1984, 173).

However, another salient part of African ethics (e.g., Deng 2004; Gyekye 2010), and indeed any philosophically plausible moral perspective, includes an impartial strain. Characteristically, human beings have dignity (or at least a full moral standing) that merits consideration by everyone else, an egalitarian standpoint that can provide leverage for criticising, say, gendered customs in one’s society. Including such an impartial dimension in one’s ethical worldview would enable one to make good sense of, e.g., the practice common amongst indigenous African villages of welcoming visitors with food and a place to sleep (Gathogo 2008; Mandela 1996). The idea that all human persons have dignity would underwrite a practice of hospitality, while also aptly forbidding the treatment of innocent strangers merely as a means to the ends of one’s community. Hence, even if family should come first and one must learn the local rules, it does not follow that the rest of the world’s peoples and their ways of life do not matter.

5 For broadly similar views, see many of the contributions to Seepe (1998) and to Higgs et al. (2000).

In short, even if partial morality prescribes parochialism, that is not the only sort of morality.

Finally, these days a notable argument for focusing exclusively on indigenous African ways of life when educating young adults is an appeal to redress for what is widely known amongst philosophers as “epistemic injustice” (Fricker 2015; Grasswick 2018, sec. 4.1), whereby one can be wronged in one’s capacity as a knower, or more broadly, thinker. Since European colonial education neglected and even denigrated traditional sub-Saharan ways of interpreting the world, some maintain that, to make things right, at least African schools in the post-colonial era should focus on recovering them, with Western cultures sometimes being deemed akin to a virus that must be eradicated (Murove and Mazibuko 2008, 104–5) or to a ghost that must be exorcised (Murove and Mazibuko 2008, 108; see also Lebakeng, Phalane, and Dalindjebo 2006, 77).

However, rectificatory or compensatory justice, which is what the political community owes those insofar as they have been wronged, is not the only sort of justice. It should be advanced in ways that are consistent with distributive justice, i.e., what the political community owes those insofar as they have not been wronged, or at least in ways that do not impinge greatly on this value. Distributive justice could prescribe familiarity with non-African cultures, perhaps as a potential way to improve African people’s quality of life, which I indeed argue below.

Not all African philosophers favour a parochial approach to education. In fact, Kwasi Wiredu, one of the most influential African philosophers of the post-independence era, objects to the sort of “education”—he thinks “indoctrination” or “authoritarianism” are better words—he finds prominent in traditional Africa, namely, one that accords “a low priority, if any at all, to the discussion of alternatives or even to the rational justification of the one given alternative” (1980, 3). He prefers an approach in which students would be enabled “to perceive, in relation to any given issue, as many as possible of the relevant alternatives” (Wiredu 1980, 3). That approach is at the heart of cosmopolitan cultural instruction, which has been a salient, if not dominant, theme in contemporary Western philosophy of education.

Broadly speaking, a cosmopolitan orientation towards education in respect of culture⁶ includes an “intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness to divergent cultural experiences” as well as “respect and enjoyment of cultural differences with a sense of global belonging” (McCarty 2011, 7). A cosmopolitan education would teach students a wide array of languages, values, belief systems, social norms, and aesthetics. Instead of solely “educating the children in the family and clan tradition” (in the words of the former Kenyan president, Jomo Kenyatta, quoted in Adeyemi and Adeyinka [2002,

6 As is well known, there are a variety of cosmopolitanisms, including moral and political beyond the cultural, on which see Kleingeld and Brown (2013).

229]), education would impart “the ability to think as a citizen of the whole world, not just some local region or group” (Nussbaum 2002, 289). In addition, the attitude towards the world’s cultures would be a substantially neutral one, in the sense of avoiding favouritism towards the culture of the students’ own society. Indeed, by a cosmopolitan approach, students “would be encouraged to question their narrow attachments” (Waks 2009, 589), as opposed to being expected and prompted to uphold them.

Martha Nussbaum (2002; 2010) has been a particularly influential advocate of a cosmopolitan approach to education, although she has hardly been the only one (see also, e.g., Hansen 2010; Papastephanou 2005; Waldron 2003). Of course, just as not all African philosophers favour parochialism, Wiredu being a clear exception, so not all Western philosophers favour cosmopolitanism.⁷ Even so, cosmopolitanism is prominent in contemporary Western philosophy of education in ways it is not in most other philosophies around the world, such as Islamic or Confucian varieties.

Although cosmopolitanism is routinely associated with some strains of early Greek thought, it is the natural companion of the egalitarian and individualist ethical systems that grew out of the European Enlightenment (Appiah 2006; Kleingeld and Brown 2013, sec. 1.2). If what confers the same moral standing on us is our ability to govern ourselves with our rational faculties, as per Kantianism, or to satisfy our informed preferences, à la utilitarianism, then it would likely be immoral for educators to restrict students to any one conception of the good life. What would matter instead would be the individual student’s choice, made in the light of an awareness of as many options as possible, or her satisfaction, potentially achieved from any source.

However, just as “family first” is implausibly interpreted to require a strict partiality such that out-groups do not matter morally, so impartiality implausibly exhausts the domain of the moral. You really should save the life of your mother before that of a stranger, if you had to choose between them, such that you should feel more guilt for not having rescued her than for not having rescued him. It is difficult for impartial moral theories such as Kantianism and utilitarianism to entail and plausibly explain why. In the next section I articulate an ethic that is attractive for including both partial and impartial facets and that grounds reasons for students to become aware of cultures other than their own, while nonetheless prioritising it.

A Prioritarian Approach to Cultural Instruction and Its Communal Foundation

In this section I spell out a “middle path” between parochialism and cosmopolitanism, at least of the sorts analysed in the previous section. I argue that the balance it tries to strike between being aware of cultures from around the world while showing greater

7 For some exceptions see the discussion of Nussbaum’s critics in Waldron (2003) and Waks (2009).

concern for one's own culture is plausibly grounded on a relational, and specifically communal, morality that has both impartial and partial dimensions. I do not maintain that the only theoretical way to defend the priority approach to cultural instruction is by appeal to the ethic I invoke below; however, insofar as the ethic is appealing, the priority approach gains some support for following from it.

The Priority Approach

With this approach to cultural instruction, the focus should be on the local while not ignoring the global; to speak of "prioritising" one's own culture is meant to suggest that other cultures are not entirely neglected and do receive some attention. To use an analogy, it would be neither a monarchy, where one person has all the power, nor a democracy, where power is equally shared; instead all would have some power, but some would have a greater share than others. A school's emphasis should be on understanding, enriching, and participating in the prominent culture in which the school is set, while also ensuring students learn about ones elsewhere in the world that might be quite different from their own.

From this perspective, *contra* cosmopolitanism, it would inappropriate merely to construct "world citizens," with no particular ability to support their culture or interest in doing so. Instead, the aim should be to produce citizens who identify with their culture and are in a position to contribute to it, more than with other cultures. However, *contra* parochialism, the aim should also be to produce citizens who understand and are open to learning from cultures other than their own, so that it would be wrong for teachers to discourage pupils from probing into the unknown and considering changes to the *status quo*.

Let us look at an example of what this approach would entail for the curriculum. When it comes to literature, a school in an African country should focus on novels that were written by those from it and that are about it, supplemented by works written by those from other African cultures. In addition, given that a large majority of African societies have featured oral "texts" for several centuries, students should listen to stories, proverbs, and poems recounted by elders, either in person or in digital form. Although a majority of the literature curriculum in an African school should be African, it should not neglect texts from, say, the Indian, Latin American, and Euro-American traditions. And where styles, techniques, or insights from non-African sources would be revealing when adapted to an African context, students-cum-writers should borrow them. Such an approach would differ from the parochial one of excluding the foreign on the one hand, and from the cosmopolitan one of according equal weight amongst sources, on the other. A similar approach would apply to disciplines such as music and philosophy.

When it comes to the attitude of the teacher, she would not impose sanctions on students for being interested in non-African texts, and instead should readily facilitate access to them. However, she might especially enable and encourage students to engage with the

local culture. For example, she might point out that it would be revealing to develop it in a certain way, suggesting that pupils should continue their studies with an eye to making a contribution someday. Or she might organise a written or oral competition whereby students would demonstrate their knowledge of texts composed by their people. Or she might organise field trips so that students listen to readings by local authors and poets and ask questions of them.

A Communal Ethic

Parochialists will object that students might choose to forsake the local upon becoming aware of the global, while cosmopolitans will object, to use Wiredu's terms, that there is no "rational justification of the one given alternative," i.e., that the emphasis on the local is not defended and perhaps is not defensible in the face of a global array of options. To respond to these concerns, as well as provide more general support to the priority approach, I now advance a communal ethic that I have articulated and applied to a variety of topics for more than a decade (key texts bearing on education include Metz 2009; 2012; 2015; 2018). I do not indicate here how I arrived at the ethic, setting aside the myriad African sources that have informed it, and instead focus on motivating it to a global audience and showing how it grounds the priority approach to cultural instruction.

The ethic has both impartial and partial facets. As noted above, it has been common for African peoples, or at least the philosophers inspired by them, to think in terms of "family first," on the one hand, while they have also tended to ascribe dignity to human beings, on the other. To enable these two ideas to cohere, I have suggested that, instead of thinking of human beings as having dignity in virtue of their having a life force that has come from God, which has been the usual idea in the African tradition (e.g., Deng 2004, 500–1; Gyekye 1997, 63–64; Iroegbu 2005; Wiredu 1996, 157–71), we should consider them to have dignity in virtue of their relational nature.

Specifically, according to my favoured ethic, we should treat individuals with respect insofar as they are capable of relating communally (or harmoniously). Communion (harmony) consists of two logically distinct ways of relating. First, it includes a relation of identity in which one both enjoys a sense of togetherness with others, say, thinking of oneself as part of a "we" and taking pride in what others have achieved, and participates with them on a cooperative basis. Second, it includes a relation of solidarity in which one helps others, in terms of both making people better off and making them better people, which one does out of sympathy with them and for their sake. The combination of identity and solidarity is full communion, and is characteristic of how members of an intuitively desirable family, workplace, or neighbourhood interrelate.

By my account, a person has dignity insofar as she is capable of being both a subject and object of communal relationship. That is, she has a superlative non-instrumental value that demands respect insofar as she can exhibit identity and solidarity with others

and others can exhibit identity and solidarity with her. It follows that a very large majority of human beings have dignity and so count from the moral point of view, regardless of where they are in the world or whether they are related to the agent. This conception of human dignity plausibly explains why, if you had to choose between striking a mouse or a human person with your car, you should hit the mouse; the human is worth more than the mouse and is so because it is more capable of being party to a communal, or roughly loving, relationship. A being, such as a mouse, that cannot be a subject of communion but could be an object of it with us has a partial moral status, but not dignity, by this account; so, if the choice were between running over a plant and a mouse, you should target the plant.

Simply having the capacity to relate communally confers moral importance on people, entitling them all to some protection and concern. However, treating people with respect in virtue of their capacity to commune will mean taking into account the ways they have actualised this capacity (just as, for Kantian ethicists, one respects people's capacity for autonomy by reacting in certain ways to the autonomous choices they have made). For example, where an agent has communed with other parties in the past, that provides some (*pro tanto*) moral reason to continue to do so with them, relative to enemies or strangers. Family members, co-workers, and neighbours are the sorts of persons who merit extra cooperation and help from a given agent, because of the relationship she has shared with them. This social interpretation of "family first" is meant to supplant the traditional African way of grounding partial obligations, viz., on blood ties (on which see Appiah 1998).

Unlike the partial moral theories of egoism and Western communitarianism, according to which the norms of one's society ground moral obligations (e.g., Walzer 1983), this communal ethic has a strong impartial dimension, ascribing dignity to a very large majority of human beings. In this way, the ethic captures the strong intuition that an agent has duties in respect of those who cannot help or harm her and who are beyond her in-group; it is a person's *capacity* to relate that gives everyone a reason to take her into moral account. However, unlike the impartial moral theories of consequentialism and Kantianism, this ethic also has a principled partial dimension. Since it entails that there is extra reason to continue to commune with those who have already been in communion with one, and since it does not make obligations to aid particular parties contingent on the long-term consequences or the fact of having made a voluntary commitment to aid them (by, e.g., having made a promise), this ethic (best) captures the strong intuition that one must save the life of one's mother before a stranger. I take it that the ethic is attractive in these respects.

Defending the Priority Approach with the Communal Ethic

Consider, now, what this communal ethic means for the way a school ought to instruct a young adult regarding culture. Against the cosmopolitan approach, the communal ethic entails that such students have weightier obligations to identify with and exhibit

solidarity towards the culture of the society in which they have been embedded. At least insofar as young adults have enjoyed a sense of togetherness with a certain society and participated in it and this society has helped them by having socialised them and supported their studies, they have an obligation to commune with it that is to some extent stronger than they have in respect of some other society. And, so, when it comes to cultural instruction, students have extra reason to think of the local culture as theirs and to take pride in it, to participate in it as opposed to remaining aloof from it, to help enrich it, and to do these things “because this is who we are” and not merely for self-interested reasons.

As noted above, cosmopolitans are likely to object that there is nothing special about one’s own culture, that its interpretations, styles, and the like demand justification in the face of so many competing alternatives on the globe. That might be relevant for a Kantian ethic that would prize “training intended to enable people to make deliberate rational choices” (Wiredu 1980, 3). However, it is not so relevant to a communal ethic, characteristic of African philosophy but of prima facie appeal to a broad audience, according to which “immorality is the word or deed which undermines fellowship” (Kasenene 1998, 21). The plausible reason to give greater attention to local culture than to other cultures throughout the world is not that the former is better or somehow more justified, but rather that it is one’s own. Putting it on an even footing with other cultures would arguably be to undermine one’s fellowship with other members of one’s society.

Turning to the parochial approach, there are several reasons for thinking that it is incompatible with the communal ethic, despite the latter’s relational orientation. First off, when it comes to solidarity, a school must enable its students, living in a globalised world, to interact with other cultures that are likely to affect them. However, it would be a mistake to think that the non-local cultures that should be taught are only those likely to influence students’ lives in virtue of extant socio-economic dynamics. Even if students would be unlikely to visit a certain foreign culture, and even if people from that foreign culture were unlikely to make decisions that would shape the lives of these students, they might still have something to learn from it. It is reasonable to think that any long-standing tradition has some insight into the human condition, which means that it would be harmful to restrict students’ knowledge to only one; they would be prevented from improving the quality of life of themselves and others. For instance, I presume that literacy has on the whole been a welcome addition to African cultures that did not have it before (setting aside the unjust, colonial means by which it was often imposed).

In addition to solidarity, there is some reason in terms of identity to teach more than just the local to young adults. Although young adults did not voluntarily choose to grow up in the society where their parents have reared them, this fact does not in itself mean that they have been oppressively subjected to its culture. Their day-to-day interactions could be communal, roughly based on trustful coordination, as opposed to coercion,

deception, or exploitation. Even so, it is true that the communion would be all the more intense if the decision to participate in, and otherwise uphold, the local culture were an informed one. A society that restricted its people's knowledge of other types of cultures would not honour their capacity to commune, where people coming together and staying together of their own accord is the intuitively most valuable instance of that.

Yet another communal reason to teach young adults about cultures other than their own is to enable them to share their own culture with people who are members of quite different ones. According to the communal ethic everyone has dignity that demands respect, and so, given that every long-standing culture has some insight into the human condition, it follows that there is some reason for, say, African peoples to go out of their way to share their cultures with the rest of the world.⁸ Although there is a particularly strong reason for Africans to commune with other Africans, where they can commune with non-Africans at little cost to themselves, they should, which, in turn, means offering some of their wisdom, aesthetics, and the like to the rest of the globe. However, in order to be able to convey one's own culture to others, one needs to understand them and what they value when it comes to knowledge, art, etc.

Parochialists will tend to object that, upon being informed of other ways of life, there is no guarantee that students will choose to abide by the local one. That is true; the odds of the local garnering support are likely to go down upon students becoming aware of other, global options. However, the relevant way to support culture, by the communal ethic, is cooperatively, not by foisting it on people. Part of what is attractive about a friendship or romantic relationship is people having made the decision to stay in it based on an awareness of what the other party is like and knowing that there are other possibilities. That is real commitment or communion, with similar remarks applying to the relationship between students and others in society who are members of a culture. Although students have an obligation to support the culture of their society, society in turn has an obligation not to force them to do so.

Conclusion

In this article I have abstracted from certain complexities in order to make it easy to spell out and defend a prioritarian approach to cultural instruction that differs from parochialism and cosmopolitanism. I have been writing as though there exists only one culture for a certain society, but of course many societies in the 21st century are multicultural in Africa and elsewhere. In addition, I have been implicitly assuming a given culture lacks morally troubling elements, for instance is free of patriarchal force, but many cultures are in fact oppressive (or, in my terms, are discordant rather than fully

8 For more on the importance of African peoples taking this "outward" approach, and not merely an "inward" one, see Metz (forthcoming).

communal). Furthermore, I remind the reader that I have set aside one major element of culture, namely, moral education.

A more comprehensive account of cultural instruction would take multiculturalism, oppression, and moral education into account. Where there are multiple cultures in a society, should schools devote resources to them in proportion to the demographics? Presumably historical injustice done to one group's culture would warrant extra attention for a time, but are there additional reasons, besides compensatory justice, to deviate from demographic proportionality? Where a local culture is oppressive, does that mean a public university ought not to teach that part of it, or should teach it but criticise it, or should teach it but remain neutral in respect of it, leaving it up to students to decide for themselves without "bias"? When it comes to morality, might there be strong reason to err in favour of parochialism as opposed to the priority approach advanced in this article for the putative reasons that moral norms have a particularly weighty influence on how the rest of society is organised or that one has strong epistemic reason to trust the moral testimony of elders in one's society (cf. Ikenobe 2006)? Or, in contrast, since moral norms are universally applicable, is there strong reason to err in favour of cosmopolitanism as opposed to the priority approach, consulting a very wide array of moral perspectives in search of common ground? My hope is that the communal ethic and priority approach to cultural instruction advanced in this article are of enough interest to merit extension to these difficult matters in future work.⁹

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