

THE CONVERGENCE OF SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND TECHNOLOGY IN MODERN AFRICA: EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF 1 SAMUEL 13:16-22 IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

The intersection of science, religion, and technology presents challenges for contemporary African societies, particularly in the context of the subjugation of the Israelites by the Philistines. This research addresses the gap in existing scholarship concerning the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) frameworks on African identity, traditional religions, and socio-economic development. Previous studies have predominantly focused on the technological advances themselves without critically examining their socio-cultural effects; thus, the current study aims to illuminate how the historical subjugation of the Israelites by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 13:19 is reminiscent of the tendency of AI technologies, shaped by Western paradigms, can affect African worldviews and cultural integrity. The scope encompasses analysis of 1 Samuel 13:19 in exegetical alignment with African religious frameworks, traditional knowledge systems, and the role of oral traditions in Africa. Employing exegetical method, this study will utilise a theoretical framework based on the works of Jacob K. Olupona and Gerald West to explore African critical responses to the challenges of AI technologies within an African paradigm. Preliminary findings suggest that AI may undermine African linguistic richness and narrative ownership, echoing the Israelites' historical confrontations with technological dependency on the Philistines. The study concludes that a proactive reclamation of African narratives and knowledge systems is essential for promoting cultural resilience against external technological impositions. It recommends that African scholars and policymakers prioritise the integration of indigenous perspectives within the broader discourse on technology and identity to foster a more equitable approach to AI development and implementation.

Keywords: Science, Religion, Contemporary Africa, identity, Technology, Ethics and Development

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Introduction

The intersection of science, religion, and technology is a critical area of exploration for contemporary African societies, particularly against the backdrop of historical narratives that shape identity and cultural integrity. The subjugation of the Israelites by the Philistines, as described in 1 Samuel 13:19, provides an illustrative framework for understanding the complexities inherent in the adoption of modern technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), in Africa. This biblical account reveals not only the socio-political dynamics of ancient Israel but also the enduring implications of technological dependency and cultural domination, which resonate within today's contexts.

Despite the significant advancements in AI technologies, existing scholarship tends to focus predominantly on the technological elements rather than their socio-cultural ramifications, particularly in African settings. This research identifies a critical gap in the literature concerning how AI frameworks, often shaped by Western paradigms, influence African identity, traditional religions, and socio-economic development. While some scholars have engaged with the challenges posed by these technologies (Collins, 2025, p. 115), there remains a lack of comprehensive analysis that connects historical narratives, like that of the Israelites' oppression, with contemporary issues in African societies. Thus, the problem statement is underscored by a need for critical examination of the implications of AI technologies and their potential to undermine African worldviews and cultural integrity.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the connections between historical narratives and present-day challenges, thereby advocating for a proactive reclamation of African narratives and knowledge systems. This purpose is crucial not only for preserving cultural resilience but also for promoting an equitable integration of indigenous perspectives in technology discourse. By grounding the analysis in the teachings of influential scholars such as (Olupona, 2014, p. 13-15) and (West, 2009, p. 13-21), this research aims to articulate African responses to the complexities posed by AI technologies within a distinctly African paradigm.

The scope of this research encompasses an exegetical analysis of 1 Samuel 13:19, framed by African religious frameworks and traditional knowledge systems. Additionally, it explores the role of oral traditions in articulating cultural identity in the context of technological advances. This

approach is justified by the necessity of contextualising AI discussions within a rich tapestry of African heritage and contemporary experiences, thereby offering new insights into the implications of AI within African societies.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the broader discourse on technology and identity in Africa, highlighting the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge systems into discussions about AI development and implementation. By advocating for an understanding of the historical subjugation experienced by the Israelites, the research underscores the urgency of reclaiming African narratives to safeguard against external technological impositions.

Employing exegetical method, this study utilises a theoretical framework anchored in the works of (Olupona, 2014, p. 13-15) and (West, 2009, p. 13-21). The research involves a critical analysis of existing literature, coupled with biblical narratives to gather diverse perspectives on the intersection of AI, African identity, and traditional religions. This methodological approach is essential for providing a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural effects of AI in Africa and positioning the study within a scholarly discourse that prioritises African voices and experiences.

The Intersection of Science and Religion in Contemporary Africa

The intellectual discourse on the relationship between science and religion has been a recurring theme throughout history and continues to be relevant today (Fleming, 2016, “Where science and religion meet” para.1-2). These two fields often sustain each other’s consciousness within human minds, not only through heated debates attempting to disprove one another's claims but also in the pursuit of potential agreements. Fleming (2016) opines that popular contemporary culture often depicts religion and science as locking up in irreconcilable and unalterable conflicts arguing that historical records on the relationship between the two shows the opposite that science has largely developed because of religious quest to know more about God through the study of nature (“Where science and religion meet” para. 2).

Generally speaking, a segment of scientists now believes that an intelligent designer or being is responsible for the order and patterns observed in creation (Fleming, 2016, “Where science and religion meet” para. 7). This view aligns with the beliefs of both Abrahamic religions and various

African religions, which attribute the workings of the universe to a supreme being. This dialogue has developed over centuries, leading to a converging relativism regarding the source of life (Nwaogwugwu, 2011, p.13).

Cunningham (1992) explains that religion fundamentally represents a belief system that encompasses the worship of supernatural beings (p.97). Regardless of how one interprets or debates this concept, it is essential to acknowledge its significance. If we were to abandon the connection to the supernatural, we would essentially strip religion of its very essence, the core that sustains it. Anderson and Keldon (2024) discussed science as a systematic pursuit of knowledge about the natural world, involving observation, experimentation, and analysis to understand how things work. It relies on evidence and seeks to explain phenomena through testable theories and models, following the scientific method of making observations, forming hypotheses, conducting experiments, and drawing conclusions. The goal of science is to build knowledge that helps us understand the universe and improve our lives (p. 13).

In this modern age, we find ourselves in a world heavily influenced by scientific advancements and technological innovations, all designed to enhance human life. This profound commitment to science and technology has, in some circles, been perceived as a form of religion in its own right. While it is undeniable that modern scientific thinking possesses its own merits, it also serves to create a distinct divide between science and religion, the empirical and the divine (Fleming, 2016, “Where science and religion meet” para.1-10).

Science operates on evidence that can be observed and measured, appealing to human understanding through empirical facts. In contrast, religion addresses a deeper, often unquantifiable reality, resonating with the human soul and driving the pursuit of a connection with a supreme order and other divine entities. This quest for spiritual fulfilment can lead to moral transformation, establishing religion as a vital agency for social change and ethical development (Fleming, 2016, “Where science and religion meet” para.12-14).

Consequently, religion has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of scientific and technological progress. At the same time, these advancements have contributed significantly to the historiographical narratives and sustainability of religious beliefs. For centuries, there has been a symbiotic relationship between science and religion. In fact, it seems that with the dawn of human

intellectual advancement and creativity, religion has continually supplied the raw materials for scientific exploration. The desire to scrutinise and verify religious claims has, in turn, enriched both scientific knowledge and the broader spectrum of human thought and modernisation (Fleming, 2016, "Where science and religion meet" para.12-14).

The conclusion drawn from scholarly research on the interplay between science and religion indicates that science holds significant potential to advance humanity, particularly in the context of religious perspectives, if it prioritises the human and ecological dimensions of creation and existence. Conversely, religion can deepen its focus on humanity's connection to the supreme beings and divine realities through ontological theology, particularly in relation to human destiny within ecological systems and in addressing moral and spiritual imperatives for eschatology.

The Exegesis of 1 Samuel 13:19

The biblical exegesis of 1 Samuel 13:19 speaks profoundly to the complexities facing contemporary Africa as it grapples with the twin threats of cultural imperialism and technological domination. The verse encapsulates Israel's struggle against the Philistines, highlighting the themes of oppression, technological disparity, and the quest for autonomy. As Africa stands on the precipice of technological transformation, paralleling the Israelites' plight under Philistine control, the lessons gleaned from this scripture become increasingly pertinent. In a rapidly evolving world, where artificial intelligence (AI) and other scientific advancements pose both opportunities and challenges, the echo of this ancient narrative serves as a call to preserve cultural identity and cultivate self-sufficiency.

Textual Integrity

Researchers investigating the biblical text suggest that the historical accuracy of 1 Samuel 13 is sound and unproblematic. It has been noted that the passage lacks specific details about the duration of Saul's reign; however, Hebrew authors chose to leave this gap unaddressed rather than alter the original text. Kolberg (2024) further explains that 1 Samuel 13:1 is usually rendered as a mark of Saul's reign, who was the first king of Israel. For example, the Revised Standard Version (RSV) phrases it as: "Saul was... years old when he began to reign; and he reigned... and two years over Israel." The ellipses indicate that the translator believed a number was missing due to shortcomings. This analysis posits that the Hebrew wording of 1 Samuel 13:1 is intact, functioning

as a chronological reference for Saul's reign rather than a comprehensive account of his time as king (p.1).

Historical Context and Contemporary Parallels

1 Samuel 13:19 reveals a time when Israel was unable to manufacture its own weapons due to the suppression imposed by the Philistines. This scenario can be likened to Africa's historical and ongoing struggles against various forms of external domination, including colonialism and neo-colonialism, as well as the current influx of Western technological paradigms that dictate the contours of development on the continent. The Philistines, having monopolised blacksmithing, represent the external forces that dictate what is produced, shaping the tools and technologies that dictate military (or, in contemporary terms, economic and technological) power.

In the modern context, Africa often finds itself reliant on Western powers for technological advancements. The narrative reflects a tangible fear: if the continent becomes overly dependent on Western technology, it risks not only economic subservience but also the erosion of its cultural identity. Just as the Philistines aimed to diminish the Hebraic ability to defend themselves, contemporary Africa risks becoming incapable of leveraging its indigenous strengths, overwhelmed by foreign innovations that do not take local contexts into account.

Key Themes Explored

Control and Oppression

The control exerted by the Philistines over blacksmithing resonates with modern Africa's dependency on foreign technology and expertise. This control is multifaceted, ranging from educational materials dominated by Western paradigms to the pharmaceutical industry that often fails to cater to local health needs. Just as the Israelites were stripped of agency in weapon-making, African nations can find themselves deprived of the capacity to innovate and produce solutions to their challenges.

Technological Disparity

The absence of blacksmiths symbolises a significant gap in technological proficiency. Today, this manifests in terms of access to education and technological infrastructure that is often at odds with

Africa's needs. While the world races toward an AI-driven future, the continent must grapple with inadequate resources, limited internet connectivity, and a scarcity of technical expertise. In an era where knowledge is power, the vast chasm in technological capability poses significant risks, not only to individual nations but to the collective identity of Africa.

Identity and Autonomy

The spiritual and socio-political implications of Israel's inability to forge its weaponry raise essential questions about African identity today. The dominance of foreign countries and cultures in shaping educational curricula, technological development, and economic policies creates a risk of cultural erosion. If African nations cannot reclaim their identity amid global advancement, there is a real danger that they will lose not just their cultural heritage but the means to thrive in their unique context.

Foreshadowing Conflict in Contemporary Context

The struggles depicted in 1 Samuel foreshadowed the wars that would follow, and today, the tensions created by dependency on foreign technology presage potential conflicts over resources, power, and identity. In a world where technology can dictate economic prosperity, access to AI, whether in agriculture, education or health, will influence which nations flourish and which stagnate. As Africa navigates these turbulent waters, the need for foresight and strategic autonomy becomes paramount.

Theological Reflection

1 Samuel 13:19 urges reflective engagement concerning the balance between reliance on God and technological advancement. Despite the Israelites' material challenges, their rich spiritual heritage offered them resilience and guidance. This touchstone poses critical questions for contemporary African nations: How can they engage with advanced technologies while remaining anchored in their cultural and spiritual traditions? The pressing need for self-reliance, echoed by the Israelites in the face of Philistine oppression, translates into a modern mandate: to develop localised solutions that integrate indigenous wisdom with technological advancements.

Religious and spiritual practices, while often viewed through a colonial lens, have proven resilient. They offer platforms for community cohesion and the transmission of culturally relevant

knowledge. With the integration of AI and technological innovations threatening cultural narratives and practices, African countries stand at a crossroads. They can either uncritically adopt Western paradigms or creatively reimagine technology's role while respecting their unique identities and histories.

Contemporary Applications of Biblical Text

The implications of 1 Samuel 13:19 extend powerfully into Africa's present-day context. The verse serves as a reminder of historical lessons that remain vital as nations approach next-generation technologies. Here are several contemporary applications:

Fostering Local Innovation

Africa must cultivate a culture of home-grown technology through investment in education and research that values indigenous knowledge. For example, local universities and institutions should collaborate with communities to develop contextually appropriate technological solutions that take African realities into account, thereby forging a path toward true autonomy akin to the Israelites' desire for weapon manufacture.

Empowering Cultural Narratives

The richness of African languages and cultural practices must be preserved and integrated into the programming of AI and technological tools. Just as the Yoruba language offers unique interpretations and expressions, technologies should reflect and amplify local voices, ensuring that AI serves as an enabler rather than a detractor from cultural identities.

Harnessing Religious Communities

Religious institutions possess deep-rooted networks in African societies, providing unique platforms for education and social cohesion. By engaging these communities in the dialogue around technology and identity, there may emerge collective wisdom and strategies that align modern innovations with traditional values.

Advocating for Policy Change

Policymakers must prioritise the integration of indigenous knowledge systems within educational curricula and technology policies. This step includes advocating for equitable access to technology that empowers local communities, ensuring that advancements in AI do not necessitate sacrifices of cultural identity or autonomy.

The Implications of AI and Western Paradigms on African Identity, Religion and Development

Africa is on the brink of a significant transformation in the 21st century, with the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and technological progress. However, the continent is currently trailing its Western counterparts in scientific and technological advancement. Many African have abandoned their digital platforms for greener pasture in favour of the West (Narkoh, 2024, p213-214). The adoption and integration of AI into various sectors raises critical questions about its potential impact on African children and youth. As we traverse this new terrain, it is urgent to reflect on how the infusion of Western intellectual paradigms into African education might disrupt traditional modes of thought, thereby undermining the essence of African identity and cultural richness.

At the heart of understanding the implications of AI on African thought is the recognition of oration as a fundamental aspect of African culture (Gregorio, 2023, "AI and Freedom of Expression" para 34) African societies have long relied on oral traditions to convey knowledge, values, and communal history. The power of language as a vehicle for cultural transmission goes beyond mere communication; it embodies the identity, struggles, and triumphs of African peoples. However, as the Western educational system becomes increasingly dominant within African universities, there is a palpable risk of cognitive colonisation. When the minds of African youth are trained to align with Western frameworks, traditional epistemologies risk being side lined, potentially leading to the loss of vital aspects of our cultural identity and richness.

The work is situated within an African scholarly context that seeks to illuminate how African societies respond to the convergence of scientific and religious thought. A pivotal voice in this discourse is (Olupona, 2014) who engages deeply with the legacy of Bolaji Idowu. Olupona emphasises that while Idowu acknowledges the many benefits inherent in the scientific method,

he also highlights its intrinsic limitations, particularly regarding the pervasive negative attitudes towards African traditional religions. This perception reflects a broader scholarly struggle for African identity, challenging the dominant narratives shaped by colonial and neo-colonial influences (p. 13-15).

Olupona's framework, a significant contribution to the field, is employed to critically assess the limitations and challenges posed by AI technologies, as well as their potential benefits, from the perspective of the African worldview, a viewpoint already marginalised by Western constructs. Idowu's equally significant contributions are especially noteworthy; he advocated for a civil religion specifically tailored to Nigeria, aiming to preserve and celebrate African identity alongside traditional religious beliefs. By utilising the Yoruba religion as a case study, Idowu (1966) successfully established the concept of "Olodumare" as a universally recognised representation of an African consciousness of a Supreme God, positioned on par with Western conceptualisations of divinity (P.35-43). This intellectual endeavour serves to uphold the communal ideologies that are central to African societies.

West (2009) traced the origins of black theology to the initial interactions between indigenous peoples of southern Africa and missionaries affiliated with colonial powers, who employed the Bible as an instrument of subjugation. This historical backdrop played a significant role in the development of liberation hermeneutics (p.13-21). In a separate analysis, West critiqued the Enlightenment scientific paradigm, positing that it is fundamentally anchored in humanism and the Renaissance. He contended that it predominantly reflects the Western culture of industrialisation, which has been instrumental in facilitating colonialism. West asserted that the enslavement of Africans served to bolster Western industries and that the occupation of the African continent by Western and European entities is a direct outcome of this dynamic. He advocated for the establishment of an African ideological framework that emphasises African identity within a religious context (West, 1995, 21-25). Moreover, the increasing prominence of artificial intelligence within the religious domain necessitates a critical examination to cultivate an African perspective on AI that effectively engages with religious texts and worship through an African lens.

Africa's legacy as the cradle of humanity is both a foundational narrative and a call to action. Western scientists have validated this narrative, recognising the continent as the birthplace of humankind, yet the true ownership of this history and its implications remains an ongoing struggle (Lombard, 2021, p.11-12). As the global economic landscape shifts towards Africa, the pressing question arises: will Africans genuinely assert ownership of the opportunities and narratives that emerge, or will we continue to be passive recipients, moulded by external influences? If we surrender our cognitive faculties to technologies like AI, the challenge of reclaiming our narrative becomes even more daunting. We stand at a crossroads where technology, while potentially beneficial, threatens to overshadow the unique creative capacities that define African thought.

The editorial capabilities of AI, alongside its rapid advancement, present both opportunities and risks. While it can enhance productivity and efficiency, we must be wary of its encroachment on human creativity, especially in communication modes deeply rooted in African linguistic diversity. For instance, the Yoruba language offers rich expressions that reflect unique cultural realities. When the Yoruba say "pele," it conveys empathy and concern, an interpretation that lacks a direct equivalent in Western expressions of apology such as "sorry." This linguistic nuance emphasises the danger of allowing AI developed within a Western context to dominate our linguistic landscape, potentially erasing the subtleties that define our communication styles and cultural expressions (Jemiriye, 1998, p.19).

Scholars such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe have made unparalleled contributions to literature and global discourse, grounding their narratives in African ideological and cultural frameworks. Their works exemplify how African voices and perspectives can resonate within the broader human experience, asserting that our stories are not ancillary to global narratives but central to them. However, suppose AI tools begin to reshape our expressions. In that case, we face the risk of diluting these rich legacies, serialising creativity in ways that strip away the essence of our cultural narratives.

Furthermore, religion, a complex yet pivotal element of African identity, intersects with our discourse on AI and colonisation. The dominant religions in Africa, particularly Christianity and Islam, have been transmitted through the cultural ideological lenses of the West and the Arab world. While they provide spiritual guidance, these frameworks can also act as agents of

colonialism, shaping the beliefs and practices of African peoples in ways that often overlook indigenous knowledge systems. The culturally contingent nature of religion means that despite the numerous interpretations it may undergo, there remains a central truth that binds Africans, transcending the boundaries of religious affiliations.

This sensibility is echoed in the traditional architecture of the Yoruba people, epitomised in structures like "Akodi." The design, featuring a central parlour surrounded by individual rooms, symbolises communal living and collaboration, a metaphor for harmony despite diversity. Such structures embody a cultural ideology that fosters unity among different religious and ethnic groups, emphasising that cooperation and mutual respect can coexist within a communal ideological framework (Adeoye, 2023, p.110-111).

Despite the incursions of Western influence that have disrupted these traditional structures, it is crucial to articulate a vision for traversing our realities that simultaneously embraces technological advancements and prioritises the preservation of our cultural identities. To do so, it is essential to advocate for an interpretive framework that integrates African worldviews not only in the arts and humanities but across all domains, including science and religion. This balanced approach is germane to maintaining our cultural identity while benefiting from technological progress.

Adamo (2005) explored the significance of interpreting religious messages through an African lens. Their works highlight the necessity of integrating African perspectives into theological discussions to maintain a sense of identity while engaging with global religious narratives. For instance, the engagement of Africans with Hebrew and other Semitic communities predates European influence, indicating that Christianity is not solely a Western construct. This counter-narrative allows for a more nuanced understanding of how African religious practices can be aligned with global traditions while maintaining their unique cultural roots (p.7-45).

However, as we embrace these scholarly perspectives, we must remain vigilant of the implications of scientific advancements, particularly those resonating from Western paradigms. The allure of technological progress should not overshadow the significance of cultivating home grown innovations that resonate with African realities and aspirations. It is vital to foster an educational environment that encourages critical thinking, creativity, and the preservation of traditional

knowledge systems. This realisation entails recognising the sophisticated epistemologies that exist within our cultures and ensuring that they coexist alongside scientific advancements.

The Findings on the Ideological Infiltration of AI in the African Context

Impact of Western Education

The dominance of Western educational paradigms in Africa mirrors the scriptural narrative of Israel's struggle against Philistine oppression, paralleling the cognitive colonisation that threatens traditional African knowledge systems and cultural identity, akin to the Israelites' loss of agency in weapon-making.

Role of Oral Traditions

Just as Israel's cultural identity was tied to its storytelling and history, oral traditions in African societies are crucial for knowledge transmission and community bonding. However, these traditions may be overlooked in favour of Western modes of communication; much like the Israelites faced a systematic erasure of their self-reliance.

Linguistic Vulnerability

The richness of African languages reflects a unique cultural expression that stands at risk if AI technologies are solely developed from a Western context. This situation echoes Israel's technological dependency, where lack of control leads to vulnerability.

Narrative Ownership

African writers like Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe echo the need for narrative ownership, similar to Israel's struggle for autonomy in the face of Philistine control. The improper use of AI tools threatens to dilute African narratives; much like the Israelites faced the risk of losing their identity and means of defense.

Religious Frameworks

The influence of Christianity and Islam in Africa often arises from Western and Arab perspectives, overshadowing indigenous belief systems; akin to how Israel's spiritual resilience was challenged by external domination.

Recommendations

Integrate Indigenous Epistemologies

Educating systems should incorporate traditional African knowledge alongside Western frameworks. This integration mirrors the need for African nations to reclaim their identity and self-sufficiency, much like the Israelites' quest for independence from Philistines.

Preserve and Promote Oral Traditions

Initiatives to document and celebrate oral traditions should be prioritized. This echoes the importance of maintaining cultural memory as central to resilience, akin to the lessons of Israel's history that should guide contemporary practice.

Culturally Contextualised AI Development

There is a need to encourage local developers to create AI tools sensitive to African languages and cultural contexts, ensuring that nuances are retained. This approach is essential for fostering autonomy, as advocated by the narrative of 1 Samuel.

Empower African Narratives

Literature and media that highlight African perspectives should be promoted, reinforcing local voices akin to the voices of Israel that resonate in their ongoing struggle.

Support Indigenous Religious Practices

Discussions around indigenous belief systems should be fostered, allowing for coexistence with major religions. This creates room for the rich spiritual heritage that once provided resilience against oppression.

Community Involvement in Tech Dialogues

Local communities must be involved in conversations about AI and technology. Engaging them aligns with the biblical call for self-reliance and informed autonomy that characterised Israel's hopes against Philistine control. By implementing these findings and recommendations, Africa can explore technological advancements while preserving its rich cultural heritage and identity, echoing the resilient spirit of the Israelites in 1 Samuel 13:19.

Conclusion

The discussion of AI and Western paradigms in the context of African development is not a simple dichotomy of good or bad. It is a complex issue that requires a balanced approach. While we must be vigilant of the potential risks and pitfalls, we should also recognise the possible benefits and opportunities. By promoting a synthesis between tradition and innovation, we can steer these challenges and forge an African identity that remains resilient, dynamic, and reflective of the rich nature of our diverse cultures.

1 Samuel 13:19 captures profound truths about human experience, the struggles for identity, autonomy, and the reclamation of agency in the face of systemic oppression. As Africa stands at a technological crossroads, the lesson of the blacksmiths' absence resonates deeply: dependence on outside powers not only compromises the capacity for self-defence but also threatens to undermine cultural identities essential for community cohesion and resilience. In this era marked by rapid advancements in AI and other technologies, African nations face the formidable challenge of constructing their narratives while leveraging modern tools. By remembering the lessons of the past and acknowledging the cultural richness that defines them, African societies can move toward a future where they are not merely consumers of technology but innovators, custodians of their heritage, and architects of their destinies. This critical examination of identity and autonomy is both a necessity and a responsibility for the emerging generations, fostering a future that proudly embraces Africa's unique narrative within the global landscape.

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