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Abstract

This inaugural lecture is about archaeology and its applications to life and living in Nigeria. Indeed, it is archaeology as if human progress on a sustainable scale matters. Archaeologists commune with the ancestors of a given socio-cultural landscape, in an attempt to deeply explore the kingdoms of the human spirit through the material forms of existence. It is not about trivialities. Archaeologists are bridge builders who connect the hidden past lifeways to the present, so as to pave the way for self-confidence and human progress on a sustainable scale. This scenario gains its importance against the backdrop of Nigeria's colonial entanglements with Europe and currently, neo-colonialism otherwise called modern globalization. My archaeological and ethnographic research work among the Tiv of Benue State between 1982 and 1987 under the direction of Late Professor Bassey Andah showed that indigenous knowledge systems of iron metallurgy, pottery technology, and architecture/engineering flourished in Nigeria before the advent of Europe. Available radio-carbon dates from some of the excavation units in Tse-Dura and Ushongo hilltop settlements ranged between 1490 and 1790 A.D as well as from 1240 to 1500 A.D respectively. Pottery making is an important component of mineralogy, a field of geology. Stone fortifications that surrounded these settlements were adaptations to security and ecological conditions. This was a feat of engineering with enormous messages for contemporary Nigerians. European slave trade as from the second half of the 15th century and colonization in the 19th century A.D, dealt a serious blow to the Nigerian thought system which was about the local people's ways of knowing and doing things. Nigeria can reclaim its lost glories by returning to the ontology of our cultural heritage. This is about cultural rebirth or a revolution by education, from the primary school

level to tertiary institutions. We can learn a lot from such Asian countries like Japan, Singapore, and China that became technologically powerful by returning to their roots in a critical manner, having experienced colonization before. Nigeria remains undeveloped and thoroughly disorientated because it refuses to put indigenous heritage and/or epistemologies on the front burner of its development agendas. Again, Nigeria's participation in the international community is largely uncritical, thus paving the way for outsiders to continue to tap the country's resources very cheaply while the citizens groan. The Nigerian ancestors through their representatives (archaeologists/anthropologists) are reminding everybody based on concrete/empirical evidence, that we were producers of knowledge and knowledge systems long before the coming of Europe. This is the central focus of my research, close to four decades ago in the Benue Valley among other places in Nigeria.