

# African Perspectives on Global Development



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Edited by

Mahmoud Masaeli, Sanni Yaya  
and Rico Sneller

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**PART I:**  
**AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE:**  
**ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES**  
**ON WELLBEING**

## CHAPTER ONE

# AN INTRODUCTION TO AFRICA AND ITS ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF DEVELOPMENT

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Africa is not merely an invention with a modern/imperial/colonial background. Nor is Africa merely a continent in need of foreign aid from the richer affluent societies. Africa might be economically underdeveloped, politically unstable, and in part socially chaotic, and/or somewhat suffering from civil wars and social unrest. Individual and cultural practices might be one of the causes of underdevelopment in some regions of the continent. Hijacking of religion by extremists—as it is evident, for example in Nigeria, Somalia, and Mali—certainly reflects the truth of miserable life of people living in these regions. Nature might also be hostile to Africa's development. But, Africa is more, and certainly different, from the negative image of the continent and its peoples portrayed in the mass media. Africa's face does necessarily reflect poverty porn, identifying the observable living condition of people suffering from the simple lack of resources, illiteracy, and the mismanagement of their own day-to-day life. It is wrong, and unintentionally deceiving, to convince the Western audiences that the continent has paused in perplexity, and that the West must embark on charitable plans to help the continent. How simplistic could the perspectives in the mainstream view of development be to confuse the audience with a sense of morality, charity and aid programs, for instance, rather than reminding them of their categorical duty for justice and advocacy missions? How unsophisticated would the idea be that the problems of Africa could be addressed by soliciting the affluent people of the advanced societies to call for monthly donations to rescue the life of the poor children etc.? It seems that we are unwittingly betraying beautiful Africa, its rich culture, its alternative view of development, its own philosophy of life, and its unexplored capacity to

growth not only economically, but also socially and politically. The continent enjoys colourful cultures, a lively sense of its own identity, the vivid authentic self-expression, and has elaborated its own genuine view of life. The continent has been the cradle of civilization in the pre-colonial era, and today it is undergoing a diverse cultural, philosophical, and spiritual development with a great potential to be aligned with, and contribute to, the contemporary debates around the spirit of Africa.

*Africa,  
has touched your soul,  
you have breathed in  
a love of Africa, a love  
that never ceases,  
a love that never  
goes away.  
You have been  
delighted, charmed,  
have become  
enchanted by  
The Spirit of Africa. (Bob Blackwell)<sup>1</sup>*

In spite of this rich and colourful background, tears may drop till chicks watching TV programs petitioning help to poor people, being engaged in anti-poverty plans, and or rescuing the life of needy children. Our conscience is definitely shocked watching documentaries narrating the vicious practice of slavery, the Scramble for Africa, genocidal colonialism, and the recent holocaust in Rwanda, and the slaughter in Sudan, Niger, and Congo. Our spirit is damaged watching the picture of the sickly body of mothers and their kinds, our heart is broken tracing news on starvation and famine, and we get angry receiving story of child soldiers or new mining slavery or hijacking of innocent girls by Boko Haram in Nigeria. We cannot sympathize with corrupt leaders, with the robbery of the richness of the continent, with violence and bloodshed. But, the disapproval of misery in the continent is not the right mode of our moral responsibility toward the continent.

It is great, as Singer puts it, to help if we “prevent something bad from happening” (Singer 2009, 15). It would be deplorable to not also donate to aid agencies to prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care. It is definitely a failure to not hear the inner voice from within to help our fellow brothers and sisters stuck in hardship. Help is a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.poemhunter.com/poems/africa/page-1/8130019/#content>

moral responsibility toward everyone, everywhere, in anytime to prevent something bad happening to them. The growing consciousness about the gamut of evils such as low life expectancy, social exclusion, ill health, illiteracy, dependency, and effective enslavement conditions us to downplay the severity and persistence of the hardship and to think of it as or charitable assistance. Moral judgment, and sympathy as a matter of fact, could justify our charitable moral sentiment. Our imaginative capacity to sympathize with others is a clear road to the undertaking of moral duty to help. But, this morality does not lead us to justice; to fulfil our undeniable duty for eradication of the man-made and systemic causes of deprivation and hardship. Nor could sympathizing with the approval of the conscience oblige us to compensate for the inflicted harm to others, rectify damages, and empower the victims. The urgent task is to understand Africa's own inspiring philosophy and discourse of life. Justice requires kneeling Africa's sweetest words of life and beauty, elucidation of its beliefs and rituals, and communion with the nature, distinctive identity, and belonging to its land. Africa is accessible through its authentic self-expression. In *Chants d'Ombre* (1945) Leopold Sedar Senghor incredibly romanticized this sense of identification of Africa:

*Naked woman, black woman*

*Clothed with your colour which is life,  
with your form which is beauty!*

*In your shadow I have grown up; the  
gentleness of your hands was laid over my eyes.*

*And now, high up on the sun-baked  
pass, at the heart of summer, at the heart of noon,  
I come upon you, my Promised Land,  
And your beauty strikes me to the heart  
like the flash of an eagle*

It is doubtless that the very beautiful Africa became the victim of the external plans sinking the richness of the continent. Past colonizers, and today's guardians of unjust systems, are guilty of the underdevelopment of the continent. Although the sincere mind and good intentions of people who are motivated to help is praiseworthy, the truth identified with poverty porn is that help may turn out to be more divisive than good for the continent. Sympathy and drive to help are adorable to the extent that we do not picture the face of people of Africa as helpless beneficiaries whose needs must be secured by the external saviors.

It is unjust to ignore the intellectual, cultural, and economic potential of the continent for its growth and self-expression, and instead imagine a moral duty framed in the self-proclaimed mission of the donor countries to develop Africa from their own, often top-down, perspective. The intellectuals of continent are right to criticize the entire gambit of help and foreign aid and emphasize justice. The voices from within Africa urge us to place ourselves in their place, to understand the nature and causes of suffering and deprivation; then by understanding of ourselves as African, we can change our perspective and our moral assumptions, and act with empathy for justice. A shift away from our sympathizing imaginary toward understanding of the systemic causes of deprivation, we could commit ourselves to empowering of our fellow humans kept in underdevelopment and deprivation. There is nothing about rectifying of the historical and systemic harms in sympathizing with others. Nor is there any view into empowering the victims and walking alongside them to the road to justice in the sympathizing imaginary. Nnyigide and Egenti cite Odimegwu's observation:

African development then would refer to the realization of the potentialities of the African continent and peoples in the principles and values of our Africanness in the course of the interactions of Africans and other peoples in the pursuit of the realization of African nature and African end (Nnyigide and Egenti 2014, 40).

Africa is insisting on the recognition of its own difference of cultural and identity; depiction of its own face as Africans; to confirm that Africa is not a construct. Rather, Africanness is born into their self-image. Africa must portray its own picture of the good life-specific to Africa and its beauty of culture, community, spirituality, and identity. If deprivation is to be terminated, our self-image as saviors in a moral mission to help must be ended. Undertaking morality to help is conditioned to accomplishing our duty for justice; changing our perspective. This change obliges us to not only stop retaining the discriminatory system, but also to rectify our past wrongdoings, and more importantly commit ourselves to respecting Africa's original image of life and be prepared to learn from them. Political will must be created to respect Africa; we must explore the beauty of its cultures, learn authentic lessons from its self-image, and imagine how we can be prouder of our duty to Africa to imagine ourselves in the face of beautiful Africa. Only in this way the *impartial spectator*<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> The term Impartial Spectator is borrowed from Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

or conscience, the voice from within, could identify our commitment to Africa.

In keeping our promise to learn from Africa, we will end up criticizing ourselves from within, transforming our superior view to Africa, halting our patriarchal self-imaginary mission to help the poor. We may lament how we have been trapped in the vortex of a self-proclaimed mission to ameliorate poverty on behalf of Africans, deceiving ourselves, themselves, and our audience. Moral sympathy to help failed in changing the face of the continent. Indeed, it is the silent killer of the growth of the continent, because it is built on the assumptions that do not necessarily reflect the living condition of the developing countries.

Idea of development is hegemonic—a given historical conjuncture sets the parameters of how we think. As a result, the idea of morality to help is inherently deceptive because it springs from the very hegemonic knowledge of development. That is the reason why post-development thinkers quarrel the foundations of the morality to help by inquiring what the meaning of development is and who is benefiting from it (Masaeli, forthcoming).

The early harbingers of Africa's independence had already raised their concern about how the West conceives of the continent. *Black Skin, White Masks* exemplifies how the idea of morality to help distorts understanding of the causes of underdevelopment and, indeed wittingly, ignores colonial dehumanizing policies which portray the picture of Africans non-European inferior people (Fanon, 1965). The mechanism of double suppression formed in the “containment” and “denial” of colonies even continued in the era of neo-colonialism. This mechanism—which entails physical, economic, social, and psychological elements—could best be interpreted in accordance with today's practice of inclusion/exclusion in international trade and other means of interaction in the international life. More critically, denial emanates from a process of alienation of people of the former colonies from their history, culture, and identity. This denial of the soul of people and communities from themselves involves a pattern of suppression depicting the invisible influence of colonial over the mind of people of developing countries. That is why Fanon disputes such a psychological construction over the mind of people and encourages a kind of people's consciousness themselves. He is clear that negation of the soul of the people of former colonies is not only a social act. Rather, it is an act of depersonalization; detaching people from their own sense of identity:

Fanon believed that reforms and help flows from the former colonizers to the developing countries are not the right solutions for perplexity of poverty and underdevelopment. What is required is to depict a link between emancipation with people's prosperity. Only through the struggle for restoring of people's humanity justice would be given to the unequal status of African and Carrabin societies (Masaeli, forthcoming).

Development of the continent through its own cultural identity and its own customs, language, values and image of life, has always been the main concern of Africans. That is obvious that, during the scramble for Africa—alongside the divide and rule by colonizers—Africa was forced into alienation from its own identity. Language assimilation and adoption of the Western culture have torn up the communitarian values of the continent and its cultural beliefs. The divided continent could hardly wrap its head around a critical discourse of life for both political and intellectual independence. That is the reason why Africa has had a long history of struggle against both colonial exploitation and colonization of the mind. Indeed, development of the continent couldn't even be imagined without success in this struggle over energising culture and values, expressing its own pattern of thinking, and celebrating of its own identity and culture. Central to this struggle is that the wellbeing of the continent is merely not envisioned in the new scientific mode of progress, but rather rests on its culture, arts, music, communal values, worldview and spirituality, fashion and customs, and its own genuine self-expression.

Africa is misrepresented as a dark continent, lagging behind modernity, identified with ritualistic religious beliefs and witchcraft practices displayed by media, falsifies the true image and potential of Africa. This is not to confirm that scientific values, critical thinking, and rationality are the means of progress. It is also true that economic growth is the main road toward terminating hardship and economic deprivation. But, human wellbeing does unavoidably rest on this narrow vision of happiness. Science for growth could be claimed, celebrated, exercised, and nurtured by all nations. What makes scientific progress humanitarian, and wellbeing the condition of flourishing nations, is their own original view of life, cultural and self-expression, belief in their self-reliance and self-esteem. Africa, envisioned in this perspective of its own genuine representation—i.e. preserving its own authentic self—will equip itself with the modern means of growth, Leo Igwe admits:

Africans should stop hiding behind this misrepresentation that reason and science are un-African Western values. Africans should embrace the

enlightening matrices of critical mindedness and work to dispel the Dark Age and barbaric mentality that loom large on the continent (2010).

Harbingers of Africa's awakening have identified the independence and development of the continent with this mutually supporting interaction of the institutionalization of modern reason and cultural and identity preservation. In other words, it is evident from Africa's struggle for independence that a double consciousness has been searched for by Africa's geniuses for the wellbeing of the continent. The first is to be aware of the importance of modern reason for progress. The second illustrates the originality and authenticity of the indigenous cultural identity. Kwame Nkrumah, who led the liberation of Ghana from the chains of colonial rule, and triumphantly gained the independence of the country in 1957, illustrates the urgency of this double consciousness. In a speech presented to his countrymen on March 06, 1907, Nkrumah insisted on a need to change the minds and attitudes to position African personality as the condition for the enjoyment of independence, and more particularly the ability to manage their own affairs. He is clear in his announcement to the world on Africa's view of development: there is a need to rebuild the African identity as the pre-condition for re-building of the independent Ghana. Dreaming of Africa's re-birth—the renaissance aimed at restoring the identity and creativity of the continent—Nkrumah identified the true independence in terms of historic Africans responsible for their own unique language, cultures, and societies. Crucial in this perspective of Africa is the Africanness of people: "We are all African People" (Nkrumah 1961, 18). This sense of being African has always been vivid in Africa, making Africans rightly proud of their own identity, culture, and Africanness. It is not a utopia; nor is it a rootless dream. The Africanness of the continent is a historical reality which could not be destroyed by the colonial rules. Even assimilation of language and customs could not dissolve the unique identity of Africa.

This fabulous expression of Africanness is reminiscent of the very double consciousness of the modern being striving to restore the devastated identity. In a wonderful manner, a dialectical interplay between the double consciousness and the responsibility of historical Africa is also displayed in this alternative view on development. It is doubtless that the heroes of Africa's independence have manifested Africa's need for self-esteem and self-reliance on the one hand, and neatly synthesized the institutionalization of reason and cultural identity together on the other hand to create the sense of and commitment to self-responsibility. This terrific spirit and quest for independence is seen in Africa's modern literature and poetics



as well. In an eloquent piece of poetry entitled “It is the Africa in Me”, Diana van den Berg (1999), expresses this spirit:

It’s the Africa in me  
that loves the forest in which I wake,  
that sees and hears its fauna and flora and revels in their names.

It’s the Africa in me  
that you hear in my spirited conversation,  
that shakes my shoulders as I sob my sorrows  
or laugh my insides, inside-out.

It is worth emphasizing again that “Africa was born into Africans”, and hence must be expressed to identify an alternative to development, reflecting how Africa looks for restoration of its past glory, the beauty of its culture, and the creativity of its life. This is the real capability of Africa for development; a powerful and original agency to build new Africa. It is in this context of conscious restoration of historical manifestation of itself that Africa could fulfil its wishes, find its best expression, and achieve its own desired development and wellbeing. This spirit of expression paves the way toward the conscious understanding of Africa.

We are going to see that we create our own African personality and identity. We again rededicate ourselves in the struggle to emancipate other countries in Africa; for our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent (Nkrumah 1961, 106-7).

A parallel dream for restoration of Africanness was expressed by Julius Nyerere, whose struggle for independence also started from traditional culture. Such a wonderful dream; he employed traditional music and dancing in demonstrations and protestations to make political rallies more visible and effective. Central to this effort to revive the local and national culture in Tanzania was a passion for a genuinely African socialism tailored into the Tanzanian road to development: *ujamaa* or extended family, brotherhood, in the Swahili language. This innovative construct was an undeniable fit into the communitarian fabrication of African tribal social beliefs, values, and practices. In theory, *ujamaa*, as a cooperative scheme, could instil the local culture, belief systems, music and dance into a sense of national identity, and then transform it into a unified body politic. Reminiscent of the cooperative villages of utopian socialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nyerere assumed that *ujamaa* boosts collective agriculture, and by which improves country’s progress. As a utopian cooperative

scheme, *ujamaa* organized the proper delivery of equipment and facilitated a productive economic system around the nucleated rural settlements, similar to what Robert Owen did in accordance with his new moral world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in New Lanark Mill in England, and then in the New Harmony societies in the US. *Ujamaa* also promoted the cooperative mode of production by the familyhood of the extended family. And, the same as utopian socialism, *ujamaa* provided a good education system as well as other basic needs to the population. Innovative in this model of development aimed at growth of the country was the dissolution of tribalism into villagization, and instilling villagization in the modern national identity. It is important, therefore, to realize that:

The policy of *ujamaa* [...] is not intended to be merely a revival of the old settlement schemes under another name. The *ujamaa* village is a new conception, based on the post Arusha Declaration understanding that what we need to develop is people, not things, and that people can only develop themselves.... (Kamuzora 2010, 96).

This cultural self-comprehension of Africanness is truly genuine to the continent because it manifests a unique way of self-expression. Nyerere was aware of the fact that true independence will not be realized if the continent cannot find its own indigenous social organization, and this achievement would be possible if Africa find ways to express its own African origin. This origin is the very communal values, ethnic perspectives, beauty of dance and music, and spiritual rituals immanent in the culture of Africa, rather than the individualistic basis of development in the Western perspective. Villagization of production as the engine of development originates from a very African model of growth invented in accordance with a deeper struggle for recovery of the crushed identity during colonial rule. Nyerere believed that restoring indigenous culture must especially start from the training of youth who may have forgotten their own traditional cultural self-expression. This could protect the future of the country against cultural trends targeting the devastation of cultural identity. Hence, although Tanzania must prepare to interact with the international cultural community, follow scientific spirit for the development of the country, and pursue intellectual exchange with the world, it must also be vigilant and remind its youth of the originality of Tanzania's identity. In light of these arguments, cultural policy came to be the central component of policy-making in the country, including the re-introduction of music and dance in the school system. Nyerere argues in favour of this policy:

Culture is the essence and spirit of any nations. A country which lacks its own culture is no more than a collection of people without the spirit which

makes them a nation. Of all the crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe we have no indigenous culture of our own; or that what we did was worthless – something of which we should be ashamed, instead of the source of pride (Nyerere, 1962).

This cultural self-expression as the genuine mode of development was best articulated by Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal and Aimé Césaire of Martinique, who delved into the intellectual construction of Africa's identity and set it as an objection against the Western view of life. Reflecting the cultural values of Africans, and in parallel to Nkrumah's African personality, *négritude* became a symbol of revolutionary consciousness in Africa's struggle for self-expression against the historical imposition of colonial racist culture. *Négritude* connoted a furious voice of those who were feeling stifled not only in Africa, but also in the Caribbean and Latin America. It could quickly have garnered supporters from all corners of the world against the assertion of supremacy of the white and inferiority of black.

A voice of revolt

A voice of resentment

No doubt.

But also of fidelity, a voice of freedom, and first and foremost, a voice for the retrieved identity. (Aime Cesair)

This insurgency was extended everywhere in both intellectual and socio-political domains aiming to empower the colonized people against the colonization of mind and economic exploitation of the colonizers. Indeed, by associating itself with *négritude*, Africa affirmed its *otherness*. But, not the inferior one asserted by the west, rather, *otherness* with its own memory, identity, culture, and self-expression. In this context of recalcitrance, the politics and discourse of the development could be meaningful if *négritude* – i.e. to recognize the identity, culture, and aesthetics of Africa – is confirmed.

Amical Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Nawal El Saadawi, Nelson Mandela, and Bishop Desmond Tutu have all marched on this road to fortify the struggle for independence, simultaneously working for the wellbeing and preservation of Africa's identity. In light of this deep cultural and identity diversity, genuine philosophy of life with roots in the beliefs, worldviews, customs, spiritual rituals, and the legacy of the sages, complex questions are posed: What are Africa's alternative views of development? In what way could Africa's rich philosophy of life contribute to the development of the continent effectively? How would this contribution improve the

living condition, and the wellbeing of the continent? How could African worldviews play a role in today's debates in the ethics of global development and global ethics? To what extent could this contribution resolve the existing economic and socio-political trauma and more importantly improve the prosperity and economic and human development of Africa?

Contemporary philosophers and scholars of Africa provide genuine insights into these questions sharing their own alternative view about the wellbeing of the continent. These insights lay down the content of this book. Stanley Uche Anozie, who has long been engaged in the debates on Africa's cultural identity, and notably works on the Igbo worldview in Nigeria, believes that demands for dignity, equity, freedom, justice, peace, tolerance, respect, common good and happiness and flourishing are central in Igbo cultural identity. However, all of these notions are to be interpreted in light of Africa's communitarian ethics of common good. To consider such powerful view of community and common good requires merging these values into the context of the culture and identity of Africa. Munyaradzi Mawere and Costain Tandi of Zimbabwe present a natural philosophy of life of indigenous persons. Reminding us of Africa's personality and specificity of culture, Mawere and Tandi marvellously draw on the beauty and power of the nature as the source of the development of the continent. For them, nature has been a case since time immemorial where natural resources had socio-cultural, economic, and spiritual significance. According to this nature-inspired account of development, Africans must conserve their natural resources through the epitomes of Ubuntu/Unhu/Vumunhu such as taboos, totems, ethnic names, folklore, and proverbs. These cultural elements are imperative in the development of Africa. In a thoughtful argument, Mawere and Tandi further remind the non-African observers of the novelty of this view of development for ecology and environment, and urges an ethical centrality in the wellbeing of the continent. Natural resources, they argue, are more than the mere engine for economic development. Rather, and more importantly, they are the very basis of the religion and cultural beliefs. The authors are reminding us of the sacredness of the nature, and the duty to preserve it; certain areas, for instance, woodlands, water points, and mountains must be considered sacred and not to be abused.

The implications of Igbo-African Eco-Bio-Communitarian Spirituality for development forms the novelty of Kanu's philosophy of wellbeing. This intellectual Augustinian scholar from Nigeria follows another specific view into the development of the continent and argues that economic

development is dramatically altering many biological processes and environmental systems, which is detrimental for the life of the continent. Kanu criticizes the merely scientific accounts of development and favours the view that religion—principally the Igbo-African Eco-Bio-Communitarian Spirituality as a belief system—is convincing enough to conceptualize on a cosmic scale the global nature of environmental concerns. In Africa, the religious perspective becomes more important for the environment and consequently cannot be relegated to the background. Influenced by this philosophy of life for the development of the continent, Kanu argues how different philosophies of life and religious perspective could come into harmony in favour of a new Africanism. He adopts Igwebuike, Africa's philosophy of complementarity or community, as the underlying principle of Africa's portrayal of the image of life.

Pius Mosima of Cameroon analyses philosophy of wellbeing in African intellectualism and looks for the avenues through which this philosophy influences the discourse of development specific to the continent. The same as almost all African intellectuals, the main tenet of his argument is that traditional African philosophy of wellbeing consists of 'Afro-communitarianism'. This philosophy of life forms the conceptual basis for indigenous African moral thought, values, beliefs and their life-forms. Pius further argues that, not only must a specific African ontological perspective of wellbeing be the beginning of the arguments about the development of the continent, but also that non-African thinkers must take this 'Afro-communitarianism' seriously into account in their outlook and practice. Aligned with the very specific spirit of Africanness, Ndlovu-Gatsheni of South Africa further expands on the post-colonial argument in accordance with which development of the continent is considered from the perspective of a struggle for re-humanization of people of Africa. Drawing on a deep analysis of African intellectualism, he argues that the road to development passes through 're-membering' of a 'dismembered' people to enable them to liberate themselves from negative consequences of impositions of colonial modernity. He moves eloquently further and advances the perspective that Africa must 're-member' and celebrate its own pre-colonial philosophy of life to preserve originality and sustainability of its respect for nature and harmony with other things in the nature. His concrete account of development of the continent has been defined in accordance with an urgency to negate coloniality – colonial modernity, and instead 're-member' and act from its own African cultural identity.

Kanakulya Dickson from Kampala draws a map of the philosophical terrain in West Africa and relates it to development discourse. Articulating the philosophical positions from the region, he observes three major trends in West Africa's higher education institutions representing the region's authentic view of development: i) *re-dignifying*, ii) *unification*, and iii) *re-constructivism*. The *re-dignification* approach in the Kenyan and Rwandan politico-philosophical discourse embraces 'politicization' and 'tribalization'. Deeply striking is Tanzania's indigenous socialism, the *unification* approach brings continuities and discontinuities under the umbrella of African socialism. The *re-constructive* approach in Ugandan philosophical studies identifies the importance of the 'meanings' and 'dis-meanings' toward the development issues and challenges. He concludes that the development challenges of Africa, at least in the East African region, must be solved by *re-dignifying*, *unification*, and *re-constructivism*, all appealing to traditional norms and concepts.

Anthony Mary Ibeazor proceeds from an analysis of African metaphysical foundation of ethics and starts from the assumption that the deep wholesomeness of being is affected by the misuse of freedom, in the end generating poverty, inequality and violence. Ethics must foster the telos of human person and account for an authentic view of life and wellbeing. African metaphysics of ethics, due to its integral approach, could address the malaises, and by which contribute to an authentic development ethics. Aligned with a similar argument, but leaning more toward the political sphere of Africa, Andrew Akampurira favours strengthening the personhood of people of Africa to develop a constructive account of social change. For him, this happened through Nkrumah's political thoughts urging Africans to recognize themselves as rational and moral beings if they want to truly play a rightful role as members of African society. This political desire could be realized if both personal autonomy and communal responsibility contribute towards making nationalism.

Another group of African scholars illustrate the use of science and technology, modern institutions, and economic systems as the essential elements in the development, but still emphasize Africanness of independence and economic growth of the continent. For Aderemi Oladele such development is marked by the "emergence of Africa", reflecting a shift from the rhetoric of the "black continent" with new hope to Africa having the immense potential to be a global player. He uses the development of Nigeria, a "sleeping giant"—as resilience and policy alternatives brought it into its present status as the number one economy in Africa—to provide clues to the "Africa emergence" story. Kehbuna

Langmia argues for good development from an information communication technology standpoint, that takes into consideration cultural identity as the point of departure. He quotes from African genius analysts that Europe underdeveloped Africa. So, this construction—i.e. underdevelopment—could be surmounted by adopting of ICTs for socio-cultural and political development of the continent. In this process of development, Langmia warns, Africa must preserve its own indigenous identity and communal communication that pays more attention to tribal institutional leaderships, ancestral worship, or language diversity.

The position of the poor countries sacrificing environment for economic purposes is another issue in the development of the continent. Rhuks Ako and Ngozi Stewart of Afe Babalola University in Nigeria evaluate such environmental stress and argue that the exploitation of the extractive industry hosted by most of the countries has had adverse impacts on the environment. In addition, the lifestyle of most African countries is such that a majority of the inhabitants rely extensively on non-finite environmental resources—forestry and land for example—for their daily subsistence without consideration for sustainability. This has further worsened Africa's environmental outlook. This notwithstanding, Africa has, however, recognized the importance of the environment to development and at all levels of government, made appreciable strides to promote environmental sustainability.

Case studies are also relevant to the continent's won alternative view of development. Maria Ericson, for example, describes some of the burning issues for women theologians from different racial and religious background in post-apartheid South Africa. She focuses especially on the ambivalent role of Christianity—which in certain respects has been found to be oppressive for women, but in certain other respects has provided women with solace, strength and inspiration to resist oppression. Looking at how Christianity has been interpreted in South Africa is quite relevant to the development of the country. This is because both indigenous African cultures and Christianity are an important part of the civil society and the road to independence and development of the country. Luck Amadi analyses impacts of globalization on the economic landscape of Nigeria and contends that globalization remains contestable on equitable and sustainable development grounds. In addition, globalization has increasingly become part of the practice by which the developing countries are integrated asymmetrically into the monopoly capitalist system. In this context, developing countries are the losers. An alternative way of thinking is to build an account of globalization which aims for effective

transformative social change that could contribute to a more inclusive, sustainable and equitable development. Surajudeen Mudasiru of Lagos State University analyses the political factors required for economic integration.

This book presents a neat blend of perspectives investigating and addressing two fundamental themes on Africa's alternative perspective on global development. The first theme introduces African philosophy of life with a concentration on alternative views of wellbeing. This theme explores Africa's meaning of the person associated with family and tribal affiliations, communal values, and the natural worldview. The second part analyzes Africa's long road towards independence beyond the conventional sense of the term. The main goal of this part is to discuss how Africa is moving away from the political understanding of independence toward an economic and identity-inspired meaning of the term. Overall objective of the two parts is to challenge the face of Africa distorted by arguments that the continent is poor, hence the need for foreign assistance for its development. Quite the opposite, it is argued that Africa, an awakening giant, has diverse potentials for its own view of development all aligned with its identity, culture, and its self-expression. Indeed, the present book intends to open a new horizon to reflect on how Africa's vast resources, its own specific values, and cultural ability could improve the wellbeing of its people. The themes which will be analyzed and addressed in this volume include the changes in the view of global development from Africa's own alternative perspective.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL NOTION OF THE PERSON AND COMMUNITY: AN ESSENTIAL PERSPECTIVE TO INTEGRATIVE ETHICS OF GLOBALITY

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### **Executive Summary**

In global ethics or integrative ethics of globality, what should be central is that every individual person or relational being of beauty demands dignity, equity, freedom, justice, peace, tolerance, respect, common good and happiness or satisfaction (flourishing). These concepts are at the heart of Igbo Nigeria Africans' communitarian ethics of common good or African hermeneutical philosophy of person/community, but we have to arrive at them through the exercise of epistemologies and interpretations of values. We are required to merge these values in order to provide content for contemporary global ethics. Achieving this goal clearly demands a thorough systematic and holistic nudging—that is a continual ethics process.

**Keywords:** Igbo Nigeria Africans, Hermeneutical Philosophy, Human Person, Individual Person, Community, Common Good, Humanity.

### **Introduction**

It is important to consider contemporary Igbo Nigeria Africans' philosophical notion of the person and community in order to see what contributions it does provide to understanding ethics of globality. The ethics of globality,

for me, is not different from the course of studies in relation to advancing global human well-being. In an emerging world of interconnectivity and necessary interrelationships, we are evaluated, tasked, held accountable from a more global sense. In this light, we need to live by and our actions be justified through the principle or hermeneutics of political belongingness and the doctrine of our common humanity. It is of glowing insight to know that Igbo Nigeria Africans' worldviews on person and community have strong roots in social ethics which encourages the emergence of an integrative ethics of globality. The Igbo Nigeria Africans' concept of the person, as a unitive concept, in my analysis, has two lineal aspects/views (horizontally considered) that are mutually inclusive: (i) Person as the beauty of life, and (ii) Person as relational—"I am because we are". These contributions from Igbo Nigeria Africans' interpretive worldviews or hermeneutics are very relevant to current projects in ethics of globality. Some of these views I have developed in my other works. Presently, I will undertake a brief project on developing an integrative global ethics in contemporary world (multicultural society and very itinerant citizenry).

### **i). Person as the Beauty of Life**

Like most African communities and nations, the Igbo—a major ethnic group in Southeastern Nigeria—uses the terms “human being” and “person” interchangeably. Being called a “human being” is the same as being called a person, and vice versa. The Igbo language considers person as *Mmadu* (Mma-du), which is the combination of *Mma* (Beauty) and *Ndu* (Life). The concept of person is the concept of the beauty of life; indeed, the concept of the “beauty of all created things” in their totality. Human beings make the world beautiful and meaningful. Another Igbo Nigeria Africans' expression that connects to beauty of life is: “mmetuko ahu bu uto ndu” (the beauty of life is in mixing up with others). Life is truly beautiful when human beings live or mix up with other persons<sup>1</sup> (<http://igwebuikipedia.info/Intricate.asp>). The Igbo Nigeria African notion of the person as the “beauty of life” evokes in philosophers the traditional doctrine of the “transcendentals”, the essential properties of being (the essential perfect prototypes that is the cause of all things in the universe), to which the beautiful is counted (next to the one, the true, and the good). Thomas Aquinas, a Medieval philosopher, offers us some resourceful materials on the transcendental (on the nature of Substance—the One).

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<sup>1</sup> I got this idea from reading the work of Dr. Ikechukwu Kanu (<http://igwebuikipedia.info/Intricate.asp>).

Beauty, for him, is one of the transcendental forms. Plato, in the *Symposiums* (4<sup>th</sup> Century BC), makes reference to the “beauty of one form” (beautiful forms and beauty in every form is one and the same) (Solomon and Higgins 2013, 365). Beauty is its own truth, even when that which is not beautiful per se is the real truth. Beauty and truth and reality do not always exist or co-exist in One Single subject or object.<sup>2</sup>

In the Modern philosophy, Kant relates beauty to nature and its grandiosity. Nature is life *qua tale*. Nature is what is “bio”, life, living (Latin, *vivus*), “what is alive”, etc. The beauty of life is extended as the beauty of nature, which suggests the purposiveness of nature. The beauty of nature—the beauty in nature—is because nature is a continuum, continuity, being-in-existence. Being-in-existence is to be essentially purposive/ purposeful. Without purpose, there is no existence. I relate this to the idea of purposiveness of existence as well as that “nature” is purposive and “hospitable to our ends” (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant/#UniNatFre>). This “our ends” is same as the “disclosure of purpose.” This point relates to Friedrich Nietzsche’s view that life is “artful.” It means that a “well-lived life is itself a work of art” (Solomon and Higgins 2013, 363-364).

In this section, I argue along the direction *of* or *from* beauty—to purposiveness—to purposeful agency—to purposeful action (being, agency and habitation to improve capacity for agency). I consider this narrative in terms of the link between existence, purposiveness, and beauty as the same as that which is essential in understanding “Cosmic Consciousness” (merely used here as the “Intelligence” or the higher “Mind” that brings everything into a meaningful or purposeful wholeness—the higher Mind, “Welt Geist”, the “Nous” of all meanings/meaningfulness).<sup>3</sup> In this sense, strictly speaking, can one appreciate the ontological richness between the person as the beauty of life and the capacity to have a purposeful agency in order to actualize this “moral beauty”, or “beauty” as a moral good in every aspect of the moral being/the moral person? (So, the wholeness

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<sup>2</sup> John Keats, 1795-1891 (“Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all/Ye know on earth and all ye need to know.”) See Solomon and Higgins (2013), 364. When Shakespeare refers to human beings as “a piece of work...” it reflects this beautiful one, this art-work that is purposeful. See Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 2.

<sup>3</sup> I will like to bring in here Richard Bucke’s thought on *Cosmic Consciousness* which, although is said to emerge among us, but no, it has always been with us. Cosmic Consciousness is not an end or goal that is arrived at or accomplished, but a point of consciousness, of holistic awareness.

experienced is cosmic as well as moral. It is moral because it is cosmic—as integrated, whole, merged, harmoniously merged or as harmony).

This harmony, which is vividly drawn from the notion of person as the beauty of life (as moral beauty), is a pertinent notion of our *Zeitgeist*. I think this aspect is significantly absent in Western philosophical tradition, or better put, it was neglected or underemphasized. Of course, there are footprints of the “person-with-the-other” form of ethics, especially after the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> Century philosophy. The basis of Western philosophical tradition is tainted with emphases on material-ness<sup>4</sup>, material well-being (giving rise to economic domination and competition). The West also focused on the materiality of painting what is enjoyable, fictional, and imaginal and ideal (idyllic, arts and ideals, without blemish). In such a competitive framework, it is difficult to see existence as much of “beauty,” and human beings as the “beauty” of this totality of existence, the totality of reality (what is truly real). The notion of beauty is clearly present in Western philosophical thought.<sup>5</sup> In Robert Solomon and Elizabeth Higgins’ views, “[T]hroughout most of Western history, reality itself, created by God, was conceived of as beautiful” (Solomon and Higgins 2013, 365), but it seems to be considered materialistically rather than holistically (mind, body, and soul).

As a matter of fact, in Africa (among the Igbos), culturally speaking, there is an intrinsic connection between person and beauty. The beautiful is understood as that which reveals itself. In the description of the person as the beauty of life we recognize something of the Heideggerian notions of being (Sein) and of the human being (Da-sein): being reveals, manifests, and discloses itself through, in, and to others. It is through human being (Da-sein) that being (Sein) discloses itself. A person is a being whose essential structures are centered in disclosedness. Something similar is expressed in the word “Existenz”- “to stand out”; the idea of person means standing out and disclosure of (the human) being through its beauty. The

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<sup>4</sup> Material-ness or materiality is fully metaphysical and so not “material” in the sense of “perishable” or “physical”, or “corporeal.” In this footnote section, this is the second or third level of application and abstraction. In my paper, “material” is of the first level of application and abstraction.

<sup>5</sup> I have tried to articulate this topic in my philosophy class on “beauty.” The evolving nature of understanding beauty in the West seems to be narrowed down to “corporeal” beauty. Much of this is driven by the cosmetic and fashion industries. According to Robert Solomon and Elizabeth Higgins, “Plato and Confucius (and many other thinkers) have taken the ultimate good in human life to be characterized by its beauty” (Solomon and Higgins, 2013, 363).

notion of person as the beauty of existence is common among Africans, but not exclusively. Richard C. Onwuanibe, former Associate Professor, Cleveland State University, Ohio elaborates that for the Igbo: “[T]rue personhood, as pure subject, is not something that can be analyzed into anything... Personhood is a manifestation or presence” (Onwuanibe 1984, 186).

Onwuanibe underscores the metaphysical, transcendent dimension of the person, which is an essential topic among African philosophers.<sup>6</sup> Person has a physical (material or bodily) and a spiritual (transcendent) aspect. African philosophical thought conceives of person as a totality of spirit (soul) and body. There is something similar in Senegal (West Africa); for instance, in Wolof, the main language of Senegal, spirit is translated as “xel, sago, or degal,” while matter or body is “lef” (thing) or “yaram” (body.)

These ideas/concepts show that in African hermeneutical philosophy (including Igbo Nigeria Africans), a person has to be thought of as a subject, rather than a mere object—if we accept Onwuanibe’s distinction. Onwuanibe states, “Object-oriented thinking aims at controlling and exploiting the other, while subject-oriented thinking feels the demand of the freedom of the other” (1984). Being a subject rather than an object, the person is not to be used, abused, and exploited. It does not matter if the “individual” person is aware or not aware of the abuses/exploitations. As a person, the “individual” human being is an end in him/herself with dignity and freedom to actualise his/her actual agency (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/maritain/>). This is where the notion of ethics clearly shows itself.

## **ii). Person as Relational—“I am because we are”**

Igbo Nigeria African thinkers try to develop a notion of person in which traditional African elements as well as the idea of an individual human being with rights that are respected. In this notion, concepts like: person, mutuality, and interpersonal community need to be balanced (that is, carefully articulated and based on a sound meeting point). African philosophy of the person centers on “I am because we are, and since we

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<sup>6</sup> Could we consider this as part of the remnant of atrophying civilization or in the sense of nostalgia of Africanity, Memory and Belongingness? Is beauty a concept that is ad rem to thoughts of developing people who live in squalor, dirt, and in “the lack” of the beautiful things of life? I relate this thought to that of a very progressive world that gained some of its richness from Africa.