

NOTES ON THE PUBLICATION OF THE FIRST  
*DICTIONARY OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY*  
- AFTERWORD -

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**Abstract.**

This paper reproduces, in full, the *Afterword* by Executive Editor, Madalin Onu, to mark the publication of the *Dictionary of African Philosophy (DAF)*, the first dedicated dictionary in the field. It reflects on the significance of this milestone—an authentic and pioneering work authored by African scholars, with contributions from over 85 academics from Nigeria and across the continent.

The *Afterword* includes notes from the editing of the manuscript and discusses key themes such as: existence and identity in African philosophy; the Cartesian *ego* vs the collective “I”; African philosophy as a philosophy of relational existence and interconnectedness; Ubuntu and dialectics in African philosophy and the relation to the European ideas of spirit and community, especially Herder’s *Humanität* (humanity) and Hegel’s concept of *Geist* (Spirit); African socialism: Nkrumah, Nyerere, Senghor, and their contributions to African communitarianism and Négritude; what is dialectical materialism?; dialectical materialism and theism in African philosophy; political science, social science, and the intersection of African philosophy with socialism and democracy; the significance of African philosophy in promoting multiculturalism, respect for diverse cultures, global epistemologies, identity, freedom, and human rights.

*DAF* = Dukor, Maduabuchi F. (ed.). 2025. *Dictionary of African Philosophy*. London Academic Publishing.

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## 1. SOUNDTRACK OF THE SOUL

Have you ever danced to a truth bomb? When Shakira belts out a beat that shakes the world, you feel it—it sparks in the air, sharp like sunlight breaking clouds, and the dry earth awakens in response. “We are all Africa”, so she’s breathing it in—that’s not a statement, but a vibe. It is philosophy in motion.

Hips don’t lie, and those were things we both agreed on. Yet there it was, staring back at me from the draft: food, an aesthetic value? Beauty, yes. But food? Since Plato, it’s been mere necessity, a function of the body, not the soul. How could it sit beside the sublime, the ugly, or the grotesque, even within the daring frontiers of today’s art? A mistake maybe, a typo? Or perhaps *haute cuisine avant la lettre*?—with those tantalising flavours, delicate textures, lush spices, and such vibrant colours bathed under the African sun. How’s that Prof. Dukor? Which logic grounds your categories?

“No mistake”, said Prof. Dukor, steady, quietly confident, the kind that builds with years of dissecting thoughts and distilling concepts to voice their essence amidst the pages of this *Dictionary*. “Food belongs. It is beauty. It is life’s art”. In Africa, he pointed out, which is a Theistic Panpsychic Universe, there are community and aesthetic values. Social, ethical, and communitarian anchor the first. Meanwhile bread, food, music, and other artistic manifestations—even work habits, agricultural practices, or architectural forms—are celebrations of life, thus aesthetic values, all of which are predicated on God.

“So it might be”, I thought to myself. In Europe too, food was often treated as a spectacle of court, where the plate becomes a canvas—precise, calculated. Designed to dazzle the eye, refined and sculpted, but still an object, a show for the senses. A fleeting distraction as some rich sauce swirling with the same shallow aestheticism that festoons a gallery.

Logic seemed confined to its two poles. A narrow canvas stretched tautly, I thought it was finite until he shifted voice to introduce the third axis, adding depth where there was only flatness.

In African philosophy, he said, food isn't just consumed. It is ritual, celebration, and connection. Every meal is an offering: a bond with the earth, ancestors, and community. It's all about this triadic connection, not merely survival.

It is an act of transcendence, woven into existence. More than sustenance, food is art, history, culture, and the divine. It bridges past and future, every bite a rite of passage. Modernity separates survival from beauty. Africa unites them: food is celebrated and shared not as a mere means to an end, but as a reflection of life itself. It is an aesthetic experience—each ingredient, flavour, and every way of preparing and sharing them reflects a story about the world and our place in it.

I sat silently, the weight of his words settling on me like the rich layers of a well-prepared dish. Then suddenly, as in a burst, a spice breaking free popped into my mind. This cultural exchange that stopped my tracks wasn't just about food. It was about connection. About how deeply ingrained the notion of sharing and belonging is in African philosophy. And all revolves around a universal truth—something that Prof. Dukor hinted at. “We are all Africa”—African thought doesn't ask whether we are connected, it assumes that we are. The question is not if we are all Africa, but how we engage with that connection. Whether through food, through philosophy, through our shared humanity—what unfolds when we acknowledge this unity? When we truly understand that every thought, every act, or every bite is part of the same experience?

Looking back on the history of thought, my friend—Maduabuchi Dukor, the Igbo logician, pushed forward—we realise that European philosophy, like all intellectual traditions, doesn't exist in isolation. It has roots that stretch back to Africa. Greeks, for instance, learned much of their philosophy from Egyptians. When they formulated ideas about being, essence, and the self, they were building on the shoulders of African thinkers, on the foundations laid down by Egypt, by Nubia. Recall the wisdom embedded in the traditions of the Nile Valley, the dialogues around cosmology,

justice, and being—these were the first philosophical discourses that travelled westward to shape the rest of the world’s reasoning.

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Think philosophy is all thick books and twisted words? This dictionary will pull back the curtain on a world you thought you knew. Philosophy started where the world started: in every rhythm, every call-and-response, every beat that makes you move. *Tsamina, Waka Waka!* You’ve heard Shakira, right? The rhythm leaps across borders. It’s in Fang—a Bantu language spoken in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, Gabon, or São Tomé and Príncipe—quite naturally meaning what it sounds like: “Come, let’s do it! Keep moving, keep striving, push forward!” A catchy tune for a strong call to action. In Africa, philosophy doesn’t idle in abstraction or sit in ivory towers. It moves, dances, and breathes grounded in the tangible, alive in every interaction with the world. African philosophy has always been more than thought; it’s about being. It lives in the communal drumbeats that synchronise hearts, in storytelling where wisdom flows in dialectical spirals instead of straight lines. Connects the living and ancestors, asks questions in the form of a call, and waits for an answer in the echo.

*Tsamina! Zangalewa? This time for Africa.* Feel the pulse? It’s not just Shakira’s voice shouting across continents. These words vibrate with energy their joyful Cameroonian origins. “*Zangalewa?*” asks “Who sent you? Where do you come from?”—a question that goes beyond curiosity, reaching purpose and belonging. It was first sung by Golden Sounds, a band whose “*Zangalewa*” emerged through the turmoil of World War II. Born of hardship, yet infused with humour, camaraderie, and defiance, it conveyed the experiences of African soldiers facing adversity. Shakira repeats the question—*Zangalewa?*—reviving a chant once confined to trenches, this time to bridge between past, present, individual, and collective. More than a song, it becomes a resounding call to confront the big questions we’ve danced to for millennia: Who are we? Why are we here?

What is justice, beauty, the self—except echoes of the baobab’s whispering roots and the cry of the griot? How do we know? Why do we love? What if the deepest truths about life weren’t locked in books but hidden in a vibe? This authentic work—the first *Dictionary of African Philosophy*—it’s the backstage pass to the big ideas that built the soundtrack of humanity. It is a call to remember that every concept hums and every thought has a dance partner—a guide to sounds buried in our veins: the philosophies we forgot we knew.

## 2. ATLAS OF THE UNSEEN

And what if it wasn’t the serpent who deceived humanity? No. It must have been a hyena—cunning, relentless, and unbound by the rules of the garden. The serpent’s sly whispers pale next to hyena’s laughter, mocking order while plotting how best to overturn it.

Or maybe it wasn’t a deceiver at all. God once dwelled in the sky but was close to men. As Mhanti are saying, the mother of these men kept accidentally striking Him with her pestle while she pounded fufu—their traditional food. To escape this constant disturbance, God moved higher up into the sky. (*See DAF* s.v. “Separation Between God and Man”.)

And maybe, just maybe, Babel tower wasn’t so big, rocky stones, and destruction, perhaps not a divine act but a foolish mistake, as the idea to throw a physical bridge to the heavens. One over the other, the woman told her sons to stack all their mortars and follow Him. They obeyed, but upon nearing God, they found themselves one mortar short. The mother instructed them to take the bottom-most one, which they did, but the tower collapsed and survivors gave up their plan to follow Him “up there”.

Thought lingers, its edges raw like marble, much like phrases I’ve edited and polished now deep under the weight of night. English, while supple, resists sometimes the African conceptual treasure. As if reluctant to align with the smooth, curving flow of post-colonial

English so deeply intertwined with rhythms of native tongues and the philosophies they embrace.

Concepts began to stretch across the page, slippery as shadows fluidly shifting meaning. Perhaps you'll search these pages for "Theodicy". You'll certainly find it, though not as you'd expect. Forget Leibniz's "the best of all possible worlds". African theodicy speaks of a force that shaped lands and humans—a force alive enough to traverse from Africa to America, influencing the world with its boundless, unyielding vitality (*DAF* s.v. "Theodicy"). Yet, you'll find Leibniz resurfaces in surprising ways, woven, for instance, into the life and work of Anton Wilhelm Amo, a scholar from Ghana who was moved to Amsterdam by the Dutch West India Company. Some accounts say he was enslaved, while others suggest he was sent by a preacher working in Ghana. Whatever the truth, Amo later met Leibniz and went on to become a Professor at the universities of Halle and Jena (*DAF* s.v. "Amo, Wilhelm").

Syntax too, sometimes echoes the cadence of indigenous languages, with phrases and structures in direct translation. The word choices, though at times unconventional, are not merely linguistic—they are vessels of thought, reflections of a worldview that deserves to be heard, not erased. The task, then, is one of balance: how much to refine without silencing; how much to adapt without losing essence. How to align concepts with the contemporary technical lexicon to preserve their vibrancy while expanding the boundaries of Western academic discourse. The alignment must happen delicately—it's an act of discovery. Like training vines to climb trellises. But even then, the vines cannot lose their own wildness, their stubborn insistence on reaching for the sun.

And now, the night grew still, the tides of this hour rising quietly. Tell me, please, how would you call a man possessed, an old diviner who wanders alone, lost in visions of his ancestors? "A house of dreams", they say (*DAF* s.v. "Diviners"). Phrases started half-formed under the weary moon. And the bush spirits—those lurking presences that blur the line between human and inhuman. Spirits are

hiding in bushes, dangerous and grotesque, guarding their secrets fiercely. It's not wise to venture there. The forest holds more than shadows; it holds the things we cannot understand. Even the bravest hunters tread lightly, knowing they might encounter something far beyond their grasp (*DAF* s.v. "Bush Spirits").

By this time, night had fallen entirely, the late autumn chill of Europe creeping through the room. Oscar, my Lab, a more than 40-kilos dog lounged at my feet, sharing his warmth while trying to colonise every sheet and pillow in sighs, as my body grew heavy. A cat nestled nearby, oblivious to the bush spirits. I drifted to sleep, my thoughts tangled with images of hyenas, unseen eyes of spirits glinting from thickets, circling shadows, and the hollow thud of mortars grinding against stone. How could I not dream after such foliage?

So it began—where else?—in the bushes—dense, impenetrable, alive with whispers, their wild green expanse pressing close on every side. An inking of something dangerous, unseen and implacable. Tangled in the undergrowth, leaves seemed to clutch at me, a thousand fingers, their grasp unyielding. But suddenly, as if the world exhaled, I stumbled forward breaking free into a path. A sunlit path that cut through the wilderness, its edges fringed with verdant shrubs glistening as though kissed by rain. I walked, hesitant. The underbrush softened, the air grew lighter, and the path opened wide: a village with colours radiant as in *Avatar*. Warmth embraced every sense. Laughter, music. Tables laden with food in every hue, lanterns swinging gently in the breeze, casting soft halos of light. They were dancing, joyous and inviting. There was even a DJ right in the midst, his hands moving over turntables, spinning rhythms and blending ancestral with contemporary, universal with the local.

Across Africa, First-Fruit Ceremonies—not mere harvests—play a significant role in spiritual traditions. Among the Swazi, the Incwala ceremony focuses on “strengthening kingship” through the sacrament of first fruits. The Yoruba in Nigeria celebrate the Yam Festival, honouring ancestors with masked figures (Egungun), while the Ga of southern Ghana observe the Hunger-

Hooting festival, a pivotal ritual of purification and renewal. (*DAF* s.v. “Agricultural Rites”)

It wasn’t the lurking spirits of bushes that came to me but a gentle warmth, much like the joy of a First-Fruit celebration. Which reflects the broader essence of African thought, grounded in goodness (*mma*), hope, and transcendence. Reflecting on humanity, Edeh elaborated on the Igbo word for man, *mmadu*, which encapsulates this philosophy. *Mmadu* combines two words: *mma* (“goodness”) and *di* (“to be”), signifying “the good that exists.” (See *DAF* s.v. “Existentialism (African)” and “Man, African Concept of”). That’s a philosophy of hope, of a goodness that is malleable, shaped by passions, but capable of rising above them.

Or maybe that was an agora, bathed in light—a clearing deep in the forest—an Agora of the Jungle, the Rainforest Academy.

### 03. SPIRIT BEYOND CARTESIAN REASON

Speaking of which, one of the key issues contemporary African philosophy grapples with is whether Africa’s philosophical traditions form a unified history and how the term *African philosophy* should be defined, particularly in light of the continent’s rich array of ethnic groups, tribes, languages, and cultures. Two major currents often emerge from this: *ethnophilosophy* and *philosophy as science*, somehow mirroring Kant’s direction when separating *Natural Metaphysics* (*Metaphysik der Natur*) from *Metaphysics as Science* (*Metaphysik als Wissenschaft*). The first—ethnophilosophy—explores African traditions, myths, and worldviews, aiming to uncover a philosophy intrinsic to African life. The second, philosophy as science, seeks to adopt a more rigorous, analytical approach, interrogating the logical and epistemological structures of thought. But the question remains: Does African philosophy truly exist as a coherent entity? Or is it merely a mixture of disparate ideas and traditions, unable to be classified into a neatly defined category?

Kenyan philosopher Henry Odera Oruka (1944-1995) introduced, on this topic, the Philosophic Sagacity project, identifying it as one, this time of four trends in African philosophy, alongside ethnophilosophy, nationalist-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy (*DAF* s.v. “Bodunrin, Peter Oluwambe” and “Ochieng’-Odhiambo, Frederick”). Nigerian philosopher Olusegun Oladipo (1957-2009), on the other hand, pleaded for moving beyond the debate on the existence of African philosophy, provoking thinkers to make their profession an impactful one. He called them to focus on addressing community issues, prioritising human welfare and reconstructing social institutions for better livelihoods (*DAF* s.v. “Oladipo, Olusegun Teju”).

Which makes me think on how similar debates emerge in other regions as well, questioning whether there is, for instance, an Eastern European philosophy, a Latin American, or an Arab-Islamic one. Amidst it all, I recall an experiment—Michelson-Morley’s famous attempt to measure the “aether wind” in the late 19th century. Their results suggested that, within a closed system, any observation made from inside would inevitably be skewed, as if the system itself were inherently unobservable from within. Perhaps African philosophy is like that. It cannot fully define itself from within its own context, because doing so might obscure its depth. It is a system that resists easy categorisation, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. Quite the opposite—seen from outside, it is an insightful blend of currents, shaping and being shaped by time, place, and peoples. Despite its complexity, it is grounded in values like goodness, beauty, and communalism, with fundamental questions that traverse eras, and efforts to provide answers to uplift their historical circumstances and collective well-being.

This thread brings me to a duo of ideas I find particularly interesting, so I would like to present them briefly to you. As both, I believe, showcase a uniquely African philosophical stance that merges between ethnophilosophy and what is often termed as scientific philosophy.

### 3.1. PARTICIPATORY BEING.

#### THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELATIONAL EXISTENCE

The first, as it appears in the trajectory of Western philosophy, is Descartes' *cogito*—man as *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. For Descartes, the famous declaration *Cogito, ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”)—grounded in the premise *Dubito, ergo cogito* (“I doubt, therefore I think”) as its first pillar—encapsulates the foundational certainty of existence through thought. The self is defined by its capacity for reason, with thought serving as the ultimate proof of one’s being. This Cartesian duality is a cornerstone of Western philosophy, where individual consciousness underpins existence.

In the African context, however, this idea shifts. It is less about the solitary act of thinking and more about the shared experience of being, about a collective consciousness—a “we think”, not “I think”. Which roots existence into community, emphasising that the individual cannot be abstracted from the web of relationships that bind him to others. Thus, African existentialism challenges Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum* with the more inclusive *Participio, ergo sum* (“I participate, therefore I am”) or even *Cognatus sum, ergo sum* (“I am related, therefore I am”) (*DAF* s.v. “Existentialism (African)”).

In my reading, *ego* becomes collective ‘I’ and receives new categories, meaning it shall encompass both “relational” and “participatory” Self. As such, the concept of Being is no longer a solitary affirmation but a relational reality—I’d like to call it *participatory Being*—bound to the community spirit that acts as a metaphysical cord linking all members. The ‘I’ does not act anymore in isolation but within a broader framework, where every action impacts both the self and the community. By extension, the ethical principle of non-maleficence—to not harm oneself or others—is reshaped. Within this interconnected world, the well-being of the individual is inextricably tied to the health of the community: whatever happens to the individual—they say—affects the entire community, and whatever happens to the community impacts the individual (*DAF* s.v. “Individual”).

J.S. Mbiti (1931–2019) captures this beautifully when he states, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am”. This thought resonates in African proverbs like the Shona’s *Munbu munbu nekuda kwevanhu*—“A person is a person because of other people”, or the Yoruba *A kii je ki a rin nikan*—“One does not walk alone”. The Akan reflect further upon this communal ethos with “Nnipa nnim a, ɔkyere”—“When one person does not know, another teaches”, illustrating the value of shared knowledge and collective growth. Interconnectedness is also central to the idea of *Ujamaa*, advocated by Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), which promotes a life of brotherhood and familial solidarity. Kwame Gyekye (1939-2019), a moderate communitarianist, reflecting on the Akan proverb “All persons are children of God, no one is a child of the earth” (DAF s.v. “Gyekye, Kwame”), brings forth another layer, highlighting the theistic inherent value of individuals.

This perspective aligns with the Igbo philosophy of *egbe bere ugo bere*—“Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too”—as it conveys another vivid ethical expression of the non-maleficence principle (DAF s.v. “*egbe bere ugo bere*”). Its contemporary variant expands on the aphorism *egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebela, gosi ya ebe o ga-ebe*—“Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too; whichever says the other should not perch, should guide the other on where to perch”. The updated version moves away from the retributive undertone of the original—*Nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwara ya* (“Whichever denies the other may its wings break”)—towards a philosophy of harmonious coexistence and peace. It suggests that competition need not devolve into rivalry; rather, it implies mutual respect, without conflict, such as birds can soar without collision. If animals can coexist peacefully—ask the Igbos—how much more should humans, endowed with reason, organise themselves and their societies without strife?

Simply put, this builds upon the relational framework of African existentialism, emphasising balance, respect, and the interconnectedness of all beings. Within this philosophy of relational existence, *participatory Being* emerges as a unifying, all-

encompassing category that propels the narrative of consciousness. Expressed as community spirit linking all members, this resonates further with Hegel's *Geist* (Spirit), reflecting its fluid and progressive essence.

In short, by reframing *ego cogito* and shifting from the individualism of "I think" to a broader level of interconnectedness, African philosophy advances a genuine counterpoint to Descartes, moving towards joint humanity. It is this very notion of *Humanity* that sets the stage for the second idea I wish to present to you.

### 3.2. REASON SUBLATES INTO SPIRIT: *UBUNTU* AND *HUMANITÄT*

It is fascinating how the European spirit found it necessary after Descartes to adopt precisely this direction—let's say, a collective *res cogitans*—and this happened spurred by a series of quite intriguing circumstances. By the time of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, in the post-Kantian era, it was already evident that rationalism had significant shortcomings, especially when it came to explaining recent history and the evolving dynamics of human relationships. This became particularly striking amidst the Enlightenment ideals and the turbulences before and after the French Revolution.

In response, even before Hegel, voices arose proposing alternatives to overcome the gap in Descartes' rationalism, while also countering radical empiricism and the dogmatic scholastic metaphysics. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* tackled both rationalism and empiricism but at a cost. By delineating the limits of human knowledge to *phenomena*, the *noumena* ("things-in-themselves") remained inaccessible. This left an unsatisfactory void, one that, for instance, Johann Gottfried von Herder, Kant's contemporary and former student at Königsberg, sought to address. Herder's *Metacritique of the Critique of Pure Reason* challenged the supposed purity of reason, arguing that reason is always shaped by the historical context: tradition and culture.

On the other hand, this epoch was marked by another shift. As Herder wrote against slavery, he emphasised not only abolishing it at home but also in colonies, exposing the economic principles masked by lofty rhetoric. These ideas materialised alongside a growing focus on Africa, the other continents, and their cultures, moving beyond seeing them solely through the lens of colonial exploitation, formerly slave markets. Which also entrained a paradigm shift in hermeneutics: from the Enlightenment, viewed by themselves as a peak, with its all-powerful reason, to an approach that acknowledged the value of each culture on its own, recognised the impact of cultural change and the irreplaceable losses that follow cultural destruction.

Wilhelm von Humboldt, an important figure of that period, brought to attention the role of language and geography in shaping human thought. He acknowledged the value of cultural diversity, alongside his primary focus on the empirical study of the world, categorising and understanding human societies through a scientific lens.

With more emphasis this time on the collective, participatory nature of human existence, Herder's thoughts found expression in celebrating folk poetry and songs. In *Volkslieder (Voices of the Peoples in Songs)*, he gathered lyrics from various cultural traditions as a means to showcase the diversity of human expression. The way he perceived them, these songs were not merely artistic creations but profound manifestations of national spirits and collective humanity. It was from this understanding he concluded that to comprehend humanity one must first embrace the diversity of cultures that shape it.

This concern ran like a golden thread through his works, both before and following *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*. Thus shaped, explorations brought him to forge a reflective, profound notion of *Humanität* (humanity), seen as going beyond the mere state of being human. To him, this concept is neither an abstract nor universal ideal but a lived experience deeply embedded in the realities and practices of diverse communities.

In *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*, he expands on this, presenting *Humanität* as a process of becoming. Humanity is not a static attribute but an aspiration—an ideal that demands continuous effort and cultivation. To embody *Humanität*, one must actively strive for it. Central to this vision is *Bildung* (formation, cultivation, education), which Herder generally saw as encompassing far more than intellectual growth. For him, true *Bildung* cultivates moral integrity, emotional depth, and empathy.

Hence, humanity emerges as both a personal and collective journey. Individuals are called to realise their potential while enriching their communal sphere, shaped by unique traditions and narratives. It is through this interplay—Herder believed—that genuine humanity is to be attained: through a dynamic fusion between individual aspirations and the richness of common experiences.

Herder critiqued Enlightenment rationalism for erasing cultural differences and diminishing human diversity. Opposing this universalist model, he advocated for a more nuanced viewpoint, one that values diverse paths, each reflecting the uniqueness of the peoples it represents. This holistic stance integrates emotions, creativity, and historical awareness with reason, challenging the Enlightened cold rationality.

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Indigenous African philosophy nurtures an insightful alternative within this context: a relational ontology that challenges individualism and resonates deeply with both Herder's *Humanität* and the later Hegelian concept of *Geist* (Spirit). At its core lies *Ubuntu*, the word for “humanness” / “humanity” in Zulu, Xhosa, and other Nguni languages of southern Africa. It reflects a foundational value within indigenous Black communities: human dignity and identity are born through recognition and mutual respect (*DAF* s.v. “Ubuntu”).

Ubuntu asserts the interdependence of all existence, entraining a vision of life grounded in interconnectedness and participatory relations. It affirms that the self is not an isolated entity but is defined through the network of relationships it maintains with others: “I am because we are”. Rejecting the notion of solitary path, it calls for a way of living where the well-being of the whole elevates and gives meaning to the individual.

A notable development in this regard is the work of Kenyan philosopher Henry Odera Oruka (1944–1995), began with *Sage Philosophy*—an initiative to document and analyse the thoughts of the wise, directly challenging the misconception that African philosophy was exclusively oral or undeveloped prior to Western influence. Furthermore, Oruka explored the theme of *humanity*, particularly in his essay *Philosophy and Humanity Today*, reflecting on the critical role philosophy has in addressing the conditions of human life. He underscored the importance of a relational understanding of human dignity, emphasising the communal ethos of Ubuntu.

Which, however, does not negate the value of individual cultivation and growth. As Desmond Tutu—the South African Nobel Peace Prize laureate—observed, the phrase “*Yu u nobuntu*” reflects not only a deep awareness of communal identity but also the recognition of an individual’s capacity to embody and cultivate this spirit. He explained, ‘When we want to give high praise to someone, we say, “*Yu u nobuntu*”—“You have Ubuntu”, highlighting how personal growth and self-awareness contribute to the collective good. In this light, Ubuntu serves as both a moral compass and a philosophical framework for overcoming the abstract “I” with gentleness, compassion, hospitality, and dignity.

If it is to compare these two trajectories, an intriguing pattern emerges. In the West, *ego*—this isolated “I”—transitions after Descartes, logically and historically, into a collective “I”, rediscovering both itself and the interconnectedness of humanity as its development unfolds. African communalism, by contrast, grounds itself from the outset in the collective self as a foundational

axiomatic premise, rooted in a network of concepts like Ubuntu. On this basis, secondary notions evolve and adapt through a phenomenological movement—an interplay of enclosure and discovery—in a dialectic exchange within this network, continually unveiling new modes of being.

Both directions now approach a threshold, calling for renewed exploration and collaboration. Just as a profound understanding of the *ego* unveils its ontological interdependence, so must these ideas evolve to confront the concrete challenges of our time. The instantaneous global communication of our era opens the door for a dialogue where, perhaps for the first time in history, each tradition is called upon to seek common solutions. This exchange—uniting unique perspectives towards a common goal—holds the potential to revolutionise the way humanity navigates today’s pressing dilemmas.

Herder’s *Humanität* and the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* converge in their emphasis—something we strive for, culturally shaped through community and participation. As I see it, this goes even further. Humanity understood through Ubuntu’s lens of interconnectedness resonates with Hegel’s dynamics of Spirit, wherein *Aufhebung* (sublation) is the driving force. As, for instance, self-consciousness first transitions (sublates) into reason—a collective bond that remains deeply personal while aspiring towards universality—then sublates again (meaning, without erasing reason) into Spirit.

With this in mind, I’ll draw this fragment to a close, leaving the notion of Spirit mark its conclusion on the verge of the next, where contemporary voices will take centre stage to carry these reflections onwards.

And still we ask, philosophy in Africa? How could we doubt its existence, when it so fearlessly confronts us with the most intricate dimensions of human thought?

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Hegel's systematic exploration of Spirit stands as another important turning point in European thought. Although his interpretation of African philosophy and cultures has been criticised for oversimplifying or misrepresenting the complexities of African societies, the core of his dialectical method offers valuable insights. For it echoes across continents and epochs, aligning with the work done by African intellectuals in charting pathways towards collective growth.

G.W.F. Hegel theorised that individual reason reaches its fullest expression only when integrated into a collective consciousness. This process—*Aufhebung* (sublation)—reconciles contradictions (such as the tension between, and within, individuality and collectivity) by overcoming and preserving them, simultaneously, within a higher unity. Hegel's systematic analysis of this interconnected web ultimately yields the renowned concept of *Geist* (Spirit). Where comprehending its movement anchors in speculative logic, a framework that provides both the means to understand its historical unfoldment (materialisations) and the rationale behind it.

At the heart of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, this critique of abstract rationality is explored in its concrete *i.e.* historical forms, particularly in the wake of the French Revolution. Reason and individuality just gave rise to a new concept—*utility*—and began the pursuit of absolute freedom in line with it. Yet, during the Reign of Terror that followed, this ideal degenerated into violence and dehumanisation, exposing the limitations of reason when severed from its communitarian grounding. Under the blade of the guillotine, individuality reached its absolute negative—death; and *utility*, the value humanity had chosen to venerate as their guiding principle, found its grim analogy in what Hegel portrayed as the severing of a cabbage head. *Geist* (Spirit) responds this crisis by placing human existence within a reality above isolated individualism. As collective consciousness, *Geist* (Spirit) offers a path towards reconciliation, unity, and understanding capable of grounding a higher, less contradictory, concept of freedom.

Likewise, *Aufhebung* may be seen as a necessary process in our modern political and philosophical struggles. The contemporary divide between left and right, capitalist and communist ideologies, are contradictions that can only be resolved through a higher synthesis—much like in Hegel’s dialectics. The fusion of opposites, heading towards a fusion philosophy, echoes the global human endeavour to reconcile contradictions while pursuing freedom and harmony in the digital and artificial intelligence era. Building on this, African and European traditions suggest trajectories that, rather than inherently opposed, shall converge to integrate differences and drive us towards Humanity.

#### 4. AFRICA IS THE REMIX

These ideas meld seamlessly into contemporary African discourse, where scholars have integrated cultural heritage and indigenous concepts into wide-ranging disciplines of the Humanities. The vibrant growth of this landscape reflects dynamic syntheses, showcased in movements like African communitarianism or Négritude. Beyond their origins, they are not confined to African contexts alone but hold broader implications: engaging critically with Western models, they might offer fresh insights to tackle today’s global challenges.

While moving forward, I’ll remain engaged with the same themes we’ve touched upon—dialectics and humanity—drawn from the rich and diverse spectrum of African thought, a vast range of many others.

##### 4.1. UBUNTU AND POLITICS

Recent thinkers have reshaped Ubuntu into a dynamic framework, adapting its principles to modern life. Rather than a static remnant, it is embraced as a living philosophy that inspires community-driven problem-solving.

## AFRICAN SOCIALISM: A SYNTHESIS OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972) and Julius Nyerere (1922–1999) reflected on this ethos, each contributing a distinct, yet complementary paradigm of African socialism.

Nkrumah, the leading advocate of pan-African unity, developed *Nkrumahism*, a political ideology centred on solidarity, justice, and economic self-reliance. At its core lies the notion of *consciencism*, a vision of liberation aimed at decolonising African thought and synthesising tradition with modernity in an African way. *Nkrumahism* thus integrates indigenous practices with modern socio-political structures, blending traditional communal values, Islamic heritage, and Western thought. Among pan-African ideals, the notion of *collective self-determination* particularly resonates with Ubuntu’s focus on shared responsibility, while also drawing on Hegelian dialectics to envision progress through synthesis. (*DAF* s.v. “Nkrumah, Kwame”.)

## DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM, THEISM, AND THE LENIN PRIZE

Furthermore, Kwame Nkrumah’s political thought offers another distinctive synthesis, this time of socialism and metaphysics. As he sees it, socialism is materialistic, not in the sense of denying the existence of immaterial reality, but in affirming the primacy of matter. Matter, however, is not inert. It is dynamic, pulsing with tensions that drive change—transforming from one form to another, from matter into spirit and back again, in a process he termed *categorical conversion*.

In this regard, Nkrumah’s theistic materialism contrasts sharply with the Soviet interpretation of Marxism, which dominated Eastern Europe. Under the weight of Lenin and Stalin, it clung strictly to atheistic principles, stripping the material world of its spiritual dimension. Despite this major divergence, and contrary to the belief—or rather, the propaganda prevalent in Eastern Europe—that true Marxism-Leninism necessitates the abandonment of

religion, Nkrumah's theistic materialism received the Lenin Prize itself—in recognition of his substantial contributions to socialist thought. On 30 April 1962, together with Pablo Picasso, among the four laureates of that year.

COCKTAIL BREAK:

WHAT IS DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM?!

The clink of ice cubes meeting glass, a ritual—old, yet always fresh, murmur of voices, and the promise of a *Cuba Libre*. A drink born of revolution. A defiant blend of rum (the spirit of the island), lime (a whisper of resilience), with the original Coca-Cola—freshly imported from the USA to a newly freed Latin American country. *Por una Cuba Libre!* With origins tracing back to the aftermath of the Spanish-American War (1898), to celebrate the end of Spanish colonial rule in Cuba and the beginning of American influence. A toast to freedom, with a curious twist.

Freedom fused with the most globalised brand of capitalism—Coca-Cola. So twisted as this drink's secret formula holds a buried link to Africa: coca leaves and kola nuts. The bitter caffeine-energising kola nut—an ingredient of deepest spiritual significance in many African cultures, brought across the Atlantic through the currents of history and trade to reach the pharmacist J.S. Pemberton in Atlanta, USA, who patented the recipe.

Kola nuts and rum to blend Latin America, USA, and Africa into a single, iconic beverage. This leads me, perhaps unexpectedly, directly to Professor Maduabuchi Dukor, an important figure in contemporary philosophy, logician of the Igbo culture of Nigeria, and the General Editor of this *Dictionary*—a result of the fruitful cultural encounter generated by the UNESCO Philosophy Day in Africa, 2021. Especially for the Igbo and Yoruba, the kola nut carries profound meaning. (*See* for more details his beautiful entry s.v. “*Oji* (Kola Nut) in Igbo Metaphysics”.) It is a symbol of hospitality, reverence, and communal sacred bond, offered in ceremonies to mark moments of unity and devotion. Breaking the

kola nut, without haste, and sharing it is a way to commune with the ancestors, bridging earthly and divine. A material connection between physical and spiritual, much like Kwame Nkrumah's vision of materialism.

Many of us unknowingly tasted it, diluted yet fizzing under the banner of modernity. Who would have thought a sacred offering of the Igbo people would spark on the other continent, in the Americas, and become a quiet participant in Cuba's struggle for decolonisation? A tiny nut speaking volumes about the ways in which cultures intersect and inform one another; a subtle detail to remind us that liberation is never isolated—it is woven from as much diverse influences, histories, and encounters. How small the world is, isn't it, compared to o kola nut?

Regarding the remarkable story of the USSR Lenin Prize, and more broadly philosophy, politics, and humanism, Professor Dukor seriously told me after reading the first form of this *Afterword*: "Dialectical Materialism begs to be explained in connection with Theistic Humanism".

In my view, this Prize awarded to Nkrumah, alongside Picasso, is another surreal emblem of ideological contortion. A bittersweet draught hinting at the contradiction in the heart of Soviet ideological purity. Acknowledging the contribution of a proponent of theistic materialism—a concept anathema to the strictly atheistic hermeneutics of so-called Marxism-Leninism which held sway behind the Iron Curtain—reveals, to put this another way, the inherent contradictions within that power structure. It also illuminates, on the other hand, the tightrope walk of African thinkers like Nkrumah, Senghor, Nyerere, or Prof. Dukor himself, who dared to imagine a brand new synthesis: African indigenous communalism, its modern communitarianism (which, probably in Khrushchev's eyes, should have been the best soil for implementing Soviet communism in Africa), interwoven with theism and, as you'll

see in the next section, even with those Western ideals of individual liberty—taboo to speak about in the East. A fissure in the monolithic ideology that proves, to take it further, the innovative spirit of these Black philosophers who paved a heretical path in the shadow of Khrushchev’s newly built wall in the middle of Berlin. A path full of spirits, ancestors, and intrinsic ties to non-material realms, practically awarded by all three of them: Stalin (the prize was meant to celebrate his 70th birthday... on the occasion of his 71st), Lenin (Khrushchev, upset with Stalin, decided to rename it in Lenin’s honour), and Khrushchev himself on the stage (the main brand promoter of this Nobel Prize of the USSR). They awarded, in reality, a new paradigm of “materialism”: one situated at the antipode of Soviet desacralised ideology, where the material is not oppressive but purposeful so that philosophy becomes praxis, capable of kindness and compassion within a shared Theistic Panpsychic Universe.

The concept of “Theistic Panpsychic Universe” was originally formulated by Maduabuchi Dukor to describe a worldview where the material world is intertwined with the divine. Its immediate derivative, “Theistic Humanism”, serves as a hermeneutical tool to comprehend and reinterpret the human condition as part of this universe. Therefore, it aligns closer to Herder’s *Humanität* and the indigenous *Ubuntu* than with its reductionist counterpart—the state-driven “scientific materialism”, also called “materialist humanism”. Like the kola nut, shared in Igbo ceremonies to link humans and the divine, now subtly present in a globally consumed beverage.

Regarding “Dialectical Materialism in Theistic terms”, and since Professor Dukor took this seriously instead of laughing—as a European under the Iron Curtain might have, eventually to keep himself warm during the cold winters—here’s a dissident, fictive joke to “further explain” this notion. Slavoj Žižek liked it much and included it in his collection (*See Žižek’s Jokes*. MIT Press, 2018) as he saw in it a lovely dialectical twist: that amazing negation of the negation that produces the most surprising effects: ‘Yuri Gagarin just returned from space and Khrushchev asked him: “While you

were up there, did you see God?” Yuri replied: “Yes”. “That’s what I suspected, but don’t tell anybody”.’

African *Theistic Materialism* and Maduabuchi Dukor’s *Theistic Humanism* operating within an interconnected Theistic Panpsychic Universe to offer solutions to class struggle. Well, that’s a true unforeseen, new dialectical turn.

So here’s another joke for you, my dear Professor—one that fits perfectly our materialistic cocktail. A true classic from the Soviet ‘60s. “Question: Will there be KGB in communism? Answer: As you know, under communism, the state will be abolished, together with its means of suppression. People will know how to self-arrest themselves”. Because, especially in the 60s, under the Iron Curtain, claiming in the East that “Dialectical Materialism should be explained in relation to Theistic Humanism” would have sent you straight to prison. The 60s were the best season for intellectuals. Another prize, this time kindly awarded by Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev to their own comrades, fellow Eastern Europeans, the oppressed class they had promised to liberate. They even gave them a special name: *political prisons*. Worst conditions, many times direct train to Siberia, and a special police force tasked to catch, let’s say, revisionist intellectuals, if not outright theist dissidents. Another true soviet joke.

Kola nut—a sacred offering to hospitality and metaphysical connection. It is this very bridging, this understanding of the universe that lies at the heart of Professor Maduabuchi Dukor.

African philosophy understands the universe as a dynamic, interconnected whole—a worldview that Professor Dukor articulated with exceptional clarity through the concept of “Theistic Panpsychic Animist Universe”. He wrote extensively on this subject. (See *DAF* s.v. “Dukor, Maduabuchi F.”, as well as his entries on “Theistic Cosmogonic Geometry”, “Theistic Panpsychic and Scientific Paradigms”, “Theistic Panpsychic Animistic Universe”, or “Feminism in Theistic Humanism”), as it beautifully expresses the profound harmony of the universe—made by God, the unique Creator. A universe that hums with spirits and ancestors; not a

collection of isolated inert matter, but a living web of interconnected beings, where the sacred and the material are dialectical partners of becoming. This is a true alternative to the “atheistic Dialectical Materialism”, axiomatically called “Scientific Materialism”. Contrary to both—this Eastern “scientific” paradigm and the radical Western positivism—Dukor shows us that theism is not an addendum but the very foundation of materialism, ensuring that the material world remains grounded in a spiritual reality. If it is to construct Scientific Materialism, then—Prof. Dukor teaches us further— “new categories must be created so that God be inside the scientific system”.

Thus viewed, Nkrumah’s concept of *categorical conversion*—where matter and spirit transform into each other—appears more likely as an answer to the profoundly spiritual call of Africa than as a manufactured revolutionary product. It’s no small irony that a thinker who refused to divorce the spiritual from the political was awarded the Lenin Prize—a prize born of a system meant to entirely erase the divine. Beyond that, this paradox emerges from the enduring wisdom of African thinkers, who have not merely rejected or adopted ideologies but transformed them. Today, as societies grapple with globalisation, this synthesis, Theistic Humanism, becomes paramount.

Remember that kola nut travelling oceans?—a small piece of Africa embedded in the global phenomenon of Coca-Cola. That journey mirrors the intellectual voyage undertaken by Professor Maduabuchi Dukor, who is constantly seeking to bridge the gap between African thought and the wider world of philosophy. Theistic Humanism is not a utopian ideal or abstract ethical system. It is hermeneutics, aimed to explain an inclusive, holistic worldview, where matter is always infused with a touch of spirituality. It unveils bread, food, religion, symbols, and myths as parts of a coherent system, each integral to understanding. A powerful key that Prof. Dukor—a careful General Editor—gave us to open the richness and complexity of his continent’s philosophy.

Curated with this ethos, the *Dictionary* moves beyond merely

listing African concepts, tribes, or anthropological descriptions. Instead, it fosters intercultural dialogue between African philosophy and the world's diverse systems of thought. Entries like “Ubuntu” or “Kola Nut”, are not cultural curiosities but expressions of fundamental philosophical principles that shape Africanity. Other ones, such as “Existentialism” or “Ontology”, may even seem distant or incomprehensible to readers accustomed to Western frameworks. Yet, through the lens of a Theistic Panpsychic Universe, relational being, and participatory “I”, they might reveal themselves as what they truly are.

To grasp Maduabuchi Dukor's vision means to consider this *Dictionary* not as a static repository but as a map of a distinct intellectual landscape—one that is living, evolving, and deeply intertwined with all other socio-human fields. Rather than an ethnographic collection, it stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of African philosophy: a way of thinking rooted in indigenous tradition while universally resonant.

Dukor's hermeneutics, in this regard, is a good path to reconciliation. In most African societies, communalism was always a central structure. As they navigate the forces of globalisation, the importance of individual well-being and aspirations becomes, however, increasingly pronounced. As such, philosophy is now called to find a means to reconcile local traditions and global thinking in a quest for freedom as intricate and complex as a *Cuba Libre* under the Havana sky.

#### SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY.

#### DIALECTICS OF RECONCILIATION, CHANGE AND COEXISTENCE

Back on tracks through the African rainforest of philosophy, we find Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa*—“familyhood” or “brotherhood” in Swahili—another organic extension of Ubuntu, with a focus on social justice, equality, and rural development. Framing African socialism as both a means to counteract the exploitative systems imposed by colonial powers and a vision for an inclusive society

rooted in solidarity, Nyerere emphasised a community-driven economic model and equitable resource distribution. Central to his vision for Tanzania was preserving the dignity of the individual while fostering communal growth and self-reliance. (*DAF* s.v. “Nyerere, Julius Kambarage”.)

	<b>Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–201)</b>	<b>Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972)</b>	<b>Julius Nyerere (1922–1999)</b>	<b>Kwasi Wiredu (1931–2022)</b>
<b>Profession</b>	Poet, philosopher, politician	Politician, philosopher	Politician, philosopher	Philosopher
<b>Philosophical Focus</b>	Négritude (celebration of African identity and culture), African socialism, the synthesis of traditional African values with modern governance.	<i>Consciencism</i> (philosophical synthesis of African tradition, socialism, and Marxism), developed as a framework for liberation and unity.	<i>Ujamaa</i> (African socialism). Communal values Integrated into modern governance through Ujamaa villages.	African epistemology, communal rationality. He reinterpreted democracy based on African traditions, as a consensus-building process rather than adversarial voting systems.
<b>Key Idea</b>	The cultural and spiritual unity of Africa and the diaspora.	Pan-Africanism and the unity of Africa.	Socialism rooted in traditional African values.	Democracy via consensus.

<b>Political Vision</b>	Advocated for a cultural and political union of African nations through the ideals of Negritude.	Advocated for African unity and socialism as a foundation for liberation and development	Advocated for economic and political equality through African socialism.	Advocated for decolonising African thought, focusing on indigenous democratic systems.
<b>Political Role</b>	First President of Senegal (1960–1980)	First Prime Minister and later President of Ghana (1957–1966)	First President of Tanzania (1961–1985)	Ghanaian philosopher, not directly involved in state politics.
<b>Relationship to Tradition</b>	Emphasised African cultural values, integrating them with modernity.	Unified African and Western ideologies for a decolonised future.	Grounded socialism in African communal traditions.	Emphasised synthesising indigenous and modern ideas.
<b>Criticism</b>	Criticised for promoting French-African relations, viewed as too accommodating to colonial powers.	Viewed as authoritarian during his presidency.	Ujamaa criticised for inefficiency and economic challenges.	At the time, he was regarded as too idealistic for practical governance.
<b>Legacy</b>	A major figure in the intellectual movement of Negritude, promoting African cultural pride and unity.	Catalyst for Pan-Africanism and African liberation movements.	Embodied a practical attempt to implement African socialism.	Intellectual foundation for modern African political thought.

Nyerere emphasised balancing collective well-being with economic progress by reconciling traditional African communal values with the principles of Marxist socialism. Adapting the latter to align with Africa's realities, this synthesis shaped his socialism into a distinct model of societal transformation, rooted in values organically developed from themselves, not imposed from the outside.

At the other end of the spectrum, Kwasi Wiredu engaged directly with Western liberal democracy. Though his ideas appeared idealistic in the political landscape of that time, they offer valuable insights into the disconnection between Western and traditional values that underpin many African societies. Wiredu's dual critique bridges democracy and socialism. He reimagined democracy to align with indigenous communal values, focusing on consensus and social harmony. Simultaneously, he addressed Marx's socialism by adopting its communitarian elements while rejecting ideological rigidity in favour of traditional African practices of governance, which prioritise collective decision-making and social cohesion. (*DAF* s.v. "Wiredu, Kwasi".)

#### 4.2. UBUNTU IN LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

While African socialism anchors in the political, dialectics of Ubuntu ventures far beyond into literature and philosophy, shedding light on new paths to redefine the conversation between individual and society.

African philosophy does not operate in isolation. Old traditions, such as those of the Dogon, Yoruba, or Igbo promote dialectical approaches to reality that exceed classical logic, inspiring a dynamic akin to Hegel's speculative one. Moreover, these traditions not only understand themselves within this framework but also invite analysis as potential alternatives or even refinements to speculative logic.

The Dogon people of Mali, for example, practice a holistic, spiral logic to fuse opposites into a unified whole. A logic of complementarity. This way of thinking reflects connection of all things, stressing that contradictions are not merely inherent in reality but essential to its continuity and evolution. (*DAF* s.v “Dogon Philosophy”.)

Yoruba philosophy relies on the concept of *Eji-o’gbeta*, which translates roughly as “two that do not meet”, a framework designed to navigate conflicting paths. This is exemplified by the *oritameta*, a crossroads which symbolises convergence. Esu, a primordial deity in their cosmology, is deeply tied to this notion, acting as a bridge among gods and the messenger for both *Olodumare* (God) and *Irumole* (deities). That’s what it is said Esu dwells at *oritameta*, the symbolic “Y-junction” where three paths meet and diverge, always presenting travellers with two possible destinations. Likewise, this juncture reflects the perplexity that arises when faced with difficult choices or conflicting beliefs. (*DAF* s.v “Eji-o’gbeta: Yoruba Traditional Logic”.)

In comparison to Western philosophy, especially the ideas of Plato and Kant, *Eji-o’gbeta* introduces a third epistemological layer beyond *phenomena* and *noumena*, resembling a Platonic shadow that precedes understanding. This model reflects Yoruba cosmology through principles like Inclusive Identity (*Obatala* - coexistence of diversity within a unified whole), Inclusive Middle (*Orunmila* - acceptance of ambiguity and coexistence within contradictions), and Non-Contradiction (*Oduduma* - the eventual resolution of opposing forces into balance).

The Igbo age grade system, known as *otu ntorobia* or *o’kwa afo*, is another thoughtful example of how to deal with duality. This traditional social structure organises individuals into groups based on age, with each group progressing through various life stages together, assuming specific social roles and responsibilities. The system is marked by complementary roles. Male age grades symbolise vertical progression, representing power and authority, while females embody horizontal progression, acting as a system of

checks and balances. In times of conflict, for instance, female age grades, such as the Umu Ada, play a crucial role in neutralising the power of male counterparts, fostering balance and resolution within the community (*DAF* s.v. “Age Grade in Igbo Philosophy”).

Contemporary thinkers like Chinua Achebe (1930–2013) or Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (b. 1938) explored and reinterpreted these ideas, applying Ubuntu’s principles to literary realms. Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, explored colonialism’s impact on African communities, illustrating the importance of collective identity. Ngũgĩ, through works like *Decolonising the Mind*, advocated for the restoration of cultural and linguistic autonomy and strived to redefine a post-colonial African identity.

In the realm of philosophy, Ifeanyi Anthony Menkiti (1940–2019) redefined personhood, arguing that it is not a birthright but something earned through community, engagement, and mutual recognition, with collective harmony taking precedence over personal freedom. He stressed that identity and humanity are discovered through active participation in the community. Thaddeus Metz or Ramose Bernard Mogobe further explored Ubuntu as both a moral and political philosophy. Their contributions illuminate its potential to inform not only governance but also education, justice, and public health systems through holistic frameworks that reflect African ethical backgrounds.

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Another compelling example—this time a form resembling speculative logic—is to be found in Odera Oruka’s critique of African nationalist movements. Oruka argued that the post-colonial struggle for independence often overlooked deeper questions regarding societal structure and individual freedom (*See DAF* s.v. “Oruka, Odera H.”). This oversight aligns with Hegel’s notion of sublation—the process of overcoming contradictions through internalisation. Where internalisation means the act of becoming conscious of what was overcome—an essential, but often neglected, condition of Hegelian philosophy.

In *Philosophy of Liberty* (1991) and *Practical Philosophy*, Oruka builds on this and stresses that true freedom means not merely the absence of oppression but the conscious understanding of the forces that shape it. Freedom arises through recognising and resolving them, as they manifest and change society. This reflects a form of *Bildung*—a process of formation and cultivation where education fosters awareness of the conditions necessary to move towards genuine freedom.

Things go deeper as freedom, for Hegel, marks the culmination of Spirit's journey to becoming aware of itself as Spirit. In a similar vein, Odera Oruka's subjects cannot be truly free unless they grasp the structures of power that shape their existence. This perspective adapts naturally to contemporary concerns about propaganda and manipulation. In Oruka's words, freedom begins with a clear understanding of the mechanisms that sustain authority—an understanding of all that grants authority its power. Ignorance or illusions about their nature hinder its realisation.

These two aspects—(1) freedom gradually emerging through the resolution of societal contradictions; and (2) freedom requiring a conscious understanding of the factors sustaining power—resonate with a third, subtler yet vital dimension of speculative logic, one that classical logic cannot fully grasp, namely the *cunning of reason*.

Oruka's insights resemble Hegel's master-slave dialectic, where the enslaved subject attains a deeper, more conscious understanding of freedom than the master. This awareness stems from labour, which shapes their existence while compels them to confront both their conditions and the external reality they continuously transform. As this process unfolds, they reflect themselves in the products they create. Unlike the abstract self-awareness of the master, the enslaved grasp not only the essence of freedom—a realm the master, lacking such reflections, cannot access—but also the stark reality of their unfreedom.

Within this dynamic, the oppressed emerges as the true agent of progress. It is him, redefined through his labour and experiences—

not the master—who steers the journey of self-consciousness towards Spirit aware of itself.

In the arc of history, the master-slave relationship extends into a broader dialectic: civilisation *versus* barbarism. Just as self-consciousness evolves through the ekstasis (polarity) of the slave, history unfolds through those deemed by the dominant pole as barbaric. Barbarians become agents of transformation just as the Romans, once dismissed as barbarians by the Greeks, and the Germanic tribes, once deemed primitive, later became pivotal forces in shaping universal civilisation. It is in such a subtle way the cunning of reason manifests, a hallmark of speculative logic's pursuits to lay comprehension on firm foundations.

Oruka's critique also aligns with Slavoj Žižek's nicely articulated standpoint that a mere return to pre-colonial roots risks replicating the trap of colonialist ideology. Rather than looking to an idealised past, Žižek emphasises the necessity of re-engaging with the colonial encounter, an understanding and integration of both positive and negative legacies left by oppressors. Echoing Hegel's phenomenology, Žižek contends that history is not about returning to a pure origin (which is precisely what colonialist oppressors would like) but a process of overcoming and assimilating what is perceived as external or imposed—a "Hegelian wound"—one that heals itself, through its own reconciliation. Likewise, by navigating the tensions between colonial legacies, indigenous traditions, and modern demands, African philosophy can build pathways to freedom that are both pragmatic and culturally anchored.

#### 4.3. NÉGRITUDE AND THE RECLAMATION OF IDENTITY

Négritude, a powerful intellectual and cultural movement, emerged in the early 20th century among African and Afro-Caribbean thinkers, leaving a lasting imprint on the global stage. It arose in response to alienation and dehumanisation caused by colonial powers, with figures like Léopold Senghor (1906–2001), Léon-

Gontran Damas (1912–1978), and Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) at its forefront. The movement reclaimed African identity, serving as a counter-narrative that celebrated African heritage, culture, and values. It challenged the erasure, transforming pride in African values into a foundation for anti-colonial thought, which then sparked a broader cultural renaissance within the diaspora.

As poet, philosopher, and Senegal's first President after gaining independence from France in 1960, Senghor gave Négritude a powerful voice through both his leadership and literary works. His poetry celebrated Africa's richness and resilience, weaving communal values into a vision of identity that goes beyond colonial rejection. For him, Négritude is a dialectical synthesis of Africa's past and present. (*supra* s.v. "Senghor, Léopold Sédar.").

Rooted in a communal ethos reminiscent of Ubuntu, his vision emphasises interconnectedness, mutual care, and shared humanity. Consequently, Senghor's model of socialism, which shaped the country's post-independence identity, diverged significantly from Marxist-Leninism. And, rather than retreating to pre-colonial traditions, Senghor charted a dynamic path forward, affirming self-determination and collective strength.

Négritude's legacy transcends the continent, addressing far-reaching hurdles such as cultural erasure and identity loss. It fosters pride within communities while advancing conversations on the importance of cultural diversity. In a rapidly globalising world, Négritude challenges the West by promoting cultural resilience and encouraging an inclusive discourse that urges societies to honour their roots while embracing a shared future.

African thinkers such as Mogobe Bernard Ramose (b. 1946) drawing on Robert Sobukwe's (1924-1978) ideas, assert that humanity comprises a single race, to which we all belong—the human race—rendering the term "race" singular in vocabulary. This perspective questions racial divisions and calls for Western thought to engage with diverse traditions beyond its own. Ramose, in a similar vein to Oruka or Žižek, argued that multiracialism and multiculturalism—going, on the other side, towards political

correctness of colourblindness—are toxic colonial constructs, disguised tools to safeguard imperial interests. He maintained that such divisive “poisonous” concepts should be rejected by the “new Africa”, which must, instead, embrace unity and equality.

## 5. FINAL THOUGHTS

When we turn to African contemporary philosophy, we find a dynamic interplay of traditional wisdom and modern challenges. In the Humanities and Social Sciences, it addresses pressing issues from climate change and economic instability to the erosion of democratic institutions. As African nations continue to navigate their post-colonial reality, philosophers draw from indigenous wisdom to offer adaptable frameworks, while simultaneously engaging with global concerns. Such ideas, far from being mere remnants of the past, reinterpret inherited knowledge to foster adaptability and shape governance models based on collective responsibility and social well-being.

African critiques of Western democratic models, which often prioritise individualism and economic power over human dignity, gave rise to alternative political philosophies rooted in communal values and a profound respect for people and the land. Shaped by historical struggles against colonialism, apartheid, and tyranny, these approaches advocate governance as a responsibility to the collective rather than a privilege for the few. Concepts like *Ubuntu* illustrate this ethos, framing identity through interconnectedness and leadership through service.

African intellectuals embraced cross-cultural perspectives while advancing innovative solutions to reconciling opposites. Philosophical movements such as communalism, socialism or Négritude highlight ways to balance individual freedom with collective responsibility, tradition with modernity, and local identity with global universality. Such evolving philosophies continue to develop and shape the continent’s present and future while enriching broader discussions.

This *Dictionary of African Philosophy* marks the first step in a dialogue inviting all to explore Africa's rich and complex conceptual landscape. It opens doors to further research and reflection, laying a strong foundation for deeper inquiry. As the conversation grows, new voices and perspectives shall emerge, each adding new layers, insights, and dimensions. We trust future editions will continue, carrying forward Prof. Maduabuchi Dukor's hope, like a seed planted in fertile soil, to bloom and reflect upon this intellectual wealth, reinforcing its enduring relevance in a constantly shifting world.