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# Jøcap

Journal of Contemporary African Philosophy

## Philosophy, Identity and Liberation

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African Personhood  
and Identity

African enslaved ancestors

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Open border issues  
in South Africa

Ethnical insights

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Monotheism  
and the Yoruba

A process alternative

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Ubuntu and  
HIV/AIDS

Barrier?

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## Inaugural Synopsis

We are very happy to present our first volume and issue of the Journal of Contemporary African Philosophy (JOCAP). The journal is a product of the efforts and dedication of the Dominican vice province of Southern Africa. Rev. Fr. Stan Muyebe, former vice provincial of the order, spearheaded this project with admirable dedication and patience. I am very grateful to Fr. Stan for his patience with this project and dedication to its success. Had it not been for him, it would not have seen the light of day. I am equally grateful to his successor Rev Fr. Myke Mwale for supporting this project. I am grateful to three other Dominicans I closely work with, Rev. Fr. Isaac Mutelo, my former student and current assistant editor, Moses Chanda and Guide Marambanyika (also my former students), responsible for administration and layout. Their dedication has been absolutely fantastic. At JOCAP, we are very grateful to our hosts DOMUNI University. Special mention must go to Rev. Fr. Michel van Aerde for his patience and dedication to the success of this project. A special word of thanks goes to all our editorial board members. They readily agreed to be on the board and we have been able to call upon their wisdom, guidance, and experience. They have assured us of their continued support and we are truly grateful for that.

The aim of this journal is quite simple. It solicits and seeks to publish quality research on contemporary topics in African philosophy. Anyone familiar with African philosophy will be aware of its heavy burdens. Not only has African philosophy had a torrid time working out its definition, justification and form of reason; it has also been burdened by the history of its place of origin, Africa. Having suffered extreme violence perpetuated in the name of the mission to civilise, African people have had to work hard at finding their own identity, asserting their humanity, and overcoming institutionalised discrimination. Though these topics crop up in a variety of ways and in different forums, at JOCAP, we choose a different emphasis for reasons I will explain shortly. While we acknowledge the importance of topics of our past and forces responsible for it, we are convinced that we could do more for African philosophy if we were to choose a different path. Africa, like any other place, on earth is caught up in the forces of the present movement towards technological advancement, environmental and ecological crisis, and the rise of nationalist politics. Africa is also in a network of global relations born, partially, out of its history and partially out of its own choices of alliances. These fast paced social and political realities place a different sort of burden on today's philosopher in comparison to the philosopher of the 1980s or 1990s.

What we think is productive in as far the pursuit of African philosophy is concerned are reflections of the day. The reasons for this choice are as follows; Africa today is faced with crises at various levels of its reality. These crises such as corruption, a lack of political accountability, endemic poverty and underdevelopment, religious extremism and terrorism, migration, and wars; have stunted Africa in very real ways. A disturbing fact about most of these crises is that they appear to be internally generated. Social and political processes that Africans have agency over, have been turned into a spectacle of enduring failure. Ordinary Africans who live on this continent know the problems of this place only too well as they rise, daily, to be confronted and almost be defeated by the burdens of these problems. Yet African

and social political philosophers of the day, on the continent, have conveniently and largely shied away from thinking through these problems.

The second reason for our concern has to do with how philosophers of the day, on the continent, understand their job to be when they begin thinking like philosophers. What is evident are divisions along three lines. There are those who are content with methods adopted from former colonial metropolises. They tinker such methods a bit, to satisfy the African requirement, but still rely on the masters of well-established Western traditions for their theoretical frameworks. The second group is composed of aggressive defenders of traditional modes of thought. They appear in various dress codes ranging from staunch traditionalists to those who seek to revive old modes to make them fit into the present. Their tone also ranges from blind association with traditional ideas to creative re-invention and re-application of those ideas. Yet there are those who seek to find a way between these two extremes. They seek to develop their own methods and at times incorporate both worlds. But at times they come up with fantastical formulations that are rejected as overambitious or ungrounded. These commitments point to issues of method. While we are not overly concerned with methodological wars, we are interested in how these methodological differences influence processes of thought and ultimately ideas that shape philosophical reflections on the continent. The final idea, we believe, is always evidence of its methodology. The methodology, we also believe, says a lot about how the thinker sees the world. Hence our interest is in the idea, the defence of the idea as opposed to the defence of its methodology.

We hope our insistence on contemporary issues will be of benefit to African philosophy itself, consumers of this philosophy, and to a continent that may believe in the value of philosophy. We hope that we will be able to generate discussions that are relevant to the times we live in, discussions that see beyond past constraints but understand perfectly how we got here and how we can escape some of our current trappings. For this reason, we do not identify ourselves with any methodology or orientation in African philosophy or any other philosophy. We are interested in the relevance of ideas to philosophy in Africa today.

Last I wish to thank all contributors to this volume. Without the authors, there is no journal. Equally I wish to thank all our peer reviewers. Without them we would not have come this far.

*Bernard Matolino (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*

# Paths to African personhood and identity in the diasporas: the case for reburial of African enslaved ancestors<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Recently, there has been confusion regarding the personality of people of African descent living in the West. This identity crisis is an issue rooted in African and Africana history. However, recent questions asked by newer generations of Africans in the diasporas warrant a re-thinking of this problem. In view of this, I set out in this essay with three objectives. First, I demonstrate that the personhood and identity of the descendants of African slaves have been compromised by the process of the enslavement of their ancestors. I argue that the present identity crisis in the diasporas is denotative of this problem. Two, I show that the identity crisis is ontological rather than linguistic. I argue that the yearning of the descendants to express their native selfhood is an ontological struggle to reclaim their personhood in Africa and this is a nausea carried over from their enslaved ancestors. As a corollary, I show that the enslaved ancestors are still in slavery even in death, and that they lack the recognition – ‘African ancestors’. Three, I explore the corpus of African philosophy to illustrate the various paths through which African enslaved ancestors and their descendants can gain authentic African personhood and identity. Particularly, I demonstrate that the bones of the African enslaved ancestors have to be exhumed and brought to Africa for reburial into freedom to enable them to become African ancestors thereby gaining posthumous African personhood and identity. The import of this is to enable their descendants to begin their own process of gaining African personhood and identity, which begins with proper burying of their own forebears, the enslaved ancestors. Finally, I ground this discourse on the matrix of land and man in African philosophy.

**Keywords:** African Identity, African Personhood, African Diasporas, Slavery, Land.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Toyin Falola Annual International Conference at Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013. Part of the issues here were raised in a paper I presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> biennial World Conference on African Philosophy held at the University of Calabar, Nigeria on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017. I thank the plenary participants at the two conferences for their comments, particularly Dr. Chigbo Ekwealo and Dr. Anthony Ufearoh. This is an improved version from the conferences.



## Introduction

*For most of my life, all the way to about my sophomore years in college, I struggled with identity, keeping up with American culture while trying to maintain a grasp of my Ethiopian heritage. It has been difficult... It took me a long time to be able to confidently figure out “what I am” or “where I’m from”... For most of my life I was confused. I never knew which box to check. This seems like a stupid dilemma to have, but it is something I struggled with throughout my life until I reach[ed] about 20... Therefore whenever I am asked, where I am from, it’s difficult to answer [EthiopianAmericanGirl 2012].*

This is a confession of an Ethiopian lady who was born and brought up in the United States of America. Is she an Ethiopian-American, as she prefers to call herself or an African-American, as others prefer to call her? Is she just an Ethiopian, American or African?

In a recent development, Terry Collier [2013] wrote a letter to the Washington Post’s editor denouncing the term ‘African American’ used as a means of identification for people of African descent. The debate over the identification of people of African descent living in America has been ongoing for centuries, but the debate suddenly enlivened passive concerns after the United States Census Bureau announced in 2013 that it would substitute the term ‘Negro’ with ‘African American’ in the list of options used to identify ‘people of color’ in the 2014 census. Following the Bureau’s announcement, the community of people of African descent experienced mixed or confused emotions. Some supported the Bureau’s proposal, others identified with Collier’s arguments. Still, some remained passive. Collier proposed that the Bureau should use the term ‘American of African descent’ instead of ‘African American’ [ibid.]. His argument was that ‘American of African descent’ puts emphasis on his nationality, whereas ‘African American’ place emphasis on his ancestry.

This is an issue of identity crisis and it is directly interlinked with the question of personhood. Who are the Africans in the diasporas? Are they purely Africans or Africans plus something else? Maria Lloyd and Boyce Watkins [2013] argue that the identity crisis among African people living in the diasporas could be attributed to ‘the community’s failure to pass down our history’. This line of argument raises the stakes of the debate. What community? What is the nature of the community? What history does the African-American community have to pass down? Do all segments of the community have a history to pass down?

In the meantime, in the midst of this confusion, the African Union has initiated a project called Door of Return (DoR), spearheaded by Nigeria, Ghana and Zimbabwe, to encourage descendants of African slaves to return and reconnect to the Homeland in all its ramifications [Warami 2019]. On 24<sup>th</sup> August 2017 the DoR was first opened in Badagry, Lagos, Nigeria. With an address to the United Nations by the Nigerian Permanent Representative Prof. Tijjani Bande, year 2019 was set aside to mark the beginning of the decade of voluntary return for the descendants of African slaves to the African Homeland [Warami 2019]. This project raises further questions: to where will the descendants of African slaves return, how are they to return, and why must they return? These questions interlace with the question of identity and

personhood raised in the earlier paragraphs. This article addresses these questions in a comprehensive way in order to provide a theoretical foundation to the DoR project and to resolve the identity issues with which descendants of African slaves are faced.

Meanwhile, it is pertinent I explain how some concepts are employed here. I use the term ‘descendant’ to interchange with the longer phrase ‘descendants of African enslaved ancestors’. The same thing goes for the term ‘ancestor’ that I use interchangeably with the long phrase ‘African enslaved ancestor’. I also use the term ‘enslaver’ instead of the regular term ‘slave master’; for the purpose of withering down the sense of superiority that seems to go with the regularly used term and to neutralize the damning effect the latter term would have on the African reader with enslavement history.

## Ontological Analysis of the Existential Condition of African Being in the Diasporas

The identity of the modern African is imposed on him at birth by the various existential conditions which predicate his existence. These conditions include the fact of colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, and slavery. Kwame Nkrumah [1964] avers that the postcolonial African is a product of triple heritage – the traditional, the Christian-Western, and Arab-Islamic – which coexist uneasily in conflict with one another. Nkrumah’s observation, it should be noted, is limited to those who survived the scourge of slavery. The Africans who were shipped away into slavery in the Caribbean, Americas and elsewhere had more complex and traumatic experiences in identity change and deformation. These deformatory experiences have been widely documented by historians and anthropologists. As a consequence of these experiences, the Africans, and by extension, their children, who were taken captive by the enslavers, had lost their identity, or at least had their identity compromised. The Africans who were shipped away into enslavement in Europe and America “*were separated from their families, denied their language, denied their culture, were brutally dehumanized, reduced to non-humans and hence eventually lost their real mode of existence*” [Owosho 2013: 162]. Okeke notes that:

*Without a peculiar culture, a people have no identity in the eyes of the world. And without identity, a people simply do not exist. Existence in this context does not mean subsistence, it means having a place in world history* [Okeke 2017: 5-6].

The loss of identity is even worse and more acute in the population of the descendants than it was among the original slaves. The descendants of African enslaved ancestors today are disconnected, in every sense, from the African personhood, identity and essence. Their problem is even more complicated due to the fact that their brethren in the African Homeland are as equally alienated as they. However, the descendants in the Americas and elsewhere have far

more transcending problems than their brethren in the Homeland; in the sense that, the descendants and their enslaved ancestors are still living in some form of captivity. This experience for the ancestors is different from that of their descendants. For the African enslaved ancestors, their captivity is due to the fact that their bones are still buried in American and European soil, in the land of their enslavement. Being buried in the alien soil, in the land of the enslavers, means that the African enslaved ancestors are still in enslavement. This is extrapolated in this Annang aphorism: *agwo akpaha k' ifun asuk aba k' ifun ke mibohoke ebuuk anye k' udi mme ette amó*, a person who dies in slavery is still in slavery unless his body is buried in his ancestral land. The land of the enslaver is an extension of the enslaver himself. The enslaver is tied to his land by spirit. By having his bones buried in his captors' land, the enslaved ancestor is still subject to his captor in death.

In the conclusion, I have articulated the matrix of land in relation to African personhood. I have explained how the African cultural ontology is constitutive of metaphysical models that explain the co-extension of man and land. Many philosophers have provided analyses to show the matrix between land and man within the framework of ontology. There are existential connexions between land and man.

*Lands are not dead things but are animated with life-force, potency of life, and they are as active as the life-forms that live in them, upon whom we depend. He, who destroys land, destroys life-force, the source of life and existence itself [Ibanga 2018: 125].*

There is an active connection between personhood, identity and the land where one's umbilical cord is buried. There is also active connection between personhood, identity and the land where one's ancestor is buried.

Joseph and Jacob, according to the Bible, understood the matrix of land and personhood. This is the reason why they instructed their descendants to liberate their bones from Egyptian soil (their enslavers' land) in the year of their freedom [Genesis 49:29-31; 50:25-26]. It was also for the freedom and emancipation of the bones and spirit of their ancestors that the liberated Jews took the bones of their ancestors with them in their march into freedom [Exodus 13:17-19 cf. Genesis 50:1-14; Joshua 24:32]. Joseph, in particular, had recognized that as long as his bones were in Egyptian soil, he was still in captivity and enslavement; and that he could only be truly free if his bones were buried in his homeland, in the land where his people lived. Joseph recognized this truth in spite of his ascendancy as the Prime Minister of Egypt. In the light of this reasoning, I argue that by having his bones in the enslavers' land, the African enslaved ancestor is still held bound in captivity even in death. As long as their bones are buried in alien soil, they remain captives and slaves. *Agwo akpaha k' ifun asuk aba k' ifun ke mibohoke ebuuk anye k' udi mme ette amó*.

What about the descendants of African enslaved ancestors? I have noted that the matrix of slavery for the ancestors is different from that of their descendants. For the descendants who are alive today, their slave-complex finds expression in three windows which points to the fact of their alienation from the African personhood. These windows are cultural, mental and spiritual. From the cultural perspective, my argument is that the adoption of the cultural forms

of the enslavers as a mode of expressing his being, as the basis of his experience and means of his epistemic processing only goes to show the depth of the captivity in which the descendants have descended. The adoption of the alien culture of the enslaver is due to the acceptance of the negative labels cast on his identity and the disillusionment of his castrated involvement in the superficial affairs of the enslavers' community. The descendant believes that by being allowed to enjoy limited freedom in the enslavers' abode, he is now as free as the 'free' enslaver. Although the enslaver had become a slave to his evil passions by virtue of the act of enslaving the other, therefore, he too is not free indeed [Mandela 1995].

The disillusionment is being reinforced by the political ascendancy of some black leaders that culminated in the election and re-election of Barrack Obama as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America. In the next section, I am duty bound to show the castratousness, temporariness and limitedness of the 'freedom' sprinkled on the descendants. However, it is important to note that there are scholars who argue to the contrary. For example, Muiywa Falaiye, in his theory of cultural adaptationism, argues that the cultural abandonment attitude of the descendants in favour of alien cultural forms of the enslavers is natural and adaptive, and a necessary evil in the matrix of their experiences (see Owosho [2014]). Okeke [2017] argues that the descendants are more steeped in cultural righteousness than their free brethren in the African Homeland. Both scholars suggest that the descendants should be allowed to continue in their cultural perverted ways. My argument is that "cultural adaptation" of the descendants reflects the psychopathic contours of the enslavement. I am not denying 'cultural exchange'; but I am saying the descendants' process of the adaptation is diseased.

The second window in which the slave-complex of the descendant expresses itself is mental. The mental dimension of the African enslavement is seen in his attitude of the mind towards his Homeland, that is, Africa. This is evident in his disconnective attitude in reasoning and cognitive processes regarding the state of his Homeland. For example, the descendants have not done much about the state of the Homestead. They mostly invest their resources in countries outside Africa, and prefer to go for holiday in other European cities rather than in Africa. Moreover, their attitude towards the leadership problem in the African Homeland is abysmal. The descendants have not questioned the negative diplomatic attitude of their host countries towards the Homeland. The overwhelming majority of them does not have homes, investments and friends in the African Homeland. Almost all of them do not belong to cultural, economic, social, political and study associations founded by their brethren and operational, perhaps solely, within the continent. These are some of the expressions of the negative mental attitude of the descendants towards their Homeland. However, it should be noted that this is due to the negative labelling of the continent by their enslavers and the acceptance of the blackmail by the descendants. Such naive acceptance was made possible by a process which involves three phases. It is a process I prefer to call 'multiple castrations'.

The first phase of the process involves the use of torture and intimidation to do what is called "taming". That is, to forcefully subject the individual to their commands by weakening his neuron, motor and other physical cognitive elements thereby rendering him weak, ill, reactive and permanently disabled in all ramifications. This action would now trigger negative mutational changes in the individual and the offspring. A recent study has demonstrated how

these negative environmental factors can weaken the brain of a person and that of his descendants [Wijeakumar *et al* 2019]. In the second phase, the individual is brainwashed – by feeding him with lies and falsehoods about himself and his heritage. This comes in forms such as labelling using such effective tools as Western religion (which condemns all his cultural forms as fetish). Already, the descendant, at stage one, has lost his cognitive abilities through the negative mutations he inherited. At this stage it is easy to aid him forget his history, already severally the distorted, thereby washing away his memories. He would have no memory to transfer to his offspring, that is, no history to pass on, except perhaps what Okeke [2017] calls ‘ICABODDED history’, that is, an emasculated history, a history without glory, a history without heroes. In the third phase, the individual is indoctrinated with the concepts, doctrines and values of the subjugator. This comes in forms such as labelling using such effective pedagogical tools as Europeanized theology and Westernized philosophy as well as ICHABODDED history and Western-biased science. Since he had already lost his cognitive abilities in the first phase, in the second phase his mind has been washed empty, the gullible, but hungry, mind accepts anything without questioning especially because he had been ‘tamed’. Having come to accept the indoctrinations as forms of knowledge (especially where there was a little ‘miracle’ pulled at him), he passed the same onto his descendants.

These are the phases the enslaved ancestors underwent, and the extension or effects of which the descendants have inherited under heavy bombardment of multiple mutations and genetic mistranscriptions. The descendants are to this extent deformed in identity and alienated from the African personhood. Now, since the descendants have been held captive in mind as well as in body, they turn their antennas towards Europe and America. Since their minds have been held captive, they pay no real attention to African problems. On the contrary, they consider the ontology and epistemologies of their Homeland as inferior. With the slightest opportunity, the descendants want to substitute the ontology of their Homeland with the alien ontology of the enslavers. They are neither critical towards Euro-American nor African ontological systems and their epistemological processes. All they want is change for the sake of change because for them the Euro-American civilization process is superior hence it is the right model for all people. There are historical as well as cultural disconnections between the descendants and their Homeland.

The third window is spiritual. Historically, Africans and Europeans view God in significantly differential ways. Absolute materialism and atheism are alien to the traditional African. This does not imply that materialism and atheism are not forms of spirituality; but they are European forms of spirituality. The African is a religious man and woman. Africans live religion in their lives and express their spirituality in objects and life endeavours [Mbiti 1969]. African spirituality enables him to understand his place in nature, and so he was always very close to it. His religion was a veneration of nature – viewed as expression of *abot* (creator or God).

Now, with the displacement of the African from his environment by the enslavers, he is by that act disconnected from his spiritual essence. The captured African was now tortured and taken to a hostile land that was both alien and demoralising to him and her. The African was coerced to become hostile to his religion. This led to many of them losing grip of their original spiritual essence. Although some of them took their religion with them to fields of slave labour, the

spiritual lack was evident because of their disconnection with the land where their umbilical cords were buried. Spirituality of the African was only possible in the context of his land. The Afe Nkuku Ekpo and Ufok Mmwommo that he served enhanced his spirituality by linking him directly with the world of the spirit [Francis 2016a]. However, with the territorial mislocation the enslaved suffered, all these enabling factors were disabled and disconnected. The enslaved African was now without his God. He became an atheist. He was later forced to pay tribute to alien gods in their slave camps. By paying homage to an unknown god that neither his father/mother nor he knew, the captured African entered into spiritual bondage. This condition therefore undermined his capabilities to transcend into the ‘world of forms’.

The spiritual enslavement which the African enslaved ancestors entered has continued until today even among their descendants. On the one hand, the ancestors are in spiritual enslavement by the fact of their bones held captive in their enslavers’ land. This is extrapolated in this Annang aphorism: *agwo akpaha k’ ifún asuk aba k’ ifún ke mibóhóke ebuuk anye k’ udi mme ette amó*, a person who dies in slavery is still in slavery unless his body is buried in his ancestral land. This means that the enslaved ancestors can only be redeemed from slavery if and only if their bones are interred in their ancestral land – the African soil. On the other hand, by failing to register the mark of their footprints in their Homeland the descendants failed to establish spiritual contact with the land. Their inability to do this is a result of the yoke of slave-complex that burdens them. The failure of the descendants to come home in order to pay homage to their cultural institutions, walk barefooted on its soil, hence becoming one in spirit with their Homeland, is a result of the enslavement in which they were held.

The analysis above represents the dialectical process in which the African enslaved ancestors and their descendants have entered, and the ontological condition in which they are found. The analysis above only shows the dimensions to which slavery has eaten into the ontological fibres of the descendants. However, I observe that a similar picture can be painted about the Africans at home, particularly those who live in urban centres. But the difference is that while the African at home is suffering from bad faith and self-deception, the descendants are suffering from mental poisoning and the attendant infections which the direct impact of the physical enslavement had caused. The effect of this problem on the identity of the African in the diasporas cannot be overemphasized. For example, the arguments that attended Terry Collier’s letter indicate that some descendants of African enslaved ancestors no longer see themselves as Africans but popularly as Americans and Black Americans, or at best, as African-Americans. None of these labels connotes or denotes African identity. Rather, they suggest identity crisis which the fact of the enslavement has triggered. A superficial look at this issue may cause this problem to appear trivial, but a deeper look at the problem reveals the ontological crisis going on within the beings of the descendants of African enslaved ancestors.



## Hole in the Heart of Diaspora African

There is a hole in the heart of the descendant of the African enslaved ancestor. In cardiology, we are told that a hole in the heart is symptomized by the discomfiture of the creature. Every now and then the individual is under the threat of system collapse. There are contours of anxiety in his eyes, which threaten to expose the caricature of his being. He is feeling some nausea and emptiness within his being. There is a hole in the being of the descendant of the African enslaved ancestor. The descendant feels this discomfiture, this nausea, this emptiness. He feels that there is something missing in his being. He feels that there is a gap in his being. He feels in his being what Jean-Paul Sartre [1992: 21] describes as a coil of emptiness – ‘nothingness [that] lies coiled in the heart of being like a worm’. He feels that his humanity is incomplete and can only be completed on African soil. He longs to come home. Edward Blyden [2007: 8] confirmed this to the American audience about 130 years ago when he wrote: The African enslaved ancestor and his descendant ‘is by an uncontrollable impulse feeling after a congenial atmosphere which his nature tells him he can find only in Africa’. This emotion has been inherited by the descendants. There is this vague ‘nausea of ontological incompleteness’ ingrained in his being. This ‘ontological incompleteness’ remains as long as he remains on and in alien soil.

All organisms, especially of animal nature, usually feel this ‘nausea of incompleteness’ when they are displaced from their pool of collective origin. The Jews experienced this nausea of ontological incompleteness until they were united with the territory that they believed was destined as their homeland. A bird in one’s hand experiences this nausea of ontological incompleteness until it returns to flock with its kind. The animals in the zoo are experiencing this nausea of ontological incompleteness until they are freed to unite with their kind living under an atmosphere of freedom. The pool of collective origin for the Africans in the diasporas is the vast territory called Africa, it is the African community founded on the free African soil. Every African who wanders abroad holds the picture of the Homeland in his heart. And those Africans in the diasporas who have never seen the Homeland before want to feel it with their hands. Barack Obama [2006: 53-4] says, ‘I remember the first time I took Michelle to Kenya, shortly before we were married. As an African American, Michelle was bursting with excitement about the idea of visiting the continent of her ancestors’. Michelle Obama, the former First Lady of the United States, experienced this nausea of ontological incompleteness – and she did not stop experiencing it until she visited Kenya and walked on its soil barefooted. This nausea of ontological incompleteness varies among a people. The nausea of ontological incompleteness of slaves is higher than that of their descendants which in turn is higher than that of migrants which in turn is higher than that of their offspring. It is important to note that this nausea of ontological incompleteness does not go away even in death. Suicide cannot do away with it. In death the spirit of the enslaved and/or that of his descendants does not rest in peace. He is troubled from every side and finds himself in restlessness in what is supposed to be a peaceful rest. But when his bones are exhumed and reburied in the land of his fore-fathers, in the land where his umbilical cord is buried; his spirit comes in agreement with the land. His

bones suddenly come alive because the land has accepted him, the clan has accepted him. He is now free.

It is a matter of fact that all enslaved people think about home at various points in their lives. The descendants of African enslaved ancestors in the Americas have a deep thirst and hunger for home. They feel that their humanity is incomplete and can only be completed on African soil. They long to come home. However, the descendant suppresses this nausea by diverting his attention to mundane things, but this only serves to cost him his humanity. It is at the pool of collective origin that the humanity of the African is fully realized. Blyden [2007] observed that those who suppress the inner impulses to come to Africa and be free, think they do so because they believe they are progressing in that country (although they are progressing in many respects), and kindled by the prospects and possibilities of land of their birth, makes him desire to remain and share in its future struggles and future glories. He further observed that among the descendants ‘wails of slavery’ were still heard. The wails of physical suffering have been exchanged for the groans of an intellectual, social, and ecclesiastical ostracism. But when the descendant makes up his mind to remain in the enslaver’s territory, he has also made up his mind to remain in slavery. He surrenders his personhood, identity and freedom which he would have reclaimed in Africa. As long as he remains in the enslaver’s land he is hampered in spirit, mind and body. He neither could rise up with spontaneous and inspiring power in his heart nor be able to stretch out his hand unto God. He feels something in him, his instinct points to it, but he cannot act out what he feels.

*But, in Africa, he throws off his trammel. He finds the atmosphere a part of himself. His wings suddenly develop, and soar into an atmosphere of exhaustless truth for him. There he becomes a righteous man; there he returns to reason and faith [Blyden 2007: 8].*

This nausea of ontological incompleteness, the ‘longing to attain self-conscious manhood’, as W. E. B. Du Bois [1903: 11] puts it, is the quest for personhood and identity. The nausea of ontological incompleteness is also a symptom of a being in an identity crisis. The descendants are confused, not knowing what identity to accept as their own – is it American, European, African, Black, Afro, Negro, etc. Some had tried to combine identities – African American, Black American, Afro-Italian American, Afro-Chinese Japanese British, etc. In this condition therefore their souls vex and experience nausea which is characteristic of their ontological incompleteness. And from within his being, his vexed soul struggles within him in search of true identity in order to attain self-esteem. The descendant ‘ever feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder’ [ibid].

Having experimented with identity combination to no avail, the soul within the descendant realizes that it is impossible to be both African and American at the same time. He realizes it got to be one of the many descriptions. But the soul is longing for authentic identity that is true to his nature – extending all the way to his ancestry in *eset* (antiquity). At this point the descendant realizes that he is not just a bundle of cells but an historical reality – carrying in the fibres of his being the cultural intelligence of his ancestry. He understands that his existence is

not a neutral phenomenon but a continuous interaction with his past. He realizes that ‘the other’ engages him on the basis his antecedents, his past, his historical identity.

His antecedents therefore constitute his identity, which in turns define his successes or failures. For this reason the Annang have an adage: *ese etoyo se ete ayen ake anam edep edia ke adan eno ayen*, there is a dialectical connexion between the manner with which a child is treated and his ancestral antecedents. This is so because the antecedent is now part and parcel of the present individual. This means that at the marketplace, ‘the other’ takes all your history into consideration. He interprets your actions and his reactions on the basis of your historical intelligence available to him. It is for this reason that ‘the other’ continuously digs into your history in order to get hold of your true identity. He compares what he has got with that of others, and tends to confirm societal stereotypes. ‘The other’ engages descendants of African enslaved ancestors basically as he would a slave or descendant of a slave – because that is how he appears to him, merely emancipated in his enslavement but not freed. ‘The other’ would not have engaged him as he would have engaged a free man. He engages him on the basis of his social status. The social status of the descendant defines the moral attitude of ‘the other’ towards him. ‘The other’ does not interact with him as an equal. But once the descendant throws off his yoke of slavery, goes home and identifies with his brethren, ‘the other’ would then treat him with respect because he now has a history and people who watch his back. He is now secured. ‘The other’ would now know that by dealing with him he is dealing with his entire ancestry. He is now cautious with him, and does not maltreat him.

But at the moment, the descendant is without history. He is disconnected from his ancestry by the fact of slavery. And as long as he remains in enslavement he is without identity. At the point of being inducted into slavery, the ancestor had lost his identity. This was signified by the change of name imposed on him by the enslavers. Jene Gutierrez [2016] notes that the enslavers were very particular and aggressive in attacking, defiling and altering African names ‘in order to suppress and erase African identity’. The enslaved ancestor was now belonging, as were property, to another. Generally, slavery is a condition whereby a person becomes personal property of another person. The African enslaved ancestor could not identify with the ancestry of the enslaver because he belongs not there but was a bought property. In that condition, the enslaved ancestor had lost his personhood since he was now without ancestry. He could only have had his humanity and identity restored to him if either he was bought back by his clan or escaped from captivity back to his pool of collective origin. But the enslaved ancestor would have none of these things: he was merely emancipated in slavery like a prisoner released from the fetters in the prison yard without being cleared to go home. However, the descendants think they have identity in Africa, and they lay claim to it; but they do not actually possess it. Whatever identity they think they have in Africa is phantom identity. If the ancestors no longer had identity or heritage in Africa, they could leave none for their descendants. Now, the onus is on their descendants to take advantage of the Emancipation and free themselves, and their ancestors, from slavery forever.

At this juncture, I want to note that there are some descendants who claim ‘pure’ American identity without mixing it with African identity. They believe that their birth in the country of their enslavement had conferred upon them the enslavers’ identity. The Annang adage says,

*ebot amanake k' esa agwo akere 'te k' ide agwo*, a goat born in human abode thinks he is human being. They conveniently identify themselves with the names of the enslavers, the very persons who enslaved their ancestors. Itibari Zulu [2017] has correctly pointed out that by wearing American and European names the African enslaved ancestors and their descendants are wearing the badge of the enslavement by their very names. Du Bois [1903: 11] notes that the 'American world – [is] a world which yields him no true self-consciousness'. They think they believe that because they were born in that country, could speak English and generally assimilate American cultures that they are now Americans. But you cannot become a member of another cultural community through slavery. As long as you have not returned to your native homeland, you remain in enslavement. It is after you have returned to your native land, your pool of collective origin, the African soil, that you have your personhood *vis-a-vis* identity restored to you by the community, thereby redeeming your dignity and humanity.

Also, there are those who may argue that the political ascendancy of President Barrack Obama had redeemed the dignity and humanity of the descendants. That is another way of looking back to the proverbial Egypt. Just like Barrack Obama, Joseph was the Prime Minister of the most powerful nation on earth [Genesis 41:39-44]. However, the Jews understood that political glory cannot redeem one's social identity as a slave or descendant of slave but only a return to one's original and native community can guarantee true redemption from slavery. The descendants of African enslaved ancestors should understand the metaphor of Alice Walker, in which the freed slave woman rather killed her children instead of allowing them to be taken as slaves. The message is clear: Africans living in captivity in the diasporas you cannot remain in enslavement forever, redeem yourselves!

## **Path to African Personhood and Identity, from Slavery**

What does it mean to be free from slavery? What does freedom mean to a slave and a descendant of a slave? What paths can the slave and descendants of the slave take in order to attain freedom to the fullest extent and its ramifications, and by extension reclaim his personhood and identity? Is this sort of freedom an end in itself or a means to an end? In the preceding sections, I have discussed the different dimensions of slavery as it expresses itself in/among the descendants. I outlined the different dimensions to include cultural, mental and spiritual slavery. Freedom for the African enslaved ancestors and their descendants necessarily encompasses the three dimensions into which they had descended in their enslavement. This means that the enslaved must attain freedom in his cultural, mental and spiritual attitudes. Freedom from spiritual slavery is particularly essential for the enslaved. It is spiritual freedom that makes freedom from cultural and mental slaveries complete. Without it freedom from cultural and mental slavery is a kind of freedom but a hollow, a shadow of freedom. Freedom from slavery is ontological and extends to the being of his being, the self, his personhood, his

identity. Freedom for the enslaved and descendant of the enslaved is not an end in itself. The captive must move from slavery to freedom and through freedom to selfhood. The selfhood is defined through others – *I am because others are*. It is by constructing his selfhood in this way that one can attain African identity.

In this article, I have outlined the chronological stages to attainment of freedom and African personhood for the descendant. For the ancestor, I have maintained that he is in enslavement even in death. Hence, there is need for his descendants, or even his clan, to exhume his bones for reburial in the African soil. This is a necessary task for the descendants. It is also a task for the clan, Africa, to facilitate. The final resting place for the African enslaved ancestors, their descendants, and indeed every African at home or in the diasporas, is in Africa. For the descendant his freedom lies in this truth: he must return home to Africa. Freedom from slavery can only be achieved by returning to your native homeland. In fact, the humanity of an African slave or that of the descendant of an African enslaved ancestor is alienated from him by the fact of slavery. Hence, his humanity can only be fully activated and cultivated if he returns to the pool of collective origin. His humanity can only be fully realized if he is freed from slavery. Being free from slavery means returning home to one's original community and be absorbed by the community. This is what freedom means for the enslaved and their descendants. One derives one's personhood from the community and from one's community his identity.

The descendants have recognized this truth. Hence, their numbers have visited Africa at various times. But rather than paying a visit I think that they should first be freed. By visiting, the descendant indeed experiences nostalgic freedom, he experiences some pilgrimagic elevation – at this point his humanity suddenly comes alive within him. He feels suddenly raised back to life. Something in him undergoes changes, he is transfigured. He feels different from what he had known of himself. At this point his humanity comes to stare him in the face. His eyes open. He realizes that he is a human person. He realizes that he has history. He discovers his ancestry. He also realizes that he is not only a missing link of the ancestry but that the fact of slavery had kept him perpetually disconnected from his essence. However, he had discovered the truth: he is a human person, he has history, he descended from an ancestry, and he has brothers and sisters. He began to nurse feelings of pride in his heart. Finally, he returns to the diasporas with this new internal image. But these experiences are merely palliative to the visiting descendant. He could not strip himself of the garment of slavery. He merely went up to the mountaintop where he could set his eyes on his native homeland; but he could not set his foot on it, fall on it and kiss it. He could have taken a step further and remained there until the clan absorbed him.

Enslavement is always a violent process. It is the process of recreating a 'new' person who lacks dignity and identity. The 'new person' which slavery fostered out of the African enslaved ancestor was not actually a human person but an object for exploitation. Therefore, freedom from slavery would enable the enslaved and their descendants to be restored as human persons with definite identity. This process is not always physical rather it has a spiritual dimension. For this reason, freedom from slavery is incomplete until the spiritual aspect is incorporated. It is a process that involves rituals of cleansing and restoration. When the Jews came out of slavery in Egypt, the Bible tells us that Yaweh instructed Moses to lead them through the Red

Sea [Exodus 13:17-18]. The significance of crossing the Red Sea, according to the Bible, was to cleanse them before there were admitted into freedom in their homeland [I Corinthians 10:1-2]. The rituals of freedom from slavery vary from culture to culture. Rituals of freedom from slavery for African slaves and their descendants must follow the procedures available in any African indigenous culture.

For the ancestors, I have maintained that their bones must be exhumed and brought to Africa for reburial into freedom to enable them to become African ancestors. The enslaved ancestors lack the recognition 'African ancestors' because they are not part of African community, which is onto-triadic encompassing both the past, present and future people. The enslaved ancestors could not become African ancestors simply because they are dead; they have to be inducted into African community. Ramose [1999: 63-4] notes that 'not everyone is an ancestor simply because of death... only the initiated may become an ancestor'. The bones of the enslaved ancestors have to be repatriated for re-interment in Africa to enable them to gain freedom and become African ancestors. But when the bones have arrived African shores, there must not just be merely mass buried. The bones should be brought through a corridor of freedom, that is, DoR, based on the funeral procedures of any African indigenous culture. As the procession is passing through the corridor of freedom, an African traditional priest or monarch, clad in his full regalia, would then utter incantations declaring that those were African ancestors rescued from slavery, and urging the spirits of the clan to accept them and restore to them their place in the clan. Thereafter, each of the set of bones shall be given African names. The native naming is to enable the ancestors to acquire a place as persons in the African community because it is through name that one is linked to the community. Ifeanyi Menkiti [2004: 326] avers that naming 'begins the first phase of that special journey towards incorporated personhood via the community'. Once this is done, the African enslaved ancestors are now free, accepted and ready for reburial in African soil. This process is to enable them to join their peers as authentic ancestors and to take their seats in the minds and hearts of the living Africans. Once this process is carried out, it will export certain dynamics unto the descendants that would enable them to be gradually recognized as descendants of African persons. This in turn will help them begin their own process of gaining African personhood and identity, which begins with proper burying of their own forebears, the enslaved ancestors.

This process of gaining African personhood is not exactly the same for the descendants of African enslaved ancestors who are alive today. The descendants (the children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and several remote others who descended from African enslaved ancestors) can only acquire unique African personhood and identity through the normal processes by which personhood and identity are acquired in the African contexts. I have opined that an individual derives his personhood from the community and from his community his identity. An individual is free to the extent that he is said to possess personhood. Let me demonstrate the implication this statement holds for the African enslaved ancestors and their descendants.

A number of African philosophers have written about what it means to be considered a person in the African context. Bernard Matolino [2008] opines that the concept of person is not merely a narrow restriction of human being as an isolated entity that can be comprehended on its own



independent of other variables. African philosophers maintain that African communities generally hold communitarian/communal views of personhood. The communitarian view of personhood held in Africa places personhood on communal relations and moral rectitude. Matolino avers that ‘the communitarian view is quite unambiguous in asserting that the status of personhood is a derivative of communal standing’ [ibid: 53]. African philosophers have explained how this is possible. Placid Tempels [1959] averred that within the African context a person exists within the context of vital force that links him to other beings that possess this vital force; and it is this vital force that gives the individual the capacity to be a person and to relate with others in significant ways. Death does not terminate this linkage rather it moves the departed to another stage in the context of forces. But this does not happen unless the relatives of the dead sustain him with certain rituals. This view is characteristically held by the Bamana people, a native African tribe in Mali, whereby *nyama* (life-force) is regarded as the central point of life; the essential characteristic of a person is his links with *nyama* without which existence is impossible [Leyten 2015]. However, Tempels maintained that merely having within his being the vital force does not confer the status of person on the individual human. Rather, he must be capable of being relational in context with other beings (humans and nonhuman); for ‘the human being, apart from the ontological hierarchy and the interaction of forces has no existence’ [Tempels 1959: 67]. This means that outside the communal context of relations one cannot be said to be a person at all. Matolino explains that:

*What Tempels is driving at is that this force alone is not adequate to grant existence to the individual. The extra requirement that is needed is that the individual must be able to interact with other forces in the hierarchy of forces. Once that interaction is underway then, ontologically, the individual is thought of as a real person that exists [Matolino 2008: 60].*

John Mbiti is another philosopher who has written about what it means to be person in the African context. He averred that one derives one’s personhood from membership to a tribe. Yet membership in an African tribe is not open to outsiders, the individual has to be born into it.

*These then are the main features of an African “tribe,” people, society or nation. A person has to be born a member of it, and he cannot change tribal membership. On rare occasions he can be adopted ritually into another tribal group, but this is seldomly done and applies to both Africans and non-Africans [Mbiti 1969: 104].*

Apart from birth, an individual can become a member of an African community by marriage, and by other tribal adoption based on either being an *iman* (distant cousin) or on the basis of one’s relatives having lived in the community for a life time and having good social-moral records among tribal people. Meanwhile, biological birth alone is not enough to confer personhood status on the individual. The individual needs other people in the community to induct him into the corporate life of the community as a person capable of claiming such. It is the community that produces the person. No individual has the right to create himself as a person or lay claim to the identity of the community without being properly inducted.

*In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group. Physical birth is not enough: the child must go through rites of incorporation so that it becomes fully integrated into the entire society. These rites continue throughout the physical life of the person, during which the individual passes from one stage of corporate existence to another. The final stage is reached when he dies and even then he is ritually incorporated into the wider family of both the dead and the living [ibid: 108].*

The individual cannot be thought of outside the context of the community. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' [ibid]. This means that only through other persons can a person become conscious of his own being and the attendant rights and duties attached thereto. The dictum 'I am because we are' is not that of an individual speaking on behalf of, or in reference to, others. Rather, it is that of an individual who recognizes other persons as the source of his own humanity, the absence of which 'no ground exist for a claim regarding individual's own standing as a person' [Menkiti 2004: 324].

Another philosopher who has written about the concept of person in African context is Ifeanyi Menkiti. He holds the view of a normative conception of person based on 'ontological progression'. He argues that the best way to define personhood in the African context is to view it as a progression from individual human child into communal personhood and beyond as ancestor [ibid]. But such ontological progression must be contextualized within one's past; 'so that the more of a past one has, the more standing as a person one also has' [ibid: 325]. This means that one's past serves as orbit or trajectory that guides one's progress into an African personhood. Without having this past (identified with one's ancestor) in an African community, one's progression into African person would be a null. The ontological progression into African personhood must be via the community and aided by the community through certain prescribed norms and societal rites [ibid]. The community plays this vital role in making one attain personhood because it is the community that defines a person as person; particularly because the community exists prior to the individual. In the African context, personhood is not construed as a biological given.

*As far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse. Hence, the African emphasized the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain social self-hood, i.e., become a person with all the inbuilt excellencies implied by the term. That full personhood is not perceived as simply given at the very beginning of one's life, but is attained after one is well along in society [Menkiti 1984: 173].*

He also opines that 'without incorporation into this or that community, individuals are considered to be mere danglers to whom the description "person" does not fully apply' [ibid:

172]. One's human biological birth by an African parent is not enough to attain the status of African person; one has to earn that identity. Menkiti observes:

*The various societies found in traditional Africa routinely accept this fact that personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained, and is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations [ibid: 176].*

These obligations include maintaining moral rectitude; showing concern towards, and rendering assistance to the physically challenged, the poor, the destitute and the indigent of the society where one lives; accepting the existence of others on a par with one's own; and showing manifest care towards the growth, development, survival and flourishing of African community [Ekei 2014; Francis 2016b]. This is what it means to be an African or become an African.

Becoming an African person thereby gaining African identity goes beyond merely taking citizenship of an African country. Mbiti [1969: 104] rightly observes that 'tribal identity is still a powerful force even in modern African statehood'. This has not changed significantly. A person who wishes to take up the African identity must play a part in an African community. Many African philosophers have noted that an individual can only be a person within communal relations. There are a number of ways this can happen. In the previous paragraphs, we have seen the view of Menkiti that such a person must have taken residence in an African community that last his entire lifetime during which period he gains more favourable conditions to be accepted and absorbed into the community and be regarded as an African person. Another possible way is if the person's ancestor is buried in the African community, where the people can point to his grave because it is only sons of the soil that are 'allowed' to be buried in African ancestral villages (ndon). This indicates that one has a past in the community, and on that basis can lay claim to a part of it. If the descendants of African enslaved ancestors want to take this option, it will require them reburying their ancestors in the African communal soil within the context of African funeral rites. This will allow them to take on the label of *iman* (cousins) thereby becoming a part of the African extended family. One other way of gaining African personhood and identity is by being married into an African community. This applies to the man where such a community is matriarchal and to the woman where such a community is patriarchal. This calls for wisdom, on the part of the descendants, in their choosing of communities from which to gain African personhood and identity. This will allow the descendants to take up the label of *n̄to abán* (indigenes by marriage).

Mbiti has indicated other ways the descendants may become African persons and properly gain African identity. One of such ways is by circumcision and initiation into communal personhood. This process is not very different from what Menkiti calls 'rituals of incorporation'. Circumcision ritual is an important step into becoming a person in the traditional African context. Mbiti [1975: 92-4] observes that circumcision is important in the life of many African communities, and serves as a criterion for being regarded as a full person in those communities. Lack of initiation into communal being puts one at the level of 'it' (a thing) and lacking the essential characteristics of being described as a person [Menkiti 2004]. One is considered an outsider (a non-person) until one is initiated into the community.

*The blood which is shed during the physical operation binds the person to the land and consequently to the departed members of the society. It says that the individual is alive, and that he or she now wishes to be tied to the community and people, among whom he or she has been born as a child. This circumcision blood is like a covenant, or a solemn agreement, between the individual and his people. Until the individual has gone through the operation, he is still an outsider. Once he has shed his blood, he joins the stream of his people, he becomes truly one with them [Mbiti 1975: 93].*

This process is like that of becoming a Jew, whereby Yaweh instructed that any such person, young or old, should be circumcised [Genesis 17:1-27]. Mbiti further notes that the 'initiation is a mark of solemn unity and identification... Through the scars, the initiated are henceforth identified as members of such and such a people... [and] in many parts of Africa, they are given new names following their initiation' [ibid]. The process of 'initiation by circumcision' also holds significance as 'initiation by tribal mark' (which takes similar process). These processes also hold similar significance as initiation into African masquerade cults. All these are processes of initiation into tribal personhood in the African context. This is followed by the person being given a native African tribal name. It is noteworthy that the act of naming a person is one of *kujichagulia*, that is, self-determination [Zulu 2017]. That is to say, it enables the person to have individual standing recognizable by the community as a distinct person who is capable of decision-making based on individual self-interest and needs within the moral contexts of the community. The process of tribal naming is critical to attainment of personhood hence it usually comes with a lot of ceremonies and festivities. Not having a tribal name may count against one's identity as African person. These are very important steps toward acquiring African identity; and these are paths that are a bit rapid for the descendants to gain African identity. However, in spite of this, the descendants must show signs of moral rectitude and social responsibility commensurable with being called African persons. It is not merely circumcision or tribal marks that earn one a place as a person. Initiation, being merely a gateway to communal participation, must be complemented with attitudes that are in harmony with the wellbeing of the community into which one is being accepted. This means that the initiated must no longer be preoccupied with merely physical needs nor display lack of moral perception. Rather, he must be ready to play complementary moral and social roles as defined by his station in the community of his adoption.

## Conclusion: The Matrix of Land and African Personhood

The matrix of land in relation to entities on it has been articulated in African philosophy. There is an active connexion between personhood, identity and the land where one's umbilical cord is buried. It is significant that one's body is buried where the umbilical cord is buried. (Umbilical cord here is used metaphorically to refer to one's ancestral lineage). It is land that connects an individual to the ancestry [Mbiti 1975: 93]. Persons, in the tribal context, are those who have part and lot in the community by ancestral linkage. The ancestral linkage to the community is entitlement to the community land. Where one fails to lay claim to ancestral land one has failed to prove one's lot in the community; therefore, one has failed to prove one's communal personhood. He is a bastard so to say. A person is a member of a community through his ancestry. One's ancestors and their burial sites are held significant in determining where one's personhood is contextualized.

Let me now briefly draw from the Annang ontological maxim – *adia mkpo ano isong koro isong adehe ayaka 'gwo* (always show existential gratitude to the land for we share common heritage) – to show the existential-ontological connexions between man and land. Ibanga has articulated this maxim in a number of his essays. For example, in one of his essays, he held that humans are connected to the land by birth and death; and that human existence depends on the land because it is from it humans derive the nourishment necessary for survival [Ibanga 2013]. The creation account of the Egyptians and Hebrews holds that it is from land that one comes into existence and by it that one goes out of existence [Genesis 3:19]. In another essay, Ibanga [2012] equates land to the woman's reproductive system whereby he argues that the land like the womb is the cradle of life, and through it one is brought into the world. If the land like the womb closes its door to an individual, then he cannot come into personhood.

Ibanga [2018] describes land as a living thing enlivened with life-force. He also defines land as 'the source of life and existence itself' [ibid: 125]. In other words, on land we live and have our beings. Ibanga [2017] opines that human beings are the progenies of land; and they are tied to land via the life-force as the foetus is tied to the mother via the umbilical cord. It is from land that human beings came into existence in a particular place. Land is therefore the bridge that connects all beings (both beings-in-sight and beings-out-of-sight) on an interrelational mode. African philosophers have pointed out that life-force or vital force permeates all existents, links animate to inanimate beings (e.g. links land with man); and without this connexion, an individual cannot be said to exist in the African context. It is the land that links one's here-before to one's here-after. The former is signified by the manner in which one's umbilical cord is disposed and the latter by the manner in which one's corpse is disposed. The ancestors are said to inhabit the land below but only their community land they inhere. In determining personhood and identity, the land of one's birth is not as significant as the land of one's ancestor's birth. But the ancestor's birthplace is not enough in determining personhood, the place where his body is laid in rest is equally important. The connexion between birthplace and burial-place in determining personhood necessarily brings land into the relationship. It is the land that projects the individual into existence through birth, and it is the land that absorbs the individual and makes him part of community land through death.

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# Open border issues, crime and xenophobia in south africa: some ethical insights

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## Abstract

The Zimbabwe socio-economic and political crisis which began at the dawn of the new millennium saw many Zimbabweans migrating to South Africa and beyond in search of better living conditions. While some of the migrants went to South Africa with the right motives others went there with wrong motives, having used illegal and unethical means. It is important to note that the category of people who used illegal and unethical means included criminal elements, and those without requisite skills to justify their entry. This development has not only exposed the corruption that is probably pervasive at the South African border to Zimbabwe, but has also put to test the effectiveness of *ubuntu* in harmonizing human relations. The presence of Zimbabweans in South Africa has, no doubt, put a strain on the country's resources resulting in the former venting their anger against the latter. I, however, argue that to deal with the problem of xenophobia, border control systems at the South African border must be tightened to flush out criminal elements, and prevent unskilled people from entering into South Africa. I also argue that there is need for South Africans to remove enemy images which tend to separate rather than unite people.

## Introduction

This paper is an ethical rendition of issues around open border, crime and xenophobia in South Africa. The paper proceeds by reflecting on the possible factors which have led to the failure by South African authorities to effectively and efficiently enforce legal instruments that ensure that people who cross into South Africa follow proper legal protocols. The paper also looks at the possible link (or lack thereof) between migration and crime as well as the response of *ubuntu* to the issues of border control, and issues around the 2008 and 2015 xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The paper calls for the need to tighten border controls at the South Africa border to Zimbabwe through putting up surveillance cameras, and increasing the number of undercover police officers in order to monitor the alleged corrupt activities taking place between South African officials and Zimbabweans wanting to migrate to South Africa. The paper also advocates for a return to the cherished values of the past such as the values of *ubuntu*, in order to inspire South Africans to remove the enemy images<sup>2</sup> and live peacefully with fellow brothers and sisters from other parts of the continent. The paper begins with a look at the relationship between countries in the Southern African block in relation to migration and border control

## South Africa, Zimbabwe and the Open Border Problems

Southern Africa is made up of about thirteen countries and these form what is called the Southern African Development Community (SADC) block and countries in this block include: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the SADC block, South Africa is rated as the biggest economy, and for that reason, it is the biggest migration destination, with the biggest number of migrants coming from Zimbabwe, a country which lies to the north. Thus, the South African border to Zimbabwe is the busiest because of the large volumes of Zimbabweans who migrate to South Africa on a daily basis. A cordial relationship is said to exist between South Africa and Zimbabwe which dates back to South Africa's apartheid era when leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) would seek refuge in Zimbabwe as their lives were under threat from the apartheid regime. History also records that the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe share the same blood with the Zulu of South Africa as they together make up the Nguni tribe.

Thus, the Ndebele people are said to have migrated to Zimbabwe as a result of the Mfecane wars of the eighteenth century. It is against this background that questions have been asked such as: Isn't it a good idea to allow free movement of people between Zimbabwe and South

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow the idea of "the removal of enemy images" from Solomon (cited in Ojedokun, 2015:168) who believes that the problem of xenophobia will only end if South Africans do not consider foreigners living in their country as enemies but as fellow brothers and sisters. A detailed discussion on this will be reserved for the last section of this paper.

Africa? Given that the Bantu people of Southern Africa have a lot in common in terms of language and culture, aren't borders artificial? In order to buttress the foregoing, it is important that I define the idea of "an open border," in this section. According to *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, "an open border is a border that enables free movement of people between different jurisdictions with limited or no restrictions on movement, that is to say, a border lacking substantive border control."

A border may be open due to the absence of legal controls or a border may be open due to lack of adequate enforcement or adequate supervision of the border (*Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*). In the case of the South African border, I think the influx of Zimbabweans into South Africa has more to do with lack of adequate enforcement or supervision. In my view, lack of adequate enforcement and supervision can be a result of a combination of factors such as corruption, invoking the spirit of brother/sisterhood, failure to cope with large numbers of Zimbabweans migrating to South Africa on a daily basis, as well as the need to maintain positive political relations between the two countries. Coming back to the issue of corruption, it is important to note that there have been untested or unproven allegations of corruption between some South African officials at the border and Zimbabweans wanting to migrate to South Africa.

Although these are untested or unproven allegations, the issue of corruption cannot be completely ruled out in a scenario where there are no strict border controls as is the case with South Africa. Another factor is that some South African officials, because of the cordial relations that are said to exist between South Africa and Zimbabwe, have felt compelled to help their brothers and sisters get out of poverty and alleged political insecurity in Zimbabwe by allowing them to enter South Africa even without proper documentation. In so doing, they have invoked the spirit of *hunhu/ubuntu*<sup>3</sup> which says: "I cannot be happy when my brother or sister is sad." Lack of adequate enforcement and supervision has also perhaps been a result of the fact that because South African officials deal with large numbers of Zimbabwean migrants every day, it becomes difficult to do a perfect job. Last but not least, it has probably been difficult for South Africa to institute tight border controls because of political reasons. Thus, with regard to Zimbabweans migrating into South Africa, politicians in South Africa have probably decided that they will treat them with due care because they know that if they fail to do so, this may lead to political tensions between the two countries.

The result of the lack of adequate enforcement and supervision has resulted in the influx of Zimbabweans into South Africa in the last two decades which includes people who have not followed proper migration protocols resulting in some of these people living in South Africa illegally. As I noted earlier, those who have not followed proper migration protocols have done so through bribing South African officials, while others have had to skip the border, throwing into doubt the efficiency and effectiveness of the South African Security systems at the border. The arguments raised above point to one thing that although it has not been made official, South Africa's border to Zimbabwe is open and porous. This is so because a lot of

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<sup>3</sup> A nuanced discussion on *hunhu/ubuntu* will be reserved for the third section of this paper.

Zimbabweans, who have entered South Africa, have done so without proper travel documents, and these include criminal elements and those with no skills to offer in South Africa. Going by the definition of an open border given earlier, it is very clear that the South African border to Zimbabwe lacks substantive border control as a result of the factors outlined above. In the next section, I look at the connection (or lack thereof) between migration and crime as this has a bearing on relations between South Africa and Zimbabwe especially with regard to issues of *hunhu/ubuntu* and regional integration.

## Migration and Crime

There is no doubt that the history of migrations, the world over, is to some extent associated with criminal behavior. Some of this criminal behavior includes: rape, murder, theft, impersonation and fraud. From around 2000 when Zimbabwe's economy plummeted, South Africa has played host to many Zimbabweans who have entered the country both legally and illegally in search of jobs, education and better living conditions. There is no doubt that this influx of Zimbabweans into South Africa, coupled with the good relations between the two countries, forced South Africa to cancel the visa requirements around the year 2000 and this development opened floodgates for more Zimbabweans to migrate to South Africa. Now, because South Africa could not cope with the large numbers of Zimbabweans crossing its borders every day, criminals fleeing from Zimbabwe also took advantage as they also crossed into South Africa carrying with them their baggage of criminality.

Although I am yet to come across philosophical literature in Zimbabwe or South Africa<sup>4</sup> which has really reflected on the link between open borders, immigration and criminal behaviour, research in Italy and America seems to show that there is no significant correlation between immigration and crime. For instance, a study by Bianchi, Buonanno and Pinotti (2008) examines the crime/immigration link across Italian provinces over the period 1990-2003. Bianchi, Buonanno and Pinotti (2008) use fixed-effect estimates which show that a 1% increase in the total number of migrants is associated with a 0.1% increase in total crime. When the authors disaggregate across crime categories, they find the effect is strongest for property crimes, and in particular, for robberies and thefts. On the other hand, Butcher and Piehl (1998b) present evidence on the crime-immigration link across 43 cities in the United States over the period 1981-1990. Again, they estimate using a fixed-effect panel and various demographic and socio-economic controls. Whether they focus on overall crime rates or violent crime rates, the authors find no significant correlation between immigrant stocks in a city and crime.

The above scenario seems to show that migration does not raise crime rates in the two countries above. But this scenario when compared to the scenario in Africa could be radically different

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<sup>4</sup> The only piece of literature that I have come across deals with migration management and migration agency issues. It is not philosophical and does not address issues to do with migration, open borders and crime. It is literature in the form of a Masters dissertation in the area of Global Refugee Studies written by Niels Dreesen & Mikkel Otto Hansen (2016).

for the following reasons: Firstly, it can be argued that in countries like Italy and America, there are probably stricter legal controls, adequate enforcement and supervision just as there are stricter laws against corruption and fraud. This probably means that people who migrate to these countries are screened or vetted, implying that criminals and those without proper travel documents are flushed out so that they do not cross the border. This obviously minimizes crime rate at the border as well as in the receiving country. Conversely, in populous African countries like South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria, there are always challenges associated with legal controls, adequate enforcement and supervision at border posts because these border posts are always dealing with large volumes of people (and yet officials manning these borders are less capacitated compared to officials manning borders in advanced countries like Italy and America), and so the chances of criminal elements gaining entry into these countries are increased.

For instance, media reports show that many Zimbabwean criminals including some retired soldiers gained entry into South Africa at the beginning of the new millennium. *The Zimbabwean* of 21 April 2008, reports that:

*Zimbabwe's notorious armed robber only identified as Simba was gunned down at Jourbert Park last week on Thursday when his luck ran out after robbing some plain clothes police officers. However, Simba's accomplice, Roy Machoko, who escaped from Zimbabwe's maximum Prison in 2004, is believed to be in hiding in Mpumalanga, and police have promised that the net will be soon closing in on him. The deceased Simba is known for terrorising places such as Hillbrow, Berea, Yeoville, Braamfontein and the Johannesburg Central Business (CBD) with his shoot to kill attitude.*

In a separate incident, *The Daily News* of 26 July 2017 quotes former South African Police Minister, Fikile Mbalula accusing Zimbabweans residing in South Africa of wreaking havoc and perpetrating crime in that country. Mbalula remarks thus, “*they kill, they do everything, we get into those buildings, they are stinking, they are dirty, and they are hijacked...*” Mbalula said at one time, he was accused of being xenophobic when he claimed that five of the people who had robbed OR Tambo were from Zimbabwe, and that they were trained soldiers. The nagging question is: How did these criminals end up in South Africa? The answer is twofold: Either, they skipped the border and got into South Africa quietly without notice or they just found their way through the border and because South African officials were (and continue to) dealing with large numbers of people crossing the border from Zimbabwe and did not do thorough checks resulting in the former illegally entering South Africa.

Secondly, strict legal controls, adequate enforcement and supervision could be hampered by a lack of commitment on the part of those mandated to do so either because they are corrupted by the immigrants or they feel compelled to help their brothers and sisters running away from poverty and harassment in their home countries. This view will take me to the next section where I critically look at issues which have to do with the obligations of both the home and host countries with regard to migration and crime. I discuss these ideas under the banner of *hunhu/ubuntu* and open border issues.

## *Hunhu/Ubuntu* and Open Border Issues

In this section, I look at *hunhu/ubuntu* and open border issues with a view to ascertain the duties or obligations of home and host countries with regard to the free movement of people from Zimbabwe to South Africa. They are two sets of questions that can be asked in the process of ascertaining these duties or obligations. In the case of people migrating to Western countries from Africa, the questions can be framed as: What are the obligations of developed nations towards people who migrate from less developed countries? Does the international political community have an obligation to look after people who migrate from less developed nations to developed nations?

In the case of people migrating from one African country to the other as is the case with Zimbabweans migrating to South Africa, questions can be framed as: Should the spirit of *ubuntu* influence decisions regarding the migration of Zimbabweans to South Africa? To what extent are strict border controls a threat to regional integration? In an attempt to respond to some of the questions above, it may be important to briefly define and characterize concepts like *hunhu/ubuntu* and regional integration with a view to showing how these concepts bring out ethical issues regarding the justification (or lack thereof) of open borders and migration in Southern Africa.

For starters, *hunhu/ubuntu* as a philosophy represents an African conception of humanity whereby *vanhu/abantu* commune with each other based on the understanding that no one can exist without the other. This understanding is based on what I have (in my previous writings) called the Common Moral Position (CMP)<sup>6</sup> whereby as social and ethical beings, *vanhu/abantu* have a set of moral standards that are developed by elders and are passed unadulterated from generation to generation. . This set of moral standards help them to relate well with each other implying that a violation of such standards by any member of the group will destabilize the group.

As Desmond Tutu (2004: 25) summarily put it:

*A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human.*

Just like Mangena (2012, 2016) and Tutu (2004), Shaazia Ebrahim (2018) considers *ubuntu* to be a Southern African ethical concept which holds that humanity is interdependent. Rooted in a sense of community, *ubuntu* means that we are people through other people. This means that no one can be complete without others. Thus, based on the ideas above, it can be argued that no one can have a fulfilling life without others. This means that even if someone were to

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<sup>5</sup> The word *vanhu* is a Shona word which refers to a human being, while the word *abantu* is its Ndebele equivalent.

<sup>6</sup> The seeds of the CMP were first sowed in an article which I authored in 2012 entitled: *Towards a Hunhu/Ubuntu Dialogical Moral Theory*, and was published by *Phronimon*, a South African journal of Philosophy. Subsequent publications also had the same idea and these include, an entry in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy entitled: *Hunhu/Ubuntu in the Traditional Thought of Southern Africa* published in 2016.

become rich or wealthy or educated, all these possessions would only make sense if they were shared with others. Thus, from a *hunhu/ubuntu* perspective, we exist because we share the benefits and burdens of society, meaning to say that during times of happiness, we commune together, just as we also commune together during times of trouble. This view makes a lot more sense when applied to the issue of open borders and migration. Sometimes, it does not make sense for African countries like South Africa to have strict border controls when they are endowed with abundant resources and when they know that their fellow brothers and sisters from other parts of the region are not privileged or lucky to have such resources because of historical circumstances or bad governance.

As corroborated by Ojedokun (2015: 176), “to have full personhood is to have managed to live out and demonstrated positive qualities which are beneficial to good neighbourliness, to have matured in positive human relations.” This mentality sacrifices selfinterest and prioritizes on others (2015: 176). The concept of *hunhu/ubuntu* and open borders can also be explained in the context of the idea of regional integration.<sup>7</sup> Thus, one of the ways to overcome barriers that divide African countries is to have open borders as well as to manage and share resources. It is not always the case that open borders will promote unethical behavior as mechanisms can be put in place to ensure that while borders are open, the free movement of people is monitored. Even if it were the case that open borders would always promote unethical behavior by migrants, the advantages of managing and sharing resources between, and among neighbouring countries under the banner of regional integration will always outweigh issues of ethics. As Christopher Heath Wellman (2015) aptly puts it in apparent reference to Cosmopolitan egalitarian states:

*The cosmopolitan egalitarian case for open borders combines the core moral insight that all human beings, whether they are compatriots or foreigners, are equally deserving of moral consideration with the central empirical observation that one's country of birth often has a profound impact upon one's life prospects. The staggering levels of international inequality would not be so objectionable if the typical Swede had done something to deserve a better life than the typical Chadian, for instance, but the truth, of course, is that Swedes were merely lucky to have been born in Sweden rather than Chad. And given this, what justification could the Swedes have for putting guns at their borders to deter Chadians from trying to move north and take advantage of the preferable social, political and economic environment?*

The above scenario, although it applies to Western nations, also has a bearing on the issues of regional integration in Africa where some African countries are endowed with resources while others are not. Since the current state of affairs seems to show that the idea of regional integration borrows a lot from the West as amplified by Gnaka (2013) who put it that, “like major policies suggested to Africa, the phenomenon of regional integration is deeply rooted in

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<sup>7</sup>The International Cooperation and Development (2018) defines regional integration as the process of overcoming barriers that divide neighbouring countries, by common accord, and of jointly managing shared resources and assets. Essentially, it is a process by which groups of countries liberalize trade, creating a common market for goods, people, capital and services.



the neoclassical economics; it is imperative that we reflect on the concept of regional integration from an *ubuntu* perspective in order to advance the cause of Southern Africa. Under such a scenario, the *ubuntu* spirit will require that those with resources share with those without in the spirit of neighbourliness. This means that in the context of issues to do with regional integration and *ubuntu*, trade within the SADC block must be liberalized in the truest sense of the word, jobs and goods must be shared, and there must not be restrictions or bottle necks when it comes to according citizenship status or permanent residency status to those who have skills to offer in any of the countries in the region. Thus, borders should be considered as artificial and all efforts must be made to ensure that people are not divided along the lines of nationality. Instead, all African people (irrespective of which Southern African country they come from) must be accorded citizenship status on the basis of what they can contribute to the host country and subsequently to the region. Below, I reflect on the relationship between xenophobia and *ubuntu*.

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## **Hunhu/Ubuntu and Xenophobia**

In order to buttress the foregoing, I begin this section by defining the term *xenophobia*. I begin by quoting Hussein Solomon and Hitomi Kosaka (2013), who define *xenophobia* as “the fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers; it is embodied in discriminatory attitudes and behaviour, and often culminates in violence, abuses of all types, and exhibitions of hatred.” I also quote Solomon (cited in Odejokun 2015: 168) who adds a new dimension to the definition of xenophobia when he argues that in order to deal with the problem of xenophobia, the best and only solution is to remove enemy images. For him, the removal of enemy images ought to be pursued with much conscientiousness. Ojedokun (2015) adds that xenophobia is something of a global phenomenon, closely associated with the process of globalization. While Ojedokun considers Xenophobia to be a global phenomenon, Alex Munyonga (2018: 202) thinks that “the disposition to be violent seems to be ingrained in the minds of all black South Africans.” Munyonga provides premises to justify his claim, one of which is from Simpson (1993) who argues “that apartheid bequeathed to South Africa, a culture of violence that is difficult to shake off except through a thorough commitment to education in tolerance and integration.” Ojedokun corroborates this view when he argues that:

*The issue of xenophobia can be traced back to pre-1994, when immigrants from elsewhere faced discrimination and even violence in South Africa, even though much of that risk stemmed from and was attributed to the institutionalized racism of the time due to apartheid (2015: 168).*

What is rather clear from the submissions of both Munyonga (2018) and Ojedokun (2015) is that they both consider xenophobia to be a brain child of apartheid, which means to them that xenophobia is a legacy of European colonization, which legacy South Africa failed to deal with

after attaining their independence in 1994.<sup>8</sup> Munyonga argues that the failure by South Africans to deal with the ghost of apartheid has resulted in them turning their anger towards innocent fellow Africans (2018: 202). While Munyonga claims that the tendency to be violent is ingrained in the DNA of South Africans as a result of apartheid, I believe that xenophobia in South Africa was triggered more by the enormous socio-economic pressures exerted on South African resources by Zimbabwean immigrants at the height of Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political crisis in 2008 and 2015.

It is critical that I justify my claim as well as justify the years 2008 and 2015. For starters, the year 2008 was the worst in Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic history as it witnessed a total collapse of the economy as a result of the political impasse between ZANU PF and the MDC-T following the disputed June 2008 run-off election in which ousted former Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe claimed to be the winner having lost the first round of elections. The election was best described by the international community as a sham election. As most Zimbabweans could not see hope with Mugabe as president again, they migrated to neighbouring South Africa and other countries in the region and beyond. As I intimated earlier, among those who migrated to the rainbow nation were criminals who were on the wanted list in Zimbabwe and those who had entered using fraudulent documents.

This obviously had serious ethical implications especially as some of these immigrants allegedly resorted to bribing officials at the South African border post prior to their entry into South Africa, and others resorted to skipping the South African border often risking losing their lives as they had to pass through forests with wild animals and crocodile infested rivers. While some of the Zimbabweans who entered South Africa using improper or fraudulent documents or had skipped the border were genuinely looking for jobs and better conditions of living, those of a criminal disposition continued with their criminal behaviour when they reached South Africa posing a danger to the former and the rest of the South African citizenry. These criminals would cause havoc to fellow Zimbabweans seeking refuge in South Africa. This view is aptly captured by Alex Duval Smith (2008) who notes that: these criminals known by the moniker 'guma-guma' would "prey on the newly arrived - scour the length of the border fence to rob them of their meagre belongings and rape the women." It is also important to note that these criminals also targeted South Africans, and this, no doubt, triggered hostility between South Africans and Zimbabweans, especially as South Africans felt that their rights to be protected from criminal behavior and their rights to get better jobs were being violated. Ojedokun (2015: 171) aptly captures this view when he remarks thus:

*South Africans appear to believe that other SADC citizens take jobs from locals, commit crime, send their earnings out of the country, use the country's welfare services and bring diseases.*

As Munyonga (2018:202-203) summarily put it, the South Africans seem to feel relatively deprived of something they feel entitled to, in this case skills, education and jobs which are

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<sup>8</sup> I challenge this view in the foregoing essay. Personally, I believe that these guys have not succeeded in showing us how apartheid is linked to xenophobia. I, therefore, present premises that show that xenophobia in South Africa is a result of other factors, rather than apartheid.

taken by foreigners who are better qualified than them. On the other hand, foreigners, particularly Zimbabweans, feel that they are victims of crimes they did not commit, considering that they decided to go to South Africa to genuinely look for better living conditions, having run away from Mugabe's tyrannical rule. Thus, the 2008 xenophobic attacks can also be understood from this perspective. In terms of statistics, in May 2008, a series of riots left sixty two people dead, although twenty one of those killed were South African citizens (Odejokun, 2015: 169). In essence, forty one foreigners were killed. The year 2015 is significant in that after ZANU PF had won the 2013 harmonized elections somewhat controversially, the party started purging some of its members who were being accused of factionalism, and the then Vice-President Joyce Mujuru was the first victim of this purge.

There was despondency within the party and outside of it as people could not understand why the revolutionary party was victimizing some of its longtime members, and this coupled with job dismissals and salary delays took a toll on the general citizenry and a significant number of Zimbabweans, who had seen some hope during the period of the Government of National Unity (GNU) from 2009 to 2013, began again to migrate to South Africa and beyond. This, probably, triggered another spate of xenophobic attacks as the number of Zimbabweans in South Africa began to surge again putting a strain on South Africa's resources. According to Los Angeles Times (2015), "in 2015, another nationwide spike in xenophobic attacks against immigrants in general prompted a number of foreign governments to begin repatriating their citizens."

But can xenophobia really be justified? Doesn't the presence of xenophobia contradict the *hunhu/ubuntu* spirit that seems to permeate South African thought? In order to successfully answer these two questions, it is imperative to consider how pre-colonial Southern Africa viewed foreigners or strangers, and the moral aptitudes that guided these views. To begin with, it is critical to note that:

*The attitudes of Africans towards foreigners or strangers in the past were those of tolerance and benevolence. Strangers were made to feel welcome and to move with ease within the community. Strangers were referred to as visitors, guests (iindwendwe) or aliens, sojourners (abahambi). These words have positive connotations (Ojedokun, 2015: 177).*

In Shona culture, for example; there are proverbs that point to the perceived generosity of the Shona people or *vanhu* towards visitors or strangers. Some of these proverbs include: "*Muenzi haapedzi dura* (a visitor does not finish food); *chipavhurire uchakodzwa* (The one who gives too much will get much) (Mangena, 2016)." In a Xhosa household, a visitor was a respected person, who was treated cordially; given water to wash, food to eat and a place to sleep... The presence of strangers was seen as more of a blessing than a burden, and this further brought joy to children since they knew that best meals would be served each time there were visitors (Saule, 1996: 86). Ojedokun (2015: 177) also put it that "*limbacu* (refugees) "were treated with respect and were shown hospitality. Thus, *limbacu* (refugees), as people who are homeless, alienated from their land and families were treated with compassion and kindness."

If the scenario in pre-colonial African society was such that visitors, strangers or foreigners were respected, then how does one explain the emergency of xenophobia in an African country like South Africa in 2008 and 2015? The first response could be that South Africa's encounter with colonialism could have changed the ethical outlook of black South Africans as they ended up assimilating white people's values that promoted individualism at the expense of black people's values which promoted oneness. The second response could be that the issue of pre-colonial African society being perceived as promoting hospitality could be a bit exaggerated as people in pre-colonial African societies, did not always give priority to strangers as compared to relatives. This point is best explained by the Shona proverb: *Chawawana idya nehama, mutorwa unokanganwa* (Share what you get with your relatives because strangers will always forget that you gave them something). Another Shona proverb which shows that pre-colonial Shona society was not always hospitable is: *Weropa ndewe ropa haakusiyi* (The one you share blood with will not abandon you). These two proverbs implicitly contradict the view that pre-colonial Shona society always treated strangers or visitors with utmost respect.

Thus, to say that it was all rosy in pre-colonial African society would be too much of an exaggeration. What this means is that blaming colonialism or apartheid for the xenophobic mentality exhibited by black South Africans today would be abdicating responsibility. It could just be that black South Africans are failing to harness *ubuntu* to live peacefully with their brothers and sisters from neighbouring countries because xenophobia opposes *ubuntu*. As Edwin Etieyibo (cited in Ebrahim, 2018) aptly puts it:

*A simple, straightforward answer would be to say...xenophobia is the opposite of welcoming to others. One that is not welcoming to others doesn't have ubuntu, right? People who practice xenophobia don't have ubuntu.*

So, if it is true that people who practice xenophobia do not have *ubuntu* as postulated by Etieyibo above, then it follows that *ubuntu* is a moral quality which some people have while others do not have it. This view also finds support from Christian B.N Gade (2012: 489) who argues, thus:

*My collection of written sources and oral testimonies shows that according to a number of SAADs<sup>9</sup>, ubuntu is the moral quality of a person...This moral quality is so positive that the very possession of it is praiseworthy.*

This view sounds persuasive at face value but its problem is that, it tends to destroy the whole essence of community which is premised on the idea that what affects an individual also affects the group and vice versa. Thus, instead of giving due praise to the community when an individual has acted in a praiseworthy manner, this view tends to give credit to the individual. Applied to the issue of xenophobia in South Africa, it means that those who have involved themselves in xenophobic acts are bad South Africans and those who have not are good ones, and yet we know that it is difficult to say because some South Africans, did not participate in these xenophobic acts, and so they are good given that these remained silent with regard to their position.

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<sup>9</sup> Gade (2012: 484) defines SAADs as South Africans of African Descent.

## Way Forward

The solution to the problem of crime and xenophobia in South Africa can be conceivable as follows: Firstly, the South African government should make an effort to tighten border control systems through increasing manpower that will ensure that the movement of people from Zimbabwe to South Africa is adequately monitored and managed. This tightening of border control systems should involve flushing out all perceived criminal elements wanting to cross the border to South Africa as well as those who have nothing to offer to South Africa in terms of skills. Secondly, there is need to prosecute all South African officials at the border who take bribes from Zimbabwean foreigners who want to cross to South Africa without proper travel documents, including the criminal elements mentioned above. Thus, a raft of measures including punitive measures should be instituted to ensure that all those who are found on the wrong side of the law are duly punished.

To ensure proper monitoring of these officials and to deal with the incidence of corruption and bribes, Chinese Central Televisions (CCTVs) must be mounted at the South African border to Zimbabwe (if they are not already there). If they are already there, the evidence they produce should be used to punish those involved in corruption and fraud at the South African border to Zimbabwe. There should also be undercover police officers patrolling the border deployed to monitor any unethical practices taking place at the border involving South African officials and Zimbabwean migrants. At the moment, it doesn't seem like there are such measures given the free movement of people from Zimbabwe to South Africa, and yet these measures, in my view, can help mitigate the problem of crime resulting from people migrating from Zimbabwe to South Africa as well as deal decisively with the problem of xenophobia.

With regard to the problem of xenophobia, my position is very clear. Firstly, I argue that once the problem of crime is addressed and people without skills are blocked from entering South Africa, the incidences of xenophobia will be reduced by more than half. What I am trying to say here is that before people make a noise about the problem of xenophobia in South Africa, concerted efforts must be made to prevent it in the first place and the best way to prevent it is decongest South Africa by allowing only skilled personnel from Zimbabwe to work and stay in South Africa. My second submission is that, with regard to South Africans and their relationship with Zimbabweans residing in their country, it is important that they accept them as their fellow brothers and sisters as this is what *ubuntu* says. In order to do so, they should first "remove enemy images" which will help them to appreciate the value of peaceful co-existence.

## Conclusion

This paper discussed the challenges associated with the open border system with particular reference to the South African border and Zimbabweans migrating to South Africa since the crisis years which were prompted by the socio-economic and political challenges caused by the disaffection between the ruling ZNAU PF, Zimbabwean opposition players and the West. The paper looked at the possible factors leading to the lack of adequate enforcement and supervision at the South African border, the relationship between migration and crime as well as the response of *ubuntu* to the problem of the 2008 and 2015 xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The paper then provided a way forward centred on a revisit of the cherished values of the past which should inspire South Africans to remove the enemy images and leave peacefully with fellow brothers and sisters from the continent.

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# Monotheism and metaphysics in the *yorùbá* thought system: a process alternative

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## Abstract

Traditional *Yorùbá* theology has been construed by some African scholars as monotheism albeit with slight but significant departures from the mainstream and dominant variety. Of these scholars, Bolaji Idowu [1962]; Omotade Adegbindin [2011]; and Akintola Adebawale [1999] are foremost. Their agenda derives from the attempt of circumventing the polytheism that is *seemingly suggestive* of the theology. But since metaphysics necessarily informs theology, these scholars have yet to provide a comprehensive metaphysical context that endorses monotheism in *Yorùbá* philosophy. As a consequence, there has been little or no reason to further explore this research gulf among scholars conversant with *Yorùbá* theology. Using the method of conversational philosophy, I make a concerted effort to propose that traditional *Yorùbá* theology is neither polytheistic nor monotheistic. When the study proposes that it is panentheistic, the process metaphysical groundwork upon which the theology and the entire thought system of the *Yorùbá* thrives is unpacked. The conclusion is therefore not far-fetched – traditional *Yorùbá* theology has a process metaphysical groundwork from which panentheism but not monotheism is discernable.

**Keywords:** Metaphysics, Monotheism, Panentheism, Theology, *Yorùbá*.

## Introduction

In this study, the thesis that traditional *Yorùbá* theology is panentheistic and an ancient stereotype of process metaphysics will be proposed. In the next section, the disparaging comments about the inability of traditional Africans to conceive a divine being and the spate of rejoinders that this charge generated will be given brief attention. In the third rift, attention shifts to the traditional *Yorùbá* theology which has been interpreted as monotheism by Bolaji Idowu, Omotade Adegbindin, and Adebowale Akintola. Though these minds are the principal representatives of the monotheistic straitjacketing of *Yorùbá* theology, there has been little attention in recent times given to revising their assumptions. The section unearths the inadequacies and erroneous implications of their outlooks from the shades of monotheism. When I propose a panentheistic outlook, I disclose some parallels between *Yorùbá* theology and process theology – an extension of Alfred N Whitehead’s process-relational philosophy. Afterward, the metaphysic that endorses my panentheistic perspective will be evinced, to be corroborated by some verses of the *Ifá* orature.

## The Ethnocentric Charges against African Traditional Religions

Ethnocentric comments that the traditional African lacks the capacity to conceive a divine entity led to a deluge of researches aimed at defending the traditional African and his/her religious beliefs. The conclusion of the missionary, Samuel Baker will always be remembered for his assertion as revealed by E.E. Evans-Pritchard [1965] that Africans are people without belief in a Supreme Being or any idea about celestial matters. Elsewhere, Godfrey Parrinder [1970] is circumspect about the type of religion and worship in traditional Africa. The contention is that paganism is the proper term for African traditional religions. To my mind, the ethnocentric charges are less of a worry. What causes more discomfort is the riposte to these charges by some African minds, including those who have misrepresented traditional *Yorùbá* theology. Prominent among these is John Mbiti who concludes that Africans are religious in everything. For him:

*Because traditional religions permeate all departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament [Mbiti 1969: 2].*

Mbiti seems to have done more harm than good as he exaggerates the view that the African is in all things a religious entity. The attempt to show that Africans are not lacking in religious knowledge and morality has led to scholarships which have tried to model the African idea of the divine parallel with the ones from Jerusalem and Mecca. It is precisely for this reasoning that 'Okot considers some African writers equally guilty of this kind of smuggling. K. A. Busia, L. S. Senghor, J. B. Danquah, J. S. Mbiti, B. Idowu, and Kenyatta are all led into sin by their methods of research and interpretation of African culture' [Imbo 2004: 370]. The case of Mbiti is not trivial as Okot dubs him 'Africa's chief intellectual smuggler. He earned this title because he smuggled enough Greek metaphysical material to Hellenize three hundred African deities' [P'Bitek 1972: 29]. This muddle necessarily extends to being one of the impediments to the unearthing of an authentic *Yorùbá* theology. And even when an African theology is attempted, the foregoing factor mitigates its originality. The question of originality will be further explored in the section that follows as traditional *Yorùbá* theology is used as a cue.

## Traditional *Yorùbá* Theology as Monotheism: The Question of Originality

Perhaps the starting point is to provide the general characterization of *Yorùbá* theology before the monotheistic interpretation enters the fray. In this regard, Bolaji Idowu [1973] lists the following in descending order of superiority: Belief in God, Belief in Divinities, Belief in Spirits, Belief in ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine. None of these beliefs stands in isolation. In his rendition, John Ayo Bewaji insists that the reality of *Olódùmarè* is not a matter for argument or debate as replete in the Western tradition. On the contrary, the belief in *Olódùmarè*'s existence is held to be foundational. He amplifies:

*The existence of Olodumare is not geotactic, nor is it dependent upon any human whim. This, perhaps, explains why no elaborate arguments or proofs are thought necessary for the existence of God in Yoruba religion. The starting point of wisdom among the Yoruba is the acceptance of the de facto existence of Deity [Bewaji 2007: 369].*

Furthermore, one must also note that belief in the existence of *Olódùmarè* is suggestive of the traditional *Yorùbá* belief in two planes of existence namely, *Òrun* ('spiritual abode') and *Ayé* ('physical world'). *Ayé* is believed to have been created by *Olódùmarè* with the assistance of the *Òrìṣàs* (subordinate deities) who reside with him in *Òrun* [Oyelakin 2013: 87]. It is in a similar spectrum that Margaret Drewal [1992: 14] explains:

The Yoruba conceive of the cosmos as consisting of two distinct yet inseparable realms—*ayé* (the visible, tangible world of the living) and *orun* (the invisible spiritual realms of the ancestors, gods, and spirits). Such a cosmic conception is

visualized either as a spherical gourd [calabash], whose upper and lower hemispheres fit tightly together, or as a divination tray with a raised figured border enclosing a flat central surface.

It is therefore important to understand that *Olódùmarè* is not a *Deus remotus*, who is far off or like Aristotle's God who bears no relation or interaction with the world [Ofuasia 2017]. There are at least two facts that must not be wished away at this juncture.

Firstly, no one directly witnessed the whole creation process. Hence, instead of saying *Olódùmarè* created, this study will admit that the Higher God plays the role of guaranteeing order in the universe. Secondly, what is to be gleaned is that *Olódùmarè* had never been alone. The Higher God has always been with the primordial divinities, who have duties and responsibilities affixed to them for the smooth running of the universe. Some of these divinities are: *Òrúnmìlà*, *Obàtálá*, *Àjàlá*, *Sàngó*, *Ògún*, *Esu*. It needs little elaboration that 'the divinities were the first creations of *Oloдумаре*; and that they were created by Him in His capacity as *Eleda*, for the primary purpose of assisting Him in the management of the planetary system' [Akintola 1999: 52]. In the words of Olarenwaju Shitta-Bey [2013: 79]: 'the divinities were created by *Oloдумаре* to assist...That they are to assist suggests that they are deputising *Oloдумаре*, which make them all the deputies of *Oloдумаре*.' Worship and ritual is directed toward *Olódùmarè* through the divinities. This relationship attests to the cardinal truth in Process-relational philosophy that 'God is not before all creation, but with all creation' [Whitehead 1978: 521].

Another crucial point to be gleaned is that in traditional *Yorùbá* theology there is no entity equivalent of the Devil/Satan. This is an idea that scholars such as John Bewaji [1998] and Wole Soyinka [1990] have made laudable attempts at decolonizing but whose social awareness is still vegetative among contemporary *Yorùbá* peoples. The general public is still struggling with the understanding that *Olódùmarè* the Higher God is not perfectly adorned with superlatives of knowledge, love and power vis-à-vis the Abrahamic God and this is why the philosophical problem of evil does not infiltrate the thought system [Balogun 2009: 31]. It therefore does not strike one that 'the Yoruba do not postulate an all evil being that is solely responsible for the occurrence of evil as we have in the West or in Judeo-Christian thought. Rather, the Yoruba conceive both evil and good as arising from the activities of *Oloдумаре* (God,) his ministers (divinities) and other theoretical entities' [Balogun 2009: 31]. This underscores the persistence of relational and persuasive power in traditional *Yorùbá* theology. This is true because for the *Yorùbá*, 'both *ire* (goodness) and *ibi* (evilness) are not separated as two distinct realities, but rather seen as one of two sides' [Fayemi 2012: 324]. It is on this account that Sophie Bosede Oluwole [1995: 20] harps:

*The Yoruba thinker recognizes evil as real, but he does not regard its existence as proof of God's incompetence or His limited goodness, since He is not conceived as absolute in any of these senses in the first instance.*

The foregoing rendition, though a synopsis, passes as the general understanding of the constitution of traditional *Yorùbá* theology. But because it is in stark contrast with how the Western mind perceives the divine and his *modus operandi* with the universe, traditional *Yorùbá* theology has suffered from the charge of polytheism and paganism. In a bid to rescue the theology from being branded as polytheism and paganism, torrents of literatures have served sharply to put matters in the right perspective. But in the process of rescue, an unfair and biased rendition soon infiltrated the schema. These points are notable in the works of Bolaji Idowu, Omotade Adegbindin, Adebowale Akintola, the trio that we contend with in this disquisition.

Reacting against the charges of polytheism, Idowu [1962: 204] postulates what he calls a ‘diffused monotheism.’ For him this ‘has the advantage of showing that the religion is monotheism in which the good Deity delegates certain portions of His authority to certain divine functionaries who work as they are commissioned by Him’ [Idowu 1962: 204].

Omotade Adegbindin too takes a monotheistic stance. For him: ‘In the *Ifá* system, *Olódùmarè* (God) is vividly presented as the Supreme Being, whose powers surpass those of the divinities. The monotheistic view that all created beings should worship *Olódùmarè* is found in a verse of *Ọ̀sẹ̀ẹ̀-‘Túrá’* [Adegbindin 2011: 5]. The *Odù* in contention reads:

*Ifá advocates the worship of God;  
He says the bees will one day leave their hives;  
Ifá advocates the worship of God;  
For the mistletoe will one day leave the palm tree;  
He says the passing shadow will soon depart  
And return to God, the creator ...*

‘It is interesting to note,’ Adegbindin insists ‘that the theme of the above verse is presented as the voice of *Ọ̀rúnmilà* himself’ [Adegbindin 2011: 5]. Similarly, Adebowale Akintola reveals from the *Ifá* chapter, *Ìwòrì-Wòdín*, describing how human beings acknowledge God in such a monotheistic manner that often leads to unnecessary rivalry and confusion in the world. *Ìwòrì-Wòdín* rejects any exclusive claim to the knowledge of God and states how *Ọ̀rúnmilà* affirms that all religions in the world are avenues of reaching and venerating the one God (Akintola 1999: 45-6).

When Idowu on the one hand, and Adegbindin with Akintola on the other hand, have adduced the *Yorùbá* scheme as ‘diffused monotheism’ and monotheism respectively, this study differs from their positions. This research acquiesces that the *Yorùbá* ontological scheme is panentheistic. What then is panentheism?

Panentheism ‘is the view that God includes the world in his being (since he is affected by every event within it) and at the same that He is more than the events in the world (God has his own unique aims and actions)’ [Lawhead 2002: 495]. This implies that the world and God are forever locked in a continuous interaction. The fact that the world and God are interactive

means that ‘it is true to say that God creates the world, as that the world creates God’ [Whitehead 1978: 528]. In panentheism, ‘there is no transcendence of God, above and beyond the world’ [OFUASIA 2015: 67]. Panentheism is present in several cult religions of the ancient periods which have now been castigated as paganism by monotheistic adherents whereas monotheism is a recent emergent as Sergei Tokarev [1989: 234] points out:

*Judaism was thus the first religion in history to declare consistent and principled monotheism, and to put it into practice. The trend towards monotheism also existed in the Egyptian, Babylonian and Iranian religions, and this trend was always the reflection of political centralisation and the autocratic power of the king. Attempts to introduce monotheism were resisted each time by the priests of local cults and other centrifugal forces. This time the Jerusalem priesthood was able to establish strict monotheism because the priesthood of the Jerusalem Temple had a monopoly on power, had no strong rivals, and had the support of the kings, Persian and others.*

From the foregoing claim it may be deduced that there is no way *Olódùmarè*'s interaction with all other entities both in *Òrun* and *Ayé* can be monotheism or diffused monotheism. These renditions from Idowu, Adegbindin, and Akintola reflect an uncharitable understanding of the *Yorùbá* ontological scheme.

Of all scholars conversant with traditional *Yorùbá* theology, Balogun may be credited for coming close to developing an ontological scheme for the theology. However, he did not see the need to further explore a process account even when he writes: ‘...the response of modern process theology, hinging upon the idea of God who is not all powerful and not in fact able to prevent the evil arising either in human beings or in the process of nature’ [Balogun 2009: 29]. Not only is this a poor rendition of process thought but an expression of the dearth of its main thrust. Had Balogun been more patient and more intellectually meticulous, he would have seen the fit between traditional *Yorùbá* theology and process theology. Unsurprisingly, what Balogun sees is the connection between *Yorùbá* theology and Judeo-Christian theology. This is justified by his juxtaposing the concepts of ‘ase’ in traditional *Yorùbá* theology with ‘annointing’ in Pentecostal Christian theology.

Balogun’s [2004: 46] exploration of the deeper connection of ‘anointing’ and ‘ase’ in Judeo-Christian theology and traditional *Yorùbá* theology respectively, serves to show that though there are basic similarities in human endeavours irrespective of space-time location, there is the attempt to make these theologies appear similar. There are always bound to be loose ends with such contrasts. For instance, a critical exposition of the ontological schemes of these theologies (which Balogun fails to take cognizance of) implies otherwise. When Balogun is certain that: ‘God the father is source of anointing. He anoints whoever fulfils the requirements for receiving it’ [Balogun 2009: 49], there is no precise mention of the efficient cause of ‘ase’ in traditional *Yorùbá* theology. However, upon my critical engagement with his text, I find that traditional *Yorùbá* theology is panentheistic with a process-relational locus. Hence, it may

share some rudiments with other theologies, yet it is a radically different but comprehensive ontological scheme. I now converse with Adegbindin.

In spite of Adegbindin's (2014: xix) conviction that '*Ifá* is not a mere divination system but a literary compendium of the *Yorùbá* classical philosophy' and his critique of Wande Abimbola, Bolaji Idowu and several other scholars who he thinks have not disinterred the philosophy latent in the *Ifá* corpus, he is guilty of similar misrepresentation, albeit from an ontological angle, as he deduces monotheism as autochthonous to the traditional *Yorùbá* theological scheme. In effect the *Odùs* (*Òyèkú Méjì*, *Òséè-Túrà*, and *Ìwòrì-Wòdín*) were merely interpreted to suit Adegbindin's intent of classifying the theology as monotheism.

The panentheistic conception of *Olódùmarè*'s interaction with the universe is lucid enough. When the stories from the *Ifá* corpus reveal the interactive nature of *Olódùmarè* and his reliance on his 'deputies' when and where necessary, this entity is in stark contrast with a monotheistic agent who needs no world to be. This is an entity that necessarily transcends the world and seems to be self-sufficient. The conclusion that the *Yorùbá* schema is monotheistic receives a vital blow given the continuum between *Òrun* ('spiritual abode') and *Ayé* ('physical world'). Speaking on the interaction between *Òrun* and *Ayé*, Mbiti corroborates the binary complementarity between these planes of existence when he asserts that the two 'dovetail and intermingle into each other so much that it is not easy, or even necessary, to draw the distinction or separate them' [Mbiti 1969: 97].

There are cases in the *Ifá* orature that strongly suggest a panentheistic approach wherein *Olódùmarè* interacts respectfully and in some cases with diplomatic tact, with the subordinate 'god-heads.' In other words, illustrations that reflect the persuasive and tactful character of *Olódùmarè* are replete in the *Ifá* corpus. One such instance is entrenched in a verse of *Odù Òyèkú Méjì* which is rendered thus:

*A child is not tall enough to stretch his hand to reach the high shelf  
An adult's hand cannot enter the mouth of a gourd  
The work an adult begs a child to do  
Let him not refuse to do.  
We all have to work to do for each other's good  
Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmìlà  
About whom his devotee  
Would make a complaint to Olódùmarè  
Olódùmarè then sent for Òrúnmìlà  
To explain the reason why  
He did not support his devotee  
When Òrúnmìlà got to the presence of Olódùmarè  
He explained that he had done all in his power for his devotee  
But that the destiny chosen by the devotee made his efforts fruitless  
It was then that the matter  
Became quite clear to Olódùmarè*

*And he was happy  
That he did not pronounce his judgment on the evidence of only one of the two  
parties.*

Within *Odù Ìwòrì' Òsá*, another *Ifá* chapter, one finds a persuasive character of *Olódùmarè*:

*Atikaraṣeṭe, the Ifá priest of Heaven  
Divined and interpreted the teachings of Ifá unto Olódùmarè and the world  
Since the people of the world turn to Olódùmarè for everything,  
Crying out: “Baba, Baba, We have come! Save us!! Please save us!!!”  
Olódùmarè answered: “What could this mean?  
Those whom I have given power have refused to use it  
Those whom I have given wisdom have refused to use it.”  
It has been decreed that the children who do not see their parents will strive  
with inner strength.*

The foregoing may be contrasted with the God of the Abrahamic monotheisms, a coercive agent that is expected to break the known laws of nature for the sake of adherents. This does not hold for *Olódùmarè* who seems to evince the process injunction that ‘God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save them from collapse. He is their chief exemplification’ [Whitehead 1978, 343]. The metaphysical principle here is persuasive agency. It is this injunction that validates the panentheistic thesis which I disclose.

Regarding the abilities of *Olódùmarè*, and its stark departure from God among the Abrahamic monotheisms, Idowu [1962: 77] says: ‘There is a story which has it that Olodumare Himself was once perplexed over a very important matter. All the other divinities tried but failed to tell Him the reason for His perplexity; only Orunmila succeeded in putting his finger on the source of the trouble...’ This showing radically differs from the outlook of ‘the deeper idolatry...the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian and Roman imperial rulers...’ [Whitehead 1978: 343], which is rampant in classical theology but has no place in traditional *Yorùbá* theology. As a way of revealing the lack of superlative accidents in *Olódùmarè*, another verse from *Odù Òyèkú Méjì* captures:

*It was Olódùmarè's forgetfulness  
That accounts for the non-separation of the duck's feet.*

Furthermore, the ability to reason with humans and non-humans to change its mind and trust in the judgments of subordinates is played out in the foregoing *Ifá* traditions. The same holds for *Yahweh* and *Allah* in classical theism. However, one point has prevented the exaggeration of these aspects of the divine in classical theology – the uncritical tendency to depreciate what cannot be understood. Hartshorne validates this outlook when he insists that ‘...in both Christianity and Islam, to a somewhat lesser extent in Judaism...there was a development of mysticism, which was different still and in some ways partially corrective of the all-too-Greek form taken by the official theologies’ [Hartshorne 1984: 1]. The mysticism implied in these



Abrahamic monotheisms, could not be admitted into the substance metaphysical framework imported from the Greek culture. Just as Moses convinced *Yahweh* not to destroy the Israelites, as Abraham pleaded for God to spare Sodom, so too does *Olódùmarè* reason and negotiate with his subordinates with whom It governs the universe in tandem. These illustrations find validation in the Old Testament book of Isaiah chapter 1 verse 18 wherein the prophet was inspired to chronicle: “‘Come now, let us reason together’” says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’ Instances and passages similar to these not only abound in the Bible but also reveal the pantheistic nature of *Yahweh/Jehovah* which is vitiated by most Western classical theologians and African theologians when espousing the religious cultures of traditional Africans. On the authority of David Ray Griffin [2010: 163]:

*What exists necessarily is not simply God alone but God-and-a -world – not our particular world, with its contingent forms of order, but some world or other. This point can be expressed in terms of “creativity” which is the ultimate reality embodied in all actualities. Whereas traditional theism said that the power of creativity exists necessarily only as instantiated in God, for process theology it is necessarily instantiated in both God and a plurality of finite actualities.*

Now that I have been able to show how pantheism is more fitting for traditional *Yorùbá* theology, the following questions still need attention: What is responsible for this push for a monotheistic religion for the traditional *Yorùbá*? Is it the case that any religious view which is not monotheistic is inferior to those that are? I concern with these shortly.

To understand the motivation which pushes scholars to brand traditional *Yorùbá* theology as monotheism, one needs to first realise that ‘it is the business of philosophical theology to provide a rational understanding of the rise of civilization, and of the tenderness of mere life itself, in a world which superficially is founded upon the clashings of senseless compulsion’ [Whitehead 1967: 170]. In the business of providing a rational understanding of religion, ‘...theology has failed’ [Whitehead 1967: 170], perhaps owing to the notion of the ‘absolute despot’ which has stood in the way [Whitehead 1967: 170]. This implies that the divine has been reasoned out as a coercive force rather than a persuasive agency [Whitehead 1967: 166]. This erroneous tendency goes as far as Aristotle, the codifier and foremost exponent of substance metaphysics, the most popular strand of metaphysics.

At this juncture, it is imperative to state here that there are two types of metaphysics that inform the conceptual articulation of any religion. These are: metaphysics of substance and metaphysics of event or process metaphysics. According to Whitehead, these two metaphysics are the deliverances of an integral experience. We all experience that some things change while others do not, some things move while others do not: being and becoming, substance and process. To a certain degree, substance metaphysics owes its success to the mode of thinking that cultivates such a mentality, that is to say, in ancient times, perfection was synonymous with changelessness [Masong 2013: 14]. This notion of perfection and its synonymy with

changelessness served as the foundation for monotheistic theologies. Kenneth Masong [2013: 15] informs us that:

*When this metaphysics entered the domain of religion, there was an almost perfect fit, especially with the rise of religious monotheism. As the ideas of Being, immutability, and impassibility suggest perfection, the concepts of movement, change, and becoming inversely suggest imperfection. The metaphysical search for the unchanging ground of changing reality became a religious search for an ultimate ground, which was found in the arms of an impassible, omniscient, and omnipotent God. When substance metaphysics found its ultimate category in the concept of Being, religion found its religious ultimate in the God that put on the attributes of Being itself.*

The above reveals why and how monotheistic religions' presentation of a despotic God which was used to instil fear originated. But this fear no longer binds the modern mind. It is for this reason that Whitehead [1948: 188] reiterates that 'religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science. Its principles may be eternal, but the expression of those principles requires continual development.' The history of the Abrahamic monotheisms is replete with instances where repression and suppression of truth are commonplace even in the face of overwhelming counterevidence.

It is the case that leading scholars on African traditional religion have employed the popular and dominant metaphysics of the Abrahamic monotheisms in their studies. This approach not only compounds research problems for posterity but also presents an unfair and misrepresented chronicle of the African traditional thought system or metaphysics which lies in the domain of process metaphysics. What then is the inner kernel of process metaphysics? In this connection, the reflections of Alfred North Whitehead, the foremost scholar in the field will be used as cue.

I should start with the caveat that process metaphysics did not originate with Alfred North Whitehead. A survey of philosophy in the ancient periods reveals that 'process-relational thinking has a long history stretching back at least to the Buddha and the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus in the sixth century BCE' [Mesle 2008: 4]. This is 'a view that not coincidentally finds much resonance within twentieth-century developments in physics and biology including quantum mechanics, ecology, chaos and complexity theories, and developmental systems theory' [Ivakhiv 2018: 235]. Process metaphysics accentuates the 'dynamism by which things are perpetually moving forward, interacting, and creating new conditions in the world...Process-relational thought rejects the Cartesian idea that there are *minds*, or things that think, and *bodies*, or matter that acts according to strict causal laws. Rather, the two are considered one and the same, or two aspects of an interactive and dynamically evolving reality' [Ivakhiv 2018: 234].

In Whitehead's version of process metaphysics, actual entities or occasions replace the notion of substance in traditional metaphysics. All things are actual entities or occasions – humans, cells, tissues, imaginations, rocks, thoughts, even God. However, there are gradations. For

Whitehead [1978: 18], actual entities ‘differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level.’ All actual entities irrespective of their gradations are interdependent. They complement one another to the extent that the attempt to divide the reality into two (matter and idea) is frowned upon. This is what Whitehead [2004: 26] calls ‘the bifurcation of nature.’ Given that God is also an actual entity how does It relate with all the entities since reality is a fusion of matter and idea?

Whitehead proposes that all actual entities have mental and physical poles, which makes them dipolar. Aside from this nature, God, being a higher grade entity, has primordial and consequent natures. In the former, God envisions all possibilities and their eventual actualization. Here, God provides possibilities from which all entities may or may not choose to conform to since all actual entities have subjective aims. In this regard, ‘...the subjective aim is constituted by the complete conceptual envisagement of all eternal objects laced with the urge toward their realization in the actualities of the world’ [Onwuegbusi 2013: 253]. These possibilities are provided by God for all other entities toprehend<sup>10</sup> for their subjective aims. It therefore implies that ‘God is the lure of feeling, the eternal urge of desire. His particular relevance to each creative act, as it arises from its own conditioned standpoint in the world, constitutes him the *‘initial object of desire’* establishing the initial phase of each subjective aim’ [Whitehead 1978: 522]. When actual entities fail to conform to these possibilities provided by God for their prehension, since they are free to or not to, evil enters the fray. These choices, in turn, affect God who continues to provide other possibilities for restitution.

The instances where other prehensions and agencies of other actual entities affect God’s actions correspond to God’s consequent nature. God’s consequent nature ‘...is the physical prehension by God of the actualities of the evolving universe’ [Whitehead 1979: 46]. This makes God in process metaphysics, imperfect, persuasive yet a guarantor for order. These features make God a necessary part of the grand plan of the actual world. Whitehead affirms this too when he relays: ‘There is an actual world because there is order in nature. If there were no order, there would be no world. Also, since there is a world, we know that there is an order. The ordering entity is a necessary element in the metaphysical situation presented by the actual world’ [Whitehead 1957: 104]. This idea of God being a necessary part of the world contrasts sharply with the starting point of wisdom among the Yoruba – the acceptance of the *de facto* existence of the *Olódùmarè* [Bewaji 2007: 369].

Much as the world depends on God, God also depends on the world. The foregoing clearly validates an earlier assertion that ‘God is not before all creation, but with all creation’ [Whitehead 1978: 521]. Since God depends on the world, and the world on God, the passage of the *Ifá* corpus, *Odù Òyèkú Méjì* cited hitherto wherein *Olódùmarè* relied on the judgment of

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<sup>10</sup>This is a highly technical term in process thought. Whitehead [1978] initiated it out of his conviction that it takes cognizance of other ways of knowing such as clairvoyance, extra sensory perceptions, telepathy, which the five sense organs may not ‘perceive’ and relay to the brain.

both parties validates the idea of a God that is persuasive but not coercive; one that interrelates with the world.

Since God is not the highest hierarchy of the being in process ontology, what occupies this role, a critic is wont to demand. In other words, for every '*philosophic theory, there is an ultimate which is actual in virtue of its accidents*' [Agyakwa 2002: 50]. For Whitehead, this ultimate is '*Creativity*.' According to Whitehead [1978: 21] Creativity is the '*universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact*.' Creativity, in his word '*lies in the nature of things that the many enter into one complex unity*' [Whitehead 1978, 31]. In the end, God "is at once a creature of Creativity and a condition for Creativity" [Whitehead 1978: 47]. Like all other actual occasions, God exemplifies Creativity but also as '*organ of novelty, aiming at intensification*' [Whitehead 1978: 104] and the '*foundation of order...the goal towards novelty*' [Whitehead 1978: 135]. This role of order makes humans to walk on legs but not with their noses, for instance. It is responsible for the regularities that we observe in nature, where I have codified elsewhere as responsible for why '*a goat does not give birth to a monkey*' [Ofuasia 2019, 67]. Creativity surfaces *Yorùbá* ontology and spirituality when there is serious turmoil in the land and *Ifá* divination is cast. Usually, one hears the priest chant: "*may the rats sound like rats; may birds sound like birds*.' What is being appealed to here is the invocation of the conditions of Creativity through God to affirm regularities in the actual world. Irregularities are not misplaced since each actual entity has subjective aims to or not conform to the possibilities given by God. However, to save the situation, further possibilities are offered to correct and initiate the stable or desirable status quo.

From the brief exploration of the main thrust of process ontology, I now draw places of parallels with *Yorùbá* thought system. Firstly, nothing is life-less, as all things from simple cell, thoughts, volitions, rocks, right up to God fall under the notion of '*actual occasions*' and form an interconnected whole constantly and persistently prehending, knowing one another [Ofuasia 2017: 159]. It is important to note that traditional *Yorùbá* thought system also shares this perspective. The idea of cells, tissues and organs of the human body undergoing divination attests to this. For instance, in *Odù Èjì Ogbe*, *Ifá* divination was cast for actual occasions like the heart, brain and even the life-force thus:

*The day that the body was created from water*  
*The day that water was created, so was blood*  
*The day that blood was created, so was the whole body*  
*Ifá divination was performed for heart (òkàn)*  
*And likewise for the life-force (ẹ̀mí)*  
*Ifá divination was performed for the inner head (orí inú)*  
*And likewise for the brain (ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀)*  
*When the four of them were coming from the unseen realm into the physical*

Secondly, and this outlook does not require further elaboration at this juncture – the absence of dualism in traditional *Yorùbá* thought system. Rather duality is underscored. This is implied in the dipolar structure of all actual occasions, which does not exclude God. Chidozie Okoro

[2011: 124] reveals in this vein that the ‘...African thought system (be it in the area of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics or logic) operates on the law of duality, not dualism.’ Okoro [2011: 125] explains further that: ‘[t]he African metaphysical system is integrative on the ground that its dualistic nature allows for a plurality of views...Traditional Africans also conceived phenomenon in a cosmological double of ‘spirit force’ and a ‘material essence’.’ Okoro’s contention is amplified by Kenneth Anyanwu [1981: 95] who avers that when the African looks at a tree within the assumptions of his culture, he sees and imagines a life-force interacting with another life-force. He sees the colour of the object (tree), feels its beauty, imagines the life-force in it, intuitively grasps the interrelationships between the hierarchies of life-forces. This ‘communication’ between the African and trees may appear strange to the Westerner. However, there are contemporary findings that relay that plant may have up to eleven photoreceptors when humans only have three [Chamovitz 2012]. The implication is that plants can see, smell, hear and feel even much better than humans [Sheth 2019].

When we place the assertion of the foregoing scholars against the thrusts of process metaphysics, there is an almost perfect fit. Almost perfect because the consciousness that process metaphysics has been the metaphysical underpinning of African reality is still in a vegetative state. It is the task of contemporary day African philosophers to try the process *goggle* and see if it makes any sense of every aspect of African life. This is in line with Whitehead’s admonition that the goal of philosophy is ‘...the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted’ [Whitehead 1978: 3] This implies that the sole aim of philosophy is to interpret or understand our experiences. He adds: ‘the elucidation of immediate experience is the sole justification for any thought’ [Whitehead 1978: 3]

## Conclusion

The thrust of this study has been to show that traditional *Yorùbá* theology is panentheistic in nature. By providing its panentheistic grounding, the process ontology that endorses this outlook has also been unearthed. Previous attempts to pass the thought system as monotheism have led to the incursion of arrays of theological quagmires from mainstream Western theology into traditional *Yorùbá* theology. It also affirms the widespread but misleading stance that pre-colonial Africans had no idea of God. Hence, this study implores other African cultures to apply the process thesis to see if it provides an avenue for tapping into relevant and treasured values and ideas of their progenitors that can be brought to the fore of contemporary living.<sup>11</sup>

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# When the hyena wears darkness: ubuntu as a barrier in the fight against hiv/aids

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## Abstract

This paper argues that the African ethic of *ubuntu* can be a set-back in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The paper argues that some cultural practices that are blamed for contributing to the high rate of HIV infection in African communities are still used in the present day because they are seen as having elements of *ubuntu*. Using Metz's theory of *ubuntu*, I will show how such practices are deemed as having elements of *ubuntu*. I have used the controversial story of Eric Aniva, an HIV positive man from Malawi, who shocked the world with his confessions that he slept with more than 100 women and girls in a cultural sexual cleansing ritual called *fisi*, in order to show how some cultural practices are used in the name *ubuntu* even though they put lives at risk for contracting HIV/AIDS. As a solution, I argue that the anti-HIV-AIDS organisation ought to develop better approaches to fighting the practices. I argue that these approaches should appreciate the people's conception of such practices.

**Key Words:** Ubuntu, *Fisi*, HIV/AIDS

## Introduction

According to the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV and AIDS [UNAIDS] 2017 report, East and Southern Africa is the region that is hardest hit by HIV. It is home to 6.2% of the world's population but has 19.4 million people living with HIV, over 50% of the total number of people living with HIV in the world. In 2016, there were 790,000 new HIV infections, 43% of the global total.

UNAIDS also reports that the Southern African region, accounted for one third of the region's new infections in 2016, with another 50% occurring in eight countries: Mozambique, Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Ethiopia. These differences between the epidemiology of AIDS cases in Africa and that in Western societies have prompted speculation regarding risk factors that may be unique to Africa. Because of the age and sex distribution of AIDS cases in Africa, emphasis has been placed on sexual transmission of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) [Hrdy 1987].

Researchers have been looking for things to blame, and identified African cultural practices as culprits. The logical consequence of this was to fight against African cultures and sexualities. Since then, many anthropologists have reacted against this viewpoint by stressing the important role of socio-economic conditions, as well as the danger of infection within the modern medical system itself. The cultural practices that have been the subject of many researches focusing on HIV/AIDS prevention, include, sexual norms, early marriage and coital debut, gender relations and norms, widow inheritance and sexual cleansing rituals as well as blood-letting rites such as male circumcision and female genital mutilation.

Further, researchers have also implicated widow inheritance in the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Africa because it encourages the formation of extended sexual networks [Nyindo 2005]. In a study in rural Uganda, over two-thirds of respondents reported the existence of widow inheritance in their communities, though less than a third supported the practice. In other cultural settings, sexual contact with a widow is encouraged through sexual cleansing rituals, in which penetrative intercourse is thought to chase away the spirit of the deceased and thereby prevent misfortune amongst the living. Through this sexual cleansing, widows believed to be tainted by death are ritually accepted back into the community and cleansed of evil.

In Malawi, the cultural practices that have been the target of the anti-HIV/AIDS organizations include; arranged marriages, *fisi* system, wife or husband inheritance, bonus wives, polygamy and the exchange of wives [Kamowa and Kamwendo 1999]. This paper has chosen the *fisi* cultural practices because of the controversies they have been attracting in Malawi and the amount of blame levelled against them.

In Malawi, *fisi* (hyena) is a traditional title given to a man hired by communities in several remote parts of its southern districts, mainly Nsanje and Chikwawa, to provide what is called

sexual "cleansing". The word *fisi* means the man whose duty is to cleanse women through sexual interactions. But the word is also used to mean the sexual act of sexual cleansing itself. According to Clement Bisai [cited in Kamlogera 2007], among the Sena tribe of the Lower Shire of Malawi, people look up to *fisi* on a number of occasions. For example, if a man dies, his wife is required by tradition to sleep with *fisi*; if a man dies by accident or suicide; after abortion or still birth or if a baby comes out first with legs and not headlong during delivery; when a house catches fire. In addition to these roles, the *fisi* are also hired to cleanse teenage girls, after their first menstruation, to mark their passage from childhood to womanhood. It is common practice in some parts of Malawi for a bereaved widow to have sex with a man for three to four nights. Often the man would be the deceased's brother, but in some cases someone from outside the immediate family, would be hired to perform the act. According to custom, sex with the hyena must never be protected with the use of condoms. But they say a hyena is hand-picked for his good morals [see the Malawi Human rights report, 2002].

Even though the practice is widely condemned by people in some parts of the southern regions of Malawi, many are still practicing *fisi* as exposed by Eric Aniva. Hence, in respect of the fact that the *fisi* is still practiced in Malawi, this paper argues that the cultural practice is liked for its aspects of *ubuntu/umunthu*. While the practice can be seen as evil in this age of HIV/AIDS, the people see it as a moral good that helps harmonize the community and promotes welfare. Now, the problem is that if some African communities see the cultural practices such as *fisi* as morally acceptable acts of *ubuntu* this will pose challenges to the campaign against HIV/AIDS. This is because the people will always be resistant to stopping the practices, even though they are fully aware of the fact that the practices expose them to the risk of HIV/AIDS infection.

This paper therefore argues that the African ethic of *ubuntu* can be a set-back in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The paper argues that some cultural practices that are blamed for contributing to the high rate of HIV infection in African communities are still used in this age because they are seen as having elements of *ubuntu*. Using Metz's theory of *ubuntu*, I will show how such practices are deemed to have elements of *ubuntu*. I have used the controversial story of Eric Aniva, an HIV positive man from Malawi, who shocked the world with his confessions that he slept with more than 100 women and girls in a cultural sexual cleansing ritual called *fisi*, in order to show how some cultural practices are used in the name *ubuntu* even though they put lives at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. As a solution, I argue that the anti-HIV-AIDS organisation ought to develop better approaches to fighting the practices. I argue that these approaches should appreciate the people's conception of such practices. Hence, in section 2, I present Metz's theory of *ubuntu* in order to show why some cultural practices are regarded as acts of *ubuntu* and can therefore not easily be stopped. In section 3, I present in detail the story of *fisi* as a representative of cultural practices associated with the spread of HIV. In section 4, I will use Metz's theory in order understand why *fisi* and related practices are regarded as *ubuntu*.

## Metz's Theory of Ubuntu

Metz's 2007 article 'Towards an African Moral Theory' attempted to provide a normative ethical theory on which actions in most parts of Southern Africa are judged as right or wrong. Metz attempted to discover principles on which the African moral theory of *ubuntu* is based in comparison to the Western ethical theories such as Utilitarianism. Thus Metz's theory established the logical grounds on which an action is seen as depicting *ubuntu/umunthu* or not and he also attempted to provide a judicious review of the competing moral theories of African *ubuntu* ethics, examined their weaknesses and synthesised them to produce one normative theory. Thus, if one wants to discuss African *ubuntu* ethics, Metz's theory could be one of the useful theories that can help in understanding the African Ubuntu ethics. Hence, I have used Metz's theory in order to examine how the cultural practice of *fisi* depicts *ubuntu/umunthu*. Using Metz, I will argue that the *fisi* cultural practice, meets most of the grounds that qualify an action as an act of *ubuntu/umunthu*.

The primary principle in Metz's theory of Ubuntu is that an action is right insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on good-will; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites of division and ill-will. Metz developed this principle after analyzing six various competing theoretical interpretations of Ubuntu that tend to explain the moral grounds for judging an action as right or wrong in Africa ethics. Metz's principle was developed in the light of the weaknesses found in the six theoretical interpretations of Ubuntu. The most important of these was that: *An action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community.*

Metz noted that there are many respects in which the fundamental requirement to promote harmony and to prevent discord could need clarification and specifications. Metz then started developing this theory by clarifying and specifying the meanings and implications of the term 'harmony'. Metz [2007:333] argued that "harmony" essentially involves a common sense of self, which includes at least the following distinct conditions: the first, a given individual conceives of herself as part of a group. She refers to herself in the first person plural, including herself in a "we." Second, the group that you consider yourself to be a member of also considers you to be a member of it. So, others in the "we" you refer to also include you in their "we." For example, you can hardly claim to share identity with the Chewa people merely on the basis of saying things like, "We Chewas need to stick together." Self-described Chewas must also consider you Chewa. Third, people share identity when they have common goals, if not also the same motives or reasons that underlie them. It is logically possible to be part of a group that does not do anything, but the relevant sort of group under consideration here is one that has some projects. Finally, shared identity also means that people in a group coordinate their activities in order to realize their ends, even if they do not use the same means or make the same amount of effort. In this case, families, clubs, churches, schools, firms and nations are instances of shared identity. The greater the common sense of self the more people think of themselves in terms of their group membership; the more goals they share the higher they rank

these goals ; the more they share the same reasons for adopting these goals ; and the more they will sacrifice to achieve these goals .

Metz also gave ‘good-will’ as another fundamental aspect of harmony which has some moral implications. Metz [2007: 334] argued that another thing that “harmony” might mean is a certain caring or supportive relationship. This means that one has a relationship of good-will insofar as one wishes another person well; believes that another person is worthy of help; aims to help another person; acts so as to help another person; acts for the other’s sake; and, finally, feels good upon the knowledge that another person has benefited and feels bad upon learning she has been harmed. Metz further argued that, the examples of good-will include nursing, teaching and charity work. Metz went on to argue that, good-will and shared identity are logically distinct types of relationships. First, there are cases of shared identity without good-will. Conversely, there can be cases of good-will without shared identity. To explain this case where one can have good-will without shared identity, Metz [2007: 335] gave an example of a story of two people who do not know each other, who are in different rooms and who are unable to communicate. When person A presses a button in his room, he thereby benefits person B (perhaps B has brought a tasty meal or learns that money has been deposited into his bank account), and, likewise, when B presses his button, A benefits. Imagine that A learns of the beneficial effects on B, but that B does not know they come from A; and suppose B knows how his button pressing affects A, but A does not know that B is responsible for his good fortune. Finally, imagine both parties press their buttons repeatedly. Metz argues that this case is an instant case of solidarity without identity, of anonymous do-gooding. That the parties care for each other, but the parties neither think of themselves as a “we” nor coordinate their behavior to achieve common ends.

In this case, Metz wanted to say that some acts of good-will without shared identity have more moral value on the face of it than does shared identity without good-will. This means that if we had to choose between promoting relationships of solidarity or identity, solidarity would usually win. However, Metz thinks that, we often need not choose between them because the most attractive sort of harmonious relationship to promote is surely one that includes both. Metz [2007: 335] argued that while good-will without shared identity is morally more valuable than the converse, it is better still with shared identity. Thus a condition in which individuals anonymously help each other is less desirable than mutually recognizing members of a group who care for one another. To be close or part of the whole is reasonably understood as sharing an identity, whereas to be sympathetic or realize the well-being of others is to have good-will. The combination of the two conditions is what Metz thinks is the most attractive conception of harmony- or a broad sense of “love.”

From the descriptions above on shared identity and good-will as contributing to harmony, Metz went on to enrich U6. Recall that U6 says that: *An action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community.*

Metz enriched the above by saying that: *An action is right just insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on good-will; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites of division and ill-will.*

Metz [2007: 338] also argued that the shared identity condition of harmony naturally accounts for the remaining intuitions regarding the private life-world of culture and family. This means that upholding traditions and participating in rituals is one important way to identify with others, in other words, to think of oneself as a member of a group and to engage in joint projects. And creating new human beings enables one to expand the range of a common sense of self, to enlarge the scope of “we.”

In conclusion, after analyzing some of the aspects of his proposed theory, Metz argued that the most justified normative theory of right action that has an African pedigree is the requirement to produce harmony and to reduce discord, where harmony is a matter of identity and solidarity. Given Metz’s theory of *ubuntu* as presented above, I will argue in the following section that the *fisi* culture is seen as the morally right action of *ubuntu* and hence people find enough reasons to uphold to it even though they are aware of the fact that the practice exposes them to risk of HIV infection.

## The story of Eric Aniva

In July 2016, Eric Aniva of Malawi’s southern district of Nsanje, Chiphwephwe Village, was all over in the major world media after the British Broadcasting Corporation’s (BBC) reporter, Ed Butler, reported his *fisi* scandal. The story caused much sensation and was later picked up by almost all the major world news outlets such as: The Washington Post, The Independent, CNN, Daily Star, Daily Mail and The Guardian, et cetera.

Butler, in his story titled, “The man hired to have sex with children”, published on BBC’s website on 21 July, 2016, described Aniva as the pre-eminent *fisi* “hyena” in his village. Aniva, who was 45 years-old at the time, thus became the subject of a BBC feature on various sexual cleansing practices in Malawi. The BBC broadcast the 27-minute radio report entitled ‘Stealing Innocence’ in Malawi and featured Aniva bragging about being paid to sleep with more than 100 young girls and women. Aniva revealed in the interview that most of the women he slept with were school-going girls as young as 12 or 13, but said he preferred the older women. Aniva also revealed that the girls found pleasure in having him as their hyena and were actually proud of him as a real man who knew how to please a woman. Aniva also revealed to Butler in the same interview that he was one of the 10 hyenas in this community, and that every village in Nsanje district had plenty of them. He said that the hyenas were paid between \$4 and \$7 (£3 to £5) each time. In the story, Butler also had a conversation with some women named: Fagisi, Chrissie and Phelia- women in their 50s and custodians of the initiation traditions in their village. The job of these women was to organise the adolescent girls into camps each year,

teaching them about their duties as wives and how to please a man sexually. The "sexual cleansing" with the hyena was the final stage of this process, arranged voluntarily by the girl's parents. These women told Butler that this practice was necessary "to avoid infection with their parents or the rest of the community". The women further told Butler that it was their duty to train the girls in a good manner in the village, so that they did not go astray and that they were good wives so that the husband would be satisfied.

Aniva's revelations led to his arrest on 26 July, 2016 on the orders of the country's president, Arthur Peter Mutharika. Mutharika was angered by the Aniva's revelations. He said that Peter Mutharika said that, "since the accused, [Eric Aniva] said he does not use protection in "his evil acts", he should be investigated for exposing girls to HIV and "further be charged accordingly" [The Guardian]. Mutharika further ordered the police to investigate all men and parents involved in what he called 'a shocking malpractice' (ibid). Aniva was summoned to the Nsanje District Commissioner, Gift Lapozo's offices where he was questioned on the truth of the story published by the BBC. At this government office, Aniva confessed that he had been in the act since the 1980s but he was not the only *fisi* in his area but there are another 10 accomplices in his village (Nyasatimes). According to the Nyasatimes, the other hyenas fled into caves after learning of the arrest of their fellow *fisi* [Nyasatimes]. The most saddening thing in the story was the fact that Aniva, revealed that he was diagnosed HIV positive and the possibility existed that that he had infected some of his clients with HIV.

Aniva's revelations received wild condemnation worldwide such that some people, including his countrymen, even wished that he be executed through hanging or even crucifixion for doing such a horrible thing of infecting innocent girls with the virus [see the comments that followed the *Nyasatimes* story published on 22 November titled "Malawi 'hyena man' Aniva jailed for two years over sex cleansing ritual: Lawyer Goba says to appeal on 'material error in law one-two-many"']. The result of this world-wide condemnation was that Aniva was sentenced to a two-year jail term by Nsanje Senior Resident Magistrate, Innocent Nebbie. He was convicted for engaging in a harmful cultural and traditional practice, under Section Five of Malawi's Gender Equality Act. He became the first Malawian to be sentenced to such a long jail sentence on matters related to engaging in harmful cultural practices. Aniva served his sentence and was realised from prison in December, 2017.

The twist to the story of Aniva was that, after his arrest, out of the hundred women with whom he had had sex with, none came forward to testify against him. Instead, he was tried for "harmful cultural practice" under section five of Malawi's Gender Equality Act, for having sex with new widows. Only two women testified against him after being dragged to the court. That scenario where the women refused to testify against Aniva, is key to opening a critical conversation about the reasons why people are not ready to abandon their culture even if those cultures expose them to the danger of HIV infection. One could be tempted to think that these women regarded Aniva as some sort of community saviour and hero. Thus it is important to understand why these women wanted to protect Aniva.

Before we go to the next section, I would like to say that the mass anger that the Aniva affair caused in the public imagination, can be attributed to fear and not sincere anger against the cultural practice. I think that this is the type of rational fear that is associated with the idea of the mass infection of HIV that one person caused- that people supposed that Aniva had infected all the women with whom he had sex with HIV. With this idea of the mass infection of a disease caused by one person, all the moral values of *fisi* as an act of ubuntu were not put into consideration by the Western media. I also think that it is these rational fears, fuelled by the anti-HIV/AIDS organisations that made some Malawians speak against the practice and portray it negatively to the whole world. For example, after the Aniva affair became a public moral issue and caused debates, one of the women in Malawi, Natasha Annie Tonthola, a former representative of the Africa's Big Brother show, came out in public and contacted the BBC to explain her fight against the Malawi *fisi* culture. She explained how, as a 13-year-old girl, she encountered the *fisi* during her initiation ceremony in Mulanje district of southern Malawi. Tonthola told the BBC that she was forced into the act and was told that was the only way to become a woman [BBC 2016].

I also think that the phenomenon of *fisi* and the campaigns against it are only a matter of a collusion of historical circumstances provided by the new HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns on one hand, and the old campaigns against African cultures that were fanned by the Western institutions on the other hand. I also think that the Aniva affair provided the window for the Western world to justify their case of why they have been fighting for so long for the elimination of some African cultures. For the first time in Malawi, the Western world had what looked like a legitimate case against the African cultural practices related to sexuality as the issue was widely condemned. That is the issue which really caused fear, as even the Malawi President Mutharika felt under international pressure. So when the issue went public after the BBC's story, he immediately ordered the arrest and prosecution of Aniva, even though he knew quite well that *fisi* culture had been practiced among the Sena tribe of the Lower Shire<sup>12</sup> for a long time.

On the part of the president this could have been a desperate attempt at disassociating his country from what the Western world regarded 'a cultural public scandal'. Though, the practice was outlawed in the country, it was common knowledge that the *fisi* (human hyena), like the bush hyena, plied his hunting trade in a way that was enigmatic and therefore elusive. So it was clear to the Malawi president that the *afisi*, despite being outlawed, are still plying their trade in the dark- they wear the darkness and it is so difficult to catch one. Aniva was only caught after his own revelations that were made in excitement as a result of the alluring questions of a journalist. But the possibility is that Aniva, could be a small *fisi*- one that has preyed on a few and that there could be a master *fisi*. Later, after Aniva's own revelations, the matter was blown out of all proportion as not a question of people and their culture- but rather as a question of some people being portrayed as barriers to the HIV/AIDS campaigns. In addition, the Aniva

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<sup>12</sup> The Lower Shire is the name given to the region lying at the southern tip of Malawi along the Shire River. The region covers Nsanje and Chikwawa districts. The region is mostly occupied by the Sena and Mang'anja tribe among which the traditional cultural practice of *fisi* was institutionalised as a sexual cleansing ritual.



affair provided a normative explanation of the Western interventions in fighting all the cultural practices that were regarded as barriers in the HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns. In the broad sense, this was the politicisation of a peoples' culture as being responsible for the high infection rate of AIDS in this region of sub-Saharan Africa.

## *Fisi as ubuntu*

Aniva's story above could be revealing of the bigger picture as to why some Africans are resistant to abandoning their culture in this age of battle against HIV/AIDS. In this section, using Metz's theory of Ubuntu, I argue that the *fisi* culture as well as some other African cultural practices, given in section 2, are seen as integral to the existence of the community by promoting the well-being of people and are believed to be acts of motivated *umunthu/ubuntu*. Some of the questions that his analysis intend to answer are: Is the cultural practice of *fisi* an *Ubuntu act*- is it conducted for the common good of the community? Is it necessary in promoting harmonious relations in the community? Is the people's resistance to stopping the practice an indication of its necessity in the African communities?

In Metz's postulation of *ubuntu*, we have seen that there are major issues arising out of this phrase which are the promotion of harmony and solidarity; self-realisation and identity and also co-existence. Metz found that the goal of achieving harmony is defined by two aspects which are 'shared identity' and 'good-will'. In this section, I will attempt to analyze the implications of these two aspects in understanding the *fisi* culture as a right action and therefore an act of *ubuntu*. I argue that Aniva's practice was only an expression of this *ubuntu* ethic and was a real attempt at becoming a real person, which is a matter of identifying with others and exhibiting solidarity with them. Metz [2010] has also argued that all self-regarding activities are ruled out of *ubuntu* ethics. And here we may pose a question of whether the practice of *fisi* is a self-regarding activity. An act which is self-regarding is done just for the sake of the self. For example, if one harms others, e.g. by being exploitive, deceptive or unfaithful in order to enrich oneself, or even if one is merely indifferent to others and fails to share oneself with them, then one is said to be lacking *ubuntu*, which literally means lacking personhood or humanness. This can mean that the men capable of being a *fisi* in the communities will be regarded as lacking *ubuntu* if they refuse to offer their services in times of need.

It should be noted that the *fisi* services are also grounded on respecting individual rights and on consent from the participant- that is the *fisi* does not rape women but goes to help them with their problems. It is also important to note that the provision of *fisi* services is regarded as a moral obligation- being concerned with and sympathetic towards one's problem or needs. This entails that the *fisi* thinks of himself as being bound up with others-or being part of the community and sharing in its problems and happiness. Another way to understand the morality of *fisi* cultural practice is it to understand the African familial relationships or in other words,

the extended family. Eliojo [2014], clearly explains this idea of familial relationships which can be applied to the practice of *fisi* as an act *ubuntu*. He says that in an extended family:

*Your husband is our husband/ your wife is our wife  
Your daughter is our daughter/ your son is our son  
Your father is our father/your mother is our mother*

This form of the extended family relationships justifies the place and acceptability of *fisi* in the African communities. This means, for example that, in a case where a husband is seen to be sterile, and makes use of the services of the *fisi*; the *fisi* would become temporarily the husband of someone's wife without the real husband lodging a complaint with the village's chief because 'Your husband is our husband'. Further, this act of *fisi* as a form of Afro-communitarianism can be explained as an act of *ubuntu*-humanness because it intended to achieve solidarity and it involves an empathetic awareness of the other's condition and a sympathetic emotional reaction to this awareness. The actions are not merely beneficial but are believed to be a way to improve the other's state, but also are ones done consequent to certain motives, say, for the sake of making the other better off or even a better person psychologically. For example, it was also interesting that after Aniva's arrest, out of the hundred women he had sex with; none came forward to testify against him. Instead, he was tried for "harmful cultural practice" under section five of Malawi's Gender Equality Act, for having sex with new widows. Only two women testified against him after being dragged into courts.

According to Metz, to seek harmony or community with others is not merely the notion of doing whatever a majority of people in society want or of adhering to the norms of one's group, which are influential forms of relativism and communitarianism in the West. Instead, developing or respecting community (harmony) is an objectively desirable kind of interaction that should instead guide what majorities want or implement norms which are dominant. Metz [2007], however, clarified that this sketch of an Afro-communitarian moral perspective should not be taken to represent anthropologically the beliefs of Africans about the right way to live. It is, rather, a theoretical reconstruction of beliefs that are recurrent among many peoples in sub-Saharan Africa and particularly in southern Africa. However, Metz suggested that this Afro-communitarian principle, which prescribes prizing friendly relationships, should be attractive to a much wider audience. Metz pointed out that there are two recurrent themes in typical African discussion of the nature of community or harmony.

First, in Ubuntu ethics as given by Metz, there is the idea that one has a moral obligation to be concerned for the good of others, in terms of both one's sympathetic emotional reactions towards other people and one's helpful behaviour towards them. In short, one has a duty to exhibit solidarity with others. In this regard, the obligations of the *fisi* in an African community could be seen as being an act of solidarity with the community's needs and beliefs. This means the *fisi* is a concerned party of the plight of the widow who is regarded as unclean in the society. Thus, he is sympathetically connected to the widow and goes to help upon the endorsement of the village's elders. Second, there is the idea that one has a moral obligation to think of oneself as bound up with others, that is, to define oneself as a member of a common group and to

participate in its practices. One also has a duty to identify with others. Here it implies that the man who plays the roles of the *fisi* is not seen as doing a personal task, rather he is bound by the community to perform those roles. In other words, he is only a representative of his community and hence he does his designated work on behalf of the community.

In the same regard, Metz described community or harmony as the combination of both solidarity and identity. This means that every member of the community is expected to consider him or herself as an integral part of the whole and to play an appropriate role towards achieving the good of all. Metz [2010] calls 'identity', a concept synonymous with *ubuntu*. This is a matter of being close, belonging and participating as well as, experiencing life bound up with others, and considering oneself a part of the group. On the other hand, one finds reference to being sympathetic, being committed to others, responding to others' needs, and acting for others' good. In this respect, harmony is achieved through close and sympathetic social relations within the group. Hence, as Gyeke [1998:16] also argued, the fundamental meaning of community is the sharing of an overall way of life, inspired by the notion of the 'common good'. In our situation, the 'common good' would mean the need to put members of the community, the widow who is regarded as unclean and is seen as outcast by the community into harmony with the rest.

Agreeing with Metz, Shutte [2001] noted that the extended family is probably the most common, and also the most fundamental expression of the African idea of community. The importance of this idea for ethics is that the family is something that is valued for its own sake. The community which is inclusive of the unclean widows is seen as a family. Hence, if anything bad happens to one person the whole community feels that it is sharing in the same plight. This is what it also meant by the common phrase in *ubuntu* ethics, which says 'a person is a person through other persons'. According to Metz, the interpretation of this phrase rooted in sub-Saharan ethical traditions, particularly those in southern Africa, and *prima facie* attractive as a basic moral primary principle. A person in the *ubuntu* worldview is the basis, centre and end of everything; all other things only make sense in relation to persons. Regardless of their social status, gender or race, persons are recognized, accepted, valued and respected for their own sake. Biko [1971], agrees with this position of a person when he said that a person is the cornerstone of society. Biko further noted that a person is valuable in himself or herself, not just his welfare, not his material well-being but just man himself with all his ramifications.

In African communities, anything that undermines, hurts, threatens and destroys human beings is not accommodated in this way of life but is frowned upon since it affects the very foundation of society: the human person. A person is not a thing or a number but something more valuable than these. Whether a person is known or not, it is expected that he or she should be accorded respect. Respect for a person, which is accompanied by acceptable good behaviour, is the very basis of the notion of *ubuntu*. This is evident in the way people relate, talk and show courtesy to each other. This stems from the fact that people are recognized and regarded as equals. Every individual in African society values being recognized and treated as an equal and with respect. This need for respect for persons becomes evident when one undermines or ill-treats another person. Others can intervene by simply asserting and reminding the perpetrator that the victim

is a person. If the perpetrator has a conscience, he or she will immediately refrain from such adverse actions. From this it is discernible that people are conscious of the fact that they have a common humanity, which has a certain dignity, integrity and value that needs to be acknowledged, respected and valued; and that no one is either superior or inferior in humanity. The acts of *fisi*, therefore are not seen to mean to cause harm or to threaten the life of the other person. This is because every person is treated with dignity. Hence, among the people that practice *fisi*, it is wrong to define *fisi* as an act of ill-will.

A human person is a person irrespective of his or her status in life. The importance of one's worth as a human being is always considered to be as important as another person's worth. *Ubuntu* is averse to things that are harmful to a human person. Its fertile ground is mostly found in respect and honour for other persons. What has been argued here so far, points to the need for mutual respect- what is important is not just the individual but the human worth of any individual. According to Biko [1971], Africans also believe in the inherent goodness of man. Man is to be celebrated for himself. Africans also regard their living together not as an unfortunate mishap warranting endless competition among us but as a deliberate act to make them a community of brothers and sisters jointly involved in the quest for a composite answer to the varied problems of life.

A person constitutes the basis from which *ubuntu* can be developed and understood. A person is understood to be the basis of all ethical actions. For those people who do not see anything uniquely African in *ubuntu*, it may be because *ubuntu* is a cultural ethos, a spirituality, which is not necessarily better, or superior, or for that matter inferior to those of other people, but from which others can learn and improve their understanding of one another. In this regard *fisi* can be seen as a practice that is constitutive of *ubuntu* because it largely deals with the actor of *fisi* as a moral agent- a being compassionate towards the problems of others. Mkhize [2008] has argued that "personhood should be defined in relation to the community- a sense of community exists if people are mutually responsive to one another's needs. He further argues that one attains the complements associated with full or mature selfhood through participation in a community of similarly constituted selves- that to be a person is to belong and to participate". This kind of construction of *ubuntu* ethics of about what it is to commune or to live harmoniously with others, suggests two recurrent themes of 'identity' and 'solidarity' which Metz earlier developed. Augustine Shutte [2001 cited in Metz 2010: 30], one of the first professional philosophers to seriously engage with *ubuntu*, says that, 'our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others'. So here it means that the *fisi* aims to help the unclean widow to retain her full humanness and hence it can be argued that the act is not intended for personal fulfilment- it is not a selfish act.

The other aspect, in which Metz describes a positive relationship with others, namely, in strictly communal terms, is that one is not to positively relate to others fundamentally by giving them what they deserve or respecting individual rights grounded on consent. Instead, the proper way to relate to others, for one large part of sub-Saharan thinking, is to seek out community or to live in harmony with them [Mkhize 2008: 38-41]. In the same way, the *fisi* does not regard the

consent or the individual rights of the widow or the girls having their debut sex to be necessary because he regards his work as a communal service in which himself and his client have no say, apart from doing the will of the community. Here we should note that the adherence to acceptable behaviour patterns helps in the maintenance of fellowship, oneness and identity. Moreover, it points to the interdependence that exists among people. This is so because biological, socio-economic and cultural factors put some constraints on the autonomy of a person. In the Western view an autonomous person acts freely by definition. He acts freely only if he has good reasons for what he does. He has good reasons, only if he acts in his ultimate interests. His ultimate interests derive from what he essentially is. What he essentially is depends on what is essential to his being that particular person.

From the explanation above, one discovers a type of autonomy that is understood in an absolutist and almost exclusivist sense. In this sense, an autonomous person is completely independent, acts for his or her own interest and trusts his or her own judgment. In the context of *ubuntu*, on the other hand, one's autonomy is understood and practised in relation to the community; in that it is tied to the role the community has assigned to the individual. That *ubuntu* is strongly based on the collective. This will mean that the *fisi* is not independent- his practices are understood in relation to the community. This is why as we have seen above, others argued that it is wrong to blame Aniva as an individual, rather it is the community in which Aniva lived that should be blamed. Moreover, we are saying that an autonomous person acts for his or her own interests and trusts his or her own judgements. In the case of Aniva, it is clear that he did not act out of his own interest. Hence, if Aniva were to be judged fairly, he was not supposed to stand in the court of law alone but it was the whole community that was to be convicted. The *fisi*'s sexual roles are encouraged and motivated by the community and not the person as such. The cultural community encourages people to seek harmony with others and to be anti-egoistic seeking their own good without regard for self, or to the detriment of other persons and the community. Hence, *ubuntu* promotes the spirit that one should live for others; it further proves that all persons form a single person, not as parts form a whole, but as friends draw their life and character from the spirit of a common friend.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the African cultural communities that are resistant to stopping *fisi* and related practices, do so because they believe that the practices are done with good-will for the common good of the community by promoting harmony and welfare of the community. I have also argued that *ubuntu* as an Afro-communitarian philosophy is at the core of African life and hence any practice that manifests *ubuntu*- cannot be abandoned without sufficient reasons. I have found that practices that are associated with the ubuntu African ethos are seen as morally right even if the practice exposes them to the risk of HIV/AIDS infection. In this way, the people regard their culture as having socio-metaphysical moral value.

Nevertheless, I have acknowledged the fact that some of the African cultural practices such as *fisi* are risky and expose the people to HIV/AIDS infection. However, I have emphasized that it not easy to detach the people from their culture, particularly if the culture is seen as exhibiting *ubuntu*- done on good-will for the welfare of the community. As such, I have suggested that the anti-AIDS organisations should tread cautiously; engage with the people- learn their values and enter with them into a critical conversation on the value of their culture and the need to prevent themselves from contracting HIV/AIDS.

From the above argument we can conclude that when the human hyenas wear the mantle of darkness<sup>13</sup> quietly and routinely, in some African communities, the communities do not see them as coming to destroy, to kill or to deliberately spread the HIV. But they are seen by the people as involved in a mission of good-will and peace; their aim is to promote harmony, solidarity and to cleanse the communities of all factors that hinder the inner peace of the people. That's the *afisi* are the agents of *ubuntu*. Thus the case of Aniva above presents us with an opportunity in this age of HIV/AIDS, to initiate a critical conversation- the people's cultural rights vis-à-vis the response to HIV/AIDS. Further, recognising that Aniva's act led to the division of opinion even among Malawians themselves, the *fisi* affair provides a window to begin a serious enquiry on why people are not resistant to stopping the practice. The Aniva affair is thus bigger than what it appeared- as the reactions to the story by the international community depicted the silent struggle that is there between the intervention to fighting HIV/AIDS and the moral-metaphysical value of a people's culture. The mass anger that characterised the reactions to Aniva's affair, therefore, was in other words, the 'inevitable' cultural response to the disease in many parts of the sub-Saharan Africa. It would t appear that the international response to HIV/AIDS in this part of Africa includes a witch-hunting project of the people's culture [Chigozi and Ekechukwu 2015].

I now conclude this paper by clarifying and restating that this article is not claiming that African cultural practices such as *fisi* have no role in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Rather the article helps to open a critical conversation between the metaphysical value of cultural practices and what the HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns are demanding from the African culture. Here I mean to say that HIV/AIDS interventions are important but at the same time but they need to develop better approaches in fighting cultural practices such as *fisi* considering that the practices are seen as promoting ubuntu. However, we have seen that in the course of exhibiting *ubuntu*, Aniva was largely portrayed as a villain- a subject of fascination representing an evil culture- a naked figure and an actor in an episode of 'mass sexual scandal'. But that portrait, attractive as it may look, could be inaccurate, because the *fisi* culture was not seen as an agent of *ubuntu*. Hence, the anti-HIV/AIDS, should first appreciate how such practices are regarded in the African cultural communities before they develop approaches to fighting the practices.

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<sup>13</sup> Steve Chimombo, who was a Professor of English at Chancellor College of the University of Malawi, had from the 1990s published a series of fiction-novelettes in which the main theme was the elimination of the cultural practice of *fisi* in African societies. He published these series under the title, "The Hyena wears darkness. Chimombo through various characters, promoted the case against these cultural practices, arguing that they aid in spreading HIV/AIDS (Chimombo, 2006, pp. 62-63). While Chimombo had a strong case for the elimination of this *fisi* cultural practice, but as I have already argued, he missed and did not tackle the *ubuntu* aspect of the practice.

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## Book review

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*Biko: Philosophy, Identity and Liberation*, by Mabogo Percy More, Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2017, pp. 306, ISBN 978-0-7969-2571-8

The challenge of systematising and corroborating the philosophical status of Black Consciousness, and of mounting a credible installation of Steve Biko, its most systematic proponent, into the canon of academic social philosophy is a task that has haunted South African black philosophers for many years. Mabogo Percy More has finally grasped the nettle of this challenge with the publication of *Biko: Philosophy, Identity and Liberation*.

Inexorably, in establishing Biko as a philosopher, More had to take the further step of situating him within a particular philosophical tradition. In the Introduction to the text he discloses this: “This book, following Lewis Gordon’s extensive phenomenological work on Frantz Fanon, seeks to locate Bantu Stephen Biko within the philosophical terrain - more pointedly, the Africana existentialist tradition” (p.2). In seeking to locate Biko thus, his thought is re-read and recast through the doctrinal postulations of Goerg W. F. Hegel, J an-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and even Martin Heidegger, with, of course, the theoretical apparatus of the author of *Bad Faith and Anti-black racism* (1995), Lewis Gordon. Biko was a Sartrean, according to Mabogo More.

In this book, Mabogo More delves with the passion of a teacher into an elucidation of nearly all the cardinal categories that have framed the debates around Black Consciousness as a philosophy and political praxis: race and anti-black racism; the meaning of blackness and situated consciousness; theoretical and genitive connections between the USA Black Power movement and continental anti-colonial African nationalism; black solidarity and self-segregation; liberalism and the role of whites in the struggle against apartheid; the race-centric versus class-centric analysis of black experience in racialised societies. The book is in this sense encyclopaedic and informative to those seeking a philosophical entry point into Black consciousness, albeit from the polemically suggested Africana existentialist vantage point.

The text is laid out in nine chapters in which all the aforementioned themes are taken-up. Unfortunately, they are treated in a rather eclectic way as opposed to a neatly grouped and systematised themes. The reader needs to read in full or peruse the entire book before jumping into a criticism of a particular point More posits or some deficiency spotted in an early chapter. For example, in Chapter 4 with the heading “Biko and Philosophy”, an explanation of the influence of Hegel’s writings on Biko’s thought is made (pp.85-86), but Biko’s pivotal usage of the Hegelian dialectic as a theoretical framework in analysing South African racism is not

elaborated. This systematic discussion of the dialectic and how Biko utilised it then crops up in Chapter 9 titled “Biko and Liberation”, in pages 250-255.

The nine chapters of the book begin with an introduction of Biko as “a rebel” in the tradition of Albert Camus, an “ontologico-existential” rebel (p.9). This assertion is somehow controversial, given Camus’ fractured relationship with Sartre when coupled with More’s overarching argument that Biko was a Sartrean (Royle 1982). The subsequent chapter gives the rather mandatory rendition of the history of Black Consciousness as a political movement, which is immediately followed by a lecture on the meaning of Philosophy (Philosophy Contextualised, pp. 58-82). The latter’s deliberately academic discussion of Philosophy lays the ground for a subsequent chapter on “Biko and Philosophy” (pp. 82-98). Besides him being portrayed as a Camusian rebel, there is very little that is directly on or of Biko in the first three chapters. There is much more on Sartre, and More’s opinion on what Philosophy is supposed to be, which pivots around his appreciative exposition of Agnes Heller’s *A Radical Philosophy* (1984).

The crux of the text is Chapter five, which bears the proclamational title “Biko’s *Africana* existentialist philosophy”. The discussion here is a philosophical reflection on Heideggerian and Sartrean human ontology, and on the problematisation of racism from the global African-American vantage point, rather than about the mapping of the germination of Biko’s thought concerning the dehumanising oppression and brutal repression of the apartheid system. In this chapter, More devotes many pages to “deal with the popular charge that black philosophers, including Biko, are primarily obsessed with racism . . . rather than with problems of metaphysical or epistemological universal significance” (p. 117). The unintended consequence of this exercise leads to an academicisation of the Black Consciousness movement. It gives an impression that the latter emerged as a deliberate effort directed at intervening in academic debates about the abstract meanings of race, humanity, authenticity, *et cetera*, and not as a political-ideological force.

In an attenuated pursuance of its main project of defining Biko as an existentialist *Africana* philosopher, the remaining four chapters find themselves trapped into the uniquely South African debates Biko provoked on the participation of white liberals in the anti-apartheid struggle. Mabogo More thematises this issue under the headings of Liberalism (in two chapters) and “the Leftists”, which is his explication of Marxists (p.237)

Ultimately, in our critical assessment, the approach of hinging its project on casting Biko as an *Africana* transatlantic thought-leader, and the *leitmotif* of fitting him into the hegemonic philosophy canon, renders the book as overly vindicationist in tone, and in being less a book about Biko’s philosophy, than one on More’s interpretation of Biko through the African-American Lewis R. Gordon and the French Jéan-Paul Sartre. Until halfway through the book, one struggles to find enough references to Biko’s direct words and ideas, one has to search for Biko’s voice throughout in the many, mainly American voices that More brings into play in his disquisition (for example, pp.116-139)

In embracing and working with the concept of *Africana* philosophy Mabogo More methodically eschewed the generally held framework of *African* philosophy that is being

developed by thinkers operating from the African continent. Notably, he does not merely operate with this term as denoted by Lucious Outlaw as an engagement with the philosophic concerns of African-descended peoples both on the continent of Africa and its diaspora, globally (Outlaw 2017). For More this Africana philosophy, and the Africana philosopher Biko ostensibly was, is specifically Africana Philosophy as articulated by Lewis Gordon in his *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (2008) as an intrinsically existentialist-phenomenology that functions as a philosophical anthropology of diasporic African being-in-the-world (see More, pp 34, 116). As a result, the critical grounding of the thesis of the book gravitates away from the South African-experience-of-being-black from which Biko operated. This South African black lived-experience is ephemeralised into the global discursive space of the African diaspora. As an extension of its foundational critical paradigm being Gordon's philosophy, the book is excessively replete with references to African-American political history, which is hermeneutically paralleled with the situation in South Africa. At some points, the text reads as though it was written for an American audience; or rather a USA market.

A disturbing feature of this apparent eagerness to make South African Black Consciousness consonant with the American political scene is the discernible ill-treatment of Marx and Marxism which, in my view, unwittingly assuages the anti-communism angst of the American academy. Dismissive and erroneous premises such as, "like Hegel, Marx is also known for having supported colonial subjugation of the black world" (p.221) are posited as a prelude to an extensive critique of a 1979 *African Communist* article that privileges "class analysis" over "race analysis" of apartheid (222-225). The flaws in More's treatment of Marx can unfortunately not be explored here.

Black Consciousness is an historical and universal psycho-political phenomenon and political movement among black peoples of African descent with roots from Ethiopianism, Pan-Africanism and the Négritude movement. Biko's articulation and thought is a South African revolutionary black consciousness that is crafted out of the explicit lived-anguishes expressed by Black South Africans as victims of settler colonial dispossession and apartheid. Specifically, here the "Black" is redefined and weaponised, so to say, to include Coloured and Indian South Africans. More based on his African diasporic vantage point, mounts an express objection against Biko's and the whole South African Black Consciousness Movement thinking in this regard, stating that this position was "enthusiastic and overambitious" (p.52). His heterodoxy from Biko's thinking is particularly focused on the inclusion of Indians into Blackness, and to buttress his argument, he cites Gordon in a page long footnote (p. 52n11).

More's project violates the sacred hermeneutic horizon of the realities of the struggle against apartheid. Acting against the sacrosanct principle of historical contextuality which is one of the kernels of Sartrean existentialist-phenomenology he is thinking through, his Gordonian-Africana hermeneutic pole diffuses the existential specificity of the experience of the horrors of apartheid racism by black South Africans which instanced their responsibility for *national* liberation, into a global transatlantic grievance. Steve Biko the politician, strategically delimited his philosophical articulations away from the rhetoric of Pan-Africanism, for this specific reason.

The book leaves room for more work that can let Biko's thought and voice be heard in its own right from its soil, not as an echo of Hegel, Sartre, Fanon and Gordon. Under the vindicationist mission of More's project, it was perhaps necessary to prove that Biko's voice echoes well within the chambers of the hegemonic colonial academy: "Biko, from Hegel to Gordon". As a research output emanating from the community of black scholarship, More's work is a monumental achievement; that accolade cannot be taken away despite my critical review. The book should be read, critiqued and appreciated as a gallant scholarly effort.

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