



# Animism in African Philosophy: A Psychosocial examination after Senghor, Bergson and Deleuze and Guattari

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## Abstract

Using a new psychosocial approach and my own research data, this paper examines animist thought and praxis' contribution to past and present African philosophy. The Negritude African philosophy and aesthetics writing of Senghor, and the European continental philosophy of Bergson, Deleuze and Guattari are used throughout in an analysis of the words and practices of two animist traditional healers. Psychosocial methods challenge any straightforward focus on language and cognition. They are a compelling choice for examining topics that require getting close to participants' experiences and/or can produce moments of doubt in research, or when words may not be enough. This paper highlights African animist thought and praxis' potential for contributing to spheres of philosophical discourse beyond ethics, metaphysical essence or nature. It is valuable to explore it and not to labour under any prejudice or the fear of being derided due to a hegemony of Western philosophy and ideas

**Keywords:** african animism; african philosophy; Senghor; Bergson; Deleuze and Guattari

Expressive African masks, wood, grass, feathers, flowers, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington, USA  
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## Introduction

Using a new psychosocial approach and my own research data, this paper examines animist thought and praxis' contribution to past and present African philosophy. The Negritude African philosophy and aesthetics writing of Le'opold Se'dar Senghor, and the European continental philosophy of Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and Fe'lix Guattari are used throughout in an analysis of the words and practices of two animist traditional healers. Psychosocial studies is an emergent perspective that draws on a mix of disciplines including sociology, psychoanalysis and continental philosophy [Clarke and Hoggett 2009]. Its research methods challenges any straightforward focus on language and cognition. The research experience is mined in its full complexity, never halting in the exploration of either a subject's or researcher's subjectivity. For instance, researchers are required to pay attention to moments in research when there is a struggle to understand a shared sense of meaning or "something unspoken, undigested or otherwise in excess of language seems to be present." [Bereswill et al 2010: 239].

Whilst studying in 1930s France, the Senegalese poet, politician and philosopher Leopold Se'dar Senghor had made a profitable reading of the French philosopher Henri Bergson's life philosophy [Diagne 2011, 2019; Thiam 2014]. The works of the later and post-modern French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his sometimes co-author the psychoanalyst Fe'lix Guattari are also greatly influenced by that of Bergson. The point of an indistinguishability of Senghorian, Bergsonian and Deleuzian thought is well encapsulated by Simone Bignall when she says:

**“For Deleuze, as for Senghor's 'African', difference (when it is adequately conceived) is not objectified as a negative or oppositional facet of a representative and defining identity; but rather is a kind of creative force that one encounters in a shared movement of affective transition”** [Bignall, 2021: 249]

Senghor's African philosophy writing is largely based on his childhood time in Senegal and his relationship with his animist cattle-herder uncle, Tokor Waly. When describing these years of his childhood Senghor said *“My uncle Waly took care of my moral and religious education ... I was 100% animist”* [in Thiam 2014: 60]. Mazrui writes, *this phase of Senghor's life is celebrated in Senghor's writing and poetry as a 'Negro-Negritude' and 'Blackness' that is 'a salute to the wisdom of remaining close to nature’* [2009: 54]. Elsewhere, Senghor writes of the widely held African spirit of communalism as *“a religious, animist existentialism”* [Senghor and Halperin 1956: 27]. The Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu is reluctant to automatically attribute animism to traditional African thought throughout Africa's numerous and diverse ethnic groups. However, where for instance he disputes an automatic attribution of animism in the case of his own Akan ethnic peoples, Wiredu agrees to the existence amongst them of, for example, beliefs in *“extra human force(s) in relation to the natural world and a belief that all of the orders of existence are 'subject to the universal reign of (cosmic) law’* [2003: 22].

Mazrui writes of an *“African religiosity debased as animism”* [2009: 395]. Whatever the disagreement

over the religious and/or epistemological status of animism and its existence across African cultures, for my part, for instance, I agree with Vest when she says that much of African philosophy labours under the influence of *“European definitions of societal development and cultural sophistication defined in terms of the acquisition of Western technology and Christianity”* [2009: 19]. Further I agree with Vest that, as a result of this influence perverse debates often ensue within African philosophy. Without these debates researchers into African philosophy would not be burdened and a greater amount of first hand indigenous data would appear in papers because, for instance:

**“the relative merits of scientific epistemologies and magico-religious epistemologies would not be guided by unspoken concerns about measuring up to Western definitions of development based on the acquisition of Western technology, nor would they be guided by Christian monotheistic devaluations of spiritist practices as primitive.”** [Vest 2009: 8]

As Agada writes about the use by African or Africanist philosophers of data derived from indigenous ideas and practices, African philosophers have often *“made it their duty to oppose ethnophilosophy for supposedly lending support to the Eurocentric belief that Africans could not engage in high-level abstract thinking of the type demanded by philosophy.”* [2022: 26]. According to this paper and Senghor's thinking, much research and writing on traditional African philosophy must continue to focus on descriptions of ideas and practices that can be regarded as animist [Kagame 1956; Mbiti 1969; Anyanwu 1987; Wiredu 1996; Ramose 1999].

## Background: Animism in African philosophy

The data in this paper is drawn from my PhD research into African culture and aesthetics. This took place during two three-week visits from my home in the United Kingdom to Cameroon. The first in October 2016 and the second in March and April of 2017. For this research I received a great amount of help and support from Dr Joachen Banindjel of the University of Yaounde<sup>1</sup>. Dr Banindjel is an academic and clinical psychologist whose own research encompasses the topics of intercultural psychology and traditional African therapies. My research question had originally been ‘What can traditional African art and aesthetic practices contribute to our understanding of healing and everyday modern culture in Cameroon?’. During both three week visits I interviewed a number of traditional healers in the mainly English speaking North-West and South-West provinces of the country. One interview used in this paper was conducted in French. For its translation I am grateful to Dr Ebede Ndi of The Conceptual Institute, San Francisco, U.S.A. My research method was a mix of sensory ethnography and photo-elicitation interviewing. These and similar methods have long been known to evoke memories, areas of knowledge and more [Pink 2007, 2015]. In character, my interviews were highly sociable with two or more other people present, for instance, myself, Dr Banindjel, a local intermediary and/or some of the healer’s associates and/or family. The interviews sometimes spontaneously transformed into roving ones of for instance, the healer’s compound. For all the interviews, ethical consent was sought and obtained for any recording, photography, filming and publication.

Traditional healers are often regarded by the local population as those members of their community most knowledgeable of traditional African culture generally (Hallen 2010). The complexity and breadth of healers’ role in traditional life is perhaps best understood by how *nganga*, the *Ki-Kongo* word for ‘expertise’, translates as “*traditional priest, doctor, savant, expert*” [Thompson 1974: 2]. The use of traditional artefacts and music are often part-and-parcel of healers’ practice [Thompson, 1974, 2011; Hallen and Sodipo 1986; Blier 1995, 2015; Vogel 1997; Bongmba 2009]. The philosophers Hallen and Sodipo [1986] worked with traditional healers in their research. Hallen and Sodipo experimented with the “*ordinary language*” approach to analytic philosophy [Austin, 1961] using an African language (in their case Yoruba) and examined how certain words are naturally used and their conceptual surround in everyday language. The choice of traditional healers was regarded by them as appropriate for demonstrating how both the form and content of philosophical thinking must be culturally relativized. According to Hallen, by this approach words are placed in their relevant “*fields of discourse*” [2010: 78]. In my research, notwithstanding the importance of language differences across cultures, the use of sensory ethnography and photo-elicitation interviewing rather than language alone encouraged the participants to utilise their own frame of reference, associations and memories. In addition, interviews that involve responses to objects and/or images allow “*the researcher to compare her or his subjective interpretation of the image with that of the research participant*” [Pink 2015: 88].

During both of my visits in 2016 and 2017 I met and interviewed Mr Singer (pseudonym). Mr Singer lived in the forest outskirts of a large city in part of the South-West Region province of Cameroon. The region is famous for scenic crater lakes and national and tropical forest reserves that boast the highest number of animal species so far found in Africa. Species include gorillas, monkeys, forest elephants, buffalo, antelope, and leopards. During the first visit Mr Singer had spoken about and modelled several masks to Dr Banindjel and I, one of which, with its nine horns revealed him to be a very high-ranking healer of the Bamileke tradition. During the second visit and interview I asked Mr Singer some questions related to what had come up about music and dancing during the first visit and interview. He explained:

**“We are always proud when we sing because, for example, especially for us the Bamileke, when there is a funeral, we have killed a cow, there are goats, pigs, fritters, there are drinks, so you should be proud because you will eat whatever you see.”** [Singer]

The notion of ‘proud’ that Mr Singer expressed was not stiff but evocative of all the magic that accompanies people happily gathering together to eat and sing. It was a joyous image of feasting and sociability. Similarly, during my first visit and interview with him he had shown a ‘monkey’ mask that is used along with a traditional dance that, as he put it, “There are many people, that is, well there are many people, but now I am the chief.” The local intermediary interjected notably about this scene, and described Mr Singer in it as “the captain of the team”. The



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notion of ‘the team’ in a context of people moving together in a ceremonial procession, simultaneously evokes the importance of both participation and community in traditional African art and life and recalls Senghor’s view that all African art is “*created by everyone, for everyone*” [1956:18]. During the second visit and interview Mr Singer explained about singing and dancing in a ceremony saying:

**“Um ... witchdoctor, when we say singing and dancing, it’s in the field, for example, when we go out with juju in the field, I sing and I dance. And the people who are there to accompany me follow the rhythm of the song and we dance together following the same moves/steps. Well, I understand that maybe you wanted to know that the song we are singing means something or...”** [Singer]

The thrust of the meaning of both the local intermediary and Mr Singer indicate how music can be understood as primarily an activity [Small, 1998]. Further that in Africa, this point is manifold and that “*by being embedded in the context of shared experiences, in a sense of community, healing through music and the arts can go beyond individualized ‘therapy’*” [Hintjens and Ubaldo 2019: 281-282]. But his words “*I understand maybe you wanted to know*” were also a “*perhaps you would rather we talk about something else?*” question. This offer of re-direction contained an implicit othering of myself, the researcher. Mr Singer had perhaps imagined that I was only interested in the song as an entity and text. It seems likely that he perceived me as a Western researcher who was typically primarily interested in music as an object [Small, 1998] rather than as a participatory action and type of cooperation [Tracey,

1983]. Whereas, the song as an entity and text was undoubtedly not Mr Singer’s primary meaning of it. There was a danger of the researcher missing something essential to traditional African aesthetics and of a failure to recognise what Akpang describes as “*cultural particularities/inspirations or determined by traditional philosophies*” [2013: 46].

Without a psychosocial studies process of research, in which the need for the researcher to both notice and take seriously moments of confusion and/or frustration in research [Froggett and Hollway 2010; Froggett et al 2014], researchers from a fully foreign or even partly foreign culture are in danger of missing a great deal in data. When a story is told, as Livia Polanyi puts it, the narrator takes responsibility for the meaning of the story and “*Stories are told to make a point, to transmit a message ... about the world the teller shares with other people*” [1985: 13]. However, when asked about a person’s emotions when singing, Mr Singer seemed to doubt that I would discern much from what he chose to narrate and describe. The scenes he chose were communicative ones of “*going out with juju in the field*” where he and others would sing and dance in-step. In addition, he described how the singing might become a japing or taunting between different groups but that he was always alert to any signs of anger when, as he said, “*I will sing a song that will appease/calm you, a song to bring me down and bring peace.*”

Mr Singer is conscious of a Western academic interest in the song as a site of interpretation and that “*means something*” but because of my psychosocial research method that encourages free association,

he firstly frames the topic of singing according to his own aesthetics and philosophical world-view. His world-view involves an Africanistic philosophical regard of communicative aesthetic practices that are thereby ethical. Mr Singer’s regard of the scene of communal movement and sound recalls the South African philosopher Mogobe Ramose’s translation of Ubuntu philosophy and explanation that “*a community is not a given. It is a construction out of relationality*” [Ramose and de Sousa Santos 2016].

Ramose’s translation of Ubuntu stems from the philosophical point that ‘movement’, the creation of forms and modes of being, cannot be separated from the idea of relation [2002]. Here relationality does not imply ‘order’ but is an unfixed and musical conception of Ubuntu for African philosophical ideas. Ramose considers that the word ‘Ubuntu’ is best approached as a hyphenated term. ‘Ubu’ is the idea of be-ing in general in an ontological sense, “*enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or the existence of a particular entity*” [1999: 50]. ‘Ubu’ is always oriented towards unfoldment or ‘-ntu’, a nodal point in the creation of forms and modes of being. The two, cannot be separated on an ontological level; they are in fact “*the indivisible one-ness and wholeness of ontology and epistemology*” [1999: 50]. Ramose’s Ubuntu as philosophy recalls Deleuze and Guattari’s also simultaneously united and restless wandering model of ‘difference’, that “*is demonic rather than divine ... Univocal being is at one and the same time nomadic distribution and crowned anarchy*” [Deleuze 2004: 47]. Ramose’s thinking and emphasis of “*the processual nature of reality*” has an antecedent in

the same ‘vital force’ metaphysics that inspired Senghor’s African philosophy writing [Agada 2022: 203].

Mr Singer’s interpretation of art and healing is an Africanistic psychosocial one that finds traces in Anyanwu’s remark that, “*African art touches on realities which are lived or experienced. It is related to the African modes of life and it creates a world that is personally relevant and satisfying*” [1987: 246]. The consideration that traditional African art and practices are an ‘in life’, quotidian experience, that are both psychosocial epistemology and experienced as personally relevant and satisfying also appeared during my first visit

### A ‘More Profound Sociality’

The philosophical import of the description of Mr Singer by the local intermediary as ‘the captain of the team’ and his and Mr Top’s ontological concern for participation in aesthetic practices may also be induced from Mr Singer’s regard of the artefacts used in his practice. During my first visit to Mr Singer, he exhibited some different animal masks and a leopard skin. About these artefacts used in his practice [see Figs.1 & 2]. He explained:

**“... there are often other masks that have a pig’s head ... this is gorilla, this is chimpanzee, there is monkey, well, each person [animal/life] has his meaning because, well, gorilla is stronger than monkey. So the person who wears gorilla (mask) means that he is stronger than the other.”** [Singer]

and in an interview with a different ‘high-ranking’ healer, Mr Top (pseudonym). Mr Top lives in an immense forest part of the North-West Region province of Cameroon is the president of a regional association of over 300 healers. Speaking in a partly Pidgin English about his training by his father he explained, “*I started when you should do it the same as he was doing, I was about eight years old*”. The words “*do it the same as he was doing*” are evidence that the practices and use of herbs that he learnt require a strict application and are sometimes magically nuanced by the inclusion of the family or social group. For instance, he went on to say:

**“Or sometimes we call the family member, would make dinner with the family people, make the mess and they cook fine. To do it well they need to call the family member and make a celebration dinner and they would pray the medicine to go work. They would call the family together and they would sit together eat.”** [Singer]

This wider explanation of the scope of his praxis illustrates an African understanding of the value and use of the whole family group in processes of healing. Similarly, an understanding the importance of the communicative and caring dimension of sensorial life in acts of cooking and eating, plus likely singing.



Fig. 1 Mr Singer shows a leopard skin he uses in healing practices. Photograph by Jim Parris, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2016.

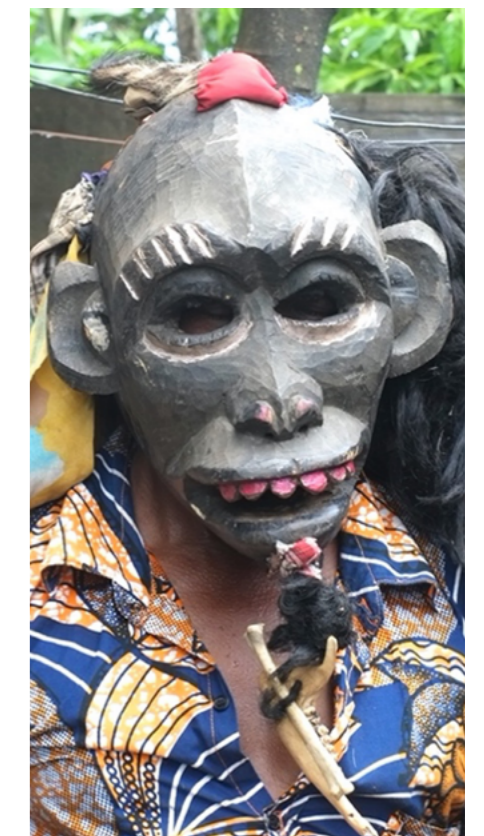


Fig. 2 Mr Singer models a gorilla mask that he uses in his healing practices. Photograph by Jim Parris, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2016.

Mr Singer's conception that every animal/life ("person") has its own meaning and relative strength, conveys the idea that animals are important and their different spirit/character are what is valuable. The distinction between each spirit or character may well be a significant one, however, because as Deleuze writes in his chapter *Bergson's conception of difference*, "it is not to the presence of characters that we must pay attention, but to their tendency to develop themselves" [1999: 45]. Thus, when Mr Singer considers, for example a leopard, pig, chimpanzee, monkey or gorilla, for Mr Singer, the different living characteristics of things creates an ontological plane of connection and possibilities. This idea that animals are important and their different spirit/character is what is valuable recalls Deleuze and Guattari's idea of rhizomatic connections that are lateral and not hierarchical. In the authors' book *A Thousand Plateaus* [1987] they introduce the idea of the "rhizome" as a foundational model of reality. Rhizomes in nature are characterized by a continual growth that has no formal centre and is non-hierarchical. In Deleuze and Guattari's work the living rhizome is both a model and set of qualities found everywhere in life and the universe. Similarly, in Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson, difference is not underwritten by specificity but by tendency. In contrast, through our initially available analytic cognitive regard of the world "we substitute purely utilitarian modes of groupings for the articulations of the real" [Deleuze 1999: 44]. Form and content are not ontologically distinct ideas and similarly the many is not subsumed under the idea of the singular, as in the traditional Western philosophical view.

Mr Singer is interested in processes of becoming that stem from meanings of connection such as family and community but not only limited along normal lines. His matching regard of different persons with his masks and artefacts of different animals is a semiotic mapping like Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'territorialization'. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari provide an example of the interchange of sign and meaning between a wasp and an orchid [1987: 10]. The orchid in Deleuze and Guattari is not merely imitating the wasp but both things are engaged in a "trans-species courtship dance" whereby the orchid's pollen is necessarily transported to other orchids for pollination [Roffe and Stark 2015: 1]. This is an example of what Deleuze and Guattari call 'becoming' [1987]. Mr Singer's masks are somewhat grotesque and cartoon in style. As I photograph, the leopard skin is striking but manifestly no longer the complete living animal. I wonder at this and his obvious pride in them as tools. Mr Singer's artefacts are not attempts to imitate reality but are purposefully discontinuous from the real like Deleuze and Guattari's "map" [1987]:

**"The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp: it forms a map with the wasp ... What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields..."** [Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 12]

Although nominally interested in difference, 'connection' is primary in Deleuze and Guattari's Bergsonian thought. Deleuze considers that Western thought has committed us to modes of thought which produce a negative understanding of difference. These authors explain that all things are naturally in motion, 'becoming' and so inherently differential and something positive. For Bergson, "There are no things, there are only actions" [1911/2020: 194]. All difference is only a snapshot of the flow of time which is 'duration'. Starting from the essence of Bergsonian thought, Deleuze proceeds to an animist understanding of difference. For him, being exists in a single sense of



everything and cannot be separated beyond style and manners. "It is not a matter of being which is distributed according to the requirements of representation, but of all things being divided up within being in the univocity of simple presence (the One-All)" [Deleuze 2004: 46]. This sharing within being is a profound sociality.

**"Life differs from itself, so much so that we find ourselves before divergent lines of evolution and, on each line, before original procedures; but it is still only with itself that it differs, such that, on each line we will also find certain apparati, certain identical organ structures obtained by different means"** [Deleuze 1999: 51]

These 'apparati', identical structures obtained by different means, resemble the correspondence Mr Singer considers between human characteristics and different animals' traits. But plants are also on this plane of environmental inclusivity. When interviewing a different 'high-ranking' healer, Mr Top (pseudonym), the interview had started inside and had been about both him in general and his knowledge of and traditional African artefacts, practices and experiences. However, when at one point he rose to take us all outside he immediately brought our attention to an array of plants growing within his compound. To my uninitiated eyes these were almost indistinguishable from each other but Mr Top's movements were those of a man excitedly joining a group of friends. He seemed to almost greet them, stopping at each one and making small indications that suggested a loving respect. At one moment he stopped to touch what may have been a Sensitive Plant (*Mimosa pudica*) and as the leaves retreated from his hand mimicked a voice saying, "leave me alone" whilst giving a little laugh. This otherwise childlike jape was however something more approaching a scientific observation on his part. It seemed like he regarded that the plant had a character and communicated its needs accordingly. After walking on with Mr Top, he suddenly stopped and gestured towards the vast tropical forest that stretched out below me. His action had both an air of theatricality and a purposeful comedic edge that produced a joy in me. For a brief moment, I saw the fo-

rest differently more colourful and alive. The sounds and voices emanating from it reached out to me. I was no longer looking at the scene of the forest from afar but instead was shrouded within its "profound reality its surreality; less its sign than its meaning" [Senghor 1956: 24]. Mr Top had 'magic-ked' me into an experience; perfect example; and grand metaphor; of connection.

As an outsider, I wonder whether I would have experienced the important ambiguity in Mr Singer's responses to my questions, without the presence of my Cameroonian colleague who is himself both familiar with the cultural practices of animist traditional healers and talking to them. Crucially, my research method had encouraged the emergence of the interviewee's own cultural view of the topic. Mr Singer is conscious of the occasional Western academic focus on the song as text but himself, firstly frames the song with a 'more profound' aesthetics. The communicative scenes he expressed, in response to a question about singing and analysed above, showed how the African idea of art is imperatively both a 'performative' and social one. This performative, social, 'in life' quality abolishes all separation between art and life. And exemplified how traditional art survives as an 'in life', quotidian experience. Mr Singer's evocative description of when he "goes out" in public ceremonies was an example of a highly complex performance involving moments of improvisation in response to the concrete world of his community.

Boys In A Trance Laying On The Sand.  
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## The African ‘team’ and a concomitant religious feeling

The local intermediary’s remark from my first interview about Mr Singer being “the captain of the team” should be interpreted in contradiction to the modern stress on the individual, with a stress rather on the word ‘team’ than ‘captain’. The narrative described a captain figure involving union and a group singing and dancing in-step together. As Mr Singer puts it, “*And the people who are there to accompany me follow the rhythm of the song and we dance together following the same moves/steps.*” The narrative, scene of singing and dancing and idea of a team recall the South African musicologist Andrew Tracey’s remark:

**“The most fundamental aesthetic principle in Africa concerning music or anything else is that without participation there is no meaning. You can go so far as to consider African music as being a form of co-operation that happens also to produce sound.”** [1983: 227]

The picture of this data also widens Christopher Small’s view that music in Africa is its verb and ‘musicking’ [1998]. The image of a captain and team is generative of ideas of everyone being musical and able to participate in some way and highlights a fundamental social conception attached to aesthetic practices. This is the social aspect of African aesthetics, is undoubtedly what Senghor hoped meant to highlight when he said, “in the black African school ... any manifestation of art is collective, for everyone’s benefit, and with everyone’s participation” [Sen-

ghor 1956:28]. In another writing, and his usual poetic turn of phrase Senghor writes of ‘the Sudan’, to describe traditional life in a vast swathe of the continent. However, the lyrical image that Senghor provides sonnets exactly with Mr Singer’s contributions over the meaning of singing and artistic practice:

**“But in the Sudan, for example, the eight months of the dry season. During this time the people are entirely preoccupied with their relations with the Others: geniuses, ancestors, members of the family, tribe, or kingdom—even strangers. Celebrations follow celebrations and death itself is an occasion for festivity, for the best of celebrations.”** [Senghor 1956: 27]

All this, according to Senghor, is the “natural” integration of art into social activities with concomitant “religious feelings” [1956: 26]. In order to better understand the foundation of Ubuntu philosophy, the ‘value’ of interrelatedness traditionally in Africa, one must return to ethnophilosophy and the topic of animism. To not do so, as Senghor understood long ago and Moya Deacon concurs, is to “*abandon the potential contribution that this trend lends to the entire discourse*” [2003: 111]. For instance, by this means, in order to dialogue between African and Bergsonian philosophy there is no need to choose one’s weapons, here ontological, but rather to choose one’s metaphysics. Senghor’s religious vitalism and nominally Christian phrase ‘a communion of

souls’ becomes important for a full understanding of the ‘value’ of interrelatedness traditionally in Africa and its philosophical links with Bergsonism.

In the works of Bergson [1963] and Deleuze and Guattari [1987], connections are made with the image of the natural mystic and sorcerers. The healers in my research are certainly examples of modern African natural mystics. In Bergson penultimate book, ‘Two Sources of Morality and Religion’, the mystic is considered by Bergson as engaged in a “more profoundly social” relationship to the world and with nature [1963: 199]. In outlining the conditions for this more profound sociality, Bergson’s philosophy accords with the thinking of the healers in this paper.

In my research, animism understands the natural world as a relationality. This relationality is not simply an ecological co-dependency, it is an ontological context, that in Senghor’s words “by which they are” [as cited in Diagne 2010]. However, the philosophical significance of this relationality is betrayed without returning to understand Senghor’s foundational ‘vital force’ metaphysics in which, the whole world and everything, “*not only to men, but also to animals, vegetables, even minerals. are (my italics) By which they are.*” [ibid]. This point is finely captured in Senghor’s powerful description of the transcendental potential of water:

**“For what strikes ... is less the appearance of an object than its profound reality, its surreality; less its sign than its meaning. Water enchants him because it flows, fluid and blue, particularly because it washes, and even more because it purifies. Sign and meaning express the same ambivalent reality. However the stress is on meaning, which is the significance – no longer utilitarian, but moral, mystique of the real – a symbol.”** [Senghor 1956: 24]

## Conclusion

The view of Ubuntu discussed in this paper compliments Jonathan Chimakonam’s writing on traditional Igbo philosophy of difference and its consequences for environmentalism. Chimakonam considers the traditional Igbo philosophical regard of the natural environment as founded on the notion of *eze o’nulo*. Chimakonam regards his *eze o’nulo* as an aspect of “*the underexplored African notion of ‘relationship’ found in many places in the sub-Saharan regional cultures*” [2019: 120]. *eze o’nulo* is an architecture of reality, a network of complementarity that results in a completeness. In accordance with the principle of *nmekoka*, all things are relatively different and by implication mutually inclusive. According to the author this sort of thinking is at a variance with Aristotelian and Russellian systems which render

The same interchange of sign and meaning in nature is expressed by Mr Singer, and the other healers in my research. The healer’s words and practices demonstrate a cultivated working of the conception of the world as a relationality and of ‘a more profound sociality’ that is no doubt implied in Senghor’s notion of the ‘mystique of the real’.

African face mask, Lekki, Nigeria.  
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2022: 207]. Anyanwu’s Africanistic description of religion, art and music as “some of the mechanisms for understanding and expressing the life forces of the invisible world” [1981: 271] recalls the experience of Mr Singer’s communicative participatory art practice. This is an African ‘more profound aesthetics’ (Bergson) that readily accords in the everyday Deleuzian ideas of a transcendental signifier and pure virtual difference. That is to say, something that animates the whole system independently of intellect and culture, in brief, nature and the world. For all these philosophers “... *the logic of the Western culture (scientific culture) ruins vital experience*” [1981: 282]. The knowledge and practices of animist healers, such as in my research, remain important for African philosophical discourse and beyond.

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