



Africanity, Cultural Dynamics and Psychological Wellbeing in African Contexts

**Yvonne Sanyanga MSc
and Isaac Mutelo PhD**

African Psychotherapy and
Family's Wellbeing: A Case Study
of the Shona, Zimbabwe

Mohammed X Ntshangase, PhD

The frenzy about White weddings:
Christianity's contribution to cultural
colonization through informal
education in African communities

Felix Mofolo, MA

Africanity of Thaddeus Metz's
Relational Moral Theory

**Agber Thaddeus Igbalumun, BA
and Gabriel Kofi Akpah, MA**

Ubuntu and Rawlsian Justice:
A Framework for Addressing
Environmental Constraints to
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Physical Address:

Domuni-Press, 1 Impasse Lacordaire, 31078 Toulouse Cedex 4, France

Office in Africa:

5 Leinster Road, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg, 3201, South Africa

Postal Address:

P.O. Box 100 150, Scottsville, 3209 KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Email: JOCAP@domuni.eu

Fax: + 27 33 345 2246

Tel: +33(0) 5 31 61 35 15 (France), +27 33 345 2241 (Southern Africa)

Publishing Director: Marie Monnet,

Rector of Domuni Universitas

Editor: Dr. Isaac Mutelo,

Director of Quality Assurance

Arrupe Jesuit University, Harare, Zimbabwe (email: isaac.mutelo@aju.ac.zw)

Editorial adviser:

Professor Bernard Matolino,

University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

General Administration:

Moses Chanda, Dr. Isaac Mutelo and Guide Marambanyika

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African Psychotherapy and Family's Wellbeing: A Case Study of the Shona, Zimbabwe

Yvonne Sanyanga MSc, and Isaac Mutelo PhD
Arrupe Jesuit University, Harare, Zimbabwe

Abstract

The role of African psychotherapy in promoting family well-being in Africa cannot be underestimated. This article analyses the role of traditional Shona healing practices and their influence on family well-being. Rooted in the rich cultural beliefs of the Shona people, these practices include herbal remedies, roots, rituals, and community support, highlighting the interconnectedness of social and spiritual dimensions. The Shona understanding of wellness includes familial relationships, where relatives, such as aunts and uncles, play essential roles during crises, while friends act as informal counsellors providing vital emotional support. The article also discusses African psychotherapy as a culturally relevant approach to holistic health, recognizing that psychological issues are often experienced within the family context. Healing is viewed as a communal effort, with traditional methods like divination, herbal treatments, and rituals central to the Shona approach to well-being. By exploring these practices, the article emphasizes the importance of cultural identity and community in addressing psychological and physical challenges. It advocates for integrating indigenous healing methods into contemporary psychological care, suggesting that such practices can enhance holistic family healing. Thus, the study emphasizes that understanding and utilizing traditional Shona healing practices can provide valuable insights into psychotherapy, especially in contexts where cultural beliefs significantly influence health issues. This approach not only honours the cultural heritage of the Shona people but also promotes a more inclusive and effective healthcare system.

Introduction

The concept of psychotherapy is widely recognized as an important tool for addressing psychological challenges and promoting well-being. However, the Shona people offer a unique perspective on this practice, deeply rooted in their cultural and spiritual traditions. The traditional Shona healing techniques and approaches are anchored in a wider religious-cultural belief system; thus, they serve the needs of the Shona people. These practices in-

volve not only the administration of herbs but also rituals, sacrifices, dreams, symbolic representations, and family and community support. Social and spiritual orders are significant dimensions in maintaining personal and community health. The Shona healing practices offer profound insight and self-understanding to patients and families affected, thereby reducing stress and addressing physical and psychosomatic disorders. Traditional African hea-

ling strategies play a crucial role in upholding the family's well-being. In traditional Shona practices, wellness is derived from the cultural understanding of the roles of family, community, and the spiritual world in human welfare.

By contrast, western psychotherapy can be perceived as a science-based approach that is mainly oriented to concrete causes of illness [Jim, Fleg, Zuniga, & Straits, 2011]. This is different from

Yvonne Sanyanga is a registered Counseling Psychologist with a BSc and MSc in Counseling Psychology, along with a Diploma in Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Adults. She lectures at Arrupe Jesuit University and practices as a freelance Counseling Psychologist. Additionally, Yvonne is an emerging researcher and serves as a journal reviewer for the International Journal of Research Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS).

Isaac Mutelo is a Lecturer and Director of Quality Assurance, Research, Innovation, and Education 5.0 at Arrupe Jesuit University in Harare, Zimbabwe. He has taught at various local and international institutions, including Domuni University in France, St. Augustine's College of South Africa, and the Catholic University of Zimbabwe. Isaac holds several academic qualifications, including a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and a Bachelor of Theology from St. Joseph's Theological Institute. He earned a BA (Hons) in Philosophy, a Master of Arts in Philosophy, and a PhD in Philosophy, all from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Additionally, he has a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from the Catholic University of Zimbabwe and a Postgraduate Diploma in Human Rights, Equality, and Environmental Law from Tech Global University. Isaac is the editor of "Human Rights in Southern Africa: Theory and Practice" (2024) and the author of "Muslim Organisations in South Africa: Political Role Post-1948" (2023). His research interests include the philosophy of religion, political philosophy, human rights, interreligious dialogue and environmental rights.



African psychotherapy where healing strategies are partly spiritual based on the challenges of daily life construed as a product of metaphysical influences [Sanyanga 2024]. Amidst these differences, the current status of practising psychological counselling in Africa is largely Western-based, with most Africans, especially the Shona people still resorting to their traditional means of attaining mental stability. Charema and Shizha (2008) acknowledge that the majority of Zimbabweans still find relief from the traditional informal remedies alongside modern Western-informed health services. It is important to blend the two approaches as a comprehensive healing strategy that is accommodative to Africans.

From the perspective of African psychotherapy, familial relationships are often credited with promoting the family's well-being. The roles of aunts and uncles are acknowledged by the Shona people. Friendships are also regarded as a vital support service during difficult times. The significance of a friend is equated to that of a counsellor, as friends are entrusted with family secrets and consulted when problems arise. Additionally, elders and in-laws play important roles in resolving issues of concern among individuals. The family court system is highly regarded as one of the best approaches to settling family matters. The use of herbs is also considered effective for addressing physical maladjustments.

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African Psychotherapy: Background

Africa has a rich heritage of what past generations thought, did, and passed on to their children [Mbiti 1975]. Since ancient times, families have faced various challenges and daily struggles, which were resolved through different solutions according to diverse cultural contexts. The general understanding of psychopathology among Africans has been perceived as deterministic; thus, chance and accidents are often underestimated, while personal problems are experienced and resolved within a family context [Sanyanga, 2024]. Indigenous approaches, which include divination, friendships, the use of herbs, and counsel from elders and others, tactfully capture the importance of family and community as modes of communication for therapy and moral values.

In the precolonial era, Africans had a strong sense of the importance of cultural self-identity [Wiredu, 2008]. Although colonialism distorted African culture to varying degrees and inflicted immense psychological, religious and social wounds, efforts were made after independence to reassert true African culture in promoting healing and reconciliation. The understanding among Africans that colonialism and its impact needed to be reviewed from an African standpoint is a clear indication of the positive benefits embedded in African culture for its people. Nyerere [1966] supported the call for Africanization and argued that in Tanganyika, and later in Tanzania, Africanization should take the form of a return to Ujamaa ('fraternity' in Swahili), which he described as a traditional African form of socialism. This African socialism was founded not on class struggle but

on the harmony of the extended family, relating to a healing strategy based on a nationalistic spirit that encompasses the family as an important unit in African culture.

For instance, in Zimbabwe, *hunhu* (personhood) is a term from the Shona language, which has the same meaning as *ubuntu* from the Nguni language. On that basis, "the attention one human being gives to another—thus the kindness, courtesy, consideration, and friendliness in the relationship between people; a code of behaviour, an attitude toward other people and life—is embodied in *Hunhu* or *Ubuntu*" [Samkange & Samkange, 1980: 39]. *Hunhu* communally upholds cultural values. Given this position, Beach [1994] notes that being in a family entails a high sense of belonging among the Shona, similar to many African cultures. Challenges and setbacks are part of a family; when one part is affected, the whole unit is affected as well [Kiminyo, 2004]. To live in harmony as a unit, the family endeavours to seek remedies to daily living problems for security and stability. Such remedies are typically traditional ones that stem from generational customs, as asserted by Manteiro-Ferreira [2014]. On that basis, it is evident how personhood or cultural identity, with all its values, can significantly impact the family's well-being. Mwiti and Al Duek [2007:224] reaffirm this: "Growing up in Africa is not just about growing up in Africa." This pertains to the values that African parents wish to impart to their children—attitudes that are authentic, tested, and tried. This focus becomes the goal of child training through early development and maturation, leading to a

unique socialized individual who can be approached distinctively when faced with challenges.

Ndlovu and Hove [2015] maintain that psychotherapy, as a healing process, has been a component of societies since time immemorial. They further attest that the Zimbabwean context is no exception, as problems existed and were solved long before the advent of professional counselling in the Ndebele and Shona communities. This is attested by the presence of counselling institutions in all human communities, where people share their sorrows, mentor, empower, and advise one another. The Shona people, however, utilize both traditional (informal) and modern counselling services, which are formalized. Focusing on this, the influence of Eurocentric counselling theory, research, and practice among the Shona people has sometimes demonized and oppressed individuals and groups whose cultures lie outside the Eurocentric counselling framework.



Person and Community in African Traditional Thought

The African philosopher Menkit [1984], in his theory of person and community in traditional African thought, maintains that an individual is defined with reference to the surrounding community and social circumstances that shape the individual. He disputes the Western view that perceives a person as an abstract entity characterized as a lone individual. According to him, an individual comes to recognize himself as a person first by knowing his community. Full personhood is not simply given at the very beginning of one's life but is attained after one is initiated into society [Menkit 1984]. To attain this personhood, the rituals of incorporation and the principal necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives are fundamental in transforming a person to attain social selfhood. This view differentiates African personhood from the Western view, thereby providing insight into how African psychotherapy can be significant in the African family context, suggesting its uniqueness.

African psychotherapy, referred to as 'African Indigenous counselling' or 'African traditional counselling,' can be defined as a sub-discipline within the currently more inclusive field of psychotherapy in Africa that is devoted to the study of the psychological healing systems indigenous to traditional communities in Africa [Madu et al., 1996; Nwoye, 2010:26–43]. African psychotherapy is also defined as the systematic study of the patterned ways, rituals, theories, and techniques invented in indigenous African communities for addressing the psychological needs and problems of living in the African world. There is a clear distinction between how psychological problems are managed from an African traditional perspective and a Western perspective. Whereas the Western perspective relies heavily on 'talking therapy' to empower the client, the African traditional perspective takes the responsibility for resolving the problem away from the client by performing mystic rituals and sometimes including others in treatment, such as extended family members, friends, and even ancestors.

In African psychotherapy, the natural and supernatural elements are inextricably interwoven, and health is not seen merely as a biological matter but as a bond between the human body and the soul in total harmony. Family well-being is characterized by the ability of every member to connect and manage daily challenges collectively. Therapies commonly employed in the African healing system include holding court systems, consulting elders, per-

forming rituals, using herbs, and involving familial relations in resolving issues of concern. Cultural healing strategies are important for the Shona; they strongly believe in them, making it difficult to separate these practices from their culture when offering assistance. The African therapies employ techniques similar to those used in Western psychotherapy, though adapted to cultural contexts.

African healing is partly spiritual since it is linked to causes such as misfortune, disease, and death [Kiminyo 2004]. The existence of all events to determinism, suggests that misfortunes are caused either by God, by humans, or by other powers beyond God. He credits healing in an African context to belief in the powers of God or ancestors, payment of compensation, and collective grieving. A family's well-being is not defined by the absence of problems but by the ability of the family to function normally, with all its members contributing to coping with disappointments, celebrating successes, and making decisions [Behnke & MacDermid, 2004]. Given the difficulty of defining individual well-being, defining and measuring family well-being is even more complex. One approach is to assume that family well-being is the sum of its parts; that is, if each individual in a family displays or reports positive well-being, the family's well-being would be considered high. In this approach, the unit of analysis is the individual, and conclusions about the family are drawn based on data from or about individuals and their experiences.

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Zimbabwe is unusual among African states because, despite its size, it has only two large ethnic groups: the Shona, which comprises 82% of the population, and the Ndebele, which accounts for 14%, along with non-African minorities and a few smaller ethnic groups such as the Tonga, Sena, Hlengwe, Venda, and Sotho [Beach 1993]. The Shona are further subdivided into groups based on modern adaptations of old names rather than historical reality. Among these groupings are the Manyika, Zezuru, Korekore, and Karanga, which are typically Shona in cultural values and customs, apart from differences in dialects and pronunciations [McFarland, 1995: 246; Beach, 1993]. Zimunya, in particular, is an area in the province of Manicaland in Zimbabwe, under the chieftainship of Chief Zimunya, where most practices are culturally oriented. Parents raise their children with initiation styles aimed at promoting cultural awareness, observance of taboos, living in harmony, using charms for protection against misfortunes, and participation in traditional rituals. Following this trend, there is clear evidence of a lifestyle that contains a deeply ingrained mindset geared toward solving problems or misfortunes in its own way.

Currently, the status of psychological counselling practice in Zimbabwe is largely Western-based. Modern scientific research has ignored the spiritual and social dimensions of traditional medicine [Dzingirayi 2022]. This alone indicates a lack of serious integration of the socio-cultural and religious beliefs of traditional African peoples into practice. While Kaela [2013] points out that it is challenging to separate religion from healing in the faith of the Shona people, the need to under-

stand this culture remains paramount. Given that the Shona are the largest single ethnic group in Zimbabwe, it is essential to determine the extent of African indigenous healing practices concerning family well-being.

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The Role of African Psychotherapy on the Family's Well-Being

The concept of African psychotherapy, as articulated by Mbiti [1969], attests that Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its religious system with a set of beliefs and practices that permeate all aspects of life to such an extent that it is a challenge to isolate it. He further maintains that:

“Wherever an 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 it to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament” p. 2

The view that Africans are deeply religious demonstrates how religion dominates the African mind. This can be accredited to the restoration of the force of life as the vital force of the moral orientation of African religion, which is unmistakable. For Magesa [1997:174], “whenever and wherever there is a diminishment of life, something must be done to restore it”. This reflects the significance of African healing to a community for the reinstatement of life. The family's well-being is determined by its ability to maintain a healthy balance emotionally, physically, economically, and spiritually. Conversely, if these attributes are not well stabilized, an unhealthy family will exist. The family will be considered ‘sick,’ and healing will be needed for the well-being of that family [Schwartz, 1997]. Suggestive of this, some African families endeavour to identify and address the root and source of their suffering to attain stability. There is a proverb in the Shona tradition

which states, Chiripo chariuraya, zizi harifi nemhepo, meaning ‘something has killed the owl; it cannot just be the wind’ (Masaka & Chemhuru [2011]; Zvarevashe [1970]). Apart from observable signs, there are always some underlying and unforeseen causes of disease and misfortune. The Shona people in Zimbabwe commonly relate their problems to either the hand of God, ancestors (vadzimu), witchcraft (varoyi), or evil spirits (mweya yetsvina). From this perspective, the Shona typically apply their traditional ways of identifying this causative ‘being’ to correct or reverse the problem collectively as a family.

There is an interrelatedness between intrinsic (psychic and immaterial) and extrinsic (social and material) factors that impact one's ability to both influence and respond to problems of daily living in an African context [Phillips 1990]. From an African worldview, the world is one of extraordinary harmony, which constitutes the natural order. This natural order implies that people's lives and relationships within and between lives are purposeful and orderly while being fundamentally spiritual. There is a clear interrelatedness of this with the family, where each member is dependent on the other, making it a unit of its own. This partly entails that if one part is not functioning well, the family will be out of order; hence, to maintain this natural order, there is a need for a remedy. Thus, specific cultural healing strategies become a solution. How then does an African family perceive a challenge, and what is done to settle this?

Events that happen or exist have a cause, and this cause is seen to have greater power and right than

or superior to the effect of the cause. For example, events such as birth, marriage, fertility, drought, or illness are said to be intentionally caused [Magesa 1997; Kiminyo 2004]. While this is mainly attributed to a person, divine or human, the cause of occurrence can be proved through divination, memory, reasoning, and judgment. Thus, it follows that chance and accidents are not emphasized in African society; thus, it is essential to find out, ‘What caused it?’, ‘Why did it happen?’, and ‘Who did it?’ In light of this, traditional strategies that align with African beliefs are preferred by some African families to facilitate wellness.

On that basis, healing from African worldviews encompasses knowledge and practices used in the diagnosis, prevention, and elimination of physical, mental, and social imbalances [Shange and Ross 2022]. These practices are based on knowledge derived exclusively from practical experiences and observations handed down from generation to generation, mostly orally. Approaches to healing from an African perspective, therefore, include practical and open relationships. The approach is directive, deals with the supernatural and natural worlds, focuses on who caused the problem, and aims at social cohesion [Kaela, 2013]. The restoration of health, whether mental or physical, from an African perspective—and Shona in particular—lies within the social, cultural, and historical contexts. The key question here concerns how African families heal after a misfortune such as death or any other problem that may arise.

Healing Strategies Applied in African Psychotherapy

Given that, from African world-views, the root cause of wellness or ill health is partly explained in metaphysical terms, healers and their patients prefer directive treatments or mostly externally oriented methods, for example, rituals, cleansing, enactments, and sacrifices [Sanyanga, 2024; Meyer et al., 2003]. In traditional Shona practices, for example, wellness is derived from the cultural understanding of the role of family, community, and the spiritual world in human welfare. These healing strategies can be viewed as social methods and techniques in the Shona traditional healing practices that are spiritually based [Machinga 2011].

Kubata Maoko (Holding Hands)

In dealing with the loss of a loved one, the act of kubata maoko (literately translated as ‘holding hands’) is supported as a useful strategy by all the participants involved. This practice is a unique Shona way of mourning the dead. When an individual dies in a family, the family members or immediate relatives gather in the specific home where the person has died and wait for all those who will come to offer condolences. Drums and lamentation songs are played throughout the day and night as people dance. Upon arriving at the mourning home, people echo a cry, and this is often performed by women. The other women who are already present at the house respond in the same tune of cry as they hold hands, an act called kubata maoko in Shona. After a while, the bereaved person or a family member will narrate the story of how the incident occurred. During the narration, there will be total silence followed by a loud cry after the narration. This process is repeated for everyone

who comes to the home. Close friends will imitate what was normally liked by the deceased and may sometimes wear the clothes of the late person to remind the mourners that the person is indeed gone, an act referred to as kumemera, which means imitation in Shona. All of this is part of the process of kubata maoko, providing significant consolation as it allows the mourners to navigate the grieving process with limited or no chances of denial, which might lead to problems in the future.

Use of Herbs, Roots, and Protective Charms

In the Shona culture, traditional healers possess knowledge of herbs, roots, and even fruits that can prevent, protect, or cure diseases and pain [Machinga, 2011]. When people visit traditional healers, the first requirement for healing is to have confidence in the healer. Those seeking help must believe in the traditional healer’s supernatural powers, the healer’s ability to deal with unseen mysterious forces, and the healer’s capacity to convey messages from the spiritual world. These traditional healers employ various methods and techniques such as divination, cleansing rituals, protective charms, and herbs to cure and heal [Chavhunduka, 1994]. The traditional healers’ attire plays a significant role in healing rituals. Traditional healers wear impressive ritual dresses and surround themselves with ritual objects when performing healing rituals.

While some of these outfits consist of red colours with images of a lion (shumba) or a leopard (ingwe) among the Shona, this can impress clients and lead them to view the healers as skilled and powerful. Even their names ser-

ve as a technique to influence their patients. For example, the names include Mafirakureva (‘he who dies for the truth of exposing evil’), Ndambaguwa (‘he who exposes evildoers to the public’), and Hazvirovi (‘nothing can be concealed’), among others [Kaela, 2013]. The possibility of abusive and unscrupulous practitioners is sometimes unavoidable. The existence of the Zimbabwean National Association of Traditional Healers (ZINATHA) acts as a watchdog, mandating that every traditional healer register with the association.

Charms are produced by medicine men and women from materials such as herbs, roots, bark, insects, skins, bones, and animal horns [Gehman 2002]. These objects are empowered magically through the repetition of specific words, a chanting style that the Shona refer to as kudetemba. These charms and herbs are believed to be useful in attracting a lover, gaining employment, protecting from witchcraft, accumulating wealth, preventing illness, and many other purposes. Among the Shona people, the effectiveness of charms or herbs depends on the materials used and the words employed in administering them [Chavhunduka, 1994].

Among the commonly used herbs and charms in Shona culture, the most popular preventive medicine for spiritually influenced chronic illnesses is a type of plant called chifumuro (‘exposer’), which is believed to possess magical power, making a person involuntarily confess evil intentions whenever he or she comes into contact with someone who has it. The Shona typically carry this with them when going to public places

for protection, and children going to boarding schools are also given it for protection against evil. The chifumuro root is tied onto a fiber or a string prepared from the bark of a tree that the diviner recommends and is worn around the waist or neck of children; for elders, it is usually carried in their pockets. This charm (dumwa) is suggested to be both curative and preventive.

Divination

Divination is a process conducted by a diviner or traditional healer to unveil the mysteries of human life [Mbiti 1969]. He or she is equated to a psychiatrist, counsellor, and healer of human miseries using ancestral and/or spiritual powers in African tradition. Geh-

man [2005] defines a diviner as a specialist who seeks to diagnose disease or discover solutions to problems through the manipulation of objects using various techniques and employing items such as divining stones, seeds, nuts, and gourds. Diviners receive communication through dreams and visions from the spirit world. While the process of divination in Africa is carried out in various ways, Kaela [2013] credits the aspect of divination in Shona traditional religion as a group affair rather than an individual and private endeavour. Diviners are said to insist on group consultations for transparency and to resolve social conflicts that might underlie sickness, allowing a family to consult as a group. The diviners

use connotations such as ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to understand their client’s problems collectively. A visit to the diviner is usually an agreement among family members, and the feedback they receive from the diviner is typically based on a common goal. This can be compared to group counselling, where a counsellor facilitates a group of individuals who may have a common challenge, employing various skills to enable healing. Although a diviner might not be trained as a counsellor, some of the techniques he or she applies greatly benefit the psychological well-being of individuals. For instance, questioning and probing help the client understand his or her problem and provide a gateway to finding solutions.

The Role of Spiritual and Familial Relationships

The traditional Shona believe in the spiritual world; everything in nature originates from One God, whom they call Mwari (‘God’), Musikavanhu (‘God the Creator of Humanity’), or Samasimba (‘God Almighty’). Mwari communicates with humanity through guardian and territorial spirits, who act as mediators between humans and God. The ancestral spirits appear through spirit mediums. Interaction with God and ancestral spirits is made possible by performing rituals and ceremonies and connecting with the non-local world through these spirit mediums. The notion of the non-local world and beyond-self experiences is central to Shona culture. Among the Shona, the physical world is seen and controlled by a hierarchy of spiritual beings, each

with its specific functions, and everything is understood in terms of this structured spiritual world [Mbuyayesango 2001]. Hence, certain challenges are viewed not only as physical or psychological but as spiritual sicknesses, which can only be treated by engaging the spiritual world. From this perspective, it is evident that spirituality influences the Shona people’s way of handling daily challenges.

Reconciliation

When one wrongs another in Shona circles, it is commonly believed that the result is experiencing bad luck or illness. To atone for this, the family is told to brew millet beer, slaughter beasts, and gather with the adversary’s family to appease the ancestral spirits through a process called Bira. Bira is a ri-

tual involving an offering of beer to appease the ancestors. The ritual is supposed to be attended by all members of the lineage and involves honouring the common ancestors through songs and dance to suspend all the social differences that gave rise to illness [Kaela, 2013]. When the individual’s problem has lessened, cleansing and confessional rituals are performed at the family’s homestead. The family will be requested to participate in a communal reparation ritual, and the families of the stranger spirits are invited to the pacifying ceremony. By involving the family, the care of the whole results in optimal balance, strength, and resilience within the family system.

The Role of Tete, Sahwira, and the Family Court System

The figure of the tete ('aunt') in Shona tradition plays and still plays, a crucial role in counseling, especially for young ladies. She is usually the father's sister and, in some cases, is referred to as baba vechikadzi ('female father'). The aunt is to constantly give advice to her brother's children from a very young age through marriage. She plays a pivotal role of guidance in her brother's family and would be constantly called upon in times of need. Gelfand [1979] notes that girls are similarly taught by their aunts (vana tete) and grandmothers (vana mbuya), to be chaste until they get married. Girls are taught how to sit modestly, when to keep aloof from males, what to say and what not to say in the presence of the opposite sex, how to react to courting proposals, how to behave toward a boyfriend, how to behave when married, to avoid annoying her husband, to control her temper in general, and to avoid sexual intercourse until married and adultery. The aunt does not only play an advisory role to her brother's children but also to her brother's marriage. She is often called upon to solve disputes between her brother and his wife.

Friendship is a very effective civic bond among the Shona, hence the ancient proverb hushamwari hunokunda hukama, meaning 'friendship is much stronger than blood ties' [Hamutyinei & Planner, 1987]. The Shona people of Zimbabwe have a cultural way of ensuring problems are discussed, which helps especially when a professional counsellor is not available. This phenomenon is known as the 'Sahwira culture,' where a Sahwira ('a close friend of a family or someone') becomes a listener or mediator during a time

of predicament or bereavement. A Sahwira is confided in by a family or one of the spouses and is better equipped to solve their problems, whether marital or otherwise. A Sahwira acts as a counsellor per se because he or she knows everything about the friend, to the extent that when the friend dies, he or she becomes instrumental in showing others what the deceased used to like or do. In times of marital problems, the Sahwira is the one to whom both spouses go for marital counselling. According to Gladding [2018], counselling involves the "discussion of a problem that usually has emotional content with an individual to help the individual cope with it better." In this way, the marital problem, which has extensive emotional content, is shared with the Sahwira and the affected party. Thus, Sahwira can be equated to a counsellor who helps the family balance their emotions.

Another important system is the family court (dare repamusha), which is understood as a private court session between members of a single family or between two families of the same extended family [Gwavaranda, 2011:148-155]. The family head or aunt presides over the case to bring justice to feuding parties without involving members of the public. Regarding the concept of law in Africa, Ramose [1999] views ubuntu as signifying the philosophical family atmosphere prevailing among indigenous African people. The purpose of law and the related court system is to promote unity, togetherness, and harmony, which are clear traits of the family atmosphere. This can contribute to the well-being of the family, thereby making the court system a form of therapy. Family therapy is a form of psychotherapy that seeks to reduce distress and conflict

by improving the systems of interactions between family members [Lebow and Stroud 2016]. In this perspective, the head of the family or aunt plays the role of a family therapist. With family counseling, problems are viewed as patterns or systems that need adjusting, as opposed to viewing problems as residing in the person. Focusing on this, there is a clear indication of the importance of this court system toward the well-being of the family.

Health Rituals and Cleansing Rituals

A ritual is a specific behaviour, action, or activity that gives symbolic expression to certain feelings and thoughts of the actors individually or as a group [Rando 1988]. It may be a habitually repetitive behaviour or a one-time occurrence and may be performed publicly or privately. In the African context, rituals are understood as a way of communicating something of religious significance through words, symbols, and actions. As there are various rituals performed in the African context, "health rituals are always a major concern" [Mbiti, 1975: 139]. These rituals are directed at ensuring good health, healing, and protection. By contrast, cleansing or fumigation is a typical treatment strategy in the traditional African perspective. Cleansing treatment is performed to remove the causes of presenting problems or ill health, either from the inside or outside of the body of the patient and from the environment of the patient. The Shona have a common concept called mamhepo, referring to evil spirits. When an individual is challenged in any way, he or she credits this to evil spirits and their works. The result is to seek rituals to atone for such. From this perspective, the desire to visit a psychotherapist



Doctor of the Shona people, Zimbabwe.
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fulfil funeral rites to avoid causing any offence to the departed, also called the ancestors or the living dead [Mbiti 1975]. For example, there is a funeral ritual intended to publicly acknowledge that a death has occurred.

According to Chiremba and Rukuni [2002], cultural mourning practices in Zimbabwe seem to promote bereavement counselling. The Shona cultural practices behind this include Shisahwira ('friendship'). A person called Sahwira leads the grieving process. This individual engages in various antics that make the family laugh. In this mourning style, friends of the deceased or bereaved will dance, shout, sing, and even dramatize the character of the deceased. If the deceased were a prostitute, a drunkard, a pastor, or a respected businessperson in the community, they would dramatize what the deceased used to do. The laughter serves as a great antidote to the heavy, depressing atmosphere that can develop at funerals, which is tiring and debilitating. The release of tension through laughter balances the atmosphere, gives the mourners renewed energy to complete the task of burial, and reduces stress and emotions, as the bereaved may even end up laughing, thereby moving from a stressful moment to a lighter one, which promotes psychological adjustment [Rugonye & Bukaliya, 2016].

Among the Shona, the cause of depression is often attributed to a preoccupation with the memories of the deceased, coupled with a lack of support from others and loneliness during and after the burial of the closest relative.

for help with psychological balance is similar to this attitude among the traditional Shona. Such cleansing rituals include a rigorous dancing ceremony where the dancers adorn themselves with ritual outfits unique to different family spirits. Examples of these include red outfits and long chains of red, black, white, and blue beads hanging loosely from their necks onto their chests [Kaela, 2013]. This healing remedy is considered effective among the Shona, as individuals, together with their families, are usually regarded as clean afterwards.

Mourning Rituals

Mourning the dead is a practice mediated by religious and cultural practices in different societies [Maloka 1995]. This usually involves core beliefs and customs, spiritual practices, and certain expected behaviours that symbolize mourning the death of a loved one. For example, when a death has occurred, there are prescribed behaviours and rituals performed, such as what is worn, how the bereaved are addressed, how feelings should be dealt with, and what will be done to symbolize the separation of the deceased from the people who are left behind [Parkes et al., 1997]. In African societies, meticulous care is taken to

When bereaved, some individuals experience delayed or aborted grieving, which can, in turn, give rise to suicidal ideations. Among the Shona, grieving individuals are easily recognized by wearing black clothes or shaving their heads. This is done for identification as the bereaved so that people can easily recognize and empathize with them. While this act is viewed culturally, it helps bring awareness into one's cognition that he or she is bereaved. This also helps people in the community identify and console the bereaved, thereby providing them with the necessary support needed to cope with grief.

The Role of Folktales and Taboos

Among Shona society, folktales are a part of everyday life. These folktales are mainly concerned with sustaining relationships and maintaining and indoctrinating peaceful coexistence between individuals and groups within communities [Chitando, 2008; Mazuruse 2010]. According to the Shona past folktales (ngano) feature a lot of characterization involving both human and animal characters. In these characters, there are heroes representing virtues triumphing over villains who signify vices. Tsodzo [1992] outlines three major types of ngano and their purposes in Shona culture: ngano dzemhuka ('folktales with animals as characters'), ngano dzavanhu nemhuka ('folktales with both human and animal characters'), and ngano dzavanhu chete ('folktales with human characters only').

In the traditional Shona culture, folktales are usually narrated during recreational times around the fire as a family sits together before going to bed. Gombe [2006] states the importance of ngano as a socialization method on issues such as conflict, wisdom, and selfishness among others, to young people, as no area of Shona's life is beyond the scope of ngano. Following this, folktales help correct the way people perceive things around them and acquire good attitudes. In a way, these folktales can be seen as a form of psychoeducation for the Shona people. Psychoeducation as a therapeutic focus in which clients learn practical and positive emotional and behavioral skills to improve life adjustment, management of emotions, and self-awareness. Through folktales, people learn valuable life skills for managing their behavior, emotions, and relationships, ultimately improving their mental health through practical life skills strategies [Belmont 2016].

Taboos (zviera) are typically applied in a family setup as a strategy for teaching children societal norms and promoting one's security. Tatira [2000] acknowledges taboos (zviera) as avoidance rules that forbid members of the human community from performing certain actions, such as eating some kinds of food or walking on or visiting some sites regarded as sacred. For the Shona people, taboos are understood as specific rules that forbid people from performing certain actions; otherwise,

the performance of such forbidden actions negates the moral code governing human conduct. Examples of some of these taboos, as cited by Tatira [2000], include:

“ukarova mai unozotanda botso (if you beat your mother, you will become a ritual beggar), ukawetera mumvura hauzozvari (if you urinate in water, you will fail to conceive), ukadya zvakatonhora semunya unonzwa mabayo (if you eat cold leftover food, you will suffer from pneumonia), and ukapfira musope unozvara musope (if you spit upon the sight of an albino, you will conceive one).”

Violators of the Shona moral code as contained in taboos are said to invite misfortunes, both for the community and themselves, such as bad luck, disease, drought, and death [Chemhuru and Masaka 2010]. For this reason, taboos impact people's behavioural patterns, promoting good behaviour among individuals from childhood to adulthood. Among the many influences on people's behaviour, the patterns of thinking and acting instilled in them as children are fundamental to their instinctive patterns of behaviour in adulthood [Bourdillon, 1976]. In this case, formal patterns of thinking in the form of taboos are introduced and inculcated into the minds of children from a young age as a way of promoting good behaviour that also encompasses sound familial ethics.

The Effects of Shona Healing Approaches on the Family's Well-being

To determine the well-being of the family, the emotional, social, spiritual, and physical domains are vital. Despite the existence of formal counselling, African healing approaches still play an important role in maintaining the family's well-being. The cultural healing strategies remain significant in the modern world of the Shona people. The African healing strategies are effective, and people believe in them. The collectivity of the Shona in facing a challenge is a key approach to daily difficulties. As Magesa [1997] notes, “Whenever and wherever there is diminishment of life, something must be done to restore it.” The cultural healing practices are not always effective, as they sometimes fail; hence, they need a replacement. In addition to this, some strategies seem to be only a belief system that individuals endeavour to uphold to attain peace.

Emotional Well-being

According to the Shona traditional culture, rituals have the power to help patients and families disengage from negatives and intentionally focus on creating positive emotional states. For instance, offering sacrifices to ancestors demonstrates respect for the ancestral spirits, ensuring protection from spiritual entities and creating a sense of security. Daugherty and Hlubocky [2008: 85] state: “When we have a thought or feeling, the brain responds by releasing corresponding neurochemicals. The parts of the brain that are involved in emotion are rich receptors for those chemicals.” Feeling guilty after wronging a neighbour usually brings distress, which further affects one's thoughts and feelings; thus, performing some rituals helps in emotional-somatic discharge

and cognitive awareness of one's surroundings. The rituals that the family participates in purify and discharge adverse thoughts, thereby restoring balance and positive inner experiences. Observing taboos promotes psychological security, hygiene, and respect for others in the family and community at large [Tatira 2000].

Conversely, the divination process involves questions to which clients respond with a ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ depending on what they agree on [Kaela, 2013]. This can be seen as a probing technique aimed at giving the diviner clues about the problem to provide proper treatment while enabling the client to internalize his or her problems as part of the healing process, as discussed previously. By involving many people through the divination process in search of the problem, the issue thereby becomes a family problem, not just an individual's problem, relieving the individual psychologically from the burden of illness. Bourdillon [1996] point out that divination is also a time when social problems underlying the sickness may be sorted out, thus reducing anxiety in the patient and setting the individual, together with the family, on the path to discovery.

Social, Spiritual, and Physical Well-being

In the Shona culture, bira is a communal ritual aimed at removing the responsibility of illness from the patient. All households of the extended family are expected to contribute grain to be used for brewing the ritual beer [Jakarasi, 2024]. Building on what has been discussed earlier, the bira ritual helps in resolving social tensions that may be underlying the illness of an individual, promoting unity

among family members and strengthening social ties. The songs and dances can also be considered a cathartic experience aimed at releasing emotional tension and facilitating peace and happiness. This indicates that traditional festivals do not only serve as entertainment but also as outlets for tensions or sources of healing. As Kilonzo and Hogan [1999] note, each ritual in the traditional mourning process has a deep psychological function. Mourning rituals serve multiple functions for the family of the bereaved. In traditional African religious cultural practices, mourning rituals address both the needs of the family and the community. For example, people come to terms with the reality of death during the funeral, and the community's traditional, ethnic, or religious identity is reaffirmed, thus aiding in social well-being.

The traditional Shona healing practices are based upon various cultural-religious beliefs; thus, health and healing practices are interrelated with traditional cultural beliefs [Sanyanga, 2024]. The traditional Shona believe that all around human nature lie broader realities in the form of boundless spiritual worlds, which influence human welfare in various ways. For the Shona, health is not merely the absence of disease but also harmony and a correct relationship with the surrounding boundless spiritual worlds. Maintaining healthy relationships with the natural and supernatural promotes the spiritual well-being of a family. Rituals and festivals in African tradition are religious ways of implementing the values and beliefs of society, and “without them, African life will be dull” [Mbiti, 1975: 143]. This is an important

way of nourishing individuals spiritually, thereby facilitating the spiritual well-being of a family at large. This can be seen as one of the existential therapies that help promote healing and forgiveness among families by focusing on the belief that inner conflict within a person [Wong, 2010].

Physical and mental health is normally promoted by the availability of adequate life-sustaining and life-enhancing resources such as food and tools, as well as by a stable and peaceful environment [Chimuka 2001]. The emphasis on *kugara kunzwana* ('mutual understanding and respect'), according to Chimhundu [1980], shows that Shona's conduct is guided by the need to avoid excesses. From the communal activities performed in the Shona cultural context, it can be noted that the physical well-being of the family is promoted. The Shona believe that life is like a heavy load that cannot be easily carried by one person [Gelfand 1981]. This realization necessitates a group approach to the challenges of life, thereby lessening emotional tension and promoting physical well-being.



Shona Boy, July 2012 © Gerhard Huber

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the role of African psychotherapy on the family's well-being, with reference to the Shona of Zimbabwe. The paper has demonstrated the need for the modification of African healing strategies by packaging herbs in neat containers with labels and instructions on how to use them. The practical formalization of African healing therapies and their introduction into the formal health care system, with continued sensitization, are important ways of improving African healing systems. Updating people with current information on how to cope with challenges that cannot be addressed through cultural practices is also vital. The contribution of the family to one's well-being can be of great help in difficult moments; hence, working toward the cohesiveness of the family system can enhance the effectiveness of African healing systems. Moreover, the importan-

ce of applying a variety of strategies allows traditional healers and users to select the proper strategies that best suit the problem for effective healing. There may also be a need to establish institutes that study and conduct research for the promotion of these cultural strategies. Appreciating the richness of Shona culture is another recommendation. Furthermore, the integration of cultural strategies in professional counseling can accommodate clients whose worldviews lie outside the Eurocentric one, making them feel accepted and understood. From that perspective, it might be vital for cultural figures who help the people to receive short courses or workshops for the enhancement of cultural healing strategies amid this changing world. Traditional practices such as *kubata maoko* during moments of grief can be strengthened among the Shona, as they promote the grieving process.

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The frenzy about White weddings: Christianity's contribution to cultural colonization through informal education in African communities

Mohammed X Ntshangase, PhD
University of Limpopo, South Africa

Abstract

Decolonization is widely discussed, yet colonial practices continue to thrive in South Africa, silencing African traditions in significant life events like weddings and funerals. Many South Africans prefer White weddings, viewing them as prestigious and desirable, largely unaware of the subtle colonial undertones. The allure of White weddings is a clear manifestation of colonial influence, where the grandeur and opulence of Western-style ceremonies are perceived as superior to traditional African customs. Critics argue that these beliefs are deeply ingrained in long-standing traditions while they perpetuate colonial agendas and hinder decolonization efforts. The widespread adoption of colonial customs, masquerading as normal, is a significant setback for decolonization and Africanization. This paper explores the underlying reasons why society perceives White weddings as superior to traditional ones. Critical Social Theory is employed to explore this phenomenon. Through the desktop qualitative approach, this study examines the cultural clashes between colonial and African traditions.

Keywords: decolonization, traditional wedding, white wedding, colonial imposition

Introduction

The point of departure in this study is, that while there are scholars like Ramadikela, Msila, and Abera [2020] who are keen to argue that African renaissance is necessary there are colonial traditions that African people still practice and consider superior to African ones. This study picks on the fundamental traditional ceremonies like weddings and funerals which according to Gopal [2021] are part and parcel of human life. Within the African traditional setting, a family begins when a man and a woman fall in love which is legitimized through a wedding cere-

mony [Akanle et al, 2019]. From that perspective, this paper argues that a wedding is a necessary fundamental ceremony from which the African tradition should be observed. Talking about decolonisation and Africanisation becomes a fancy debate that is a mere circumlocution if traditional ceremonies as primarily fundamental like weddings are colonial by nature. Nweke [2023] argues that there seems to be a serious frenzy about white weddings among African Christians. This study considers Christianity as a colonial religion which needs to be replaced by

African spirituality when African people get to be serious about decolonisation and Africanisation. Scholars like Ottuh [2022], Kouega [2022], and Resane [2020] who hold the same view as this paper argue that Christianity came from Europe with missionaries who were agents of ridiculing African spirituality and destructing traditional beliefs. This study focuses on Christianity because it is the most dominant religion in African communities, and it has a serious influential power such that it demands superiority over any other form of belief system. Kgatele and

Thinane [2023] even consider it the most powerful colonial drug which refuses to go out of the market despite all efforts made by atheists and heathens like Krause, Hitchens, and Maponga.

The important issue which necessitated the conceptualisation of this kind of study is the fact that Christianity does not end at dictating weddings, but it also dictates how burials are conducted. Akanle et al [2029] narrate that contemporary African communities have gone beyond only white wedding ceremonies and gotten into a terrain of embracing white funerals as well. For this study, the perpetual existence of white weddings and white funerals pictures the life of an African whose beginning and ending is of a Chri-

stian white colonised soul/ being. That leads to the main purpose of this study which is to argue that Christianity with its superior colonial influence hinders the necessary efforts to decolonise and re/Africanise the African people. The main question for this study is, how effective the colonisation and Africanisation efforts could be when Africans are still holding on to the belief that some colonial religions and traditions supersede African traditions? This question has its significance in the fact that it seeks to expose the argument that some African people seem to consider some colonial traditions valuable and as the source of their enlightenment. This comes as Prof Wole Soyinka Dauda and Falola [2021] argue that Africa was viewed by colonial mis-

sonaries as the jungle of darkness that needed Christianity to liberate it from barbaric darkness, and in that case, all African traditions had to be destroyed. This study will not delve in the discussions of what the white missionaries did or said about the African religions and traditional rituals at this point, but the main point is that decoloniality efforts fall into vanity when African people still feel a strong attachment to a colonial religion like Christianity [Maponga, 2024]. As Maponga [2024] argues that “you cannot have your cake and eat it”, this study asserts that African people cannot enjoy the colonial lifestyle, religion, and colonial rituals while at the same time hoping to decolonise and re/Africanise Africa.



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Mohammed Xolile Ntshangase graduated from UKZN with a triple major in Philosophy, Politics, and Law, followed by an Honours degree in Philosophy focused on African metaphysics and theology in 2014. He obtained his Master's degree in Philosophy in 2015 and in 2025 completed his PhD in Philosophy at UKZN. Mohammed currently lectures in Philosophy and Psychology of Education at the University of Limpopo. His research interests include African philosophy, philosophy of education, psychology of education, and gender studies. He has attended and presented at 12 academic conferences and has over 30 publications in DHET accredited journals. Mohammed aims to be a globally recognized scholar with a polymathic approach to research, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary studies. His accolades include the VC's Best Teacher Award in 2023 and Best Researcher Award in 2024 at the School of Education (UL).

From the main question of this study, some sub-questions became unavoidable as they are the guiding enquiry of this whole exploration. Those sub-questions are (a) what is the essence and origin of white weddings and white funerals? (b) does the practice of white weddings and white funerals bear any respect for a decolonial African? (c) how does Christianity necessarily truncate/ defy the efforts towards reconfiguring African identity which is part of Africanisation? (d) how is being a Christian incompatible with being a decolonised African person? (e) why is Christianity, being a colonial religion, still so influential in African communities that should be immersing themselves in the decolonisation and Africanisation projects? The significance of these questions is that they not only shape this study but also spark the debate about the damage that coloniality has done in the everyday lives of African people. It is at this point that this study coins the concept of “self-colonisation” as a process whereby people fail to embrace decoloniality due to their attachment to what their colonisers taught them. As Smelda and Romero [2020] argue perhaps over a long period of being colo-

nised and forced to comply someone becomes conditioned, this study blames the long period of Africans being told to reject their Africanness as the main thing that makes some refuse to drop it and be re/Africanised.

Following the aforementioned sub-questions, this study pursues the following objectives (i) to deeply explore the essence and origin of white weddings and white funerals, (ii) to explore the question of whether or not the whole practice of Christianity with its white weddings and white funerals has any respect for decolonial Africans, (iii) to explore critical arguments for the position that Christianity is incompatible with Africanness and its traditional beliefs, (iv) to explore perspectives in which being a Christian strictly conflicts with being decolonised/ Africanised being, and (v) to explore how Christianity still harnesses Africans in this decolonial era where decolonisation has become topical in many circles of debate. As it stands, this study is more of a critique than a criticism of Christianity in Africa despite the struggle to decolonise and open the space for re/Africanising the African people. For the

sake of clarity in the ideas of this study, white weddings refer to the type of weddings that are officiated by a Christian priest with the readings from the Christian bible and a total disregard for African traditions. That similarly applies to the concept of white burials. Having that clarified, one can note the following points as they emanate from literature, (i) some African thinkers are serious about decolonisation, but in many African communities white weddings and white burials continue to be an ongoing fashion, (ii) Christianity and its ritualistic processes/ events overshadow African traditional practices right on the African land and amongst African people, (iii) Christianity by its nature was to impose colonial perspective to spirituality, and it is a religion that stands incompatible with African traditional beliefs, (iv) Christianity remains a popular and growing influential religion among both learned and unlearned African people despite the ongoing decolonisation debates/ efforts, and (v) many Africans begin and end their lives with colonial Christian rituals, from being a product of white weddings to being sent off with a white burial.

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Critical social theory

Critical social theory (CST) stresses ideas of emancipation, development, and transformation acquired through a fair process of respectful deliberations Giroux [2023]. Collins et al [2021] narrate that the emancipation of any nation from oppression cannot be possible until that nation gets ready to transform the status quo. At the same time, Cherubini [2024] argues that although development in any nation is always desirable, if victims of oppression do not show interest in transformation it becomes impossible to develop. In other words, this theory’s conceptual framework interlinks emancipation, transformation, and development as processual elements acquired through respectful deliberation. In the African context, this theory aligns with the debates around the issues of decolonisation and re/Africanisation of the African people. As scholars like Barros et al [2023] would argue, emancipation hereby refers to being free from any colonial imposition whether it be religious or life in general. According to Green [2022] any nation that is colonised by the other cannot develop to its full potential because it lacks its own identity. It is against that backdrop that Ntshangase [2024] argues that together with making efforts to decolonise Africa, enough energy should be directed towards re/Africanising the debased Africans. CST is a direct critique (or at best Marcuse’s criticism) of social theory which according to Cherubini [2024] is merely concerned with understanding the status quo and living with it. Scholars of CST like Kretzel and Kaschula [2021] find it problematic that African scholars would be interested in studying colonisation just to understand it and endure coloniality.

Within the primary conceptual framework of CST, there are finer concepts like kindness, fairness, care, respect, equality, transparency, and equity [Ntshangase, 2024]. The understanding of all these concepts demands that all people have equal knowledge about their problems to play a role in emancipation, development, and transformation. Since this study is about the decolonisation of Africa and its reversion to the traditional African identity, it seems paramount and necessary to argue that all Africans must work together to oust all colonial traditions that have seized African masses. Omotosho [2024] asserts that if the emancipation of African people must happen, it will only be Africans who consciously engage in the struggle to decolonise Africa and return to its dignity. In addition to that view, this study presents the idea that it is not only the job of scholars to decolonise Africa, but rather it is the project of all African people. Within that thought, this study deems it abnormal that decolonisation has been much of an academic debate which is somehow concealed from the unlearned African masses. For instance, the mass conversions to Christianity, the overspread of white weddings, and white burial ceremonies in African communities prove the disconnect between theorisation and practice [Björck, and Johansson, 2019]. This study follows Maponga’s [2024] narrative that the popularity of colonial rituals and lifestyles in the name of modernity is tantamount to mockery of all efforts towards decoloniality and Africanness. Hence, Bentley [2021] asserts that the abnormality of white weddings and white burials can be seen from the fact that no European has ever conducted a black

wedding or black burial anywhere in the world. Taking that thought into consideration, this study goes further to argue that following colonial religions like Christianity is a sign of living within the oppressive bondage of coloniality. CST with its conceptual framework is not only for academic consumption, but it pragmatically motivates a collaborative action towards freedom, transformation, and development [Ntshangase, 2024]. In other words, CST marks its significance in this study through its defiance of the status quo and advocating the necessary mass inclusion of all Africans in the decolonisation and re/Africanisation struggle.

CST as a philosophical thought seems radical and unapologetic, but it maintains the necessary sensitivity and the communal approach to addressing social problems. Hence, this study considers CST as the most relevant theoretical framework with special concepts that are a significant drive in this study’s argumentation. At the core, this study argues for a radical holistic decolonisation that disentangles all African people from all colonial traditions, religions, and rituals. However, caution must be taken not to interpret this study as arguing that Christianity is wrong, rather one must understand Christianity as a foreign religion which is one of the tools to perpetually undermine decolonisation efforts.

Christianity and Cultural Colonization

Despite its colonial imposition on African traditions, Christianity continues to thrive in different parts of Africa. This enduring presence often results in a complex relationship where many Africans find themselves bound by the tenets of colonialism. The incompatibility between Christianity and African traditional beliefs, along with its dominance over indigenous practices, highlights the ongoing impact of this cultural colonization.

The enduring popularity of white weddings and funerals

Scholars like Asngar, Nkoa, and Zambo [2022] argue that colonisation was a process that fulfilled its purpose of imposing indignity on being an African and mentally debasing the value of African people. This study could not agree more with this view because findings show that even in this era where there are vivid debates against colonisation some African communities are still stuck in colonial traditions. The expectation was that once African people gained political independence from Western colonisers, they would abandon all colonial traditions, rituals, and influences, but as Thiam et al [2020] argue, that is still a mirage. Literature bears evidence that scholars like Soyinka [in Dauda and Falola, 2021] and Maponga [2024] have made noticeable efforts to decolonise African thought around religion, spirituality, and social rituals. However, with the widespread white weddings and white burials in African communities, it seems apparent that scholarly efforts are locked in universities for only academic utility and nothing more than that. Maponga [2024] argues that the place for an African priest ends within the four corners of

the shrine such that even those who consult the Dibia or Inyanga feel ashamed of it while attending church is considered fashionable. Due to the shame of being African, some conduct the African traditional wedding first and still see it mandatory to arrange a white wedding [Carter, 2022], and that invariably expresses the superiority conferred to Christianity over the African traditional spirituality. On one hand, there are those Africans who live from birth to death as captives of Christianity while on the other hand, there are those who live as heathens according to Christians but get a white burial after death [Maponga, 2024]. According to Narah [2022] in some communities, some people have never seen an African burial that has no element of Christianity whatsoever, hence they run to call a pastor to conduct the burial even if the deceased never like Christianity.

Christianity's dominance over African traditional practices

Christianity came to Africa with Western missionaries who were on a mission to clean Africans of paganism and barbarism (Maponga, 2024). To the Westerners, Africans were godless and consumed with paganism which according to Dauda and Falola (2021) is idol worship due to lack of knowledge of the only true God. In other words, colonisers of the African nation acknowledged African religions/ spirituality, but as something to be destructed and be dominated by Christianity. For the colonial missionaries to fulfil their mission, there was a dire need to demonise or bedevil African norms of worship and all their ceremonies, thereby giving Christianity the composure of being a messiah to save Africans from

paganism and barbarism [Noyes, 2022]. As the colonisation process advanced, many African people grew a sense of shame regarding their traditional beliefs and that compelled them to convert to Christianity according to Maponga's [2024] and Noyes's [2022] narrative. The hope was that Christianity would give them honour and make them equal with their colonisers, but as Maponga [2024] narrates, that remains an idea hoped for. In some African communities where Christianity is quite dominant children grow up being taught that non-Christians are heathens or sinners who must not be honoured until they convert to Christianity [Dadau and Falola, 2021]. That kind of thinking somehow harnesses those who are already Christians into disrespecting anything that falls within African spirituality, and as Gagne [2024] narrates reverting to African traditional customs gets considered as digression and being lost. This seems to be the kind of thinking that motivates the contemporary Africans' state of being ignorant of their traditional practices and rituals. Therefore, Christianity finds a fertile ground to flourish regardless of it being foreign and colonial. Maponga [2024] argues that Christianity's disrespect for African beliefs can be seen from the times when some Christian churches taught some Africans to consider their ancestors as demons while honouring some foreign spirits called angels. In a clear perspective, Iheanacho [2021] argues that in some communities the very people of African origin cannot conceive of any blessed ceremony besides being sanctified by a Christian priest. According to Sibani and Nyama [2024] Christianity being colonial as it is, continues to forcefully overshadow African

traditional beliefs and practices, hence the overspread of Christian ritual ceremonies than African traditional ones.

Incompatibility of Christianity with African Traditional Beliefs

Given that on its very inception and delivery to Africa Christianity was to destroy African traditions and dominate debased African people, it is not surprising at all that it remains incompatible with African traditional beliefs. Mokhoathi [2019] gives a narrative of some African people who have dual religiosity, whereby by in one person keeps the African traditional practices and becomes a Christian at the same time. Although that might sound well to others, this study considers such as serious dishonesty because it is done by cowardly Africans who fear full rejection of Christianity. Nweke [2020] argues that some African Christians are held into Christianity for fear of going to hell and burning for eternity if they leave Christianity, and that is what they are taught by pastors in churches. Then it is not only the case that Christianity is incompatible with African traditional beliefs and rituals, but it is strictly incompatible with any other belief system. According to Cornille [2021], Christianity uses threats to instil fear in people for them to remain captives even when they want to leave it, and that means one must have deep courage and be ready to face condemnation by Christians before leaving the church. In the case that Makhoathi [2019] narrates about, whereby some African people are found embracing/ following both Christianity and African traditional belief systems this study argues that such is due to a serious state of cumbersome confusion. Those who subscribe

to dual religiosity usually prioritise and present Christianity as the main one while at times sneaking into traditional African beliefs and practices privately or as a back-up. In a nutshell that means all Africans who practice dual religiosity still respect the colonial superiority of Christianity over the African belief system. This leads to the next theme discussed below as it leads to the continuity of Christianity's dominance in Africa during this era of decolonisation.

Christianity with its colonial override over African traditions still thrives

Scholars like Haramanuba and Maponga [2024] have given lectures in the public media like YouTube podcasts about African spirituality but regardless of all that, Christianity still thrives among African people. This means that despite all efforts employed by African decoloniality scholars, Christianity still overrides the idea of Africanness among ordinary African people in villages or communities. According to Mutwa and Icke [2019], since African spirituality and traditional beliefs do not have any elements of threats like eternal hellfire, they suffer being sacrificed for Christianity. Another reason for Christianity to keep thriving despite counter efforts to decolonise Africa is the fact that the current generation of Africans values modernity over African traditional beliefs which make up the African identity [Maponga, 2024]. This study posits that perhaps methods used by African scholars to popularise African spirituality and its significance in the project of African decolonisation are less effective. However, it remains not clear what radical methods would

be used to de-Christianise Africa and properly free African people from the colonial shackles. Haramanuba and Maponga [2024] relate that lies are usually easier to believe than the truth, with that thought in mind, this study argues that those Africans who sacrifice their African traditions and beliefs believing that Christianity will grant them honour have found it easier to believe the untruth. Therefore, since Christianity as colonial as it is, issues threats of eternal hellfire and promises of eternal bliss in heaven, people get more prone to following it than other belief systems that do not share the same content. Contrary to Christianity, African spirituality does not have any threats or uncertain promises that could serve as the equivalent of eternal hellfire and heavenly bliss [Haramanuba and Maponga, 2024], it is rather more voluntary for everyone. Therefore, Christianity so far has a more coercive nature than the African traditional belief system, and that is why masses have converted to Christianity and are afraid to revert to their African traditional beliefs.

Africans spend their entire lives in the bondage of colonial Christianity

Any organisational setting that coerces people to join or not leave could be accused of keeping people in bondage [Maponga, 2024]. There is no other explanation for the fact that African people forget themselves or their African identity trying to fulfil the requirements of being a Christian, except downright stating that those Africans live in bondage. According to Glenn [2019] living in captivity of being threatened with eternal hellfire if you leave, in this era whereby scholars apply their

time and effort into the process of decolonisation is a shameful situation. The first problem that certifies this bondage amongst the African people is being born into a Christian home after one's parents underwent a white wedding ceremony. Glen [2019] argues that some people bear the pain of tolerating different forms of Christian abuse till death because they are institutionalised into believing that Christianity is the only way to live. However, some African scholars like Haramanuba and Maponga [2024] express the pain of having children who grow up being told that practising African traditional rituals is devilish or a sin caused by paganism. From that line of

thought, this study considers both the widespread of Christianity and the stagnation of those Africans who have lived as Christian captives for life as an unignorable shame. It is an unbearable shame because nowadays information is very much more accessible than it was back in the dark ages whereby the decolonisation project would remain quite hidden [Mutwa and Icke, 2019]. Although this view might be challenged, this study argues that if Christianity had any value for African people, Western colonial settlers would have never shared it with African people whom they wanted to weaken, debase, and dominate.

Recommendations

After a careful exploration of the findings and discussions in this study, the following recommendations seem important as suggestions to address this problematic phenomenon. The recommendations from this study are (a) African scholars who are seriously making efforts towards decoloniality must devise ways to work with communities than making the decolonisation project be only an academic discourse, (b) African thinkers who have deeper knowledge about African traditions and beliefs should find spaces where they interact with religious figures in communities, (c) there must be a tentative way radicalise Afrocentric philosophy and spirituality amongst African people, (d) there must be forms/ models to organise platforms where knowledgeable and leading African thinkers like Soyinka, Maponga, and others give talks about African traditional beliefs, rituals, and practices, (e) African scholars and African spiritual priests must work together in sensitizing communities towards valuing African traditions and rituals involved in human life and its continuity.

Conclusion

This desktop qualitative study has found that the existence and embrace of Christianity which is a colonial religion as well as the widespread practice of its rituals undermine the efforts of decolonisation. The whole decolonisation discourse remains the academic project locked in universities if the African communities keep succumbing to Christian influence. By far, this study has argued that it remains a topic of further research as to how African thinkers can radicalise their decolonisation project in communities where counter-thinking is de-

monstrated. In addition, this study asserts that perhaps African philosophers must work together with sages who can capacitate communities with African indigenous knowledge. At the core, this study's significance lies in its critique of Christianity as a religion that, although popular in African communities, undermines decolonisation efforts. This study further exposes the uncommonly spoken truths about Christianity, and it seeks to enlighten both academics and ordinary Africans who find themselves trapped in coloniality while wishing to revert to

their traditional customs. As some scholars argue that one who has found his identity cannot be conquered again, this study purports the same idea that the contemporary African Christians who have lost their African identity are more prone to both self-colonisation and recolonisation by the same colonisers. As the discussion ends, this study concludes by saying that the African decolonial scholars still have a lot to do given the frenzy about white weddings and white burials in African communities.

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Africanity of Thaddeus Metz's Relational Moral Theory

Felix Mofolo, MA
Arrupe Jesuit University, Harare, Zimbabwe

Abstract

African metaphysics and religion significantly influence African ethics or moral theory. African moral life is deeply connected with beliefs in the afterlife, healing, causality, sickness, death, hierarchical existence (hierarchical conception of being), and supernatural powers. Yet, Thaddeus Metz, a contemporary African moralist, excluded the concepts of metaphysics and religion in his Relational Moral Theory (RMT). This exclusion has prompted debates on the Africanity or the authenticity of RMT as an African theory. While scholars agree on RMT's African roots, some argue that it is more African even without these elements, while others believe it is less African due to its exclusion. This article seeks to examine the discourse on the Africanity of Metz's Relational Moral Theory, ultimately concluding that Metz's exclusion of African metaphysics and religion does not render them irrelevant to African moral thought but was rather a deliberate move to develop a defensible moral theory both within and beyond Africa.

Keywords: Africanity, (RMT), Ubuntu, Exclusion, African Metaphysics, Religion, Relationality.

Introduction

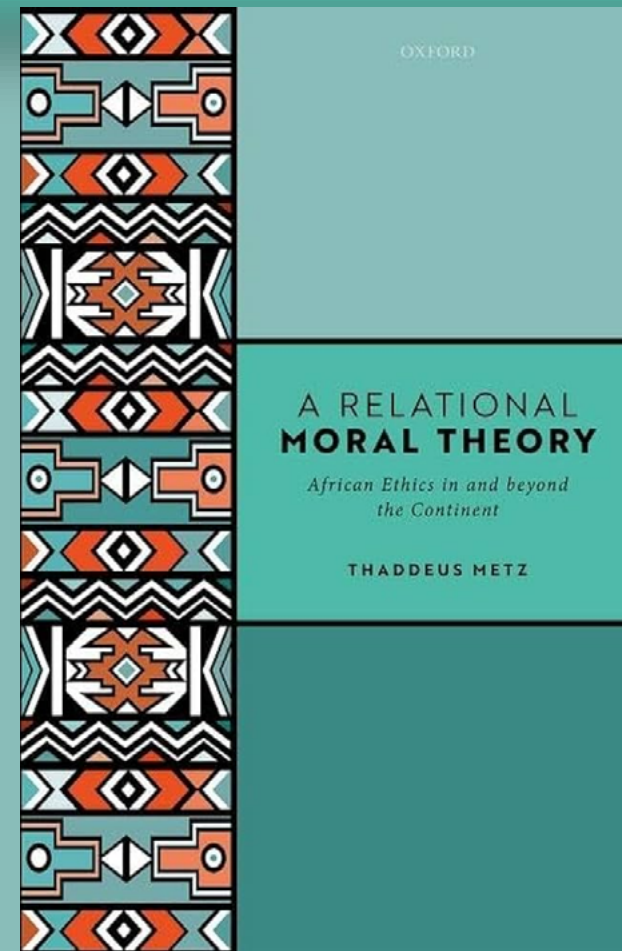
Thaddeus Metz, an African philosopher with American roots, has made substantial contributions to the study of African philosophy, particularly ethics. He adopts an analytical approach to the discourse on African morality. In his prominent work *A Relational Moral Theory: African Ethics in and Beyond the Continent*, published in 2022, Metz seeks to develop an African ethical framework that is applicable both within and outside Africa [Metz 2022]. This framework, known as the Relational Moral Theory (RMT), posits that morality involves fostering communal relationships and respecting the beings or entities that possess the capacity to form

such connections [Mofolo 2024]. In essence, the core of ethics lies in honouring individuals who can relate to others, rather than merely promoting communal relationships. Respecting a being entails identifying oneself with others, showing solidarity, and providing mutual support [Metz 2022]. However, RMT has generated diverse reactions within the academic community of African ethics.

On one hand, scholars commend Metz for his methodical and analytical approach to African ethics. His integration of traditional African values into modern ethical discourse highlights the depth and relevance of RMT. Ad-

ditionally, RMT has spurred further exploration and development of African ethics, inspiring academic research and discussions. On the other hand, RMT has also prompted debates, particularly regarding the interpretation and application of African moral concepts. Some scholars argue that RMT may not fully capture the nuances of traditional African thought. For instance, Metz [2022] deliberately excludes metaphysical and religious claims from RMT due to their controversial and impractical nature. Such exclusions could potentially limit the universality of RMT in societies that downplay metaphysical or religious claims.

Felix Mofolo holds a Master of Arts in Philosophy and Humanities from Arrupe Jesuit University (AJU) in Harare, Zimbabwe. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Human Sciences from the Catholic University of Malawi (CUNIMA) and a Diploma in Philosophy and Religious Studies from the Inter-Congregational Institute (ICI), affiliated with CUNIMA. Felix has lectured at METI University and taught in various secondary and primary schools in Malawi. His research interests include moral philosophy, African philosophy, religion, environmental studies, Indigenous philosophies of education, and inclusive education.



Therefore, this paper examines whether Metz's exclusion of metaphysical and religious claims lessens or diminishes RMT's Africanity. To achieve this goal, the article begins by defining some key terminologies that cut across the work. Secondly, the work explores the debate on an authentic African moral theory and offers a response grounded in Ubuntu philosophy and RMT. Then, the section presents the author's perspective on what constitutes an African moral theory. Later, the paper addresses the question of whether RMT is more African than Ubuntu. The article concludes with the author's final thoughts on the matter.

Understanding Key Terms

This work discusses Metz's RMT while emphasising its African roots. To begin with, it is essential to define morality which cuts across this article. Morality originates from the Latin word *moralis*, which refers to guiding a person's behaviour within society [etymonline.com]. Essentially, morality serves as a mechanism to regulate or direct individuals' actions within a community. Metz [2022] interprets morality as relational, meaning it involves respecting or honouring a being's¹ capacity to relate or commune with others. Thus, morality entails valuing a being for its own sake,

rather than as a tool for achieving another purpose [Metz 2022]. Having understood the concept of morality, let us discuss the concept of a moral theory.

Metz [2009: 339] contends that a 'moral theory is a fundamental principle that accounts for what right actions, as distinct from wrong, have in common'. This implies that moral theory is prescriptive, offering guidelines for rationally determining what is good or bad and what is right or wrong. For Metz's account, moral actions or morality promote friendliness, whereas immoral actions

¹ In this work, the term being is synonymous with entity, meaning both living and non-living, including humans, animals, plants, and lifeless entities (stones, corpses, etc).

or immorality extend to unfriendliness [Metz 2022]. Friendliness involves respecting an entity's capacity to commune or relate with others. Metz [2022: 110] articulates the principle of friendliness by stating that;

“[a]n act is right if and only if it respects individuals in virtue of their capacity to be a party to harmonious ways of relating ... An action is permissible if it treats beings as special in accordance with their ability to be friendly or to be befriended.”

Moreover, let us discuss how Metz conceptualises an African Moral Theory. Metz [2009: 339] defines an African Moral Theory² (AMT) as ‘a philosophical construction unifying a wide array of the moral judgments and practices found among many of the black and Bantu-speaking peoples of the sub-Saharan region’. Metz [2015b: 186] further explains that AMT is considered African because it refers to;

“ideas about what the good life is for human beings and which choices they should make that have been salient in the world views of black peoples indigenous to the sub-Saharan region and, especially, in contemporary philosophical writings grounded on them.”

This entails that a moral theory is African if it is grounded in the enduring or recurrent lifestyles, ideas, customs, and traditions commonly found in Africa. It is not deemed African merely by referencing the dominant views and teachings of African philosophers and ethicists throughout history [Metz 2022]. Additionally, even if similar properties are found in other places, such as China, a moral theory is African if these properties have been long-standing in Africa.

Finally, a Relational Moral Theory (RMT) states that morality or rightness is ‘a function of communal relationship, a way that individuals can and should interact’

[Metz 2022: 2]. RMT serves both descriptive and prescriptive functions. It is descriptive when it outlines what various African cultures value or consider right, and prescriptive when it dictates what should be valued. RMT would position that the right act ‘is a matter of honouring individuals in virtue of their capacity for communal relationships, where one (but not the only) facet of these relationships involves helping others and being helped by others’ [Metz 2022: 75]. This means that RMT values friendliness and people ought to honour friendliness. Thus, the foundation of RMT is not the actual relationship as the ultimate end or highest good, but the capacity to execute and maintain such relationships. In essence, moral agents³ respect a being's capacity to relate by sharing identity and showing solidarity with others. So, let us venture into the debate on the authenticity of a moral theory to be African.



² In this article, the term African Moral Theory will be used interchangeably with African ethics.

³ According to Gichure Wanjiru Christine [2008:60], moral agents ‘are persons who can reason and be responsible for their actions’. It means that moral agents have the capacity to hold moral responsibility for their actions such as adult human persons. Other beings such as children below the age of reason, mentally incapacitated people or animals are moral subjects. They are moral subjects because they cannot hold a moral responsibility for their acts but, their actions can be questioned on moral grounds for instance, if a child's act inflicts pain and pollutes the air.

Debate on an Authentic African Moral Theory

There is an ongoing debate about what constitutes an authentic African moral theory, with significant disagreement among scholars due to their diverse political, social, economic, philosophical, and technological backgrounds. This diversity leads to biased interpretations of what is truly African. Proponents of Ubuntu philosophy argue that humanness, or Ubuntu, forms the foundation of African ethics. Ifeanyi Menkiti [2017] asserts that Ubuntu, which translates to humanness, entails living a genuine life and avoiding behaviours that dehumanises oneself or others, for example, committing suicide, theft, and voluntary or intentional abortion. That's, for Africans, Ubuntu emphasises living communally and seeking help from fellow community members. In other words, Ubuntu recommends us not to kill ourselves or others voluntarily or intentionally as it cuts sacred human life⁴.

Yvonne Mokgoro [1998: 17] describes Ubuntu as ‘harmony achieved through close and sympathetic social relationships within the group’. This indicates that African morality revolves around caring for others and not existing in isolation. This emphasis on relationships is encapsulated in the African (Nguni) aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which can be translated as a person is a person through other persons [Tutu 1999]. This aphorism or maxim entails that Africans should be genuine, true, and morally virtuous [Ramose 2005]. Despite various

interpretations, Ubuntu is broadly recognised as a central concept in African moral theory.

Another interpretation of an African moral theory is modal relationalism, also known as a Relational Moral Theory (RMT), as developed by an African moralist, Thaddeus Metz. Metz [2015: 186] argues that RMT is genuinely African, because,

“ideas about what the good life is for human beings and which choices they should make that have been salient in the world views of black peoples indigenous to the sub-Saharan region and, especially, in contemporary philosophical writings grounded on them.”

RMT is rooted in the enduring or recurrent lifestyles, ideas, customs, and traditions prevalent in Africa. It would also entail that; the theory is African not just by referencing the views of African philosophers and ethicists but by being grounded in these long-standing African elements [Metz 2022]. Even if similar concepts are found elsewhere, like in China, a moral theory is considered African if these elements have been historically significant or long-standing in African soil.

Furthermore, RMT is African because it addresses issues pertinent to African societies and beyond. In environmental ethics⁵, RMT states that it is wrong to prioritise trivial interests over the urgent

needs of the environment, and playing with animals for fun is considered morally wrong [Metz 2023]. Additionally, RMT extends moral status to non-human agents, such as aliens or Martians, due to their capability to form communal relationships [Metz 2023]. In business ethics, RMT generally promotes partiality but also supports impartiality in certain crucial or necessary circumstances [Metz 2022].

Lastly, RMT is African because it draws on the insights of African moral philosophers. Metz has emphasised the value of learning from the wisdom of indigenous scholars. He learned the concept of friendliness or social harmony, an African *summum bonum* (greatest good), from Desmond Tutu [Tutu 1999]. Metz also interpreted friendliness as sharing identity and demonstrating solidarity as influenced by Kenneth Kaunda and Nelson Mandela [Mofolo 2024]. Thus, by building on the work of existing scholars, Metz firmly believes that RMT is African. Despite Metz's conviction, the question of what constitutes an African moral theory remains outstanding. Therefore, the next section of the paper will explore a comprehensive understanding of African ethics.

⁴ In Africa, human life which is the principle of movement in human beings is sacred. The term sacred or sanctity is ‘that which makes something to be treated with a great respect’ [Mofolo 2018:15]. Sanctity also entails intrinsic goodness and value that offers a condition for respect and protection of human life. So, the sanctity of human life entails the great respectability of human life.

⁵ Environmental ethics emphasises the promotion, conservation and respect of animals, plants, and other entities. Environmental ethics stresses the importance of respecting the dignity and value of nature.

Understanding of an African Moral Theory

The term Africanity will entail criteria or requirements of a moral principle or theory to be considered truly from the African soil. Scholars agree that an African moral theory should encompass several features including metaphysics, religion, the principle of humanity, professionalism, ethics, contextuality, complementarity, and relationality.

In the first place, metaphysics, which addresses fundamental questions of existence, reality, and the universe, is particularly significant in Africa. People in Africa often contemplate the meaning of life, suffering, healing, death, witchcraft, and the afterlife. In African thought, for example, life is seen as infinite, and continuous without a clear distinction between life and death. That is a reason Kwasi Wiredu [1980] views life as a preparation for the next life or existence. Death is considered a rite of passage to another realm, where one joins the ancestors or the Supreme Being, referred to by names such as Mulungu in Chichewa or Chinyanja, Mungu in Kiswahili, Mwari in Shona, and Nkosi Nkulunkulu in Ndebele. No wonder John Mbiti [1975] refers to deceased relatives as the living-dead stressing their enduring presence and positive influence on their living descendants.

Ancestors also play a crucial role in caring for, supporting, and protecting the living, serving as sources of wisdom, knowledge, lifestyle, and morality. Disobedience to the ancestors' guidance can lead to sickness, death, calamities, and natural disasters. The remedy often involves repentance and appeasement through sacrifices [Mazama 2002].

Now, the question is, why metaphysics is significant in African morality? African metaphysics mostly emphasises the interconnectedness of all beings (living and non-living, finite and infinite, alive or dead). This interconnectedness has the potential to promote responsibility and respect towards others, hence, leading to moral behaviours that foster community well-being and harmony. It also promotes communalism or cooperation, solidarity, and mutual support which identifies African ethics as opposed to Western individualism. These traditions and norms are transmitted through oral traditions, rituals, and cultural practices. Hence, instilling moral values and guiding individuals in making ethical decisions. Thus, excluding the significance of African metaphysics from a moral theory renders incompleteness.

Secondly, an African moral theory should incorporate elements of religion⁶. Most Africans adhere to a hierarchical concept of being, with natural elements at the bottom, followed by animals, humans, ancestors⁷, deities⁸, and God [Mazama 2002]. Africans believe that God has supreme authority over all. However, there is no direct interaction with lower, corporeal or material beings, such as humans, unless mediated through deities and ancestors, owing to their spiritual nature. Deities, who never existed as material beings on earth, act as messengers of God, while ancestors continue to influence and support or care for living human beings. Both deities and ancestors can convey God's messages through dreams and natural disasters and serve as sources of morality, which can be interpreted through divination⁹ by fortune tellers, priests, traditional healers, and sorcerers.

In Zimbabwe, among the Shona people, Fainos Mangena notes the concept of totemism (mitupo), which contributes positively to environmental protection [Mangena 2013]. Totemism postulates that humans have a spiritual kinship with particular animals, plants, or natural objects, which serve as symbols or emblems for specific clans, families, or tribes. Mange-

na [2013] argues that totemism encourages humans to treat these animals with reverence to maintain the cosmic balance and avoid problems such as droughts, famine, and diseases. For example, if one's totem is a goat, it is considered immoral or abominable to eat or ridicule a goat. In this way, totemism impacts environmental protection.

Thirdly, an African moral theory ought to promote humanness. In Africa, humanness embodies qualities like selflessness and commitment to one's community, which are valued more than the celebration of individual achievements and disposition [Dolamo 2013]. Humanness is demonstrated through compassion, kindness, and benevolence. Thus, what is morally good respects the dignity or existence of others. Going further, African moralists also believe that morality is inherently philosophical.

Fourthly, Jonathan Chimakonam and Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues [2023] define philosophy as the systematic and analytical study of questions deemed philosophical by the relevant community. This definition implies that African ethics emphasises thorough and logical investigations into societal questions, highlighting the collaborative nature of philosophical inquiry where the community collectively identifies key questions to be explored and examined. Regardless of whether it uses metaphysical or religious terms, African ethics should be open to testing against new realities and experiences in a dynamic world. Peter Hountondji, one of the African moral scholars, supports this central theme of African ethics. Additionally, an African moral theory should be fundamentally ethical.

Fifthly, an African moral theory should be ethical [Chimakonam and Rodrigues 2023]. Chimakonam and Rodrigues [2023: 4] describe ethics as 'a systematic and analytical study of normative problems'. The goal of ethics is to understand and guide how individuals and societies should act by employing reasoned analysis and systematic inquiry into moral principles and values. Hence, African ethics involves a rigorous and methodological approach to exploring ethical and value-based questions, emphasising the importance of logical reasoning and structured methods to address issues related to norms and values. As well, an African moral theory should be contextual.

Moreover, the principle of contextuality posits that 'the moral values of behaviours or actions can only be determined within contexts' [Chimakonam and Rodrigues 2023: 11]. This implies that moral judgments in African ethics are influenced by various situational and cultural factors, and are not absolute. Not all circumstances are judged equally; the needs, intentions, consequences, culture, background, and situations of others are vital. For instance, while no culture promotes abortion due to the sanctity of human life, a pregnancy that endangers a woman's life may be terminated. However, this termination does not validate the rightness or legality of abortion but underscores the importance of the woman's life. It means morals or norms may be interpreted and understood differently according to a situation, context, or circumstance. Moreover, African morality should also consider the role of complementarity.

Furthermore, the principle of complementarity asserts that conflicting moral values are not merely contradictory but rather complementary [Chimakonam and Rodrigues 2023]. This means that African moral values, even when appearing opposed, can work together to form a more balanced and nuanced ethical framework. The principle of complementarity is also evident in the RMT's dichotomy of subject and object. This dichotomy shows that moral actions are not solely about individual subjects acting in isolation, but also about how subjects relate to objects and how objects directly or indirectly affect other entities. This could be a reason Metz refutes the criticism that RMT does not protect aliens and he holds that immoral actions by aliens or animals can be accounted for in a moral framework [Metz 2023]. Furthermore, an African moral theory should be relational.

Finally, an African moral theory includes the principle of relationality. In this work, relationality entails that, ethical behaviours should focus on fostering positive relationships, communal bonds, interpersonal connections, and mutual respect. This principle postulates that 'social behaviours or values are necessarily relational' [Chimakonam and Rodrigues 2023: 11]. It suggests that behaviours and values are fundamentally about how individuals relate to and interact with one another and cannot be fully understood or practised in isolation from their social context. Thus, the essence of African moral theory is grounded in relationships with others, transcending constraints such as gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, or historical background.

⁶ Religion can be described as a collection of beliefs, practices, and systems that connect humanity to spiritual and moral values. It generally includes the worship of deities, rituals, moral codes, and worldviews that aim to explain existence, the universe, and humanity's role within it. Religion often involves sacred texts, traditions, and institutions that are crucial in shaping a culture's identity and societal norms. Therefore, to be religious would mean to hold a deep belief in a deity or deities and engage in the rituals and customs linked to that belief [Cambridge Online Dictionary].

⁷ In Africa, ancestors refer to spirits or elders or deceased family members who are venerated and honoured by their descendants. They can be also referred to as saints in a Christian set-up. Ancestors are believed to give guidelines and protection to the living.

⁸ Deities are beings of higher power often worshipped or revered in various African religions and cultures. They can also be identified as angels in a Christian set-up. They are believed to possess supernatural abilities and often play pivotal roles in myths, creation stories, and spiritual practices.

⁹ Divination in Africa refers to the practice of seeking knowledge or guidance from the spiritual realm to understand events, situations, or the future. It is a significant aspect of many African cultures and often involves various rituals and techniques to communicate with deities, ancestors, or other spiritual entities. Divination is often performed by specialised practitioners such as priests (ansembe), traditional healers (asing'anga), or diviners (oombeza ula), who are believed to have a deep connection to the spiritual world. This practice is not only used to predict the future but also to find solutions to problems, heal illnesses, and maintain harmony within the community. Different methods of divination are used across the continent, including: throwing bones: this involves casting bones, shells, or other objects and interpreting the patterns they form; consulting oracles: some cultures have specific individuals who serve as oracles and are believed to have the ability to receive messages from the divine; dream interpretation: dreams are often seen as messages from the spiritual world and are analysed for their symbolic meanings.

The principle of relationality is a core aspect of RMT. The Relational Moral Theory asserts that ‘right action is a matter of honouring individuals in virtue of their capacity for communal relationships, where one (but not the only) facet of these relationships involves helping others and being helped by others’ [Metz and Miller 2016:

2; Metz 2022: 121]. This principle invites moral agents to be friendly towards themselves and others, especially those capable of friendliness. It promotes moral values based on their impact on relationships and friendliness between individuals. Therefore, RMT emphasises the importance of relationships, interconnecte-

dness, mutual care, community support, and friendliness. A moral principle that encompasses the above eight factors qualifies as an authentic African moral theory. So, the next section will analyse whether RMT is more African than other moral principles, such as Ubuntu.

Africanity of the Relational Moral Theory vis-as-vis Ubuntu

Considering both Thaddeus Metz’s views and those of other scholars on what constitutes an authentic African moral principle, RMT can be seen as more and less African. Firstly, RMT is more African because it embodies the core of Africanity or morality, which is relationality. For Metz, relationality involves respecting or honouring beings that have a capability to foster communal relationships. He categorically asserts that, for Africans, morality means recognising others as fellow Africans or humans with their own goals, interests, needs, likes, and dislikes. Regardless of any situation or circumstance, one should have a sense of belonging. Additionally, uplifting each other through mutual support, love, care, or help is essential. Consequently, being African should not only be about theoretically recognising dignity, humanity, or identity but also practically being of service to one another.

Moreover, relating involves allowing oneself to be assimilated, incorporated, recognised, and benefited by others capable of doing so. In simple terms, morality is about welcoming others into one’s life and providing space to achieve mutual goals and visions. Chielozone Eze [2016] argues that a true African acknowledges the humanity and dignity of others

as part of one’s own. Morality fosters empathetic imagination, which means seeing the world from another person’s perspective without any sense of superiority or power (Eze 2016). However, this does not mean that morality requires self-sacrifice. Morality requires mutual sacrifice, where both parties feel, think, and are passionate about associating and engaging with one another. These scholars further assert that skin colour, birthplace, or soil do not define Africanity as a moral concept or theory.

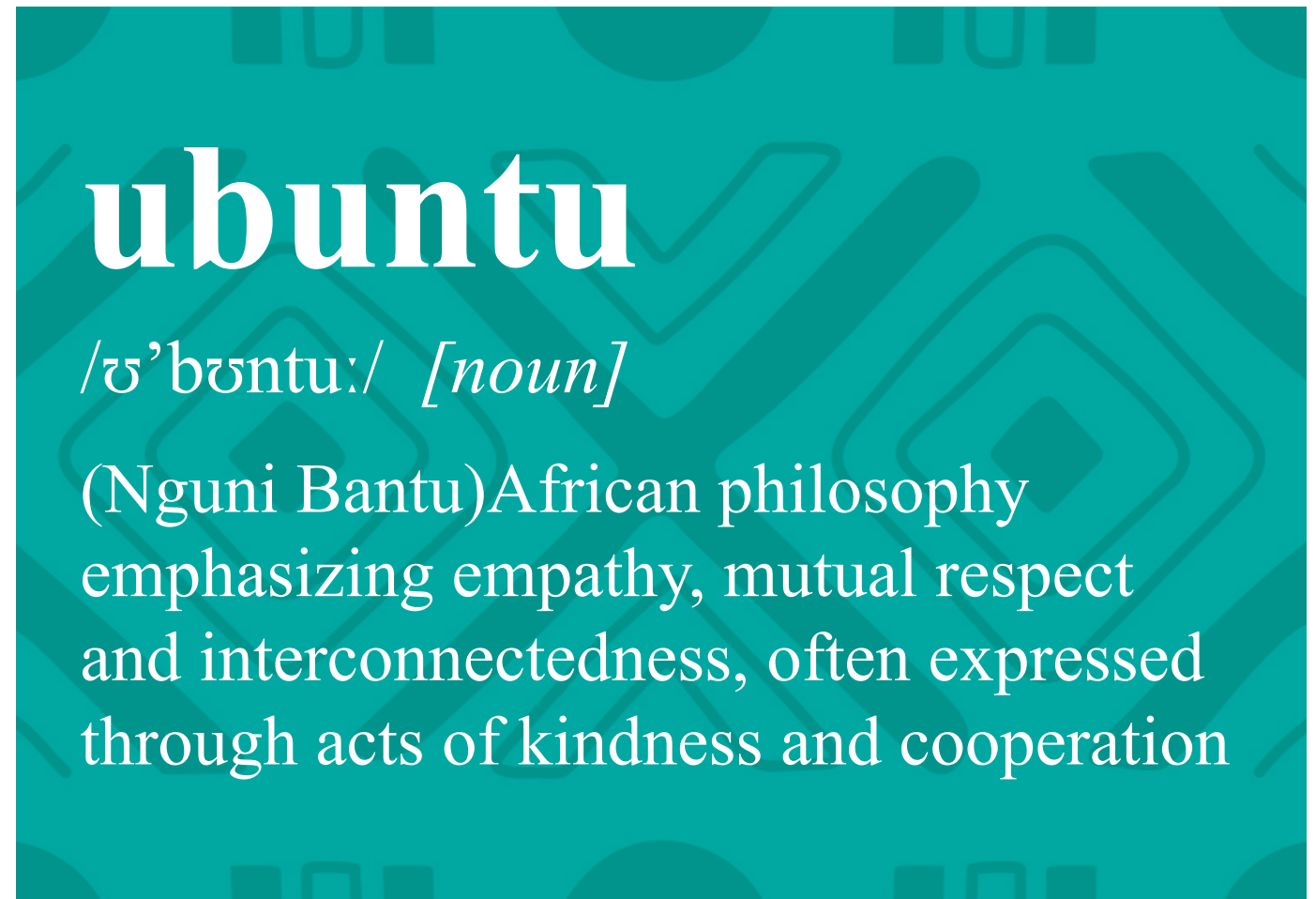
Furthermore, RMT is considered more African because it is prescriptive, providing normative guidance [Metz 2015a]. Unlike merely describing existing moral practices, RMT offers principles on how individuals should decide and act, emphasising the importance of harmonious relationships and the capacity to commune. Being prescriptive also involves communal obligations, as Metz argues that everyone has a moral duty to promote the well-being of their partners in relationships.

In addition, RMT is prescriptive as it emphasises active participation [Metz 2015b]. It rejects passive observation and calls for intentional efforts to foster understanding, empathy, and shared values [Metz 2022]. Moreover,

RMT prescribes a universal principle [Metz 2015b]. It implies that, although rooted in an African thought system, this principle transcends local contexts to address global moral dilemmas such as abortion and environmental degradation.

Conversely, RMT is seen as less African because it lacks features like metaphysics and religion. Thaddeus Metz deliberately excluded metaphysical and religious claims from RMT, as he believed that, they do not provide practical evidence or moral guidance [Metz 2022]. For Metz, incorporating metaphysics would not be ideal for explaining everyday moral decision-making, as metaphysical claims are more descriptive than prescriptive. Additionally, Metz did not define his moral theory using religious beliefs or beliefs in the spiritual world, which are often seen as legitimising moral concepts.

However, it is evident that, in traditional African societies, a good life is achieved through strong connections with fellow humans, religion, ancestors, and the Supreme Being [Magesa 1997]. Jacob Olupona [2014: 39-40] supports this view that ‘diviners act as intermediaries between the supernatural and human worlds. They decipher hidden meanings to ad-



dress misfortune, sickness, death, and calamity, or to forecast good tidings or future occurrences. Nevertheless, Metz does not adhere to these prevalent narratives in African moral philosophy. He argues that metaphysical claims ‘are highly contestable and so inappropriate for a particular purpose, which is to construct an ethic with a broad scope, one that could be appreciated by a multicultural audience’ [Metz 2022: 17]. This implies that religious claims may restrict the universal applicability of a moral theory, making it more pertinent only to a specific community that holds religious or metaphysical claims. Moreover, invoking divine revelation does not offer rationally justifiable arguments that are accessible and defensible to outsiders or non-Africans [Metz 2022]. Appealing to religious claims may limit a moral theory’s defensibility in global ethics, particularly to atheistic or agnostic¹⁰ communities.

In many African philosophies, there is no clear separation between the spiritual and the moral perspectives. Morality, metaphysics, and religion are intertwined aspects of a holistic worldview. Moral values are often derived from metaphysical beliefs and religious practices, and separating them would fragment this perspective. Metaphysical beliefs and religious traditions provide a foundation for moral values in many African societies, influencing moral judgements and behaviours. For instance, beliefs about the nature of existence, the role of ancestors, and the relationship between humans and the divine influence moral judgements and behaviours. Removing this foundation would leave African morality unanchored.

African morality is deeply embedded in cultural traditions and religious practices, which include rites, rituals, and stories that

convey moral lessons and ethical guidelines. Disregarding metaphysics and religion would strip African morality of its cultural context and integrity. Additionally, metaphysical and religious beliefs play a crucial role in shaping community identity and social cohesion. African moral values often emphasise communal well-being, reciprocity, and interconnectedness, reinforced through religious and metaphysical frameworks. Separating these elements would weaken the communal aspect of African morality.

Lastly, many African moral systems recognise a spiritual dimension to existence that influences ethical behaviours. Concepts such as Ubuntu underscore the importance of acknowledging the humanity and spirituality in others. Disassociating morality from metaphysics and religion would disregard this essential spiritual aspect. Overall, African morali-

ty, metaphysics, and religion are deeply interconnected, creating a cohesive and culturally significant worldview. Disentangling these elements would diminish the richness and complexity of African moral systems. In other terms, the relegation of these core concepts, which define key African values, norms, and beliefs, was implausible. Rather than seeking an authentic African Moral Theory (AMT) with the discussed features, Metz created a metaphorical moral theory that appears African but lacks sufficient African characteristics. It also implies that Metz was judging an African concept by non-African standards.

Nevertheless, Thaddeus Metz's exclusion of metaphysical and religious claims did not suggest that such claims and beliefs are irrelevant. Neither did he deny the existence of African metaphysics or African ways of practicing religion nor did he imply that those who believe in such metaphysical and religious principles are less Africans. Similarly, he did not suggest that those who subscribe to RMT, which excludes these claims, are more Africans. It was simply a deliberate move to develop an African theory that could be well-defended in non-African contexts. In seeking to universalise RMT, it was necessary to remove these elements in African societies that do not hold such beliefs. That is to

say, the intended audience included not only non-African societies but also some parts of Africa influenced by atheistic, agnostic and pragmatic ideologies.

The subsequent inquiry could be: How would Thaddeus Metz integrate African metaphysics and religion into Relational Moral Theory (RMT) while simultaneously enhancing its defensibility within and outside Africa? This prompts moralists or scholars to pursue a more robust¹¹ and defensible¹² RMT that applies to various African and non-African contexts. The upcoming section will endeavour to address this fundamental question.

Seeking a More Robust and Defensible RMT within and Beyond Africa

Formulating a genuinely African theory that incorporates metaphysics and religion and withstands scrutiny both within and outside of Africa is a challenging endeavour for African moralists, including Thaddeus Metz. Metz could highlight the significant roles of community, relationships, interconnectedness, ancestors, and the balance between individual and collective interests. For instance, Metz could explore the equilibrium between personal and communal interests, drawing on African metaphysical concepts that stress harmony between indi-

vidual and collective well-being. Additionally, he could examine how metaphysics and religion influence ethical behaviour, social justice, and community welfare. By illustrating the tangible impact of these beliefs, he can strengthen the case for RMT's relevance and defensibility.

However, the inclusion of African metaphysics and religion, adds little to the defensibility of RMT. Instead of making it more robust beyond Africa, their incorporation makes RMT more distinctly African, aligning with the prominent

beliefs in African metaphysics and religious practices prevalent in many parts of Africa. RMT would not serve as an ideal philosophy for global morality, especially in societies that do not adhere to concepts of metaphysics and religion. Thus, considering RMT's intended audience, which includes both Africans and non-Africans, it seems more reasonable to omit these concepts or beliefs. However, if the audience were limited to Africans, irrespective of the implications for global ethics, their inclusion could be plausible.

Conclusion

To crown it all, the paper has examined the authenticity of the Relational Moral Theory. It strongly argues that RMT is more African because it includes relationality, the essence of an African moral theory. However, it also contends that RMT is less African than other theories because it lacks essential features of African moral theories, such as metaphysics and religion. The paper clarifies Metz's likely reasons for excluding African metaphysics and religion, concluding that their exclusion did not significantly harm the theory's authenticity. On one hand, Metz's relegation of African metaphysics and religion permits African philosophy to engage more profoundly with worldwide philosophical dialogue. In other words, by focusing on moral and ethical dimensions, his work can appeal to a wider

audience and promote cross-cultural comprehension. On the other hand, the sidelining of metaphysics and religion disregards the rich, traditional African ontological and religious views. This could result in a loss of cultural identity and a lesser appreciation for the distinctive contributions of African thought. Nevertheless, Metz's work signifies a notable transition in African philosophy, fostering a more inclusive and globally pertinent approach, while also rendering provoking questions that would preserve indigenous African philosophical aspects. Finally, future studies should aim to develop a moral theory that integrates African views on metaphysics and religion. This theory should be applicable and justifiable both within and beyond the African continent.

¹⁰ Agnostics are individuals who are uncertain or open-minded about the existence of higher powers or the supernatural entities. They typically hold that our human mind or knowledge or understanding are limited to comprehend metaphysical questions such as existence of the Supreme Being.

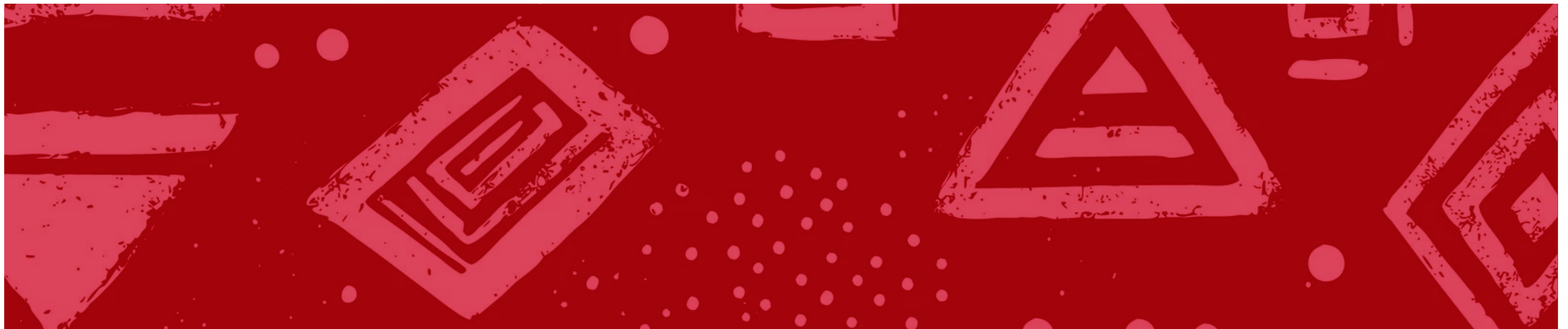
¹¹ According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, robust signifies having the capacity to perform well under various conditions.

¹² To be defensible in this context means that an idea, theory, or belief can be supported with logical reasoning, evidence, and sound arguments. It's about being able to justify the position taken and respond effectively to criticism or challenges. In the case of Relational Moral Theory (RMT) incorporating African metaphysics and religion, a defensible theory would be one that can withstand scrutiny from both within and outside of African philosophical traditions, showing that it is coherent, consistent, and applicable across different contexts. So, for Metz, making RMT more defensible would involve ensuring that his integration of African metaphysics and religion is well-founded, clear, and robust enough to address potential objections and to be appreciated by a global audience. Does that make sense?



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Ubuntu and Rawlsian Justice: A Framework for Addressing Environmental Constraints to Talent Development in Africa

Agber Thaddeus Igbalumun, BA (Hons), Gabriel Kofi Akpah, MA, MPhil
St. Paul's Interterritorial Major Seminary-Regent-Freetown, Sierra Leone

Abstract

The underdevelopment of Africa continues to be a significant issue, with some scholars, such as Walter Rodney, attributing it to a mix of historical, political, and economic causes. The factors encompass the history of colonialism, persistent wars, and insufficient infrastructure, all of which impede growth and development throughout the continent. However, this paper attributes Africa's under-development to the environmental circumstances in which numerous African children are raised. This environment often characterised by antiquated cultural practices, tribal and ethnic conflicts, and poverty among others has impeded the capacity to cultivate and express their talent. These limits have a ripple effect, resulting in adverse results such as economic stagnation, diminished global standing, and brain drain, eventually sustaining the cycle of under-development throughout the continent. This paper further claims that the root cause of these factors, especially wars and poverty, which leads to Africa's under-development is bad governance. This paper therefore suggests drawing on the principles of Ubuntu and Rawls' Theory of Justice, that a just and collective society where fairness and equity thrive can provide the foundation for creating a healthy environment that will support the development of children's talents for the development of Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Under-development, Environment, Talents, Children, ubuntu, Rawlsian Justice.

Introduction

Centuries ago, the only means of communication with someone from a distant land was through letters. This sometimes takes months or years before proper communication is achieved. Nowadays, technology has made communication very easy such that communicating with a person in any part of the world is just a click away. In a similar instance, the major means of transportation before the invention of the first

aeroplane in 1903 were horses and ships [Lambart, 2020]. The movement of people and goods from one country to another used to take several days, months or years, depending on the distance. However, with the invention of aeroplanes, fast-sailing ships, speed boats, and cars, transportation has become time-saving. Thanks to science and technology for making life simple and smooth.

The transition from the rudimentary method of communication and transportation to the modern and advanced forms became possible through a nurtured talent. Most importantly, the environment was a special medium in which those talents were planted and nurtured. The environment in which one grows has a great impact on the development of one's talent. According to Julia Roberts, "Having talent does not guarantee

Agber Thaddeus Igbalumun holds a diploma in Medical Laboratory Sciences from the School of Medical Laboratory Sciences, Mkar Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria, as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Humanities from Arrupe Jesuit University in Harare, Zimbabwe. Thaddeus has published several journal articles and book chapters and has presented at various conferences. He has a special interest in visual art, social justice, and the promotion of African identity.

Gabriel Kofi Akpah is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at St. Paul's Interterritorial Major Seminary in Regent-Freetown, Sierra Leone. He teaches courses in Introduction to Philosophy, Social and Political Philosophy, Philosophical Ethics, and Philosophy of Law. Gabriel holds a Licentiate in Philosophy (PhL) from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Philosophy from Loyola University of Congo in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a Master of Arts (MA) in Philosophy from the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in Ghana, and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Philosophy and Social Sciences from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana.



that a young person will develop that talent and reach an exceptional level of expertise. Opportunities and resources of the schools, community, and home environment are required to encourage and foster talent" [2008: 502]. This means that the development of one's talent is dependent on the environment one lives in.

If Roberts' assertion is true, then it is arguably that Africa's environment does not support the development of talent in young people. This is because a good number of children in Africa are out of school as a result of different environmental circumstances. Research carried out by UNESCO in 2019 reveals that sub-Saharan Africa

has the highest number of out-of-school children; "As in previous years, sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest out-of-school rates for all age groups. Out of the 59 million out-of-school children of primary school age, 32 million, or more than one-half, live in sub-Saharan Africa" [2019: 7]. In most cases, the children are out of school as a result of wars, poverty, and religious/cultural beliefs but not necessarily because they lack the intellectual capacity to undergo studies or they do not have the passion for Western education. In this case, the environment seems to be a barrier or an obstacle to the development of the talents of the affected children.

Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the effects of the environment on the talents of African children. The paper shall begin with the analysis of some key concepts such as; environment, talent, and Africa; followed by a detailed discussion on "the environmental factors that affect children's talent development in Africa" in relation to children from other parts of the world. The paper shall discuss the general impacts of Children's talent under-development in Africa. After which, the paper shall present some suggestions on the way forward.

Understanding Key Terms

The meaning of the word “environment” varies depending on the context. In this paper, the word environment simply means the situations or social conditions that surround an individual [Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021]. The social conditions or environment according to Barnett and Casper include:

“The immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact. Components of the social environment include: built infrastructure; industrial and occupational structure; labour markets; social and economic processes; wealth; social, human, and health services; power relations; government; race relations; social inequality; cultural practices; the arts; religious institutions and practices; and beliefs about place and community”
[2001: 465]

Barnett and Casper’s definition of social environment encompasses most aspects of human interaction. Generally, human beings are constantly in contact with their

environment, beginning from the moment of conception where the womb is the first environment till birth. At birth, human beings are exposed to the world which is a bigger environment through the family. Here, an individual is introduced to the parents, siblings and other members of the family. Thereafter, one begins to move into the wider society which comprises different people and events. These events may sometimes help to develop or under-develop their talent.

The word ‘talent’ as used in this paper denotes innate qualities of a person which are latently present. Gallardo et al., define talent as the “innate abilities, acquired skills, knowledge, competencies, and attitudes that cause a person to achieve outstanding results in a particular context” [2013: 297]. Talent is first of all acknowledged as an inborn quality or acquired skill; it could be academics or athletics. In each case, there is a need to nurture one’s talent, especially the inborn ability to yield expertise. But in a situation where one’s talent is not nurtured, the effect may be termed, “talent-underdevelopment.” There are environ-

mental factors that may enhance the development of one’s talent. Some of these factors include; attending good schools with qualified teachers, a conducive home for learning, having access to learning materials, parental guidance, having a mentor, coaching by an expert and so on.

The word “Africa” has many controversies in terms of a consensual definition. But in this paper, the word Africa signifies a place or geographical area and most importantly, a continent. According to Ladipo Mabogunje et al; “Africa is the second largest continent after Asia, covering about one-fifth of the total land surface of the earth. The continent is bounded to the west by the Atlantic Ocean, to the north by the Mediterranean Sea, to the east by the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and to the south by the mingling waters of the Atlantic and Indian oceans” (2020). Therefore, the paper focuses on the children who live within Africa as a continent no matter their race, cultural or religious belief. By children, the paper implies any human being under the age of 18 years [UNICEF, 2021].

Environmental Factors Hindering the Development of Children’s Talent in Africa

One of the oldest and most common problems of Africa which has come up in almost all discussions about Africa’s under-development is poverty. A good number of Africans live on a “hand-to-mouth” income. According to UNDP, “Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region that has witnessed an increase both in the incidence of poverty and in the absolute number of poor people. About 300 million people there (almost half of the region’s population) live on less than \$1 a day” [2006: 268]. This partially validates the result of UNESCO about the number of African children who are out of school. By critically engaging the result and the claim of UNDP, if almost half of the region’s population live on less than \$1 a day, how then can those families train their children, since there is no free education in most countries in Africa? The chances of the children of those families being educated look gloomy. But what then becomes of the talented children in those families? Perhaps, some of them are the ones who roam on the streets and in the open markets hawking for food instead of being in school.

In cases where children from poor families manage to attend school, they are faced with different challenges such as lack of adequate learning materials and payment of school fees. In some cases, they are usually sent home when they fail to pay the school fees on time. Also, most of those children attend public or rural schools where there is no infrastructure and qualified teachers. Julius Agbor [2012] claims, “Considering the significance of rural poverty across the continent, it should not come as no surprise that rural school-children are the most disadvantaged

from a socioeconomic perspective when it comes to access to a quality education”. Agbor also claims that rural schools generally struggle with the issue of qualified teachers and sufficient teachers in relation to the number of children enrolled in the school. Perhaps, poverty is one of the reasons for insufficient and incompetent teachers in rural areas since people generally prefer to migrate to the city in search of greener pastures. Poverty, therefore, can be seen as an enemy of talent development for some children in Africa.

The second factor or characteristic of an African environment that seems to be an obstacle to the development of children’s talent is “conflict.” Although this factor affects some parts of the continent, its impacts in the affected regions are colossal and may affect other regions as well. One of its famous impacts is on the educational sector. Kathryn Touré argues that “The impact of crisis situations on educational systems is significant and of a variety of kinds. Violence and conflict have become a part of everyday life and threaten education and societal development on the African continent” [2006: 17]. In a similar vein, Seitz Klaus avers that “Wars and military conflicts inevitably impair the functioning of educational systems, and they are often associated with considerable destruction of the original educational infrastructure. Millions of children are prevented from attending school as a consequence of violent conflicts” [2004: 21]. Also, children are not only prevented from attending school but are also killed in the process. According to the figure released by UNICEF, the decade between 1990 to 1999 witnessed two million child deaths from ar-

med conflict, six million children were brutally injured, one million children were orphaned or disconnected from their families, and twelve million were rendered homeless [qtd in Bensalah et al, 2000: 8]. More practically, some selected countries with a high impact of conflict on the education and welfare of children will be discussed. The countries are; the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), witnessed several wars. The most recent of it all was in 2003 which is considered as the great war of Africa. Notwithstanding, some rebel groups also emerged after the war. According to the Council on Foreign Relations CFR, the most prominent group after the war was recognised as the March 23 Movement (M23), which according to the CFR was organised by the Tutsi ethnic group and sponsored by the Rwandan government. The group rebelled against the Congolese government for allegedly defaulting on the peace deal signed in 2009. This made the UN Security Council organise an aggressive brigade to support the DRC army in to fight against M23. The rebel group was finally defeated in 2013 [Global Conflict Tracker, 2021].

The effects of these conflicts are enormous, especially on children. The result from Internet Relay Chat, IRC claims that the most victims of the war are children. More than half of the estimated 5.4 million deaths are linked to children. Again, UNICEF ranked DRC as the country with the maximum number of child soldiers, labourers and sexual slaves [Jones and Naylor, 2004: 5]. This conflict has also caused many children



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to drop out of school as a result of insecurity. Jones and Naylor presented a figure of approximately 180 000 children who are out of school. According to them, conflict produces other factors like poverty, family constraints, lack of teachers, ill health as a result of malnutrition, and death of loved ones [2004: 11]. All these factors affect the development of talent amongst the affected children in the DRC.

Nigeria also experienced several conflicts, ranging from; civil, inter-ethnic, and communal. However, the recent and the ongoing conflict which calls for urgent attention is that of Boko Haram insurgency. The group started around 2003 by a charismatic preacher, Muhammed Yusuf. The primary aim of the group is to establish God's Kingdom on earth by retreating themselves from the wider society. Though, the group was antagonistic to the Nigerian government and rejects western education as non-Islamic, it was generally non-violent until 2009 [Campbell, 2014: 2]. The group conducts violent attacks in the north-eastern part of Nigeria and Plateau state. The leader of the group, Abubakar Shekau also claimed to be responsible for a suicide bomb attack in Lagos' fuel depot on 25 June 2014 [Campbell, 2014: 3].

These attacks by Boko Haram have devastating effects on the inhabitants of the affected areas. John Campbells claims that; "the struggle between the government and Boko Haram has dire humanitarian consequences. Many people have been internally displaced in the north-eastern part of Nigeria and many refugees have fled to neighbouring countries" [2014: 1]. Apart from the children who have taken refuge in the neighbouring countries, the con-

flict has also claimed the lives of many children, others have been abducted, internally displaced, and forcefully recruited. [Isokpan and Durojaye, 2006: 2].

The ravaging effects of the Boko Haram insurgency have been traumatic for children in the affected areas as they have been compelled to abandon their precious homes in fear of being killed. They have also abandoned school which is the main target of the terrorist group. According to the report by UNICEF, the continuous attack on schools, teachers, and school children has forced over one million children out of school and their teachers also have been forced to stay away from school. Again, the abandoned schools have been used as refugee camps [Isokpan and Durojaye, 2006: 10]. But the school is meant to be a place for studies but it has become a home for internally displaced children together with their families.

Generally, the attacks by the insurgents have not just displaced children but also resulted in the deaths of many children. Isokpan and Durojaye claim that a government-owned boarding school in Mamudo, Yobe state was attacked by the insurgents in July 2013. In the attack, 42 students and some teachers were killed and the school building was set ablaze. A similar attack on a school also took place on 25 February 2014 when the insurgents invaded Federal Government College, Buni, Yadi, Yobe state. The attack claimed the lives of about 59 students and several buildings were burnt down in the school. Another shocking event of this kind took place in April 2014 when over 200 Chibok girls were abducted from their school dormitory. Later the same year in November, a suicide bomber disguised himself as

a member of a secondary school and killed about 47 students and many sustained injuries in Potiskum, Yobe state [2006: 10-11].

The case studies in the two countries above show clearly how conflict has detrimental impact on education and the future of the affected children. Generally, education is described as a process of character formation and skills acquisition. Babs Fafunwa describes education as; "the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or a young adult develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives" [1974: 17]. Following Fafunwa's line of thought, the aim of education is defeated in the affected regions, and the abilities/talents of the affected children may not be developed. Some children are forcefully recruited into the armed rebel group to antagonise or fight the state. All these affect the development of children's talent in the affected areas.

The third factor which partly under-develops the talent of children in Africa is "culture." Although, what we may term the western civilisation has conquered several parts of Africa, other parts still hold onto their cultural beliefs and practices. The cruelest of all kinds is "education for a girl child is a waste of resources." In Zimbabwe for instance, the UNAIDS reports that the secondary school enrolment ratio for girls in some parts of the country has declined. This is linked to the patriarchal attitude which considers educating a girl child as a waste of money since they will end up benefiting other families. Some religions like the Apostolic Sect within the region usually give out their girl children for marriage whilst still in primary school to older members

of the sect [Kambarami, 2006: 5]. This cultural practice does not only hinder or under-develop the talent of a girl child but also enslave them. It also opposes the Universal Declaration for Human Right (UDHR) to education which says, "everyone has the right to education..." [1948: 26].

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a survey was carried out by Laura Bolton to ascertain the barriers to education for girls in the country. Gender inequality emerged as a prime factor. In her study, discriminatory culture where girls are looked down upon was identified. This culture makes girls view themselves as inferior to the boys. Also, domestic chores are usually done by girls such that girls are kept out of school to look after younger siblings as well as to do kitchen work and laundry [2020: 5]. The negative effects of this culture are colossal; early child marriage, teenage pregnancy, poverty, prostitution and high risk of contracting STIs. This cultural practice of course, has done more harm than good in developing the talent of a girl child in the affected regions.

Another aspect of culture which is worth mentioning is the idea of parents determining the occupation of their children. In the Tiv culture, the people who are found mostly in Benue state, Nigeria, once a child is born, he/she is introduced to the farm as early as four years old. This is because their main occupation is farming, and so every male child is obliged to farm. The Tiv people have different types of hoes for each age group. Therefore, one has no excuse to stay away from farming as long as you are up to four years old. In some families in Tiv land, if a child shows other kinds of abilities other than farming, he is greatly scolded by

his parents. Such a child is being called lazy and one who has no bright future. The Tiv people's commitment to farm is known all over Nigeria. Moses Tsenongo agrees that the main occupation of the Tiv is subsistence farming. They regard yam farming as their birth right and commit themselves to its work with religious dedication. Their farming productivity is what has earned Benue, the state where they are the most populous ethnic group, the official title of being the "Food basket of the nation" [2011: 134].

This excessive commitment to farming is a tradition that has been passed on by their ancestors. Emmanuel Ahua claims that; "Before the advent of Christianity and its development, traditional Tiv education was based on oral tradition and the undertaking of practical activities used in domestic life, as well as occupations such as cooking, child bearing and rearing, farming and animal husbandry among others" [2019: 29]. This aspect of Tiv culture has not been friendly with children who show abilities in other areas of life such as arts, science and technology, fishing, or western education in general. Though the practice is no longer prevalent in the area as compared to thirty or forty years ago, other individuals in the region still hold on to this tradition. It has caused many talented children in the area to end up spending their entire life in the farm in order to preserve this aspect of the Tiv culture.

The experience of children from other developed nations seems to be different from the children in Africa. European nations, for instance, have strong policies that support early development of children's abilities. A survey was carried out by Velea and Tamburlini amongst five European countries; Armenia, England, Italy, Kazakhstan, Moldova on "Early Child Development in the European Regions." The result shows that all these countries have strong policies in the field of early child education [2014: 14]. Although the mere existence of policies does not guarantee their enactment, the percentage of school children in the regions clearly shows their implementation. The study shows the percentage of school children in these countries as follows; Armenia 70.4%, England 80%, Italy 98%, Kazakhstan 74%, and Moldova 97.4% [Velea and Tamburlini, 2014: 10-13].

A practical case is seen in the story of Arat Hosseini, a six-year-old footballer in the making. His father, Muhammed Hosseini, an Iranian having discovered the talent of his child as early as 13 months, quit his job in order to focus completely on his son. He also sold his house and car and moved to Liverpool to better pursue their goal (Oh My Goal, 00: 01:10). In an interview with Arat's father he said; "We are thinking about the future and the steps we can take. Nothing will stop us. Arat loves school and football. He is currently playing with the Liverpool FC Academy and wants to be the best player in the world. So, I'm doing all I can to help him" [IRAN, 2020]. This will help the child to develop his talent and possibly achieve his dream of becoming the best footballer in the world.

The Impacts of Children's Talent-Under-development on Africa

The first impact one could think of when it comes to the under-development of the talents of children in Africa is the under-development of Africa itself. This is because human resources is the fundamental attribute of any developed state. But in a situation where the human resource is left in shambles, such a state may experience no development as is the case of Africa. According to Lederman, "Not only do we have to have equity and close the famous achievement gap, we also need to have innovation if we are going to survive, so you have to nurture the gifted kids" [qtd in Roberts, 2008: 502]. This means that the state or any organisation should not only focus on human relations but also the development and management of human resources for its development. Many countries in Africa today are underdeveloped because they do not develop the talents of their citizens. It sounds strange when Africa, a continent blessed with numerous natural resources, can only import the final products of almost everything. However, it is not a surprise because many talented children cannot develop their talents because of different environmental factors surrounding them.

The aforementioned point explains why developed nations continuously hunt for talented personnel across the world. This also leads to the second impact which is the loss of personnel to developed nations, also known as brain drain. It is no longer stories that developed nations fish out talented people from under-developed nations. This is evident in the report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, "The best employers

the world will be looking for is the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth and will be willing to pay them top dollar for their services" [qtd in Roberts, 2008: 502]. Many talented individuals are also willing to work for developed nations to receive their fair wages. Since almost everyone desires greener pastures, it is evident that Africa may lose her talented people to other nations.

This also gives birth to another impact, a "decrease in the continent's economy and fame." It looks devastating, in the sense that the few talented people whose talents were developed and are supposed to work and boost the economy of their respective African states have gone to look for a greener pasture. This has affected almost all the sectors in many African states, especially the sports and health sectors. Many football players who play for European countries are of African origin. According to Khaled Beydoun [2018], "Twelve of the 23 French players called up to represent France in Russia are of African ancestry rooted in nine nations across the continent". Fortunately for France, they won the World Cup. This is a huge loss for Africa. The health sector also has a similar experience if not worse. The available results as of 2000 show that; "Approximately 65,000 African-born physicians and 70,000 African-born professional nurses were working overseas in developed countries" [Clemens and Petterson, 2008].

It is very pathetic how Africa is developing other nations at its expense. Some of these African physicians were at the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic

but the world never recognised them as African physicians. The only African country which made some efforts to produce COVID-19 vaccine was South Africa (Dorfman and Kirstein, 2001). Otherwise, no other African country attempted to produce a COVID-19 vaccine but relied on the "residual" from other nations. But the vaccine only got to Africa when those countries vaccinated more than half of their population. One may question both the level of independence and the future of Africa as a continent.

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Recommendations

The negative impacts which are caused as a result of the under-development of children's talent in Africa are enormous and the factors responsible for children's talent under-development (poverty conflict and some cultural practices) are complex. However, it will be an empty effort if the root cause of these challenges is not addressed. According to this paper, the root cause of the present condition of Africa revolves around its "self-centred leaders" who have no interest in the well-being of their people and states. They are only concerned with the welfare of their families but the development

of their nation is completely relegated. After all, their children are attending the best schools abroad. Thus, "self-centred leaders" become the primary factor for Africa's predicaments.

To address this issue, there should be an amendment to the constitutions of each African state. It should first of all make the judiciary independent not only on paper but in reality. This will empower the judges to rule against any corrupt government without fear of being removed from office. Secondly, there should be a law that would force the leaders to

execute their manifesto. In other words, there should be a constitutional provision which would kick corrupt and unfaithful leaders out of the office before their tenure expires. In this case, most leaders may be forced to execute their campaign promises for a better Africa.

Additionally, if self-centred politicians are the root cause of Africa's underdevelopment, then a general state reformation through John Rawls' theory of Justice becomes necessary. Rawls' theory emphasizes justice as fairness. He proposes a redistribution of

wealth for the benefit of the least advantageous members of the society. According to him, "For us the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" [1999: 6]. According to Rawls, the major social institutions include; the political constitutions or the state, the economy, the family, and education. These social institutions have profound impacts on the lives of people and everyone has certain expectations of life which may be determined in some ways by these social institutions [1999:7].

The major social institutions according to John Rawls are responsible for the distribution of rights and duties. By rights, Rawls implies the fundamental rights that each individual has such as the right to take part in a political affair, right to freedom of speech and assembly, right to be treated fairly by others, right to vote or to hold office, right to education, right to own property and to move from one place to another and so on [1999: 195, 275, 327]. According to Rawls, everyone has the moral obligation or duty to respect the rights of others. For example, if everyone has the right to education then it means that no one should be the cause of a child's inability to be educated. Unfortunately, the environmental conditions in Africa have denied a good number of children education, thereby preventing them from developing their talents. However, if Rawls' theory of justice is to be implemented by African states, there will be fairness in the distribution of resources and the wealth of Africa shall no longer be

in the hands of the few. This will reduce poverty, and also prevent unnecessary conflicts since the rights of everyone will be upheld thereby creating an enabling environment to nurture the talents of African children for the development of Africa.

Furthermore, African communitarianism which is rightly captured in the philosophy of ubuntu also needs to be emphasized or implemented where there is need. Ubuntu philosophy places the needs of the community before that of the individual. According to John Mbiti, the individual does not exist alone but owes his existence to the community. The individual for Mbiti is part of a whole [1969:108]. This means that the community is a corporate body where the individual's existence belongs. But most importantly, since the individual is part of the whole group or the community, it means that whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and vice versa. In this case, Mbiti captures it well when he says that the individual or a person who is an African can only say "I am because we are" [1969:109]. In simple terms, it means that my existence as an African is only possible because of the existence of the other person. If this is true, then no country or group of people in Africa should go to war with one another simply because if I destroy another person, I am indirectly destroying myself since we share a common existence.

Another important aspect of Ubuntu which is paramount to our discussion is its emphasis on the common good. According to Michael Eze, "ubuntu is a politics of common good according to

which collective pursuit of ends as shared by members of a community is the primary political aim" (2008: 389). This means that the end of any endeavour for Africans should be for the common good of the community. What this idea attempts to postulate is that the ends or the interests of an individual do not and should not conflict with those of the community. But, in any case of conflict, the community's ends take precedence. Ifeanyi Menkiti sums it up when he says that the reality of the community is prior to the reality of the individual histories (1984:171). In simple terms, the community's needs should be considered before the needs of the individual. But is this the case with African politicians? Not, as many politicians prefer to enrich themselves at the expense of the community's needs thereby increasing the level of poverty in Africa. This is practically against the idea of communitarianism and the politics of common good as proposed by the ubuntu philosophy. Therefore, to eradicate poverty in Africa, the values of ubuntu need to be emphasized so that the politics of the common good will become the ultimate priority for African politicians and everyone.

If these suggestions are implemented, African leaders will have no other choice than to develop their nations. This will eradicate poverty and every child will have access to quality education to develop their talents. There will be mutual understanding between the government and the civilians. This means that civilians will hardly rebel against the government and this may put an end to unnecessary crises which usually arise as a result of the government's failure to execute its mandate.

Conclusion

This paper revealed some of the challenges faced by African children in the area of talent development as a result of poor environmental conditions. The paper identified Poverty, Conflict, and

some cultural practices as the major environmental factors responsible for the under-development of the talents of some children in Africa. The paper shows the prevalence of poverty in Afri-

ca, whereby more than half of the continent's population survives on 1 US dollar a day. Also, the incidence of wars across different regions and some cultural practices have contributed to the number of out-of-school children, which by extension results in the under-development of their talents.

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Furthermore, the paper noted that the failure to develop children's talents in Africa has resulted in the under-development of Africa. The under-development of Africa has resulted in the loss of her human resources to some developed nations, which is a huge detriment to Africa's economy. The paper identified the root cause of Africa's under-development and offered some possible solutions. In a nutshell, the paper has addressed some of the factors responsible for children's talent under-development in Africa. However, subsequent researchers should focus on each factor exhaustively to obtain a more concrete result.

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