

A critical analysis of political philosophy in African political discourses

Abstract

To identify political philosophy in African political discourses is the task this paper is trying to unravel. Substantial record is available on African political discourses, but the clear philosophical thinking that lie beneath these discourses and unify them is not clear. Some authors are of the view that African political discourses has little or insufficient philosophical theories that inform them. However, African political discourses are texts and talks about African political ideas, contexts and situations on how to govern African political societies. Some of these discourses are; development, identity and unity, liberation, democracy, nation building, and sovereignty. This paper argues that Africa still need to identify and articulate political philosophy that unify these different political discourses. The hypothesis is that the African political philosophy that unifies these African political discourses, can be derived from African metaphysics, which is characteristically holistic, teleological and transcendent. The paper proposes that for African political philosophy to be based on African metaphysics; the mystical should not be substituted with the rational; the natural with the scientific; the human with the machine; cooperation with competition; and community with individuality, all in the name of liberation, identity, development, and democracy.

Keywords: political philosophy, African political discourses, liberation, identity, development, and democracy

Volume 4 Issue 5 - 2020

Wilfred Lajul

Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda

Correspondence: Wilfred Lajul, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda, Email wodangom.lajul@gmail.com w.lajul@gu.ac.ug

Received: November 16, 2019 | **Published:** September 17, 2020

Introduction

This paper examines the possibility of African political philosophy that harmonizes different African political discourses and practices. This arises from the divergence of views on what constitutes African political thought or philosophy. In analysing African political thought, views are divided between ideological approaches and the purely philosophical discussions. Martin Guy¹ defines African political thought as the original ideas, values, theories and ideologies developed by various African thinkers to inform African political system and institutions from the ancient periods till today. Such political ideas usually precedes and informs political practice; while political practice, in turn influences those political ideas and theories.¹ In his own words he says, "African political thought also refers to political theories and ideologies developed by various African scholars and statesmen, [. . .] the main focus here being on the *ideas* rather than on the individuals".¹

On the other hand, Boele van Hensbroek² thinks that, African political philosophy is the philosophical reflection of individual thinkers, often going against the collective political world-views, on the political ideas and practice of their societies. He distinguishes, political philosophy from political ideology, which he called state ideologies expressed in statements of presidents or equated with traditional political systems.² He complains that oftentimes, philosophers are confused with anthropologists. From the above views, one wonders whether African political thought is exclusively African political philosophy or it also includes African political ideologies. For Guy, political thought in African politics includes both African political philosophy and African political ideologies. Hensbroek instead, makes a neat distinction between an anthropologist and a philosopher in the context of Africa. His attempt is to identify anthropologists

with collectivistic thinking, and philosophers with individual thinkers. Besides, Hensbroek associate ideologies with communal thinking and statement of African presidents [political discourses], while political philosophy is associated with critical defiance of communal thinking. This paper will adopt Guy's understanding of political thought as constituting both African political philosophy and African political ideologies. This is because, as Kwasi Wiredu³ has observed, in the African world views exposed by anthropologists, lies the ideas of individual African thinkers as well. Buried in the wealth of African communal thought are individual ideas. This should not be ignored in discussing African political thought.

Secondly, we shall try to understand African political philosophy as political ideas and theories expounded by African thinkers. The paper will desist from annihilating communal thoughts from political philosophy, since in those communal thoughts there are deeply seated political ideas, theories and value systems originated by individual Africans whose ideas have been accepted, assimilated, and deeply buried into the communal African political systems.

Thirdly, though ideologies are usually associated with set of beliefs aimed at changing the world; so it is rigid, subjective, imposing and that it discourages thinking,⁴ as opposed to philosophy, which is flexible, seeking the truth, based on the principles of life and that it encourages thinking; care has to be taken, since the two might not be as neatly distinguishable at that. This is because political philosophy is born of deep reflections on the concrete political situations by political thinkers; and political ideologies are the practical means designed to realise those political ideas and theories. Indeed as Michael Freedman asserts, "ideology offers a route towards a reconnection of political thought with political sciences" (2006:17). "Besides, all ideologies have some underlying philosophy and not vice versa".⁵

Apart from the negative understanding of ideology as given above, Van Dijk⁴ outlines the following as positive characteristics of an ideology in its original sense. He outlines that ideologies have both social and cognitive properties. Cognitively, ideologies are special social belief systems stored in long-term memory; socially and cognitively, ideologies are belief systems shared by the members of a specific social group. Ideologies are essentially social; group identities are not only based on their structural properties, but also on their ideologies; ideologies form the axiomatic basis of group knowledge and opinions (attitudes); it is possible to have positive and negative ideologies.⁵⁻¹⁰

So, African political thought is both philosophical and ideological in nature, since they are works of individual African thinkers, both traditional and modern, and reflections on original African political belief systems stored in the long-term memory of the African peoples. To discuss and analyze African political philosophy that harmonizes African political discourses and practices, which this paper believes it is in African metaphysics, we need to understand some of these African political discourses.

African political discourses

Political thought in any political system or practice is reflected in its political discourses. African political discourses are the texts and talks about political ideas, contexts and situations on how to govern, manage, realize or improve political situations in particular African political dispensations or in African society in general. Van Dijk describes political discourse as the sharing by participants on political ideas and situations expressed and reproduced through the structures of texts and talks (2006:734). He continues to argue that political ideologies find concrete manifestations in political discourses. “[. . .] discourses make ideologies observable in the sense that it is only in discourse that they may be explicitly expressed and formulated” (2006:732). This means, political discourses are theoretical attempts at describing and explaining political philosophies and ideologies. Political ideologies are explained through political discourses. Similarly, philosophical political ideas or theories are also explained through philosophical political discourses. This paper accepts that political philosophy is different from political ideologies. However, African political philosophy are the political theories and value systems on which African political system rests. On the other hand, African political ideologies are the belief systems designed as means to put these political theories in practice.^{4,11-14} African political discourses have featured several political themes, which this paper will discuss. Some of these themes are on; African identity and unity, African development, African liberation, African democracy, African nations’ building, and African sovereignty. In discussing these discourses, African political philosophies and ideologies will be brought out. African political philosophy should then be to provide the underlying theoretical justifications and values systems relevant for understanding these political discourses and proposing better theories and ideologies for putting these African political ideas into practice. We shall critically analyse some of these political discourses.

African identity and unity

In describing the African identity and unity discourse, Hensbroek identifies the following. The basic concern of identity discourse is authenticity and the philosophy behind authenticity is existentialism. While the fundamental features of identity discourse are: polarity creation of a net divide between the indigenous and the alien.

The world order it advocates is a cultural world order which is (i) constituted essentially of culture-constituents, (ii) people are grouped according to cultural belonging. The main duty of its advocates is to guard and unfold the deeply rooted indigenous identity. Its main slogan or metaphor is ‘roots’, and the example where this can work is the African family and village meetings. The field of attention it concentrates on is culture, while the theoretical key word is identity; and the philosophical inclination is holism and essentialism.²

Hensbroek thinks that political discourse based on cultural belongingness, polarity between the indigenous and the alien, a continuous struggle to guard and unfold cultural identities is problematic. He writes; “The boundary that is drawn thus is ‘over-conditioned’: it is assumed that racial, cultural, continental and linguistic boundaries more or less coincide. The human world is assumed to be carved up between a limited number of grand units whose boundaries and differences cannot be erased. This view of the world as divided into *culture-continents* induces many reflections upon difference, value and ‘relativity’”.²

While to a great extent I agree with Hensbroek, but what he fails to identify are the deeper issues behind African persistent longings for national or tribal identities and unity. In the view of this paper, this is metaphysical ontology, meaning; the yearning for togetherness of body, spirit and soul of individuals with their fellows, ancestors and their Gods for their good as an end and the very means of human survival and prosperity. This is also because without self-identity there can be no meaningful inter-cultural dialogue and unity. Different cultures that interact with one another must have some basic stand point from which to base their collaboration. This is the case whether the culture is African or foreign.

Secondly, this paper strongly believes that, today it is misleading to think one can create a neat distinction between the indigenous and the alien, an African identity today must take contingency of cultural diversity; linguistically, axiologically, tribally and racially. The African society of today is composed of people from divergent cultural origins with different value systems and composed of different races and tribes. It is wrong for Africa to struggle for unity in isolation and not unity in diversity. Today, there cannot be any cultural purity in Africa, since a lot of linguistic, value and political ideas have blended together. This has been accelerated through intermarriages, globalization, migrations, politico-social and multi-cultural mixtures that have taken place in Africa.

Philosophically however, this paper observes that, the more global the world becomes, the greater is the social and political annihilation of the individuals from the apparent global melting pot. This has created greater longings by individuals and minorities groups within the bigger communities to look for individual and social security into their cultural roots; linguistically, axiologically and politically. This is the new phenomena in the world today; the more the world globalizes, the more racist and tribal individual humans become; contrary to the earlier social science’s prediction that the more global the world become the less tribal or racial will the individuals also become.¹⁵ Africa is not immune to this paradigm that is why, African identity and unity is being challenged by this new global annihilation seeing cultural and tribal communities within African states wanting to become autonomous, culturally and politically.

Apparently, the drive for national identity and unity in general is a strong sense of cultural consciousness and sub-nationalism based on assumed common heritage. African communal identity considers

a strong sense of cultural identity, sub-nationalism and assumed common heritage as results of a pursuance of some fundamental virtues, values and the common good of particular societies like; preservation of life of the individuals and of the group members.¹⁶ In fact, the surge for African communal identity and unity is the yearning of individuals at the centre of African communities, who believe by pooling together their independent and differing efforts, they can form a strong community, united not only in the final purpose, but also in the means that bring them together like; working together to produce what they need, fighting together to protect their social values and invoking ontological virtues like divine and ancestral blessings. This yearning, will need to be carefully investigated by African political thinkers, if the dream for African communal identity and unity is to be realized.

African development

Analysing the African development discourse, Hensbroek holds that “For many African intellectuals the flagrant development deficit has been a more pressing intellectual challenge than culture. The issue of development puts the practical problem at the top of the agenda of how to catch up, economically and technologically, with the rest of the world”.² He goes on to identify the main features of African development discourse, which he literally calls modernization model. The basic concern is development and the philosophy behind it a pragmatism. The fundamental features are; polarity divided between developed and undeveloped or primitive worlds. The world is conceived as a single human civilization developing towards universal modernity. Action is to be directed to make a ‘great leap ahead’ along the universal path of development. The slogan or metaphor is ‘take off’, and best example given is the modern society of the West. Field of attention is technology or economics, while the theoretical key word is modernity. The philosophical inclination is universalism, voluntarism.² Hensbroek seems to be fascinated by this development paradigm, and he gives, Horton, Casely Hayford and Azikiwe as typical exemplars of this model. He writes; “Horton, Casely Hayford and Azikiwe were intensely exposed to cultural plurality already at an early age. All were successful, self-confident and highly competent modern Africans motivated by a practical sense of achievement rather than by indignation over injustices of colonialism or racial discrimination”.² He gives three reasons why this model seems to be convincing:

- i. The fact of a single human civilization which is gradually advancing in science and technology implies that for developing countries there is not really a question of development objectives. Since ‘we know where to go’, there can only be questions concerning strategy. [...]
- ii. The basic equality of mankind suggests that it does not make sense to dwell too long on questions of race and culture. One can have a critical attitude towards other cultures but finally it is a matter of pick-and-choose what is helpful for a ‘great leap ahead’ in one’s own development. The model suggests strategies of *integration* rather than of *isolation*. [...]
- iii. As far as political systems are concerned, there is no reason not to learn from experiences anywhere in the world. [...] Modernists therefore preferred the modern nation-state and the standard institutions of democratic politics (or those of a socialist polity) as these were said to have proved to work.²

This paper thinks that the argument of a single humanity is more of a slogan than a reality and it can best be understood that universal civilization and modernization are for the good of the developed other than the developing nations or even for the disadvantaged individuals within developed nations. Basic equality of mankind is still a very far off dream to realize. Though the world is getting more globalized, racism and individualism are on the increase.^{17, 18} A world where 80% of the world resources are concentrated in the Northern hemisphere and 20% in the South; where 80% of the world resources are concentrated in the hands of the 20% top richest individuals of the world and the remaining 20% of world resources are shared by the 80% of the world population is simply a joke of equality of mankind.¹⁹⁻²¹

As Africa moves towards the modern nation states, there are grave political upheavals that tend to stagnate democratic and economic development in African nations. This paper agrees with Okenna Ndubuisi²² who opines that African identity is “being-with” as opposed to the Western individualism. Secondly, African self is rooted in the “family-hood”. So, “African ontology is anthropocentric; any serious minded development paradigm must take man *nmadu* as its point of departure and point of arrival. It must be people’s oriented, relevant to peoples’ needs and aspirations”.²²

The real problem with African development seems to be in the blind adaptation of Adam Smith’s economic paradigm. But if you analyse this paradigm critically, then you will realize that the proponents seem to propose that if Africa accepts Adam Smith’s free market economic theory and policies, then there will be development in Africa. In his paper on “Market economy and its role in poverty in Africa: myths and realities” Lajul argues that, “[. . .] for economic development to take place, much more than free market economy is required”.²³ Lajul concludes that;

To stimulate economic growth in the world, both individuals and institutions (economic and political) should foster cooperation when and where it is necessary and competition when and where it is necessary. Besides, adopting the right methodology, employing the right economic ideology, and permitting the required political interventions; these have been the basis of economic growth in developed and the fast growing Asian economies.²³

The way forward for Africa is to balance between liberalism and controlled market economy. Without sufficient level of government intervention and control in terms of development policies and management, the other purely undigested free market economic policies advocated by Adam Smith and his followers, will instead stagnate African development.

African liberation

About African liberation discourse, Hensbroek identifies the following features; the basic concern of this discourse is liberation. The fundamental features are; dialectic between the oppressor and the oppressed, master and slave. The world view is that it is torn apart by a system of imperialist capitalism. What is to be done is to bring about a revolution. The slogan or metaphor in this discourse is ‘breaking the chains,’ delinking. The best example given is that of Chinese Long March to revolution. Field of focal attention is political economics, and the theoretical key word is exploitation, delinking, while the philosophical inclination is historicism, mechnicism.²

Hensbroek thinks that this is a very narrow way of looking at change in the world, since it perceives the world only in terms of

socio-economics. Change is conceptualized as necessarily qualitative, not piecemeal; change is a political issue and the horizon of political thought is not open: it consists of definite alternatives. Seemingly, liberation equals the solution to all social problems. Liberation is achieved by moving forward (Marxist), renaissance of the old or returning to “true self-identity” or “our own history” (Fanon, Cabral). Issues of cultural, ethnic and historical difference do not have a place in the model. “Important differences are only those produced by the system itself, such as between imperialist and colonized nations or between internal oppressors, perceived as foreign agents or *compradors*, and the ‘masses’”.²

To some extent, I agree with Hensbroek’s critical analysis of the liberation discourse in that, change should not be seen only as political, nor can liberation solve all social problems. Differences in society are more than political and social ones; others could as well be religious or cultural. However, my main contention is that both the west and Africa’s concept of liberation is insufficient to bring lasting and positive results for the good of any society. For instance, if we analyse some of these terms used by western and African thinkers; antagonism (Immanuel Kant), dialectics (Hegel), revolution (Karl Marx), competition (Adam Smith) or liberation (Fanon, Cabral), we realize that these are terms that tend to emphasize tension, friction, resistance, struggle of individuals or organized groups to take control of power over themselves or control over other socio-economic goods, groups or means of survival of other individuals or less organized groups. This in itself is not a form of liberation or justice that Africa needs, since not everybody has the same shared advantages to benefit from such tensions. Because liberation necessarily implies friction, the alternative is cooperation, shared brotherhood, shared opportunities, shared values and goals, which in the view of this paper, is most of the time completely forgotten in liberation discourse. Africa needs much more cooperation among its citizens and support from the other worlds other than conflict with them.

African democracy

A number of authors have illustrated that the key political discourse in Africa should be about democracy. However, there is the divided view on how Africa can become politically democratic. Adetula Victor²⁴ captures some of these views in the following words:

The culturalist/traditionalist perspective focuses on the African past and tradition, including the implications of its overwhelming “culture of informality” on African polities. This perspective is conceptually aligned with the “re-traditionalisation of society” and the ‘instrumentalisation of disorder’ frameworks, and its emphasis is on autocratic tendencies, corruption, chaos, anarchy and violence, all of which are wrongfully linked with the traditional. [. . .] within such apolitical “order”, in which there is little meaningful institutionalization, the notion of corruption as habitually defined in Western polities, is of little significance’.

Some of these western thinkers argue that cultural and traditional political perspective of Africa focus too much on the past and instrumentalization of disorder, like; informality, autocracy, corruption, chaos, anarchy, violence and little institutionalization, instead of creating political institutions and adopting liberal democracy.

For that matter, western countries are not only eager to share their ideas and experiences with Africa, but are also set on reproducing liberal democracy in Africa by giving overwhelming support for

the installation of western liberal social values, expressed overtly as; respect for rule of law, individual freedom and civil liberty, electoral competition, etc. Those African countries needing aid, trade concessions and other forms of development assistance, are used as ways to show that they have satisfied western political conditions and, in most cases, are ready to adopt liberal democratic principles.²⁴

On the other hand many African thinkers argue that the blame levied on the cultural and traditional political perspectives of Africa is wrong. For instance, it is wrong to equate democratization with modernization as Francis Fukuyama did. Fukuyama developed the unilinear view of historical development to explain political developments, which in the end equates modernization with westernization, which is misleading.²⁴

Adetula continue to argue that “conclusions in the donor-funded assessment reports on democracy and good governance in Africa are concerned essentially with regime type rather than the nature of the state and its relationship to the processes and outcomes of democratization. Also, most of the reports fail to appreciate structural contradictions as major constraints inhibiting the actualization of democracy in Africa”.²⁴

This paper also criticizes the essential link western thinkers make between traditional African political societies with corruption, saying it was because African traditional societies were informal, instruments of disorder and apolitical, so, corruption, and violence has become the order of the day in modern African political dispensation. In this paper, we think that African traditional societies were not instruments of disorder, resulting into widespread political corruption. On the contrary, if modern African political societies demonstrate widespread political corruption, then it is the result of a divorce between political practice and ethics they are borrowing from western political theories. When western thinkers like Machiavelli believe that ethics makes political practice weak, so many modern African political leaders adopt this without question, since it favors them to act the way they want, leading to political corruption.

Besides, to imagine that, institutionalization of political structures in Africa automatically solves the problem of political democracy in Africa, is equally incorrect. For example, Posner and Young, observed that Africa is on the right path of democratization when the Senate in Nigeria (on 17th May, 2006) was able to deny the change of the constitution that would allow Olusegun Obasanjo to seek a third term in Office. For them, this is the movement of Africa in the right direction, by making the formal rule of law of the political institutions to prevail. I wonder what they would say now that in 2017 Uganda used the very formal rule of law to change the Constitution to allow any president in Uganda to rule beyond the age of 75. The move towards the formal rule of law by itself is not sufficient to demonstrate the existence of a flourishing democracy in Africa. In the same way, Ugandan institution of parliament used the very formal rule of law to ban freedom of association of its citizens through the Public Order Management Act, 2013.

A number of political governments in Africa today are regulated by the rule of law in the name of the Constitutions; they hold regular elections on the basis of competitive democracies; they apparently allow individuals to vote freely; there is semblance of civil freedom; yet many of these African countries are very far from the ideals of democracy. So, the problem should be somewhere else and not in the adoption of liberal democracies.

Adetula opines that the main democratic problem in modern Africa comes from the west's blind support for neoliberalism. He argues that, "It is therefore necessary to place the main theses in these frameworks alongside other arguments that throw more light on the benefits and limits of neoliberal democracy in Africa" (2011:14).

This paper, however, believes that the missing link is much deeper than that; and it is metaphysical. One may apply all the principles of liberal democracy as proposed by the west, but unless the human person that is the subject and main beneficiary of democracy is put in his/her proper ontological perspective, all will still fail. The ontological relationship between an individual human person and the universe, between the visible and the invisible are all needed to put political practices in their proper ontological perspectives, to make democratic principles work effectively and efficiently.

African nations' building

Another important political discourse in Africa today is about nations' building. It is good to note that most African states were created during the partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) except for Ethiopia and Liberia, the only two African countries that were not colonized.²⁵ The dividing lines on the map of Africa did not correspond to the national boundaries already existing before the coming of the colonial masters. This has created a unique political problem for nation-building in Africa. Most African countries remain states and not nations.

There is however, a distinction between state-building and nation-building according to von Bogdandy, et al.²⁶ Bogdandy and his colleagues maintain that "*State-building* means the establishment, re-establishment, and strengthening of a public structure in a given territory capable of delivering public goods". Essential to state building are the following: creating a centre of sovereign capacities with the monopoly of power (political and physical); creating a legitimate source of power and the rules governing it; making 'the people' the legitimate source of this power; creating a balance of power between the people and the those who govern; creating a bond uniting the governing and the governed.²⁶

On the other hand, von Bogdandy et al. say "*Nation-building* is the most common form of a process of collective identity formation with a view to legitimizing public power within a given territory". This process is characteristically: an indigenous process projected for a meaningful future and drawing from existing traditions, institutions and customs, redefining them as national characteristics in order to support the nations claim to sovereignty and uniqueness. "A successful nation-building process produces a cultural projection of the nation containing a certain set of assumptions, values and beliefs which can function as the legitimizing foundation of a state structure" (2005:586).

While the distinction made between state-building and nation-building are correct, however, what may need to be clarified is that, state-building in modern Africa started with colonialism after dismantling the by then existing African nations. Though centers of sovereign capacities with monopoly of power has been created in most countries of Africa, legitimization of this centre of power and the rules governing it has eluded most states in Africa. The bigger problem has been to make 'the people' the legitimate source of this power, which has been the major African political problem. The most serious role of African political thought will need to focus on identifying the right solution to this problem; making the people the legitimate source of political power. Secondly, there is no balance of

power between this centre of political power and the power of the governed; whereby the power lies more heavily with the rulers other than with the governed. Lastly, there is no genuine bond uniting the governing and the governed. Political thinkers in Africa have an uphill task to identify and propose solutions to these gaps.

As far as nation-building is concerned, Africa is still very far from the ideals of any nation. Bogdandy and his colleagues defined nation-building as the collective identity formation legitimizing public power. In the context of Africa, this collective identity formation within African nation states is still very far from being realized. It should be the central role of the African political thinkers to propose how this collective identity formation can be established. The political thinkers have to draw from the existing traditions, institutions and customs of the African peoples to create an indigenous future oriented cultural projection of the different African peoples. The main hurdle they will face is the eroding indigenous values systems, which are being rapidly replaced by the foreign ones. That may not be the main problem, but the main problem lies in how to create harmonious legitimate and acceptable set of assumptions, values and beliefs to the different cultural communities now lumped together within the different African nation states.

Vincent B. Khapoya²⁷ defines African nationalism as "a subjective feeling of kinship or affinity shared by people of African descent. It is a feeling based on shared cultural norms, traditional institutions, racial heritage, and a common historical experience. [...] Along with this sense of shared identity is a collective desire to maintain one's own cultural, social, and political values independent of outside control".²⁷ In the view of this paper then, nation-building is not only a process of collective identity formation with a view to legitimize public power within a given territory, it is also a process of creating a shared socio-political values and norms, putting political traditions together with a culture of shared identity of a people, based on economic, cultural, social, and political values independent of outside control. This second dimension of identity creation, is yet a difficult task in the context of Africa, which requires substantial political thinking. Characteristically then, the role of African political thought is to redefine these values systems as a basis of national bond among the people who, originally, come from different African cultural backgrounds.

African sovereignty

Sovereignty is another important political discourse in Africa today. State sovereignty is defined by Alain²⁸ as "[...] non-interference by external powers in the internal affairs of another state". This international norm is derived from the principle of the sovereign quality of independent states. So, "sovereignty of a state depends not only on the autonomous will of its sovereign, but also on its standing *vis-à-vis* others overign states. From this perspective, one can say that the sovereignty of any single state is the logical consequence of the existence of several so vereign states".²⁸

However, Alain distinguishes between sovereignty as a 'supreme public power', which has the right and the capacity to impose its authority in the areas of its influence; and sovereignty as 'the holder of legitimate power', who is recognized to have authority. This first refers to 'national sovereignty', which is the independence and freedom of a collective entity to act. The second, refers to 'popular sovereignty', which is associated with power and legitimacy.²⁸

But in the midst of the market economy and forces of globalization, the sovereignty of African states are constantly under threat in two ways; one they can no longer act in support or for the good of their

collective entity due to unnecessary threats from the global forces. Both politically and economically, African states fear isolation from the global world forces, so are forced to adopt political and economic policies which they may know are greatly compromising the interests of their own peoples. Secondly, internally, sovereignty as a 'supreme public power' is often abused by African political leaders on the basis that they have the legitimate power to act on behalf of their people.

African political thinkers have a difficult task to identify and propose the right theories, ways and policies to follow in such regards, so that African sovereignties may be respected both internationally and nationally. Jens Bartelson²⁹ thinks that the root problem is in the confusion in the concept of sovereignty itself. This confusion is an ontological problem, other than purely linguistic, political or legal ones.

Bartelson argues that, "While most authors today agree that the meaning of the concept of sovereignty is open to change across time and space, students of inter nation allow and international relations disagree about the causes and consequences of this conceptual change. While some scholars take such changes to be indicative of a corresponding transformation of global institutions, others regard them as evidence of the remarkable endurance of the West phalian order".²⁹ In Bartelson's view, "this disagreement depends less on divergent accounts of the world, and more on the ontological status implicitly accorded to concepts by these authors. He concludes that the very emphasis on the changing meaning of sovereignty makes normative problems intrinsically hard to settle, and that dealing with this impasse will be a major challenge to legal and political theory in the years to come".²⁹

Clarifying on the ontological root problem in the concept of sovereignty, Bartelson claims that, with regard to the concept of sovereignty, the focus on the "questions of *becoming* makes questions of *being* intrinsically hard to formulate".²⁹ He categorizes the views of most authors between those who emphasize the concept of sovereignty as constantly changing (becoming) and those who think it is constant (being); yet these philosophical ontological underpinnings are sometimes ignored by the very proponents who approach the concept, at times, purely from the legal or from the political point of view.

This paper agrees with the above analysis, which means that the problem of sovereignty in Africa, cannot be solve politically, but it can only be resolved by philosophical thinking, which in the context of Africa must be centered on African metaphysics, as we shall discuss in the next section. These thoughts may not need to be homogeneous, but thinkers should accept the initial premise for discussions; which should be the philosophical metaphysical premise.

African metaphysics in African political practice

The intrinsic relationship between African metaphysics and political philosophy is that without investigating the deeper issues behind African political realities, we cannot come out with convincing and workable solutions for African political problems. As for African thinkers, this does not need to be a dispassionate reflection of the political realities, but by interacting with these political realities, like poverty, corruption, democratic malpractices, abuse of the rule of law etc. , they can derive meaningful solutions for African political problems. This is because African metaphysics, which is the main branch of African philosophy, is the engagement with reality and not a dispassionate reflection of reality, as the Greeks would say.³ Lajul

contends that "African metaphysics is the identification of empirically grounded and deeply seated rational explanations of existence. It is the attempt to explain the relationship between what humans experience in their interactions with the visible and the invisible world around them" (2017:21). According to Obenga, Greek philosophy can be distinguished from Egyptian philosophy by noting that the Greek version considers philosophy to be *love of wisdom* and a philosopher to be a *lover of wisdom*. In the Egyptian version, to philosophize is "to be engaged with love, intense desire, and strong enthusiasm in the investigation of causes underlying reality in order to buildup a system of values by which society may live".³

So, the view of this paper is that in African metaphysics, the neat distinction between general metaphysics and special metaphysics (Kant) or between metaphysical anthropology and ontology (Heidegger) is not there. In living and interacting with the particular sphere of essences, like God, fellowmen and nature, man acquires deep insight into the qualities of those essences that link them together as beings, but also of those essences that distinguish them from one another.^{30, 31} That is why thinkers like Alexis Kagame are able to identify such ideas in the Bantu term *ntu* (the Kantian *general* is the Heideggerian *metaphysics*), which is general to all beings. It is only when *ntu* is joined to other prefixes that the Kantian *special* is and the Heideggerian *physics* become particularized: *Muntu* - human being, *Kintu* - thing, *Hantu* - place or time, and *Kuntu* - modality.

In an effort to derive a political philosophy that can give fundamental answers to African political problems, according to western thinkers, a Cart is already placed squarely in front of the Horse. African political thought according to the Western political paradigm, must give answers that are rational and critical for it to qualify as political philosophy. In this mind-set, rationality must be separated from mythology; democracy must be distinguished from theocracy; the individuals should be isolated from the collective world-views of their peoples, for them to qualify as philosophical political thoughts. Besides, Western political thought has successfully separated theology from political philosophy. Attempts in political theories and practice, after the classical western political period, has been to insulate political practice from ethics. Machiavellian political discourse, is a classic example in this direction. According to Machiavelli,³² any political theory and practice subjected to ethical limitations will be weak and ineffective. Though other political practices exists in the west, in general, for any socio-political organization to qualify as democratic, it must be competitive, multiparty based, and leaders must be elected through secret ballot. Yet these modules and approaches may not all be relevant and applicable to African political problems. In the view of this paper, we can only have a breakthrough in African political discourse if our understanding of philosophy itself is broadened.

This paper proposes that philosophy should be understood in the Egyptian sense, as Obenga underscores. He said, for the Egyptians, "to philosophize was not just to speculate about life and reflect on nature, but also to be engaged with love, intense desire, and strong enthusiasm in the investigation of causes underlying reality in order to build a system of values by which society live".³ This may be contrary to the Greek philosophy being a dispassionate *love of wisdom* and a philosopher being a rational *lover of wisdom*. This means, a political philosopher is one who is involved, engaged intensively, and not just in reflecting on wisdom, but in investigating passionately the causes underlying the political reality in Africa in order to build a practical value system by which African societies should live. Political philosophy, like any other philosophical discourse, is not only a

rational activity, but also a passionate reflection on African political theories and practices. Lajul³³ was emphatic that there was no need in creating disparity between rationality and emotion. Distinguishing between reason and emotion, Lajul wrote;

[. . .] these elements are two inseparable and supplementary dimensions of human activity. Reason shows the way and provides direction to human activities, while emotion provides the force behind human activity. Without this source of force, human reason becomes powerless and, without reason, human emotions remain blind.³³

African metaphysics, which is being proposed in this paper as the basis of African political philosophy, should be the starting point in analysing the role of political thought in African politics. African metaphysics, in my opinion, has three main characteristics; it is transcendent, teleological and holistic, without sacrificing the well-known rationality, criticality and the beyond physicality thesis of any metaphysics.¹ African metaphysics is then *transcendent* in the sense that, behind the physical realities of the world there are also realities that cannot be perceived by our naked eyes. However, they can be perceived by our minds and they have influence on our lives. This may include acceptance of the existence of God, the soul etc. To say philosophy cannot be related to such ideas because they cannot be verified by scientific proof or by rationality, therefore they are not objective, would be a wrong step to begin from. Total denial of these realities in the name of science, rationality, objectivity is just burying our heads in the sand.

Asouzu³⁴ thinks this transcendent aspect of African metaphysics is mythology, which undermines serious metaphysical knowledge. My view is that what Asouzu calls mythology, is instead the transcendent aspect which is a result of answers given to the teleologically fundamental questions put in African metaphysics. This metaphysics is not a myth, but provides answers which go beyond rationative answers of western metaphysics. Lajul contends that, "Mythology is not a belief in mental categories, but a belief in the existence of realities beyond those that can be mentally verified, although they are mentally perceivable. All scientific discoveries and inventions were at one time mythologies in the sense that they were initially only mentally perceivable, and only years later were they scientifically verified" (2017:23).

Secondly, African metaphysics is *teleological*. By teleological I mean the ability to see meaning behind the existence of reality, purpose for the existence of the world and underlying consistent principles creating coherency between being and existence.

Thirdly, I can say African metaphysics is *holistic*; that is to say, there is the interaction of the vital forces; God and humankind, between different people, between humankind and animals and between humankind and material things. Teffo and Roux put it bluntly;

[...] African metaphysics is holistic in nature. Reality is seen as a closed system so that everything hangs together and is affected by any change in the system. [...] There is a principle concerning the interaction of forces, that is, between God and humankind, between

different people, between humankind and animals, and between humankind and material things.³⁵ I would say the role of political philosophy in African politics and in solving African political problems is to equally stress the transcendent, teleological and holistic dimensions of African metaphysics. Discussing this further, I would say the following.

Transcendently, African political theories and practice should provide answers that go beyond the rationative answers of Western political ideas. This would help to re-emphasize the overriding role of ethics in political practice, which later thoughts in western political philosophy, beginning with Machiavelli, tend to dismiss. This is contrary to what Machiavelli asserted that, "the show of religion was helpful to the politician, but the reality of it is hurtful and pernicious".³² It would also help to re-affirm the ethical and social conception of justice, which underpins any good political system. Without ethics, there can be no meaningful base for justice. This will also help to re-enforce the importance of the spiritual dimensions and aspirations of man, which is not fulfilled after death, or in the afterlife; but in this very world under the auspices of good political practice. It may re-introduce into political practice the fact that all physical and metaphysical laws have their off shoot in the spiritual world. Besides, economic and political practices will be permeated by the thought of God and the yearning to commune with Him. For some political thinkers this would translate African political theories into a theocracy. Theocracy is "a political organization in which God himself is recognized as head of state. Such government or state is believed to be under the immediate direction of God."³⁶ But the African political system I am proposing is not theocratic, though it must accept the existence of God in the world. So it should not become atheistic in practice and in theory as is the case in Western capitalism and Eastern communism, respectively. Indeed, in theory capitalism admits the existence of God, but they live as if there is no God; that is practical atheism. While the dying Eastern communism, in theory advocates for the non-existence of God, theoretical atheism.

Teleologically, Africans should begin to focus more on the future and the related practices that affect their political future. Teleological African metaphysics is the ability to see meaning behind the existence of reality, purpose for the existence of the world and the underlying consistent principles creating coherency between being and existence. The world today seems to over emphasize the importance of existence over being. This is seen in the importance the world puts on *having* other than on *being*. Being a human being is now not as important as acquiring material wealth, which is important for sustaining humans in existence. Countries of the world have been distinguished and categorized on the basis of the amount of material wealth they have accumulated; as first world versus third world. Life has lost its meaning amidst this new world philosophy. African political metaphysics should refocus on the purpose for life and create political laws and practices that enhance this purpose and meaning. Such meaning balances and makes clear the distinctions between concepts of *having* and *being*; *welfare* and *wellbeing*; *existence* and *personhood*.

As things are at the moment, most of our political laws and practices do not reflect this metaphysical reality. Political laws are focused on promoting the welfare and existence of man, but not the well-being of the human person. When political laws and economic systems are focused on the welfare and not well-being of man; then political and economic laws are bent on meeting the immediate and existential needs of man, but not the long termed and sustainable well-being of humanity. Because people want food to fill their stomachs

¹When referring to African metaphysics, we should be reminded that, views that are prevalent in African thought system, may as well exists elsewhere, since African philosophy is not an antithesis of other world philosophies. However, for it to qualify as African, it must have substantive foundation in an African thought system. Secondly, to say western metaphysics is individualistic, does not exclude condescending voices within western philosophy. However, the general trend in western metaphysics springs from its methodology of doing philosophy as necessarily an individual rational enterprise.

and continue living, no one cares whether genetically modified foods must be allowed even though their effects on the well-being of man may be dangerous or not. Because the world need political leaders, attention is paid on the process of election and access to power dominated by competition other than the purpose for which elections are done, namely; management of society and service provision to the poor and the needy. In a way, democratic elections which is supposed to be “the means of choosing political leadership has become an end in itself” Lajul.³³

Without blurring the future or denying the existence of God, as Inokoba seems to suggest, we should try to distinguish human role from divine role in a political dispensation. The danger is for man to take up the role of God, as is the case in Western political practice, or for man to relinquish his role to the unknown, as was the case in some traditional African political practice. In trying to substitute God in his role, man has become the inventor of mental or rational laws to which nature, man and his society are subjected. One can make reference to the theory of *Kantian Copernican Revolution*, which suggests that instead of depending on natural laws (i. e. depending on the laws of nature), man should make nature obey and depend on (or rotate around) manmade laws. Indeed Immanuel Kant is the inventor of the idea that man should subject the laws of nature to the rational laws of man so that nature gives answers to human problems.³⁷ Similarly, the Rousseau’s *contract theory*, which is in my opinion is more positive, starts from people’s political power base. Though it is still human invention not necessarily derived from nature, is a means by which the people can regulate human political activities.

On the other hand, in trying to relinquish their political roles to the unknown, many Africans have not played their roles in political dispensations or demanded from their leaders’ accountability, since all is left to wait for the unknown future to get rewards or punishments from the gods. Lajul earlier noted that, “in traditional African societies, it requires the intervention of spiritual or metaphysical powers to control the excesses of the practice and exercise of political authority in the hands of leaders” (2014:89). Mfuniselwa³⁸ observed that African *ubuntu* metaphysics could be an answer to African politico-economic problems. He did this by highlighting two dimensions: the internal and the external dimensions of *ubuntu* metaphysics. The internal dimension in this metaphysics is an ontological bond that ties an individual to another, an intimate ontological relationship, comparable with the causal tie which binds creature and creator. This internal bond is being disorganized by the modern economic and political systems that preach amoral political competition without any due regard to the existence of God and the bond that man should create with Him. Indeed Oswald Hirmer, the author of *Marx, Money, Christ*,³⁹ was right to observe that, Western capitalism is practical atheism, while Eastern communism is theoretical atheism. Both political systems do not believe in the existence of God, either practically or theoretically. Besides, the desires for power and profit in the name of democracy and free market economy have destroyed the principle of justice in Western socio-political systems. Democracy without justice is empty, and free market economy without fairness is exploitation of the vulnerable and injustice in practice. The western political system over-emphasizes competition instead of balancing competition with cooperation, making political practice a game of the strong and the advantaged, instead of making political democracy the ability of the society to manage it self for the benefit of the majority weak and the vulnerable.⁴⁰⁻⁵¹

The outer dimension of *ubuntu* metaphysics is the responsibility that we owe to one another on the basis of one moral universe and our shared moral sense that makes us recognize our duty to the other. This shared responsibility is no more under the modern world politico-economic system. If these inner and outer ontological ties are not restored in Africa, then an African will be annihilated, in that his inner self and its demands will not be in harmony with the outer environment imposed by the modern politico-economic system. This will retard development in Africa.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has presented some of the main political discourses in Africa; identity, development, liberation, democracy, nation building, and sovereignty. While liberation discourse was very important at the time for the struggle of African political independence, today burning issues on the African soil are more to do with identity and unity, development and democracy, and nations’ building and sovereignty. The identity and unity discourse in African politics is important in that African nations are conglomerations of different nationalities that were lumped together at the time of colonization. The up-heap task for African political thinkers and leadership remains in making African political units harmonious national states; making the different African peoples who now live within the same national boundaries, one people, and one nations. This cannot happen unless African political thinkers reflect deeply to propose to the African political leadership to play their cards correctly. To play such political cards correctly requires correct political philosophies and ideologies, which unfortunately are still not harmonized.

The most common political theory and good ideological approaches being practiced on the African soil today are borrowed from outside Africa. Without home grown political theories, the effort to unite African peoples, politically and economically is an illusion. This is where the main role of political philosophy in Africa lies. The political thinkers have a task to identify such a political theory by which political practitioners should live.

Secondly, the issue of development is very pertinent to Africa and its future. However, the kind of development Africa needs is quite different from the one advocated by Western thinkers and their system. According to this paper, development should be reflected in the qualitative improvements of life of the African peoples, progressively and sustainably. But this cannot happen with the level of political corruption and economic mismanagement by the political elite of the different African countries. Indeed, many Africans are living below poverty lines, not because Africa lacks resources, but more importantly because African resources are mismanaged. In the most recent research done in Makerere University,³¹ reveal that where ethics and integrity are high, the quality of life of the people is higher, and where ethics and integrity are low, the quality of life of a people is lower. The role of philosophical thought in this situation is to propose relevant political theories and ideologies centred on African metaphysics to curb political corruption and improve equity, cooperation, hard work and better management of African societies.

Lastly, Africa needs political theories derived from her metaphysics, which is holistic, teleological and transcendent. Meaning, political theories and ideologies that are inclusive and not exclusive, based on the harmonious ontological relationship between the individuals and their God, and between the individuals and their creation reflecting

the purpose for life and its meaning, and that transcends the material welfare of man taking care of human well-being and the immaterial dimensions of man. It is to produce an ethical community that are politically and economically sensitive to the importance of the human person and his or her environment.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding

None.

References

- Guy Martin. *African Political Thought*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2012.
- Pieter Boele van Hensbroek. *African Political Philosophy, 1860–1995: An inquiry into families of discourse*. Preager Publishers. (Greenwood Publishing Group), New York. 1998.
- Obenga Théophile. *Egypt: Ancient History of African Philosophy*. In: Kwasi Wiredu, Editor. *A Companion to African Philosophy*. Blackwell, Oxford. 2004.
- Van Dijk. *Politics, Ideology, and Discourse*. 2006.
- Differencebetween.net. *Difference between Similar Terms and Objects*. 2017.
- Erikson RS, Tedin KL. *American Public Opinion*. New York: Longman. 2003.
- Adorno TW, Frenkel-Brunswik E, Levinson DJ, et al. *The Authoritarian Personality*. New York: Harper. 1950.
- Campbell A, Converse PE, Miller WE, et al. *The American Voter*. Oxford, UK: Wiley. 1960/1965.
- Kerlinger FN. *Liberalism and Conservatism: The Nature and Structure of Social Attitudes*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. 1984.
- Denzau AD, North DC. *Shared mental models: ideologies and institutions*. In *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*. In: Lupia, McCubbins, SL Popkin, Editors. New York: Cambridge Univ Press. 1994/2000;23–46.
- Billig M. *Ideology and social psychology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1982.
- Eagleton T. *Ideology: An introduction*. London: Verso. 1991.
- Larrai J. *The concept of ideology*. London: Hutchinson. 1979.
- Zizek S. *Mapping ideology*. London: Verso. 1994.
- Erickson T Hylland. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press. 2010.
- Olasunkanmi, Aborisade. Economic Globalization and its Effect on Community in Africa. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*. 2011;2(1):61–64.
- Attali, Jacques. *Millenium: Winners and Losers in the Coming World Order*. New York: Times Books. 1991.
- Hannerz Ulf. Scenarios for Peripheral Cultures. In Anthony King, *Culture, Globalization*. 1996.
- Ezinne C Oji. The African Union: Examining the New Hope for Africa. *An Ethics of Development in a Global Environment Report*, ENGR 297C. 2004.
- Brandmeir K, Grimm M, Heise M, et al. Allianz Global Wealth Report. *Economic Research*, Munich: Allianz SE. 2017.
- The Wealth Report. *A comprehensive Analysis of how wealth is distributed around the world*. 2015.
- Okenna Frank Ndubuisi. The philosophical paradigm of African identity and development. *Open Journal of Philosophy*. 2013;3(1):222–230.
- Lajul Wilfred. Market Economy and its Role in Poverty in Africa: Myths and Realities. *Journal of Business and Economics*. 2016;7(8):1376–1385.
- Adetula AO, Victor. *Measuring Democracy and 'Good Governance' in Africa: A Critique of Assumptions and Methods*. In: Kwandiwe Konde, Chinenyengozi Ejiogu, Editors. *Governance in the 21st Century: African Focus*. Human Sciences Research Council HSRC. 2011:10–25.
- Akpan MB. *Liberia & Ethiopia, 1880–1914: The Survival of Two African States*. In: Adu Boahen, Editor. *General History of Africa, VII: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880–1935*. Heinemann, California, UNESCO Publishing. 1985;249–283.
- Von Bogdandy A, Wolfrum R. State-Building, Nation-Building, and Constitutional Politics in Post-Conflict Situations: Conceptual Clarifications and an Appraisal of Different Approaches. *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*. 2005;9:579–613.
- Khapoya B Vincent. *The African Experience*. Pearson, Verlag. 2012.
- Alain de Benoist. *What is Sovereignty?* In: Julia Kostova, Editor. *Qu'est-ce que la souveraineté?* In *Éléments*, No. 96. 1999;24–35.
- Jens Bartelson. The Concept of Sovereignty Revisited. *The European Journal of International Law (EJIL)*. 2006;17(2):463–474.
- Lajul W. *African Metaphysics: Traditional and Modern Discussions*. In: Ukpokolo E Isaac, Editor. *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. 2017;19–48.
- Lajul W, Wamala E, Kasozi FM. *Ethics and Integrity in Governance for Sustainable Livelihoods*, Kampala, Fountain Publishers. 2017.
- Machiavelli, Nicolo. *The Prince*. Translated by Thomson. New York: PF Collier & Son. 1909.
- Lajul Wilfred. *African Philosophy: Critical Dimensions*. Fountain Publishers, Kampala. 2014.
- Innocent I Asouzu. Science and African Metaphysics: A Search for Direction. *Philosophy in Africa*. 2015.
- Teffo LJ, Roux APJ. *Metaphysical Thinking in Africa*. In: Coetzee PH, Roux APJ, Editors. *African Philosophy Reader*. London, New York: Routledge. 1998.
- Uche A Dike. African Metaphysics and Theocracy: A Case Study of Theocratic Politics in Ogbia Land, Rivers State, Nigeria. *Open Journal of Philosophy*. 2013;3(1A):81–85.
- Kant Immanuel. Preface to the second Edition of Critique of Pure Reason. *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith, London, Macmillan. 1990.
- Mfuniselwa J Bhengu. *Ubuntu as an African Metaphysics in Economics: Towards an Economic-Cultural Synergy in Humanising our Economic System*. South Africa, UNISA Press. 2010.
- Hirmer Oswald. *Marx, Money, Christ: An Illustrated Introduction into Capitalism, Marxism and African Socialism, Examined in the Light of the Gospel*, Mambo Press, Gweru. 1982.

40. Adu A, Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1987.
41. Alofun, Grace Olufolake O. African Socialism: A Critique. In *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* (IOSR–JHSS). 2014;19(8):69–71.
42. Bamikole O, Lawrence. Nkrumah and the Triple Heritage Thesis and Development in Africana Societies. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*. 2012;2(2).
43. James N, Kariuki. Pan–Africanism: Strengthening the Unity of Global Africa. In: Bankie BF, Mchombu K, Editors. *Pan–Africanism/African Nationalism: Strengthening the Unity of Africa and Its Diaspora*. The Red Sea Press, Trenton NJ, Demara Eritrea. 2008.
44. Jost T John, Federico M, Christopher, e al. Political Ideology: Its Structure, Functions, and Elective Affinities. *Annual Review of Psychology*. 2009;60.
45. Kasanda A. Analyzing African social and political philosophy: Trends and challenges. *Journal of East–West Thought*. 2015;5(1):30–50.
46. Kwame Gyekye. *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Revised Edition, Temple University Press, Philadelphia. 1995.
47. Kwameh Nkrumah. Consciencism. In: Eze CE, Editors. *African Philosophy: An anthology*. Blackwell Publishers, Malden. 1998.
48. Mazrui Ali. *The African: A Triple Heritage*. London: BBC Publication. 1986.
49. Falola Toyin. *Introduction*. In: Toyin Falola, Editor. *The end of Colonial Rule: Nationalism and Decolonization*. Carolina Academic Press, Durham, North Carolina. 2002;4.
50. <http://www.scirp.org/journal/ojpp>
51. Wiredu K. *Philosophy and an African Culture*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 1980.