

Bumuntu Memory and Authentic Personhood: An African Art of Becoming Humane

Mutombo Nkulu-N'Sengha

MEMORY AND THE NARRATIVE IMAGINATION In the African and Diaspora Experience
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Chapter 12

In Central Africa, humor artists remind us that "Africans have become capitalists without capital and nationalists without nation." This popular sense of humor uses laughter to convey how the loss of memory of ancestral values has plunged Africa into a dramatic existential condition, fraught with alienation, estrangement, and petrification of the mind. The crisis we witness in African politics, the failure of economic development, and the widespread social corruption are due to this loss of memory about the meaning of being human. In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate that African tradition offers enough sapiential resources to overcome such a crisis. In this context, I intend to explore a vision of the dignity of the African conception of personhood. I shall use the *Bumuntu* memory to retrieve such a vision and to bring into relief what in Africa is viewed as the authentic mode of being human. In so doing, I will explore the notions of historical consciousness, historical memory, and cultural memory through the analysis of traditional literature in both its oral and its written sources.

I shall proceed as follows: after a brief excursus on the loss of *Bumuntu* memory, I will articulate the importance of cultural memory and oral tradition in Africa. This will lead us to the central theme: the notion of *Bumuntu*, i.e., genuine personhood in Africa. In so doing, I will highlight the African attitude toward the individual and the community (i.e., the *Fadenya-Badenya* paradigm), toward government and democratic values, and finally, toward foreigners and foreign religions. I shall conclude with a reflection on " *Bumuntu* Memory in the Age of Globalization." It should be noted from the outset that my vision of African (or *Bumuntu*) personhood comes largely from my memory of the Luba tradition in which I was raised in Central Africa, and the values that were instilled in me by my parents and elders in various villages of *Lubaland*.

Status Quaestionis

During the colonial and postcolonial eras, Africa has known phases of incredible political grotesqueness that have produced ubuesque dictators, rocambolesque kinglets, and monstrous warlords of Caligulan proportion. But it would be un-African to overlook other political phases in the long, intricate, and variegated historical development of Africa over more than three thousand years, or to confuse the corruption of some rulers with an overall African conception of power. Likewise, it would be illogical to use the brief episodes of the Rwandan genocide, the

Liberian civil war, or the Congolese war to argue that African culture and spirit are essentially antithetical to peace, justice, and love. To do so would be to succumb to neocolonial tales and grids of interpretation which are only a pale hobgoblin of a rocambolesque cultural amnesia. Historical consciousness and cultural memory remind us that Africa has produced a set of values that are useful for solving the current social crisis. As Georges Balandier and Jacques Maquet acknowledged, "African wisdom is not merely a convenient expression; it is something that exists. It is a collection of unique precepts that enable the people of traditional Africa to settle as harmoniously as possible the disputes that mar human relationships" (Balandier 336). This wisdom is contained in *Bumuntu* memory.

The Loss of *Bumuntu* Memory and the Death of Africa

Hampate Ba, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, and other thinkers have often reminded us that in Africa the death of an old person is viewed as a burning library, for it constitutes a tremendous loss of the memory of ancestral wisdom. In particular, this wisdom includes the memory of the art of being human and humane, or what I shall refer to in this chapter as the "*Bumuntu* memory." In fact, in 1978, in one of the first systematic elaborations of an African liberation theology, Monsignor Bakole wa Ilunga (a Catholic bishop) observed that "If our ancestors could return and see what is going on in our society, they would not believe they were in Africa, nor would they recognize their descendants." Why? Because, Bakole explains, "We are far from being true Africans.... [T]here is nothing authentic about the way in which the masses and the leaders of society, especially in the cities, are living today.... That shows how far we have lost our grasp of deeper meaning and of the values that supported the life and ways of our real ancestors" (Wa Ilunga 17). One of the causes of this loss of memory is the rise of a new school-the modern civilization of writing brought in a colonial context.

Reflecting on the dramatic loss of freedom and cultural amnesia caused by the colonial process, Cheikh Hamidou Kane captured this issue of the loss of memory in his philosophical novel, *L'aventure ambiguë*. After their defeat by the colonial forces of France, the Diallobe people met to reflect on the causes of this defeat and to make a critical decision: Should they send their children to the new school of the White man? And what does such a new education imply for the future of Africa? La Grande Royale (the most Royal Lady, and sister of the chief) observed, first, the dramatic challenge to the worldview of African value system: How could the aggressive foreign forces win when their behavior was clearly morally wrong? She then thinks that African children should be sent to Europe and to the school of the European conquerors to understand the reasons for the African defeat, to learn this strange "art de vaincre sans avoir raison." Conquering the conquerors' fire will enable Africans to better defend themselves. Moreover, both the chief and La Grande Royale observed that the weakness of African episteme could be remedied by the school of European conquerors. After the speech by the Most Royal Lady, the chief made his observation:

If I do not tell the Diallobe to go to the new school, they will not go. Their houses will fall into ruin, their children will die or be reduced to slavery. Extreme poverty will be entrenched among them, and their hearts will be filled with resentment... If I told them

to go to the new school, they would go en masse. They would learn all the ways of joining wood to wood which we do not know. But learning, they would also forget. Would what they would learn be worth as much as what they would forget? I should like to ask you: can one learn this without forgetting that, and is what one learns worth what one forgets? (Kane 45-50).

What the chief's and La Grande Royale's strains of thought exemplify is not merely the loss of African traditional knowledge or history, but something more fundamental: the loss of *Bumuntu* memory, i.e., what it means to be an African, to be a genuine human being.

The Importance of Memory and Oral Tradition

The fundamental dilemma that has faced Africa since the colonial era has been how to embrace Western modernity without losing African values of personhood. As Bakole put it, it is only by restoring the historical consciousness and memory of ancestral wisdom that Africans can reconcile Western modernity with their authentic identity. It is the goal of this chapter to contribute in some modest measure to the recovery of such a *Bumuntu* memory. However in a world where writing is considered superior to oral tradition, the restoration of African memory begins with the acknowledgement of the profound value and validity of oral tradition, as the ancient Egyptians did, despite their use of hieroglyphic writing.

In discussing the importance that Africa accords memory and oral tradition, it is worth remembering that Jesus did not write the Bible and that almost all the major sacred texts of the world existed for years, decades, and even centuries as oral tradition. Religion was sustained by memory rather than books. But let us examine a better case: the crucial African legend told in ancient Greece by Socrates and recorded by Plato in *Phaedrus*. This is a tale about the importance of memory. The famous father of Western philosophy tells us that it was the African God, Thoth (i.e., Theuth) who invented writing. Theuth, Socrates says, the patron God of the Egyptian city of Naucratis, was the inventor of many arts, such as arithmetic, calculation, geometry, astronomy, draughts, and dice. However, emphasizes Socrates, his most important discovery was the use of "*grammata*" (i.e., letters, writing). The most significant part of this narrative is not so much that Africans invented writing, but rather that they considered its different uses and concluded that writing should not be overpraised for it has some serious limitations on the path of knowledge and wisdom. According to Socrates, when Theuth came to Thamus (i.e., Ammon), the supreme God and king of the land of Egypt, praised his inventions, and expressed the desire that the Egyptians might be allowed to have the benefit of them, Thamus carefully analyzed their uses, praised some, and disapproved of others. On the invention of writing specifically, Theuth offered the following praise: "This invention, O King, will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; I have discovered a remedy [pharmakon: potion, medicine, drug] both for the memory and for wisdom." To which Thamus offered the following astonishing reply:

O most ingenious [*technikotete*] Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in

this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a power opposite to that which they in fact possess. For this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it; they will not exercise their memories, but, trusting in external, foreign marks [*graphes*], they will not bring things to remembrance from within themselves. You have discovered a remedy [*pharmakon*] not for memory, but for reminding. You offer your students the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom. They will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality. (138-139)

In the West, since the time of ancient Greeks, writing became the mark of distinction between civilized people and savages. Knowledge and civilization came to be equated with writing. Subsequently, the oral tradition and the culture of memory were regarded as an infirmity of the mind that should be overcome. For centuries, a Western tradition going back to ancient Greeks held memory in bad repute and glorified the written word. The very origins of history, civilization, and humanity itself were identified with the invention of writing. Civilizations based on writing were glorified and societies based on oral tradition were deemed savage, primitive, barbaric, and ignorant. And yet, for Africa, the knowledge of the book is in some cases viewed as inferior. I hear from friends in Munich, Paris, Rome, London, and many parts of the United States that what, as Africans, we need from the West is merely science, technology, and modern ways of organizing the economy; but if we want to know what it means to be a good and genuine human being we have to go back to Africa and learn from our village elders. This view does not stem from delusional romanticism. It is grounded in the incredible pitfalls one encounters in Western societies and in the reality of humane values that, in Africa, sustain a life of dignity, meaning, and purpose despite rampant poverty, war, and weak political institutions.

***Bumuntu* Memory: The African Concept of Memory**

After centuries of disparaging "oral tradition" and learning based on memory, we now witness an emerging interest increased by the overwhelming impact of digital technologies and television on our society. Most importantly, the very faculty of memory that sustains oral tradition is now of great interest to scientists. Indeed, new disciplines of neurosciences have emerged and nowadays research on memory is the focus of thousands of scientists and students worldwide. From most major dictionaries, encyclopedias, and writings by scientific experts we learn that memory can be defined as "the mental faculty of retaining and recalling information and past experiences" or as "systems, representations and processes in living organisms that are involved in the retention of information." Or, "the act or capacity to remember." At the same time, we learn from this research that "memory" is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to define in dogmatic formulas. It is not the intention of this chapter to address all the arcane nuances and forms related to the definitions and taxonomies of memory as revealed by brain research. We shall limit ourselves to a working definition or rather, a perspective useful for our approach to *Bumuntu* tradition. More specifically, we are interested in the African understanding of the nature and importance of memory.

The first question one must confront is where to find sources necessary to understand the African vision of memory. The primary source is, of course, memory itself. In the present chapter, I make use of my own memory, what I remember about African culture in my early stage of life, i.e., the first twenty years of life in Lubaland, where I was exposed intensively to an oral tradition. The second source is the abundant literature on memory and African culture produced by anthropologists, historians, Africanists, missionaries, linguists, and other scholars (see, e.g., Roberts and Roberts). Some of these written sources are the dictionaries written on African languages and civilizations. The lexicographers of African languages have explored the various words used for memory and the complexity of their semantic fields. Regarding the language of the Baluba people, there are two works of great significance: Gillis's *Dictionnaire Francais-Kiluba* and Van Avennaet and Mbuya's *Dictionnaire Kiluba-Francais*.

It appears from these sources that memory plays a crucial role in Luban understanding of what it means to be human. Memory not only has an anthropological significance, but also a cosmological and metaphysical origin. As creation myths point out, memory stands at the very origin of the universe. Indeed, the Baluba commonly refer to the supreme creator of the universe as "*Leza Malango*" (Almighty Intelligence). Such an attribute means that for the Baluba, the creator of the universe possesses omnipotent thought and knowledge. God is believed to be supremely intelligent because he knows yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He knows everything and there is no forgetfulness in him. This means that intelligence includes memory. For the Baluba, memory is not a passive faculty, nor merely a storehouse. Memory is the dynamic glue that holds all the cognitive faculties coherently together. This is why the Luba lexicon that refers to memory comprises a plethora of terms covering a vast semantic field. Words such as *malango*, *lute*, and *tunangu*, which are commonly used to refer to memory, show that, for the Baluba, memory implies not only retention and reminiscence (*lute*), but also reflection, thinking, deliberation, judgment, discernment, and circumspection (*tunangu*, *malango*). Indeed memory implies knowledge, powerful mind, great spirit, and most importantly, absence of forgetfulness. It is the knowledge that is not forgotten that makes humans function normally. Memory is the foundation of the three pillars of personhood: thought, language, and action (or behavior). Memory is the glue that binds our being together. Without memory, no one can speak or think properly. Without memory of learned behavior and wisdom, no one can know how to behave properly. Without memory, the mind is empty, the spirit dead, and the being (*Muntu*) becomes a thing (*Kintu*). Without memory, no one can be fully humane. Memory sustains our humanity and personality. And the recovery of African memory means the recovery of our very humanity.

***Bumuntu* Memory and the African Concept of a Genuine Human Being**

The literature produced over the last five centuries by Western historians, anthropologists, missionaries, novelists, and other scholars has largely presented Africa as a land antithetical to humanity itself. Our libraries are still replete with stories of cannibals, witch doctors, naked savages, and bloodthirsty kinglets. One can scarcely find anything positive written about

Africa or Africans in modern Western scholarship. Most books on African religions focus on rituals, witchcraft, fetishism, cannibalism, and polygamy almost never on moral principles. If we open the index of more than ninety percent of the books published on Africa, we never find a serious rubric on ethics, democratic values, or human rights.

However, although the conceptual apparatus and paradigms invented during the colonial era still continue to shape postcolonial scholarship in a subtle-and sometimes overt-fashion, over the last three decades, the process of the decolonization of knowledge that began after World War II has gained momentum. It is now widely understood that, as Leo Frobenius put it several years ago, "the African is civilized to the marrow of his bones, the idea of a savage negro is a European invention." Most importantly, as Roger Bastide put it, "there is in Africa, an entire civilization of spirituality comparable to that of wood carving" (Bastide, *Le Candomble de Bahia*, cited in Zahan 126). This dramatic paradigm shift found its clearest recent expression in the words of Pope John Paul II. In 1994, during the first African Synod of Bishops held in Rome, Pope JohnPaul II acknowledged that despite all the crises occurring in Africa, Africa has produced a fundamental wisdom that can contribute not only to the articulation of an African solution to African problems but also could enrich humanity as a whole. In his document, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation," he articulated some of these positive values:

Although Africa is very rich in natural resources, it remains economically poor. At the same time, it is endowed with a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole.... They are values which can contribute to an effective reversal of the Continent's dramatic situation and facilitate that worldwide revival on which the desired development of individual nations depends.

The Pope went on to specify these African values:

Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is very much present in the consciousness of these peoples, as is also the need for rites of purification and expiation. In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God. The sons and daughters of Africa love life ... The peoples of Africa respect the life which is conceived and born. They rejoice in this life. They reject the idea that it can be destroyed, even when the so-called "progressive civilizations" would like to lead them in this direction. And practices hostile to life are imposed on them by means of economic systems which serve the selfishness of the rich. Africans show their respect for human life until its natural end, and keep elderly parents and relatives within the family. African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never

succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions.
(Browne 245)

The very leader of a Catholic Church that for centuries disqualified African spirituality as devil worship, paganism, or Satanism declared that Africa is endowed with priceless human qualities. The discovery of these priceless human qualities is what we refer to as "*Bumuntu* memory." These qualities are not learned from academic volumes. Rather, they are transmitted from generation to generation by way of memory. It is a memory enhanced by rites and rituals, celebrations and festivals. In the following, I shall explore the fundamental question: What does it mean to be a genuine human being in Africa?

African personhood can be defined in a variety of ways. Important insights can be gained by examining man's attitude vis-a-vis 1) the ethical principles of good and evil, 2) the individual and the community, 3) women, 4) children, 5) persons with disabilities, 6) foreigners, 7) religion in general and foreign religions in particular, 8) government, 9) economy, and 10) nature. All this is embodied in the cultural memory expressed in African proverbs. Proverbs play a crucial role in the oral education of people in the path of wisdom. There are over a thousand written collections of African proverbs, and scholars estimate the sum total of African proverbs at over a million. This is an incredible body of wisdom. Proverbs are the repository of the most precious philosophical and religious ideas of Africa. Proverbs are memorable sentences of traditional wisdom reflecting a keen observation of human existence and conduct and a long experience of life throughout the ages. African proverbs transmit fundamental values of life. They deal with, among other things, education, moral teaching, the concept of God, marriage, government, relationship between individuals, and the meaning of life and death. Proverbs are a particular form of a literary genre. They tend to be compact statements of wisdom expressed in a poetic and enigmatic fashion. The meaning of a proverb is often hidden, cryptic, or elliptical. They can take various modes of expression. Some take the form of a short maxim, dictum, adage, aphorism, or apophthegm. Or they may take the form of a riddle or even an allegory, legend, or song. The words for proverbs among the Baluba (*nkindi*, *bishintshi*) emphasize the esoteric and enigmatic aspect of their message or meaning. Among the Akan, "*ebe*" (pl. mme), the word for proverb, is etymologically linked to "*abe*" (pl. mme), the word for palm tree. It highlights the richness of its meaning in reference to the tremendous wealth of a palm tree, which produces palm oil, palm wine, palm-kernel oil, broom, salt, or even soap. Because these products are a result of a process of distillation, the proverb stands as a refined product of the reflective process, the result of an elaborate and complex thinking process that involves a higher level of imagination and a synthesis of human experience. Like palm-kernel oil or palm wine (which are not obvious to the eye as the juice of the orange), the meaning of a proverb is deep, profound, hidden. It is not obvious or direct. To better grasp the meaning of a proverb, one must dig deeper in his thought. Proverbs are excellent didactic sayings and precious storehouses of ancestral wisdom and philosophy. They clearly exemplify the power and beauty of African oral tradition. By endorsing a symbolic, metaphorical, and poetic form of language, proverbs skillfully abstain from direct talk. In so doing, proverbs help smooth tensions and enable people in conflict to debate issues while avoiding ad hominem attacks. Thus, painful issues can be discussed without anybody feeling directly vilified. In this way, proverbs are not

merely didactic, they are a powerful tool for conflict resolution and peace making. And in so doing they teach us what it means to be human in Africa.

The following is a brief survey to illustrate the value of the wisdom of African proverbs. The first category of proverbs deals with the nature of proverbs themselves and the issue of knowledge and wisdom. The Fulani teach that "a Fulani will lie but he will not make a lying proverb." This vision illustrates the normative and transcendent nature of proverbs as reliable source of wisdom. This wisdom is understood as available to all, for as two Akan proverbs have it, "Wisdom is not in the head of one person" (*Nyansa nni onipa baako ti mu*) and "Wisdom is like a baobab tree, a single person's hand cannot embrace it." In a world where the use of knowledge for negative or harmful purpose is rejected as mere witchcraft the Baluba teach that genuine knowledge is to know how to live in harmony with our fellow human beings (*Bwino bonso ke bwino, bwino l kwikala biya ne Bantu*). Thus, Africans value not just any kind of knowledge but that "knowledge-wisdom" called by the Baluba *Bwino*. By applying this wisdom to specific areas of human existence, we can examine human nature, moral conduct, and ethics in government.

Anthropological proverbs teach that a genuine human being is the one who succeeds in maintaining that delicate balance between individuality and the sense of community, for a genuine human being is, in the beautiful expression of the Mande, a *Fadenya-Badenya* (an individual and collective being). Thus numerous proverbs teach emphatically personal responsibility: "*Vidye wa kuha buya nobe wa mukwashako*" (God gave you beauty and good character but you must help him, by taking care of yourself and constantly cultivating your virtues [Luba proverb]). To a lazy person, the Baluba throw the following proverb: "*Kalele Kadia Tulo*." (Let the one who sleeps eat his sleep). And to one who hates hard work, another Luba proverb says: "*Kwamwene malwa udye bufumu?*" (If you want to be a king, you must first learn the art of suffering and hard work). Likewise, the Ifa corpus of the Yoruba teach that each individual must use his own hands to improve his own character ("*Owo ara eni, Là afi l tunwa ara enii se*"). Good character is emphasized as the very essence of personhood, as a Yoruba proverb explicitly puts it: "*Iwa rere l'éso eniyan*" (Good character, good existence, is the adornment of a human being).

This notion of personal responsibility stems from an acknowledgement of the sacred nature, and therefore the dignity, of each individual, for as an Akan proverb has it, "All human beings are children of God, no one is a child of the earth" (*Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obi nnye asase ba*). To those who suppress individuality, many proverbs remind them of the uniqueness and dignity of each individual in the eyes of the ancestors. "Human beings," says a Chewa proverb, "are like sand out of which one cannot make a mountain." (*Wanthu ndi mchenga saundika*). Likewise, the Baluba emphasize the value of individual privacy: "*Munda mwa mukwenu kemwelwa kuboko, nansha ulele nandi butanda bumo*" (No one can put his arm into another person's heart not even when sharing the same bed). And yet the individual is advised to value the community: "If you do not let your neighbor have nine," says an Akan proverb, "you will not have ten" (*Woamma wo yonko antwa nkron a, wo nso wonntwa du*). Respect for the community emphasizes a particular kind of respect for people with disabilities: "Do not

laugh at a crippled person," warns a Luba proverb, for "God is still in the creating process" (*Koseha lemene Vidyē muntanda ukihanga*). It also commands hospitality and respect for the stranger, for as a Luba proverb put it, "your guest is your God" (*Mwenyi obe I Leza obe*). These are some of the critical values that define a genuine human being or a *Muntu*, a person of *Bumuntu*.

To be more specific, there are three fundamental concepts—*Muntu*, *Kintu*, and *Bumuntu*—involved in the definition of a human being in the African context. In Kiluba language, a human being (man or woman) is referred to as a *Muntu* (plural: *Bantu*). *Muntu* is not an ethnic concept but a generic term for every human being. It is found in closely related variants in other Bantu languages. The word "*Kintu*" refers to things, and to human beings who have lost their dignity. All over Africa, we find a clear distinction between genuine humans and bad ones. Thus, to fundamental existential question "what is a human being?" Africans respond: *Bumuntu*. This notion conveys the fundamental African understanding of genuine personhood (i.e., authentic humanity). It is indeed *Bumuntu* that defines sainthood, holiness, or gentleness. The Akan "*Tiboa-Aboa*" paradigm of personhood, the "*Muntu-Kintu*" paradigm of Luba religion, and the vision of humanity in Yoruba religion point to the existence of a common African vision of personhood. *Bumuntu* means the quintessence of personhood, that fundamental authentic mode of being humane. *Bumuntu* stands for the content of a *Muntu*, the moral character, the essence of genuine humanity, the essence of a deeply humane being. This word is widespread among Bantu languages. "*Ubuntu*" is another variant of *Bumuntu* found in the southern part of Africa.

The distinctive characteristic of *Bumuntu* is the feeling of humanity toward fellow human beings. As John Mbiti pointed out so eloquently, a genuine human being does not define his humanity merely in Cartesian cogito ergo sum terms. He rather focuses on those thoughts of goodness and compassion toward others. Thus, the *Bumuntu* is defined in terms of hospitality and solidarity: "I am because we are, and because we therefore I am." This is translated into daily greetings. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, for example, greetings go as follows:

"Mangwani. Marara sei?" (Good morning. Did you sleep well?)

"Ndarara, kana mararawo." (I slept well, if you slept well.)

"Maswera sei?" (How has your day been?)

"Ndaswera, kana maswerawo." (My day has been good, if your day has been good.)

Such greetings exemplify the feeling of humanity toward others. Thus, the *Bumuntu*, as Bishop Desmond Tutu puts it, is the feeling that "my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours," that "a person is a person through other persons" as a proverb has it. The "*Muntu wa Bumuntu*" is the "*Muntu wa Buntu*" (a generous person)—one who feels that the joy and pain of others are also his own joy and pain, that his humanity is humiliated or diminished whenever other people are dehumanized. A person with ubuntu does not feel threatened that others are good or successful. He celebrates cooperation over competition. Thus, *Bumuntu* is that good character that believes in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity. It is the ontological authenticity that governs the African quest for well-being and the African

celebration of the humanity of other fellow humans. Such solidarity is not a superficial condescension. It stems from the understanding of the common origin of humanity as defined in African cosmologies. Creation myths indicate that *Bumuntu* derives from the transcendent origin of human beings. As an Akan proverb has it, "All human beings are children of God, no one is a child of the earth (*Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obi nnye asase ba*). For the Baluba people, as for the Akan, all human beings, men and women, are "*Bantu ba Leza*"(God's people) and "*Bana ba Vidye Mukulu*" (Children of the Great Spirit).

It is because of this transcendent origin that the true nature of human beings consists of good character, which is the intrinsic attribute of *Bumuntu*. Thus, in many regions of Africa, people make a distinction between two kinds of human beings: those without *Bumuntu* are regarded as nonhuman, whereas those with *Bumuntu* are appreciated as genuine human beings. The Baluba maintain, like the Yoruba and the Akan, that "good character is the essence of religion."

One of the fundamental characteristics of the African concept of the person is the distinction made between what the Baluba call "*Muntu wa bine*" (the true human being) and "*Muntu wa bitupu*" (an empty shell or nonperson).

To the question, "what is a human being," Luba religion responds by establishing first a distinction between the categories of *Muntu* (a genuine human being) and *Kintu* (a thing). According to Luba cosmology, every human being exists as a pendulum that swings between two categories of being, as the following table shows:

The MU-NTU Category of good morality and intelligence	The KI-NTU Category of bad morality and stupidity
<i>MUNTU</i> (good, respectable person)	<i>KI-NTU</i> (someone who does not deserve respect)
<i>TATA</i> (a good father)	<i>KI-TATA</i> (a bad father)
<i>MULUME</i> (a good husband)	<i>KI-LUME</i> (abusive husband)
<i>MULOPWE</i> (good king)	<i>KI-LOPWE</i> (tyrant, stupid king)

Thus, as this table clearly shows, a human being can lose his humanness and shift to the category of things (i.e., the animal state). *Bumuntu* is determined by a person's capacity to move from *Ki-ntu* to *Muntu* state of being. This distinction is not limited to the Bantu-Luba worldview. It is found in many other regions as well. From West Africa to South Africa, there is the widespread belief that people of bad character are not truly human. In Nigeria, the Yoruba say: "*Ki I se eniyan*" (He/she is not a person). In South Africa, we find the expression "*Ga se Motho*," and the Baluba people of Central Africa say "*Yao Ke Muntu*" (He is not human) or "*I mufu unanga*" (He is a dead body walking). It is not possible here to explore the worldviews of each ethnic group. Among the Yoruba, the concept of personhood is expressed through the term *Eniyan*. The Yoruba make a distinction between *Eniyan* as "ordinary meaning" of human

being and *Eniyan* as "normative quality" of a genuine human being; exactly as the Baluba distinguish *Muntu* from *Kintu*. For the Baluba, as for many other Africans, to be is to be ethical. This implies not only the capacity to distinguish good from evil, but the ability to choose to do good. An unethical person is "*muntu wa bumvu*" (a man of shame), a "*Muntu bituhu*" (a zero-person). In Kiluba language, ethics is expressed by *Mwikadilo muyampe* (A good way of being in the world) or *Mwendelo muyampe* (A good way of walking on the road of life).

The African religious anthropology maintains that a human being can increase or lose his humanness. The quality of a human being does not stem from his gender or ancestors, but from his personal behavior. Hence, the centrality of ethics in African religions. In Africa, to be a human being is a project to be fulfilled by each individual. Being a human being is an on-going process. Birth alone does not define humanity. One must "become" a real *Muntu*. One becomes more fully human by one's "way of life," i.e., by behaving more ethically. This ethic (*Mwikadilo*) is based on a distinction between the notion of *Bubi* (evil) and the notion of *Buya* (goodness, righteousness, purity, moral beauty). The criterion of distinction is the attitude toward human life. Everything (word, thought, and action) that threatens, destroys, or belittles human life (*Bumi*) or human dignity (*Buleme*) is considered evil. Luba religion identified four main modes of behavior (through thought, speech, eyes, and action) as the following table shows:

BUYA (Goodness) <i>Mwikadilo Muyampe</i>	BUBI (evil) <i>Mwikadilo Mubi</i>
The <i>Mu-ntu</i> category (good human)	The <i>Ki-ntu</i> category (thing)
<i>Mucima myampe</i> (good heart)	<i>Mucima mubi</i> (evil thought)
<i>Ludimi luyampe</i> (good speech)	<i>Ludimi lubi</i> (evil speech)
<i>Diso diyampe</i> (good eye)	<i>Diso dibi</i> (evil eye)
<i>Bilongwa biyampe</i> (good deeds)	<i>Binlongwa bibi</i> (evil actions)

As this table suggests, human qualities are learned and expressed in a variety of ways, including "linguistic memory" and "visual memory."

In Africa, the whole conception of witchcraft is based on the belief that *Mucima mubi* (evil heart or evil thought) and *ludimi lubi* (evil tongue or evil speech) produce "death" and constitute a threat to human dignity. On the issue of ethics, Luba religion has a long list of "taboos," that is, forbidden behavior that is considered harmful to human dignity or life. For the sake of illustration, the following table gives just a few elements of the Luba ethical charter:

BUYA (goodness) Virtues	BUBI (evil) Vices
1. <i>LUSA</i> (compassion)	<i>MUSHIKWA</i> (hate)
2. <i>BUSWE</i> (love)	<i>BUTSHI</i> (witchcraft, sorcery, killing)
3. <i>BULEME</i> (dignity, respect, integrity)	<i>KIBENGO</i> (insolence)
4. <i>BOLOKE</i> (righteousness)	<i>BUNZAZANGI</i> (hypocrisy)
5. <i>BUBINE</i> (truth, integrity, honesty)	<i>BUBELA</i> (lie)
6. <i>BUNTU</i> (generosity)	<i>MWINO</i> (selfishness)
7. <i>KANYE</i> (sensitive heart)	<i>BUSKESE</i> (fornication)
8. <i>BUYUKI/NGENYI</i> (wisdom, intelligence)	<i>BWIVI</i> (stealing, robbery)
9. <i>BUTALALE</i> (peacefulness)	<i>BULOBO/BUKALABALE/NSUNGO</i> (violence, anger)
10. <i>BUKWASHI</i> (help)	<i>NTONDO</i> (discrimination)
11. <i>BUTUNDAILE</i> (hospitality)	<i>LWISO/MALAKA</i> (absence of control of one's desire and sentiments)
12. <i>BWANAHABO/BULOHWE</i> (freedom, autodetermination, Being one's own king, nobility)	<i>BUHIKA</i> (slavery) <i>KIBENGO</i> (insolence)

This ethical scheme is not limited to the Baluba. We are reminded of *Iwa* (character) in Yoruba tradition. Among the Yoruba, the word "*Iwa*" means both "existence," and "character." That is why a true being is a (character) in Yoruba tradition. Among the Yoruba, the word "*Iwa*" means both "existence," and "character." That is why a true being is a being with good character (*Iwa rere*) or gentle character (*Iwa pete*). It is crucial to understand that for the Yoruba, each person is responsible for the growth of his moral character, as is stated in the following proverb, "*Iwa rere l'eso eniyan*" (Good character, good existence, is the adornment of a human being). The Ifa corpus is even more explicit: "*Owo ara eni, La afi I tunwa ara end se*" (Each individual must use his own hands to improve on his own character). This concept of free will and personal responsibility finds an interesting echo in the Luba proverb, "*Vidye wa kuha buya nobe wa mukwashako*" (God gave you beauty and goodness but you must help him), meaning that God will not do everything for you. This notion of personal responsibility shows that the traditional ethic was not about following customs blindly. It also shows that the notion of God as the foundation of morality does not rule out self-improvement. In its attempt to define personhood, the Yoruba traditional wisdom explicitly states:

Where did you see Iwa?
Tell me
Iwa is the one I am looking for
A man may be very, very handsome
Handsome as a fish within the water
But if he has no character
He is no more than a wooden doll ..
Iwa, Iwa is the one I am looking for

If you have money,
But if you do not have good character,
The money belongs to someone else.

Iwà, iwà is the one we are searching for.

If one has children,
But if one lacks good character,
The children belong to someone else.
Iwà, iwà is the one we are searching for.

If one has a house
But if One lacks good character,
The house belongs to someone else.
Iwa, iwa is what we are searching for.

If one has clothes,
But if one lacks good character,
The clothes belong to someone else.
Iwà, iwà is what we are looking for.

All the good things of life that a man has,
If he lacks good character,
They belong to someone else.
Iwà, iwà is what we are searching for ...

Each individual must use his own hands
To improve on his own character
Anger does not produce a good result for any man
It is honesty which I have in me,
I do not have any wickedness
Iwà lèsin
Good character is the essence of religion.

A similar vision of ethics is found among the Akan of Ghana. Like the Yoruba, the Akan have a sophisticated ethical system that has been well articulated by Kwame Gyekye. This system is based upon three basic concepts, *Suban* (character), *Tiboa* (conscience), and the *Papa-bone* antithesis (moral goodness versus evil).

At the center of the Akan conception of personhood stands the concept of *Suban* (character), which occupies a pivotal place in Akan moral language and thought. *Suban* stems from conscience (*tiboa*). The Akan maintain that every human being possesses a *Tiboa*, a sense of right and wrong. When speaking about somebody who constantly misbehaves, the Akan use the expression "*ne tiboa awu*," which means that the person in question is somebody whose "*Tiboa* is dead." When somebody who has persistently denied wrong-doing finally confesses his fault, people say that his conscience has judged him guilty (*ne tiboa abu no fo*). But it is mainly the way a person listens to her conscience that determines her character. Like the Baluba, the Akan make a distinction between two 'categories of human beings, the person with conscience (*Tiboa*) and a beast (*Aboa*) or a person without conscience. Bad people are said to be without conscience or morals. Thus, the expression "*onni suban*" (he has no character or morals) is used interchangeably with "*onni suban pa*" (he has no good character). In Akan anthropology, being is itself determined by character. One fundamental characteristic of the Akan notion of character is found in the notion of personal responsibility. Although the Akan, like many other people around the world, wrestle painfully with the issue of destiny and fatality, people clearly maintain that character can be changed (*suban wotumi sesa no*) and that human beings are not born virtuous or vicious, as the proverb puts it: "One is not born with a bad head, one takes it on the earth" (*Ti bone wofa no fam, womfa nnwo*). What this proverb highlights is that among the Akan, like many other African societies, freedom is the engine of morality. No one is evil because he is pushed to be so by God, ancestors, or evil spirits, but because one is free to make his or her own choices. And it is because people are free to act as they please that each person can be blamed for wrongdoing. For the Akan, as for other Africans, God did not create evil and does not push anyone to do evil. But what does the word *suban* exactly entail? To understand the content of *suban* is to grasp the Akan moral code. Here, like in many other African religions, the catalog of good and evil is not limited to ten commandments, but is much broader. Among things regarded as praiseworthy, we find *Mmobrohunu* (compassion), *Ayamyie* (kindness, generosity), *Nokwaredi* (truthfulness, honesty), *Ahooye* or *Adoe* (hospitality), *Ahomeka* (dignity), and *anuonyam ne obuo ba* (that which brings respect). The list can be completed by various attributes of God, such as love, justice, or forgiveness. Evil is distinguished by two categories, "*bone*," which encompasses "ordinary evils" (e.g., theft, adultery, lying, backbiting [*kokonsa*]), and "*musuo*" (indelible evil [*ade a woye a wompepa da*]), which is viewed with particular abhorrence and revulsion. This type of evil is so disgusting and rare that it is remembered and referred to by people even several years after the death of the doer. These "extraordinary" evils, according to the Akan worldview, are so horrible that they provoke the wrath of supernatural beings and are considered "taboos" (*akyiwade* [abominations]). They include rape, incest, and murder.

It should be noted, however, that the African ethical system is holistic. It is extended to the animals and the whole cosmos, precisely because the first principle of African cosmology is not

the concept of *Muntu*, but rather that of *Ntanda* (the world). God first created the world, the universe, and then humans. God did not create only one village, but *ntanda yonso* (the whole world) and all its content. All human beings have but one single source of existence, and not only human beings, but all other creatures. Indeed, as the Mashi expression clarifies, God is "*Ishe Wabantu n'ebintu*" (father of human beings and things). The natural world is an extension of the human body, as the Yoruba orisha tradition makes it clear. This interconnectedness with nature marks the specificity of the African conception of both God and the human. Indeed for the Baluba, as for other Africans, religion is cosmotheandric. God's nature and human nature, include animals, trees-the whole cosmos is the home of the divinity. It is also the home of human beings. This is the foundation of the general solidarity that the Bantu feel with nature. Thus, a genuine human being, a person of *Bumuntu*, is one who has a good heart (*Mucima Muyampe*), one who extends his goodness to all human beings, animals, and the natural world. As noted above, *Bumuntu* is manifested in four basic ways: good thought and good heart (*mucima muya*), good speech (*ludimi luya*), good actions (*bilongwa biya*), and a good way of looking at people and the world. Such is the art of becoming human as defined by African religions, according to the will of the ancestors and the will of Shakapanga Vidye Mukulu (the Great Spirit and Supreme Creator). Needless to say, this vision of personhood reflects the fundamental spiritual and moral values found in ancient Egypt in the Maatic charter (chapter 125 of the Egyptian Book of coming forth to light).

***Fadenya-Badenya* Memory**

Another important component of African philosophical anthropology is the memory of the delicate balance between the individual and the community.

Nowadays, many in Africa complain that people are becoming individualistic and selfish. The loss of the traditional sense of community is regarded as the cause of corruption in politics, business, and society at large. At the same time, many Western and Westernized writers have argued that the rampant violation of human rights and the inability to build lasting democratic institutions in many parts of Africa is due to the fact that traditional cultures ignored the dignity of the individual. In Africa, many have argued that the individual was merely at the service of the community and the notion that an individual has rights was unknown. All this, of course, is based on ignorance of the complexity of traditional worldviews. Claims that the notion of the dignity and rights of the individual were totally unknown in traditional Africa are a gross distortion due to the loss of *Bumuntu* memory. From time immemorial, African tradition has honored both the individual and the community while being fully aware of the difficulty of striking a genuine balance between the rights of the individual and the rights of the community in a society where the individual depended on the community and the welfare of the community itself depended on the contribution of each individual.

Anthropological proverbs teach that a genuine human being is the one Who succeeds in maintaining that delicate balance between individuality and the sense of community, for a genuine human being is, in the expression of the Mande, a *Fadenya-Badenya* -- an individual and collective being. Numerous proverbs emphasize personal responsibility: "*Vidye wa kuha*

buya nobe wa mukwashako" (God gave you beauty and good character but you must help him, by taking care of Yourself and constantly cultivating your virtues [Luba proverb]). Likewise, the Ifa corpus of the Yoruba teach that each individual must use his own hands to improve his own character (*Owo ara eni, La aft I tunwa ara enii se*). Good character is emphasized as the very essence of personhood, as a Yoruba proverb puts it: *Iwa rere I 'eso eniyan* (Good character, good existence, is the adornment of a human being). This philosophical anthropology can also be found in the nature of African names and what I refer to as the *Fadenya-Badenya* paradigm.

The history of African names refutes any notion that African societies did not acknowledge the value of the individual. As Benezet Bujo has pointed out, "family names" were unknown in Africa. Rather than taking automatically the name of the father or the mother, each African child received his own name, revealed to the pregnant mother in dream or revealed by the spirits through divination. To this should be added the famous practice of "praise name" poetry Whereby a child learned to ascertain his own personality.

To better understand the *Bumuntu* memory on this issue, we shall turn to what I call the *Fadenya-Badenya* paradigm of traditional philosophical anthropology. According to this vision of personhood, Africa had a conception of the individual that is far from an "absolutized individualism," or a faceless token of the community. In the African worldview, the *Muntu* is not a Windowless monad. As the Mande pointed out, each person has two forces within him, *Fadenya* and *Badenya*, and thus a symbiosis of individuality and community (Bird and Kendall 14-16).

Fadenya ("father-childness") is the centrifugal force of individualism. It orients human actions toward individual reputation and renown. It should be noted that no one gains on reputation in the clan by simply repeating the deeds of his father. As Chinua Achebe pointed out, in Africa, "age was respected, but achievement was revered" (Achebe 8), and young people had to strive for their own excellence and greatness because the ancestral wisdom teaches that "a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness" (Achebe 19) in a society that ridicules lazy people and where "a man is judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father" (Achebe 8). What Chinua Achebe said about the Ibo people of Nigeria also reflects the worldview of the Mande, the Baluba, and many other people throughout Africa. Fame comes from surpassing the deeds of one's predecessors. The Luba practice of *Kwisansula* (praise names) is an expression of this force of individuality. It is as individuals that some people are venerated as wise judges, excellent orators (*ntenda-mambo*), heroic warriors, good hunters, good healers, etc. The *Fadenya* force produces the heroes needed by the community: people without shame or fear who can easily act against conventions and status quo. However, because the search for personal fame can easily lead to selfishness, self-aggrandizing passions, and anti-social behavior, *Fadenya* is feared as a force of social disequilibrium, envy, jealousy, abuse of power, competition, and self-promotion. The individual can find equilibrium only with the intervention of a counterpower, the centripetal force known as *Badenya* ("mother-childness").

This is a "conservative force," a force of submission to authority, stability, and cooperation; it brings the child to the mother's womb. Like the Chinese "Yin-Yang," and the Greek "Prometheus-Saturn" bond, *Fadenya-Badenya* cannot be reduced to masculine and feminine attributes, nor to a father and son hierarchy. It is a principle of being within every being. *Fadenya* corresponds to the Promethean impulse within the being: restless, heroic, rebellious and revolutionary, individualistic and innovative, eternally seeking freedom, autonomy, change, and novelty (Tamas 492). *Badenya*, on the other hand represents the Saturnian impulse: conservative, stabilizing, controlling, a force that seeks to contain, sustain, order, and repress (Tamas 492). From *Badenya* arises social solidarity, benevolence, and altruism. *Fadenya* and *Badenya* stand as two sides of the coin that is the *Bumuntu*. What the *Fadenya-Badenya* paradigm indicates is that there is in each human being an individual dimension and a collective force constantly in tension. A healthy human being is one who keeps a balance between the two forces. This suggests that African societies do not despise the value of the individual nor do they blindly embrace individualism. Like many other human beings around the globe, Africans struggle painfully to keep a balance between the rights of the individual and the rights of the community, which means the rights of other individuals. The silencing of the individual should then be interpreted as abuse and violations of human rights rather than an authentic expression of ancestral tradition, for in African philosophy in general, and Bantu philosophy in particular, individuality is a fundamental basis of identity, personality, and humanity. Indeed, since two separate individuals, the father and the mother, constitute the foundation of the family, no African community exists in vacuum nor can find meaning without acknowledging the dignity of each individual. Because each individual already has an individual and a collective dimension, the *Bumuntu* memory suggests that the welfare of every individual and community depends on honoring both the individual and the community. This is a *sine qua non* for having a healthy government, a healthy economy, and a healthy religion.

The Attitude about Government and the Doctrine of the "Sage King"

While traditional society produced many forms of tyrants, it also created a powerful antidote to tyranny-the philosophy of sage king. It is not the goal of this chapter to articulate an exhaustive study of all the positive conceptions and examples of good governance in traditional Africa. I shall limit myself to a few examples that illustrate the topic of cultural memory.

In order to better grasp how the *Bumuntu* memory can contribute to the promotion of democracy in Africa, we shall begin with an interesting narrative from oral tradition, the tale of sage king from the Ashanti people. The story surrounds the investiture of Adoko, the king of the Agona people, who succeeded his cousin. When at the end of a long procession, the new king sat on the royal stool, many bards appeared singing the praise of the new ruler. However, Adoko was impressed only by the song of the last bard, an old man who had seen many kings "come and go" in his life. He sang:

Our new father is Adoko,
He is wise,
But our last chief understood nothing.

Our new father is Adoko,
He is generous,
Even though our last chief was stingy.

Adoko is our father,
He cares for the welfare of all,
But our last chief did not care.

Nana Adoko is here,
He will judge our lawsuits with justice,
Our former chief cared little for such things (...)

When Adoko heard this song, he thought that the people had recognized him as the wisest ruler they had ever known. He thought: "Indeed, I am the great Adoko. Who has ever said it so well? And my cousin, the chief who has gone, was he not truly the poorest of rulers? How sharp and understanding these people are! How wise is this old bard!"

Satisfied by the praise, Adoko ordered his servants to distribute gifts among all the people at the celebration, and said to the old bard: "This song, it is good. I shall make you the first singer of Agona as long as I live." Then the king asked the old bard: "Who is the maker of the song you sang? He must be a great singer indeed. Are you the maker of this song?" The old bard answered, "Oh, no. I am not the composer. This song was made in ancient time, and we sing it each time a new chief is appointed over us. We merely change the name of the chief." (Courlander 114-115)

This tale belies the prevailing mythologies of modern scholarship that deny the aspirations of the African people to democratic forms of government.

It is the memory of this political tradition that prompted Kofi Annan, then secretary general of the United Nations, to reject, on May 12, 2000, the argument often made by African dictators and warlords-and accepted by many scholars and policy makers in the West-that the dictatorial postcolonial politics in Africa obey the spirit of the traditional African conception of power. In an interview, Mr. Annan evoked the case of the Ashanti kings to refute the misconceptions that still prevail concerning the nature of African traditional politics:

Mr. Annan, a Ghanaian, rejects the view that someone who makes himself president for life reflects traditional African tribal culture, where democracy can flourish within an essentially closed system. "That's not true," he said. "Take my own society. In West Africa, we have the Ashanti kings. But the king can be removed for wrongdoing, incompetence or lack of leadership. It's not as if they are anointed by God and can stay there forever." (Crossette A8, A8)

Mr. Annan, who was head of peacekeeping at the UN before becoming the first sub-Saharan African (and the second African after: the Egyptian Boutros Boutros Ghali) to lead the UN as Secretary General, is familiar not only with the nature of African corruption, senseless wars, and

the crisis of leadership in postcolonial politics, but also with the aspirations of African people to security, liberty, and prosperity which are enshrined in the *Bumuntu* tradition. His view of African traditional politics encapsulates the paradigm shift that is progressively taking place in African studies. It corrects the old anthropological school of exotic cannibal chiefs and lawless tribal society. It is worth noting that all over Africa people made a clear distinction between a bad ruler (*Kilopwe*) and a "sage king" (*Mulopwe*).

In Luba empire, the *Twite* began the investiture speech by reminding the young king that his illustrious ancestor Kalala lunga Mwine Mwanza was a wise man, and therefore he should know that the success of the kingdom depends on wisdom, on his commitment to serve the people wisely rather than merely taking their tribute (Dewey and Childs 64):

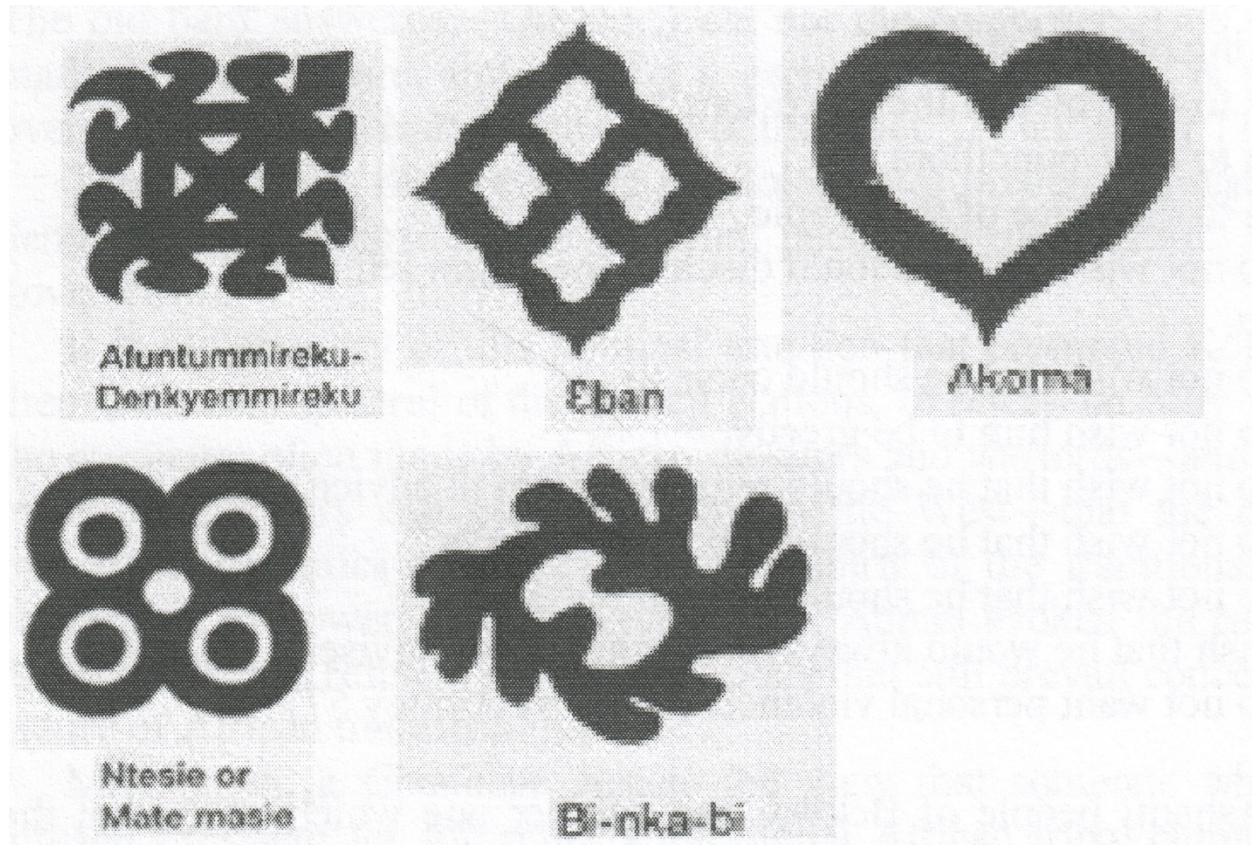
In the Ashanti kingdom, the investiture speech went as follows:
Oh, King of the Ashanti,
listen to the voice of the Ancestors Listen to the Councillors
Listen to the voice of the people
We do not wish that he should disclose the origin [ethnicity] of any person.
We do not wish that he should curse us We do not wish him to be greedy.
We do not wish that he should refuse to listen to advice
We do not wish that he should call people ""fools.""
We do not wish that he should act without advice.
We wish that he would always have time for his advisers.
We do not want personal violence. (Cited by Ayittey 57)

The Ashanti people of Bekwai had another one which states that the king should not make civil war, that he should not gamble with the people and that he should listen to the advice of his people. (Courlander 112-113)

The *raison d'être* of political power illustrated in this tale is also magnificently articulated in various other investiture speeches that taught the art of good governance to new African kings. The investiture speech of the Ashanti people of Juaben tells the king that he should not disclose the origin whence his people came, that he should be humble and listen to" advice from the people: "Let your ears hear our advice" (Courlander 112-113).

Finally, in the investiture speech of the Dagomba people (Northern Ghana), the king is told that his job is to defend the oppressed and that he should not beat the people and should always listen to his people's advice. (cited by Ayittey 77).

In Ghana, the Akan people invented an interesting system of written symbols to express their conception of the main spiritual values and the nature of the government. These Adinkra symbols offer an interesting summary of the notion of good government in African political thought. The theological significance of the twenty basic Adinkra symbols was well articulated by John Mbiti (Mbiti 38-39). The symbols show that the traditional vision of power was not completely foreign traditional idea of democracy.



The *Ajuntummireku-Denkyemmireku* represents several crocodiles sharing the same stomach. The first meaning of this symbol is that of unity in diversity. The king is expected to respect the diversity of opinions and not force people to believe the same doctrine or organize their life in uniformity. There is here a foundation for freedom of thought and expression in the traditional view of power. It is well known that, in traditional institutions, "talking" was a crucial means for solving problems in society. The choice of the crocodile suggests that the strength of the political system resides in its flexibility and openness to different ideas, rather than in a dictatorial imposition of one rule and one worldview. The second meaning of this symbol is that of "equal economic opportunity." A king is not one who eats alone, and cares only for his stomach, but rather one who makes sure that everybody has enough food. There is a clear focus on the "right to means of existence" or "economic rights." One can see how modern dictators do not reflect the spirit of traditional view of power. Also significant is the notion of the oneness of humanity in spite of cultural diversity. As such, the symbol is a rejection of tribalism within the state. The *Ajuntummireku-Denkyemmireku* is considered the symbol of democracy.

Another crucial symbol of power is *Bi-nka-bi*, which literally means "no one should bite or provoke another." This symbol is the embodiment of the right to private property and the right to fair trial. It is also an imperative not to restrict the freedom of another person. That is why it is translated as "justice" and "freedom." It is a call to respect the dignity of every human being. In the same vein, the right for security is found in the symbol *Eban*. Moreover, the combination

of safety and love within the same symbol shows that in traditional worldview, rights stem from that very notion of *Bumuntu*, which makes a human being human.

Finally, *Akoma* (heart) and *Ntesie* (what I hear I keep) summarizes the Akan vision of the "sage king." The king was expected to be a wise man, one who listens to the people and keeps their concerns in his heart. Indeed, he had to be a man of good heart, such as in the Luba empire in which *Mucima muyampe* was the main virtue of the *Mulopwe*. According to Kwame Gyekye, in Akan thought, *Ntesie* (or *Matemasie*) is the symbol of wisdom and insight. It is crucial that the wisdom of the king be evaluated according to the way he listens to his people and not in following the caprices of his will. Although abuses of power were not uncommon, rulers were instructed by many ethnic groups that power was about serving the people according to the will of the ancestors. And when rulers failed to do so, it was the will of the ancestors that they be removed from power without delay. This is why rebellions against kings abound in African history. This leads us to the second important point in the recovery of *Bumuntu* memory—the issue of removing rulers from power. In many parts of Africa, people held as sacred their right to impeach abusive rulers. Even Hegel, who did not have a high opinion of Black people, recalled that African people do not accept injustice and oppression from their own rulers (Hegel 208).

The Asante people destooled at least three kings: Osei Kwame in 1799 for absenting himself from the capital Kumasi and endangering the security of the nation in failing to perform his religious duties. Karikari was impeached in 1874 for extravagance, among other failings, and Mensa Bonsu was removed for excessively taxing the people. It should be noted that the impeachment of the king was not the result of a purposeless riot, but rather a legal matter, carefully followed by the judges and the prime minister. In the fifteenth Benin reached its height under King Eware the Great, a popular king who was credited for ushering in an era of prosperity and stability. But when his two sons died, he declared three years of national mourning: during this period, he said, nobody should "have children," take a shower, or put on decent clothes. People rebelled and he escaped death only through the help of his freed slave, Edo. People continued to mistrust the government up to the sixteenth century (Ki-Zerbo 161).

We also find another famous example of rebellion against tyranny in the Kingdom of the Zanj. According to the testimony of Abu ai-Hasan al-Masudi, who visited the region in about 925 C.E., the Zanj people considered their ruler a "king of kings" and gave him the title "Waqlimi," which means "supreme Lord." But they could not tolerate any violation of their rights by him. Al-Masudi tells us:

The Zanj give this title to their sovereign because he has been chosen to govern them with equity. But once he becomes tyrannical and departs from the rules of justice, they cause him to die and exclude his posterity from succession to the throne, for they claim that in behaving thus he ceases to be the son of the Master, that is to say, of the king of heaven and earth. (Davidson, 36)

Putting this spirit in a general African context, British historian Basil Davidson comments that "[o]ther Africans will quickly recognize the echoes of their own attitudes to good rulers, as well as to bad rulers who depart from the ways of God and the wisdom of the ancestors" (Davidson, 36). In fact, the notion of capital punishment for the king is prevalent in Africa. One of the most notorious cases remains that of Chaka, executed by his own relatives because of his mad extravagance. But execution was not the only way of disagreeing with the tyrant. In many cases, people packed their bags and went to live somewhere else where they elected another king. The idea behind this practice was that the tyrant should be abandoned so that he can be king to the rocks and trees, since he is insensitive to the needs of human beings.

As Basil Davidson rightly pointed out, in many societies, Africans held in high esteem their right to depose tyrant:

A majority of African societies have been like the Lozi of western Zambia who are apparently terrified of giving away power, even power to protect, for once a man is elevated it is feared he will stand against those he ought to care for. Even societies with chiefs and kings seldom deprived themselves of the right of deposition, at least up to the nineteenth century; and the founding notion of England's Magna Carta, that you could justly act against an unjust ruler, was deeply rooted here. (Davidson, 75)

We may summarize *Bumuntu* memory as follows: First, the African conception of power begins with a clear distinction between a good ruler (*Mulopwe*, a "sage king," a "humane" ruler), represented by Ilunga *Mbidi Kiluwe* in the Luba empire, and an evil and illegitimate ruler (*Kilopwe*, a despot, a thing, a monster, a beast), represented by *Kongolo Mwamba* the red. The same distinction is found in South Africa between *Morena-Inkosi* (a king of the people) and *Morena wa Mekopu* (the king of pumpkins). This distinction is illustrated in many proverbs that teach that one is king only with the consent of the people, so much so that to be king against the will of the people and their welfare is to oppose the will of the ancestors. A Luba proverb states, *Bulopwe i Bantu* (Power is the People). The same idea of power is found in the South African proverb, *Morena Ke Morena Ka Botho* (one is a king only when and as long as he is acknowledged by the people). This same conception of power is found in West Africa, where, for example, it is expressed through the Adinkra symbols of the Akan people. This means that the *raison d'être* of power in African political thought is to serve the people. Such is the meaning of the notion of "sage king."

Second, the sage king and enlightened government were defined on the basis of what the Baluba called *Mucima muyampe* (good heart). The main virtue required from the king was good character, which included goodness and kindness toward people. The king had the responsibility to show moral leadership and be an ethical person. People expected the king to be "humane," not to be a god. This is why among the Baluba a tyrant is not viewed merely as a bad ruler, but rather as a "nonhuman" (*Kintu*). In other words, the traditional notion of power was predicated upon the traditional philosophical anthropology of *Bumuntu*.

Third, the traditional vision of power excluded the notion of *pouvoir absolu*. The entire life of the king was regulated by a series of taboos. The religious notion that human beings belong ultimately to God, and not to the king, led to the right of impeachment and to the creation of counterpower in the form of council of elders and religious groups, such as the *Bambudye* among the Baluba, which had the supreme power to check on the king's behavior and depose or even condemn him to death in case of dangerous abuses of power. African history is replete with examples of kings who were killed or deposed for tyranny or for failing to respect the "oral constitution." It is significant that, among the Baluba, the Twite responsible for the investiture of the new king was called the "king's father." The fact that the king received his power only during the investiture, but not on his birthday, and that he received this power from other human beings who stood as the embodiment of traditions and the power of the ancestors is revealing. As Thomas Reefe pointed out, the whole notion of "divine kingship" applied to African societies is quite misleading. Among the Baluba, the King was recognized as divine only after his death. And only "sage kings" were venerated with shrines!

Finally, the traditional mode of government held dialogue and consultation in high esteem, i.e., the practice of palaver and consensus was considered the best political approach. All sectors of the societies were consulted at various levels in the decision-making process. These mechanisms allowed the recognition of freedom of expression.

This type of political philosophy shows that the widespread opinion that African dictators follow the African tradition of tyrannical bloodthirsty chiefs is a colonial habit of the mind, which is contradicted by historical evidence. As William Pfaff and many other conservative Western scholars have acknowledged, the tyranny of Mobutu, Bokassa, Amin Dada, and other African dictators is a "post-modern barbarism" characteristic of neocolonial mercenaries. It has nothing to do with African tradition. Because of the limitations imposed on African kings by religious taboos, the ideology of the will of the ancestors (controlled by the council of the elders), and religious secret societies, it is fair to say that "African tradition" rejects beings and institutions of government that would mistreat people and deny personal liberties and rights. The fate of traditional tyrants such as Chaka and Mzilikazi confirms the basic traditional belief that kings who destroy human dignity and life should be removed from power to avoid having the wrath of the ancestors fall upon all the people, and also because by their evil behavior they cease to be a channel for divine blessings.

Attitude toward Foreigners

It is largely held by Westerners-and even a great many Africans-that the fundamental cause of the lack of democracy and socioeconomic development in Africa is tribalism. The centrality of blood relations, we are told, hinders the ability of Africans to take the welfare of a national or global community into account. Tribalism certainly plays a role in Africa. But it is also true that an African solution to this plague had already been invented in traditional Africa. Almost all African kingdoms or empires were multiethnic and multicultural. From time immemorial, exogamy customs, trade, migrations, state expansions, and conquests brought together people of different ethnicities. It would be hard, if not impossible, to find an African king who ruled

only over his blood relatives. This experience of human contact led Africa to develop the philosophy of universal brotherhood exemplified in the sacred and legendary African traditions of hospitality and solidarity. The recovery of the traditional memory of hospitality could serve as a powerful antidote to tribalism. It is worth noting that hospitality is grounded in the very foundation of African cosmologies. It is understood that every family is part of a broader human family which has a single origin, with one supreme father or mother understood to be the creator of the universe. This is why tribalism as a form of discrimination, segregation, or exclusion is a betrayal of the will of the ancestors. It is indeed antithetical to African identity and the African notion of family, for in Africa *jamaa* is always an extended family. All African creation myths present a creator who created not one family, one village, or one race, but *ntanda yansa* (the whole world). This is why all human beings are to be viewed as brothers and sisters. African creation myths speak of our common humanity, and invite Africans to see and honor humanity beyond the tribe, nation, or race. This means that compassion, generosity, solidarity, and hospitality might be extended to the global village of the human race. In fact, the African tradition of hospitality insists on giving special treatment to those who cannot be expected to pay back: strangers, children, and the most marginalized segments of society, especially the handicapped, the sick, the poor, and beggars. In other words, one is genuinely human only when he honors humanity in every human being. Thus, solidarity and hospitality to "foreigners" are among the virtues highly praised in African ethics. This vision of morality stems from the African understanding of the nature of the universe as expressed by various creation myth. *Shakapanga* is not the creator of one single clan, race, or nation, but the father of every creature that exists. From this notion of a common origin of humankind, Africa drew the ethical principle of universal brotherhood. According to the Yoruba creation myth, the Yoruba God as father of the whole universe created Black and White people, albinos and hunchbacks, the Yoruba people, and all other nations as well (*Abimbola*, "The Attitude of Yoruba Religion," 137). As a result, the Yoruba regard all human beings as kin, so much so that most prayers and invocations offered in Ile-Ife are deemed incomplete until prayers are offered for the people of the entire universe (*agbala aye gbogbo*), who are regarded as having had their origin in *Ile-Ife* (*Abimbola*, "The Attitude of Yoruba Religion," 137). The Yoruba religion is not an exception in this regard. When we move from West Africa to East Africa, we find the same theology in Kenya, where a "Meru Prayer" explicitly links prayer for one's family and country to prayer for "the trouble of other nations"

Kirinyaga [God], owner of all things,
I pray to Thee, give me what I need,
Because I am suffering, and also my children,
And all the things that are in this country of mine.
I beg Thee, the good one, for life,
Healthy people with no disease...
Give goats, cattle, food, honey,
And also the trouble of the other lands
That I do not know, remove. (Shorter, cited by Magesa 197-98)

In Yoruba religion, the High God Orinsala, the molder of human bodies, is praised as "the husband of hunchback" (Oko abuke), "the husband of lame" (Oko aro), and "the husband of dwarf with a big fat head" (Oko arara bori pete') (Abimbola, "Ifa," III).

The divine nature of foreigners, people with disabilities, the sick, and the marginalized is also grounded in the fundamental feature of African traditional religions: the veneration of the ancestors. Thus, the Bula treat strangers, orphaned, handicapped people, beggars, and lepers well because of their belief that their ancestors visit them in these forms (Olikenyi 105). This connection between hospitality and the vision of ancestorship is widespread in Africa. The Fang people of Gabon believe that an ancestor passes by in the person of a stranger and, therefore, a stranger should be given kind and warm treatment (Olikenyi 105). The Fang' are not an isolated case. In most African communities, it is believed that unexpected guests are the embodiment of ancestors; hence, they are given the ancestors' food. Such a hospitality goes beyond simple courtesy. It is viewed as a way of communicating with the ancestors and maintaining a relationship with them.

The Dogon memory of the origins of the world maintains that God all human beings and all the races, but used the light of the moon "to cook the bodies of White people" whereas he used the light of the sun for those of Black people. Other myths maintain that God used clay of different colors. In sum, God is the universal creator, father and mother of all human beings, of the poor and the rich, the fortunate and the unfortunate. Moreover, in the creation process, God used the same material to mold all human beings. Thus, despite the differences of character and personality among people, human nature has a common ground that is founded upon the equality of all human beings, men and women, people of different ethnicities and races. This is also why Africa has largely enjoyed a positive attitude toward other races and never developed the kind of dogmatic and pathological racist thinking found in the writings of many venerable Western scholars and scientists over the last five centuries. This positive attitude to strangers was also extended to their cultures, especially their religion. In order to better understand the African attitude toward foreign religions, it is worth grasping the general attitude toward religion as such. This attitude is deeply marked by a lack of dogmatic certainty and awareness that God remains the great unknown. This leads us to the [mal point: the critique of religion itself.

Attitude toward Religion in General

In a world where eighty to ninety percent of people claim to be religious; claims made in the name of God have tremendous consequences for society at large. The most venerable religious traditions teach us that no human being has ever seen God. This being the case, the distinction between God and humans' idea of God is crucial to a genuine understanding of religion.

In this era of religious competition, fundamentalism, fanaticism, blind fideism, and religious terrorism, it is imperative to reexamine religion itself and distinguish authentic religious attitudes from caricatures. *Bumuntu* memory provides the wisdom of discernment, based on a tradition of apophatic theology, the doctrine of a laughing God, Iconoclasm, the principle of one

supreme creator, the notion of God's motherhood, cosmotheandricity, the rejection of anthropomorphism, and the rejection of theological ideologies of "chosen people." This is a matter for an entire book. I shall limit myself to the uniqueness of the African approach to God and the notion of the laughing God in order to illustrate the point that in Africa, fideism and fanaticism are curbed by a tradition of religious skepticism and *Bumuntu*. By refusing to imprison God in man-made sculptures and icons, African traditional theology sent a powerful warning against the absurdity of religious totalitarianism. God is not the private property of one mind, gender, race, ethnic group, nation, or religious tradition. God as "*Adro-Adroa*" transcends all human categories, constitutions, and institutions. This is underscored by that singular African vision of God as the father of laughter, as illustrated in Yoruba theology. Indeed, African traditional religion is a religion of abundant life, love, and laughter. In this era of a global war on terror and rising religious fundamentalism, the hermeneutics of laughter offers us a precious lesson. It looks upon the cold solemnity of fanatical orthodoxies as a spiritual disease. Laughter is cathartic and therapeutic, but also, and most importantly, laughter is matter and magistra of life. It calls for caution, discernment, and constant flexibility. Moreover, laughter is prophetic: it denounces the folly of dogmatic modes of thinking in a global village that has become the stage of maverick and Machiavellian politics, and is dominated by the *diktat* of the orthodoxies of fundamentalist freemarket theologies. The worship of a laughing God is liberation from all types of dogmatic and authoritarian ways of thinking, praying, or being-in-the world.

An African Vision of Religious Tolerance

Bumuntu memory is fundamental to the survival of Africa in a world dominated by the clash of religions. The invasion of Africa by "the religions of the Book" led to the loss of religious tolerance and religious liberty that characterized the ancestral "religions of memory." As Wole Soyinka, Ali Mazrui, Benezet Bujo, and other scholars have rightly pointed out, Africa has more to gain by retrieving the ancestral memory of religious tolerance than by clinging to the orthodoxy offered by the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which promote an exclusivist view of religion that, in some cases, calls for the outright murder of "idol worshippers." (Exodus 22:20; Deuteronomy 6: 1-7:6; Deuteronomy 13: 6ff; and the 9th chapter of the Koran).

Before retrieving this memory, it is worth noting that it has been buried by modern colonial scholarship, which relentlessly portrays traditional religions as superstitious beliefs rooted in violent rituals, human and animal sacrifices, and a questionable tribal morality that fuels hatred of foreigners and condones violence against women. The end of European colonialism has progressively led scholars to reevaluate this intellectual brouhaha and recognize the long-standing tradition of peace and tolerance that guided African spirituality for millennia, well before Christianity and Islam came on the stage.

Nowadays eighty percent of Africans have converted to Islam or Christianity. As a result, the continent is mired in religious conflicts and wars created by the very religions that claim, ironically, to have saved Africa from paganism and introduced it to a true religion of higher

moral values and virtues. Over the last five centuries, the continent has witnessed the violence of Christians and Muslims fighting each other in a ruthless competition to convert the continent. There has also been a clash among various branches of Christianity competing to convert Africans to the religious brand they regard as "true" Christianity to the exclusion of other Christian churches. And, most importantly, both Christianity and Islam colluded in the persecution of African traditional religions. Even though traditional religions have gained some rights in the postcolonial era, it is worth noting that almost no African country has been governed by a president who publicly practices a traditional religion. The strong opposition of Christians to the short-lived experiment in Benin is symptomatic. Christians decried the move to make Vodun official as a backward attempt to bring Africa back to Satanism. All over the continent official celebrations follow Christian and Islamic calendars.

Wande Abimbola, Wole Soyinka, Benezet Bujo, Ali Mazrui, and other scholars remind us that, traditional Africa was devoid of religious wars because traditional African religions are fundamentally steeped in a worldview that teaches tolerance toward other religions. In comparison to the history of Christianity and Islam, traditional African religions exhibit a profound spirit and practice of religious tolerance. This tolerance has been recognized by both Christians and Muslims. According to the Catholic theologian Benezet Bujo, religious wars were unknown in traditional African society (Bujo 55). Summarizing the Islamic view, Ali Mazrui, a Muslim scholar, is more explicit:

Of the three principal religious legacies of Africa (indigenous, Islamic, and Christian), the most tolerant on record must be the indigenous tradition. One might even argue that Africa did not have religious wars before Christianity and Islam arrived, for indigenous religions were neither universalist (seeking to convert the whole of the human race) nor competitive (in bitter rivalry against other creeds). Indigenous African traditions have not sought to convert the whole of humanity. The Yoruba do not seek to convert the Ibo to the Yoruba religion-or vice versa-and neither the Yoruba nor the Ibo compete with each other for the souls of a third group, such as the Hausa. Because they are not proselytizing religions, indigenous African creeds have not fought with each other. Over the centuries, Africans have waged many kinds of wars with each other, but they were rarely religious ones before the universalist creeds arrived. (Mazrui 77)

This traditional spirit of tolerance has influenced even Christianity and Islam in such a way that, in comparison to the situation in other parts of the world, sub-Saharan Africa emerges as clearly "above average" in religious tolerance. It should be noted that this tolerance characterizes traditional African religions in general and is based on the African understanding of God, humans, and truth. Writing from the perspective of the Yoruba religion of Nigeria, Abimbola observed that Yoruba religion begins with myths of creation, which maintain the idea of a universal descent of all human beings from the same God creator, Obatala (Abimbola, "The Attitude of Yoruba Religion," 138). Secondly, there is the search for peaceful coexistence:

In the African primal traditions there is a continuing witness against violence, brute force and intolerance of each other's beliefs. The African point of view is one in which there is respect for

all the religious traditions of humankind. While we hold steadfastly to our own beliefs, we respect the right of others to practice their own religions in their own ways, provided they do not infringe on the right of other people. Furthermore, we believe that religious freedom is a condition precedent to world peace and individual freedom. We believe that we all can live together in peace if we are prepared to respect one another's point of view. (Abimbola, "The Attitude of Yoruba Religion," 138)

In her history of Christianity in Africa since antiquity, Elizabeth Isichei reports a story that highlights a certain difference of spirit and attitude between traditional African religions and Western Christianity in matters of religious tolerance. The event took place at the beginning of the period of missionary evangelization in Africa in the nineteenth century. After reaching San Salvador, the capital of ancient Kongo empire, in 1879, the first Baptist missionaries were soon joined by French Spiritans. Immediately, a bitter competition started, thus introducing in Central Africa the kind of religious war Protestants and Catholics were used to in Europe. Protestants saw themselves as the representatives of true Christianity in Africa. The fact that the evangelization of the Kongo by Portuguese Catholics during the fifteenth century was in decline seemed to them as the glaring evidence of the intrinsic spiritual inadequacies of Roman Catholicism. On their part, Spiritans considered the Kongo Kingdom the private property of the Roman Catholic mission which first introduced Christianity there in the fifteenth century. Wishing to claim their "right," the Spiritans went to brief the Kongolesse king, Pedro Y, Hemique's successor, on the "heresiarchs and chief Heretics" of Protestantism. Amazed by this new vision of religion, the king rejected their plea, declaring boldly: "You white men, you perplex me with your different teachings. I do not know how to choose between you.... I shall keep both these palavers in my heart, and when I appear before God, He must decide and judge both" (Isichei 186). Moreover, according to Isichei, the Kongolesse king was so perplexed by their rival claims, and the political implications of denominational choice, that he evaded the issue by refusing to attend religious services on Sundays (Isichei 186). This spirit of religious intolerance has been part of Christian missions since the beginning, and was often intertwined with political ambitions. Africans were brought to Christianity through a variety of conflictual denominational and national filters, such as Flemish Catholics, British Baptists, Black Presbyterians from the southern United States, and Scottish Plymouth Brethren. Despite some alliances, such as between the British Baptists and King Leopold II, monarch of the Congo, in general France favored French Catholics; Belgium, Belgian Catholics; Portugal, Portuguese Catholics, and so on. Already fighting each other, Catholics and Protestants waged an even greater war against traditional religions, often asking the colonial authorities to outlaw various tenets of traditional worship. This situation left African Christianity with a terrible legacy even after the independence. Historical evidence shows that, in Central Africa, Christianity did not introduce interreligious dialogue and the principle of religious liberty, but quite the opposite.

The Yoruba proverb according to which no one can teach God to a child expresses the fundamental African belief that divine revelation is not a privilege of a "chosen people" against the whole world. It is in the understanding of God, religion, truth, goodness, and the nature of beings that traditional African religions offer a major contribution to the African vision of human rights. As Opoku pointed out, Africans believe that "since God is the God of all

humankind and he is not so unkind as to withhold his presence from others. God's divine truth and salvation have not been confined to a favoured few; on the contrary, God is God because he is accessible to all, and his revelation does not lead to the denial of his presence in certain areas of the world and an affirmation of his presence elsewhere.... The good elements in African traditional religions were put there by God and this clearly demonstrates that God has no favourites and that He shares His truth with all but does not hide it from others and share it only with those whom He favours. The African religious experience helps to give us a broader and much deeper understanding of God, and rescues us from the limitations which partial human appropriation of God's activity and revelation tend to place on God (Opoku 70). Moreover, the African vision of religion is that any understanding of God which comes through a single religious system must not be confused with the reality of God, for God remains greater than any religious system, or understanding of Him.

Conclusion: Bumuntu Memory in the Age of Globalization

Aime Cesaire wrote in his famous "*Lettre a Maurice Thorez*" that "[t]here are two ways of losing oneself ... through fragmentation in the particular or dilution in the universal." In this era of globalization, humanity has come to realize that its greatness lies in an identity that embraces the knowledge and wisdom of other cultures and human experiences. To paraphrase Huston Smith, we have come to the point in history when anyone who is only Japanese or American, only European or African, only Asian or Western, is only half human, until the other half that beats with the pulse of all humanity is born in him (Smith 7). Yet, becoming "a citizen of the world" would yield a harmful outcome if one is not rooted in one's ancestral tradition. We are reminded that despite all the forms of Westernization endured by Asian countries, the Asian miracle is largely grounded in the power of the people to keep their own names and identity, languages, cultures, ancestral wisdom, and spirituality. The tremendous effort made by Europeans over the last five hundred years to Christianize Asia has yielded but a meager result. Asia remains defiant, and prefers its traditional spirituality. Japan is less than 3% Christian. Likewise, Christianity accounts for fewer than 5% of the total population in the emerging world powers of India and China. Moreover, in these countries, the education is provided mostly in their own languages. With the exception of the Philippines and South Korea, Christians account for less than 10% of the total Asian population, and no country is linguistically divided into large Anglophone and Francophone communities. The fact that Asia suffered no massive slave trade at the hands of Westerners nor a radical and lengthy colonial system like that of Africa is instructive in terms of the importance of cultural memory and historical consciousness.

Reflecting on the loss of memory brought about by modern colonial education, Cheikh Anta Diop, one of the fathers of "African history," had this to say:

"Imperialism, like the prehistoric hunter, first killed the being spiritually and culturally, before trying to eliminate it physically. The negation of the history and intellectual accomplishments of Black Africans was Cultural, mental murder, which preceded and paved the way for their genocide here and there in the world." (Diop 1-2)

The importance of historical memory and historical consciousness is self-evident. It is obvious to any observer of human affairs that the strength of the West, the Jewish community and some Asian communities stem not primarily from wealth, science, or military might, but rather from culture and cultural memory. The fact that the West takes such care of its museums and libraries and the teaching of history is a good case in point. It may even be argued that the real power of the West derives from its extreme care of its historical memory. This is why museums and libraries play a prominent role in Western society. The preservation of memory by writing or oral tradition is crucial to every society's identity, empowerment, and survival, as the post-Holocaust Jewish community has well understood. The loss of cultural memory accounts for much of the trouble that plagues Africa today. It is only by reviving historical memory that Africa will be able to reconcile with itself. To paraphrase John Mbiti, "the African cannot live by the bread of science, politics, foreign aid and Western ideologies alone; he also needs the vitamins of cultural identity, ethics and morals, faith and hope, love and security, comfort and attention in the face of death and misfortune, a feeling and experience that as a person he matters infinitely." These are the elements that *Bumuntu* memory provides. It contains fundamental moral, spiritual, religious, and political values needed for peace and security, and for the creation of genuine democracy and genuine economic development in Africa. It is certainly a truism to state that much of the corruption, oppression, wars, violence, abuses, and human rights violations that traumatize Africa today is due in large part to the loss of the memory of what it means to be a genuine human being. Dictatorships, *coups d'état*, and various forms of violence are due in large measure to the selfish pursuit of money and power, which is due to the loss of ancestral values of authentic personhood. The human being has become a means rather than an end in itself. The African tragedy has been caused largely by the loss of this cultural memory, which produces mental murder in the form of alienation, mental slavery, or colonization of the mind. This type of alienation kills a person culturally, mentally and spiritually. To restore *Bumuntu* memory would be to reconcile Africa with its authentic identity and hence set it on the path of human dignity. This effort transcends romanticism and crass nationalism. This is not the invention of absurd mythologies, for as this study has demonstrated and as many lucid scholars have already acknowledged the African "*Bumuntu* wisdom" is not merely a convenient expression; it is something that exists. Indeed, there is in African tradition an entire civilization of decency, morality and spirituality, i.e. the art of being humane.

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