

RECLAIMING AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY: VALUES, SYMBOLS, AND THE THEISTIC HUMANISM OF MADUABUCHI DUKOR

Ibegbunam Henry Azubuike

ibegbunamazubuike003@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper critically examines the erosion of traditional African values and symbols in the context of globalization, and how this phenomenon distorts African historiography and identity. It draws upon Maduabuchi Dukor's theory of Theistic Humanism to advocate a return to the spiritual and philosophical roots of African thought. Through an exploration of metaphysical panpsychism, communal ontology, and traditional symbolism particularly within the Igbo worldview; the study reasserts the centrality of African historical agency. Philosophers such as Frantz Fanon, Kwasi Wiredu, Innocent Asouzu, and John Mbiti are engaged to build a coherent philosophical framework that resists colonial legacies. The dual roles of the individual and the state are critically analyzed, revealing how distorted policies and existential choices have perpetuated historical irrelevance. The work further explores the transformative potential of education, religion, and economy when guided by indigenous values. It concludes by urging a philosophical and cultural renaissance rooted in African epistemology as essential for achieving political freedom, cultural dignity, and sustainable development.

Key Concepts: African Historiography, Theistic Humanism, Metaphysical Panpsychism, Communal Ontology, Postcolonial Identity, Symbolic Cosmology, Spiritual Ontology, Epistemic De-

colonization, Cognitive Imperialism, Existential Alienation, Colonial Epistemology, Cultural Renaissance, Historical Consciousness, Postcolonial Metaphysics, Indigenous Symbolism.

Introduction

History, though commonly understood as a mere chronicle of past events, is far more complex and philosophically nuanced. As E.H. Carr posited, history is not just “a record of what happened” but “a continuous dialogue between the past and the present” (Carr, 1961). This dynamic engagement compels both historians and philosophers to interrogate not just what is recorded, but why it is recorded and what is omitted.

In the African context, the stakes are higher. African historiography has long suffered from colonial distortions, Eurocentric interpretations, and the marginalization of indigenous voices. This paper engages the African philosophy of history, using the Igbo worldview as a case study, to demonstrate that traditional African societies developed coherent, rational, and spiritually grounded models of life that qualify as authentic historiographical paradigms.

At the center of this philosophical inquiry is MaduabuchiDukor’s Theistic Humanism a framework which proposes that African metaphysics is rooted in belief in God, divinities, and ancestral spirits. This ontological orientation underscores a communal and spiritual worldview where metaphysical reality informs ethical action and historical consciousness (Dukor, 2021). Dukor asserts: “Theistic Humanism presupposes that the metaphysical world that informed all these propositions is the belief in gods, ancestors, spirits and God and their roles in the enhancement of human interest” (Theistic Humanism, 111–112).

This introduction serves to anchor the study within Dukor's doctrine while exploring its broader implications for historical reconstruction. The present work aims to rationalize and defend the relevance of African traditional values such as respect for life, communal justice, and symbolic cosmology within the pressures of globalization. These values, often seen as outdated, in fact offer philosophical resources for decolonizing African consciousness and reasserting the dignity of African history. Thus, this paper seeks to answer: Can African historiography reclaim its relevance through a philosophical revival of its own metaphysical and symbolic frameworks? The following sections explore this question across domains of the individual, the state, religion, education, and the economy.

Statement of the Problem

Are we living the wrong history? This provocative question underpins the existential crisis confronting African societies in the modern era. Rooted in existentialist philosophy particularly the Sartrean dictum that "existence precedes essence" this question challenges us to consider how our lived experiences, choices, and values constitute our historical essence (Sartre, 1943).

In this framework, history is not a passive record of the past but an ongoing narrative shaped by conscious and unconscious human actions. Yet, many Africans navigate existence divorced from historical consciousness. Their values and actions often reflect imported ideologies rather than indigenous principles, thereby creating a dissonance between lived experience and cultural identity. This disjunction results in what Frantz Fanon (1961) termed "historical dislocation," where the subject lives in alienation from his own past and cultural roots. This distortion of reality, reinforced by educational systems, media, and state policies, has led to an existential malaise and a bleak future for younger generations. The issue, therefore, is not merely historical but also

metaphysical and moral. If, as John Mbiti(1969) argues, African philosophy is deeply tied to communal and spiritual memory, then erasing or distorting that memory equates to cultural suicide.

The research identifies two key loci of this crisis: the individual and the state. The individual through actions guided by fear, ignorance, or opportunism may forsake traditional values for ephemeral gain. Simultaneously, the state, representing the collective will, may codify this betrayal through policies that uphold colonial legacies over indigenous wisdom. These twin agents the personal and the political form the axes through which history is either preserved, perverted or even completely annihilated.

This paper sets out to analyze both levels, drawing from philosophical anthropology, political theory, and metaphysical thought. The central claim is that reclaiming African historiography requires not only a return to traditional values but also a robust philosophical framework like Dukor's Theistic Humanism that grounds those values in a coherent worldview.

On the Individual

The individual, as the foundational unit of society, bears significant responsibility in shaping the trajectory of history. In African philosophical thought, personhood is not merely biological existence but a moral and communal identity. As Kwasi Wiredu (1980) noted, "To be is to belong and to act responsibly within the communal web." When individuals abandon these responsibilities, they become agents of historical distortion.

Drawing from Protagoras's relativist dictum that "man is the measure of all things," the individual is not only a passive product of history but also its co-author. Wrong choices, driven by fear, ignorance, greed, or survivalist instincts, generate historical dissonance. As Innocent Asouzu's notion of *Ihemkpuchianya* suggests, such

decisions may appear beneficial in the short term but ultimately recoil, undermining both personal and collective well-being (Asouzu, 2004).

This moral failure manifests when individuals:

- Support injustice for personal gain;
- Distort reality through misinformation or half-truths;
- Deny or disparage traditional African values;
- Uphold exploitative colonial paradigms over indigenous frameworks.

Such behaviors foster existential and historical alienation. John Mbiti (1969) famously emphasized that “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am,” highlighting the communal basis of identity. When this relational ontology is disrupted by individualistic or Eurocentric motives, the cultural fabric begins to erode.

Therefore, any meaningful effort at revalidating African historiography must begin with reeducating the individual reorienting them toward values of truth, justice, and historical continuity. Personal decisions must reflect not only self-interest but also the deeper call to cultural fidelity and communal harmony.

On the State

The state, as an institutional embodiment of collective identity, reflects and amplifies the moral and historical choices of individuals. Plato’s assertion that “the state is man writ large” (Stumpf, 1986) affirms the idea that state policies, cultural attitudes, and political decisions are ultimately extensions of individual values. In the African context, the modern state has frequently functioned as a mechanism for perpetuating colonial ideologies rather than fostering indigenous values. From a historical and philosophical standpoint, the African state has inherited and often failed to transform the structural legacies of colonialism. As Fanon (1961)

warned, the postcolonial state risks becoming a mere mimicry of colonial power if it does not consciously reconstruct itself on authentic cultural and epistemological foundations.

Social contract theory, as articulated by Hobbes and Locke, frames the state as a product of a collective agreement to ensure peace, justice, and the common good. Yet, in many African states, this contract has been repeatedly breached. Instead of promoting the well-being of citizens, governments often enact policies that reinforce dependency, suppress cultural identity, and advance personal interests at the expense of the communal good. Dukor (2021) argues that “dependency syndrome and political instability” are twin forces that have historically hindered African development and freedom.

When the state fails to prioritize indigenous values such as the sanctity of life, communitarian justice, and spiritual ontology, it not only distorts historical continuity but also perpetuates cultural alienation. The continued reliance on colonial economic structures, Eurocentric educational systems, and externally imposed governance models serves to deepen this crisis.

Moreover, the state’s failure to invest in value-based civic education and cultural institutions (e.g., language preservation, traditional councils, religious shrines) signals a retreat from its duty to uphold collective identity. Instead, it often becomes complicit in the historical amnesia afflicting African societies.

A historically responsible African state must, therefore, be one that:

- Reclaims governance structures rooted in traditional systems of justice and accountability;
- Elevates native languages and epistemologies in public discourse and education;
- Promotes policies of self-reliance in economic planning and resource control;

- Actively preserves and supports indigenous religious and cultural expressions.

Only then can the state become a true vessel for historical redemption and cultural restoration.

Theistic Humanism and African Values

Maduabuchi Dukor's concept of *Theistic Humanism* provides a vital philosophical framework for understanding African values and their historiographical implications. Rooted in a metaphysical worldview that acknowledges the interplay between the spiritual and material, Dukor's model challenges the secular assumptions of Western historiography by positing that reality is both divinely ordered and morally infused. "Theistic Humanism," he writes, "presupposes that the metaphysical world that informed all these propositions is the belief in gods, ancestors, spirits, and God and their roles in the enhancement of human interest" (Dukor, 2021, p. 111–112).

This view aligns with traditional African ontologies, which emphasize a panpsychic universe where all being animate and inanimate is imbued with spiritual significance. Dukor echoes the metaphysical assertions of Innocent Asouzu's *Complementary Ontology*, which holds that "being in any possible mode is only thinkable within a framework of mutual complementary relationships" (Asouzu, 2004, p. 306). This relational philosophy affirms that no entity exists in isolation, and that African values such as solidarity, justice, and reverence for life derive their potency from their embeddedness in a spiritually interconnected cosmos. The panpsychic metaphysics underlying African traditional thought confers moral weight to symbols, rituals, and communal institutions. For instance, the concept of *Ofo* (a sacred symbol of justice among the Igbo) is not just a cultural artifact but a representation of divine authority and ancestral endorsement. In this worldview, every human action

is both existential and historical, contributing to the collective memory and moral fabric of the community.

Yet, this value-laden ontology is under assault. The incursion of Western religions, colonial political structures, and global capitalist norms has systematically undermined traditional values, replacing them with ideologies that are alien to African cosmology. As Chidozie Okoro (2018) notes, the African crisis of leadership and identity stems from “stubborn adherence to colonial structures that are meant to divide Africans further” (Okoro in Dukor ed., p. 149). Theistic Humanism thus calls for a revalidation of African historiography not merely as a reactionary exercise but as a philosophical necessity. It insists that the African subject must reclaim history through a reaffirmation of indigenous values, symbolisms, and ontologies that define what it means to be fully human within an African worldview.

In this effort, Theistic Humanism is not anti-modern. Rather, it proposes an alternative modernity one grounded in the spiritual integrity, communal wisdom, and cultural authenticity of Africa’s metaphysical traditions. Reconstructing history through this lens allows for a form of cultural resistance that is deeply philosophical and powerfully political.

Religion and the Spiritual Foundations of African Identity

Religion, in the African context, is not a compartmentalized institution but the nucleus of cultural, moral, and historical identity. African traditional religions (ATR) form the spiritual matrix from which values, symbols, and collective meanings are derived. Yet, with the advent of Western imperialism and Abrahamic religions, ATR has suffered marginalization, misrepresentation, and systemic erasure.

Historically, Christianity and Islam were not simply religious imports; they functioned as instruments of cultural domination. As Frantz Fanon (1961) observed, colonial missionaries did not merely preach salvation they preached inferiority. They replaced sacred groves with churches, ancestral wisdom with catechisms, and spiritual plurality with exclusivism. Consequently, the African subject was alienated not only from their past but from their metaphysical ground of being. In modern society, to profess African traditional religion is often to invite ridicule or suspicion. This is a tragic inversion of the African metaphysical worldview.

As John Mbiti (1969) famously wrote, “Africans are notoriously religious,” meaning religion permeates every aspect of life birth, death, politics, justice, and agriculture. Gods, spirits, and ancestors are not abstractions; they are real presences that shape the moral order and historical trajectory of the community.

This sacred cosmology is also evident in names, rituals, totems, and taboos that encode metaphysical truths. Dukor (2021) highlights that in Igbo ontology, the Supreme Being (*Chukwu*) is central, with lesser divinities serving as intermediaries. Rituals are not idolatrous but communicative acts that maintain harmony between the visible and invisible realms. The earth goddess (*Ani*), for instance, symbolizes justice and fertility, reflecting the intimate link between morality and nature. To deny this religious heritage is to commit what Asouzu (2006) calls “existential self-sabotage” a denial of the foundational categories of African thought. It reinforces the ‘dwarf mentality’ that venerates foreign values while despising native ones. This internalized inferiority fosters historical amnesia and distorts African historiography.

Moreover, religion in Africa is not dogmatic but pragmatic. It seeks balance (*Ịnị na ogu*), cosmic justice, and social cohesion. In this sense, African traditional religion is deeply humanistic. It

affirms the dignity of human life, the sanctity of nature, and the interdependence of all beings. These values remain highly relevant in today's fragmented world.

Theistic Humanism calls for the restoration of ATR as a valid religious and philosophical system. This is not a rejection of religious plurality but an appeal for epistemic justice. African religions deserve equal philosophical status and public recognition. They offer unique ontologies and ethics that can enrich global discourses on morality, ecology, and social justice.

If history is to be reclaimed, African religion must be restored not merely as folklore, but as a living tradition with profound metaphysical insight.

Education and the Transmission of African Historical Consciousness

Education is the vessel through which values, identity, and historical consciousness are transmitted across generations. In the African context, education was traditionally integrated into the fabric of life through oral traditions, communal rites, apprenticeships, and religious instruction. However, colonial conquest redefined education not as cultural affirmation but as cultural substitution. It introduced a model that displaced indigenous epistemologies and installed a foreign value system rooted in Eurocentric paradigms.

Today, the crisis in African education is not merely a matter of infrastructure or access it is epistemological. As Molefi KeteAsante (2003) argues, education systems across Africa continue to promote "cognitive imperialism" by privileging Western histories, languages, and philosophies while marginalizing African heritage and thought. The result is a generation educated in forgetting a citizenry trained to admire what is foreign and dismiss what is native.

This leads to what Innocent Asouzu (2004) describes as “existential skepticism and pessimism”—a state in which Africans, having internalized the inferiority of their own cultures, become skeptical of their capacity to lead, innovate, or philosophize in their own terms. This mindset, which Asouzu calls the “dwarf mentality,” manifests in the abandonment of indigenous languages, traditional institutions, and native religious practices, often in favor of Western substitutes that appear more “civilized” or “global.”

Education, when grounded in African values and history, is a powerful instrument of liberation. It has the capacity to re-embed moral consciousness, revive traditional values, and counteract the alienation imposed by colonial pedagogies. But for education to serve this transformative role, it must undergo radical philosophical restructuring.

This reformation should include:

- A curriculum that integrates African philosophy, religion, history, and languages as core components;
- The elevation of indigenous knowledge systems agriculture, medicine, art, ethics as legitimate and modern forms of science;
- The deconstruction of Western hegemonic narratives that portray Africa as a passive recipient of history;
- A pedagogical approach that fosters critical thinking, historical empathy, and cultural pride.

As John Mbiti (1969) observed, “every society educates its children into its worldview.” If the African worldview is absent from the classroom, then so too is the African child’s historical relevance. Reclaiming our history requires that we teach it not as colonial tragedy, but as a chronicle of resilience, wisdom, and ontological depth. To this end, national education policies must be revised to align with African values and philosophical frameworks. Ministries of education and culture must collaborate with scholars, elders,

and traditional custodians to build curricula that reflect the lived realities and metaphysical convictions of African peoples.

Only then can education become a means of cultural restoration, rather than a mechanism of continued alienation. In the words of Frantz Fanon, “The oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves” unless education teaches them otherwise.

Economy and the Legacy of Dependency in African Historiography

The economic crisis facing African nations today is not merely financial; it is deeply historical and philosophical. At its core lies a structure of dependency established during colonial rule, in which African economies were configured as extractive outposts for the benefit of imperial powers. As Walter Rodney (1972) incisively argued, colonialism did not “develop” Africa it underdeveloped it by crafting economies centered on raw material exportation and foreign dependence. This legacy persists. According to Janvier D. Nkurunziza (2020), many African countries still rely on a narrow portfolio of primary commodities oil, minerals, and agricultural produce for over 80% of their export revenue. At the same time, nearly all consumer goods, technologies, and even basic pharmaceuticals are imported. This structural dependency results in a “chronic vulnerability” to global price shocks, foreign policy shifts, and exploitative trade agreements.

Philosophically, this raises questions about African agency and historical authorship. Can a continent that does not control its economic narratives truly reclaim its historiography? Theistic Humanism, as proposed by Dukor (2021), suggests not. A self-reliant, spiritually anchored

Africa must also be economically sovereign. Dukor warns that “dependency syndrome and political instability mutually reinforce each other as efficient causes of African unfreedom” (p. 73). This economic captivity has spiritual and cultural dimensions. Traditional African economies were rooted in values of reciprocity, sustainability, and community welfare principles diametrically opposed to capitalist extraction. Trade was not merely transactional; it was symbolic, ritualized, and ethically bound. For instance, the Igbo *ogwu* economy integrated spiritual legitimacy with market activity, ensuring that moral violations could nullify economic transactions. Such practices reflected a metaphysical economy that aligned with African ontology.

The modern system, by contrast, promotes materialism, individualism, and profit maximization values alien to traditional African ethics. This disjunction erodes not only economic sovereignty but also cultural integrity.

To reverse this trajectory, African nations must pursue an economic renaissance grounded in indigenous values and developmental self-reliance. This involves:

- Processing raw materials locally to add value and retain wealth;
- Investing in local industries, agriculture, and technology that serve the needs of African people;
- Reforming trade agreements to favor African producers and consumers;
- Cultivating economic models that are ethically rooted in communal well-being, not exploitative gain.

Moreover, the economy should be reintegrated into the symbolic order of African culture. Symbols, festivals, and rituals must regain their place in economic life not as nostalgia, but as frameworks that ensure justice, accountability, and spiritual balance.

This vision is not utopian. Countries like Rwanda and Botswana have made strides toward locally rooted economic policies with cultural pride as a driving force. The rest of Africa must follow suit, rejecting the illusion that Western economic models are universally applicable or morally superior. As Mirembe and Nkurunziza argue, Africa's wealth will only serve its people when processed, invested, and redistributed through African systems. This is not merely an economic necessity but a historical obligation. Only then can Africa reclaim its historiographical agency, not just as a continent with a past, but as a force shaping the global future.

Summary and Conclusion

The journey to reclaiming African historiography is not merely an academic pursuit it is a cultural, spiritual, and existential imperative. This paper has traced the multifaceted crisis facing the African continent: a loss of identity rooted in the abandonment of traditional values, the internalization of colonial ideologies, and the perpetuation of foreign epistemologies through state, education, religion, and economic systems.

At the heart of this crisis lies a fundamental misalignment between African ways of being and the structures that govern African societies today. Theistic Humanism, as articulated by Maduabuchi Dukor, offers a powerful philosophical response. It calls for a metaphysical and ethical reclamation of African history one that recognizes the spiritual essence of African values, the communal foundation of African identity, and the symbolic coherence of African institutions.

Revalidating African historiography, therefore, requires a multidimensional approach:

- Culturally, it demands the restoration of indigenous languages, rituals, and symbols.

- Philosophically, it insists on frameworks like Dukor's Theistic Humanism and Asouzu's Complementary Ontology to ground African values in coherent metaphysical systems.
- Educationally, it calls for curricula that teach African history, philosophy, and science from an Afrocentric perspective.
- Religiously, it affirms African traditional religions as valid spiritual systems that encode historical memory and moral consciousness.
- Economically, it urges a departure from the dependency model and the embrace of homegrown policies rooted in African communal ethics.

The failure to integrate these values has led to existential alienation and historical irrelevance. The modern African state, if it is to serve its people meaningfully, must become a site of cultural restoration, not just political administration. As Frantz Fanon (1961) warned, liberation is not given it is seized by those who recognize their worth and act with philosophical clarity. Quoting

Fanon once more, Dukor reminds us that "man's collective identity will not be given to him on a platter of gold... Only Africans can save themselves" (Dukor, 2021, p. 181). This saving is not simply economic or political it is ontological. It is the act of choosing to live the right history.

This paper affirms that African values if restored and rationalized hold the key to resolving the continent's historical, moral, and developmental dilemmas. Reclaiming these values is not a regression but a renaissance. It is not a rejection of modernity but the birth of an African modernity grounded in who we are, and projected toward who we must become.

Only through this revalidation can Africa cease being a footnote in global history and become a sovereign author of its own destiny.

Endnotes

Asante, Molefi Kete. *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*. African American Images, 2003.

Asouzu, Innocent I. *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy*. University of Calabar Press, 2004.

Asouzu, Innocent I. *New Complementary Ontology: Beyond World Immanence*. Lit Verlag, 2006.

Carr, E.H. *What is History?* Penguin Books, 1961.

Dukor, Maduabuchi. *African Freedom: The Freedom of Philosophy*. Malthouse Press, 2021.

Dukor, Maduabuchi. *African Philosophy in the Global Village: Theistic Panpsychic Rationality, Axiology and Science*. Malthouse Press, 2021.

Dukor, Maduabuchi. *Theistic Humanism of African Philosophy: The Great Debate on Substance and Method of Philosophy*. Malthouse Press, 2021.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2004.

Hountondji, Paulin J. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*. Indiana UP, 1996.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Heinemann, 1969.

Mirembe, Kambalé. "Does Growth Contribute to Development?" Presented at African Economic Conference, 2015.

Nkurunziza, Janvier D. "Dependency on Raw Materials and Human Development." *United Nations Economic Commission for Africa*, 2020. <https://www.uneca.org>

Okoro, Chidozie. "Militocracy and the Crisis of Leadership in a Plural State." In Maduabuchi Dukor (Ed.), *The Federal Republic of Nigerian Army Symposium on Sage Philosophy*, MalthousePress, 2018, pp. 145–158.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel Barnes, Methuen, 1958.

Stumpf, Samuel Enoch. *Philosophy: History and Problems*. 6th ed., McGraw-Hill, 1986.

Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972.

Wiredu, Kwasi. *Philosophy and an African Culture*. Cambridge UP, 1980.