

THE LIMITS OF COLONIALITY ON TRANSIDENTITY WITHIN AFRICAN IDENTITY

Jude I. Onebunne, PhD*, Felix Okechukwu Akamonye, PhD** & Mirian N. Alike, PhD***

Abstract

This paper explores the tapestry of the connectedness between coloniality, transidentity and African identity contextualized within the enduring patterns of postcolonial maltreatment which sustains the inequalities and hierarchies established during the colonial times as implied in the imperial legacies. Coloniality, referring to an enduring structures shaped by colonialism and transidentity, encompassing fluid and self-determined identities, challenging fixed tradocultural *cum* societal norms are all in contrast to African identity, as it reflects the rich complexity of a well defined Afrocentric worldview which borders on cultural heritage and shared history as well as an evolving sense of self-worth among African peoples. Using the method of hermeneutics, the researcher tries to understand the legacy of coloniality and contemporary transidentity challenging the fluid identity constructs imposed by colonial systems which have continued to challenge the rigid and often more dynamic African identity, thereby, fostering significant debates on African modalities of *to be*.

Keywords: Coloniality, transidentity, African identity.

Appreciation of Colonialism

The conceptual idea of coloniality is informed by the idea of colonialism and neocolonialism. Colonialism refers to a form of domination, where one nation rules over the political, economic and cultural life of another territory and its people, often through military conquest and settler occupation (Loomba, 2005). European colonialism was motivated by economic interests, territorial expansion, and the exportation of Western ideologies (Fanon, 1963), particularly from the 15th to the 20th century. Colonialism, therefore, has multiple types including settler-type colonialism (permanent occupation of colonizers on land, such as through colonialism in the Americas and Australia) and extractive colonialism (focusing on resource exploitation without large-scale settlement, such as through colonialism in Africa and South Asia) (Wolfe, 1999). *Colonialism* comes colony and tends to be applied in contexts addressing the effects that colonialism has on the lives of those living in colonies, (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Colonialism is a complementary idea to neocolonialism. From the moment the exploration of continental of Africa that turned into exploitation due to the beauty of Africa in human and natural resources made the imperial masters not to go even after the independence. The whole idea is captured within the concept of neocolonialism. It was in Jean Paul Sartre's *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964) that the term neocolonialism was first recorded. The term has become an essential theme in African Philosophy, most especially in African political philosophy, (Afisi, n.d.). Despite achieving independence, the influences of colonialism and its agents are still very much present in the lives of most former colonies. Practically, every aspect of the ex-colonized society still harbors colonial influences. These influences, their agents and effects constitute the subject matter of neocolonialism. Halperin, S. (n.d.) explains that neocolonialism, the control of less-developed countries by developed countries through indirect means. The term *neocolonialism* was first used after world war 11 to refer to the continuing dependence of former colonies on foreign countries, but its meaning soon broadened to apply, more generally, to places where the power of developed countries was used to produce a colonial-like exploitation.

Dictionary.com defines coloniality as the set of attitudes, values, ways of knowing, and power structures upheld as normative by western colonizing societies and serving to rationalize and perpetuate western dominance. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.) without any word

like coloniality defines colonialism as the domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation : the practice of extending and maintaining a nation's political and economic control over another people or area. However, Wikipedia (n.d.) explains that the coloniality of power is a concept interrelating the practices and legacies of European colonialism in social orders and forms of knowledge, advanced in postcolonial studies, decoloniality, and Latin American subaltern studies. Coloniality, therefore, is a fundamental theoretical as well as an enduring ideological legacy that began with colonialism and persistently endures while reshaping the entire life of the colonized people after the much lauded and presumed independence. Coloniality is a broad concept that goes beyond colonialism to describe the inherent structure of power, persistent built-up of knowledge and intrinsic make-up of being that started with the imperial imposition and colonial invasion of continental Africa.

Coloniality represents the legacies of power structures, maintenance of knowledge systems and forms of social hierarchies created by colonial rule that outlast formal decolonization (Quijano, 2000). The matrix of coloniality continues to inform global imperatives regarding politics, economy, culture, epistemology (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). As Mignolo (2011) describes, coloniality does not refer to the direct political and economic domination of control but to the embedded ideologies and institutions that reproduce Eurocentrism and marginalize knowledge systems from other backgrounds. Coloniality can be elaborated by deconstructing three main aspects: coloniality of power (which maintains global hierarchies favoring former colonial powers), coloniality of knowledge (which privileges Western epistemologies over indigenous knowledge systems) and coloniality of being (which dehumanizes non-Western peoples by imposing racialized categories), (Grosfoguel, 2007). This helps to explain the systemic inequalities that many postcolonial nations continue to face, despite (often superficial) political independence. Colonial scholars state that dismantling coloniality involves epistemic disobedience (or resisting the production of Eurocentric knowledge) with pluriversality, as in other ways of knowing and being in the world (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Coloniality is another national sense of representation, domination and exploitation. Moreover, coloniality marginalized indigenous knowledge systems with Eurocentric world views, thus constructing African philosophy in a certain trajectory. Coloniality emerges from the vestiges of colonial domination, as Aníbal Quijano (2000) explains coloniality is that set of structures of power, knowledge and being that persist beyond colonial rule.

Understanding Identity

Identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses personal, social, and cultural dimensions. This definitional response highlights the complexity and multidimensionality of identity in its personal, social and cultural aspects. This is a term that refers to aspects of individual or group identity such as characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, values, and experience. Identity formation is a process that occurs through the combination of the things within (how we see ourselves) and outside of us (society, culture, history) (Erikson, 1968). Thematically and critically, identity is tied to questions of selfhood and the persistence of consciousness across time. And John Locke (1690) claimed that personal identity consists in consciousness and memory, and matters of psychological continuity. Addressing this fixed self, David Hume (1739) criticized the idea of identity, arguing that it is an illusion mistaken as reality based on the mind's perception of a string of experiences over time.

Identity is formed through interactions with others sociologically. George Herbert Mead (1934), in particular, argued that self-identity, a derivation from social processes, most fundamentally language and role-taking. Drawing upon Erving Goffman's (1959) work, keep in mind that identity is ultimately performative (pg. 239). Stuart Hall (1996) speaks about cultural identity in a way that puts forth their dynamic and constructed quality. Hall contends that identity is not a static fact; rather it changes according to historical and cultural contexts. This understanding is central to postcolonial identity, as Frantz Fanon (1963) argues,

colonialism causes an identity break and strangeness, necessitating a new identity reconstruction.

Today the discourse of identity is informed by concerns around race, gender and globalisation. According to Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), social identities are group memberships that shapes self-concept and behavior. Intersectionality demonstrates how intersecting social categories shape privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). In short, identity is not fixed but rather fluid and permeable, emerging in the process of social interactions and challenging the idea of a static self.

Identity Formation as a Process of Alignment

Identity is a formative process when the real self tries and struggles to meet the ideal self. This is a formative process — a tug-of-war between the real self and the ideal self. Yet it was the statement “identity is when my real self meets my ideal self” that expresses a psychology and philosophy of identity construction. It means that you can realize your identity when you can be accepted that how you look like in actual & how you want to look like. This concept is deeply anchored in the self-concept theories in psychology, especially when looking at theories from Carl Rogers or Erik Erikson. An Understanding the Real self and Ideal self is really required.

- Real Self: The real self refers to the actual self of an individual. It is affected by genetics, the environment, social interactions and personal history (Rogers, 1959).
- Ideal Self: This is who we aspire to be, shaped by our dreams, expectations of society, and our values. This is a reflection of our ambitions, dreams and self-imposed guidelines.

According to Carl Rogers (1959) in his humanistic theory of personality, psychological well-being is based on the degree of congruence between the real self and the ideal self. If there is a big discrepancy between the two, it creates incongruence that can lead to anxiety, unhappiness, or low self-worth. In contrast, when the actual self closely matches the ideal self, one feels self-fulfilled and has a robust sense of identity. In a similar vein, Erik Erikson (1968) also wrote about where identity development takes place across different life stages, especially adolescence. He proposed that people experience an “identity crisis,” a period, essentially, of trying on different values to find a consistent sense of self. The successful resolution of this crisis would resolve in the achievement of identity, in which one's actual self and ideal self are aligned. There are challenges in this process of selves alignment. These are the challenges in accessing identity. There are many factors that decide whether one's real self can be good enough for the ideal self:

- Social & Cultural Expectations: The external expectations placed on us can result in an ideal self that is not realistic or achievable (Hall, 1996).
- Personal Growth and Reflection. In this one embark on the journey of transition: Shifting from the person who accepts their shortcomings to share a utopia where they are the ultimate version of themselves. There is need for continuous self-improvement and introspection help bridge the gap between real and ideal selves.
- Trajectory of Being: Repeated experiences inform our sense of self — identity emerges as the result of an ongoing process rather than a static state. There ought to be experiences of failure and success:

When people realize consistency between their current and ideal selves, they gain authenticity, self-acceptance and mental health. In sum, identity is not static but a lifelong journey of reconciling who we are with who we aspire to be. When individuals achieve alignment between their real and ideal selves, they experience authenticity, self-acceptance, and psychological well-being.

Appreciation of Gender

Onebunne (2023) opines that in the metaphysics of being, the Aristotelian predication and categories, whatever is being is either Substance or accidents. We conceive of being through metaphysical abstraction. Whatever is, shares in this conception. The concept of being is all applicable to all that is. The process of this application is called Predication. Through predication being or any of its aspects is applied to another. The arrangement of concepts according to their contents or the internal difference between one being and another is brought out by the Aristotelian Categories thus: Genus, Species, Specific Difference, Property and Logical Accident. In line with Genus and specific differences, the human species as members of sub-group that constitute a given genus, is differentiated between male and female. This is Gender. Gender defines humanity in terms re-productivity. Gender evokes the ideas of male sex or the female sex, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences. It is the condition of belonging to or identifying as having a particular gender: male gender or female gender. Many languages have classes of nouns with regard to humanity typified in masculine, feminine, common (neuter). Grammatical gender is only very loosely associated with distinction of sex, (Onebunne, 2023).

Gender is from Old French *gendre* (modern *genre*), based on Latin *genus* 'birth, family, nation'. The earliest meanings were 'kind, sort, genus' and 'type or class of noun. WHO defines Gender as the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. The idea of gender disparity in our time is very awkward. This has made many live in identity crisis of whom they are. However, in the midst of these contemporary gender identity crisis Trump maintains that the only gender recognizable today is the one received at birth. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.) refers to gender as something that has "to identify (someone) as being either male or female...to treat (someone) as either male or female". With all these nuances of gender, one tries to understand specific differential roles gender plays in human society. This is the thrust of gender roles.

Gender Role

The specificity of human nature respects the gender nature of man as man and woman as woman. Wikipedia (n.d.) is so clear that gender role, also known as a sex role, is a social role encompassing a range of behaviours and attitudes that are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for a person based on that person's sex. In further appreciation of gender role, planned parenthood maintains that Gender roles in society means how we're expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex. For example, girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite, accommodating, and nurturing. Men are generally expected to be strong, aggressive, and bold.

Onebunne (2023) stresses that the idea of gender roles in human society has long been a subject of intense controversy. Human beings are unique individuals. The challenges of gender in human enterprise shows the complexities in the society. The idea of gender roles has undergone a gradual transformation throughout history. Gender roles simply dictate societal expectations and environmental norms, (Onebunne, 2023). Gender reshapes individuals' behaviour and opportunities. The Scriptural creation account of human beings seems to gender sensitive as male and female had different creation account. Equally, in ancient societies, such as the Greeks and Romans, men held the dominant positions in both public and private spheres, expected to be strong and assertive, while women were confined to the domestic realm, caregivers and nurturers. Such disparity as gender roles is evidenced in the writings of Aristotle and other philosophers of the time, who viewed women as inferior to men. A good equilibrium can be achieved via healthy gender roles distribution. By and large, the mental health and emotional equipoise are directly and indirectly connected with gender roles. The dynamics of gender roles portray men and women in specific roles and behaviours amidst systemic inequalities. A gender role (in a sociocultural understanding) or

sex role (biological appreciation) is equally a social role embracing a wide range of behavioural attitudes that are specifically considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for a person based on that person's sex. Gender role is specifically socio cum trado-culturally bound. On this stance, some cultures distinguish male and female, boys and girls, while some contemporary society recognizes more than that thereby accommodating transgenders (who may identify themselves simply as men or women,), androgyny, etc. Gender role is specifically socio cum trado-culturally bound. Roles are specific assignments given and expected to be carried out responsibly and response-ably. In our context, gender roles simply specifies in accordance with our human nature as male or female in contradistinction to what feminism as well as transgenderism is all about.

Understanding Gender Identity

Gender identity is a person's deeply held sense of being male, female, both or neither or another gender. Unlike biological sex, which is assigned at birth based on physical characteristics, and gender expression, which includes external manifestations such as clothing, behavior, and social roles (American Psychological Association [APA], 2015). According to Mathias M. (n.d.) "gender identity is a personal conception of oneself as a man or a woman or as a boy or a girl or as some combination of a man/boy and a woman/girl or as someone moving back and forth between man/boy and woman/girl or as someone who does not fit into those categories at all." It is neurobiologically different from biological sex, id est, male or female as assigned at birth. Typically gender identity and biological sex align in a conventional manner. The natural relationship between sex and gender roles is broken down in the case of people like that, among transgender people for example biological characteristics of sex are clear and definite but the subject identifies with the gender role normally assigned to the opposite sex (Mathias M, n.d.) The developmental nature of gender identity has been studied and debated by psychologists, philosophers and social activists since the late 20th century. Essentialism, social constructionism and performativity are the central theories of gender identity. The theories are applied, with extra questions, in the appreciation of gender identity. The essentialist position asserts that gender identity is determined at birth, being influenced by genetic or other biological factors, while the social constructivist position maintains that gender identity or the projection of gender identity is "socially constructed" or determined by social or cultural factors. Performatist social constructivism holds that gender identity is not expressed, but constituted by the ongoing "performance" of various gendered behaviour (action and speech). The idea comes from Judith Butler, the American philosopher famous for this view of gender: "It is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." And from the male and female, comes the gender identity that is innate or socialized in human beings and have then led to different sexual orientations: heterosexual or homosexual, among other nonbinary identities. Gender identity describes the internal disposition and sense of self that a person has about her or his own gender, which may or may not match nor correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth. An analogous extension of the nuances of gender identities has made space for transgenderism

According to Mathias M. (n.d.) transgender is a term self-applied by individuals whose gender identity does not correspond to that which is traditionally associated with their apparent biological sex at birth. In its original, narrower sense, transgender referred to males and females who gender-identify as females and males, respectively. More recently, it has been used to refer to people whose gender identities include behaviors or traits belonging traditionally to the opposite sex. Transgender individuals may therefore consist of transsexuals and androgynes.) Well, towards a bit of normality, as every gender issue precisely was about the normal life of one among many. Aside from this gender appreciation gap, nature- or nurture, plays havoc with mankind leading to choice neighbours extremes or what we deem gender normal. THIS IS NOW BECOMING AN LGBTQ+ ISSUE. On this day, many individuals have demanded to rebuild their identity or

literally speaking, their gender as determined by nature with a reason that they seemingly join male structures rather than female body. Some feel like they are stuck in a child's body instead of an adult body. The litany of this contemporary madness as nothing is or rather every is fluid goes on *ad infinitum*. This is key of identity crisis we are dealing with. Transgenderism has been fortunate different sexual disorientations and its a problem in mental wellbeing. And we now have this gender dysphoria (GD) or gender identity disorder (GID). Interpretation of what GID is according to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-4; 2000)→ GID is a form of sickness. The GD diagnosis is included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5; 2013), which is the American Psychiatric Association's (APA's) official compendium of psychiatric disorders. The World Health Organization (WHO) International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems¹⁰ (ICD-10) also includes a clinical description of GID.

Transgender is a term used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth (American Psychological Association, 2023). This includes a range of different identities from binary trans people (trans men and women) to non-binary individuals who identify as being beyond the binary gender category (GLAAD, 2022). Research shows that the feeling of being transgender is not a mental illness but a natural variation of the human experience (World Health Organization, 2019) Many transgender people have gender dysphoria — distress resulting from misalignment between assigned sex and gender identity — although not all do (Coleman *et al.*, 2022). Gender-affirming care, which can involve social, medical, and/or surgical interventions to bring someone's physical body into alignment with their identity, is frequently sought by transgender people (Turban *et al.*, 2020).

In theoretical dimensions, Judith Butler (1990) proposed the notion of gender performativity—arguing that gender is not simply an innate characteristic, but instead, a performed reality dictated by societal norms. This undermines the binary way of thinking about gender and advocates the acknowledgment of nonbinary gender identity. By way of psychology, it is well understood that biological, social, and cognitive aspects impact gender identity growth. This internalizing of the appropriate social categories during childhood was better explained by Lawrence Kohlberg's (1966) cognitive-developmental theory, with which the children were able to develop gender identity. Gender Identity as a Possible Evolutionary Adaptation Neuroscience Research Gender identity is possibly related to variation in brain structure and possibly also function (Zhou *et al.*, 1995). And from the cultural and social aspects, orienting gender identity differs by cultures. Non-binary and third-gender identities exist in many societies, for example, the Hijras in South Asia (Nanda, 1999); the Two-Spirit identities in Indigenous North Americans (Driskill, 2010). These examples show us that gender identity is never solely binary but is defined by the cultural context. Merriam-Webster. According to GLAAD (2022), gender identity is a person's internal sense of being male, female, some combination of male and female or neither male nor female. Gender Identity The personal sense of one's own gender (Wikipedia, n.d.) Gender identity may align with a person's sex given at birth or differ from it. In most people, the different biological determinants of sex are congruent and align with the person's gender identity. These are all within the bounds of gender expressions and gender roles that usually align with someone's gender identity. Gender identity, gender expression — whatever it is that you want to reflect, whatever you feel you are, whether you believe that expression is gender role or gender identity. Stylistically, the name gender identity was made up by the psychiatry professor Robert J. Stoller in 1964, then spread by the psychologist John Money.

Understanding Transidentity

Transidentity is the experience of individuals whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth. This is similar to transgender identity, but comes from a different place, creating a wider definition for identity and expression than the traditional binary

framework (Butler, 1990). Historical and These are historically used in the past but recently only one was used, it has not been used all of them in the same time, it used to categorize the people. This was first elaborated by Judith Butler (1990) with her theory of gender performativity, which conceptualized gender not as a fixed identity but as something that is performed, something that one does. This view undermines strict gender binaries and lends to the argument for the acknowledgment of multiple gender identities.

Psychiatrically, the APA pathologized gender variance (which originally included identity-issues) but eventually redefined those norms as dysphoria — suggesting that there was nothing inherently disgusting about being gender-variant but that it might lead to distress regarding incongruence between assigned sex and identity (APA, 2013). Medical and psychological care for trans people has since shifted to affirmative models prioritizing self-identification and overall well-being. Transidentity differs culturally as well as socially. Non-binary and third-gender identities are recognized in many non-Western societies (e.g., among the Hijras in South Asia (Nanda, 1999), and Two-Spirit people from Indigenous North America (Driskill, 2010)). Such examples reveal the fragility of Western norms and the cultural dynamics of gender across both history and geography. Despite increasing legal and social recognition, trans people experience discrimination, stigma, and systemic barriers to healthcare, employment, and legal recognition (Whittle et al., 2007). One way trans people seek to address these inequalities is through advocacy and policy reform; affirming trans people's rights helps in supporting a more equitable society.

Identity Crisis

An identity crisis is a time of intense uncertainty about the essence of the self, one's basic values, role in the social order, or personal pathway through life—they can't decide who to be. As Erik Erikson had proposed in his theory of psychosocial development stages, identity formation is a critical developmental task of adolescence but can be readdressed later in life (Erikson, 1968). An identity crisis can occur when a person questions the foundations of their identity, such as their job, their relationships, their religious beliefs, their sexual orientation or their culture. This questioning typically arises during significant life transitions such as adolescence, mid-life, retirement, or post major disruptions like migration, divorce, or job loss (Marcia, 1980). Recent studies have further developed Erikson's theory, acknowledging that identity formation is nonlinear and a fluid, continuous process that is influenced by sociocultural dynamics.

According to Côté and Levine (2002), in contemporary societies, with extensive options and less traditional structures, there is more room for identity chaos. Identity crises are experienced and resolved differently depending on the cultural context. And so while the Western lens sees a desire for individual autonomy in identity formation, non-Western cultures may privilege collective identity and familial roles (Jensen, 2003). Psychological science offers a few approaches that may help when you're moving through an identity crisis: by some mix of self-exploration through mental processing or journaling; a focus on meaningful relationships with others; openness to grappling with uncertainty, which is part of the growth process; and small-scale trialing of new roles and commitments (Schwartz et al., 2013). For example, one textbook describes how successful resolution by most who experience an identity crisis involves achieving a state called "identity achievement"—a state where individuals have explored alternatives and made commitments aligned with their authentic selves. This resolution often leads to increased psychological well-being, stronger sense of purpose, and greater resilience in facing future challenges (Kroger & Marcia, 2011).

Understanding African Identity

African identity is both a multifaceted and contested idea constructed through historical processes, cultural diversity and current sociopolitical forces. The complexity of African identity is immense. The African identity is vast and rich with diversity—over 2,000

languages and numerous cultural traditions—yet sharing some philosophical universalities. Across the continent, the principle of Ubuntu espouses a sense of fragile interdependence over Western notions of individualism (Ramose, 1999; Gyekye, 1997). Forwarding the discussion of How cosmopolitanism redefined African identity, which is a philosophy derived from the African identity. It is a reflection of the collective consciousness, traditions and values of African peoples, molded and influenced by colonial pasts, globalisation and current socio-political transformations (Mbembe, 2002). These other and inhuman activities of slavery and that of the colonial experience hugely disturbed the normal creation of traditional African identities through the design of imaginary borders and agglomerated cultural imposition (Mudimbe, 1988). African Boundaries Based on the Berlin Conference of 1884 Such as in the case of Pan-Africanism, which was a newly emerging narrative in post-independence Africa to foster unity among the continent and Diaspora (Nkrumah, 1963; Diop, 1987).

The experience was fundamental to the redefinition of African identity. European powers created artificial borders, downplayed indigenous knowledge systems, and externally induced a sense of inferiority among Africans (Fanon, 1967). This alienation sparked discussions about whether African identity should be based on a return to pre-colonialism or an infusion of African and Western characteristics (Wiredu, 1996). Thinkers like Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire led the charge of the Negritude movement, which sought to reclaim African cultural heritage and Black identity (Senghor, 1964). In the African history and culture, the African identity is derived from the sense of community living, where a person does not consider himself/herself as an independent person, but rather as part of the big social fabric. A philosophy which Ramose (1999) calls Ubuntu where man values solidarity, cooperation and mutual care among his peers. African cultural, linguistic and philosophical achievements prior to colonialism were not only indigenous but gave people a sense of identity and belonging. Nonetheless, the imposition of Western colonial cultural, economic, and political systems in Africa interrupted these traditions and led to identity crises in African nations (Mudimbe, 1988).

Scholarship on contemporary African identity recognizes the tensions between tradition and modernity, and encourages a form of what Appiah (1992) called "rooted cosmopolitanism," wherein cultural preservation is weighted alongside global engagement. Mbembe (2001) identifies through a similar lens that African subjects construct themselves based upon tastes encountered from the outside. In the quest for identity in Africa, Eurocentricism which paid the price of the loss the African Identity is replaced by Afrocentricism through a more cosmocentric approach. Through notions of "double-consciousness" (Du Bois, 1903) and cultural retention amidst dislocation (Gilroy, 1993) the Diaspora is crucial to African identity. African identity is still evolving today in the face of globalization, urbanization and technological change, with younger generations defining African identity in the 21st century (Adichie, 2009).

African philosophers such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere promoted African socialism, a vision of merging traditional African communal values with modern governance structures (Nkrumah, 1963). Likewise, Achille Mbembe (2002) targets postcolonial African identity as the subject of resistance to colonial narratives and implores scholars to embrace an ever-developing conceptualization of Africanness. Similarly, globalization and digital culture has shaped African identity today, creating space for African traditions and global ideologies to collide, creating new forms of hybrid identity (Appiah, 1992). African-ness is shaped by history, culture, colonial legacy and globalization; it is ever-evolving. It is marked by resilience, communalism, and adaptability while having to negotiate its place within modernity. If African scholars keep up with critical dialogue, I would assume that African identity will continue to grow in ways that recognize its delicate past but also do what is needed to metamorphosis in the most beautiful way.

African Identity and African Modalities of To Be

African identity African modalities of To Be is the African ways of being. African identity is the collective sense of belonging, values, and cultural heritage that encompasses individuals and communities across the continent of Africa and its global diaspora. Culture is influenced by historical, social, and philosophical outlooks across various facets of life including language, customs, spirituality, art, and communal values. African identity is a fluid construct, shaped and reshaped through its history, and influenced by globalization and contemporary societal dynamics. African identity is the complex interplay of everything that makes an individual an African. These five African modalities of To Be—ontological relationality, vitalist ontology, dynamic becoming, communal and ethical being, and ancestral/spiritual being—profoundly inform African identity. African philosophy does not conceive of identity as an independent individual essence, but as arising in relationships, moral actions, and spiritual connections. Here are indications of how each modality corresponds to African identity. African identity is essentially a communitarian one. Identity is not something we create without being in relationship — with family, with society, with nature. The Ubuntu philosophy (“I am because we are”) emphasizes that identity is constituted by social bonds. No one individual who is not part of a community is complete. Thus, there is an ontological constraint.

African Identity is constructed by language, traditions, and culture shared in social interactions. Identity has nothing to do with being human; it has everything to do with the quality of your being. The force of life itself (*ntú, nyama, chi*) in a person is augmented or depleted based upon their actions, relationships, and chosen spiritual practices. As we give more to society, we become more embodied and engender our identity. This is one of the reasons elders, wise leaders, and ancestors are held in high esteem in African societies. Identity is not a birthright, but a process; it develops as we accrue knowledge, experience, and recognition within our (intended) communities. The question of African identity is not static but continually contested. African identity is understood differently than the Western notion of identity, which stars an immutable essence: instead, it is cultivated over time. In Bantu philosophy, a child is not yet full human (*mutu*) until they achieve knowledge, moral consciousness, and social responsibility. Identity is formed through rites of passage, education and community engagement. Life as a reflection of identity trumps identity as a reflection of life. Without acting with integrity, kindness, and responsibility toward others, a personal social recognition is not even complete. There are many African proverbs that reinforce this idea, that good character is what really makes a man. So, for instance, the Yoruba say, *Iwa l'ewa* (“Character is beauty”), which means that in the end a person’s true identity lies in their moral actions. Social values like respect, hospitality, cooperation, etc. play a vital role in identity formation and sustainability.

African identity is complex, moving beyond the material world to include worlds of ancestry, nature, and spirit. The dead are still part of the community, shaping the identity of the living. People maintain close ties to their ancestors through rituals, names, and storytelling. Not only experiences, but ancestry, ethnicity, and spiritual associations define identity. In summary, African identity has fluidity, communalism, ethics and profound spirituality. My definition is not something I'm individually and solely defining myself, it is a collective definition that is not static; it is an ongoing process that is informed by relationships, ethics and ancestry (the lives that precede my own). This differs with Western concepts of identity, which stress individuality and personal agency. This is why there are the individual elements of African identity are best appreciated through a lens of meaningfulness that these modalities help to clarify.

African modalities of "to be" could also mean the diverse ways existence/ being/ identity is viewed differently across different African philosophical traditions. In contrast to Western ontological traditions that often privilege individual existence and move toward

abstract categorizations, African conceptions of being are relational, communal, and dynamic. In the African view, to be or existence is participatory. An individual's being is co-constructed through social bonds and moral responsibilities. In this way being highlights relational being. For the western construct, being is a fixed essence. Or your being is, constructed not in a vacuum, but in relation to your fellow man. This counters the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" with a communal proposition: "We are, therefore I am." This is why existence in many African worldviews is beyond the physical to the level of ancestors, spirits and the divine. For instance, the Yoruba notion of *Àṣẹ* signifies that which animates existence and links the living, the dead, and the not yet born. The material and the spiritual are not dichotomous, but connect each human being to the cosmic and the divine, to gods and ancestors. Where Western thought often has a static conception of being, African thought often sees being as a process of becoming. *Sunsum* (personal spirit) and *Nkrabea* (destiny), as understood within the Akan worldview, speak to a self that is always changing, a being that exists in continuity and transformation through experiences, moral choices, and interactions with other beings in the communal sphere. This fits with the notion that personhood is not conferred at birth, but earned through good living and social contribution. In many African traditions, human existence is closely intertwined with nature. According to Bantu philosophy, the world is a natural web of interconnections among humans, animals and nature, forming balance with one another in harmony. But being isn't limited to humans; it encompasses land, rivers and cosmic phenomena, which breeds an ethic of environmental respect and sustainability. To be or Being is associated with moral and ethical duty. To "be" in an African philosophy sense signifies that one is alive and living a full life in conformance with communal values, justice and harmony. To be an Igbo person, or *Mmadu* (human person), the most important thing is not just the condition of being alive (existence) but the responsibility to be a moral human being—one is not really worthy of being when he/she lacks wisdom (*nka*), respect (*ùkwú*), or responsibility (*ogbù*). In this way, African modalities of being contest the notion of existence as a static, individualized reality. They instead highlight the relational, processual, spiritual, ecological and ethical aspects of existence. It also can see these overarching collective entities in the core being of "to be," and thus is enshrined in community, nature, and spirituality that may offer an alternative to the dominant Western ontologies.

Afromodals Underlining African Modes of *To Be*

Limitations of Coloniality on Transidentity within African Identity

Coloniality imposes rigid boundaries on transidentity within African identity by enforcing binary gender norms and suppressing indigenous gender fluidity. The intersection of coloniality, transidentity, and African identity reveals complex tensions that challenge both Western frameworks and reclaimed African epistemologies. Colonial impositions continue to influence how gender and sexuality are conceptualized across Africa, yet indigenous understandings of gender fluidity predate and sometimes transcend these colonial constructs. The coloniality of gender predicates its imposition within African identity by constructing transidentity within a binary that is foreign to most indigenous African conceptions of identity, more importantly, disallowing indigenous gender fluidity. In fact, these complications of coloniality are so fierce that they critique not just Western concepts, but also reclamations of African intellectual traditions. Colonial impositions remain relevant in the ways gender and sexuality are understood across Africa, but that colonially imposed violence was preceded—indeed, sometimes informed—by indigenous understandings of gender fluidity.

In many parts of pre-colonial Africa, societies acknowledged gender identities and roles beyond the male-female binary. The Buganda of Uganda had the mukodo dako, and the Igbo of Nigeria had female husbands (Amadiume, 1987). But the what we call Western heteronormative colonial structure imposed on top of these coexisted structures criminalized and erased these and them as natives (Lugones, 2007). Peoples across pre-colonial Africa exhibited different conceptions of gender outside of binary categories. The Dagaaba in

Ghana saw gender as situational rather than static (Dankwa, 2009; and the Igbo had a flexible gender system in which women could become husbands in "female husband" relationships (Amadiume, 1987). Likewise, the Ugandan Ankole regarded the "muserukai," persons who were assigned male at birth but lived as women (Tamale, 2011). These instances confront the colonial narrative that inflexible gender binaries were native to Africa.

Coloniality, as a category of analysis that Quijano defined (2000) reconfigured the tensions of power through racialized classifications, with it European norms of gender. The criminalization of gender non-conformity through missionary education and colonial legal systems identified indigenous gender diversity as "primitive" or "deviant" (Lugones, 2010). This colonial legacy continues to inform twentieth-century discourses about LGBTQ+ rights across Africa, framing transidentity as "un-African," even in the face of historical evidence to the contrary. Coloniality still delegitimizes trans identities via religious indoctrination, legal frameworks and education systems, rendering gender variance "un-African" (Epprecht, 2008). When colonization ended, these systems of discrimination remained embedded in the legal apparatus of postcolonial African states, where they continue to be used to criminalize and socially oppress gender-diverse persons. For example, anti-LGBTQ+ laws in numerous African nations originate from colonial penal codes, as opposed to being indigenous practices (Hoad, 2007).

These limitations aside, present-day African activists resist coloniality through revival of indigenous notions of gender. Academics encourage decolonizing African identity to include trans and nonbinary beings within the continent's historical and cultural frameworks (Nzegwu, 2016). Thus, coloniality continues to exert its influence on transidentity, through legal, religious, and social marginalisation, and yet, resistance movements actively attempt to restore inclusivity, as it once existed in precolonial societies. According to Oyěwùmí (1997), in many societies in Africa before colonization, gender itself was not necessarily the primary organizing principle. Among the Yoruba, there was this seniority rather than gender hierarchy; social position was determined by seniority, not gender. These so-called tributary forms serve as a colonial foundation on which European gender categories were imposed, which clarifies their distorted representation of indigenous social structures, producing what Mbembe (2001) characterizes as a "postcolony," where the identities of Africans are crafted in constant performance against European colonial frameworks.

TransAfrican identities today are thus in intricate relation to both the legacies of colonialism and indigenous traditions. In the struggle to decolonize gender in Africa, these transformative efforts will also involve managing the paradox of resisting an idealized vision of a pre-colonial gender system without succumbing to an uncritical romanticisation of these gender systems (Msibi, 2011). It is the fact that these assertions are made within the confines of coloniality— this, the place where colonial mores meet the decolonial project, but are limited in their expressions of current embodiment— where particularity does not embody those rights, and an affirmation of blackness does not include the diversity of gendered expression that is present in pre-colonial conception and that should find itself in current representations.

Conclusion

The idea of transidentity within African identity shows a significant interplay between colonial-imperial encumbrance and indigenous resistivity. That is, the relationship between colonial forms of redemptive ontology and indigenous transidentity within African identity is therefore just one of many instances of dialectic that encourages rigorous exploration. Coloniality attempts to suppress diverse epistemologies with a strict binaries, but will never be successful in destroying what people have known about gender since before European contact. The continuity of indigenous gender expressions, which still exist (though often subordinated), most visibly disrupts the limits of coloniality. These manifestations of gender fluidity written across the body reveal that this gender reality is an epistemological truth in

Africa, the specter of colonization does not contend with the quotidian power of this African epistemological reality as something foreign and Western. Yet in response to the colonial project's (and a current-day imperialist economic project) violence against gender diversity, there has been remarkable resistance, an evidence of the inherent resiliency and complexity of African identities.

To unequivocally state that contemporary African trans and non-binary persons do not merely survive colonial violence, but also resist, reclaim, and re-imagine their realness. They occupy a vital space of epistemic resistance, on the one hand honoring pre-colonial gender traditions and, on the other hand, developing new modes of being that go beyond colonial and traditional constrictions. This, in turn, should be taken as an exercise of radical self-determination, whereby identity is seen not as a static category but as a fluid process. Transidentity in Africa should be informed by ongoing conversations, academic studies, and approaches centred around communities, while also being cognizant of existing global trends. It needs to thread the needle between revisiting what we once knew, and opening space to new, amorphous iterations of gender and sexuality. In the end, it is not the violent prowess of coloniality that determines its limits, but rather the resilient, reformatory strength of African epistemologies that continually resist, subvert, and reconstitute the very notion of identity itself.

***Jude I. Onebunne, PhD**

Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
juno.anyi@gmail.com , 08034074664
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-89956097

&

****Felix Okechukwu Akamonye, PhD**

Pope John Paul II Major Seminary Okpuno
Awka-South,, Anambra State Nigeria
monyee@priest.com

&

*****Mirian N. Alike, PhD**

Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
mn.alike@unizik.edu.ng
08069253940

Reference

Adichie, C.N. (2009). *The danger of a single story*. Heinemann.

Afisi, O. T. (n.d.). Neocolonialism. In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<https://iep.utm.edu/neocolon/>

Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. Zed Books.

American Psychological Association. (2023). *Guidelines for psychological practice with transgender and gender nonconforming people*.

- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-4; 2000)
- Appiah, K. A. (1992). *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989, 1991). *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex*. University of Chicago Legal Forum.
- Coleman, E., et al. (2022). *Standards of Care for the Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse People*, Version 8.
- Côté, J. E., & Levine, C. (2002). *Identity formation, agency, and culture: A social psychological synthesis*. Oxford University Press.
- Diop, C.A. (1987). *Precolonial Black Africa*. Indiana University Press.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. (1903). *The souls of black folk*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Dankwa, S. O. (2009). "It's a silent trade": Female same-sex intimacies in post-colonial Ghana. *NORA—Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 17(3), 192-205.
- Driskill, Q. (2010). *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*. University of Arizona Press.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. Norton.
- Epprecht, M. (2008). *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS*. Ohio University Press.
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2007). "The epistemic decolonial turn". In *Cultural Studies*, 21(2), 211-223.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The black Atlantic*. Grove Press.
- Gyekye, K. (1997). *Tradition and modernity*. Grove Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday.
- GLAAD. (2022). *GLAAD Media Reference Guide - Transgender*.
- Hoad, N. (2007). *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Hume, D. (1739). *A treatise of human nature*. Doubleday.
- Hall, S. (1996). *Questions of cultural identity*. SAGE.

- Halperin, S.(n.d.).Neocolonialism. In Britannica. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica
- Hountondji, P. J. (1996). African Philosophy: Myth and Reality. Indiana University Press.
- Loomba, A. (2005). Colonialism/Postcolonialism. Routledge.
- Jensen, L. A. (2003). Coming of age in a multicultural world: Globalization and adolescent cultural identity formation.
- Kroger, J., & Marcia, J. E. (2011). The identity statuses: Origins, meanings, and interpretations. Doubleday.
- Kohlberg, L. (1966). "A Cognitive-Developmental Analysis of Children's Sex-Role Concepts and Attitudes". In *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 19(3), 178-193.
- Lugones, M. (2007). "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." In *Hypatia*, 22(1), 186–209.
- Lugones, M. (2010). "Toward a Decolonial Feminism". *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742-759.
- Locke, J. (1690). *An essay concerning human understanding*.Doubleday.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mathias M. (n.d.). *Health & MedicinePsychology & Mental Health*
The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/science/gender-dysphoria>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Gender identity*. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved February 25, 2025, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender%20gender_identity
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Colonialism. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved February 24, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colonialism>
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/neocolonialism>
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). *On the coloniality of being*. Cultural Studies, 21(2-3), 240-270.
- Mignolo, W., & Walsh, C. E. (2018). On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis. Duke University Press.
- Marcia, J. E. (1980). *Identity in adolescence*.Heinemann.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. (1988). *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Indiana University Press.
- Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press.
- Msibi, T. (2011). "The lies we have been told: On (homo)sexuality in Africa". *Africa Today*, 58(1), 55-77.
- Nkrumah, K. (1963). *Africa Must Unite*. Heinemann.

- Nzegwu, N. (2016). *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture*. SUNY Press.
- Nanda, S. (1999). *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. Wadsworth.
- Onebunne, J. I. (2023). Expanding the Definitions of African Philosophy Within the Edges of African Predicaments. In Akamonye, F. (ed.), *Pope John Paul II Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, No. 2., 2023. p. 111-146
- Oyěwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Quijano, A. (2000). "Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America". In *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), 533-580.
- Rogers, C. (1959). *A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships*. McGraw-Hill.
- Ramose, M. B. (1999). *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Mond Books.
- Senghor, L. S. (1964). *On African Socialism*. Praeger.
- Schwartz, S. J., et al. (2013). *Identity around the world: An overview*. Oxford University Press.
- Turban, J.L., et al. (2020). *Pubertal Suppression for Transgender Youth and Risk of Suicidal Ideation*. Indiana University Press
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict*. Heimann
- Tamale, S. (2011). *African sexualities: A reader*. Pambazuka Press.
- Whittle, S., Turner, L., & Al-Alami, M. (2007). *Engendered Penalties: Transgender and Transsexual People's Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination*. University of Minnesota Press.
- World Health Organization. (2019). *International Classification of Diseases*, 11th Revision.
- Wiredu, K. (1996). *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. Indiana University Press.
- Wolfe, P. (1999). *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*. Cassell.
- Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.
(2022). *Coloniality*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/coloniality>
- Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. (2022). *Coloniality of power*.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/coloniality_of_power
- Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. (2022). *Gender Role*.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/gender-role>
- Zhou, J. N., Hofman, M. A., Gooren, L. J., & Swaab, D. F. (1995). "A Sex Difference in the Human Brain and Its Relation to Transsexuality". In *Nature*, 378(6552), 68-70.

