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# Unpacking African rhetorical theory in an African game

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## Abstract

African rhetoric usually stands accused of one basic charge: false equivalences. Scholars argue that the burgeoning field, for instance, heralds Afrocentricity to rival Eurocentricity. In responding to this concern, this article seeks to reimagine ways of conceptualizing African rhetoric on its own terms in order to propose an alternative concept termed as *Afrifuge*. Focusing on *ampe*, a traditional Ghanaian game, the paper demonstrates how scholars of African rhetoric can draw on unique tropes to think, speak, learn, and write about African rhetorical inventions and processes. The analysis brings to light significant rhetorical arguments when scholars closely examine the game from an Africanist perspective. These include a discovery of the laws of probability and calculus, critical thinking skills, multi-tasking, and agility. The overarching goal of the paper is to invite scholars to build a meta-theory of African rhetoric.

**Keywords:** Afrocentricity, African rhetoric, African philosophy, *ampe*, indigenous game

## Introduction

This paper begins with a vignette. In August 2018, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, a fellow Mellon scholar, a Nigerian, had a riveting conversation with me about the rhetoric of naming. To my colleague, I couldn't pass for a true Ghanaian, and for that matter, a true son of the African soil. And what was my crime? "This, your name now, Wincharles, is it not European, specifically English or French, abi?" Chichi (not his original name) passed his verdict. Two things may have emboldened

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my friend to think the way he did. The workshop was *ab initio* squarely about decolonizing knowledge systems, where participants read non-Western revolutionary works like Mignolo (2009) and his bon-mots such as *decoloniality*, *de-linking*, and *epistemic disobedience*. Second, Chichi is a proud member of the Igbo ethnic group; he insists, it is a nation unto itself. Therefore, for Chichi, one can truly be African so long as one has an African name.

As our dialogue piqued the interest of all the participants and the director of the workshop, Dilip Menon, including invited guest scholars, Magid Shihade, Nivedidat Menon and Carolyn Hamilton, I was presented with the opportunity to give a formal response concerning what Nivedidat Menon described as an unprovoked polemic on my person. I raised three fundamental points in my defense. I argued that yes it was factual to say that the name “Charles,” as Chichi emphasized, was indeed European. I told the gathering that *Charles* is a masculine [name](#) from the French form *Charles* of a Germanic name *Karl*. The original Anglo-Saxon was *Ċearl* or *Ċeorl*, as the name of King [Ċearl of Mercia](#) that disappeared after the [Norman conquest of England](#). But my name is not Charles, I insisted: it is Wincharles. I intimated that it did not lie in the mouth of Chichi to point out to me what ought to be foregrounded in my first name, and that which ought to be at the background. Second, I reminded my Africanist purist that although the disyllabic name X may be phonologically English, same is not common among Europeans, to say the least. I also argued, more forcefully, just as Fanon (2008) did in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that I am a product of the colonial experiment. Therefore, it could not be that by obtaining a local name such as Kofi Acheampong, I simply could undo the impact of the legacy on my intersectional, fractured self *stricto lato*. Indeed, Lee (2005) reports that Fanon’s renunciation of his name and French citizenship in favor of an Algerian nationality did not matter to a fraction of local Algerians who still saw him as an outsider.

What, then, was at the heart of our conversation was a negation of my Ghanaianess and/or Africaness. My colleague, I think, was casting a penumbra of doubt on the purity of my identity. He was weary of me. Perhaps, he conceived of me as a tainted *métis* whose commitment to the cause of African scholarship may be suspect.

### **Making a case for African rhetorical theory**

The paper is woven around the following questions: What conceptual maps are useful for reading African rhetoric? How should scholars of rhetoric in/about sub-Saharan Africa get to change the content and terms of the conversation in rhetoric, and how can rhetorical scholarship be truly decolonial by neither being stubbornly indigenous nor religiously Western?

The focus of this paper, then, is to explore the politics of that liminal space in rhetorical pedagogy in Africa. Reflections on the attainment of this goal in the Global South, *ipso facto*, point to minimal contributions from African scholars. The knowledge economy in African universities writ large is shaped by a multilayered imperative. In *Rethinking Africa's Globalization*, the Malawian historian, Zeleza (2003) bemoaned the tendency to reduce Africa into a descriptive appendage of theoretical formulations manufactured in other historical contexts. This is because, according to him, globalization (such as the global criteria for the world's university ranking), is a kind of universal elixir utilized by groups of people to sell their own political, cultural, and economic 'goods'. Scholarly efforts that valorize the differing and productive knowledge systems in, about, and for Africa are urgent to counter reification of Western thought about the continent, its vast cultures and vast peoples. It is, thus, of mammoth importance to conduct research and build theory grown on African soil. As Nwosu (2014) recently pointed out, "There is a growing discourse in Africa regarding how best to position African scholars as strategic partners and competitors in knowledge production and distribution" (p. 39).

It must be noted that unlike the West, Africa has little to show for its involvement in rhetorical communication research. A number of the countries on the continent have for a long time pursued a media-tropic pedagogy. A media-tropic pedagogy considers the core of communication studies to be mass media-oriented. Taylor *et al.* (2004) have blamed this development on four events: (a) the colonial experience (*i.e.*, print journalism was used as a tool for colonization and liberation); (b) the dependence of psychology-based solutions to media uses and effects; (c) the idea of mass communication as a means of modernization, and (d) the problem of technological determinism (*e.g.*, the role information and communication technologies play in teaching and learning). The authors added that the teaching of introductory classes in human communication in Africa relies on research findings and textbooks that are often unsuitable to explain the African communication experience, and thus called for a shift in paradigm that will "permit better understanding of the African communication environment" (p. 1).

An empirical exploration into these perspectives in an African nation such as Ghana is important in order that the scholarly community may understand, further theorize about, and seek ways to help address the political texture of rhetorical communication which has undeniably undergone a massive global, or more appropriately, a transcultural transformation. In an ever-globalizing work culture, interventions from colleagues from the West can no longer be interpreted as interference as stakeholders in the educational enterprise seek new ways to make education more responsive to the exigencies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Technical communicators Brady and José (2009) couldn't

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have been more right stating that, "... the globalization of the workplace increasingly requires that students be prepared to work in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts" (p. 41).

### **Problems facing scholars of African rhetoric**

Scholars of African indigenous communication systems are confronted with two basic problems. The first concerns the trap to return to what may be referred to as "the romanticization of an Idyllic Africa" seeking to purge itself from the vestiges of the ex-colonial leviathan. Some commentators have observed that to think of what constitutes African indigenous communication is to idealize rhetorical traditions and practices that were privileged and conventionalized in pre-colonial Africa where the continent was "untouched." Following the work of Fanon (2008/1952) and his edict not to be slaves of the past, it can be contended that the effort would yield little results in unearthing African indigenous communication theory to the rest of the world. This is because although Africa does not belong in the abbreviated time of modernity, it certainly does not belong in the past. As a matter of fact, Africa belongs in the present of the past. Thus, scholars of African rhetorical thought and media can look back at the past to nuance thinking of the present and future. But to posit that African rhetoric should look up to Kemet as its crucible is to deny the complexities confronting it.

Another problem the scholar of African communication and media needs to grapple with is what may be termed as the *theory of equivalence*. Very often, in the quest to show the world that the continent has rich rhetorical and communication practices, African and Africanist scholars tend to create an unintended impression that it is only by reifying knowledge systems and tropes afforded in Western thought that they can legitimize African rhetoric. How do the five canons of rhetoric, for instance, look like in many African contexts? What kinds of *pistei* (appeals), *topoi*, or *kairoses* (contexts) characterize African rhetorical traditions? What is the nature of deliberative rhetoric in indigenous African court systems, and how do rhetorical situations shape, enact, or give rise to African oratorical discursive practices? Such questions, it may be noted, satisfy the quest to tell the West that Africa too has a unique type of rhetoric. What is even far more reaching, and I daresay quite risky, is the theorizing of African rhetoric, using Western tropes through and through to understand Africa. The *African Journal of Rhetoric*, the leading journal of rhetoric in Africa, recorded its earliest volumes (circa 2009-2010) in this tradition. For example, one of the leading scholars on the continent, Philippe-J Salazar is notably a French phenomenologist who draws on the works of Heidegger and Foucault to theorize about African rhetoric. So, what is risky about this? I used the

modifier *risky* because it will be of little consequence to learn, and hopefully unlearn, from other contexts culturally different from the West if we keep holding on to what we already know. Rather, our knowledge of the world, and for that matter, rhetoric, will grow if we practice radical ignorance. That is to say, we want to proceed on the assumption that the cultures we're entering and wish to know are epistemologically different from our own.

## **The nexus between African rhetorical theory and African philosophical thought**

Any inquiry into the essence of African indigenous communications, it may be suggested, must first unpack the difficulty surrounding the concepts *Africa* and *African*. These labels are complex, and have multiple meanings. Africa is not a single continent with a single identity. There are multiple Africas that have and continue to give rise to a bundle of identities. The identities can be mapped on the basis of race, representation, or history. Two of Mudimbe's (1988; 1994) renowned books, *The Invention of Africa* and *The Idea of Africa*, show that arguments about the histories, representations, and identities of Africa are nuanced. We, then, need to be clear about what we mean when we employ the descriptor *African*. What exactly is an African identity, and what does it entail? For Azenabor (2000), *African* can only mean a specific race which relates to individuals whose identity derives from the African continent. These individuals, Azenabor (2000) explained, may be blacks, non-blacks, Carribeans, White, or Arabs, and that despite their cultural diversity they share a relatively common history of colonial experience and tutelage. Writers from these cultures have greatly influenced African philosophical thought from their unique perspectives.

That said, African philosophy is not a homogeneous body of thought. In the first place, it is often confused with African communal thought. The latter represents mores, wise sayings, customary laws, folklore. These communal collections have didactic values, and carry the history and identity of the group (Boaduo, 2011). African philosophy, on the other hand, refers to a systematic inquiry into the epistemologies, ontologies, phenomenologies, and hermeneutics of Africans obtained through formal training. The difficulty with this training, as I have said before, is that when it does not proceed on reflexivity it presents African philosophical thought as an extension of Western ideation. For example, how much can be understood about African enthymemes, using the tools of Cartesian logic? (Wiredu, 1998). Another issue is that, African philosophy shares some commonalities with other fields such as Black Studies, African-American Studies, Afrocentrism, Cultural Theory, Postcolonial Studies, and Race Theory (Janz, 2007). There also are scholars

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whose philosophic engagements are a reaction to the colonial obliteration of the African continent, or pre-colonial discourses of utopia, commonly termed as *narratives of return* (e.g., Boaduo, 2011; Gade, 2011). Such dialectics may be considered as a postcolonial agenda in which African philosophers heavily rely on hermeneutics to deal with the *misunderstandings* about/of Africa. Here mention must be made of the works of Outlaw (1998) and Asante (2007), and their coinage of such terms as *Afrocentricity* and *Afrology*.

What, then, is African philosophy, and what is its scope? It is interesting that pioneering work in this field formally commenced by Father Placide Tempels, a non-African, who in 1945 published *La Philosophie Bantoue* [*Bantu Philosophy*] as a challenge to Western philosophy. Tempels (1945) contested the claim that Africans were less capable of engaging in ‘true’ philosophy (see also Outlaw, 1998: 24). In particular, he disproved the idea that Africans cannot dissociate the subject from the object, nor time from space. Tempels’ work, however, is criticized for its generalization and inability to articulate nuances of African lived experience. For instance, the work emphasizes Bantu communal wisdom, and yet says little about Bantu hermeneutics. In other words, Tempels’ work tends to conflate the communal thought of the Bantu and the ability of the Bantu to philosophize.

African philosophy also struggles to establish geographical *versus* conceptual distinctions. Although a legion of scholars have argued that contemporary contemplations in African philosophy theorize the abstract (e.g., Wiredu, 1998; Fayemi, 2011; Metz, 2014), their treatments tend to focus on geographical locations or ethnocultures, which gave birth to the pejorative term *ethnophilosophy* attached to this pursuit (cf. Mbiti, 1971; Gyekye, 1995). Geographical philosophical accounts problematize practitioner identity, concepts, and claims, as well as anthropology located within traditional communal wisdom. It was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that African and Africana scholars (the latter being scholars of African descent) took the spatial dimension much more seriously because it offers a phenomenological basis upon which African philosophy articulates an African lifeworld.

That said, I now wish to turn to a classification of African rhetorical traditions. Here I am inspired by the pioneering work of Oruka (1990) in his bold attempt at creating a taxonomy of African philosophy. Below is my own effort:

1. Ethno-rhetoric: This area examines the collective traditional wisdom or generally ontological assumptions and worldviews of African ethnic groups. An example may be Kwesi Yankah’s (1995) of-cited *Speaking for the Chief*.
2. Sage rhetoric: This branch explores repositories of cultural wisdom.

3. Nationalistic/Ideological rhetoric: This is the critical examination of the rhetorical contemplations of emancipation and nation-building of key African political figures such as Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere, and Leopold Senghor. An example is Nkrumah's (1963) *Africa Must Unite* and Mandela's (1995) *A Long Walk to Freedom*.
4. Literary/Artistic rhetoric: This area articulates concerns raised by literary stalwarts like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi w'a Thiongo, and Chinua Achebe. Examples of their works are *Brother Jero*, *Weep Not Child*, and *Things Fall Apart* respectively.
5. Hermeneutic philosophy/rhetoric: This field first began as the analysis of African languages for the sake of finding African philosophical content, and currently is understood as the philosophy of interpretation. Examples of scholars here are Kwesi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, and Godwin Azenabor.

Upon a careful examination of the taxonomy I have attempted to construct, we may hold that if rhetoric is construed as the study of the principles undergirding argumentation, thought, and knowledge, then, African rhetoric may be described as the rhetoric "that is nourished within an African cultural experience, tradition, and history" (Azenabor, 2000: 321). What makes African rhetoric unique is that, it has a metaphysical dimension and spiritual orientation which is more of co-existence with nature rather than conquest, more of collectivism rather than individualism, more of holism rather than atomism, more of synthesis rather than analysis. African rhetorical thought is, therefore, fundamentally subjectivist. It contemplates the human experience. This understanding is crucial for doing research in rhetorical communication. Obeng-Quaidoo (1986) argued that in order to propose communication theories and methodologies congruent with the African lived-experience, researchers need to understand African ontology and cosmology. According to him, "any discussion of methodological innovations without considerations for the underlying cultural imperatives is like a mouse gyrating forever" (p. 91). Because rhetoric is an enterprise of the culture from which it emerges, scholars of rhetoric need to grasp the basic philosophies that shape their discipline. One such tenet is the place of the individual in the social order. For Gyekye (1995), the African identity is largely amphibious, that is, it is neither communalistic nor individualistic. The admission of one does not negate the other; there is no dualism in the Akan, and possibly by extension, the African, idea of the human person. He posited that communalism is the Akan social thought of humanism which ensures the welfare of each member of the society. This means that no one individual is born outside of a community.

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“Communalism insists that the good of all determines the good of each or, put differently, the welfare of each is dependent on the welfare of all” (p. 156). One’s sense of responsibility, the author stressed, is measured in terms of one’s responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs of the group. In his view, emphasis on community should not be read as whittling away individual identity, initiative, and responsibility. This is because the African, he said, has proverbs and dicta that expressly reflect the values of personal worth, aspiration, interests, and identity. After all, a society is a community of individuals, and individuals are individuals in society (p. 162).

The world senses I have discussed so far have implications for studying rhetoric in Africa. I am of the view that non-African scholars, in particular, need to be mindful that many local Africans will, in some cases, find it discomforting to isolate a member of their family or community for interview purposes; in such an instance, group or focus group interviews will be more appropriate because of the communal spirit of Africans. Obeng-Quaidoo (1988) notes that whereas Western communication is persuasive (*meaning giving*), Afro-centered communication tends to be cooperative (*meaning sharing*). The problem of the relationship between an individual and society is a problem of what I term “collective subjectivity.” To be a human subject, I contend, is to be able to understand how to negotiate one’s own agency in the web of structural constraints society has established. Anthony Giddens intimates that subjectivity is the pre-constituted center of experience of culture and history. In his theory of the duality of structure, Giddens (1984) argues that human action, meaning, and subjectivity are always shaped by the duality of individual agency and societal constraints. These activities, he stresses, shape the conditions that make social practices possible because “actors draw upon the modalities of structuration in the reproduction of systems of interaction” (p. 28).

In bringing this section to an end, it is important to draw some connections between African Philosophy and European Continental Philosophy. Both African and Continental Philosophies recognize that communication is an embodied practice. For example, the African social thought of communalism parallels Heidegger’s (1962) concept of *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*). This idea explains that humans (*Dasein*) do not choose the material conditions of their existence. On the contrary, it is these conditions that determine human existence. Being ‘thrown’ into the world means learning to deal with life as one knows it. Thrownness explains the perennial conditions of humans with all the attendant frustrations, sufferings, and demands that humans do not get to choose. A critical study of rhetoric, must, therefore, explicate how the perennial conditions of human existence impact on the communication behaviors of social actors. An Afrocentric study of embodied



communication, in a similar fashion, should articulate the idea that rhetoric is engaging when it involves the whole gamut of the human person. This means that some African conceptions of communication, as in Continental philosophy, valorize a comprehensive approach to communicating with the other that is not limited in scope. It can be reckoned that they both focus on how mind and body cohere to give meaning to particular acts. An embodied ritual is filled with a number of meanings to be decoded within specific cultural contexts. In North America, for example, a thumbs up is an expression of cheer and approval, although this may attract outright condemnation because it is considered an insult in many Ghanaian cultures. It is precisely because of the possibility of *misreading* the meaning of communication outside of the West in African cultures that it is important to understand why it matters to theorize African rhetoric.

The next section discusses the usefulness of studying rhetoric in Africa, using African tropes by focusing on an indigenous game called *ampe* (*am-pay*). Interviews with elderly women in Cape Coast, former administrative seat of the Gold Coast, have revealed to me that the name is an onomatopoeia that imitates the repetitive clapping of hands (*am*) and the thrusting of one foot forward (*pay*).

### **What does Ghana's *ampe* teach us about African rhetoric?**

*Ampe* is a traditional Ghanaian game or sport usually played by two or more among females. It is especially commonplace game among young girls which involves jumping up and thrusting one foot forward while clapping simultaneously. The game is also played in some parts of Nigeria and Cameroon where it is known as *oga* and *nzango* respectively. It is difficult to trace the exact origin of *ampe* because information about the game has been by word of mouth. Our interviews with elderly women in surrounding villages in Cape Coast show that *ampe* dates back to more than two hundred years ago.

**Fig. 1** School children playing *ampe* on a school compound



In times past, the game was played among females to entertain themselves. Even though *ampe* may have originated from Ghana, its popularity spread to other African countries such as Congo, Togo and Ivory Coast. In Ghana, the game is played only during the day because superstition has it that if played at night, the participants would lose their mothers. It was sometimes a competitive sport between groups from several villages. Some tournaments were watched by a number of spectators and could last for as long as two to three days. The type of clothes worn to play the game was very significant in the early years of the game. Each player was supposed to wear a short and tight skirt which was necessary in facilitating the movements of the legs during the game.

The popularity of *ampe* has waned over the years due to a number of reasons. The first could be the allure of technophilia. Millennials would rather play video games or surf the internet rather than play *ampe*. Another reason that accounts for the non-popularity of the game is the absence of the game in Ghanaian schools' co-curricular activities. Unlike popular games such as football, handball, high jump, and volley ball, *ampe* is excluded from the physical education programs in Ghanaian basic and high schools. Since the history of the game is passed on through word of mouth, valuable information may be missing during the process of passing the information from one generation to another.

Because *ampe* is a game, albeit one on the decline in Ghana, its valences are often overlooked. That is to say, the significance of the game is usually taken for granted, and worse of all, it has attracted little scholarly scrutiny. Our analysis of the game shows that *ampe* is a highly rhetorical engagement in which affordances such as rhetorical appeals are highly deployed. For instance, the game stimulates intellection in many performers or players. The most obvious rhetorical strategy in playing *ampe* is *multi-tasking*. This may be

explained as simultaneous rhetorical performances in which a player/s draws on all available means of winning the game of play. It involves clapping, jumping, singing and thrusting a foot forward simultaneously. Focus on the game is thus key to emerge victorious. This task requires sharp cognitive skills displayed by opposing players to combine all these embodied actions at once in addition to thinking of what foot the opponent will thrust forward. In a word, *ampe* is a game that teaches critical-thinking, agility, and concentration. These are some of its inherent rhetorical arguments. It sharpens players' cognitive reflex and alertness for precision and quick decision-making.

The game also thrives on the *ethos* of opposing teams. Each opposing team relies on the dexterity of their protagonist. This is because the game thrives on the rule of *probability*. Probability is the measure of a chance that an event will occur as a result of experiment. A team, usually even in number (two, four, six), is made up of a *mother* (captain) and her *daughters* (or team mates). It is the mother who comes forward to take on the mother of another team in a competition. In *ampe*, either party wins only when the same legs of the two players meet or when they thrust their foot forward in opposite direction. My research shows that when legs don't meet, it is called *ampabo*, to wit the legs did not meet. This is what is called *oppositonality* or *divergence*. The reverse is *ehyam*, that is to say, the legs have met. This is termed as *convergence*. The probability that either of them will occur is one. It follows, then, that there is only one chance at winning an opponent and moving on. Since the ultimate goal is not to lose but win, only one who is observant and is able to predict an outcome has the tendency of wining over an opponent player one at a time. All these processes take someone who is sound and has a reasoning capacity to arrive at this. *Strategy* is thus key in this enterprise. How this comes to play in *ampe* is in terms of selection of players to make up a team. As simple as it may seem, there is an ultimate goal that a team desires. In order that it is achieved, the team needs someone who is very skilled and predictive of how the game goes to identify who their threats are in order to quickly eliminate them from their opponents' team so they can have a way to victory. This is because, if proper selection of team members is not done, the opponent may be a threat to victory for the leading team.

Fig. 2 Two young 'White' girls explaining the rules of *ampe*



It must also be noted that playing *ampe* evokes *high pathos*. This is often made possible through the artistic deployment of songs that are quite simple in composition. Singing is the wheel upon which the game runs. For instance, there are special songs that are sung prior to the commencement of the game proper, and there are those that are sung during and after the game. Here is an example of a song sung before the start of the game:

*Mother mother mother*  
*Paaa paa paa* (while clapping of hands)  
*Are your buttocks shaking?*  
*Paa paa paa*  
*Are you ready to learn?*  
*Paa paa paa*  
*Blue, white, and yellow* (Repeat the same line)

The chant above presents powerful rhetorical arguments. At the outset, the song lets us in on the nature of humor afforded in a child's world. At least, they are capable of starting a competition on a lighter note by making fun of the *derrière* of their mothers. More important, the song is didactic in nature; that is, it is a call on players to learn although they may be playing in the process. "Are you ready to learn?" emphasizes the rhetorical question. Compare the song above with the following performance which is chanted while the game is ongoing. Like the previous song, the next song also features very forcefully the theme of motherhood:

*Mother go last*  
*Mother go last*  
*Mother mother do something*  
*Before you die*

When this song is performed, the leaders of the team, that is the *mothers*, rotate when they stop winning. “It means instead of having a *shoot*, you will be the last person to play” Akosua explained to me. Here is another one. Notice how all the songs are gendered, and reflect the lived-experience of the performers: they are girls and so sing songs that seek to challenge as well as educate them about their femininity. What do you think the reference to vegetables mean in the following recital?

*Armoo* (tomatoes)

*Shitɔ* (pepper)

*Sebɛɛɛ* (garden eggs)

Here, each team decides what vegetable or sometimes fruit they would like to be called. As they win, they call out the names.

It is now necessary to point out that one of the overlooked usefulness of *ampe* is that it turns our understanding of what competitions and winning are all about *topsy tury*. While modern sports, as we have come to know, tend to show gladiatorial tendencies, *ampe*, on the contrary, tends to make a different argument. That is, it is communitarian in nature. It is a kind of Ubuntu that aims to promote unity among players and their cheering audience. The story is told of an anthropologist who proposed a game to a group of African children. He placed a basket of sweets near a tree and made the children stand 100 meters away. Then he announced that whoever reached first would get all the sweets in the basket when he said, “ready, steady, go!” Do you know what these children did? They all held each other’s hands, ran together toward the tree, divided the sweets equally among themselves, ate the sweets together. When the anthropologist asked them why did they do so, they all said in unison, “Ubuntu.” They meant to say, “How can one be happy when the others are sad?” Ubuntu in their language means “I am because we are, and because we are I am.” Recall that what makes African rhetoric is its spiritual orientation which is more of co-existence with nature rather than conquest, more of collectivism rather than individualism (Azenabor, 2000).

## Conclusion

This paper sought to reimagine ways of looking at the idea of rhetoric in Africa. It has advanced a dialectic that aims to recognize the power of rhetoric unto itself not as a way of paying obeisance to indigeneity but as a way of conceptualizing African rhetoric on its own terms. This paper has argued that it is by thinking, speaking, and writing about African rhetoric in these terms that we can contribute meaningfully to the web of global scholarship. Such

conceptualization of rhetoric within the context of sub-Saharan Africa should rightly be termed *Afrifuge*. Afrifuge is not a nonce word reminiscent of Afrocentricity. For the latter, as we have indicated earlier, is caught in the trap of establishing an idea parallel to Eurocentricity. By using the term *Afrifuge*, on the contrary, we invite all scholars of rhetoric, communication, and allied fields to collaborate in order to theorize the lived-experience of the contemporary African.

*Afrifuge* offers a conceptual metaphor for finding solace in a liminal space not bounded by filiation with the past nor romance with the West. It should be understood as an attempt to unpack, deconstruct, and unearth unknown and already known forms of rhetorically speaking about communication phenomena in a conceptual Africa. Thus an *Afrifugal* theory of rhetoric should be bold to add to the canon of rhetorical studies by seeking to develop novel ways of thinking about rhetoric. *Afrifuge* is an invitation to theorize anew.

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