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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE  
AND AXIOLOGY

2018

Vol XV

No 1

2018  
1

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY OF  
CULTURE AND AXIOLOGY



PETER LANG

CULTURA

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE AND AXIOLOGY

## **Cultura. International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology**

E-ISSN (Online): 2065-5002

ISSN (Print): 1584-1057

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# Cultura

International Journal of Philosophy  
of Culture and Axiology

Vol. 15, No. 1 (2018)

Editor-in-Chief  
Nicolae Râmbu



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**Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Umschlagabbildung: © Aritia Poenaru

ISSN 1584-1057  
e-ISSN 2065-5002

Peter Lang GmbH  
International Academic Publishers  
Schlüterstraße 42, 10707 Berlin  
[www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com)



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## HERITAGE, KNOWLEDGE AND MEMORY

**Acknowledgements:** This issue was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CCCDI – UEFISCDI, project number 17/2016, Heritage Plus – HeAT, within PNCDI III.

### CONTENTS

Simon C. ESTOK Climate Change Narratives and the Need for Revisioning of Heritage, Knowledge, and Memory	7
Arianti Ayu PUSPITA, Agus SACHARI, Andar Bagus SRIWARNO, JAMALUDIN Knowledge from Javanese Cultural Heritage: How They Manage and Sustain Teak Wood	23
I Wayan MUDRA Bali Traditional Pottery as a Cultural Heritage on the Global Competition Era	49
Vaida ASAKAVIČIŪTĒ Cultural Crisis as a Decline in Human Existential Creativity	65
I Gede Mugi RAHARJA Heritage, Knowledges and Memories on Pura Penulisan Architecture Bali at Ancient Mount Batur Caldera Area	85
Nadiya FEDCHYSHYN, Halyna KLISHCH, Tetiana HORPINICH, Nataliia YELAHINA Echoes of the Herbartianism in Western Ukraine (late 19 <sup>th</sup> – early 20 <sup>th</sup> centuries)	103
Eugenia ZAIȚEV The Memory and the Ailing Imagination at Immanuel Kant	115
Sanja IVIC European Philosophical Identity Narratives	125

I WAYAN ADNYANA	147
Tiger-Hunting Scene on Yeh Pulu Relief in Bali. Romanticism of People's Heroism in the Study of Iconology	
Emmanuel Ifeanyi ANI	161
The Question of Immanence in Kwasi Wiredu's Consensual Democracy	
Mohd Faizal Bin MUSA	177
The Memory of Tanzimat and How the Malay World Could Have Learned from It	

## The Question of Immanence in Kwasi Wiredu's Consensual Democracy

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**Abstract:** Kwasi Wiredu, arguably the most influential African philosopher, has proposed a democracy by consensus as an alternative to the majoritarian democracy African countries inherited from their colonial masters. His proposal has generated a lot of debates, and these debates have spanned several aspects of his proposal. In this paper, I focus on the debate regarding his attribution of immanence to the practice of consensus in traditional African social relations. Bernard Matolino has recently written an article defending Wiredu's employment of the word immanence in describing the traditional African attitude to social relations. In this article, I find Matolino's defense to be unsustainable.

**Keywords:** Democracy, consensus, Africa, immanence, axiomatic

### INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on a specific debate within a broader debate generated by Kwasi Wiredu's proposal for consensual democracy. Being perhaps the most influential African philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu's proposal for consensual democracy has attracted wide readership because of the deleterious experiences with the multiparty democracy in many African countries. But his proposal has also generated a lot of debate because he takes his inspiration from the traditional consensual practices of his native tribe the Akan, raising questions about whether we could replicate the conditions that facilitated traditional African consensus democracy in the modern African setting. I had triggered a certain aspect of this debate by arguing that Wiredu did not need to argue that consensus was an *immanent* feature of traditional African social relations (since immanence means inherent in most dictionaries). Bernard Matolino has recently responded to me by defending Wiredu's employment of the word immanent in his qualification of the practice in the traditional milieu. I have deemed it necessary to write this article because I find his arguments unsustainable. I have divided the article into three sections. The first section narrates the background to the debate by laying out Wiredu's

arguments in favour of a consensual democracy. In the second section I narrow my focus to the question of immanence. I begin with my initial objection to the deployment of the word in discussing traditional African consensual practices. I present Matolino's response to my objection, and I refute his response. Section three discusses Matolino's claim that I rejected the idea that consensus could lead to a genuine reconciliation and abstention from further recriminations and collisions. But I showed that this is a straw man interpretation of what I wrote. Matolino tries in this section to argue that consensus could have led to genuine reconciliation because the traditional society that was Wiredu's case study (the Akan) operated a lineage system, and the heads of lineages, being the main political actors, tended to cooperate because the inter-lineage system is relational and produces tendencies to cooperate. But I pointed out that this is precisely where scholars are concerned about adopting a modern consensual democracy: the lineage system of common ancestry has been replaced with multi-ethnic, culturally diverse and highly pluralistic societies today, and the absence of the traditional lineage system, which facilitated the cooperation vital to a consensual democracy in traditional societies of common ancestry, needs to be accounted for.

## BACKGROUND TO THE DEBATE

Kwasi Wiredu has proposed consensual democracy as an alternative to the majoritarian democracy most African countries inherited from their colonial masters. In his proposal for consensual democracy, Kwasi Wiredu had argued that consensus was the practice among the Ashanti of Ghana and many other traditional African societies. He had quoted the former President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, as saying, "In our original societies we operated by consensus. An issue was talked out in solemn conclave until such a time as agreement could be achieved" (apud Wiredu, 1996: 182). He also quoted the former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, as saying "... in African society the traditional method of conducting affairs is by free discussion", and he quoted Nyerere's quoting of Guy Glutton Brock as saying "The elders sit under the trees, and talk until they agree" (Wiredu 1996, 182).

Wiredu then argued that reliance on consensus was "not a peculiarly political phenomenon" (*Ibidem*). He writes, "Where consensus characterizes political decision-making in Africa, it is a manifestation of an immanent approach to social interaction. Generally, in interpersonal

relations between adults, consensus as a basis of joint action was taken as axiomatic” (*Ibidem*).

Wiredu supports this attribution with the argument that consensus in traditional African societies aimed to attain genuine reconciliation rather than mere abstention from further recriminations or collisions. Wiredu asks us to consider this as important in view of the fact that “disputes could be settled without the achievement of reconciliation.” (*Ibidem*). In his view, reconciliation is itself a form of consensus, being “a restoration of goodwill through a reappraisal of the importance and significance of the initial bones of contention.” (Wiredu, 1996: 182-183) Wiredu opines that consensus “does not necessarily involve complete identity of moral or cognitive opinions, and that “It suffices that all parties are able to feel that adequate account has been taken of their points of view in any proposed scheme of future action or coexistence.” (Wiredu, 1996: 183)

Wiredu admits that not all African societies manifested enthusiasm for consensus. But among those who did, he singled out the Ashanti of Ghana (where he hails) as a case study of traditional African consensual democracy. He writes, “Lineage is the basic political unit among the Ashantis... Every such unit has a head, and every head is automatically a member of council, which is the governing body of the town or village.” (Wiredu, 1996: 184) Wiredu tells us that heads are selected by members of their lineages based on “seniority in age, wisdom, a sense of civic responsibility, and logical persuasiveness”, and the election of the lineage head is “the point at which consensus first makes itself felt in the Ashanti political process... In any matter of particular significance consensus is always the watchword.” (*Ibidem*) According to Wiredu,

“The town or city councils were the most basic theater of political authority. Representatives from these councils constituted divisional councils presided over by ‘paramount’ chiefs. These latter units also sent representatives to the national council presided over by the ‘Asantehene’, the king of the Ashantis [...] Decisions was by consensus at all these levels.” (Wiredu, 1996: 185)

Wiredu wrote that the pursuit of consensus was “a deliberate effort to go beyond decision by majority rule.” He wrote, “It is easier to secure majority agreement than to achieve consensus. And the fact was not lost on the Ashantis. But they spurned that line of least resistance.” (Wiredu, 1996: 186)

In contrast to the uniting potentials of consensus, Wiredu expresses disappointment with the effects of practicing majoritarian democracy in

modern Africa. He blames the multiparty system of democracy for exacerbating the competitive struggle for power and for being too adversarial, aggressive, and divisive (Wiredu, 1996: 179, 186; Wiredu, 2011: 1059-1061, 1063; Ani, 2014b: 342). In contrast to this experience, Wiredu prescribes a consensual democracy based on inspiring principles that underlay the practice of consensus in traditional African societies. He admits, “In the rare case of an intractable division a majority vote might be used to break the impasse. But the success of the system must be judged by the rarity of such predicaments in the workings of the decision-making bodies of the state.” (Wiredu, 1996: 190) He ends by appealing to scholars to develop his proposal further, commenting, “Further points of detail and even of principle remain to be spelled out...” (*Ibidem*)

Wiredu’s proposal has generated different loci of debate. There is debate about the role of rationality in consensus. There is another debate about the role of interests in securing consensus. There is a third debate about whether consensus is more viable in a non-party dispensation. There is debate about whether we could always agree to action without agreeing in notion. In this article I will focus on the debate I triggered regarding Wiredu’s attribution of the quality of immanence to the African approach to consensus in social relations. This debate also extends to Wiredu’s reference to the capacity of consensus to facilitate genuine reconciliation instead of merely preventing further recrimination or collision.

## THE QUESTION OF IMMANENCE IN WIREDU

My general response to Wiredu’s proposal for a consensual democracy has been a qualified acceptance (Ani, 2014b: 345). Wiredu had argued that consensus “is a manifestation of an immanent approach to social interaction”, and “consensus as a basis of joint action was taken as axiomatic.” (Wiredu, 1996: 182) I had began this particular debate about attributing immanence to the practice of consensus in traditional African societies when I argued in a 2014 article titled “On Traditional African Consensual Rationality,” that Wiredu did not need to attach the doctrine of immanence to his proposal, since this means “inherent” in most dictionaries (*Ibidem*). I wrote,

“If the idea of immanence is to be attached, it should be a *human* rather than an African immanence. Thus, I am not so much opposed to the doctrine of immanence as to its African particularisation, as I do not see how such selective or taxonomic particularism will give a helping nudge to its contemporary practice in Africa, or how it can, for that matter, help us to dislodge other alleged (and more unhealthy) taxonomic particularisms and ‘inherent’ differences like that of inherent White superiority in intelligence.” (Ani, 2014b: 346)

In a footnote, I had referred the reader to other attempts by African scholars (such as Leopold Senghor) to argue that emotion is immanently African and reason as immanently European, and how Tsenay Serequeberhan had lambasted this argument as a taxonomic ordering of the human species. In a 2016 article titled “Rationality and Consensus in Kwasi Wiredu’s Traditional African Polities”, Matolino has objected to my criticism of Wiredu’s use of the word immanence, and defended Wiredu’s use of the word in describing consensus in traditional African relations. In responding to me, he wrote, “... Wiredu does not only use the word immanence neither does he write of consensus’ immanence in traditional Akan political set up. The other word he uses is ‘axiomatic.’” (Matolino, 2016: 39) The first part of this statement by Matolino is correct, but the second is incorrect. Since Wiredu had said that African social relations manifest consensus as an immanent quality, and the Akan are African, he means that the Akan social relations manifested consensus as an immanent quality (a valid *modus ponens*). So the above denial of immanence to the Akan political set up by Matolino on behalf of Wiredu is not convincing.

In the following paragraph, Matolino defends Wiredu by arguing that consensus was not immanent in my sense of being an immanent constitution of Africans, but immanent only in “specified social interaction”, in terms of being “the currency of interpersonal adult relationships.” (Matolino, 2016: 40) But this effectively *extinguishes* the meaning of immanence. Is it possible for something to be immanent *in social relations*? Since it is an attempt to change the meaning of immanence to only something that is a social habit, Matolino is here attempting to salvage Wiredu from criticism against his use of the word “immanence” (or “being inherent”).

Matolino accuses me of selectively focusing on the word “immanence” (ignoring the other word “axiomatic”), and argues that this selective reading is “not innocuous.” (*Ibidem*) The word “innocuous”

means “not harmful” or “not hurtful” in most dictionaries. So Matolino credits me with the ulterior motive of trying to “harm” or “hurt” Wiredu’s proposal. This, however, contradicts Matolino’s introductory praise of my article as “an earnest search for a system that would work.” (Matolino, 2016: 36)

Matolino argues that my concentration on the word “immanence” is “questionable”, writing that “immanence” means “inherent” whilst “axiomatic” means “self-evident.” He points out that “The difference between these two is vast, particularly if used disjunctively; the former is disparaging and the latter is not disparaging. Wiredu only understands consensus as immanent in the sense that it was an axiomatic social feature.” (Matolino, 2016: 40) Here, Matolino argues that the difference between immanence and axiomatic “is vast”, yet he proceeds straightaway to *marry* their vast difference in meaning by saying effectively that they can mean the same thing. Here, meaning is itself twisted and tossed around in a way quite unprecedented. Is being self-evident a *sole* metaphysical ground for being inherent? Are things inherent *simply* because they are self-evident? Being self-evident means being obvious to perceive. So Matolino says here that something could be inherent *in the sense* of being obvious to perceive. Wither the meaning of being inherent?

A few paragraphs later, Matolino denies that Wiredu described consensus as an immanent quality of Africans. According to him, “For Wiredu, consensus was never an immanent feature of Africans.” (Matolino, 2016: 41) But where did Wiredu make this denial? And what is the difference between Africans and their social relations to which Wiredu ascribed immanence in reaching consensus? Matolino argues that Wiredu did not mean to say immanence of Africans because discussions usually began with dissensus, and differences often led to wars and deaths (*Ibidem*). He wrote, “For Wiredu, consensus was never an immanent feature of Africans. On the contrary, he argues that the starting point was dissensus, and that at times they engaged in brutal differences that led to wars and deaths.” (Matolino, 2016: 41) But this is more reason why Matolino should not refer to immanence. One cannot be using the word immanence to describe consensus in social relations and simultaneously refer to differences leading to wars and deaths.

In his objection to me for criticizing Wiredu’s reference to immanence in describing consensus as a property of traditional social relations, Matolino chides me for ignoring Wiredu’s reference to consensus as

being ‘axiomatic’ in the traditional social setting (Matolino, 2016: 40). But it seems to me that Matolino does not do any credit to Wiredu’s proposal by calling attention to this second qualification of consensus in traditional social relations by Wiredu. Matolino is himself *selective* when he tells us that axiomatic means self-evident. Other meanings of axiomatic are “unquestionable”, “taken for granted”, “obviously true.” But these are deep words to attach to the practice of consensus in the traditional milieu. When we say that consensus was *unquestionable*, taken for granted, and obviously true in social relations, we *presuppose* that there was an obviously true position for every decision, and every decision ended in consensus. But the extremity of this word directly contradicts Wiredu’s admission (a sentence later) that “This is not to say that it (consensus) was always attained.” (Wiredu, 1996: 182)

We see a reverse contradiction when Wiredu writes that there was no word for voting in traditional Ashanti society (implying that something needed to exist to have a name and whatever did not have a name probably never existed at the time) (Wiredu, 1996: 184). This then seems to be why Wiredu had described consensus as axiomatic in traditional social relations.

Let me list the available applications of the use of the word “axiomatic” in most dictionaries. They are: “It is axiomatic that governments rise and fall...” (*Cambridge Dictionary*), “it is axiomatic that dividends have to be financed,” (*Oxford Dictionary*) “(Mathematics) 1914 saw the first axiomatic declaration of exactly what constitutes a ring,” (*Ibidem*) “It is axiomatic that as people grow older they generally become less agile,” (*Collins Dictionary*) “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...” (*Declaration of Independence* by the original thirteen American States) We are also familiar with the term “axiomatic” in areas such as mathematics where it is taken as axiomatic that 2 plus 2 equals 4. A particular dictionary provides one of the definitions of “axiomatic” as “consisting of a set of axioms from which theorems are derived.” (*Collins Dictionary*) In *all* available examples, being axiomatic means being so mathematically exact as to transcend culture and context. So in this more familiar sense, axiomatic shares a quality with immanence (in their different ways) in having the consequence of being able to transcend social change. In this sense, then, consensus would have been untouched by the attack (or interruption) of colonialism and we would not be wondering at this time how to *re-institute* it for modern practice.

No matter how Matolino tries to water down the meaning of “axiomatic” for Wiredu’s use, it is too strong a term to use in describing the amenability of issues in the traditional deliberation to common agreement. No reasonable analysis would agree that decisions and positions were so *routinely* self-evident, obvious, or unquestionable. Such an analysis trivializes the topics for deliberation to the extent that raises questions regarding whether there was really any need for deliberation over them.

Insisting on the appropriateness of the terms ‘immanence’ and ‘axiomatic’ in describing consensus in traditional African social relations, as Matolino does on behalf of Wiredu, is stereotyping (a non-argumentative rhetoric concerned with encouraging certain pre-conceived notions about a group of people, which notions are in fact over-simplified). The thinking here is that *consensus is or has been our own*. This *particularisation* goes against history, since consensus has been the general form of decision-making in traditional societies and in most modern small-scale groups. Philip Urfalino writes,

“Some kind of consensus is often observed in the decision processes of tribes, villages or small communities, of political assemblies, international organizations and expert committees, to name but a few. Studies by ethnographers and historians attest that this decision-making practice, which they designate as either “consensus” or “unanimity,” has long existed across all continents. It is the only decision-making mode mentioned for hunter-gatherer societies. It was the unique form of legitimate collective decision-making in village communities in Kabylia, in Ethiopia, in sub-Saharan Africa, in India, in Vietnam, and in Japan. It is not uncommonly endorsed by radical protesters, who reject majority voting, the dominant practice within political parties and trade unions. Decision by consensus has also been privileged by the global justice movement, as well as by international fora.” (Urfalino, 2014: 320)

Jane Mansbridge observed that consensus is the pre-eminent decision-making outcome for most small groups (town hall meetings, expert committees, and so on). After researching consensus for roughly a decade in the meetings of many town halls and in the governance of many cities in the USA, she found that consensus worked better in groups where interests were more common than conflicting, and not suitable for decisions in groups where interests were more conflicting than common. According to her, “When interests conflict, a democratic polity needs adversary institutions. When interests do not conflict, unitary institutions are more appropriate.” (Mansbridge, 1983: 4) She noted that consensus was the natural form of ending deliberation in

most town and city meetings. She added that due to the preponderance of common over conflicting interests, consensus is more popular with participatory and hunter-gatherer groups (Mansbridge, 1983: 10-13).

Also, Jonathan Moreno has noted that consensus was the preferred form of closing deliberation in medical practice. Medicine, he says, is a consensus-driven system.” (Moreno, 1988: 415) We can also perceive the visibility of common interest here (finding solutions to pathological issues). It seems therefore that the more political the platform, the more complex the interest lines, and vice versa. So the suitability of consensus as an instrument of social decisions varies along the structure of interest lines *everywhere* rather than being an immanent and axiomatic feature of a certain part of the world.

Ironically, Matolino argues that Wiredu could not have meant that consensus was immanent in Africans because Wiredu is aware that all traditional societies share the same features (Matolino, 2016: 40-41). He leaves it to us to deduce that this means consensus was not an immanent quality of only traditional African social relations. So Matolino stops short of telling us outrightly that consensus was practiced generally by traditional societies, since this would contradict the posture he has since adopted in defense of Wiredu. The information that consensus was generally practiced by traditional societies globally changes the entire debate, since it leaves us wondering why no other society has until now been able to transfer the practice into its modern pluralist national polity. Jurgen Habermas (1962/1992) proposed roughly the same idea for the Western Hemisphere many decades ago, and it fell out of favor after decades of debate there.

In my 2014 article, I had written that Wiredu’s attempt to reach into the African past in an attempt to retrieve a practice for consideration regarding modern use is an example of a “return to source” project (so labeled by Amilcar Cabral). This project refers to “an attempt to (re)discover in the African past resilient forms of social and political organization that, with proper reworking, would lead some African countries out of their current self-destructive patterns of political existence.” (Eze, 2000: 1). I had also mentioned other return-to-source projects such as those of Senghor’s *On African Socialism* and Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* (Ani, 2014b: 346).

I had lauded the return-to-source project (in which I am involved), but had expressed worry about *how* this project was being handled. I had

written, “To be sure, the project of reaching into African tradition for conceptual schemes (which in my view is admirable) has otherwise been recently tainted with a presupposition of not just cultural but human or biological dichotomies between races.” (Ani, 2014b: 346) I had argued that such dichotomies enable us to view concepts such as consensus or majority (among others such as communalism or individualism) as disjunctives (either this or that). Encouraged by this mentality to choose one rather than the other, we are affected by false or shallow dichotomies that blur research and obfuscate our ability to interrogate the concepts we hope to marshal into practice. This was the point I was making in that article.

Matolino accuses me of “deliberately” casting aspersions on the ‘return to source’ project that Wiredu advocates by citing it along with more discredited proponents of socialism that Wiredu is opposed to, such as Senghor and Julius Nyerere. Senghor had in particular argued that the Negro is emotional whilst the European is analytical. And Matolino reminds us that Senghor and Nyerere were one-party thinkers. Matolino then accuses me of putting Wiredu in the same camp with them without justification. He writes, “Without accompanying analysis or explanation of that move, I am left with one conclusion – that Ani is up to mischief. His mischief is that he reads Wiredu and Senghor and Nyerere as cut from the same cloth.” (Matolino, 2016: 43) Matolino commits a straw man here since nowhere did I claim that Wiredu is a one-party thinker like Senghor and Nyerere. I had only written, “Other return-to-source projects include Senghor’s *On African Socialism* and Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* (Ani, 2014b: 346).

My argument was that a number of scholars interested in the return-to-source project introduce confusion into the project by approaching it with the notion of a basic dichotomy between races. This mentality of racial biological dichotomy leads them to ignore similarities between traditional African societies and other traditional societies, and between traditional African and contemporary African societies. When Wiredu refers to consensus as being immanent in traditional African social relations, it places him in this category along with Senghor in spite of Wiredu’s other writings to the contrary. And I do not see how Wiredu’s writings to the contrary (such as his exhortation that we avoid anachronism in Africa), which Matolino readily cites, exonerate him from the analysis that we should provide with regard to Wiredu’s doctrine of

immanence. One does not deny that a person held a view by basically saying that the same person held a contrary view at a different time. Such an observation should rather lead to charges of contradiction.

As my quote shows, I am not against return-to-source projects. I have returned to the traditional source myself in a good number of my articles. In one of them I argued that marriage for many traditional African societies was a union of societies rather than that of individuals, and that the moral support offered by the extended family and the community at large is ultimately geared to inculcate in the spouse interpersonal and social skills of restraint, prudence, tolerance, constructive criticism and other virtues desperately needed to execute societal responsibilities (Ani, 2014a: 1). I had offered this principle as a refreshing alternative to the modern practice of regarding marriage as strictly a business between the couple and leaving them to their own devices, which has not borne well for the institution in contemporary Africa. In a working paper I have also observed,

“Certain traditional cultures of Africa (such as that of the Akan of Ghana) place a high premium on linguistic discipline and have built a network of norms that discourage verbal aggression. Norms in this culture summarize into the principle that how we say a thing is as important as what we say. This paper extrapolates these principles into the contemporary practice of democracy. Suggestions are made about how social policy could do for contemporary society what culture has done for certain traditional societies.” (Ani, forthcoming)

Here I argued that the verbal discipline seen in some of the traditional African societies could be a refreshing inspiration to the barrage of insulting language that we see dominating the practice of multi-party democracy in many African countries. My general point, therefore, has been that we should return to our sources with the intention of developing traditional values or principles critically for modern use instead of simply using them as poster cards against Western ethnocentrism.

A return-to-source project is not an honest one if it ignores other ‘sources’ around the world, at least for the sake of comparative analysis. As far back as the 1960s, Jurgen Habermas had made a proposal roughly similar to that of Wiredu: rational deliberation should expectedly lead to consensus (Habermas, 1962/1992). In the course of three decades, this idea had fallen out of favour because of the discovery made by a lot of studies on deliberation (see Bachtiger *et al.*, 2007; Bachtiger *et al.*, 2010).

Even Habermas had shifted his general position a bit in his latter book about facts and norms (Habermas, 1996). I find it hard to conclude that Wiredu did not encounter any of this literature on Habermas' proposal or subsequent studies when he made his proposal in the 1990s. Let me not be overtly judgmental of Wiredu's intentions here, but his sidetracking of Western literature lends more strength to suspicions of essentialism and reification. It is certainly not okay for him to have assumed that discussions about consensus could had led to quite different logical outcomes in Africa, and unless it is assumed that different races possess different biological dispositions to consensus, it is suppression of evidence to ignore the literature (any body of literature) for any reason. A confrontation of cross-cultural literature, on the other hand, could possibly have influenced a less nationalistic handling of the proposal for consensual democracy. Importantly, the last sentence in Wiredu's plea for consensual democracy reads, "... there is nothing peculiarly African about the idea itself. If it is valid, especially with respect to its human rights dimension, it ought to be a concern for our whole species." (Wiredu, 1996: 190) But this means we should have looked (from the onset) at how the idea of consensus has been handled by our whole species. This comparative study, however, is not the focus of this article.

### THE QUESTION OF CONSENSUS AND ABSTENTION FROM FURTHER DISPUTE

Wiredu had written that consensus could lead to a solution that goes beyond the mere abstention from further disputes. He wrote, "The remarkable thing... is that if and when a resolution of the issues was negotiated, the point of it was seen in the attainment of reconciliation rather than the mere abstention from further recriminations or collisions. It is important to note that disputes can be settled without the achievement of reconciliation." Matolino has chided me for not agreeing that consensus could lead to a genuine reconciliation (in the case of disputes) instead of a mere abstention from further disputes. He writes, "Ani disputes the idea that consensus would have led to a solution that goes beyond mere abstention from further disputes." (Matolino, 2016: 41) This is another straw man. Wiredu had written, "...if and when a resolution of the issues was negotiated, the point of it was seen in the

attainment of reconciliation rather than the mere abstention...” (Wiredu, 1996: 182) And I had written, “Thirdly, *not every* conflict resolution in traditional Africa would have yielded the kind of genuine resolution that goes beyond mere abstention from further disputes.” (Ani, 2014b: 346). *emphasis added*) When Wiredu uses the qualification “if and when” a resolution of issues was negotiated, he argues that *all cases* (or any case) of such resolution led to the abstention from further recrimination. And I had denied this blanket capacity of *every* single instance of resolution to lead to genuine reconciliation. Matolino twists my position to mean that I deny *the very idea* that resolutions could lead to abstention from further recrimination. In plain language, Matolino twists my position to mean that I deny the capacity of *any* case of resolution to lead to the abstention from further recrimination. This is to pave way for an easy rebuke of this kind of extreme (and unreal) pessimism.

Let me restate my position: I do not think that conflict resolution *always* yielded the abstention from further recrimination. Matolino has reminded us of Wiredu’s observation that “conflict (including mortal ones) among lineages and ethnic groups and within them were not infrequent.” (Wiredu apud Matolino, 2016: 40) This puts Matolino and Wiredu in a logical dilemma: if consensus was *axiomatic*, it is reasonable to assume that consensus was *usually* attempted before these conflicts degenerated to mortal levels. It would be a contradiction to think that a social instrument so capable of extinguishing further recrimination would be willfully ignored whilst disagreements degenerated to lethal levels. A more realistic suggestion would be that a good number of mortal conflicts were actually failures of consensus or conflict resolution. In summary, I still think that Wiredu and Matolino should tone down the encomiums they heaped on consensus in traditional African social relations if they desire a realistic discussion of its prospects today.

Matolino reminds me that the capacity of consensus to lead to genuine reconciliation and abstention from further recrimination was made possible by the lineage system that Wiredu discussed: the heads of lineages represented their lineages at the council, and brokered reconciliation on behalf of their lineages. He writes:

“What Ani is probably missing is the import of the political structural arrangement of the society in which Wiredu’s consensus operated. It was a society whose most

basic unit of political power was the lineage. The lineage head (or a chosen representative) was one who represented this particular lineage in council. Alongside other lineage heads they sought to arrive at decisions that were consensual. If it were the case that there were serious differences between two or more lineages, their ultimate aim would have been to restore goodwill that was under threat.” (Matolino, 2016: 42)

Matolino beseeches me to understand that the nature of inter-lineage constitution was relational and that “Such a nature is apt to induce tendencies to cooperate among social and political players.” (Matolino, 2016: 42) Here, Matolino actually lends credence to Emmanuel Eze’s complaint that these were *precisely* the social structures that helped consensus work the way Wiredu admired it, and we do not have these structures in contemporary African societies (Eze, 2000: 5-6). It takes us back to Eze’s conclusion that any determination to make consensus work in contemporary Africa would need to invent social structures or ideas that are equally enhancing of consensus to replace the traditional lineage political system (Eze, 2000: 6). Ironically, Matolino had resisted this observation from Eze, arguing that a society can simply be founded on “certain truths, such as justice, civil liberty and equality...” (Matolino, 2009: 38-39) This is correct, but Matolino stops short of telling us whether these truths (or rather principles) can make consensus work in contemporary societies just as it worked in traditional societies. One therefore wonders why Matolino was resisting that observation from Eze in his 2009 response to Eze (see Matolino, 2009: 36-39).

## CONCLUSION

In this article I responded to Matolino’s recent defence of Wiredu’s use of the word “immanence” to qualify the practice of consensus in traditional African social relations. I had argued that it means “inherent”, throwing up difficult implications about the capability to achieve consensus. I had argued that referring to it as “axiomatic” has similar but equally serious implications. I had argued that this whole attitude to discussing traditional values for modern use is informed by a mentality of assuming that they have not been practiced or discussed elsewhere, often leading to inaccurate conceptions of consensus. To satisfy nationalistic sentiments, I had also clarified that I am not against return-

to-source projects since I am also involved in them (with examples). I have shown that Matolino misrepresents my response to Wiredu's claim that consensus, if and when it is reached, leads to genuine reconciliation rather than mere abstention from further disputes. Matolino's argument that genuine reconciliation was made possible by the lineage system leads us to the point of concern driving the whole debate, which is that contemporary African countries are not founded on the lineage system, and therefore an alternative supporting framework must be proposed for the viability of genuine consensus among multi-cultural or pluralist segments of contemporary societies in its place.

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