

EXPLORING BELONGINGNESS AS A COMMON STRAND IN AFROMODALS

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ABSTRACT

Belongingness remains the African metaphysics of *to be* while Afromodals are African ways of *to be*. Afromodals are African modalities of being and belongingness. They are the African models for communalistic existence and a communitarian mode of being and belongingness. Afromodals are the African metaphysical modalities of realities as well as the existential *locus* of interconnectedness of realities in the African worldview. Being is always in one way or another. That is to say that being belongs. In African philosophy, especially in African metaphysics, there are different modalities of this associative nature of belonging, which is represented in the concept of afromodals. Afromodal is an African way of appreciating the modality of to be. Using the method of critical interpretation, the researcher finds out that belongingness is a common strand in the afromodals.

Keywords: Belongingness, afromodal, being, strand.

APPRECIATION OF AFROMODAL

Onebunne (2025) is of the opinion that Afromodal is an African concept that encapsulates all the attitudinal relationships of valued love and every form of responseability of the other. Afromodal is a conceptual framework and a neologism which upholds the genesis of the core of African communal philosophies and critical modalities such as *igwebuike*, *ubuntu*, *egbeberegobere*, *onyeaghananwanneya*, *birikambiri*, *kwetuism*, *njikoka*, *consciencism*, *ibuanidanda* and several others which share common philosophical threads and dealings within the African roots but increasingly and manifestly very inclusive of all traditions and languages. The Afromodals are the above-named concepts. Afromodal is phonetically pan-African—not overly language-specific, but influenced by indigenous tongues. It instills a sense of warmth, connection, community, life, peace, and solidarity (Onebunne, 2025).

Continuing Onebunne (2025) insists that Afromodals reflect the African sense of having shared walks, solidarity, cooperation, interdependence and mutual responsibility. These ideas describe subtly distinct facets of a shared conviction that human life is fundamentally relational, not individual. Afromodal, while not yet firmly established in scholarly literature, is a conceptual position or philosophical modality developed from African worldviews and epistemologies. It captures the interplay of African cultural principles, especially those that emphasize community, shared humanity and moral responsibility. Thus, afromodal thought serves as a perspective through which the shared nature of human behaviour is analyzed and venerated, mirroring African ideals of unity, collaboration and accountability. Afromodals, therefore, have foundational elemental pillars such as relationality, solidarity, mutuality, interdependence and harmony, *et cetera* (Onebunne, 2025).

All in all, the *afromodal* is an African philosophical attitude towards life, of solidarity, deliberate cooperation and ethical responsibility. It embodies the African way of seeing human beings not as isolated units, but as axes in a network of moral, social and spiritual relations (Onebunne, 2025). *Afromodal* is all about the philosophy of African modality, that is, a philosophical modality that explores the various aspects of African values and beliefs, both in traditional and modern practice. Therefore, *afromodal* is a form of connectedness. Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines connectedness as the state of being connected and having a close relationship with other things or people. It is the state of being joined or linked. It is a feeling of belonging to or having affinity with a particular person or group. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.) defines being connected as an adjective to mean joined or linked together; having the parts or elements logically linked together, and having social, professional, or commercial relationships. As an adverb, it is connected, and as a noun, it is connectedness. Harper Collins maintains that in British English, connectedness is the state of being connected (HarperCollins, 2019). The idea of connectedness leads to the view of the state of being connected. *Afromodal* is a form of connectedness of African modalities of beings and models of existential interaction. *Afromodal* is a form of modality. *Afromodals* are the modalities of being or belonging in African-Igbo ontology. Onebunne (2025) maintains that *afromodal* is an existential modality that is humanocentric. Beyond the idea of Eurocentricism, *afromodal* is Afrocentric as well as cosmocentric because the conceptual idea it projects is within the bounds and range of positive human relationships and interaction. *Afromodal* is a human effort towards humanity's unified common effort for survival and other existential operations as social human beings. This idea, therefore, makes *afromodal* a philosophical stance that confronts people's worldview as well as their reality. More so, *afromodal* is an idea based on human endeavours to challenge man's inhumanity towards man through a collective familial communitarian common-front. Hence, it faces all onslaughts of inhumanity by virtue of communal humanism. *Afromodal* thus emerges as a philosophical and socio-ethical matrix based on African communal and or collective systems of epistemic thought, aimed at wrestling with the intractable fact of human sociality. Onebunne (2025) maintains that an *afromodal* is an existential modality that is humanocentric. The tapestry of *afromodal* is premised on a common front held by people who share a similar worldview and cultural solidarity in opposition to structures of dehumanization and *deaffricanization*. By this, *afromodals* are in tandem with all expressive manners of African spirit born during the colonial era and more in the midst of painful post-colonial manifestations as well as the contemporary post-coloniality. As an African modality, *afromodals* are not only reactive but constructive by validating the humanity of Africans and liberating them as such. *Afromodals* succinctly become pathways towards healing from historical trauma via the rehumanization of Africans and their rehumanization. Based on these facts, *afromodal* is also a modality of African humanism (Onebunne, 2025).

APPRECIATION OF BELONGINGNESS

Etymologically, the word 'belongingness' is a compound word that can be broken down into constituents thus: *be – (l) on (be on)*, *be – (l) on going*, *be – long and belonging*. It is equally an apprehension of belongingness as the African Metaphysics of *to be*. However, each epoch of human history has had things to decry, and issues and problems have demanded urgent attention and remedy, just like our own present epoch. Similarly, belongingness has been a fundamental aspect of African philosophical and communalist engagement. Belongingness, we must note, has been a fundamental cultural trait within the exigencies of African philosophy. In the words of Iroegbu (1994), "belongingness is an abstract term, an ontological one that specifies that a thing is, because it belongs". Put another way, belongingness is the African

Metaphysics of *to be*. That is to say that *being* belongs and this *belongingness* is a fundamental condition for a thing to be considered a reality. To this end, being and belongingness are said to be ontological. Reality, therefore, is better known and understood by the concept of belongingness. In other words, reality, or *being*, in its total manifestation, is a process involving belongingness. In this form of belongingness, reality is a given that needs continuous existential understanding and development. Without belongingness, there would be no discussion on being or *to be*. Whatever is part of reality belongs to something (Onebunne, 2019a).

To understand belongingness, it must be understood in its relation to others. Belongingness, however, overshadows these existential facts of operations. This notion of belongingness is clearly reflected in John Donne's poem: "No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee". Belongingness is a fundamental quality in understanding every existential reality. It identifies realities such. However, being's nature is in belonging. Its role is in belonging. Its mode and operations are in belonging. Belongingness, as such, is the ontological value of being. Iroegbu (1994) opines, solidarity of belongingness in being and solidarity of being in belongingness, in the manner in which we exist and relate in the reality of being and belongingness thus: Belongingness holds that our existence as human beings, as well as our integral participation in the society in which we find ourselves, are to be defined by our being given the sense and substance of belonging. *Belongingness* adequately describes the modality of any existing reality. Iroegbu (2004) tries to maintain that belongingness specifies that a thing is because it belongs. Belongingness can be conceived in various ways, either as *participation* or *possession*. In the hermeneutics of belongingness, the various contents or senses of the concept of belongingness are thus: *be-on*, *be ongoing*, *be-long*, *be-longing*, *belong*. These four analytic contents, according to Iroegbu (1995), substantiate the various contents or senses of the concept of 'belongingness'. Iroegbu calls them the sub-themes of belongingness as:

- *Be-(l)-on (Be on)*: This analytic theme would not be clearly understood if it is not explicated side by side with its contrary: "be off". To *be on* is to escape not being off, or not to be off. This is because either one is on or one is off. To be is to be on. Being-on is being. Being is being-on. Being-off is not to be, to cease to be, to cease to exist, to be nothing. As Iroegbu (1995) stressed this issue "the belong" involved in belongingness is a turning-on of being as general and abstraction into being as concrete expressible entity.
- *Be-(l) On-Going*: This is the second stage of the etymological understanding and hermeneutic appreciation of the word, belongingness. For Iroegbu (1995), "...it is a form of ongoing and the ongoingness of being means that somebody who belongs today cannot, all things being equal, be regarded as not belonging tomorrow, unless at the price of annihilation." *Be Ongoing* is an assertion as well as continuity—a kind of ongoingness. In the words of Iroegbu (1995), ongoingness is an existential constituent of being-in-belongingness. The ontological consequence is that being is being in so far as it is ongoing.
- *Be-Long*: This is the third content of belongingness. It expresses a form of relationship and or relational presence. In belongingness, a being is fulfilled since to belong means to keep on, settle, abide or live long in being. To belong is to prolong the belongingness of the being. Through belonging, *be-long* or to belong relates reality to another. For Iroegbu (1995), to belong means: To stay, abide or live long. Long live belongingness. Belongingness lives long. Belongingness means that the subject of *Uwa* stays long in being. Here, time is brought in. Being is expressed in time and space. To be is to be long:

long in existence, long in goodness, long in prosperity, long in communion with others, while on-going may be open-ended, being-Long stretches it still further unto everlastingness.

- *Be-Longing*: Belongingness entails a decision to stay on concretely. It is a desire to remain and continue its concrete existence. It brings in and stresses the personal element: the longing for life, for being. For Iroegbu (1995), “to belong is to be in the desire for life. It is the will to march along in life.” Stressing further, he notes: the be-longingness, being-in-longing, or the longing for continued existence explains the natural inclination for self-preservation in all creatures.

In sum, belongingness is ‘the reality of whatever is in so far as it is, being a part of, therefore belonging to reality (*Uwa*), (Iroegbu, 1995). Belongingness, however, is derived from the basic understanding of reality. It has a character of identification with and within a community. Moreover, in such a societal disposition, belongingness finds a powerful basis and sustenance. All these are seen in the developmental structures of African communalism. As Iroegbu reiterates, belongingness implies the basic commonness that makes a given African community as such. For Iroegbu (1995), belongingness constitutes the most important mode in which being expresses itself. Although he holds that “belongingness” is an abstract term, an ontological one that specifies that a thing is, because it belongs, he articulates the idea of belongingness within the context of the theory of communalism. Hence, the specific articulation and understanding of belongingness embodies various definitions and meanings: conceptual, psychological, existential and physiological. Moreover, what should be noted here is that communalism makes belongingness an indispensable conceptual starting point. Belongingness, according to Iroegbu (1995), therefore, is the synthesis of realities seen in the statement that *to be is to belong. To belong is to be*. Moreover, the principle of autonomy, which is often referred to as *EBUB*, that is, an afromodal: *egbe bereugobere*, shows the communitarian aspect of the individual in the African community he or she belongs to. However, Okere (1983) sees *EBUB* as an African concept of justice and peace. *To each one his due. Live and let live. Be and let be*. According to Okere (1983) maintains that “...the rhetorical balance in these expressions, with their frequent nods to alliteration and repetition reflects the will to use balance, equity and fair measure to gauge and order human relations, to have them reconciled, balanced and fair, to base them on justice”, (p.86). For him, this aphorism, *Egbe bere, Ugo bere. Nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwaa ya, (Let the Kite perch, let the Eagle perch, whichever would not let the other perch should have his wings broken)*, espouses a philosophy of total fairness and champions Igbo ethics. Okere appreciates this aphorism more from a moral interest, as it controls social peace and harmony. However, he must be aware that concepts like justice and peace are community-bound, that is, they are realizable in a community life and setting. It is, therefore, within the context of human interaction and relation as well as being-with-others that one can speak of and demand justice, peace and fair play. In a rigorous sense, as human beings belong, so they relate; hence, belongingness allows the need for harmony and respect. In the same view above, Okere submits thus: To talk of society is, of course, to talk of a plurality of persons, of groups, of interests, political, religious and economic interests. These interests are often misaligned and at cross purposes and need to be reconciled and harmonized. Okere further reiterates: “men relate to each other singly or in groups, and justice, *Egbe bere Ugo bere*, governs this relationship if each gives to the other his due. This is a normal and proper way people live together by letting each other be who they are and have what they have, not crossing boundaries, not stepping on toes; letting things be in their due and proper place, arranged,

aligned, beautiful. When this is the case, there is peace, *udo, ndokwa*, everything in its place, in order”.

Iroegbu nevertheless went beyond understanding the referred aphorism, *Egbe bere Ugo bere, only as an African concept of justice and peace*, to seeing it as an ontological principle. According to him, “*Egbe bere, Ugo bere* as an ontological principle re-enacts the hermeneutic contents and existential significance of belongingness. It expresses the essence or *Kpim* of reality, what a being is, is its activity of perching. To perch is to be...” The *Egbe* and *Ugo* are only in potency until they perch. Perching is a part of belonging. Belonging is seen in the act of perching. Moreover, as for Iroegbu (1995), the act of perching is the process of acquiring being. To perch, therefore, is to belong; perching is belonging. To fully perch is to fully be. Belongingness, for Iroegbu then becomes an “arrangement of the fundamental structure of society (laws, duties, privileges, positions, jobs, offices, advantages and incumbents of the community), such that it incarnates and manifests the commonness of origin, of history and general destiny of all the members of the community, (Iroegbu, 1995). The concept of contact is a backdrop for a person’s realization of his belonging as a being immersed in his community. This is summarized in the saying; *I am because we are*. This is a communitarian view. Belongingness is, therefore, a fundamental quality in understanding whatever is. A relation defines everything; that is, a thing or being is in relation to something, or with an attribute of engaging in something.

THE CONCEPT OF STRAND

A strand is a single thin length of material that can be on its own or combined with other strands to form more complex structures. The notion is not limited to any single domain: In biology, DNA is a double helix of two complementary strands carrying genetic information. Similar strand-based structures can be seen with hair, strands of muscle fibres, and strands of connective tissues that provide tensile strength based on their arrangement. They twist strands of cotton, wool or synthetic fibres into thread or yarn, which is then woven into fabric. How these strands are arranged gives the material its properties. Strands manifest as wires in electric systems in physics and engineering, conducting current or data. Therefore, rope is a strand of strands twisted together and is stronger than any element alone. Strands, conceptually, also stand for related things in narratives or arguments- a plot thread that runs through a book or film, for instance, is known as a narrative strand. Ridges can correspond to singular paths or chains of causation within complex systems. Strand holds a profound critical duality- both one and many, both singular and a feature of greater wholes. This paradox reflects deep philosophical tensions between individuality and collectivity, autonomy and interdependence.

Strand itself is a dependent origination, manifesting itself through strand-based structures— nothing exists in and of itself, all phenomena arise from a relationship to each other. The strength of a rope comes not from its strands but rather from their interweaving arrangement. Moreover, most powerfully of all, strands manifest the philosophical tenet that inextricable systems emerge from simple pieces in relationship, suggesting that connection itself might be the central creative principle of the universe. Thus, Heraclitus could find an expression of the *logos* in strands, that is, the physical embodiment of *logos*, the order connecting discrete elements. Strands are made visible by their haptic connection, suggesting that separateness is what we are stripped down to, but often proves illusory. In the same way, from an existentialist standpoint, strands represent our radical isolation and yet unavoidable interdependence. Like Sartre’s idea of being *condemned to freedom*, each filament coexists intact while being affected by and affecting all others. Strands also shed light on epistemological questions about

relationships between parts and wholes. Strand has the same conceptual meaning as stream. *Stream according to Merriam-Webster.* (n.d.) is a ray of light, a prevailing attitude or group and a dominant influence or line of development

Beyond other lexical meanings, a stream is a focused sequence of learning in a curriculum that meets the interests of the student, whether it be career goals or academic goals. It provides opportunities for specialization by combining subjects together into pathways, such as science, arts, or commerce. Streams allow for an education more carefully tailored to learners' strengths and aspirations, developing depth of knowledge and skill in specific areas. This method improves feasibility, engagement, and readiness for postsecondary education or employment. The stream system accommodates individualized learning in a meaningful and unified context while upholding a commitment to a shared body of general knowledge and learning across the disciplines. The essential concept of stream is a curated sequence of learning, arranged in a way that best serves students based on their interests, academic pursuits, or career aspirations, all of which align within the same curriculum. It enables students to pursue a more streamlined curriculum, allowing them to take subjects in streams with specific subjects grouped together; for instance, science, arts, or commerce. Streams can help structure education around learners' strengths and interests, allowing for depth of knowledge and skills to be developed in targeted areas. Such an approach strengthens relevance, motivation, and readiness for post-secondary education or the world of work. The stream system organizes learning into coherent tracks, supporting personalized and purposeful education, all while ensuring a broad base of general knowledge in all disciplines. Streams and strands, therefore, are used in the above contexts to show the modal relationship of belongingness in afromodals.

THE STRAND OF BELONGINGNESS IN AFROMODALS

The afromodals are: *igwebuiké, ubuntu, egbeberegobere, onyeaghananwanneya, birikambiri, kwetuism and ibuanyidanda et cetera*. Strand, as in stream, connotes a single thin idea running through a conglomerate of related ideas. It denotes a commonness of uniquely related views. Furthermore, in our context, belongingness is a labyrinth running through and across all the afromodals depicting interconnected concepts that are of African models and origin. This view is Afrocentric. Belongingness as a strand runs through the afromodals as it is located within the operations of the afromodals. Consequently, belongingness is expressed more within the context of basic community living and communal interaction.

Belongingness, as a strand in afromodals, emphasizes communal interconnectedness and identity within African philosophical thought systems. It reflects the relational ontology prevalent in African cultures, where the individual exists through and with others (Mbiti, 1969). Afromodals highlight the modalities of being rooted in collective existence, reinforcing that personhood is achieved through social harmony and mutual recognition (Ikuenobe, 2006). Belongingness, therefore, embodies the lived experiences of inclusion, mutual care, and cultural embeddedness that shape educational and social practices. It offers an epistemic lens through which African identity is not only affirmed but dynamically cultivated within community contexts (Gyekye, 1997).

Belongingness is the human demand to be an accepted member of a group. It illuminates how interconnectedness fundamentally shapes African thoughts and worldview. Belongingness, therefore, is an Afrocentric model of approach to communal interaction and existence. From an African perspective, the philosophical traditions articulated in European binders' stress communal identity and social harmony over the emphasis of individualism found in Western

philosophy. This is perfectly captured within Mbiti's famous dictum, *I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am* (Mbiti, 1969). This ontological principle situates the self as fundamentally relational. This view is further developed by Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984), who notes that "It is the community which defines the person as person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory" (p. 172). For Menkiti, one becomes a whole person only through integration in the community. In traditional African societies, the sociological structure strengthens feelings of belongingness with the extended family, age-grades and communal rites of passage ceremonies. Meyer Fortes notes that the irreducible component of social life in varied African societies is constituted by kinship bonds (Fortes, 1969). More recent studies validate these trends. Oppong's (2006) multi-country study of social support networks in sub-Saharan Africa found that "extended kinship networks continue to serve as the primary social safety net and source of identity even amid rapid urbanization" (p. 89).

Belongingness, as a thread in Afromodals, invokes the connectedness of belonging to one another through identity-related concepts in African philosophy. It embodies the relational ontology characteristic of African cultures in which an individual is through and with others (Mbiti, 1969). Afromodals emphasize the modalities of being grounded in collective existence, reiterating that personhood is realized within social harmony and mutual acknowledgment (Onebunne, 2025; Ikuenobe, 2006). Belongingness, then, reflects the lived experiences of the inclusion, mutual care and cultural embeddedness that influence educational and social practices. It provides an epistemic perspective in which African identity is both confirmed and actively developed in the context of community (Gyekye, 1997). Belongingness is, therefore, stranded or streamed in all the afromodals like *igwebuiké*, *ubuntu*, *egbebereugobere*, *onyeaghananwanneya*, *birikambiri*, *kwetuism*, *negritude*, *ibuanyidanda*, *consciencism* or *Nkrumahism* and *njikoka*, et cetera.

Belongingness in Igwebuiké

Belongingness as a strand in *Igwebuiké*, an Igbo-African philosophical framework meaning "there is strength in unity", captures the essence of our being together as an identity. It confirms that the individual is not an isolated being adventuring as a solitary stranger into a strange world of objects. However, it is instead embedded in a network of relationships, in which personhood is actualized through interconnected participation (Kanu, 2015). *Igwebuiké* argues that belonging is being in solidarity, it is providing and drawing strength from the group. This interconnectedness nurtures a moral responsibility to others and thus enhances peace, interdependence, and shared responsibility (Kanu, 2016). At the bottom line, belongingness is ontological and epistemological. It organizes how knowledge is both acquired and lived in the space of acquaintance. It goes beyond physical space, reaching into cultural and spiritual dimensions as well, situating identity within the values and experiences that bind a group together (Edeh, 1985). *Igwebuiké* thus renders belongingness not only a social construct, but a foundational axiom of African metaphysics.

Belongingness in Ubuntu

Belongingness in *Ubuntu* (a Southern African philosophy meaning "I am because we are") is foundational to understanding personhood and community. It argues that human identity is not formed in isolation, but emerges in the context of relationships and shared humanity (Mbiti, 1969; Tutu, 1999). In *Ubuntu*, belongingness means being embedded in a web of mutual respect, empathy and care. It challenges the neoliberal perspective that the well-being of each individual is independent of others, which is a view that reinforces individualism and exclusivity (Ramose, 2002). Within this framework, belongingness constitutes a right and a

responsibility: one belongs when one enhances the community through community and through affirming others' dignity. The essence of *Ubuntu* is in this ethics of care and interdependence, which embodies a holistic worldview, whereby belongingness is manifested as an experience of unity, trust and shared purpose, which is central to social cohesion, education and governance in African societies (Letseka, 2012).

Belongingness in Egbeberegobere

Egbeberegobere, an Igbo philosophical dictum that translates to “*live and let live* captures the disposition of coexistence, goodwill and mutual respect. Within this framework, belongingness symbolizes a communal ethic and paradigm of being where individuals are valued not in isolation but by virtue of their capacity to accommodate and support other members of the community (Edeh, 1985). Moreover, it generates inclusivity — the acceptance of different identities, opinions, and roles in a shared social arena. As articulated in *egbeberegobere*, belongingness is maintained through reciprocity or peaceful coexistence, which highlights that the community thrives when each individual makes way for others to thrive (Nwala, 1985). It promotes social harmony and guarantees that no person is excluded or marginalized. Thus, belongingness is not just passive presence but an active, moral commitment to one another's well-being, equity, and upliftment, echoing with rich sound in African educational, political and cultural systems dominated by collective wellbeing (Iroegbu, 1995).

Belongingness in Onyeaghananwanneya

Moreover, *Onyeaghananwanneya*, an Igbo saying that means “let no one abandon their sibling,” reflects a deep ethic of solidarity and collective responsibility. Belongingness in this philosophical vein stems from kinship, mutual care and a duty to pull others up as one gets ahead. This culture embodies an integrated cosmology in which no individual achievement is fulfilled outside the context of family wellness (Iroegbu, 1995). As Edeh (1985) opined, in *onyeaghananwanneya*, belongingness means that you are not allowed to abandon others or marginalize them in your community life; hence, it functions as a duty and empathy within communal life (cf Sorrell, 2020). This principle fosters social justice through the mutual sharing of resources, opportunities, and emotional support, a concept that underpins the sense of community and is a trait vital in African communities. It is understood here that biological ties do not matter, that anyone could be part of the community; thus, togetherness and communalism become moral obligations in public and private life (Nwala, 1985). It is a philosophy that is lived, and it has profoundly influenced African education, governance, and cultural identity.

Belongingness in Birikambiri

Birikambiri, an Igbo saying that means *let us remain* or even more: *live and let me live*, emphasizes the importance of co-survival and interdependence. This aspect of belongingness speaks more to maintaining and preserving relationships, and staying together as one, particularly during tough times. It emphasizes that members of the community have a responsibility toward each other, hence none should be lost or left behind in the community (Iroegbu, 1995). In *birikambiri*, belongingness means intentionally showing up for others and affirming their humanity and their worth as people. This creates and influences resilience and togetherness, which claims that the strength of the people lies in enduring bonds and collective responsibility (Nwala, 1985). It repels isolation and propels a model of coexistence in which individuals are morally bound to make sure each other thrives and survives. A strand of African

communalism, *birikambiri* frames belongingness as a social condition but also as an ethical act that is fundamental to African education, leadership and cultural identity (Edeh, 1985).

Belongingness in Kwetuism

Kwetuism, as a word from *kwetu*, is derived from the local Swahili dialect and means “our home”. *Kwetuism* is a philosophical concept built around rootedness, a sense of communal identity, and the importance of place in African thought. Community is *kwetuism*; a profound spiritual attachment to land, ancestors, and fellow members, where ontological identity finds its place in a collective cultural and historical space (Nyerere, 1968). It expresses the idea that one’s identity is incomplete without acknowledgment of one’s roots and engagement in communal life. In this paradigm, belongingness comes with responsibility, reciprocity and intergenerational continuity—everyone has a role that they play in the preservation of the communal balance and evolution (Mbiti, 1969). *Kwetuism* rejects alienation and insists that genuine belongingness happens in the sharing of the values, memories and dreams of one’s people. It, therefore, influences African education, ethics and governance by rooting human dignity in communal rootedness and solidarity (Ramose, 2002).

Belongingness in Ibuanyidanda

Ibuanyidanda is an Igbo-African philosophical framework of purpose, meaning given by Innocent Asouzu, which states “no load is insurmountable for collective effort.” *Ibuanyidanda* creates a sense of belongingness through complementary relationships and communal synergy by accepting each singularity as an essential component of the whole (Asouzu, 2004). It tells us that human beings realize our wholeness not alone but in interdependence with one another. By this perspective, belongingness is thus a functional and ethical requisite—everyone belongs as a meaningful participant in common enterprises, transcending limits in and through cooperation (Asouzu, 2007). It encourages diverse thought for a better community. *Ibuanyidanda*, as belongingness, has ontological implications as it is an ontological reflection of the dynamic oneness of being in its communal nature as Africans live their reality. It promotes African education, leadership, and development through holistic engagement, equality, and the reinforcement of those mutually esteemed among them.

Belongingness as a Strand in Ujamaa

Belongingness is central to *Ujamaa*, Julius Nyerere’s African socialism, which reimagined nationhood through kinship-based communalism. Rooted in the Swahili term for “familyhood,” *Ujamaa* emphasized that individuals exist as part of an interdependent whole (Nyerere, 1968). Belongingness manifests in the shared labour systems, collective ownership of land, and village-based life that reinforces mutual responsibility. Nyerere argued that African society must “recognize the inherent dignity and equality of all” within a communal ethic (Nyerere, 1968). This strand affirms identity through active participation in the community, where each person’s worth is derived from their contribution to collective wellbeing (Shivji, 2009). Thus, *Ujamaa*’s belongingness is not merely social inclusion, but ontological, anchoring it in relational solidarity.

Belongingness as a Strand in Negritude

In *Negritude* (championing the fact that black matters), belongingness is articulated through a reclamation of Black identity and a collective African consciousness. Founded by poets and intellectuals like Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Negritude* emphasized solidarity among peoples of African descent, resisting colonial alienation by affirming shared cultural, historical, and emotional ties (Césaire, 2000). Senghor described *Negritude* as “the sum total

of the values of the civilization of the African world” (Senghor, 1965), where belongingness is not geographical but spiritual and cultural. This strand fosters a sense of homecoming for diasporic Africans through language, rhythm and ancestral memory, positioning blackness as a unifying ontology (Wilder, 2005). Belongingness in *Negritude* thus transcends borders, nurturing identity through poetic resistance and cultural affirmation.

Belongingness as a Strand in Consciencism or Nkrumahism

In Consciencism, belongingness is conceptualized as the ethical and ideological unity necessary for post-colonial African identity and development. Kwame Nkrumah proposed that Africa’s liberation requires a synthesis of traditional African values, Islamic heritage, and Western influence into a cohesive philosophical framework (Nkrumah, 1964). Belongingness emerges through this ideological integration, ensuring individuals see themselves as part of a historical continuum and collective destiny. Nkrumah emphasized that a “philosophical conscience” is essential for forging national solidarity and resisting neocolonial fragmentation (Nkrumah, 1964). By rooting identity in communal consciousness rather than imposed divisions, Consciencism affirms belongingness as both a political and metaphysical stance, where being is validated through commitment to collective emancipation and socio-economic justice (Wiredu, 1998). Thus, belongingness in Consciencism is transformative: it binds personal identity to Africa’s holistic liberation.

Belongingness as a Strand in Njikoka

Belongingness is an important strand in Njikoka, the Igbo-African idea of complementarity initiated by Innocent Asouzu. Njikoka, or "unity-in-diversity" or "integration," posits that all beings are interdependent and find meaning only through their relations with others (Asouzu, 2004). Within this theoretical framework, belongingness is not just social inclusion, it is an ontological imperative, where everything that exists makes up a complementary web where nothing is sufficient unto itself. The essence of Asouzu's claim that "to be is to be in mutual complementary relationship" (Asouzu, 2007) is that what it means to be human comes forth from this interdependence. In Njikoka, however, belongingness is also an ethical commitment to recognize and affirm others as necessary parts of one’s flourishing. It helps us reject the exclusivity and binary of worldviews and cultivates a way of being that moves through principles of harmony and relationality in thought and action. The *Ibuanyidanda* maxim: “No task is insurmountable when the relevant missing links are harmoniously integrated” (Asouzu, 2007) captures this principle. And so, *Njikoka* re-configures belongingness as both an existential condition and a moral imperative, necessary for authentic human cohabitation.

BELONGINGNESS AS BEING-WITH IN THE AFROMODALS

Belongingness is in line with the concept of being-with, which centers on relational existence as the foundation of personhood. Drawing from both African communal ontology and Heideggerian existentialism, Being-With (Mitsein) emphasizes that human beings are always already in relation with others (Heidegger, 1962). In African philosophy, this is echoed in the idea that “a person is a person through other persons” (Mbiti, 1969). Belongingness, therefore, is not a secondary condition but the ontological ground of existence. It manifests in mutual recognition, co-presence, and interdependence within the community. The African mode of *being-with* reflects the African-modals-lived ethics where identity is co-constituted through shared humanity. Thus, belongingness is the essential mode of being, where the self is incomplete without the other, and existence is a web of co-belonging that affirms dignity, responsibility, and social harmony. Equally, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, belongingness is embedded in the embodied, intersubjective nature of *being-with*. He argues that human existence is fundamentally relational, grounded in the body’s openness to others

and the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Belongingness arises through inter-corporeality, the mutual, bodily recognition that we exist with and through others. This relationality is not abstract but lived, as our perceptions, gestures, and expressions are shaped by and directed toward others (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Belonging, then, is not a fixed identity but a dynamic process of co-existence, where self and other intertwine in a shared lifeworld. It implies a pre-reflective communion with others, making sociality a condition of being. As Diprose (2002) notes, for Merleau-Ponty, subjectivity is always already given with others, making belongingness an ontological structure of human existence.

In sum, belongingness remains the sole strand that runs through the afromodals: *Igwebuike, Ubuntu, Egbebereugobere, Onyeaghananwanneya, Birikambiri, Kwetuism, Ibuanyidanda, ujamaa, negritude, consciencism, et cetera*. Belongingness as a strand is the LCM in all the conceptual understanding of the afromodals as modalities in African existentialism. Belongingness, which, similar to indigenist sentiments, emphasizes the wholeness of the African existentials. It is a relational ontology - a way of being that is dependent on the other relational ontologies within the African context, the individual exists through and with others. Afromodals emphasize modalities of rootedness in collective existence, reaffirming that personhood is relationally obtained through social harmony and mutual recognition. Thus, belongingness is the lived practice of inclusion, inter-care and cultural embeddedness that coordinates education and sociology. It provides an epistemic angle through which African identity is not just recognized but actively constructed in communal contexts. Afromodals are of African origin, specifying the continent's communal spirit of relationship confronting both internal and external challenges.

CONCLUSION

Afromodals are distinct modes within the existential paradigms of African philosophical and socio-political thought. While each emerged in different historical, cultural and intellectual contexts, they share a common thread: they offer African-centred responses to colonialism, Western modernity, Eurocentric models and the quest for African identity, dignity and communal well-being. Afromodals share communal values and reject Western individualism, emphasize African ontologies, epistemologies, and moral systems as well, and serve as frameworks for African self-understanding and reconstruction.

Afromodal philosophy is a theoretical paradigm that emphasizes the active choices that individuals make when grappling with existential realities, especially from an African perspective. This is a philosophical stance that encourages us to grapple with the problems that life throws at us with action, and that action can be individual or social. Afromodality investigates the greatness and grandeur of human endeavour in the struggle against death and dying, which strengthens the African experience. Rather than focusing on pure theorizing alone, this philosophy places individual human effort at the core of overcoming mortal challenges. Afromodal philosophy, afromodalism, afromodality, is a unique approach that places human action at the heart of the matrices of power, creativity, and accomplishment in confronting quotidian realities of existence. This philosophical tradition of afromodality teaches us how humans can engage with what we face through practical wisdom, communal solidarity, and contextually appropriate solutions: hard-learned sources of insight. With Afromodalistic thought as the foundation, contemporary African philosophers still uphold and serve the tradition into which they were born, as they seek to liberate the everyday and the social from the grasp of negativity. Afromodality explores the tapestry and grandness of human attempts to confront the existential challenges that define the African experience.

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