ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE AFRICAN ONTOGENESIS: NAVIGATING THE DIALECTIC OF TRANSFORMATION, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the complex interplay between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and African ontogenesis, understood as the philosophical, cultural, and socio-historical process of becoming in the African world. While AI is often celebrated globally for its transformative potential in healthcare, education, governance, and economic development, its introduction into Africa raises deeper questions about identity, culture, and being. Through the philosophical complementary methods of dialectics and hermeneutics, this study critically examines both the opportunities and the challenges AI presents to Africa's ontogenetic journey. It interrogates the risks of digital colonialism, cultural erasure, and epistemic dependency, while also underscoring the possibilities of technological empowerment, knowledge democratization, and cultural preservation. Therefore, engaging African philosophical frameworks such as Igwebuike, Ubuntu and decolonial thought, the study highlights pathways for grounding AI within African values and realities. Its significance lies in showing that Africa must not be a passive consumer of external technologies but an active agent shaping AI in ways that affirm its identity, resilience, and ontological becoming. The study thus contributes to broader

debates on technology, decoloniality, and the future of human flourishing in Africa and beyond.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, African Ontogenesis, Digital Colonialism, Decolonial Philosophy, Transformation

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has been characterized by technological advancements that are reshaping the foundations of human life, society, and culture. Among these advancements, Artificial Intelligence (AI) occupies a particularly dominant position. AI, broadly understood as the capacity of machines to simulate human intelligence through processes such as learning, reasoning, and problem-solving, has become a global phenomenon influencing economic growth, healthcare delivery, governance, and even cultural production. For many regions of the world, AI is celebrated as the pinnacle of innovation and the harbinger of a new era of progress. Yet, beyond its technical manifestations, AI raises profound philosophical questions about the nature of being, identity, and human becoming. These questions become especially pertinent when considered in the African context. Africa's historical trajectory has been shaped by encounters with colonialism, globalization, and the continuing challenge of asserting its ontological identity in the face of external pressures. It is within this trajectory that the idea of *African ontogenesis*, the process of becoming within the African cultural, spiritual, and philosophical milieu becomes an indispensable category of analysis.

The central concern of this study is how AI interacts with African ontogenesis. How does Africa navigate the dialectic between technological transformation and the preservation of cultural identity? In what ways does AI promise opportunities for growth, and in what ways does it threaten existential displacement? These

questions cannot be reduced to technical considerations; they require deeper philosophical inquiry grounded in Africa's rich intellectual traditions. This is thrust of this study.

Before proceeding to the discussion on the context of ontogenesis, it is important to note that methodologically, this paper employs the twin philosophical methods of dialectics and hermeneutics. Dialectics allows us to examine the tensions, contradictions, and synergies that emerge in the encounter between AI and African ontogenesis. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, provides a framework for interpreting AI not simply as an external imposition but as a phenomenon that can be understood, appropriated, and integrated within African ontological frameworks.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT OF ONTOGENESIS IN AFRICA

Ontogenesis, from the Greek *ontos* (being) and *genesis* (becoming), is a concept employed in philosophy to describe the unfolding, development, or evolution of being. Unlike static conceptions of ontology that emphasize being as fixed or immutable, ontogenesis foregrounds becoming as a dynamic process. In African philosophy, this dynamic understanding of being finds particular resonance, as African thought often emphasizes the relational, communal, and spiritual aspects of existence. John S. Mbiti's oft-cited dictum, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am", captures the essence of African ontogenesis as communal becoming rather than individual autonomy.[1] This emphasis stands in contrast to certain Western paradigms of subjectivity, which tend to privilege individual rationality and autonomy. Kwasi Wiredu, likewise, has argued that African philosophy cannot be divorced from the lived experiences and social contexts of African peoples, making ontogenesis not only a metaphysical but also a cultural and historical category.[2]

Furthermore, Mogobe Ramose's articulation of *Ubuntu* and Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu's *Igwebuike* philosophy point to the fact that African being is fundamentally relational. According to Ramose, *Ubuntu* is not merely an ethical orientation but also an ontological framework: to be human is to be embedded in networks of relationships that define one's existence.[3] For Kanu,

> *Igwebuike* rests on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. It argues that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity and to live outside that parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other' in a community of beings. This is based on the African philosophy of harmony and complementarity, which is the underlying principle and unity of African Traditional Religious and Philosophical experience.[4]

Igwebuike Ideology*,* in the understanding of Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi, "captures the philosophical, religious, political, economic and social life of the African people."[5] Thus, African ontogenesis is shaped by communal values, interdependence, and spirituality, all of which contrast with the mechanistic and efficiency-driven logic of AI systems.

The historical trajectory of Africa further deepens the significance of ontogenesis. The continent's encounter with colonialism and postcolonial struggles has been marked by a tension between tradition and modernity, between cultural preservation and adaptation. In this regard, African ontogenesis is not a closed system but an open-ended dialectic of continuity and change. The advent of AI represents yet another stage in this dialectic: a confrontation with a technology that challenges traditional ontologies while simultaneously opening new horizons of possibility.

In this sense, African ontogenesis cannot be adequately understood apart from its encounter with external forces, namely, colonialism in the past, globalization in the present, and AI in the future. Each encounter brings both disruption and renewal, rupture and continuity, alienation and creativity. The challenge is to navigate these encounters without losing sight of the ontological identity that grounds African becoming.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN GLOBAL AND AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

Artificial Intelligence has evolved dramatically since its early conceptualizations in the mid-twentieth century. The initial optimism of the 1956 Dartmouth Conference, where the term "artificial intelligence" was coined, has given way to successive waves of development, from rule-based expert systems in the 1970s and 1980s to the machine learning and neural networks of the present era.[6] Artificial Intelligence, as observed by Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi and Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, "is a constellation of technologies that enable machines to act with higher levels of intelligence and emulate human capabilities to sense, comprehend and act."[7] Today, AI encompasses technologies that not only process data but also learn, predict, and in some cases, generate content in ways that mimic human cognitive activity. Globally, the narrative of AI has been dominated by Euro-American and East Asian paradigms, where technological progress is measured by speed, efficiency, and innovation. AI is deployed in finance, medicine, security, and even the creative industries, leading some to proclaim the dawn of a "Fourth Industrial Revolution."[8] However, these narratives often carry with them a technocentric worldview that prioritizes progress as technological mastery over the environment and society.

Africa's encounter with AI is both promising and precarious. On the promising side, AI has been applied in fields such as agriculture, where predictive models aid farmers in weather forecasting and pest control.[9] In healthcare, AI-enabled diagnostic tools have been used to compensate for the scarcity of medical professionals across the continent. In financial technology (fintech), AI-driven platforms are expanding access to banking services, particularly through mobile money applications that serve millions of unbanked Africans. These developments suggest that AI could function as a catalyst for socio-economic inclusion. Yet, Africa's relationship to AI remains marked by structural dependency. Much of the infrastructure, expertise, and capital investment in AI are controlled by foreign entities, making African societies more consumers than producers of AI technology. This dynamic reproduces patterns of dependency reminiscent of colonial and postcolonial histories, a phenomenon increasingly described as *digital colonialism*.[10]

Philosophically, AI also invites reflection on divergent epistemological frameworks. Western traditions often regard intelligence as calculative and problem-solving, aligning AI with rationalist and technocratic models. In contrast, African traditions, such as *Ubuntu* and *Igwebuike,* emphasize relational intelligence, community, and the integration of ethical-spiritual values into knowledge.[11] The divergence creates both tension and opportunity: AI can disrupt African values if uncritically imported, but it can also be reinterpreted and reappropriated in light of African ontological commitments.[12] Thus, the African encounter with AI is not merely technological but deeply philosophical. It presents a moment of confrontation between different visions of intelligence, knowledge, and being, a confrontation that calls for careful dialectical engagement.

THE DIALECTIC OF TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICAN

ONTOGENESIS AND AI

The transformative potential of AI in Africa cannot be denied. In healthcare, AI-powered diagnostic systems and telemedicine platforms offer practical solutions to the chronic shortage of medical professionals, especially in rural communities.[13] In education, adaptive learning platforms could democratize knowledge by offering personalized educational experiences that transcend infrastructural limitations. In governance, AI systems can enhance data-driven decision-making, promote transparency, and help address corruption. Economically, AI holds promise for sectors such as agriculture, fintech, and entrepreneurship, offering tools for both small-scale innovation and large-scale development. However, these transformations are not without dialectical tensions. The very efficiency of AI risks alienating societies from traditional forms of knowledge transmission. For example, communal storytelling and apprenticeship models may be overshadowed by algorithm-driven learning systems. Similarly, the emphasis on predictive analytics in governance could undermine deliberative, communal forms of decision-making valued in many African societies.

Another tension lies in the question of dependency. While AI promises efficiency and innovation, much of the technology remains foreign-produced. Thus, every adoption of AI risks deepening reliance on external infrastructures. In this respect, the dialectic unfolds as empowerment through dependency, progress through alienation, and innovation through possible cultural erosion.[14] From a philosophical standpoint, this dialectic mirrors earlier confrontations in African history. Just as colonial modernity disrupted indigenous ways of life while also introducing new avenues of development, AI presents a dual reality: both the potential to catalyze growth and the risk of perpetuating external domination. Here, dialectics serves not merely as an abstract

method but as a lived African reality, an ongoing negotiation between rupture and continuity, between external imposition and creative adaptation.

If properly navigated, the dialectic of transformation could yield a synthesis in which AI becomes a tool not of alienation but of empowerment. This would require Africa to appropriate AI within its ontogenetic trajectory, grounding technological adoption in cultural values, ethical commitments, and decolonial strategies. In this way, transformation becomes not merely technological but ontological, a process of becoming that affirms African identity while engaging global modernity.

CHALLENGES IN NAVIGATING AI AND AFRICAN ONTOGENESIS

While AI presents transformative prospects, Africa's engagement with this technology is fraught with critical challenges that demand careful philosophical reflection. These challenges extend beyond technical constraints and touch upon deeper ontological, cultural, and ethical dimensions.

a. Digital Colonialism: Africa's adoption of AI often occurs within structures dominated by global corporations and foreign governments. Tech giants from North America, Europe, and Asia control most of the hardware, software, and data infrastructures that underpin AI systems.[15] This asymmetry risks reproducing colonial patterns of dependency, where Africa provides raw data, analogous to raw materials during colonialism, while value-added innovation occurs elsewhere.[16] The result is a form of technological domination that undermines Africa's sovereignty and perpetuates epistemic subordination.

b. Cultural Erasure and Homogenization: AI systems are primarily trained on datasets sourced from Euro-American contexts. Such datasets embed cultural assumptions, linguistic

biases, and epistemological orientations that may not resonate with African realities.[17] The consequence is a subtle but pervasive homogenization that erodes indigenous languages, oral traditions, and cultural diversity. In the long term, this could lead to a form of cultural erasure where African ways of knowing are rendered invisible within global AI ecosystems.

c. Ethical Concerns: Algorithmic bias is a well-documented challenge in AI, with systems often reflecting and amplifying existing social inequalities. For Africa, the stakes are particularly high. Biased algorithms in areas such as credit scoring, hiring, or criminal justice could exacerbate systemic marginalization of vulnerable populations.[18] Moreover, the absence of African voices in global AI ethics debates means that issues of representation are often framed in terms that neglect local contexts and priorities.

d. Socioeconomic Inequalities: The digital divide in Africa remains stark. While urban centers may benefit from AI-driven innovations, rural areas, where the majority of Africans reside, often lack basic infrastructure such as reliable electricity and internet access.[19] Without deliberate efforts to bridge these divides, AI risks becoming another driver of inequality, concentrating benefits among elites while excluding the majority.

e. Ontological Dissonance: Perhaps the deepest challenge is ontological. AI, as currently conceived, embodies a logic of efficiency, quantification, and control. This logic often clashes with African values rooted in spirituality, relationality, and communalism.[20] The result is a form of ontological dissonance in which the adoption of AI threatens to displace the very frameworks that ground African being and becoming.

Taken together, these challenges reveal that AI is not a neutral tool but a site of contestation where power, culture, and identity are at stake. The task before African philosophy, therefore, is to articulate

pathways that transform these challenges into opportunities for renewal. This is the focus of the subsection that follows.

OPPORTUNITIES AND PATHWAYS FOR INCLUSIVE TRANSFORMATION

Despite the formidable challenges, Africa is not condemned to be a passive consumer of AI. Rather, by engaging critically and creatively, Africa can harness AI to advance its ontogenetic journey. Several pathways present themselves as briefly discussed below:

a. Grounding AI in African Epistemologies: A starting point is the grounding of AI ethics and development in African philosophies such as *Ubuntu* and *Igwebuike.* Through emphasizing relationality, dignity, and communal responsibility, *Ubuntu* and *Igwebuike* ideologies can offer an alternative framework for designing and deploying AI.[21] Such grounding ensures that AI serves human flourishing rather than reducing humans to data points.

b. Decolonial Approaches: Decolonial thought calls for resisting forms of domination that perpetuate colonial hierarchies of knowledge and power. Applied to AI, a decolonial approach would entail fostering indigenous AI research, building local infrastructures, and asserting control over African data.[22] This approach affirms Africa's agency and ensures that technological adoption does not amount to renewed dependency.

c. Policy and Governance: African governments and regional organizations such as the African Union can play a decisive role in shaping AI policy. A Pan-African AI framework, grounded in shared values and collective bargaining, could prevent exploitation while fostering collaboration.[23] Such frameworks would not only regulate AI use but also ensure ethical accountability and inclusivity.

d. Education and Capacity Building: Sustainable engagement with AI requires investment in human capital. Expanding AI literacy and supporting research programs in African universities can empower a new generation of innovators.[24] This approach shifts Africa from being a consumer to a producer of AI knowledge.

e. Participatory AI: Finally, AI systems should be developed with active input from African communities. By involving local voices in the design, testing, and deployment of AI, technologies can reflect the lived realities of those they are meant to serve.[25] Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi avers: "Developers of AI systems must ensure that their technologies are built with a deep understanding of African cultural contexts. This requires ongoing collaboration with local communities, cultural experts, and knowledge bearers to ensure that AI applications reflect the unique spiritual, communal, and historical significance of African cultural practices."[26] This participatory approach democratizes AI and resists the imposition of external paradigms.

To sum up the discussion in this subsection, it is pertinent to note that Africa's encounter with AI can become an opportunity for ontological affirmation rather than displacement. In this sense, through proper appropriation of AI within African epistemologies and deploying it through decolonial and participatory strategies, Africa can chart a path toward transformation that honors its unique ontogenetic trajectory.

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN HERMENEUTICS OF AI

If AI is to contribute meaningfully to Africa's ontogenetic trajectory, it must be understood not merely as a technical artifact but as a cultural and philosophical phenomenon. Hermeneutics, the art and science of interpretation, provides a critical framework for

this task. By applying hermeneutics to AI, Africa can engage in a process of *understanding* and *appropriation* that resists passive adoption. At the heart of African hermeneutics is the interpretive engagement with lived realities, oral traditions, and communal experiences. The works of Theophilus Okere underscore that African philosophy must always return to culture as the "raw material" of thought.[27] "Hermeneutics", Ndubisi argued, "encourages the interpreter to immerse themselves in these contexts, ensuring that AI applications designed to preserve African cultural heritage respect the local traditions and convey the authentic meanings embedded within them."[28] If AI is approached hermeneutically, it is possible to situate technological innovations within African cultural narratives rather than importing them wholesale.

Moreover, African hermeneutics demands a dialogical process. Gadamer's notion of the "fusion of horizons" suggests that understanding emerges when distinct perspectives enter into dialogue.[29] In this light, AI represents a technological horizon that must be placed in dialogue with African cultural horizons. The goal is not to subordinate one to the other but to create a synthesis where AI is reinterpreted and redeployed in ways that affirm African being. For example, rather than viewing AI exclusively through the lens of efficiency, Africa could interpret it through the prism of *Igwebuike* and *Ubuntu*, where technology must serve the flourishing of the community. Similarly, AI systems could be evaluated not only for their technical robustness but also for their alignment with communal values such as solidarity, reciprocity, and justice.[30] In this way, African hermeneutics transforms AI from a foreign imposition into a resource for ontological renewal.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

So far, this study has been able to affirm that the encounter between

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and African ontogenesis is not simply a technological development but a profound philosophical moment in the continent's continuing journey of becoming. Africa, with its history of colonial imposition and its ongoing struggle for epistemic sovereignty, now faces AI as both a promise and a peril. The promise lies in AI's capacity to transform healthcare, education, governance, and culture in ways that can enhance human flourishing. The peril lies in the dangers of digital colonialism, cultural homogenization, and ontological displacement that may follow uncritical adoption.

This study contributes significantly to philosophical discourse by reframing AI within African categories of being, such as *Ubuntu* and *Igwebuike*. Rather than accepting AI as a neutral technological import, it highlights the importance of grounding technological innovation in Africa's lived realities, relational philosophies, and communal values. Therefore, through employing the methods of dialectics and hermeneutics, it demonstrates that the encounter between AI and Africa is not a one-sided imposition but a dialogical process, one that can yield creative syntheses if navigated thoughtfully.

The work also illuminates how African hermeneutics can reinterpret AI, situating it within indigenous cultural narratives and ensuring that technology serves the flourishing of communities rather than undermining them. By calling for participatory, decolonial, and epistemologically grounded approaches, the study provides a roadmap for Africa to engage with AI without forfeiting its ontological identity. In essence, the significance of this study lies in its insistence that Africa must not be a passive recipient of global technologies but an active agent in shaping them. Its contribution is twofold: first, it offers a critique of the risks posed by AI to African being and becoming; and second, it articulates constructive pathways for harnessing AI as a vehicle of

empowerment, resilience, and renewal.

The broader implication is that Africa's ontogenetic trajectory in the age of AI is not predetermined. It is a dialectical unfolding that depends on choices, values, and interpretive frameworks. So, affirming Africa's agency and grounding AI within its cultural and philosophical soil, the Africa can ensure that its future is not one of alienation but of authentic transformation. This study, therefore, is both a warning and a call to action: a warning against technological determinism that erases identity, and a call for a deliberate, hermeneutically guided engagement with AI that enriches the African journey of being and becoming.

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