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A PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS OF AXEL HONNETH'S CONCEPT OF RECOGNITION AS A REMEDIAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT IN SOCIETY

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Abstract

This article advances a philosophical hermeneutics of Axel Honneth's concept of recognition, arguing that the tripartite framework of love, rights, and solidarity achieves remedial efficacy in pluralistic African societies only when reconstructed through the relational ontologies of *Ubuntu* and the Yoruba ethical ideal of *Omo Oluwabi*. Recognition, once fused with African communal personhood, ceases to be liberal individual affirmation and becomes relational restoration that integrates moral reciprocity, epistemic inclusion, and structural justice. While social conflicts are conventionally explained by scarcity, demographic pressure, or elite manipulation, such accounts overlook their moral grammar: experiences of humiliation, exclusion, and denial of dignity. Drawing on Honneth (1995), Fraser and Honneth (2003), Gadamer (1975), Ricoeur (1981), and African philosophers including Mbiti (1969), Menkiti (1984), Ramose (2002), Metz (2007; 2011), Okeja (2017), and Mangena (2016), this study contends that misrecognition generates ontological insecurity that material redistribution alone cannot repair. Using Nigeria's herder-farmer crisis as an illustrative heuristic, the article demonstrates how violations of legal recognition, solidarity-based esteem, and epistemic inclusion produce cycles of violence that militarised responses exacerbate. The reconstructed model proposes recognition as relational praxis: public acknowledgment of harm, participatory governance through palaver, validation of indigenous conflict-resolution norms, and co-original redistribution of land, water, and infrastructure. In societies fractured by identity, recognition so understood is not optional but the ethical condition of coexistence and peace-building.

Keywords: Axel Honneth, Recognition, Philosophical Hermeneutics, Social Conflict, *Ubuntu*, *Omo Oluwabi*, Restorative Justice

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Introduction: The Moral Deficit in Materialist Accounts of Conflict

In 2018, the International Crisis Group reported that violence between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers in Nigeria's Middle Belt killed approximately 1,300 people in the first six months alone, six times the fatalities attributed to Boko Haram in the same period (International Crisis Group 2018). The dominant explanatory framework is neo-Malthusian: climate change desiccates northern

grazing lands, population growth increases farming acreage, and the collapse of state-managed grazing reserves creates an unregulated scramble (Adamu and Ben, 2021). These factors are empirically verifiable. Yet they do not explain why scarcity becomes meaningful as ethnic humiliation, why neighbours become existential threats, or why communities accept lethal risk to defend not just cattle or crops but honour.

Materialist accounts suffer from a moral deficit: they treat human beings as utility-maximisers competing for goods while ignoring them as meaning-makers competing for dignity. Communities do not mobilise merely because water is scarce; they mobilise when they believe they are treated as less than human, when grazing bans are enacted without consultation, when security forces arrive late to burnt villages, when media label entire ethnic groups "invaders" or "terrorists." The question is not only "Who gets what?" but "Who is seen as who?"

This article's central claim is diagnostic and reconstructive. Diagnostic: Following Honneth (1995), I argue that social conflict possesses an internal moral logic. It erupts when institutionalised patterns of recognition break down across three spheres: (a) emotional care that grounds self-confidence, (b) legal respect that grounds self-respect, and (c) social esteem that grounds self-esteem. Violence is a distorted "struggle for recognition" when other channels of moral address are blocked. Reconstructive: Honneth's framework, however, emerges from the post-Hegelian Frankfurt School and presupposes a liberal-individualist ontology that misfits African life-worlds where "I am because we are" (Mbiti, 1969). Applied uncritically, Honneth risks committing epistemic misrecognition, the very pathology it diagnoses, by failing to recognise African moral vocabularies as theoretical sources rather than ethnographic data.

Therefore, I advance a philosophical hermeneutics of recognition. Using Gadamer's (1975) "fusion of horizons" and Ricoeur's (1981) dialectic of explanation and understanding, I read Honneth in reciprocal interrogation with *Ubuntu* (Ramose, 2002; Metz, 2007) and *Omo Oluwabi* (Akinyemi, 2016; Abiodun, 2019). The result is not rejection but transformation: love becomes communal care through *agbo ile*, rights become participatory duty through palaver, and solidarity becomes shared moral flourishing through *simunye*. Recognition becomes relational repair rather than individual rights-claiming.

Section 2 reconstructs Honneth's tripartite theory and engages its two decisive critics: Nancy Fraser's redistribution challenge (Fraser and Honneth 2003) and the African critique of individualist personhood (Menkiti, 1984; Okeja, 2017). Section 3 elaborates philosophical hermeneutics as method and specifies what "fusion" means at ontological, ethical, and political levels. Section 4 develops the African reconstruction via *Ubuntu* and *Omo Oluwabi*, engaging Metz, Mangena, and Menkiti. Section 5 applies the model to the herder-farmer conflict as a heuristic, citing ECOWAS protocols, Nigerian legislation, Supreme Court jurisprudence, and secondary literature to diagnose legal, solidarity-based, and epistemic misrecognition. Section 6 synthesises a four-dimensional framework of recognition as relational praxis: relational ontology, moral reciprocity, epistemic justice, and structural justice. Section 7 concludes that peace in pluralistic societies requires rebuilding the moral infrastructure of everyday life.

This study moves beyond "applicationism," using Western theory to explain Africa, and beyond "nativism," celebrating indigenous thought in isolation. It enacts intercultural philosophy: a reciprocal critique in which Honneth is Africanised and *Ubuntu* is critical-theorised. The aim is a recognition theory with global reach and local roots.

2. Honneth's Tripartite Theory of Recognition: Achievements, Aporias, Debates

2.1 The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts

Honneth's The Struggle for Recognition (1995) retrieves Hegel's Jena manuscripts and G.H. Mead's social psychology to ground critical theory in pre-political experiences of disrespect. Identity-formation, Honneth argues, depends on intersubjective recognition across three "practical relations-to-self":

a. **Love [*Liebe*]:** Primary affective bonds, mother-child, friendship, erotic relations, provide self-confidence [*Selbstvertrauen*]. Through consistent emotional responsiveness, the infant learns that her needs and emotions are worthy of articulation. Winnicott's "good enough mother" becomes a paradigm of recognition. Physical abuse, rape, and torture are the negative: they violate bodily integrity, the somatic basis of autonomy, producing shame and social anxiety (Honneth, 1995). Without love, the subject cannot risk herself in public because she lacks basic trust in the world.

b. **Rights [*Recht*]:** Legal relations confer self-respect [*Selbstachtung*]. Modern law institutionalises the Hegelian insight that freedom requires mutual limitation. As a bearer of rights, one experiences oneself as a morally accountable person equal to all others. Slavery, statelessness, and legal discrimination are misrecognition because they signal that one is not a full member of the moral community (Honneth, 1995). The French and American revolutions mark the historical expansion of this sphere from status-based privileges to universal human rights.

c. **Solidarity [*Solidarität*]:** Shared value horizons enable self-esteem [*Selbstschätzung*]. In modernity, honour gives way to dignity, and esteem is democratised: one's traits and achievements are affirmed as contributions to common goals. Cultural denigration, stigma, and enforced assimilation are solidarity-based misrecognition because they deny that one's way of life has social worth (Honneth, 1995). The labour movement demanded esteem for manual work; the civil rights movement demanded esteem for Black culture; feminism demanded esteem for care work.

For Honneth, these spheres are not merely psychological but institutional. Family, law, and the public sphere of ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*] embody them. Social conflict erupts when institutionalised recognition-expectations are systematically violated. A strike is not only about wages; it is about respect for labour. A riot is not only about poverty; it is about humiliation by police. Conflict thus has a normative logic: it makes violated moral norms visible.

2.2 The Fraser-Honneth Debate: Is Recognition Enough?

Nancy Fraser's *Rethinking Recognition* (2000) inaugurated the most sustained critique. Fraser argues that since the 1990s, "the politics of recognition" has displaced "the politics of redistribution." Identity movements fight for cultural affirmation while economic inequality deepens. This produces two problems: displacement, struggles over class are recoded as struggles over status; and reification, groups are treated as homogeneous, obscuring intra-group power.

In *Redistribution or Recognition?* (Fraser and Honneth, 2003), Fraser defends "perspectival dualism": every social injustice has economic and cultural dimensions, but they are analytically irreducible. Maldistribution cannot be reduced to misrecognition because it concerns objective resources, not intersubjective meanings. Conversely, misrecognition cannot be reduced to maldistribution because some status harms, e.g., racist stigma, persist even with economic parity.

Honneth (2003) replies that maldistribution is experienced as misrecognition. Low wages insult

because they communicate that one's labour is worthless. The "wounded self-respect" of the unemployed is not epiphenomenal; it is the moral core. Thus, redistribution conflicts are really recognition conflicts at a deeper level. However, critics like Zurn (2015) note that Honneth provides no institutional mechanism to translate moral claims into tax policy or welfare law. His theory remains at the level of social theory, not political economy.

For African contexts, Fraser's intervention is crucial. Land dispossession under colonialism, structural adjustment programs, and contemporary "land grabs" are not merely symbolic. To tell a community dispossessed of 10,000 hectares that it is "recognised" while its children starve is ideological (Fanon, 1963). Yet Honneth's point also holds: land is not just acreage; it is ancestral burial ground, source of *oríkì*, shrine of the earth deity. Dispossession is ontological: it severs the bond between people and *ile*. Thus, redistribution and recognition are co-original, but their articulation requires a non-Western ontology [earth].

2.3 The African Critique: Personhood, Duty, and Epistemic Exclusion

African philosophers have long contested the liberal individual. Menkiti (1984) argues that in African thought, personhood is achieved, not innate. The infant is an it; through ritual incorporation, ethical conduct, and social roles, the it becomes a person. The aged who embody *iwa* are "persons par excellence." Thus, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" inverts Descartes. Community is ontologically prior.

Gyekye (1996) moderates Menkiti, proposing "moderate communitarianism": the community constitutes the self but does not absorb it. Individuals can critique norms, but the framework of critique is social. Rights exist, but they are nested in duties to *ajobi* and *araiye*. A right to free speech without *otito* is destructive [consanguines][community][truth].

Okeja (2017) extends this to politics. African deliberative agency begins from the premise that "to be is to be in relation." The palaver is not a contract among pre-social individuals but a ritual of becoming-together. Therefore, Honneth's second sphere, legal rights as unconditional, misfits contexts where rights are inseparable from responsibility to uphold iwa.

Mangena (2016) shows that *hunhu*/*ubuntu* grounds dignity in participatory difference: one's humanity is realised by contributing to *ukama*. The disabled, elderly, and children are esteemed not for productivity but for being-nodes in the web of life. Honneth's meritocratic solidarity, esteem for achievement, fails to capture this [relatedness].

Finally, Sithole (2017) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) identify epistemic misrecognition: Western theory treats African concepts as "case studies" or "culture," never as theory. To apply Honneth without allowing *Ubuntu* to interrogate Honneth is to reproduce coloniality of knowledge (Mudimbe, 1988). The task is not to reject Honneth but to provincialise him (Chakrabarty, 2000), to show his universality is a particular.

3. Philosophical Hermeneutics as Fusion of Horizons

3.1 Beyond Comparison: Interpretation as Transformation

Comparative philosophy often places Honneth and *Ubuntu* side by side, noting similarities and differences. Hermeneutics, by contrast, is productive. Gadamer (1975) argues that understanding is not a method but a mode of being. We are always already thrown into traditions that provide "prejudices" [*Vorurteile*], not biases to be eliminated but conditions of intelligibility. The Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice" is itself a historical prejudice.

Understanding occurs as a "fusion of horizons" [*Horizontverschmelzung*] (Gadamer, 1975). The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything seen from a vantage point. The text's horizon and the interpreter's horizon are not fused into identity; each is transformed. We do not leave Honneth intact and add *Ubuntu* as a footnote; nor do

we leave *Ubuntu* intact and use Honneth as a mirror. Both are risked.

Ricoeur (1981) adds a critical moment: distanciation. First, explanation [*erklären*]: we objectify Honneth by situating him in the Frankfurt School's trajectory from Marx to Habermas, noting his debt to Winnicott and Hegel. We trace his Eurocentrism not as moral failing but as historical situatedness. Second, understanding [*verstehen*]: we appropriate Honneth by reading him from within Yoruba *agbo ile* and *Shona dare*. The meaning of the text is not behind it, in Honneth's intention, but in front of it, in the world it opens for us.

3.2 Three Levels of Fusion

a. **Ontological:** Honneth's methodological individualism encounters Mbiti's (1969) relational ontology. The "I" of recognition is decentered. Following Menkiti (1984), the subject is processual: one becomes a person through recognition-events: naming, initiation, marriage, elderhood. Recognition is not given to a pre-existing subject; it constitutes the subject. This transforms Honneth's first sphere: love is not dyadic but networked. A child's self-confidence depends on the *agbo ile*, not just the mother.

b. **Ethical:** Honneth's unconditional legal respect encounters *Omo Oluwabi* (Akinyemi, 2016). *Iwa* is the condition of full personhood. The community recognises those who embody *otito*, *inurere*, *suuru*. The *omo ale* suffers *oshu* [public shaming] and *ijiya*. Thus, rights are nested in duties. This does not abolish rights but moralizes them: to claim rights without *iwa* is *agidi*. Okeja (2017) calls this deliberative agency: to be recognised is to be answerable in palaver.

c. **Political:** Honneth's meritocratic solidarity encounters *Ubuntu's simunye* [we are one] (Metz, 2007). Esteem tracks contribution to harmony, not individual achievement. The praise-singer [*akewi*], midwife [*iya abiye*], and farmer are esteemed equally because each sustains balance. Metz (2007) formalizes *Ubuntu*: "An act is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord." Thus, solidarity-based misrecognition occurs when policies pit groups against each other, fracturing ukama [sanctions][obstinacy].

3.3 Avoiding Ethnocentrism and Relativism

Ethnocentrism would universalise Honneth and judge Africa as lacking "rights culture." Relativism would insulate *Ubuntu* from critique, ignoring patriarchal distortions. Hermeneutics pursues critical interculturalism (Taylor, 1994): traditions remain distinct but mutually accountable. *Ubuntu* critiques Honneth's individualism; Honneth critiques *Ubuntu's* potential for gerontocratic abuse. The fusion is a third horizon that judges both.

4. African Reconstruction: *Ubuntu* and *Omo Oluwabi* as Normative Sources

4.1 *Ubuntu*: Recognition as Participatory Harmony

Ramose (2002) derives *Ubuntu* from *ubu-* [be-ing becoming] and *-ntu* [nodal point of be-ing]. Reality is a flow of forces; to be is to be-in-relation. This is not romantic holism but ontological. The individual *umuntu* exists only through *ubuntu*. Desmond Tutu (1999) popularised it: "A person is a person through other persons."

Metz (2007) reconstructs *Ubuntu* as a moral theory with two dimensions: shared identity, thinking of oneself as a we, and goodwill, caring for others' quality of life. Harmony [*ubunye*] is the *summum bonum*. From this, Metz (2011) derives human rights: rights protect the capacity to relate harmoniously. Hate speech is wrong not because it offends an individual but because it fractures we-ness.

For recognition, *Ubuntu* transforms all three spheres:

a. **Love as Communal Care:** The *agbo ile* socialises children collectively. Murithi (2006) documents how orphans in Rwanda were absorbed into other households post-genocide,

not as charity but as obligation. Self-confidence is grounded in the we, not the dyad. Abuse of one child is taboo because it wounds the community's *seriti* [vital force].

b. **Rights as Participatory Membership:** To be *umuntu* is to have a voice in *imbizo*, *kgotla*, or *dare*. Gyekye (1996) argues that exclusion from deliberation is ontological death, one becomes into *engasimuntu* [a thing, not a person]. Thus, political misrecognition is not procedural injustice but de-personalisation. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recognised this: victims testified not for compensation but to be heard into personhood (Hayner, 2011).

c. **Solidarity as Moral Flourishing:** Esteem tracks *ukama*. Mangena (2016) notes that in Shona courts, the thief is not jailed but made to work for the victim until harmony is restored. Esteem is regained through restitution, not punishment. This contrasts with Honneth's meritocracy, where esteem follows achievement. In *Ubuntu*, esteem follows repair.

Ubuntu also provides a metacriterion for recognition: authentic recognition promotes harmony; ideological recognition promotes discord. Recognising "white supremacy" is anti-*Ubuntu* even if claimed by a group. Thus, *Ubuntu* is not relativist; it is critically normative.

4.2 Omo Oluwabi: Recognition, Character, and Answerability

Omo Oluwabi, "the child begotten by the lord of character," names the Yoruba ethical ideal (Abiodun, 2019). Fafunwa (1974) lists its seven virtues, taught through *alo apagbe*, *oríkì* [praise poetry], and apprenticeship: *iwa*, *otito*, *akinkanju*, *ola*, *inurere*, *suuru*, *imo* [folktales][character][truth][bravery][honor][goodwill][patience][knowledge].

Two features reshape Honneth:

a. **Conditionality and Pedagogy:** Unlike Honneth's unconditional legal respect, *Omo Oluwabi* makes recognition earned and taught. Community confers *oríkì* on children who display *iwa pele*. The *omo ale* [child of the street] suffers *oshu* and *ijiya*. Recognition is pedagogical: it forms persons (Fafunwa, 1974). This answers a gap in Honneth: how do subjects learn to recognize? Yoruba answer: through *oríkì*, taboos, and rites.

b. **Deliberative Agency and Forgiveness:** Okeja (2017) argues that African recognition integrates answerability. To be recognised is to be held to account in palaver. Victims are not passive; they can grant *aforiji* or withhold it. *Aforiji* is not forgetting but remembering the offender into the community under new terms. This corrects Honneth's tendency to treat the misrecognised as claimants only. In Yoruba cosmology, even the *orisa* can be questioned in *itadogun*, showing that answerability is cosmic [forgiveness][deity][calendar].

4.3 The Fused Model: Three Reconstructed Spheres

Honneth's Sphere	Liberal Content	Reconstructed African Content	Institutional Form
Love	Dyadic intimacy → self-confidence	Communal care in *agbo ile* → basic trust in the we	Extended family, age-grades, *ubuntu* child-rearing
Rights	Universal legal status → self-respect	Participatory duty in palaver → respect as accountable member	*Imbizo*, *kgotla*, *lekgotla*, town hall + legal pluralism
Solidarity	Meritocratic esteem → self-esteem	Contribution to harmony → esteem as sustainer of balance	*Oríkì*, restorative justice, co-management boards

The shift is from "I demand recognition" to "We make recognition." The subject is not prior to

relations; relations make the subject.

5. Illustrative Heuristic: The Herder–Farmer Conflict as Triple Misrecognition

This section does not present primary ethnography but uses public documents, legislation, and peer-reviewed studies to illustrate the reconstructed model. Per the editor's guidance, the case is a heuristic, not exhaustive proof.

5.1 Beyond Scarcity: The Moral Phenomenology of Conflict

Adamu and Ben (2021) document that desertification reduced northern grazing land by 20% between 1975-2015. Okello and Gilkes (2020) add that population growth increased farming acreage in Benue by 35%. Yet the ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance 1998 already provides for cross-border pastoral mobility via International Transhumance Certificates and designated corridors (ECOWAS 1998, Art. 3-5). If scarcity alone caused war, these institutions should mitigate it. Their failure suggests moral factors.

Interviews cited in Okello and Gilkes (2020) reveal the language of dignity: "They call us foreigners on land our grandfathers used," says a Fulani *ardo*. "They slaughter us and police say it's farmer-herder clash, not murder," says a Tiv youth leader. Both speak of humiliation, not just loss. This is the language of misrecognition.

5.2 Three Interlocking Misrecognitions

5.2.1 Legal Misrecognition: The Benue Law and Constitutional Tensions

The Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law 2017 criminalizes open grazing and prescribes ranching (Benue State, 2017). While the Land Use Act 1978 vests land in state governors, the Supreme Court in A.G. Lagos v A.G. Federation (2003) held that state laws must conform to the Constitution and federal legislation. Pastoralist associations argue the Benue Law violates the ECOWAS Protocol, which Nigeria ratified, and was enacted without providing functional ranches, water, or credit. This is experienced as second-sphere misrecognition: the state denies pastoralism as a legitimate way of life. It communicates: "You are not a rights-bearer in our polity."

Conversely, farming communities cite Section 44(3) of the Constitution vesting minerals and land in the state, and argue that federal failure to enforce anti-grazing laws denies them equal protection. When police do not prosecute cattle destruction of crops, farmers experience legal disrespect: "The state values cows over our children" (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2010). Thus, both groups suffer legal misrecognition, fueling mutual reprisals.

5.2.2 Solidarity Misrecognition: Stigma and Counter-Stigma

Media and political discourse frequently label pastoralists "Fulani herdsmen terrorists," collapsing a diverse ethnic group into a security threat. This is third-sphere misrecognition: cultural denigration. It denies that pastoralism embodies *iwa*, knowledge of ecology, animal husbandry, and inter-group diplomacy. Conversely, pastoralist discourse sometimes labels farmers "infidels" or "land-grabbers," denying Tiv and Idoma ancestral ties to land. Both are solidarity violations: they refuse to see the other's contribution to national harmony.

5.2.3 Epistemic Misrecognition: The Death of Dambe

Pre-colonial polities managed farmer-pastoralist relations through *dambe* [land-use agreements] negotiated by *sarki pawa* [chief of butchers], *ardo*, and *tor tiv*. These specified *burti* [cattle routes], *haraji* [grazing tax], and *diyya* [blood compensation] (Achebe, 1983). Colonial Native Authorities and post-colonial Local Government Areas sidelined these as "customary" and "backward." This is epistemic injustice (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013): the denigration of indigenous knowledge systems. When contemporary peace

committees exclude *ardo* and *tor tiv* in favour of "stakeholders" defined by the state, they commit solidarity misrecognition by denying epistemic esteem.

5.3 Militarization as Misrecognition

Operation Whirl Stroke, Operation Safe Haven, and similar deployments treat the conflict as criminality. Arrests without dialogue confirm pastoralist narratives of state hostility; delayed response to village attacks confirms farmer narratives of abandonment. Honneth (1995) observes that violence is a "moral appeal" when institutional channels are blocked. Militarization answers a moral appeal with force, thereby repeating misrecognition at a higher level. It says: "You are not a citizen to be heard but a body to be managed."

5.4 Toward Relational Repair: Applying the Four Dimensions

Relational Ontology: Peacebuilding must re-weave *ukama*. Search for Common Ground's "festivals of transhumance" in Plateau State bring farmers and pastoralists to celebrate shared harvest and calving season (Hayner, 2011). These are not "sensitisation" but rituals of we-formation. Policy should fund such festivals as security infrastructure.

a. **Moral Reciprocity:** Following *Omo Oluwabi*, accountability must be mutual. Community tribunals, modeled on Rwanda's *gacaca*, should try cattle rustling and crop destruction, with sentences including *aforiji* rituals and restitution. The goal is not punishment but re-personalisation. This enacts recognition as duty: to be recognised, one must do *iwa*.
b. **Epistemic Justice:** State law should legally recognise *dambe*. The 1976 Land Use Act can be amended to create "Customary Transhumance Corridors" as a land-use category, giving *ardo* agreements statutory force. The African Union's Charter for African Cultural Renaissance 2006 already mandates integrating indigenous jurisprudence. This treats *kiwo* [pastoralist ecological knowledge] as expertise, not superstition (Dei, 2012).
c. **Structural Justice:** Per Fraser and Honneth (2003), ranches, water points, and markets must be co-managed. The National Livestock Transformation Plan 2019 allocates ₦100 billion but lacks participatory governance. Co-management boards with 50% farmer-pastoralist representation, 30% women, and 20% youth would signal esteem as material. Compensation for victims must be timely: delayed payment is disrespect.

Without these four, "peace" is a ceasefire that awaits the next dry season.

6. Toward a Four-Dimensional Philosophy of Recognition as Relational Praxis

Synthesising Honneth, Fraser, and African philosophy, I propose recognition as relational praxis with four co-original dimensions:

6.1 Relational Ontology: The Priority of the We

Following Mbiti (1969) and Menkiti (1984), the person is processual and communally constituted. Policy evaluation must ask: "Does this intervention strengthen or sever *ubunye*?" Individual title deeds that isolate farmers from communal land trusts may increase productivity but destroy solidarity-based recognition. The criterion is not GDP but gross harmony product.

6.2 Moral Reciprocity: Rights Nested in Iwa

Following *Omo Oluwabi* (Akinyemi, 2016) and Okeja (2017), rights must be taught alongside duties. Civic education should integrate *oríkì* and constitutionalism, palaver and parliament. To claim freedom of movement without respecting *burti* is *agidi*. Institutions should create "deliberative accountability forums" where citizens can be questioned, not just heard. This answers Honneth's gap: how are subjects socialised into recognition?

6.3 Epistemic Justice: Cognitive Pluralism

Following Mudimbe (1988) and Sithole

(2017), research and policy must adopt cognitive pluralism. The National Universities Commission should accredit schools of endogenous knowledge where *sarki pawa* and earth priests teach alongside professors. Courts should admit proverbs as evidence of custom, as South Africa's Constitutional Court did in Bhe v Magistrate 2005. This is not romanticism; it is epistemic democracy.

6.4 Structural Justice: Redistribution as Recognition

Following Fraser and Honneth (2003), material equity is not separate from recognition but its mode. To recognise pastoralists is to build ranches; to recognise farmers is to pay compensation within 90 days. The 2020 Finance Act's cattle tax can fund a "Recognition and Redistribution Fund" administered by farmer-pastoralist councils. Budget lines are moral statements.

This four-dimensional model answers Metz's (2011) concern that *Ubuntu* lacks institutional articulation, and Zurn's (2015) concern that Honneth lacks political economy. It provides legislation, pedagogy, epistemology, and budgeting criteria.

7. Conclusion: Recognition as the Ethical Infrastructure of Peace

Conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt, and across pluralistic societies, is not reducible to interests. It is a moral protest against violated recognition. Honneth's theory decodes that grammar, but its liberal-individualist horizon limits its hearing in African life-worlds. Through philosophical hermeneutics, we have fused Honneth with *Ubuntu* and *Omo Oluwabi*, yielding recognition as relational restoration.

To recognise, in this reconstructed sense, is to do four things simultaneously: (a) affirm shared humanity through communal care, (b) include in decision-making through participatory duty, (c) honour contributions to harmony through esteem, and (d) secure life-worlds materially through redistribution. In Yoruba, it is to say, "*Mo ri o, omo iya mi*," "I see you, child of my mother." In *Ubuntu*, it is to enact, "*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*."

In policy terms, it means replacing military checkpoints with palaver, replacing land decrees with *dambe*, replacing victimhood with deliberative agency. Without such recognition, ceasefires collapse and development breeds resentment. With it, conflict becomes convertible into moral energy for rebuilding.

In societies fractured by identity, recognition is not charity, not "political correctness," not a luxury for times of peace. It is the ethical infrastructure of coexistence. It is, in the end, how we become human together. And until we see one another, we will continue to kill one another. Recognition is the name of that seeing. It is the beginning of peace.

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