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**AFRICAN MUSIC AS A MODE OF REASONING EXPRESSION,  
REPRESENTATION, AND RESISTANCE IN SONIC PHILOSOPHY**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines African music within a broader African philosophical continuum, arguing that musical practice functions not merely as sound or artistic expression but as a form of philosophical engagement through which ontology, knowledge, humanistic values, and ethical resistance are articulated in lived, communal contexts. Utilising the insights of J. H. Kwabena Nketia, Kofi Agawu, Jude Onebunne, Ikechukwu Kanu, and Eunice Ibekwe, this study reconceptualises African music as a dynamic form of knowledge—an intellectual exploration articulated through sound. The initial segment elucidates music as a dynamic ontology, illustrating how rhythmic frameworks and ritualistic performances encapsulate metaphysical continuities among the human, spiritual, and cosmic domains. The second delves into music as a repository of cultural memory, serving as a moral archive that safeguards communal identity and values through the passage of generations and across diasporas. The third explores resistance through the lens of philosophy, scrutinising Afrobeat, Chimurenga, and South African struggle songs as decolonial expressions that transform rhythm into a form of ethical defiance. The fourth section juxtaposes academic frameworks to uncover the diverse African listening methodologies, subsequently transitioning to a contemplative examination of composition as a form of philosophical practice. This paper posits that the integration of theory and creative practice reveals that African music encapsulates the essence of life, intertwining existence, memory, and liberation through the medium of vibration. The conclusion drawn is that the future of African philosophy should integrate music not merely as a supplementary element to thought, but as a fundamental expression of it: a mode of reasoning that is experienced through sound, emotion, and existence.

**Keywords**

African philosophy, sonic ontology, decolonial aesthetics, Ubuntu, music and identity, African epistemology, philosophy through sound

## **Introduction: Music Beyond Sound**

African music transcends mere sound or entertainment; it embodies a profound philosophy interwoven with ritual, social structure, spirituality, and the essence of communal existence. African music transcends mere accompaniment to experience; it encapsulates the essence of experience, articulating cosmologies, histories, and social realities with profound depth. It operates as a mode of existence and understanding, while also serving as a means of opposition, encapsulating shared memory, identity, and the continuity of culture. In numerous cultural traditions, music functions as a vibrant repository that safeguards indigenous philosophies while facilitating the expression and transmission of communal values and struggles (Onebunne & Kanu, 2022).

In this research, the term “African music” encompasses not only traditional or precolonial musical forms but also contemporary expressions. It encompasses a wide and dynamic range of musical practices developed by African composers, performers, and communities within indigenous, art-music, popular, sacred, diasporic, and hybrid contexts. Contemporary African music encompasses compositions created within Western harmonic frameworks, experimental modalities, and global genres, alongside rhythm-focused and community-oriented traditions. The commonality among these varied expressions lies not in stylistic consistency but in a collective philosophical stance that emphasizes relationality, participation, ethical awareness, memory, and social significance. This paper argues that African music should be viewed as a dynamic intellectual continuum rather than a static traditional category.

Engaging with African music presents an experience of contemplation in dynamic form. Drum patterns serve as a medium for social communication, choral structures embody communal ethics, and tonal expression reflects the rhythmic qualities of indigenous languages. Music transcends mere entertainment within the confines of Western aesthetics; it embodies a mode of existence: a cosmology expressed through cadence, a historical narrative conveyed in harmony, and a repository of memory articulated through vibration. It maintains a sense of ethical awareness while addressing the challenges of cultural erasure and the impacts of colonial disruption (Onebunne & Kanu, 2022; Ibekwe, 2020).

This paper posits that African music serves as a dynamic philosophical framework: an auditory medium through which identity is constructed, knowledge is conveyed, and acts of

resistance are performed. It illustrates that African music transcends being a mere cultural artefact; rather, it serves as a domain of intellectual engagement that contemplates existence, embodies shared realities, and contests established frameworks (Nketia, 2005; Agawu, 2016). This study engages with the contributions of notable African musicologists and philosophers such as J. H. Kwabena Nketia, Kofi Agawu, Jude Onebunne, Ikechukwu Kanu, and Eunice Ibekwe to explore the ways in which African sonic traditions fulfil three philosophical roles: articulating ontology, embodying identity, and challenging domination. These viewpoints illustrate that African music should not merely be examined as a mere reflection of philosophy, but rather as a distinct system of philosophical reasoning in its own right (Agawu, 2003; Onebunne & Kanu, 2023).

Recent academic inquiry has progressively organized the interplay between music and philosophy through various disciplinary perspectives. The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy (2020) delineate a discourse that encompasses historical musicology, music theory, ethnomusicology, analytic philosophy of music, and continental philosophy of music (McAuley et al., 2020). Although these frameworks primarily originate from Western intellectual traditions, they offer a valuable framework for contextualizing philosophical exploration of music as a human practice. This research contributes to the wider discourse from an African perspective, emphasizing ethnomusicology and expanding philosophical inquiry into the ontological, ethical, and epistemic aspects of African musical practices.

The discourse progresses through four interconnected phases. Initially, it investigates the ways in which African music articulates cosmological and existential concepts, anchoring existence in auditory experience. Secondly, it explores the ways in which music encodes and conveys notions of identity, memory, and collective ethics. Third, it examines the function of music in the context of decolonial resistance and the preservation of culture. Ultimately, it participates in academic discussions to recover African music from simplistic ethnographic interpretations, framing it instead as a self-expressive intellectual heritage (Ibekwe, 2013; Agawu, 2016).

## **Sound as Being: African Music and the Philosophy of Existence**

In African philosophical thought, sound is not merely a sensory phenomenon but a fundamental expression of existence. Sonic ontology, in this context, refers to the understanding of sound as a living force through which being reveals, affirms, and sustains itself. Sound does not simply represent reality; it actualizes it, linking human life to spiritual and cosmic dimensions.

This worldview is embedded in traditional African cosmologies articulated by scholars such as Idowu (1973), Mbiti (1969), and Opoku (1978). Idowu (1973) characterizes African cosmology as a harmonious monism in which all forms of existence: human, natural, ancestral, and divine are interconnected. Within this metaphysical structure, music operates as a vibrational bridge that binds the visible and invisible realms. Mbiti (1969) affirms this relational view, describing African existence as a continuum in which the living and the spiritual coexist in ongoing interaction. Opoku (1978) further explains that this cosmological order is accessed ritually through sound; among the Akan, for example, rhythmic drumming invokes *sunsum* (spirit) and *ntoro* (life force), allowing individuals to align themselves with the cosmic rhythm of creation and renewal.

Building on these religious and metaphysical foundations, Nketia (1974, 1981) and Agawu (1992, 2003) demonstrate that African musical traditions embody philosophical insight. Nketia (1974) shows that indigenous musical practice is “a mode of participation in the existential order,” especially in rituals of passage where music mediates transitions between life and death. The *atumpan* (talking drum) exemplifies this ontological function. Through tonal speech, it communicates with the ancestral realm, affirming continuity between generations and restoring social harmony in moments of disruption (Nketia, 1981).

Agawu (2003), however, critiques the reduction of African music to rhythmic complexity in Western scholarship. Such analysis, he argues, isolates musical form from its ontological and cultural significance. Instead, Agawu (1992) proposes an interpretive approach that “listens ontologically,” hearing African music as a mode of thought rather than a technical object of study. His call for the “re-presentation” of African music reclaims its philosophical voice and resists epistemic distortion.

This philosophy of sound as relational being is further illuminated by *Igwebuike*, a relational ontology developed by Onebunne and Kanu (2020). Derived from the Igbo worldview, *Igwebuike* translates as “strength in unity” and asserts that existence is communal rather than

isolated. “I am because we are, and because we are, I am” (Kanu, 2015) mirrors the sonic structure of African ensemble music. In Ewe *Gahu*, for example, the *atsimevu* master drum does not overpower the ensemble but interlocks with supporting drums to create a coherent polyrhythmic whole. Each part derives meaning only in relation to the others, enacting the logic of collective being (Agawu, 1995; Onebunne & Kanu, 2020).

African rhythmic systems further express this metaphysics of continuity and renewal. Cyclical time, encoded in the 12-pulse bell timeline of *Gahu* (Anku, 2000) and the 16-beat ostinato of Yoruba *dùndún* traditions, rejects linear progress in favor of eternal recurrence. These rhythmic cycles embody the African understanding of life as a continuum of birth, death, and regeneration—not as abstraction, but as sonic ritual.

Thus, African music does not simply comment on existence, it actually performs existence. Its relational structure, cyclical pulse, and ritual function reveal a sonic metaphysics in which sound constitutes being. African music is not philosophy about sound; it is philosophy through sound. To hear, in this worldview, is to participate in the rhythm of life itself: to hear is to be, and to be is to sound.

### **Echoes of Identity: Music as Representation and Cultural Memory**

In African traditions, music functions as a vessel of collective memory, carrying history, values, and identity across generations. Far from being a decorative art, it is a living archive through which societies preserve and transmit cultural consciousness. Through songs, rhythms, and performance, communities recount their origins, codify moral lessons, and maintain social cohesion (Nketia, 1974). Among the Mande of West Africa, for example, the griot is not merely a musician but a custodian of memory. Through praise poetry and genealogical recitations, griots transmit historical knowledge and shape moral imagination, turning performance into a philosophical engagement with the past.

However, as Agawu (2003) cautions, academic interpretations often distort such traditions by reducing them to technical rhythmic patterns or exotic cultural artifacts. This analytical detachment overlooks the fact that African music is not simply expressive—it is epistemic. Even Agawu acknowledges that scholarship often fails to hear what African musicians know intuitively: music is memory embodied. In African thought, remembering is not passive

recollection but an active reaffirmation of identity. Thus, music does not merely represent culture—it enacts it.

This ontological link between being and remembering is evident in Nketia's (1974) analysis of drum language. The Yoruba *dùndún*, for instance, does more than communicate linguistic phrases; it performs a philosophy of continuity between self, community, and ancestry. Its tonal sequences encode proverbs, oral histories, and moral teachings, transforming rhythm into speech and sound into thought. Through this sonic discourse, the drum preserves identity by maintaining a constant dialogue between the present and the ancestral past. In this way, music is not just cultural memory, it is memory sounding itself.

Ibekwe (2018) extends this view by describing African music as a moral archive, a repository of ethical consciousness. Songs do not only preserve history; they instruct, warn, and guide. War songs reinforce courage and solidarity; initiation music encodes moral responsibility; lullabies transmit communal wisdom. Music becomes a form of ethical philosophy in action, reminding the community that to remember through sound is also to remain accountable to shared values.

The same philosophical logic of sound as cultural memory travels beyond the continent into the African diaspora. Reggae and Afrobeat, though shaped by new social realities, sustain Africa's sonic philosophy of identity and resistance. King (2002) notes that reggae, rooted in African rhythm and Rastafari theology, frames music as a tool of spiritual and political liberation. In Bob Marley's *Redemption Song*, the injunction to “emancipate yourselves from mental slavery” becomes a philosophical call to reclaim ancestral memory through sound (Manuel & Marshall, 2006). Similarly, Veal (2000) argues that Fela Kuti's Afrobeat fuses Yoruba aesthetics with jazz harmony and polyrhythm to create a sonic critique of oppression. Both genres function as transnational philosophies, that is sound essays of survival and cultural continuity.

Through these diasporic echoes, African music composes a continuous meditation on memory, belonging, and freedom. It resists historical erasure by transforming collective struggle into rhythmic endurance. To listen to African music, whether on the continent or in the diaspora, is to enter an act of remembrance. Each song is an echo of identity; each rhythm a witness to history. To sing is to exist again—to recover the self from silence.

### **Songs That Speak Back: Resistance and Philosophical Defiance**

In African political and ethical philosophy, music functions as a vital mode of resistance that challenges domination, restores dignity, and affirms collective moral values. Through rhythm, poetic language, symbolism, and performance, African musicians transform sound into a philosophical medium of defiance and social critique. This section examines how Fela Kuti's Afrobeat, Thomas Mapfumo's Chimurenga music, and South African struggle songs operate as sonic resistance. These forms of musical protest do not merely express dissent. They also enact decolonial thought grounded in African philosophical traditions. Agawu describes this as the recovery of musical consciousness, while Onebunne refers to it as Igwebuike, which is the African ethic of collective strength and communal agency. Protest music in Africa therefore becomes more than an artistic response to oppression. It emerges as a living ethical and epistemic project that restores moral authority to oppressed communities.

Fela Kuti's Afrobeat represents one of the most compelling examples of nonviolent philosophical protest. Through satire, multilingual expression, and African rhythmic structures, songs such as *Zombie* and *International Thief Thief* condemned military brutality and postcolonial corruption in Nigeria. Influenced by the revolutionary thought of Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X, Kuti developed what Balogun and Oladipo (2023) describe as a Pan African consciousness expressed through rhythm, performance, and political critique. His philosophy of resistance rejected physical violence and emphasized ethical transformation. The symbolic creation of the Kalakuta Republic signified a rejection of imposed colonial identity and an assertion of cultural sovereignty. By adopting the name Anikulapo, which means the one who holds death in his pouch, Kuti dramatized mastery over destiny and affirmed self-determination. Balogun (2023) explains that his art united protest, persuasion, and intervention through indigenous ethical traditions that privileged communal harmony over violent confrontation. In his Shrine performances, music became a civic forum where citizens were mobilized toward social justice and political accountability. Afrobeat therefore emerged as a music of conscience that confronted oppression through moral defiance.

Thomas Mapfumo's Chimurenga music in Zimbabwe carries a similar intellectual and ethical force. The term Chimurenga means struggle, and Mapfumo rooted this struggle in both political critique and ancestral wisdom. By blending Shona traditional musical idioms with modern instrumentation, he created a musical philosophy that advanced liberation and cultural renewal. During the Zimbabwean war of independence, songs such as *Pfumvu*

*Paruzevha* and *Tumirai Vana Kuhondo* inspired collective resistance while grounding action in the moral authority of ancestral tradition (Marara, 2023). After independence, Mapfumo confronted new forms of injustice. Songs such as *Corruption* and *Mamvemve* criticized the moral decay of postcolonial governance. Muranda, Chimbudzi, and Maguraushe (2022) observe that his lyrics, rooted in Shona proverbs and moral reasoning, offered indirect but powerful critiques of political hypocrisy. His music embodies the ethics of Ubuntu which affirms human dignity, communal justice, and social responsibility. Mapfumo paid the price for truth telling through political exile, which illustrates the ethical burden carried by artists who challenge injustice. Through Chimurenga, he demonstrated that music can be a form of civic duty and philosophical reflection on justice.

This spirit of moral defiance also defines South African struggle songs from the apartheid era. Freedom songs such as *Ndodemnyama we Verwoerd* and *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* united diverse communities in collective protest and sustained hope under conditions of violent racial oppression. According to Schumann (2008), these songs shaped political consciousness and mobilized both nonviolent resistance and armed struggle. The accompanying toyi toyi dance transformed collective movement into political expression and provided psychological strength for oppressed communities. Schumann describes this phenomenon as a weapon available to the vulnerable that converted weakness into resistance. Vershbow (2010) adds that struggle songs preserved history and constructed alternative realities in the face of censorship and forced silence. Songs such as *Meadowlands* documented the trauma of forced removals while maintaining communal hope. These performances affirmed the ethics of Ubuntu by upholding solidarity, interdependence, and shared humanity. In these communal spaces, song became the conscience of the freedom struggle and a catalyst for social transformation.

The philosophical implications of African protest music are illuminated by the theoretical contributions of Kofi Agawu, Eunice Ibekwe, and Jude Onebunne. Agawu (2009) argues that African music must be interpreted on its own cultural terms rather than through Western theoretical frameworks. He calls for a decolonial recovery of African musical consciousness that centres African agency. In a similar way, Ibekwe (2014) extends decolonial thinking into music education by critiquing Eurocentric curricula that elevate Western notation over African musical knowledge systems. She advocates participatory learning rooted in community, memory, and oral heritage, a pedagogy that echoes the ethics of Ubuntu which

values inclusivity and shared knowledge. Onebunne (2019) advances the philosophy of Igwebuike, which emphasizes unity of purpose and relational existence as sources of strength. His framework rejects epistemic oppression and affirms communal knowing as a path to liberation. These philosophies converge in arguing that music is a site of resistance that challenges domination and restores cultural agency.

In conclusion, African protest music is a form of nonviolent action and a reclamation of historical voice. Fela Kuti ridiculed authoritarianism through irony. Mapfumo confronted injustice through ancestral wisdom. South African freedom singers transformed grief into collective strength. As Vershbow (2010) notes, this music gives voice to the disenfranchised and restores their humanity. Through melody, rhythm, and communal expression, African protest music resists oppressive power and asserts moral truth. It functions as a living philosophy of defiance and a practice of ethical thought. To sing in this tradition is to act, to think, and to uphold freedom through sound.

### **Listening Through Different Ears: Scholarly Method and Philosophical Divergence**

To listen to African music is to enter a dialogue of philosophies. Each rhythm, melodic pattern, and call-and-response embodies a world of meaning. Yet these meanings change with the interpretive lens that hears them. This chapter argues that listening through different scholarly perspectives, such as those of Kofi Agawu, J. H. Kwabena Nketia, Jude I. Onebunne, Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, and Eunice U. Ibekwe, reveals the plural nature of African sonic philosophy. These frameworks do not merely interpret music differently. Together they construct a composite epistemology of sound in which music functions as moral reflection, historical memory, and philosophical inquiry. Listening therefore becomes an act of decolonial critique, ethical participation, relational understanding, and pedagogical reclamation.

Consider a single African song: the eloquent speech of a talking drum echoing across a village gathering, or the insistent voice in Bob Marley's call for continental unity. The same song, heard through different intellectual traditions, becomes a philosophical text. Agawu understands it as a semiotic act of decolonial resistance. Nketia perceives it as an expression of moral and communal responsibility. Onebunne and Kanu hear it as a sonic manifestation of African metaphysics and relational ontology. Ibekwe receives it as oral pedagogy that

transmits indigenous wisdom. Listening through these different ears transforms sound into a site of interpretation, and interpretation into philosophical reflection. In such a listening practice, sound becomes thought and music becomes method.

Kofi Agawu's approach is grounded in semiotics and postcolonial critique. His work challenges the Western academic tradition that has often reduced African music to rhythm or treated it as primitive. Agawu (2003) argues that African music possesses complex tonal systems, rhythmic logic, and symbolic depth that constitute an intellectual language. Listening therefore requires interpretation of musical meaning through cultural and historical context. Agawu does not limit his analysis to musical technique. His scholarship advances an ethics of listening. He argues that decolonial listening demands humility, cultural accountability, and respect for the epistemic authority of African musical traditions (Agawu, 1992, 2023). In this sense, the encoded language of a talking drum or Marley's refrain "Africa Unite" becomes a statement of philosophical and moral protest. Agawu transforms listening into an ethical act that restores African agency and challenges colonial narratives.

Where Agawu listens for symbolic meaning, J. H. Kwabena Nketia listens for lived experience. His ethnomusicological philosophy emphasizes that the meaning of African music is rooted not in abstract analysis but in communal participation (Nketia, 1962, 1974, 2005). Music, for Nketia, is a reflection of African social ontology. It is a practice that performs moral values such as cooperation, respect, and social responsibility. A drum ensemble is not merely a musical performance. It is a social institution that requires discipline, interdependence, and unity among its performers. Nketia challenges Western separations between art and life by showing that in African cultures, the aesthetic is inseparable from the ethical. Listening, from this perspective, is not passive observation. It is active participation in shared meaning. Knowledge arises through engagement, through rhythm that is both heard and lived.

Jude I. Onebunne and Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu build on this foundation by exploring African music through the metaphysical lens of Igwebuiké, which affirms unity and relational existence. Igwebuiké expresses the idea that being is communal and that existence is sustained through interdependence (Onebunne, 2019; Onebunne and Kanu, 2022). Music becomes a powerful expression of this ontology. Every instrument in an ensemble depends on others to form coherence. The relationship between soloist and chorus mirrors the African understanding of self within community. Listening therefore becomes a metaphysical act that

reveals the relational fabric of reality. Freedom songs such as Marley's "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery" embody both individual awakening and collective liberation. Through Igwebuike, Onebunne and Kanu reveal that African music carries a philosophy of unity, harmony, and shared destiny.

Eunice U. Ibekwe extends the philosophy of listening into education and knowledge transmission. She argues that African music is a form of oral literature that preserves history, ethical values, and communal identity (Ibekwe, 2013, 2017). Each song is both a repository of memory and a tool of instruction. Through proverb, metaphor, and narrative, music teaches as it entertains. Ibekwe rejects the colonial hierarchy that privileges written knowledge over oral tradition. She insists that oral music traditions are legitimate and rigorous forms of knowledge. Her work exemplifies epistemic justice by restoring value to African modes of learning. Under this lens, listening becomes a form of study. The performer becomes a historian and philosopher. The audience becomes a community of learners.

Across these interpretive frameworks a rich scholarly conversation emerges. Agawu restores African musical agency and the ethics of decolonial interpretation. Nketia situates music within the moral life of the community. Onebunne and Kanu emphasize the metaphysics of relational existence. Ibekwe reveals the educational and archival power of oral performance. Their perspectives do not compete but instead harmonize into a collective understanding of African sonic philosophy. Each expands the meaning of listening and demonstrates that African music is not a cultural artefact that belongs to the past. It is a dynamic philosophical medium that shapes identity, critiques injustice, sustains memory, and transmits wisdom.

To listen through different ears is therefore to practice African philosophy itself. It is to recognise that knowledge in African thought is dialogical and relational. It is carried in song, rhythm, breath, and memory. African music shows that thinking does not only occur on the written page. It lives in vibration, participation, and collective expression. African sonic philosophy teaches that truth is heard, felt, and shared. It calls for a way of listening that is attentive, humble, and open to wisdom that moves beyond words.

### **Composing Thought: Personal Reflections of a Scholar-Musician**

This reflection explores my identity as both composer and philosopher, a dual vocation that is not decorative but essential. Composition, for me, is not merely an artistic craft. It is a mode

of inquiry and a philosophical method. As Addaquay (2025) argues, music in the African worldview does not simply express emotion but generates knowledge, shapes moral consciousness, and interprets existence through sound. In that sense, my compositional process becomes a form of thinking, questioning, and seeking truth. This chapter reflects on my composition *Freedom Forever* as a case study in African sonic philosophy, demonstrating how music can enact ontology, relational ethics, resistance, and spiritual reality.

This chapter adopts a practice-as-research approach supported by autoethnographic reflection. My own musical practice serves as a source of philosophical evidence. Through reflective analysis, I articulate the philosophical concepts embedded in my work and demonstrate how composition in the African tradition functions as a site of theoretical production. This approach allows artistic experience to enter into dialogue with scholarly thought.

Philosophy in the African worldview is not detached speculation. It is lived, embodied, and communal. African philosophical thought emerges from relational ontology, an understanding expressed in the concepts of Ubuntu, which is the affirmation that a person exists through other persons, and Igwebuikwe, which means unity is strength. These frameworks affirm that existence is shared and that knowledge is co-created. Within this context my work as a composer is inseparable from cultural meaning and social responsibility. I do not compose in isolation. I compose within a living tradition of communal wisdom, ancestral memory, and spiritual consciousness.

My composition *Freedom Forever* for string ensemble embodies this relational philosophy of music. The work was inspired by a church camp concert themed *Liberation: Thou Art Loosed*. In this piece I integrate three Twi liberation songs:

- Halleluya me wo fa ho di meaning *Hallelujah, I have freedom*
- Onua kyere me w'anigye meaning *I found joy when I met the Lord*
- Anigye ben na m'anya meaning *I have heavenly peace and freedom*

These songs are not mere melodies. They are narrative philosophies that wrestle with the human struggle for liberation, both spiritual and existential. They express hope after adversity, the triumph of communal resilience, and the belief that freedom is a shared

journey. Each song carries historical and spiritual memory, transforming sound into testimony.

African musical logic is grounded in participation. Sound is not private expression but communal energy. During the performance of *Freedom Forever*, I invited the audience to sing and hum along. By doing so, I rejected the Western concert tradition of passive observation and embraced African participatory aesthetics. In that moment, music became ontology. Existence was affirmed through shared sound. Composer, performer, and listener were united in one experience. This is Igwebuike enacted in sound, a sonic demonstration that freedom cannot be isolated. It must be shared to be real.

To compose within African tradition is to accept ethical responsibility. Music in African philosophy carries moral weight. It is a force that shapes behaviour and social values. My choice to centre Twi liberation songs was a conscious ethical decision. It was an act of cultural affirmation, spiritual witness, and artistic resistance. African aesthetics values beauty, but beauty is inseparable from purpose. True beauty must uplift the community. Through this work I assume the role of cultural custodian. I honour the songs of my heritage while translating them into a contemporary orchestral language.

Inviting communal participation in composition also means accepting vulnerability. There was uncertainty in inviting the audience to sing. There was risk in introducing an indigenous language into a classical setting. Yet this vulnerability is itself philosophical. It affirms relational responsibility and shared truth. To compose is to trust others and to create space for many interpretations. *Freedom Forever* became a conversation in sound rather than a performance to be consumed. In that moment music became a form of human connection.

The work also participates in African traditions of musical resistance. Freedom in this piece is not only a religious theme. It is also a commentary on social and historical liberation. It speaks to cultural trauma, postcolonial identity, and the human struggle for justice and belonging. In this sense *Freedom Forever* aligns with the legacy of African liberation music. It shares continuity with South African freedom songs, Bob Marley's liberation anthems, and Fela Kuti's musical defiance. Music becomes a form of protest that does not destroy but heals. It becomes resistance through hope.

Through this reflection I affirm that composition is philosophy. It is not separate from inquiry. It is itself a method of inquiry. Through composition I ask questions of being, identity, truth, and freedom. Music becomes a way of knowing. It thinks through sound and reveals wisdom beyond words. As I continue in my journey as a scholar-musician, I embrace this call. I compose not only to express but to understand. I compose not only to move emotion but to shape thought. Through music I continue to become, African, human, becoming free.

### **Conclusion: The Future of African Sonic Philosophy**

African sonic philosophy affirms that music in Africa is not merely an artistic practice. It is a mode of theorising existence, community and reality. Recent research in music and philosophy has shown that philosophical engagement with music inherently spans multiple disciplinary domains, including historical, theoretical, ethnomusicological, analytic, and continental perspectives. As outlined in *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy* (2020), these disciplines collectively form the modern discourse on music and philosophy (McAuley et al., 2020). African music philosophy extends beyond the scope of ethnomusicology, despite its fundamental significance, and must also incorporate ontological, analytical, and critical approaches rooted in African intellectual traditions. Positioning African musical practices within this pluralistic discourse affirms music as a valid form of philosophical inquiry and broadens global discussions beyond their primarily Western paradigms.

The central argument developed in this study is that African music does not simply accompany life but interprets, critiques and structures it. It is therefore both a lived philosophy and an epistemological system encoded in rhythm, melody, performance and communal participation. As Agawu (2003) and Nzewi (2007) observe, sound functions in African thought as a bearer of meaning and as a medium through which metaphysical, social and ethical realities are enacted and understood.

The musical traditions of Mandé griots, who preserve historical memory through narrative performance, and Yoruba *bàtá* drummers, who communicate with the *Òriṣà* through tonal drumming, are not merely cultural expressions. They are philosophical enactments. These practices demonstrate that African music is cognitive. It renders being audible and intelligible. These sonic traditions embody ontology because they affirm that existence in

African thought is relational and vibrational. They express ethics by reinforcing communal responsibility through performance. They situate humanity within a spiritual cosmos where sound mediates between the visible and the invisible.

African music has also functioned as a language of resistance across history. Ballantine (1993) explains that liberation songs during the struggle against apartheid in South Africa were not only political tools. They were philosophical articulations of freedom, hope and metaphysical defiance. African American spirituals communicated a theology of survival and a critique of oppression. Contemporary Afrobeats continues this intellectual legacy by expressing postcolonial identity, agency and social critique. Even the musical structures themselves carry philosophical meaning. Polyrhythm affirms the coexistence of multiple yet interdependent realities. Call and response reflects communal dialogue and shared truth. Ensemble performance affirms that being is constituted in relation to others.

These ideas are also present in African philosophy. Ramose (1999) explains that Ubuntu teaches that personhood is achieved through ethical interdependence. Kanu (2016) defines Igwebuiké as the principle that strength is achieved through unity. Ubuntu grounds relationality in moral responsibility, while Igwebuiké emphasises existential complementarity. This distinction enriches African metaphysics and clarifies why African ensemble music does not elevate individual virtuosity above collective harmony. Sonic performance functions as an audible expression of African philosophical anthropology.

The future of African philosophy must therefore recognise music as a legitimate medium of knowledge. This requires expanding philosophical methodology beyond the written text to include oral and performative epistemologies. As Euba (1990) and Nketia (1974) argue, African musical systems contain theories of time, morality and transcendence. Engaging African music philosophically does not abandon textual philosophy. It extends the boundaries of philosophical knowledge by including embodied, communal and creative modes of reasoning. African sonic philosophy therefore challenges the narrow limits of Eurocentric epistemology and contributes to a broader understanding of reason.

Advancing this field requires sustained interdisciplinary dialogue among African philosophy, ethnomusicology, decolonial studies and performance theory. It also requires the recognition of creative practice as a method of inquiry. Composition, improvisation and performance are not only artistic processes. They are forms of theorising. Sonic creation becomes a way of

generating and transmitting knowledge about reality, identity and human relationships. African sonic philosophy therefore belongs not only in academic writing but also in sound, rhythm and performance. Knowledge must be listened to as well as read, and philosophy must be performed as well as written.

African sonic philosophy endures because it is rooted in memory, community and spiritual continuity. It is a living knowledge system that listens as it speaks and remembers as it renews. Its survival does not depend on archival preservation but on continued practice. As long as drums speak, voices unite in song and rhythm calls humanity to its shared essence, African philosophy will remain alive in sound. The Akan proverb says, “When words fail, the talking drum speaks.” The future of African thought depends not only on our ability to hear but on our willingness to listen with understanding.

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