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Contextualising Social Cohesion I: An Overview of Concepts in Africa

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JRF

MEMBER Johannes-Rau-
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Foreword

This discussion paper is part of the research and advisory work on social cohesion of the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS). The project "Social cohesion in Africa" (2018-2023) forms the cornerstone of this work. Social cohesion within societies is a key success factor for sustainable development. However, social cohesion is under pressure in societies in all world regions. The IDOS team therefore aims to identify patterns of social cohesion as well as analyse factors that influence the degree of social cohesion (or its absence) and the effects of social cohesion on development outcomes. It furthermore identifies domestic and international policies that contribute towards the creation and consolidation of social cohesion. In addition to knowledge-creation, the project aims to provide a science–policy interface and dialogue between practitioners. It therefore established the Social Cohesion Hub,[*] which provides a collaborative platform for exchanges on social cohesion in research and development cooperation.

Social cohesion is universal in the sense that there are elements which hold a society together. IDOS captures these elements in its universal concept of social cohesion (Leininger et al., 2021). It draws on the mainstream literature on social cohesion, which has been dominated by Western, mainly sociological thinking. At the same time, how the understanding of social cohesion evolves in specific contexts, and what societies perceive as the most important elements of social cohesion are highly contextual questions. In particular, in the African context, societies and intellectuals have developed powerful concepts of social cohesion, for example "Ubuntu" ("I am because you are"), which is probably one of the most known African concepts. Thus, when aiming to understand and explain social cohesion, scholars need to find a balance between universalism and idiosyncratic realities. The IDOS team thus complemented its universal concept with contextualisations of social cohesion in Africa. One objective of these analyses is to assess whether the universal concept and standardised measurement matches with African realities in different countries or whether it misses out on common features of the understanding of social cohesion across African societies. These analyses comprise two parts:

1. An overview of existing traditional African knowledge, social theories and ethnophilosophical discourses on social cohesion in Africa (**Part I, IDOS Discussion Paper**).

2. A case-based contextualisation of social cohesion that comprises seven case studies, covering Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Rwanda and South Africa (**Part II, IDOS Study**).

We are grateful that outstanding colleagues and experts on specific countries and social cohesion in the African context have accepted our invitation to join this effort. We built a group of scholars who provided texts, engaged in vivid online discussions and met for in-depth exchanges at an authors' workshop held in November 2022 at IDOS in Bonn, Germany.[†] All these insights and rich discussions would not have been possible without the contributions of Francis Agbubilla (case study Cote d'Ivoire), Joseph Chunga (Malawi), Erika Dahlmans (Rwanda), Fundiswa Khaile (South Africa), Sagnane Saïkou Oumar (Guinea), Ghadafi Saibu (Ghana), Eli Wortmann-Kolundžija (overview, Part I) and Yitez Zewda (Ethiopia). We are also very grateful that Man Zhang (University Leipzig) and Klaus Boehnke (Bremen University) commented on our approach and enriched our discussions with their deep insights on social cohesion in Asian and European societies. As always, in our journey on studying social cohesion in Africa, we are indebted to the great team at Afrobarometer, who not only provided reliable data but was also always there to discuss and advise on our research. Many of these amazing

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[*] See https://www.socialcohesion.info

[†] See https://www.idos-research.de/veranstaltungen/details/social-cohesion-in-context/

We hope that our work contributes towards building science–policy interfaces, enriches policy-making and fosters exchange between researchers in different corners of the world. In the best of all worlds, our work shall help others to foster social cohesion in these current times of global polarisation.

Bonn, 27 November 2023   Francesco Burchi, Julia Leininger and Armin von Schiller

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Executive summary

The social fragmentation of societies is one of the greatest challenges for peace, democracy and human rights worldwide. For some years now, observers have been witnessing ever-stronger tendencies towards social division, also in Western societies, which had been believed to be united for so long. Rising inequality, the rejection of previously shared values and growing scepticism towards public institutions suggest that social cohesion is at risk. Against this background, it seems more important than ever to understand what factors hold a society together – and when such cohesion is most vulnerable. Protecting and strengthening social cohesion has therefore become an objective of many activities at the local, national and international levels, and academics have started to develop methodologies on how to measure social cohesion (see, with further references: Leininger et al., 2021).

This paper aims:

- to give a systematic overview of the literature on African concepts of social cohesion;

- to introduce the discourse around African concepts and to see which relevant concepts of social cohesion can be located in African societies;

- to analyse in more detail some key African concepts and their core elements and to see which conceptual dimensions and insights on determinants of social cohesion differ from the mainstream, while inviting scholars to add further to this listing; and, in particular

- to gain a better understanding of the academic discourse on social cohesion in Africa by analysing the concepts, determinants, origins and context of social cohesion theories as well as the risk of Western bias in identifying concepts for social cohesion in the African context.

One of the questions that inspired the present research project is how we could better understand which relevant concepts of social cohesion in African societies are particularly emphasised by African scholars and how "Western" concepts of social cohesion relate to the various African academic approaches to the topic. Further research questions that were raised in the context of the present paper are:

- How can traditional knowledge and African social theories contribute towards contextualising the debate on social cohesion in Africa?

- What are the key aspects of the concepts of social cohesion in selected African countries, and how can these be analysed?

- How did pre-colonial societies in Africa understand social cohesion, and what insights can be gained from this?

Methodologically, we identify and analyse concepts within the African context in order to gain insights into basic elements of social cohesion. This literature review draws on different sources such as ethnophilosophy, political philosophy, religion, culture, economics and international discourses. This literature review is the first part of an assessment of concepts of social cohesion in Africa. It is followed by a systematic comparison of social cohesion concepts in specific African countries.

The academic benefit is to identify the current state of research on social cohesion in Africa, to identify the need for further research and to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of social cohesion. In addition, we aim to deliver developmental value through these publications by helping decision-makers come to evidence-based decisions and synthesise as well as make use of scientific evidence for development practice.

1 Introduction

Why do some societies stick together more than others? How do they overcome critical situations more effectively? Can core elements be found in the African context that have not been sufficiently considered in Western discourse so far? What can we learn from each other to prevent drifting apart?

We assume that significant differences exist across societies in how different factors of social cohesion are valued, on the role societal norms and practices play, how relevant factors interact with each other, to what extent social cohesion depends on interpersonal relationships, and to what extent the relationship between individuals and public institutions matters. Thus, the aim of this paper is to get a better understanding of the academic and political discussions on social cohesion, but also of "community knowledge", particularly in the African context, in order to avoid looking at the concept of social cohesion just from a European or Western perspective. It is, however, an ambitious project, considering the vast amount of thoughts and concepts developed by African academics, politicians, intellectuals and others. Therefore, this literature review and analysis might just be the beginning and should be understood as laying the ground for further research within this field. The literature review illustrates that various factors have shaped the current academic discourse on social cohesion in Africa. Two influences in particular stand out, namely traditional knowledge and social theories developed by African intellectuals in the context of decolonisation and nation-building. Even if the gain in knowledge by using both sources seems to be enormous, it must be noted on the one hand that the social-cohesion discussion also has to be framed in light of colonialisation, and on the other hand that the goals of intellectuals changed in part when they moved from academia to politics.

In a first step, we identify the sources relevant to studying social cohesion in the African context (see Section 2.1). Here, we first focus on the role of traditional and (often orally) transmitted knowledge, stories or proverbs in relation to social cohesion and the extent to which these are considered valid sources for social cohesion studies. We believe that it is important to consider these traditional sources, even if they must be used with caution. They are often only available to us because third parties have written them down. It is therefore always necessary to ask whether this third party was an objective and neutral observer, or whether he or she may have been pursuing their own (political?) agenda, so that the account may have been altered. In addition, the context of the transmission is missing, that is, what was the reality of life at that time for the person transmitting the knowledge?

A second important source of knowledge on social cohesion is found in certain social theories, (see Section 2.2). We provide an overview of the – in our view – relevant social theories, some of which, however, are politically charged and should therefore also be viewed with caution. The concepts of African humanism and socialism, which relate to numerous approaches of social cohesion, are addressed in this regard. These concepts, which had their heyday in the phase of decolonisation in the second half of the 20th century, may have lost relevance in their original form. Nevertheless, they still seem to be relevant for more modern theories of social cohesion in our view (see e.g. Pointer, 2020): Either because modern theories are oriented towards these same basic ideas – or precisely because they consciously distance themselves from them. Either way, these theories were an important starting point in the development of current schools of thought, which should at least be briefly addressed in the context of this publication for a broader understanding of social cohesion in Africa.

Within Section 3, we outline some of the identified social cohesion concepts. The predominantly tabular listing of the identified concepts serves as a starting point for a first comparative analysis and interpretation. This, in turn, makes it possible to compare and evaluate the respective theories and concepts and see how they relate to Western approaches to social cohesion. In this context, we examine questions in particular on the relational modes of interaction between

the actors involved. Here, three relational dimensions are addressed: state–individual relations, individual–individual relations and the relations between social groups. The objective of this analysis is to develop a basis for further research into African theories of social cohesion in terms of content and methodology. On the one hand, this should make it possible to draw a comparison between different concepts – be it between African concepts themselves or their comparison with Western approaches – and to assist in developing tools for further research on African social cohesion theories. How this analysis can work is illustrated here using various African concepts of social cohesion. A more in-depth analysis of individual concepts, however, is reserved for the seven comparative case studies (Part II).

The academic benefit is to identify the current state of research on contextualising social cohesion in Africa, to identify existing research needs and to deepen understanding about the phenomenon of social cohesion. In addition, the authors aim to provide developmental value through these publications by helping decision-makers come to evidence-based decisions and synthesise as well as make use of scientific evidence for development practice.

2 An introduction to academic discourses on social cohesion in the African context

The description of the phenomenon of "social cohesion" in an African context requires the collection of various sources. In the African context, these are, on the one hand, ethnophilosophical and political philosophy, but also others such as political,[1] religious, cultural (e.g. literary, indigenous knowledge, archaeological findings) and economic works[2] as well as international discourses.[3]

In this section, the aspects of understanding social cohesion in the African context – which we outlined in the introduction – are further elaborated. This review illustrates that existing literature and academic discourses focussing on and highlighting the relevance of social cohesion (even if this term is not always used) is extremely rich and multi-faceted. Second, the literature review is the foundation of further empirical examination of social cohesion concepts in selected African countries.[4] We proceed with the assumption that a lot of the global literature on social theories addressed in this sub-section, in particular on African socialism and humanism, have in one way or the other influenced the social cohesion theories in many African countries. Finally, this literature review also aims to identify and cluster certain elements, dimensions and relationships that have been frequently used in the respective literature (Section 3).

2.1 The role of traditional sources of knowledge for social cohesion studies in Africa

2.1.1 Social theories

The consideration of African social theories and ideologies is important to contextualise the debate on social cohesion insofar as they often refer to pre-colonial social structures. Due to

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1 For further literature on the subject, see Mamdani (1996), Mbembe (2001) and Lonsdale (2013).

2 For further literature on the subject, see Lopes (2019) and Stiglitz (2017).

3 For further literature on the subject, see Ferguson (2006), Mamdani (2009), Mkandawire (2010) and Moyo (2009).

4 See upcoming IDOS Study.

their analytical–scientific character, they offer a complement to ethnophilosophical discourses in the depiction of African, pre-colonial societies, which mainly rely on oral traditions, indigenous knowledge systems and anthropological studies (Mutekwe, 2015). Therefore, in this context, they serve as historical documents that are mainly consulted for their descriptions of pre-colonial societies. For example, social theories can describe (traditional) structures, systems, ideas and dynamics that they consider crucial to support human society and its cohesion. However, these descriptions of social realities should only be taken as a starting point for further research, as the respective country-specific social theories have been mixed with the authors' political agenda(s), and some descriptions of social elements have been idealised and politically interpreted to promote certain political goals (Mbembe, 2001; Ranger, 1993).

The partial consideration of social theories is also important for the present discussion paper in that, according to Sangmpam (2008), African societies are often lineage societies and differ from capitalist and other types of societies, primarily in terms of (obligatory) ideological rituals. In his view, these ideological rituals regulate the daily and direct property relations as well as the private and public relations between the individual, the groups and the state.

2.1.2 Traditional knowledge and ethnophilosophy

Another relevant source for the study of social cohesion in the African context is traditional knowledge – often transmitted orally for generations and in proverbs, stories and rhymes – the analysis of which is attributed to the ethnophilosophical approach. Kwame Nkrumah was instrumental in forming and sharpening the ethnophilosophical approach with his analyses of "myths, folktales, beliefs, proverbs, and languages and institutions" (Kasanda, 2015, p. 36). Dasaolu and Fayemi added sources such as "fable, legends, stories, beliefs, songs and dances, liturgies and rituals, pithy sayings, riddles and adages, ideas, social attitudes, conventions, institutions and customs" as well as "personal poems and testimonies, maxims, drum texts and art motifs" (Dasaolu & Fayemi, 2015, pp. 58 and 66; Ndabiseruye, 2002). In these "cosmologies of traditional African societies and their belief systems" (Agada, 2019), Nkrumah saw the "traditional wisdom" hidden and thereby described a metaphysical system and an ideology that formed "the quintessential African approach to the world" (Kasanda, 2015). Other prominent ethnophilosophers included L. S. Senghor and Julius Nyerere. Ethnophilosophy becomes philosophy when the above-mentioned traditional sources are understood as a constitutive starting point of philosophising that is scientifically analysed and contextualised (Kimmerle, 1997, p. 47, in Dasaolu & Fayemi, 2015, p. 61).

These oral transmissions serve to provide indications of relevant elements of social cohesion and extract them for further use. However, these traditional sources must also be used with caution, as they are often only available to us because third parties have written them down and we do not know their motives or the realities of their lives. Particularly in view of the fact that ethnophilosophical research is concerned with using the knowledge gain inherent in traditional knowledge to free knowledge about African pre- and post-colonial cultures from existing epistemological and cultural-imperialist overlays, an investigation of these sources could offer rich insights (Kasanda, 2015). It is particularly illuminating for our research to look at pre-colonial societies and their understanding of social cohesion, as these seemed to be defined by a particularly strong sense of connection, responsibility, and striving for mutual well-being and social justice within the clans. This demonstrates shared values, celebrated customs and practices, collective decision-making and actions, implemented social institutions, etc. (Gyekye, 1996; Mbiti, 1991). Post-colonial societies, on the other hand, paint especially a picture that provides information about the long-lasting destructive influences of the colonial powers on traditional socio-cultural and institutional structures, among other things, so it could be more

difficult here to find originary definitions of the term "social cohesion" in African societies[5] (Fanon, 1963).

We know from ethnophilosophical research that the pursuit of the common good (Mbiti, 1991; Tutu, 1999), tolerance and respect, including for nature (Bullard, Agyeman, & Evans, 2003; Mudimbe, 1988; Wiredu, 1980), supportive family and social structures (Gyekye, 1996; Tempels, 1959), and functioning social institutions that enable social justice for each clan member (Gyekye, 1997; Wiredu, 1996) were arguably high values in pre-colonial societies. Numerous African philosophers argue that proverbs were the way elders expressed their wisdom (Achebe, 1958; Gyekye, 1996). Therefore, similar to Dasaolu and Fayemi (2015), we think that oral tradition has an intellectual significance that is indispensable for understanding history, culture, religion and philosophy and that is also indispensable to the analysis and understanding of social developments.[6]

For example, proverbs that address social cohesion emphasise the interdependence of clan members,[7] the relevance of uniting forces and collective action,[8] and that society is the identity-forming foundation of human beings.[9] Atabavikpo (2002) presents the cultural significance of paroemias – short and witty sayings – in society and emphasises that, among other reasons, they should be more widely used in scholarship as a form of gnomic poetry. From his West African research of the "Òló" (proverb) and "Òhànló" (proverb song) of the Sáxwè and Igbo, he deduces that most paroemias are culturally historical, as their creation relates to socially, artistically, temporally and spatially antecedent events of a culture (Atabavikpo, 2002).[10]

Proverbs generally have an intellectual, affective, aesthetic or directional function, for example to express rebuke and remind people of social norms (Atabavikpo, 2002). Both Sáxwè and Igbo proverbs place their proverbs in an "animistic world" and frame them as spells, philosophical questions or questions about one's identity (Atabavikpo, 2002). Thematically, the Sáxwè proverbs tend to focus on, for example, customs, health, unity, destiny and values, whereas the Igbo proverbs often consider social advancement, ancestral power, social hierarchy, the individual, etc. (Atabavikpo, 2002). The Sáxwè and the Igbo see the human being as a wanderer between this world and the hereafter who should follow his individual divine destiny.

"A significant aspect of Igbo theology is the belief that at birth, each person acquires a chi or a spiritual double" (Innes, 1990, in Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 264). The Sáxwè see it the same way, calling this spiritual protective god "èsé" (Atabavikpo, 2002, pp. 305-306). This personal protective spirit can be provoked if one does not adhere to the rules of life[11] of his society and the laws of nature (Gbégnonvi, 1985, p. 207, in Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 265):

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5   For further literature on the subject, see Rodney (1972), Mamdani (1996), Smith (2005), Obadare (2018) and Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002).

6   "Oral tradition to the peoples in pre-literate societies, is many things rolled into one, including religion, knowledge, the natural science, apprenticeship in craft, history, etc., with a view to re-enacting the past" (Akinyoola, Akano, & Oyatowo, 2009, p. 187, in Dasaolu & Fayemi, 2015, p. 58); "Oral tradition provides the most important source of data for any serious study of the cultural beliefs and practices" (Omolafe, 1996, p. 1, in Dasaolu & Fayemi, 2015, p. 58).

7   Zulu proverb: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Tutu, 1999); Ghanaian proverb: "One hand cannot wash itself" (Wiredu, 1996).

8   African proverb: "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together" (Asante, 1987); Congolese proverb: "A single bracelet does not jingle" (Mbiti, 1970).

9   Ugandan proverb: "A person is a person through other people" (Gyekye, 1996).

10 Leopold Sédar Senghor refers to metaphorical images as: "Images simples, [...] dont la force est qu'elles sont empruntées au terroir: aux animaux, aux plantes, aux phénomènes de la nature, à la vie de nos paysans" (Atabavikpo, 2002).

11 The Fon in Benin refer to these rules of life as "GBɛ-SÙ" (Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 265).

> Life is like a branch at the water's edge: sometimes it leans to the right, sometimes to the left. [...] This symbolically evokes the permanent tension to which man is subjected, and which obliges him, in order to hold the boat of life as well as possible, to constantly seek balance and harmony.[12]

Social rules are, for example, the prohibition of violence, especially against women,[13] the call not to cause trouble,[14] to stay away from sorcery[15] and not to hinder anyone's growth,[16] etc.[17] The latter, for example, serves not only as an admonition not to put obstacles in the way of others, but to refrain from social excesses (Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 275). It also seems to place a high value on promoting social and interpersonal harmony (Kasanda, 2015), such that societal benefits seem to take precedence over individual benefits. A special role for resolving disputes within families and clans among the Sáxwè is played by the tanti[18] or the top tanti. These preside over dispute resolution proceedings and, according to Atabavikpo (2002), have other society-supporting functions as well, which is why the Sáxwè would like the top tanti to be immortal.[19] In several proverbs, the Igbo point to the prominent role of women in society, and especially in the family construct – even beyond their death.[20]

Asouzu (2007) also analyses Igbo cosmology and language and derives – directly from Igbo society and its notions of community, togetherness and cooperation – his Ibuanyidanda ontology (Agada, 2019).

He assumes that traditional African philosophers influenced Igbo society's communal worldviews, which are reflected in concepts such as "onye ka ozuru (who is perfect?), njiko ka (togetherness is the greatest virtue), Ibuanyidanda (no task is impossible for the ant), among others" (Asouzu, 2007, in Agada, 2019):

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12 "La vie, c'est comme un rameau au bord de l'eau: tantôt elle penche à droite tantôt elle penche à gauche. [...]. Ainsi se trouve symboliquement évoqée la tension permanente à laquelle est soumis l'homme, et qui l'oblige, pour tenir au mieux la barque de la vie, à chercher constamment l'équilibre et l'harmonie."

13 Igbo saying: "It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman" (Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 275).

14 So saying: "If one finger brought oil it soiled the others" (Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 170).

15 "You shall not use magic to protect yourself from death" (Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 306).

16 Igbo saying: "Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other let his wings break" (Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 275).

17 Some Igbo proverbs: "A patient dog eats the fattest bone"; "He who fetches ant infested firewood has only ex-tended an invitation to the lizards"; "May the Kite perch and may the eagle perch, whichever does not want its neighbor to perch, may its wings be broken"; "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap"; "He whose brother is in heaven does not go to hell"; "One should not swallow phlegm in the name of decorum"; "He who brings kola brings life"; "Live and let live"; "The man who sells sand as salt should not complain when he receives pebbles as money." All proverbs were taken from Onwuchekwa (2013, pp. 218-219).

18 "Tanti" is a term found in West Africa for a female person who is highly valued.

19 "The chef Tanti dies too. I wonder what happens to her in the afterlife. No one has gone to the afterlife yet to know about it" (Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 146).

20 From the Igbo: "Nneka – Mother is supreme" (Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 173) and "A mother is an emotional index in Igbo culture, hence several songs and stories are spun around her legendary importance in society. The relationship between a child and his father may not be as sentimental as that between him and his mother." And "[...]. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. That is why we say that mother is supreme." Among the Sáxwè: "òvi vé", which means "the child is expensive" in the sense of "childbirth is painful" and is meant to indicate that the mother is the head of the family (Atabavikpo, 2002, p. 261).

> One of the most common metaphors or imageries that the traditional Igbo uses to express the idea of complementarity is that of the collective effort needed by ants (danda) to lift heavy crumbs or loads (ibu) that would otherwise remain an insurmountable task. This is the ibu anyi danda approach or the traditional Igbo spirit and understanding of complementarity … This experience is captured by the Igbo work song: Bunu bunu oo ibu anyi danda … The idea of complementarity spans the whole Igbo thought system in its understanding of man as a being caught in the challenges of historicity and relativity … Complementarity (ibu anyi danda) is an opportunity to seek relations, causes and meaning; it is an opportunity for the ego to reach out to something outside of itself … Complementarity is thus the unifying force of all community-centred reasoning … The ability to enter into complementary relationship gives units the forcefulness they need to uphold their unity in diversity. (Asouzu, 2004, pp. 108-109, in Agada, 2019, p. 14)

The camp of ethnophilosophers is mainly divided into universalists, who are open to the application of Western methods of analysis, and the particularists, who study the philosophical lines of development in Africa without Western influence (Agada, 2019).[21] There are numerous debates within ethnophilosophy, such as cultural unity[22] on the one hand, and the extent of diversity[23] among ethnic groups and differences in social and cosmological[24] values within the African continent on the other (Kasanda, 2015). The cultural difference could be observed, according to Bell (2002, p. 23) especially in sub-Saharan Africa and among the Dogon and Yoruba, Sambura and Dinka, among the Kuria and Bambara as well as the Zulu and the San (Kasanda, 2015).

However, the ethnophilosophical approach has been heavily criticised for its apparent lack of analyticity, criticality and originality (Agada, 2019). Hountondji (2004) criticises that in global discourse there has long been a limiting belief of a collective African worldview, whose euphoric collection and processing has meant that knowledge has not been systematically or critically evaluated to be considered philosophy, which is why ethnophilosophy has also been called "oral folk philosophy" by its critics[25] (Appiah, 1992, p. 91, in Agada, 2019). Despite its methodological shortcomings, Agada (2019) argues for understanding ethnophilosophy as a proto-philosophy and taking the ideas and concepts it contains as a starting point from which to create individual thought-systems that are universally applicable while retaining their local flavor, such as the Ibuanyidanda[26] ontology and the Ezumezu[27] logical system.

The originality, relevance and scholarship of the local lore and in general the oral tradition can only be ensured through close, collaborative scholarly discourse with local scholars who place

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21 "The West, in constructing the universal, instead of truly embracing all that there is, or at least what of it can be so embraced, has merely puffed itself up and invited the rest of humanity, or the educated segment of it, to be complicit in this historical swindle" (Taiwo, 1988, p. 4., in Agada, 2019, p. 6).

22 See e.g. Tempels (1945), Mbiti (1977) and Senghor (1995, in Shutte, 1998).

23 See e.g. Gyekye (1987) and Wiredu (1996).

24 Further literature e.g. in Chimakonam's logic system, which is inspired by the African ontology, i.e., it refers to the "African communal worldviews, the African understanding of the universe as consisting of the material and spiritual, the tendency towards holism, and the age-old wisdom locked up in indigenous languages" (Agada, 2019, p. 15).

25 How oral tradition is perceived can mainly be summarised in three counter-positions, namely those of the advocates of using the oral sources a) as material/a basis for philosophising, b) as partially existing philosophies and those which c) reject them completely (Dasaolu & Fayemi, 2015).

26 The term "Ibu anyi danda" in this context means complementarism (Agada, 2019).

27 Ezumezu can be seen as a complex, dynamic Igbo philosophy of social harmony and cooperation based on the principles of mutual aid and the common good, enabling people to live in harmony with their environment (Chimakonam, 2019).

the local lore and the oral tradition in which it is embedded around social cohesion in its proper context:

> […] African oral tradition [*sic*] have a basis in historical reality and are at the same time explorations of the possibilities of group and individual thoughts and views about their intellectual heritage, historical experiences and philosophical thoughts. Since every philosophy is cultural conditioned and historically influenced, oral literature cannot be swept under [the] carpet in philosophical matters. (Dasaolu & Fayemi, 2015, p. 66)

Only through an interactive joint discussion and analysis of ethnophilosophical sources can we ensure a meaningful interpretation and scientific integration into the discourse on social cohesion.

2.2   Ideologies, social theories and the risk of Western bias

Especially since the ethnophilosophical approach is accused of lacking analyticity, criticality and originality (Agada, 2019), among other things, it makes sense to supplement the picture of pre-colonial African society gained from this approach with other sources, such as frameworks that are characterised by a strong academicity. These academic frameworks – such as social theories, political writings, ideologies, schools of thought – are in part equally related to structures and values of traditional African societies, which is why they are used to answer the research questions of this paper. In the following text, some social theories, schools of thought and ideologies are briefly outlined in order to be able to classify their relevance for this analysis. However, a detailed discussion is reserved for other research projects, as this analysis would go too far here.

When reviewing the particular literature, it should also be kept in mind that many influential Western scholars had biased perspectives, especially towards the contributions of African academia. The field of research around "African social and political philosophy", for example, initially had to assert itself against external and internal resistance: External, since influential Western philosophers such as Hegel, Kant, Hume, Baker and others doubted the historical and cultural relevance of African academic discourse for the global community; internal, since the colonial legacy distorted the intellectual debate in Africa (Agada, 2019; Eze, 1997; Kasanda, 2015) and caused a partial lack of appreciation and understanding of African culture. This again led especially Africans to individual and collective alienation from their own culture (Fanon, 1975 and 1979; Kasanda, 2015).[28]

This circumstance and the political nation-building efforts since independence partly explain the strong return to and reference to traditional values in post-colonial discussions and intellectual writings, as well as the identity-building movements that accompanied them (see, among others, the Négritude movement, Pan-Africanism, the African Renaissance). Depending on the country, the scientific, social and political emphases often differed, but in some cases also had similarities, referring for example to pre-colonial values (e.g. African socialism) and complementing them with humanist philosophies (e.g. Ubuntu).

In some countries, certain ideologies and movements have found greater favour with the majority opinion or with the opinion of the ruling majority. Without intending to be exhaustive of the research, opinion or governance landscape, the following list illustrates the diversity of social theories and ideologies discussed and the associated complexity in the debate on the

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28 Individual alienation is manifested, among other things, in the adoption of stereotypes and prejudices, while social alienation is manifested inter alia in the distancing from African collective life (Kasanda, 2015).

contextualisation of social cohesion in the African setting (see e.g. Akyeampong et al. (2014), Fanon and Philcox (2004), Mamdani (1996) and Wiredu (1996)):

- Pan-Africanism was particularly present in Ghana, Senegal and Mali;

- African socialism was felt especially in Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville, Tanzania, Angola, Burkina Faso and Uganda;

- Various philosophical currents were mainly associated with the following countries: Négritude movement (Ghana, Guinea), Sufi Islam (Senegal), Black Consciousness (South Africa), Ubuntu philosophy (South Africa), Botho (Botswana) and Ethiopianism (Ethiopia);

- Other ideologies included Algerian or Zimbabwean nationalism, apartheid (South Africa), Revolutionary Nationalism (Congo-Brazzaville, Angola, Burkina Faso), Islamic socialism (Libya), Third International Theory (Libya), Developmental state capitalism (Rwanda) and Malawi Socialism (Malawi).

Taking a closer look at the philosophy of African humanism and the political ideology of African socialism (and later Pan-Africanism) is particularly of interest for our research context. These elements are very good sources for exploring pre-colonial values, structures and customs as well as their relevance to private and public life, and thus they could offer us good inferences about elements of social cohesion in Africa.

For the research presented in this paper, it is important to separate the aforementioned two perspectives, namely the (more academic) research of traditional societies and, on the other hand, the (more politically driven) discourse on the concept of African socialism (although it is, as we have seen, difficult to draw a clear line between them, as the concept of African socialism broadly references alleged traditional African values). At a very general level, Western humanism (as an ideal fostering social cohesion) can be said to be more rooted in Greek ideals; intellectual and artistic achievements; the emergence and cultivation of individual strengths and virtues; and the affirmation of individual freedoms and civil rights; which can also be associated with the social school of thought of individualism and the emphasis on individual needs and freedoms that put individual welfare before the common good (Pinn, 2021). This is in contrast to the collectivism that is often associated with East Asian and African countries.

African humanism, for example, emphasises the idea of "lived interdependencies" (Bell, 2002, p. 40; Masolo, 2021; Wiredu, 2004):

> African humanism, on the other hand, is rooted in traditional values of *mutual respect* for one's fellow kinsman and a sense of position and place in the larger order of things: one's social order, natural order, and the cosmic order. African humanism is rooted in lived dependencies. Where life's means are relatively minimal and natural resources are scarce, the individual person must depend on his or her larger community. (Bell, 2002, p. 39)

By this, Bell means that "mutual respect for one's fellow" human beings and a sense of social, natural and cosmic order are central, and that "where life's means are relatively minimal and natural resources are scarce, the individual person must depend on his or her larger community" (Bell, 2002, pp. 39-40). Referring to the South African philosophical concept of Ubuntu, Ngomane (2019) speaks of a moral compass based on the fact that a person only becomes a human being through interaction with other people. In her opinion, this is a key difference between the Western and Ubuntu approaches. If the cornerstone of Western growth lies, in her opinion, primarily in the stoking of desires and needs – mostly created by comparison – Ubuntu would place the focus differently. In her opinion, Ubuntu propagates the appreciation of individual differences, since these enrich the lives of the interacting persons in the present (Ngomane, 2019). Whereas the Western approach – through the competitive pursuit of individual need fulfilment, growth and success – shows less willingness to connect with the community through cooperation,

identification and the sharing of resources, knowledge and skills, thereby advancing the overall well-being of the community and its cohesion (Masolo, 2021; Wiredu, 2004).

2.2.1 Analysis and contextualisation of African humanism and socialism: Historical foundations, political narratives and their implications for contemporary social cohesion

The political literature on African humanism and socialism is rich. Although the original and pure theories of African socialism are arguably outdated, central elements of the aforementioned theories continue to be part of today's scholarly discourse (see also Nkrumah, 1964). Critically analysing these central elements – especially with regard to the possible motives of the authors, some of whom were politically active – is important in order to make the political ideologies and glossed-over narratives expressed in the texts transparent and not to adopt them as apparent truths in the current discussion (Bell, 2002). In the following, we briefly outline the two broad concepts of African socialism and African humanism, and how they may relate to modern social cohesion studies. Beforehand, it should be noted that many African intellectuals writing on African socialism and humanism were also (or later became) politicians. One should therefore always critically ask to what extent the description of, for example, social cohesion in pre-colonial societies might have been used to create a national consciousness among the population for the newly created nation-states, which often had not grown historically.

The philosophy of African humanism analyses, among other things, moral and social issues with regard to their significance for the community, the social order and community life, social harmony, individual human dignity, the common good, as well as mutual support, the living of community-promoting values, as well as the connectedness within a group (Masolo, 2021). These research questions, anchored in a traditional value system, could and can be partly explored with social theories such as functionalism and the theory of cultural ecology.

These theories examine, among other things, social structures and cultural practices for cohesion maintenance, problem-solving and adaptive interaction with nature in pre-colonial African societies. Research results from functionalist theory describe, for example, the relevance of tribal elders for dispute resolution and decision-making (e.g. in the Tiv society in Nigeria (Bohannan, 2020) or the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania (Berntsen, 1976)) or the importance of collective action for the common good (e.g. Igbo society in Nigeria (Achebe, 1958)). Research results from cultural ecology illustrate the coordinated and community-oriented management of scarce resources, for example by cultivating special farming methods over decades, such as terraced cultivation in steep areas of the Tigray region and irrigated agriculture among the Dogon in Mali.

Since the 1960s, African politicians have increasingly referred to the philosophical thoughts, discourses and developments based on traditional knowledge sources addressed above and to African communalism,[29] and they have tried to introduce so-called Afro-centrist[30] economic and social models, for example in Tanzania, Mali, Senegal, Ghana and Guinea. Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), Sekou Touré (Guinea), Tom Mboya (Kenya), Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia) and others coined the term "African socialism" (Sanders, 1978). Former Zambian President Kaunda, for example, emphasised that a legal system would have to be based on – and specifically tailored to meet – each society's own needs and cultural expectations in order to be accepted by society (Sanders, 1978, p. 69); in

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29 "African communalism describes the interconnectedness of people, their social and political duties and rights within a society oriented towards the common good" (Mbiti, 1970).

30 Africa-centrism describes the approach to represent/respect African values equally in (international) discussions, see e.g. Mazama (2003) and Asante (1987).

other words, to be able to create, maintain or strengthen social cohesion. This can be found most clearly in the writings of the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah. In his view, it was necessary that

> [...] law being based upon what he [Ibn Khaldun] called "social solidarity". [...] (O)ur law must embody our traditional social attitudes of communal endeavour, of a classless society and of mutual self help so as to avoid the narrow interpretation of man's duties to the community and the state, found so often in Western law. (Sanders, 1978, pp. 71-72)

In their opinion, the basis for the formation and acceptance of the new states (and thus, we understand, for social cohesion within a newly created nation-state) after independence since the 1960s was the promotion of a "mass ideology" that had its roots in "society's own past, but which lives in the present and aims at a new future" (Sanders, 1978, p. 69). These ideologies differed greatly from country to country, but were arguably all based on two central aspects, namely the idea of an "African personality"[31] and of the "traditional African society". The central pillars of the ideology were, on the one hand, the generalised but distinctive characteristics of an African person summarised in the concept of an ideal-type "African personality" and, on the other hand, the values and qualities of a "traditional African society", that is, pre-colonial African society (Sanders, 1978). President Senghor said: "Let us guard against believing that the community society ignores the person, even if we believe that it neglects the individual" (Sanders, 1978, p. 74).

In principle, Senghor's position was "that African value systems were more properly humanistic than European ones because the African models affirmed that the passionate or emotional side of a person carries the same value and legitimacy as the rational, analytic side" (Encyclopedia.com, 2022a). A central assumption was that this society was characterised by a religious-, community-, discourse- and consensus-oriented basic feeling, which forms the basis for democratic governance and, according to Sanders (1978), denotes a feeling of social solidarity firmly anchored in the African soul.

However, with its clear commitment to the relevance of religion, as well as its rejection of a "proletarian revolution" and economic class differences, such types of African socialism differed from classical Marxist approaches (Sanders, 1978). The former Tanzanian president Nyerere said in this regard that

> we start from a full acceptance of our African-ness and a belief that in our own past there is very much which is useful for our future. [...] To make our socialism and our democracy a reality we should (however) adapt to modern needs the traditional structure of African society. [...] We want the whole nation to live as one family. (Sanders, 1978, pp. 70-71)

Kofi Abrefa Busia, a Ghanaian politician and professor known for his pro-Western stance and his policy of economic liberalisation, supports the same thesis:

> African socialism is [...] a search for effective methods for creating a new social order built on the best traditions of the old, especially on the traditional sense of community and of solidarity between the individual and the group, whereby the welfare of each member was bound up with the welfare of the whole community. (Sanders, 1978, p. 70)

Many of these ideologies were largely driven by nationalistic motivation, but many of the inherent narratives also supported the idea of Pan-Africanism, African unity and even, beyond that, pan-

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31 African personality is a collective term closely associated with African humanism. It was developed by Nkrumah (1964) and Nyerere (1967; 1974), among others, to refer to and appreciate shared values, philosophies, culture, etc. This concept goes hand in hand with other movements, such as the Négritude movement and pan-Africanism (Dayi, 2022).

humanism, as President Kaunda emphasised when he said "*our socialism is humanism*" (Sanders, 1978, pp. 74-75, emphasis added; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2012).

Pan-Africanism focussed less on economic unity and more on the political and cultural unity of African countries and people of African descent and the promotion of this unity (Kofi, 1976; Mamdani, 1996; Mbiti, 1970). Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois and Kwame Nkrumah in particular supported this movement. Theories that have helped shape the development of Pan-Africanism certainly include the social theory of structuralism and post-colonial theory.

A concept that can also be seen in the pan-African debate is the concept of the "common world", which describes in this context people's everyday lives and moral decisions, their everyday group experiences, their interconnectedness and the harmonious collective actions that should result from them (Gyekye, 1997; Kasanda, 2015; Wiredu, 1996).

The idea of an African (as opposed to a Kenyan, Ethiopian, etc.) personality and a traditional African society is reflected in the merging of humanism and socialism into an "African socialism". The declared aim of these new ideologies was, on the one hand, to take greater account of the African humanist school of thought and, on the other hand, to place human beings at the centre of all political decisions (Kasanda, 2015) in order to achieve "political and economic autonomy, self-reliance, the Africanisation of business and the civil service, Pan-Africanism, and non-alignment" (Akyeampong, 2017, p. 9). It has been pointed out that African socialism would be a "syncretic attempt" to reconcile Marxism, Christianity, modern economic theories as well as African values (Kasanda, 2015). It should be noted here, however, that such approaches in their original political form are now seen critically by many African academics and intellectuals (Mazrui, 1980).

However, while social cohesion was an overarching issue relevant to all approaches, it seems that the specific objectives and goals at times differ. Malisa (2017), for example, observed that terms such as "Ubuntu, Masakhane, Ujamaa, Gutsaruzhinji", which are introduced in Section 3, refer to complex concepts that express a socialist, egalitarian understanding of society that is independent of European nomenclature, and that the aim of these concepts is mainly to achieve collective welfare satisfaction, as well as the fulfilment of human needs and their rights (Malisa, 2017). African socialism literature, on the other hand, can often be seen as more politically driven. Humanistic ideas and concepts from research on traditional societies have at times been incorporated into propagandistic narratives for political purposes, for example to strengthen the nation-state or a one-party system of government. An example of such a politically used narrative is the pre-colonial mode of consensus-based decision-making, as reflected in the following two illustrative statements: "In our original societies we operated by consensus. An issue was talked out in solemn conclave until such time as agreement could be achieved" (Kaunda in Wiredu, 1995, p. 303), and "In African society the traditional method of conducting affairs is by free discussion. [...] The elders sit under the big trees, and talk until they agree" (Nyerere in Wiredu, 1995, p. 303).

It has been questioned whether this ideal of a pre-colonial consensus-based society was actually a correct factual description. Bennett (1964) and Wiredu (1997) emphasise that the concept of consensus-based decision-making is too complex to be stylised into a generalisable model of solution; they therefore consider these demands rather as "…desire to return to an African past that never was" (Bennett, 1964, p. 98). However – and this is why such narratives should be read with caution – the image of the consensus-based, classless, pre-colonial society was in part probably also used politically, for example, to indirectly promote the merits of the one-party system reflecting consensus, as opposed to Western multi-party-based political disputes (see e.g. Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) under Mobutu Sese Seko, Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe, Ethiopia under the Derg regime, Angola under the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)). It has already been mentioned that it is

sometimes debatable whether these assumptions are historically correct (see e.g. Makang in Eze, 1997).

On the other hand, it would be too simplistic to regard the concept of consensus-based decision-making as a purely (power)politically abused demand against multi-party democracy. Consensus-based decision-making is found especially in the regions of Africa where a consensus orientation is also firmly anchored within society and forms the basis of general joint action (Wiredu, 1995). In particular in small communities at the local level, consensus-based decisions may be more feasible than at the national-state level. Unfortunately, this does not mean that these regions experience particularly low levels of conflict, but that the focus of discussion goes beyond the sheer resolution of disputes. Wiredu (1996) describes that the focus is on reconciliation, that is, the restoration of goodwill and a reassessment of the initial points of contention. In this process, it is not mandatory that the disputing parties align their moral or cognitive views, but mainly that the respective viewpoints are taken into account to an appropriate degree for future joint action or coexistence. Wiredu (1996) thus describes that consensus does not mean complete agreement, but a "smoothing out of the edges", that is, a dialogue-based compromise that is acceptable to all, or at least unacceptable to no one. However, this model reaches its limits in situations that require unanimity. Wiredu (1996) says that this can only be achieved if the remaining concerns can be addressed through patience and persuasion in such a way that no one is alienated. Moreover, he believes that the traditional African consensus system was such that it never permanently pushed any particular group into a minority.

In the research context here, the social process of consensus-based decision-making suggests that it was important for these societies to work cohesively towards common goals by reducing conflict as well as promoting participation, acceptance and a sense of community through consensus (Gyekye, 1996; Mbiti, 1991).

From these scholarly and political works, among others, some elements can be drawn that describe how social cohesion was enshrined in pre-colonial societies, such as:

- The "Ofo system" of the Nigerian Igbo culture, which describes a consultation process of elders and other clan leaders (Harneit-Sievers, 1998);

- Women also had prominent roles (Diop, 1990) and were involved in other social, political and economic activities among the Igbo of Nigeria besides dispute resolution (Achebe, 1958);

- "Iya agba" among the Yoruba of Nigeria (Awolalu, 1979) and "asaase yaa" among the Akan of Ghana; Opoku (1978) describes the special role of older women in society;

- Age-mate system of the Kikuyu of Kenya, which they used as a social guarantor to ensure equitable intergenerational distribution of knowledge and resources (Eisenstadt, 1954);

- Collective, need-based resource ownership (land, water, livestock, etc.), such as with the Bantu of South Africa (Mafeje, 1971);

- Collective action for the common good, as among the Wolof in Senegal, who call the concept "Ndëpp" (Badji, 1986);

- Storytelling to pass on traditional stories and myths, strengthen a sense of community, build identity and communicate the common past, as done by the Yoruba of Nigeria, who call the concept "Itan" (Omotoso, 1978);

- Compassion and support for members in need describes the concept of "Nnoboa" among the Ashanti of Ghana (Wiredu, 1996, 2004);

- Self-efficacy to be used for the common good is described by the concept of "Osotua" in the Maasai culture of East Africa (Hodgson, 2004);

- The "Egungun" concept of the Yoruba of Nigeria describes the ancestral spirit to be involved in social processes and decision-making through consultation (Awolalu, 1979).

The concept of communitarianism, which Ghana's Akan lived by, emphasised the relevance of the common good over the individual good and the interconnectedness of all members with each other, accompanied by rights and duties of each member to perform as part of their function as a community member (Gyekye, 1997).

The social-ethical philosophy of African humanism, the political-socialist movement Pan-Africanism and the political ideology African socialism could be further analysed with other social theories such as functionalism, cultural ecology, structuralism, post-colonial theory, Afrocentrism, etc. to gain further insights. This additional analysis, however, would not be useful at this point, so it is left to other research projects. This paper can only do so at a higher level of abstraction, as there are numerous concepts that represent different expressions of African humanism in this regard, many of which are still relevant in the present academic discourse.[32]

2.2.2   Relationship between African humanism and African socialism

African humanism can, in our view, best be understood as "a kind of grassroots humanism embedded in traditional society" (Bell, 2002, p. 40). Bell (2002) describes that African humanism, which developed partly from the concept of negritude,[33] should be seen in the context of national independence movements and the development of a collective African identity that sought, among other things, to highlight the value of the common African heritage. So what does this mean for the relationship between African socialism and African humanism? We agree with Bell that "the more political side of African humanism is also referred to as African socialism" (Bell, 2002, p. 36). The fact that these two terms seem to be used alternatively by many authors may also be an indication of a central underlying assumption: that these authors see an inseparable relationship between the importance of the individual (which the term "humanism" tends to suggest) and the community or society (hence the reference to "socialism"). The development of African humanism and socialism is based on the socialist or communalism ideas of Franz Fanon, as well as the concepts of Kwame Nkrumah and Julius K. Nyerere in particular, but also Léopold Senghor and Kenneth Kuanda (Bell, 2002). However, as already indicated above, one should not understand the terms "African humanism" and "African socialism" as if they stood for

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32 This includes e.g. the "Rwanda philosophy of being, the Luba notion of being, the dialectics of the Burundi, the idea of old age among the Fulbe, the sense of honor among the Wolof, the conception of life among the Yoruba, the African concept of time, the African metaphysical clearings" (Hountondji, 2004, p. 259), Ubuntu (Desmond Tutu, South Africa), Ujamaa (Julius Nyerere, Tanzania), Nkrumaism (Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana), Sankarism (Thomas Sankara, Burkina Faso), Harambee (Kenya), Pan-Africanism (among others Modibo Keita from Mali), the discourses around Léopold Senghor (Senegal), Sékou Touré (Guinea), the Akan concept of personhood (see also Kwasi Wiredu; West Africa), the Wolof culture (Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania; see The Wolof People in Wolof Resources (2018)), Odinala (Nigeria), the Wasta (especially in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq), the Third International Theory (Libya), see also Arab socialism (and to a limited extent Pan-Arabism, Pan-Africanism and Pan-Humanism), Malianism and Melanesian socialism (Melanesia, i.e., Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu, the Indonesian region of West New Guinea, the French overseas territory of New Caledonia, and the Australian Torres Strait Islands), and also some non-African concepts such as Swaraj (India), Guanxi and rén (China), and Gamey'a (Middle East).

33 Led by Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Négritude concept was about highlighting and valuing African culture; see, among others, Césaire (1983) and Senghor (1964).

a unified, self-contained theory. Both are more likely to be used as theoretical umbrella terms. A number of different theoretical and sociological concepts have developed under their umbrella. For example, Nkrumah introduced the concepts of "consciencism", "negative and positive action", Nyerere of "villagization", "Ujamaa" or "familyhood", "education for self-reliance" and Senghor of "revised humanism"[34] (Bell, 2002, p. 36).

For Nyerere said, that "our socialism" is the recognition of society as an extension of the *basic* family unit; it was an attitude of mind for Nyerere that reaches back to "tribal days" (Bell, 2002, p. 37). This mindset of "true" socialism, which he traces back to the "tribal days", includes humanity as a whole and does not only refer to Africa (Bell, 2002).

Many concepts (see "Négritude", "black personality", "authenticity") developed as a direct derivative of the "Marxian presupposition of the centrality of the individual as historical actor" (Mudimbe, 1995, in Bell, 2002, p. 38). The individual became the collective concept of an acting people in the African context (Bell, 2002). In many respects, the above-mentioned concepts should also be understood as a counter-model to capitalism and as a detachment from colonialism. Nkrumah, Nyerere and Senghor emphasised that capitalism did not fit the traditional humanistic values and principles of African society. Rather, they equated the legacy of Western colonialism with capitalism (Bell, 2002). The colonial experience and the struggle for collective independence is thus certainly a major factor that has influenced the content of social cohesion theories in many African countries. Colonial foreign rule is an experience that many authors of Western social theories have not had, and therefore it may not play a particular role in their work.

Within the African concept of socialism, further distinctions can be made between the humanitarian and scientific interpretations. Here, humanitarian socialism is largely based on pre-colonial African values and traditions (see Nyerere, 1962), whereas scientific socialism more strongly emphasises the universality of socialist values and ideas (see Kasanda, 2015; Nkrumah, 1964). Nevertheless, both forms emphasised the ideal of a classless society, a high work ethic and communal labour, and embraced the economic ideal that saw the primary means of production, exchange and social services in the hands of the community (Sanders, 1978). Nyerere sees familyhood ("Ujamaa") as the basis of African socialism, and Sékou Touré adds that collective life and social solidarity are the humanistic foundation of what he sees as a communitarian African society[35] envied by many (Bennett, 1964; Gyekye, 1997; Wiredu, 1996).

So a central assumption of many theories, for example by Nyerere, Sékou Touré, Senghor and Nkrumah, was that pre-colonial African society did not know any class differences. However, since these values of pre-colonial society were also to be the model for society in the emerging independent states, it follows that, in their view, a classless society is important for social cohesion in those African states. However, the thesis of a classless pre-colonial society needs to be considered in a more differentiated way (Bennett, 1964). There were, for example, occupational castes and hierarchies in West Africa, even if there were no indigenous entrepreneurial classes in the sense of Western industrialised states, that is, no classes that were distinguished by economic prosperity and therefore represented different interests (Bennett, 1964). But Gakou (1987) describes that it is not possible to clearly trace how pre-colonial African societies were structured and organised. Evidence suggests that societies evolved from primitive communes to slave societies to feudal societies – similar to Western

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34 For further literature on the subject, see Nkrumah (1964), "Negative and positive action" in Nyerere (1973a), "Villagization" and "Ujamaa" in Nyerere (1968), "Education for self-reliance" in Nyerere (1973b) and "Revised humanism" in Senghor" (1964).

35 Communitarianism denotes ideology of community values, solidarity and strong social relations (Gyekye, 1997; Wiredu, 1996).

Europe. Other evidence suggests that, for example, an Asiatic mode of production[36] was dominant in many parts of Africa.

In this context, Malisa (2017) sees the introduction of the colonial language as a social incision that changed not only everyday realities, but also philosophical discourses as well as the "oral tradition", and thus the preservation of (local) history. According to him, African and European values were deliberately presented as incompatible, history was distorted and the assimilation of Africans to the progress brought about by the West alone was presented as inevitable and logical, which also contributed to devaluation and alienation.

3   Identification of social cohesion concepts

The literature review identified some of the numerous local concepts in African societies. We give a rough overview of these concepts in Table 1. Detailed descriptions of the concepts are often not available in secondary literature and not traceable in a desk study like this one. Each concept requires an extensive review of, inter alia, local, academic and literary sources as well as oral resources and aphorisms in the local language, or other historical documents. Against this background of limited access to such resources, Table 1 is only a first step in the collection of local concepts and is intended to provide an overview. Some of these concepts are subjects of the case studies in Part II of this publication. However, this preliminary collection of genuinely African concepts shall encourage other scholars to participate in expanding the coverage of concepts and their more detailed analyses and assessments. In addition to the initial overview outlined here, the identification of local concepts is intended to support a convergence of perspectives on the topic of social cohesion in the African context and to help the international research community address "issues of universal meaning and significance" together (Wiredu, 2004, p. 530; see * below).

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36 "Marx's definition of the Asiatic mode of production included the absence of private ownership of land, autonomous village communities, and a despotic centralized state in charge of public works, especially irrigation. To finance public infrastructure, the state extracts, mainly through coercion and the control of the armed forces, an economic surplus produced by local communities in the form of tributes and collective work. Once surplus is extracted, village communities remain relatively independent within their 'self-sustaining' economies" (Encyclopedia.com, 2023).

Table 1: Selection of identified African concepts that refer to social cohesion[a]

Concept	Scope	Short description / Keywords
Ubuntu ("I am because you are")	Southern Africa (esp. Zulu, Xhosa)	The concept of Ubuntu emphasises the importance of communal or harmonious relationships for self-realisation. This involves identifying with others and exhibiting solidarity with them, which includes engaging in helpful behaviour and having positive attitudes and emotions towards others. The ideal form of interaction between people is a community or communal relationship, which has influenced societal decision-making in African societies and is often appealed to by contemporary African intellectuals and policy-makers for organising public and large-scale institutions. The Ubuntu ethic does not necessarily demand pacifism, as acting in unfriendly or conflicting ways to prevent harm can also be seen as promoting friendliness and community.[b]
"Rwanda philosophy of being"[c]	Rwanda	Refers to a linguistic ethnophilosophy of the Kinyarwanda people, as described by Masolo (1983). Masolo argues that the Bantu language's grammatical categories form the basis for the Bantu people's metaphysical categories. These categories include Ntuis, which can be further divided into four categories: Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu. Muntu refers to human beings with intelligence, while Kintu includes non-human beings or things that cannot act independently. Hantu refers to place and time, and Kuntu refers to modality, or the mode of being (Masolo, 1983).[d]
"the Luba notion of being / the Luba religion"[d]	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Social cohesion is intricately connected to the interdependence between humans and their environment, as well as the complex patterns of dependence within human communities. The parent–child relationship serves as a universal model for most relationships, even in societies that follow matrilineal or patrilineal systems. "Among the Luba people, the chief is seen as the father of his subjects, while the social fabric is rooted in a unified spiritual interdependence. Strong ties between community members" (Encyclopedia.com, 2022a) not only support the lineage, but also form the foundation for group dynamism, restraint and cohesion.[e]
Harambee	East Africa	"Harambee" is a term coined by Jomo Kenyatta that means "let us pull together" and refers to the collective accomplishment of physical tasks. It was later expanded to include governmental self-help projects, serving political and ideological purposes. Harambee represents attitudes of self-help, communal assistance and good neighbourliness, and it is characterised by the norm of reciprocity and mutual social obligations. The Harambee phenomenon is a key feature of the Kenyan patron-client state.[f]
Ujamaa	Tanzania	The Ujamaa policy was introduced in Tanzania as a way to bring about socio-political and economic changes after the colonial period. Its founder, Nyerere, aimed to restore personal dignity and socio-economic welfare. However, despite being practiced for almost two decades, the policy failed to meet its intended goals, leading to its decline and the need for modernisation.[g]
"the dialectics of the Burundi"[d]	Rwanda, Tanzania and DR Congo	Makarakiza (1957) argues that the Burundi people may not have explicitly developed the principles of social cohesion he describes, but instead follow them instinctively. He outlines five principles: non-contradiction, compared identity, sufficient reason, finality and causality. These principles are believed to be implicitly followed by the Burundi in their reasoning and social interactions.[h]

Concept	Scope	Short description / Keywords
"the idea of old age among the Fulbe"[d]	Nigeria, Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Kamerun, Burkina Faso, Niger	The daily lives of the Jenngelbe are not deeply regulated by their religion but rather their traditional ethos, known as pulaagu, which is a shared code of conduct that expresses their identity at the ethical level. Pulaaku is a fundamental notion that defines what it means to be a Fulbe, and it indicates the qualities appropriate to them. These qualities are often explained in negative form, and the Fulbe ideal is a "being entirely cultural and independent of nature, whose actions are never involuntary" (Djedje, 2008).[i]
"the sense of honor among the Wolof"[d]	Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania	The Wolof culture places great emphasis on social cohesion, with community being a key pillar alongside hospitality and generosity. Maintaining honour and appearances is also crucial, as it is seen as a way of upholding community expectations and avoiding dishonour. The ultimate goal of Wolof society is transcendent peace, which is achieved through establishing proper relationships with spiritual beings, nature and fellow humans as well as seeking protection from destructive forces.[j]
"the conception of life among the Yorùbá"[d]	Nigeria, Benin, Togo	The Yorùbá culture emphasises the promotion of the common good and communal well-being while rejecting things that go against this. According to traditional Yorùbá thought, a meaningful life involves achieving material comfort, a "long healthy life, having children, a peaceful spouse, and overcoming life's" challenges (Balogun, 2020, p. 166). This concept of a meaningful life is grounded in communal structures and values, reflecting the social cohesion of traditional Yorùbá society.[k]
"African concept of time"[d]	East Africa	According to Mbiti (1970), traditional African "time is two-dimensional with a long past, present, and virtually no future, unlike the linear concept of time in the Western world" (Kabala, 1999, p. 153). Mbiti's research on East African tribes led him to conclude that Africans do not consider time in terms "of the future because events in the future have not" yet occurred. Additionally, some tribes in Kenya lack verb tenses to reference the future (Babalola & Alokan, 2013, p. 144).[l]
Odinala	Nigeria	The concept of social cohesion in Igbo culture is rooted in the belief that the community owes its existence to God in a far distant past, resulting in a group whose cohesion is the result of shared history, traditions and culture. The Igbo recognise the universal brotherhood of all, and kinship relations, which tend to correspond to blood relations, ensures an intense level of interaction and fosters community spirit among its members. The community is seen as a reality outside of the individuals that make it up, with an ontological dimension made symbolically concrete through the masquerade cults.[m]
Wolof culture	Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania	The cohesion of the Wolof community in mid-Saloum was affected by several factors, including the competition between patrilineal kin, the increase in individualisation and the stricter application of Islamic land-law. The communal farm became less important as households became economically independent, resulting in conflicting self-interests among household members. Friction between the head of the household, wives and male dependants was inter alia caused by personal plots and the portion of individual appropriation. The Wolofs have a high level of spending on social relations, and the government could encourage the establishment of savings banks in the villages to take advantage of their willingness to borrow for production and consumption. Government shops could also be set up that would sell spare parts of farm implements to compete with the local shopkeepers.[n]

Concept	Scope	Short description / Keywords
Akan concept of personhood	Western Africa	The Akan concept of personhood is based on social achievement and personal relationships, which creates networks that foster communal trust. This notion supports social cooperation and effectively resolves collective action problems. It motivates individuals to contribute towards the social good while maintaining the moral value of every individual as an essential part of the community.[o]
"the African metaphysical clearings"[d]	Nigeria, Benin, Togo	The Ifa religion is an ancient African spiritual tradition that originated in Nigeria and is characterised by its belief in the interdependence of all life. It recognises the existence of a Supreme Being, Olodumare, who is benevolent.[p]
Wasta	(especially in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq)	The concept of "wasta" in Arabic "refers to the use of personal connections to gain preferential treatment. It involves three parties": the client, the agent and a mediator (often called "wasta"; Loewe et al., 2007, p. 21). Favouritism "based on long-term social relations and mutual trust" differs from bribery, creating an implicit obligation and "generalised reciprocity" within family networks (Loewe et al., 2007, p. 22).[q]

[*] Other identified local concepts that could still be explored include: "Menzi" (Xhosa culture), "Gacaca" (Rwanda), "Utu" (Kikuyu culture), "Abangani" (Zulu culture), "Sankofa" (Akan culture), "Mato oput" (Acholi culture), "Wiri" (Hausa culture), "Osu" (Igbo culture), "Abusu" (Urhobo culture), "Nabo" (Songhai culture), "Ngoni" (Ngoni culture), "Kamano" (Luba culture), "Gurungu" (Gbagyi culture), "Shuka" (Galla culture), "Lebollo" (Sotho culture), "Kwibuka" (Burundi), "Musondwe" (Lozi culture), "Ubufumu" (Bemba culture), "Konyir Kende" (Luo), "Obwasio" (Luhya), "Mwethia" (Kamba), "Ematonyok" (Maasai), "Kgotla" (Setswana culture) and "Nguni" (Nguni people). [b] Metz (2019, 2020); Tutu (1999); Ogude and Dyer (2019). [c] "Thousands of writings of all sizes, including books, articles, theses, doctoral dissertations, and conference papers, have been trying for 100 years or more – and especially since World War II – to describe African philosophy in that sense. I took it that this kind of investigation had been first launched in the West at a given point in the development of Western ethnography. What I accepted least, however, was the way African scholars themselves took up this project uncritically as handed down to them by this tradition. They too started writing about such topics as the Rwanda philosophy of being, the Luba notion of being, the dialectics of the Burundi, the idea of old age among the Fulbe, the sense of honor among the Wolof, the conception of life among the Yoruba, the African concept of time, African meta-physical clearings, etc. They did this without asking themselves what was the use of such investigations, what could be their significance for themselves, and whether such investigations were suitable for anything other than feeding the curiosity and other intellectual and even non-intellectual needs of Western readership. I did not accept, either, the way in which this tradition implicitly defined the task of the African philosopher today. To make it clear that this way of doing philosophy was not the standard one, I described it as ethnophilosophy, i.e. a branch of ethnology mistaken for philosophy. More exactly put, I wanted to make it clear that this kind of investigation amounted to creating a new standard of philosophical practice specific to Africa and such other areas as are traditionally considered research fields for ethnographers and anthropologists. This new standard was one that was bound to hinder the African philosopher or, for that matter, the so-called primitive or semi-primitive philosopher from tackling issues of a universal meaning and significance (Hountondji, 1970; Tempels, 1949)" (Wiredu, 2004, pp. 529-530), Kanu (2019); [d] Hountondji (2004, p. 259), Alexis Kagame "La Philosophie Bantou-Rwandaise de L'Etre" (1956) in Masolo (1983), Tempels, Read and Rubbens (2010); [e] (Encyclopedia.com, 2022b), Hountondji (2004, p. 259); [f] Ng'ethe (1983); [g] Keskin and Abdalla (2019), Kibona and Woldegiorgis (2023); [h] Makarakiza (1957), Hountondji (2004); [i] Djedje (2008), Hountondji (2004, p. 259), Riesman (1977) in Ogawa (1993; pp. 119-137); [j] Wolof Resources (2018), Hountondji (2004, p. 259); [k] Balogun (2020), Hountondji (2004, p. 259), Oluwaseyi and Esther (2017, p. 30), Balogun (2020); [l] Kabala (1999), Babalola and Alokan (2013, p. 144), Hountondji (2004, p. 259), Mbiti (1970); [m] Ezeuchenne (2010); [n] Venema (1978); [o] Wingo (2006); [p] Hountondji (2004, p. 259), Organisation Ifa Foundation International (2022), Ifayemi (s.a.); [q] Loewe et al. (2007, pp. 21-22).

As Table 1 illustrates, concepts such as respect, trust, social harmony, shared values, practices and mutual commitments, etc., are mentioned to describe a strong community. This, like the previous section, paints a picture of pre-colonial African societies that is diverse in culture and values, even if this has been idealised in part for political purposes. In the context of this analysis, it is asked to what extent the identified elements can give us information on the understandings

of social cohesion in contemporary African societies. Overall, they are often narratives that had a certain impact on shaping Africa's post-colonial societies. Against this background, it is not of primary importance for the purposes of this discussion paper whether the historical assumptions about pre-colonial values are accurate in detail. What is more central is whether these elements have shaped the current discourse on social cohesion and to that extent can still be considered relevant.[37]

For these purposes, this analysis tries in the following to group the insights gained in this paper in such a way that a picture is generated which sensitises us to the various aspects in the discourse. This shall serve as a first attempt to contextualise the term "social cohesion" in African discourse. The grouped core elements of the literature reviewed above will be assigned to three relational perspectives, namely the relations between individuals (Section 3.1), relations with the state (Section 3.2) and inter-group relations (Section 3.3). The first and third refer to the horizontal dimension of social cohesion, while the second refers to the vertical dimension of social cohesion.

3.1 Horizontal relations between Individuals

The question of how social theories evaluate the relationships between individuals is certainly one of the more complex issues. Therefore, only three factors will be singled out here that concern and shape the relationships between individuals and, based on the above, play an important role in many African concepts of social cohesion.

3.1.1 "Common identity" (based on pre-colonial culture) that shapes individual identity

Identity concerns the relationship between individuals and a group, but also between individuals themselves. In many African concepts, pre-colonial values play a special role in identity formation.

It is clear from the literature that the pre-colonial living of common values and beliefs and the sharing of a common history created an image that is still referenced today when it comes to shaping social interactions and relationships. For example, the Négritude, Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism movements have taken up these cross-ethnic and cross-national traditional commonalities and propagated them with concepts such as "common world" and "common identity" to legitimately promote their own value and cohesion within the African community (Gyekye, 1997; Mbiti, 1991; Wiredu, 1996).

Especially in connection with decolonisation in the second half of the 20th century, the invocation of pre-colonial African culture and societal values played a major role in various discourses. Notions of identity are therefore often built on reference to pre-colonial values. This invocation of pre-colonial culture and values should also contribute towards strengthening social cohesion in the newly independent states and nation-building in this regard.

In addition to Nyerere, the Ghanaian politician Nkrumah also emphasised – at least in his early writings – the existence and relevance of pre-colonial African values and stressed that these (in contrast to the Western worldview) were more communal and not focussed on the individual. In his view, this should also affect how economic and political life should be institutionalised (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005).

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37 We would like to take this opportunity to invite academics to participate in the discussion we are holding in this context.

The reference to and appreciation of pre-colonial values is thus arguably a factor that was used to strengthen social cohesion in post-colonial times and for nation-building. It is therefore a fact whose relevance must be taken into account when evaluating modern African theories of social cohesion.

3.1.2 Spirituality, cultural practices and customs

Spirituality is another element that can – to varying degrees – be found in African discourse related to social cohesion. This becomes clear when analysing Senghor's criticism of Western socialist theories. In his view, Marxist theory and the Soviet application of socialism neglected the spiritual development of the people because, according to him, it focussed only on material advancement (Bell, 2002). He, on the other hand, wanted to promote the spiritual development in addition to material development and aimed to do so by emphasising the relevance of African humanism (Bell, 2002). He aimed at material development by replacing private capitalism with a higher self-organisation and responsibility of the workers. They were to organise and own the means of production independently in order to regain their freedom (Bell, 2002). This material element still shows similarities to Marxist-socialist social orders. However, the element of spiritual development is different. In this respect, he emphasised the community-based society,

> in which the hierarchy – and therefore power – is founded on spiritual and democratic values: on the law of primogeniture and election; in which decisions of all kinds are deliberated in a palaver, after the ancestral gods have been consulted, in which work is shared out among the sexes and among technico-professional groups based on religion. This is a community-based society, communal, not collectivist. (Bell, 2002, p. 39)

Senghor is oriented towards a theistic-evolutionary humanism and emphasises that this corresponds to the way Africans have always thought about the matter (Bell, 2002). At the same time, this approach – at least from a "Western" perspective – already shows certain tensions in principle between theological, hierarchical (e.g. first-born rights) and more egalitarian (elections) elements.

Spirituality also had a structuring quality. Religious leaders such as the Babalawos of the Yoruba people, for example, could influence political, economic and social decisions. Other spiritual leaders legitimised chiefs through spiritual rituals (see e.g. in the Congo kingdoms), regulated trade in goods among, for example, the Ashantis or consulted the ancestors and spirits to find their approval for certain decisions (Cox & Olupona, 2002; Mbiti, 1991). Cultural practices and customs were important for social cohesion, as this was where the community came together to celebrate events, but also their own culture and history, thereby strengthening the connection with each other, and thus the community (Geertz, 2000).

3.1.3 Common-good orientation, reciprocity, shared commitment and social harmony

These values epitomise the notion of "lived interdependencies" (Bell, 2002) and seem to have occupied a particularly high status in pre-colonial societies. They served as a normative compass that guided everyday decisions and were supported or sanctioned by the spiritual and physical world (Richards, 1948). Nyerere picked up on these social norms in developing his idea of Ujamaa (Swahili for "family" or "community") (Kasanda, 2015). These conscious dependencies and connections strengthened the community and were intended to ensure that each individual contributed to everyday life and helped out in emergency situations and alike (Richards, 1948).

3.2   Vertical relations between ruling authority and people

3.2.1   Traditional political systems

Traditionally, governments were tasked with resolving conflicts, resolving resource distribution issues and providing for the welfare and cohesion of the community (Oliver & Atmore, 2003). Common forms of rule and governance in pre-colonial Africa were in particular tribal leadership (e.g. Zulu in South Africa, Kingdom of Lesotho, Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania), centralised, institutionalised rule structures (e.g. Kingdom of Dahomey of Benin, Kingdom of Congo) and councils (e.g. Ashanti in Ghana, Kingdom of Buganda, Yoruba in Nigeria), often based on kinship or clan systems. Although these systems were diverse, they generally differed in whether they had a centrally executing governmental structure (the Zulu and the Ngwato of South Africa, the Bemba of Zambia, the Banyankole of Uganda and the Kdede of northern Nigeria) or lived without a centralised structure regulating social life (the "Logoli of western Kenya, the Tallensi of northern Ghana and the Nuer of southern Sudan)" (Wiredu, 1997, p. 304). Despite their differences, these systems are functional equivalents (Wiredu, 1997).

Often, the mode of decision-making of these systems was similar. For example, many centrally organised ethnic groups, such as the Zulu and Ashantis, who were considered warlike, practised consensus-based political decision-making (Wiredu, 1997). The philosophy of Ntu illustrates the foundations of such consensus-oriented decision-making: "Ntu, the total reality of the universe as a unity, is a world in which harmony prevails and contradiction or dissent have no place, for each element of this monolithic universe is once and for all assigned a place" (Makang, 1997).

Ruling a society thus included consensus-based decision-making, community-based justice systems, consultation with community elders and the inclusion of other community members. Consensus is also deeply reflected in traditional tribal societies, even though such forms of community are often perceived as hierarchical. As Wiredu states, "[c]ontrary to a deliberately cultivated appearance, the personal word of the chief is not law. His official word is the consensus of his council, and only in that capacity can it be law" (Wiredu, 1995). In consequence, it has been argued that deliberation and rational discourse were essential elements of traditional African societies. Wiredu describes that a common understanding of Ashanti societies was that people can overcome their differences, and that the way to get there, according to this view, is through rational discussion. The Ashantis are clear about the possibilities of this means. "There is, [they say], no problem of human relations that cannot be solved by dialogue" (Wiredu, 1995, pp. 306-307). This bears some resemblance with basic assumptions of deliberative democratic theories in modern Western political philosophy.

3.2.2   Post-colonial political systems

In post-colonial Africa, relations between the people and the state naturally varied from state to state and also changed over time. The scope of this discussion paper does not allow for an in-depth examination of these complex issues. Instead, the aim here is to pick a few aspects and illustrate how African theories of social cohesion did – or at least could – influence the relationship between the state and the citizens. In particular the social cohesion theories can be used to interpret the political organisation of a society. For instance, a widely shared assumption is that African humanism and socialism would clearly reject the idea of a liberal "night watchman state", as the concepts of social cohesion seem to favour community spirit and communalism over individual freedoms.

Debates on the forms of government are also largely known and common in the Global North. However, there are numerous examples where additional elements exist in African social theories that shape the relationship between the state and citizens, and which can be said to reflect original African concepts of social cohesion. This can be seen using the example of the

Ashanti. According to this, descent and state self-government are linked. Wiredu (1997) describes that maternal lineage is followed to define groups that had a common female ancestor. The head of this group is automatically in the urban or village administrative and governmental council. If no person can be found who combines a sense of responsibility, logical persuasion, and maturity in age and knowledge, the head of the group is elected. However, it should be noted that there is no formal election, there is not even a traditional word meaning "election". "Election" in this context means careful, usually lengthy deliberation with the aim of reaching a consensus. Wiredu describes the process of voting as a "modern cultural import", described by the term "aba to" (Wiredu, 1997). However, the elected political leader of a group is subordinate to the "natural leader", that is, the chief of a town, and remains the leader for life, unless there are moral, intellectual or physical reasons why he should not hold office. A new "natural" leader is proposed by a female head of the previous leader, approved by the administrative and governing council and must be approved by the people to be legally recognised as the new chief.

Excursus: Democratic elements of theories of social cohesion in African contexts

As the previous section already indicated, democratic and consensus-based values play an important role in African concepts related to social cohesion. This does not necessarily have to be in conflict with other elements. For example, despite the spiritual elements mentioned above, the democratic elements are an essential part of social discourse, also in Senghor's work. It is therefore important to have a closer look at the democratic element.

To what extent does the element of democracy in social cohesion theories correspond with Western concepts of democratic decision-making understood as the accumulation of individual preferences, or to what extent are democratic rights limited by communalism and the primacy of communal well-being? Depending on the scope and role of the democratic elements, the concept of consensus-based decision-making can – as will be seen below – also have an impact on the way the relationship between the state and its citizens is being structured. In Europe, for example, there are also efforts to involve citizens through citizens' councils. These are discussion forums in which citizens, often selected at random, participate. It is an often declared goal of these citizens' councils to strengthen social cohesion in a society through the exchange of views on controversial issues and the direct involvement of citizens. Here, then, one sees an attempt to promote social cohesion through stronger deliberative democratic elements.

3.2.3 Communalism and philosophical consciencism

The discussion of African humanism is strongly linked to the phenomena of communalism and the discussion around philosophical consciencism. Communalism is a phenomenon that has been observed in many traditional societies in Africa and describes that the common good can be achieved primarily through solidarity, collective effort and the prioritisation of community needs (Nkrumah, 1964, in Dayi, 2022). Nkrumah took up this phenomenon in the philosophy of "philosophical consciencism", which he developed, emphasising that it takes a conscious decision for social change and the common good to achieve it (Nkrumah, 1964, in Dayi, 2022). Communalism concerns the social (and potentially even legal) norm that communal well-being always takes precedence over the "self-interest" of the individual (Bell, 2002). Kwame Gyekye describes the underlying philosophy as

> a philosophy that sees human needs, interests, and dignity as of fundamental importance and concern. For, the art, actions, thought, and institutions of the African people, at least in the traditional setting, reverberate with expressions of concern in African socioethical thought generally. (Bell, 2002, p. 41)

With his "philosophical consciencism", Nkrumah wanted to develop a form of socialism based on the original humanistic values and principles of traditional African society, combining pre-colonial traditional African, Euro-Christian and Muslim ideologies in his "philosophy of consciousness" (Bell, 2002). His aim was to elaborate a collective African philosophy, but

> a major flaw in Nkrumah's philosophy of consciencism is "the idea that there were no ideological conflicts in pre-colonial Africa on the one hand and, on the other, that this illusion should be valorised by making theoretical unanimity into a value to be struggled for. Let us call this unanimist illusion." (Hountondji, 1996, in Bell, 2002, p. 43)

The academic discussions about relations between individuals and the state in African societies have increased, particularly in recent years. Kasanda has shown that, in contrast with a widely held belief, actors in the liberation movement did not necessarily believe there *had to be a* *"*contradiction between modernisation and African cultures" (Kasanda, 2015, pp. 29-50, quotation on p. 35). In this context, the debates about whether societies in the newly independent African countries should be structured in line with Western paradigms, or whether state institutions should rather be organised "in accordance with African traditions" (Kasanda, 2015, pp. 29-50), are equally important for the present discussion paper. One argument brought forward by African state leaders in support of Western paradigms was that they were "capable of overcoming ethnic divisions" (Kasanda, pp. 29-50), or – in other words – fostering social cohesion among divided ethnic groups. In a way, this political discourse can therefore be analysed through the lenses of social cohesion theories.

3.3 Relations between social groups

3.3.1 Lineage structures and social cohesion

The relationships between individuals affect how social groups consisting of such individuals relate to each other. Due to the natural interdependence between individuals and social groups (being formed by individuals), there is no clear-cut line between the relationships among individuals on the one hand, and the ones between social groups on the other hand. Nevertheless, looking at social cohesion theories also through the lenses of inter-group relations offers additional perspectives. African societies are often lineage societies and differ from capitalist and other types of societies primarily in terms of (obligatory) ideological rituals. For example, a distinction between social groups in terms of a "bourgeoisie" and a "proletariat" (to use classical Marxist terminology) was not even advocated by the authors of "African socialism". Instead, lineage more strongly defined social groups and their relationships with each other. Sangmpam (2008) describes that these ancestries not only have an identity-forming character, but also determine social status as well as property and power relations (in this regard, probably more comparable with pre-industrial European "status" societies).

Lineage as a bond for social groups is a constitutive element of social cohesion in African societies and, thus, relevant in African concepts of social cohesion. This is a contrast to Western concepts, which do not include traditional elements. Traditional values and practices of African societies, such as ceremonies, rituals, celebrations as well as religious and cultural values such as hospitality and caring for those in need, have a society-strengthening, cohesive effect in social groups (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016). For example, Ubuntu is a multidimensional construct that combines the main "values of African ontologies" such as "[…] respect for any human being, for human dignity and for human life, collective shared-ness, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, communalism, to list but a few" (UNDP, 2016, p. 16).

For example, the concepts of Guanxi ("relationships"), Ubuntu ("I am because others/you are") and wasta ("who you know") are shaped by the quality of social connections and by the fulfilment

of social, culture-specific obligations (Lutomia, Yassine, & Tong, 2017). Wasta emphasises tribal affiliation, whereas Confucianism and Ubuntu emphasise interdependence among social groups (Lutomia et al., 2017). In the Guanxi concept, building personal connections emphasises collectivism, hierarchy and social harmony, and it is similar to a psychological contract that has the goal of maintaining long-term, loyal, helpful and binding relationships (Lutomia et al., 2017). Similar to the Guanxi concept, the focus of the Ubuntu concept is on a humanistic orientation, which has even found its way into business relationships and, for some years, into management systems.

Wasta, on the other hand, seems to refer more to purposeful relationships with key people in all areas of life whose social commitments lie within the underlying tribal relationships (Lutomia et al., 2017). The wasta concept becomes more understandable when considering the low levels of trust among residents of countries in the Middle East and North Africa. These people do not seem to trust their governments, institutions or each other, thus also hindering the maintenance of a functioning nation-state (Sapsford, Tsourapas, Abbott, & Teti, 2017). Wasta is characterised by three main aspects (Lutomia et al., 2017):

- the positive support of patrons in order to gain access to resources from third parties, for example;

- the tribal affiliation as a reference;

- the influence, control or distribution of information for the purpose of exercising power within social networks.

What all concepts have in common is that they reflect or are based on, to varying degrees, a form of social capital – which is used for productive advantage – that Hofstede (1980, 2011, in Lutomia et al., 2017) describes as "power distance, individualism versus collectivism", "masculinity versus femininity", uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation and forbearance versus control (Lutomia et al., 2017). If the quality of wasta in the Arabic context apparently determines personal success, the perspective for Guanxi lies in Ubuntu, mostly on an ethical, spiritual, philosophical and conflict-resolving orientation of one's actions (Lutomia et al., 2017).

What all three concepts also have in common is that the positive or negative network effects have less to do with the network type or country itself, and more to do with the overall purpose of the network (Lutomia et al., 2017):

> […], an underlying commonality in all three cultural practices is the assumption of personal identity through the lens of the community. To Western ears, this begins to sound like hive-mind collectivism, but at least one vehemently Western commentator rejected this. Decrying not only collectivism in the sense that the West typically imagines but also the West's rugged individualism as "pathological and inimical to life" (p. 761), Jung (1971) described individuation as the foundation of healthy communities, where individuation is the personal expression of a collective norm. As such, since "the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation". Williams (1977) underscored this, emphasizing how the bourgeois framing of the "'individual' as 'private' can become complicit with a process which rejects, deforms, or actually destroys individuals in the very name of individualism" (p. 194), hence, again, "pathological and inimical to life" as Jung noted. This bourgeois framing of the individual as private is antonymic to the individuated framing of the person implicated in Guanxi, Ubuntu, and Wasta, so that to analyze them through a (culturally) Western lens of individualism is at best misleading, if not actively violent when norms framed in its terms are imposed locally. (Lutomia et al., 2017, pp. 61-62)

Gyekye (2011) writes of an African morality of common good, duty and sociality based on humanism that gave rise to the communitarian ethos of African society. This communitarian ethos is based on the notion that community is not an option, but rather that it is naturally given that well-being and need satisfaction can only be found in community. Gyekye (2011) describes that human beings are enmeshed "in a web of moral obligations, commitments, and duties to be fulfilled in pursuit of the common good or the general welfare" (Gyekye, 2011). This is also exemplified in the Akan metaphor "onipa firi soro besi a, obesi onipa kurom" ("when a human being descends from the heavens, he descends into a human town") (Gyekye, 2011). At the heart of the communitarian ethos, however, is the character of each community member, as this is crucial to living a moral life. Basic moral norms, behavioural patterns and ideals defined what is right and good and what constitutes good character and satisfying social relationships, thereby enabling justice, social harmony, cooperation, etc. One ideal explains that all human beings, by virtue of their common humanity, are to be regarded as brothers (Gyekye, 2011).

3.3.2   Lineage structures and its critics

An ultimate goal according to the traditional African view is to realise a harmonious coexistence with others as a virtuous person who is guided by a community orientation by balancing the individual will and the common good (Lutomia, 2017). Criticisms, however, include that the Ubuntu concept suppresses the individual and that the concept of Ubuntu remains elusive and has received little empirical study. However, with a rough idea of what the concept entails, it seems to serve in part as a moral compass in business relationships as well, identifying behaviours as Ubuntu-appropriate or hurtful, for example. It cannot be ruled out, however, that the Ubuntu yardstick could be used manipulatively to encourage corruption and complicity through misinterpretation (Lutomia et al., 2017). By emphasising the relevance of social solidarity and the existing privileging of men in society, some women's rights activists fear the underrepresentation of African women's concerns:

> The effect of the world-wide concern about the woman's position in (Africa) has been varied. It is multi-faceted and contradictory when it is not totally false and misleading. The male-dominated society reacts in the usual fashion by denying that there is any oppression of women in Africa, glorifying an unknown pre-colonial post where our African mothers were totally happy: accusing conscious women activists of being victims of western ideas and copycats of white women; claiming that "the family" is more important than the fate of the individual woman; brushing aside women's concern with the hypocrisy that "national development" is a greater priority now than women's liberation; asserting that women anyhow do not need to be liberated because they have never been in bondage. So you have a compounding of historical and sociological falsification, all to the end of frightening women into quietude. The most vocal and courageous who continue to talk and act socially and politically are stigmatized. (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993, quoted in Bruner, 1993, pp. 3-4, in Lutomia et al., 2017, p. 60)

In summary, the academic discourse on social cohesion in Africa is characterised by several core elements. These include a strong sense of shared identity and communal values that are not only preserved but also reinforced through cultural practices. There is also a deep-rooted orientation towards the common good, which is underpinned by both traditional and academic values. Moreover, societal social structures facilitated social support and caregiving, while governance and leadership structures were designed to promote community well-being and unity.

4 Conclusion

In this literature review, the concept of social cohesion was discussed in the African context, drawing on sources such as ethnophilosophy, political philosophy, religion, culture, economics and international discourses. The aim of the literature review is to better understand academic discourse and "community knowledge" in Africa and to avoid examining the concept of social cohesion just from a European or Western perspective. The first part of this analysis identified sources of knowledge relevant to the study of social cohesion theories. It concluded that the use of oral sources and "traditional wisdom" is justified or even necessary, even though with some caveats. We are aware that critics emphasise the alleged lack of analyticity, criticality and originality of ethnophilosophy or, to put it pejoratively, "oral folk philosophy" (Appiah, 1992, p. 91, in Agada, 2019). Proponents, on the other hand, see it more as proto-philosophy, namely as a starting point for the creation of individual systems of thought that can be universally applicable while retaining their local character. We are convinced that it can only be understood what "African concepts of social cohesion" really are if one takes ethnophilosophy into account.

At the same time, this paper has highlighted some of the pitfalls and limitations of using such traditional resources. Access to these orally transmitted insights is often only possible because they were later written down – and it is unclear how neutral and balanced the writing is. Moreover, thorough knowledge of the social context – and ideally also of the respective language – is important in order to interpret the subtleties correctly. So if one really wants to use these sources, cooperation with experienced anthropologists would be important.

However, caution should also be taken when evaluating modern social theories that are directly written down by their authors. Here, we refer in particular to the elaborations of the concepts discussed in this paper in the context of African socialism and African humanism. We have pointed out that academic research and (political) ideology were conflated at times, which poses challenges when using such sources for one's own research. Especially in the early days, it was also a matter of finding a country's or political leader's own positioning between the Eastern and Western blocs. Liberation from the intellectual colonial legacy also played a role.

The paper furthermore outlined relevant concepts of social cohesion and clustered them according to some frequently mentioned core elements. For the purpose of analysis, these clusters were, in turn, assigned to three categories of relationships. These dimensions describe the relational modes of interaction between actors, especially (i) state–individual relations, (ii) individual–individual relations and (iii) the relations between social groups. Important clusters that we identified are: identity formation based on pre-colonial culture; spirituality; a common-good orientation; consensus-based decision-making; as well as the ideas of communalism, philosophical consciencism and an understanding of structures of domination and descent.

Furthermore, we have sought to gain a better understanding of the academic discourse on social cohesion in Africa by analysing the concepts, determinants, origins and context of social cohesion theories. We have also examined the risk of Western bias in identifying concepts for social cohesion in the African context. Our findings suggest that a comprehensive understanding of social cohesion in Africa requires a critical engagement with the cultural, historical and political contexts that shape social relationships.

Overall, this discussion paper contributes to the growing body of literature on social cohesion in Africa by providing a comprehensive overview of African concepts of social cohesion. These findings can only serve as a prelude to further research, as many questions remain unanswered. They highlight in particular the need for a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of social cohesion in Africa and call for further research in this area. Additional and presumably more country-specific literature reviews and empirical studies are required to explore the contextualisation of social cohesion in Africa with the international research community. In this way, a better understanding of social cohesion in Africa can be formed, which in turn could help

address issues related to conflict, poverty and social inequality, and promote peace, stability and sustainable development.

In this line, this analysis builds the foundation for a systematic comparison of African concepts of social cohesion (Part II). The second part of "Contextualising social cohesion in Africa" comprises seven case studies, which give insights to the concepts, history and practice of social cohesion in Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Rwanda and South Africa. We hope to contribute towards a better understanding of social cohesion with the findings of this analysis and the comparative case studies. All in all, this should provide valuable insights for scholars, policy-makers and practitioners interested in promoting social cohesion in African societies.

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