

REASONABILISM AND CREATIVE RE-HUMANIZATION OF WILL IN AFRICA: A TRANSCOLONIAL REFLECTION

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Abstract. *This study explores how the transcolonial framework provides conceptual and methodological grounding that enables Africans to re-focus on their agency and to creatively re-humanize their predominant understanding and use of their will. Specifically, we explore how the transcolonial concept and principle of reasonabilism offer fresh and sustainable hopes for development on the continent by reawakening agency and the concomitant sense of responsibility among Africans. This is a crucial part of a broader mission of re-imagining the will and willing in today's Age of Will. We demonstrate that since the will (always) wins, it is most appropriate for African elites to take up their social responsibility of championing the process of redirecting their will towards the creative transformation of themselves, their societies, histories, and resources, rather than blaming others for all their ill conditions.*

Keywords: *Transcolonial framework, Africa's agency, reasonabilism, re-humanized will, African elites*

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1. Introduction

Describing the 21st century as the Age of Will is both striking and demanding for all knowledge seekers and leaders around the world. It is striking because it captures two concurrent and conflicting situations. The first is that we are in a moment in human history when the wealth of knowledge available to humanity is enough to sustain life peacefully and for the good of all. Within the same era, the politicized will of several leaders and citizens seems to be drawn to destruction rather than to mutual building and global peace. What is required to avert the extinction of the human species from possible climate disasters, deployment of weapons of massive destruction, uncontrolled deployment of AI systems and modification of human genomes, disregard for science, and so on - is to will for the good of the species and life generally rather than of individuals and a few groups. The same description of our era (as the Age of Will) is demanding because the lure to hold onto power and control of material resources has continued to becloud reason, consistency, empathy, and humaneness in several quarters. It hollows discussions and subverts previous agreements within and among countries, political parties, regional organizations, and so on. This demand implies, for instance, that ethicists and other social theorists need to continuously remind humanity in this age about the place of human will in the face of life-transforming and revolutionizing AI systems.

A huge percentage of human beings in Africa are measurably classified as living in (and continuously descending into) extreme poverty. As of 2025, the percentage of specific African countries with the highest share of global population living below extreme poverty indicate that 11.7% are from each of Nigeria and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); 4% are from each of Tanzania and Mozambique; 3.3% are from Madagascar, 3% from Uganda, and so on.¹ In the area of highly innovative, transforming, impactful and patented knowledge production, the statistics about locally developed patents in Africa reveals a consistent and wide lag by the continent. Between 2012 and 2021, Nigeria generated 522 local patents, from a population of approximately 200 million people. Ethiopia generated 5 patents from among 118 million people; Ghana generated 13 patents from 32 million people; and Liberia generated 0 patents from among 5 million people, within the same ten-year period. Malaysia generated 5,284 from 32 million people, and Singapore generated 3,836 from 5 million people, within the same ten-year period (World Intellectual Property Organization [WIPO], 2022). In 2020, Africa accounted for only 0.5% of global patent applications, compared to 66.6% from Asia, 19% from North America, and 10.9% from Europe (AUDA-NEPAD 2023). These imply that the task of drawing attention to the use of the will should, therefore, be heightened in the continent.

So, how can philosophers in Africa re-think the connection between the decisions and will of their leaders in all sectors (politics, economics, education, and so on), on the one hand, and the entrenched high level of poverty in terms of quality of living condition, knowledge production, and overall contribution to human knowledge pool, on the other hand? How can this connection be re-imagined in such a manner that the will of the

¹ See data at Statista.com: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1228553/extreme-poverty-as-share-of-global-population-in-africa-by-country/>

human agents within the continent is properly understood as the causal factor for the quality of life and knowledge contribution from there? That is, how can a conceptual and methodological clarification and projection of African agency serve as a new and sustainable grounding for fresh and sustainable hopes towards Africa's development and contributions to humanity?

Agbakoba (2023) had wondered why hundreds of thousands of children of those previously sold into slavery to, and later colonized by, the global West, will continue to seek refuge and more decent living in the countries of the colonizers. His concern is made palpable by the fact that migration out of Nigeria, for instance, has come to be described by the term '*japa*.' He defined the word *japa* as a process of "breaking loose from binds and shackles and escaping into freedom, as for instance a tethered ram or a bound captive managing to break loose and escape."¹ It means breaking loose and escaping into Europe, the United States, Canada, any other nation of the global north, or, indeed, anywhere there is the promise of a better life. Their countries are now places of binding and shackles, while the homes of the former colonizers are now places of freedom. How, therefore, can social theorists on the continent explain migration out of Africa as disturbing evidence of overall misdirection of political and economic will in Africa, as well as evidence for the inadequacy of decolonial responses to social problems on the continent? These intricately related and complex questions warranted this reflection.

Within the field of African studies, various conceptions and contributions have been made towards addressing the issues embodied in these questions. Two of such conceptions stand out. The first is the view about African Renaissance as part of a broader idea of pan-Africanism. During its initial launch in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Thabo Mbeki announced a new orientation and pattern of engagement among African leaders and citizens, based on a new self-definition that is anchored on 'who they are' and 'who they should be' (Olaniyan & Ifidon 2018; Cossa 2009; Evaldsson and Wessels 2004). The second prominent conception is captured in the deconstructive movement to decolonize all spheres of human engagement in Africa. Scholars with this orientation insist, for instance, that if the continent really wants to innovate in the areas of knowledge generation and ethical standardization, or achieve political transformation within their societies, they need to de-link from the West. They blame the failures in Africa on Western manipulations via Western models, or on how unfit those models are for African contexts (Hoffmann & Metz 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021). Thus, for each knowledge, moral, political, economic, and so on models borrowed or adapted from the former colonizers and in use within the continent, the continent needs to identify its own unique models as alternatives to the Western or adapted ones.

We contend that the first conception (African Renaissance) is merely an expression of desires. There was no clear conceptual and methodological grounding to make these desires achievable, palpable, and sustainable. The second focuses on antagonistic reflections about Africa in relation to others, with a strong emphasis on how Africa is different and needs to find alternative modes of being and doing things. Although social development is unarguably the cumulative result of human agency, preferences, choices,

¹ See: Agbakoba (2023), <https://therenaissance.com.ng/what-japa-really-means-by-joseph-c-a-agbakoba/>

and will, these dominant articulations of development in Africa have manifested an understanding and use of will within the continent that has largely ignored the foundational place of Africa's agency in Africa's development.

Our aim in this reflection, therefore, is to re-center human agency and will of Africans in an Age of demanding focus on consistent, reasoned, and empathic collective human will. This approach to African affairs is crucial and promising for three reasons. First, it provides a fundamentally self-reflective, self-critical, and therefore rare stance on Africa. It invites African elites to rethink their collective self-conception and, therefore, their understanding of what it has always meant to will in Africa. Second, our approach returns attention to African elites and the fact that nothing would have happened and/or would happen on the continent without the outright collaboration and willing of Africans. Third, our approach is an invitation to African elites to explore why their predominant understanding of what it means to will in Africa needs to change urgently.

This reflection is divided into three sections, following the Introduction and preceding the Conclusion. In the first, we articulate the problem of defeatist understanding and use of the will in Africa. We describe the pattern in which this problem has largely manifested, and how that manifestation creates a vicious circle by consolidating the problem. In the second section, we present the idea of *transcolonialism* and highlight its principle of reasonabilism. We demonstrate how a *transcolonial* focus on African agency transcends previous frameworks for describing and resolving the lingering development crisis in Africa. The third section explores the crisis of agency and underdevelopment in Africa, highlighting the continent's generational losses. We contend that to improve the situation on the continent, there is a need to re-humanize the will of its citizens, beginning with their elites, so that by realizing social development, the continent will make up for centuries of generational losses and placate humanity for the willful wastages the continent has represented. Specifically, we articulate the conceptual and methodological foundations necessary for the process of re-humanizing will and willing in Africa.

2. Will and Willing in Africa: Highlighting a Patterned, Consolidated Problem

Most of the formally articulated history of Africa's engagement with the global human community has been hugely defined by a struggle for freedom from 'outsiders.' This includes freedom from the outsiders' gaze and the supposedly 'iron-clad will' of these 'outsiders' to manipulate and/or misrepresent the continent to justify their exploitation. These struggles have continued to shape the African condition, characterized by lies, self-deception (Ajah 2013), and myths about will and willing on the continent, as part of grand narratives (Ajah 2019; Agbakoba 2019) about the continent. These grand narratives are being crafted to highlight the nature and sources of the African condition, responses to the condition, and as tools for the struggle(s) for freedom. This is a defining metaphysical fact about Africa. We describe it as a metaphysical fact because what was supposed to be a mere empirical fact has come to be a key component of defining the being of Africa(ns). This same fact, sadly, defines the history of post-colonial African citizens with themselves on the one hand, and with their political leaders on the other hand. A crucial feature of

this fact, which relates to Africa within the global human community, has led to various forms of self-articulation and struggles for Africa's freedom from 'outsiders': political, scholarly, and epistemic struggles, among others. Two of such articulations stand out, and we describe them as predominant understanding of African's will among African elites.

2.1. Predominant Understanding of Africans' Will among African Elites

Academic argumentations about the nature and means of expressions of will in African societies have largely hovered around the question of the source and organizing principle of will and willing in Africa. Most Africanist scholars insist that in Africa, both the person and their capacity to will are subsumed to the will of the community. This is captured in the idea of Afro-communalism and personhood. Menkiti (1984) and Gyekye (1992), for instance, insisted that individuals attain their sense of meaningfulness from the community because they are ontologically embedded in their communities. In fact, in the African contexts that Menkiti described, "priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to the collectivity, and their rights, *whatever these may be*, are seen as secondary to their exercise of their duties" (1984: 180. Emphasis is mine). Put another way, the will of individuals [whatever their intentional content(s)] is understood as irrelevant once they clash with that of their communities. This way of understanding the nature of the will suggests that personal will is ontologically empty content. It also suggests that the individual has no metaphysical and moral grounding to will against the collective. After all, the proponents argued, he is nothing outside the community. Contentions from authors like Matolino (2009), Matolino and Kwindingwi (2014), Asiegbu and Ajah (2020), Ajah and Asiegbu (2022), and so on, in response to this understanding of the will, constitute parts of the debate about the community and the individual. We contend that, granted that the community has normative influences on the nature and sources of will by their citizens, it was wrong to have argued that the individual's will is necessarily subsumed and overridden by the community, 'whatever these may be.' It was even further wrong for the citizens to have willingly subsumed their wills to that of the larger community, including when the leaders of the community were obviously directing the collective will towards long-term destructive options.

Another lingering understanding of the will in Africa is the discussion in favor of decolonization of power, knowledge, science, and so on. Authors in this group have tried to identify the route to improved human condition in Africa in the need to sever conceptual, mental, economic, and political links with the global West as the one-time colonizers and continued exploiters of the continent. They insist that Africa needs to return to traditional models as alternatives to Western models. This search for alternatives derives from an almost maniac-level claims of uniqueness (Akah & Ajah 2019; Ajah 2022a; Ajah 2025). The second position has remained only a reactionary engagement that blames others for the human conditions in Africa. Many of those involved in such discussions seem not to appreciate the connection between their engagements and their articulation of the nature of the will in Africa.

One of the weaknesses of the decolonial position is that several concepts that are crucial to human flourishing have remained *cognitively inaccessible* to its logic and

contemporary defenders. This is valid for several reasons. The first is the collation of inconsistencies in decolonial articulations of dehumanized will. The other is the lack of agency that grounds their articulation. This is followed by their inability to engage in productive willing from within the framework that grounds their understanding of themselves and their will. The fourth is a continuous reference to an overgrown past, both as a point of reference and as a solution to the freedom being sought. The fifth, which results from the third and fourth, is the consistent and consolidated production of negative knowledge. On the one hand, they argue that all human beings are equally imbued with relevant capabilities to flourish. Yet, they argue that the will of people from an entire region of the world supersedes that of others from another entire region. This presents a clear inconsistency. If Africans are at par with those in the global West, it is metaphysically destabilizing to narrate the history of African societies as if their agency is inferior. Besides, if the knowledge system and values in pre-colonial Africa were as good as what obtains in the modern era, it is difficult to explain how a few explorers from the West could completely subdue communities that knew as much as they knew at the time.

Ajah (2025) explained this idea of cognitive inaccessibility using the black hole imagery as a key problem with decolonization. According to him, decolonization involves the bundling of emotions with so much energy that any contrary idea to the perspective supported by these emotions is disregarded, thereby blocking opportunities for critical self-reflection. To block opportunities for critical reflection because one prefers to hold onto past negative experiences and the concomitant emotions is to demonstrate that one's understanding of the will as a tool for concrete living is poor. If these problems are cognitively accessible to decolonialists and yet they hold onto the alternative positions, then they are denying the truth. This is an even more difficult problem that involves self-deception. I will explore this in section 4 below.

What should have been clear up to this point is that our interest is not in how others have, over the years, understood Africans and their will. We would rather focus on articulations and interpretations of how African elites and wider citizens have understood, conceptualized, and projected their individual and collective wills, to themselves and to the broader human community. Of course, one's understanding of an aspect of reality determines their approach and/or use of that reality.

2.2. Predominant Use of 'Will' Among Africans

In this section, we demonstrate the various ways many African societies undermine development by using their will in such a manner that the result of their choices and actions reveals their preferred use of their will—to undermine development rather than to help themselves (*The Economist* 2025). A further description by *The Economist* captures the results of the predominant use of the will in Africa. We will cite in some detail:

In the past decade, as America, Europe and Asia have been transformed by technology and politics, Africa has, largely unnoticed, slipped further behind. Income per person has fallen from a third of that in the rest of the world in 2000 to a quarter. Output per head may be no higher in 2026 than it was in 2015... Behind those figures lies a depressing record of stagnant productivity. African

countries are experiencing disruption without development... For all the talk of using digital technology and clean energy to leapfrog ahead, Africa lacks the 20th-century kit needed to thrive in the 21st. Its road density has probably fallen. Less than 4% of farmland is irrigated and almost half of sub-Saharan Africans lack electricity. (*The Economist* 2025)

Put another way, while the rest of the world willed in favor of the transformation of their societies and citizens, most African leaders willed in favor of stagnant productivity. They chose to lag behind; 25 years into the 21st century, they are generally and empirically verifiably described as having willed to be lacking the toolkit for the 20th century. Let us specify some of the ways in which they use their will.

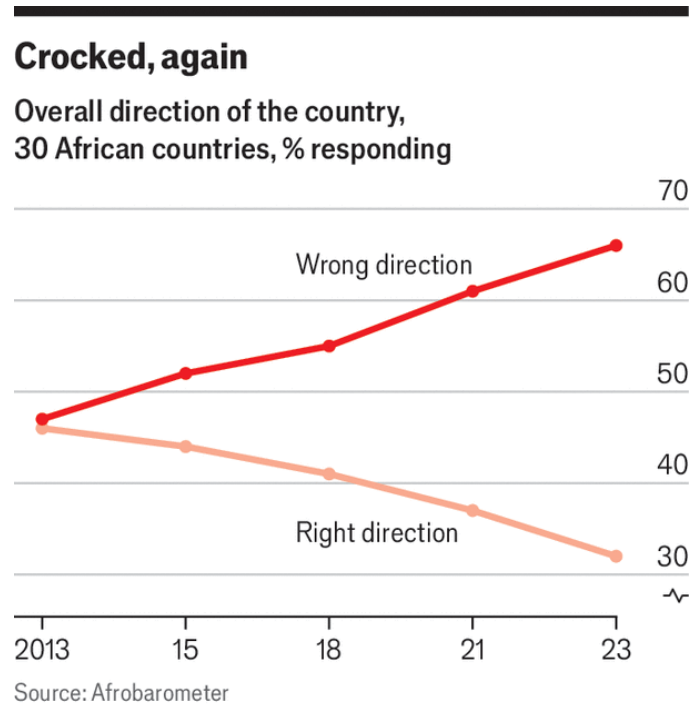
The first dominant use of the will that we explore here is the problem of willing for negative justice, retribution, and the dearth of collaboration. We make the distinction between negative justice and positive justice. In the first, the focus is on retaliation, retribution, and foreclosure of possibilities of collaboration. Negative justice forecloses collaboration because the retributive agent rarely admits that what is at stake is justice for another agent. For this reason, most cases of retribution do not restore harmony (Agbakoba 2019). Rather, they renew a sense of ‘cutting a pound of flesh.’ This mode of using the will manifests when members of ethnic groups who felt disregarded during an earlier regime in positions of power get their own turn. For instance, it is common for those appointed Vice Chancellor of a Federal university in Nigeria to be extremely likely to fill key administrative positions with people from their ethnic group. Once it is time to elect a new Vice Chancellor, a key deciding factor for most of the learned men and women tasked with selecting a new Vice Chancellor is often the ethnic group or state from which the candidates come, rather than who is most capable of taking the institution to improved heights. And, once the new VC is appointed, he tries to retaliate by removing from appointed positions all those who were appointed by the former VC. Then, he replaces those positions with people from his ethnic group or state. This choice for negative justice weakens opportunities for collaboration, and worse, destroys the chances of continuity in such institutions. The consequences are manifest in many institutions in Nigeria.

Following the example we just presented, it is worrisome why decolonial scholars and politicians would blame former colonialists for the woes in their countries. By ignoring palpable facts, they will for what we term ‘self-deception 1.0’ rather than the truth. And no one can succeed without an appropriate relationship with the truth. Thus, in answering the question ‘Who did what to Africa?’, most Africanist scholars and politicians continue to blame others, except African elites. They use their will in favor of self-deception rather than the available truth. This is the second dominant use of the will by many African elites.

A third predominant use of the will in many parts of the continent is willing for the wastage of human creative potentials instead of for their development and excellence. Resources that could transform the lives of the present and prepare for a higher quality of life for future generations are wasted by corrupt politicians and their cronies. The January 2025 edition of *The Economist* magazine titled “Africa Gap” reported

that as of 2023, over 65% of respondents from 30 African countries insisted that their countries were heading in the wrong direction (see Figure 1). Yet, a pro-regime cabinet minister in Angola willed to report otherwise: He insisted that the president is overhauling Angola. In response to the point about the movement of African countries in the wrong direction, the Angolan cabinet minister insisted that: “You don’t change a political system overnight.”

Figure 1: Responses on the direction of 30 African countries



One would get similar response(s) from most cabinet members in Nigeria. The Nigerian counterpart may add that any negative report on the performance of political regime in power is informed by the ‘opposition’. This differs from the concrete experiences of businesspeople all over Angola who report stories of graft and willful wastage of resources to the effect that outside of the capital, Luanda, “there is little sign of the tens of billions of dollars earned from oil” (*The Economist* 2025). As political officeholders waste funds and resources, they create an increasing population that lives in poverty, whose lives and creative potential are often wasted. Political leaders in Angola willed to spend only around 3% of their GDP on health and education, which is less than half of the regional average. Hence, an Angolan citizen further reported:

[W]e had the potential to accumulate generational wealth just as the population was exploding. But we didn’t leave enough on the table. (*The Economist* 2025)

Put another way, the Angolan society, like many others in Africa, continues to waste resources instead of accumulating and using them to build wealth for current and future generations.

The Economist expressed the hope that, although sub-Saharan Africa is home to 15% of the global population, it accounts for just 3% of global output and contributes

only 5% of global growth, it can still catch up. The condition, it explains, is that the region needs to raise its productivity growth to something close to India's recent rate, that is, from around 1% a year to 4%. Doing this will imply that by 2050, sub-Saharan Africa will be able to contribute 10% of global productivity output, a fifth of global growth. This scenario and hope, it retorted, is currently unfounded: "Africa combines high population growth with low or stagnant productivity growth" (*The Economist* 2025). Its people continue to will for a "disappointing path" where its gap compared to the productivity in other regions only continues to widen. Preferring to continue on this path implies that by 2043,

Africa will still have 400m people in extreme poverty, the vast majority of the world's destitutes. (*The Economist* 2025)

But who is taking the continent through and along this path? We contend that it is the people of the continent at different levels—not just the political class, but also their cronies, and tribesmen and women.

Willing *for the tribe* against high and universalizable standards and collective goals, and misrepresenting tribalism as solidarity and/or normative relativism, is the fourth dominant use of the will within the continent. We term this self-deception 2.0. It usually manifests in answer to two questions: (a) 'How do we understand and approach contemporary Africans?' and (b) 'How should Africans proceed to improve their lives and catch up with others around the world?' This mode of willing resembles the first. In this case, however, African elites insist on defining themselves and their world from the limited prism of their tribe, ethnic group, and race. They prioritize these over high standards that can place them on par with humans from any other part of the world, making them comparable to them. Instead, they willingly misrepresent their tribalism as solidarity by excavating and throwing around various concepts that capture their preference for tribalism over solidarity, and demand to be treated as unique and deserving standards that are relative to them. By focusing on the tribe and claims of uniqueness, many Africans face a dearth of principles and consistency, as well as the weakening of values and standards. These cumulatively result in stifling and useless government institutions, the reign of injustice from the rule of tribal politicking, and the extreme difficulty in getting the best hands for key positions in all spheres of engagement. It is therefore strange how a society that uses its will within this logic is expected to flourish. This is metaphysically impossible.

The fifth of the predominant uses of the will in many African societies is the will for culpable ignorance. The concept of culpable ignorance is found in the works of authors such as Moody-Adams (1994). It implies intentionally avoiding circumstances that bring one face-to-face with the truth—conceptual, moral, empirical, and so on. In the context of this discussion, we focus on the fact that many politicians in African societies shield themselves from the concrete sufferings and pains of their societies. They avoid travelling via specific routes and hearing from more critical and demanding sources. Some intellectual elites are involved in this too: They ignore concrete and contemporaneous situations in Africa and prefer to focus on what happened to/within the continent hundreds of years ago. These intellectual elites engage in the version of culpable

ignorance that they champion by willing for the past as 'the referent point' for societies they are supposed to be leading intellectually and morally. They refer to the past for hope, as the source of the best for self-conception, value articulation, governance, and so on. By doing this, they shift discussions about responsibility for the human condition in Africa, from African elites and their citizens to colonizers and neo-colonizers.

The point about willing for the past and doing so for reasons of searching to prove how unique Africans can be in the alternative models they present, returns us to the problem of an emotional and intellectual blackhole that some contributors in African studies are stuck in (see Ajah 2025). To continue on this path implies a will for something that culminates in the dearth of the capacity to self-reflect. It also addresses the issue we mentioned earlier regarding *cognitive inaccessibility* among several African elites and decolonialists, in particular. We contend that although this problem of the inability to self-reflect, self-criticize, and cognitively access the concrete contemporary conditions of citizens is becoming a metaphysical issue, it is not yet a metaphysical fact about the continent. We don't think they can become metaphysical. At most, they have gotten entrenched but should still not be used to describe the nature of those who have opted for this path. This latter position is derived from the transcolonial assumption and confidence in human possibilities to continuously reimagine and recreate themselves and their conditions, which we will discuss in the next section.

The last of the misuse of the will in many African societies is the intentional confusion of lanes among most African elites: politicians, businessmen, and others who pretend to be academics and researchers. These elites create what Nic Cheeseman described as "Africa's shadow states," which are "made up of parasitical networks through which businessmen get sweetheart deals in exchange for funding politicians or accepting kickbacks" (*The Economist* 2025). South Africa (under Jacob Zuma), Nigeria, and several other African states are easy examples here. By this involvement of politicians in the activities of businessmen, and what happens in universities and research institutions. These elites make the worst of their worlds: The fusion of lanes makes it difficult for them to specialize in either business, research, or politics, resulting in a region full of mediocre politicians and researchers, as well as politically dependent, mediocre businesspeople and academics. We think it is more of 'confusion' than of 'fusion' of lanes. This description also fits what happens in most institutions of higher education in Nigeria, where supposed academics and researchers are handy tools for politicians to willingly disrupt elections into offices in the universities to make sure that those elected are handy tools for politicians. By doing these and more, they manifest themselves as mediocre academics and researchers. They will for the destruction of their research institutions and knowledge generation processes rather than for their sustenance. They also will for loss of their capacity for critical assessment of government activities since they feed from those activities. They metamorphose from supposed social critics to government praise singers, giving honorary awards to people who are destroying the future of their children, and inviting poorly performing politicians to deliver keynote lectures on good governance as if to say that in Nigeria, one can give what they do not have.

The Economist (2025) capped this confusion between politicians and businessmen—and we add, between politicians, businessmen, and academics—in these words:

The closeness of business and politics also helps explain why there are so few African entrepreneurs of global standing, and so few globally competitive African firms. It is hard to become a legitimate billionaire when wealth depends on politics. (*The Economist* 2025)

In the same way, it is hard to become a good researcher when the rigorous thinking and decency that should guide research processes are sacrificed in the process of fusing their lane with that of poorly performing politicians.

So, what conceptual and methodological adjustments do we need to make to change what we described as a consolidated problem or resolve the issues surrounding our claim about *cognitive inaccessibility*? Since one of the most presented solutions to Africa's problem is defined by the problem of continuously 'willing for the past as the reference point' by the majority of African elites—namely, the widely spread idea of decolonization—how can we get out of this vicious circle? We contend that the transcolonial framework is a necessary part of any robust and promising answer to this question.

3. Transcolonial Framework and the Principle of Reasonabilism

The term 'reasonabilism' was coined by Joseph Agbakoba as part of the core explanatory points and principles within a wider transcolonial framework also coined by him (Agbakoba 2019; 2023; 2024; 2025). The transcolonial framework, or simply transcolonialism, is Joseph Agbakoba's intercultural, self-critical, and philosophical contribution to addressing the lingering demand for conceptualizing Africa's development problems, their sources and sustaining factors, and responsibility-centered solutions to them. Transcolonialism offers a new vista and perspective on perceiving and approaching Africa's historical past and the future, in a manner that creatively transcends the uncritical and crippling reference to traditions, the years of colonial experiences, and their immense negative baggage. It suggests that despite the weight of this baggage, the same colonial experiences also have huge positive deposits and heritages that are worth leaning on by inhabitants of the continent, to creatively form intercultural, hybridized, rich resources, to jumpstart themselves on the path to their flourishing. That is, the transcolonial framework holds that Africans can still create newer and more flourishing versions of themselves by creatively tapping from the positive ideas, practices, principles, frameworks, and deposits from both their traditions, the colonial deposits, and other resources from cultures around the world. To explore these core arguments of transcolonialism, Agbakoba distinguished between traditional frameworks that guide(d) life in precolonial and many postcolonial contexts in Africa, and some modern scientific frameworks that have evidently improved the quality of contemporary life all around the world. Transcolonialism, therefore, is an attempt to access these more modern frameworks and their undergirding principles, and interculturally merge them with related excellent principles in African societies.

There are several connections between the art of creative willing and the key positions of the transcolonial framework. Here are just two of them. The first is that the focus of this framework implies a will beyond the past, into the present, and with a clear focus on huge possibilities of intentionally creating the future individuals and groups need and deserve. This creativity component of the framework is founded on a principle of Afro-constructivism. This principle emphasizes that human beings can creatively (re)construct new versions of themselves and their contexts out of their past and present circumstances (Ajah 2025). In this regard, the transcolonial framework emphasizes that the process of predominantly regurgitating the past and making it a central reference point for thinking, valuing, and acting is, first of all, an art of the will. It is, however, a dangerous path and art. This way of using the will has failed the continent. That 'will' needs to be redirected if Africans are to flourish. The second connection between the art of creative willing and the transcolonial framework is that transcolonialism implies positioning the will beyond, yet including, the self, in openness to learning from and collaborating with others. This is at the heart of the intercultural frame that informs transcolonialism. It derives from the deeper and more evidential human crave and capacity to reach out to the unknown, to become one with it (the unknown) by giving to and taking from it. Thus, 'to will to withdraw' from others and from the facts in the here-and-now, as an option towards solving Africa's underdevelopment crises, is anti-human and unsustainable.

Another principle that informs transcolonialism and therefore justifies this perspective to the art of willing and human flourishing in Africa is the deference to and willing in favor of reason, consistency, and universalizable frameworks/values. This is the point about reasonabilism. Reasonabilism contrasts with particularism and insensibilism as a dimension of the prevailing traditional thought systems in several societies in Africa (Agbakoba 2019). Whereas reasonabilism focuses on the universalizability of values, principles, and conceptions of the human person, particularism and insensibilism have "circumscribed radius of consistency" (Agbakoba 2019: 210). Agbakoba (2024: 93) defined reasonabilism as "an unalloyed combination of the principle of consistency and ontological beneficence." It is meant to counter any form of reasoning that sweepingly excludes or disregards the humanity and fundamental capabilities of/from any human group, including a disregard for their philosophies and mode(s) of thinking, validity and usefulness of their values, and so on. To counter such disregards that imply an imbalanced approach to life and others, the reasonabilism principle implies a continuous awareness that the consciousness and capacities of conscious humans are always defined by both substantive and relational features. The features seek to ensure that there is always a balance between reason and affect in such an alloyed manner that "the presence of one aspect necessarily involves the presence of other aspects" (Agbakoba 2024: 76). This balance is also a manifestation of unity. It implies the wholesomeness of a human being operating with this principle.

The point about balance in the idea of reasonabilism implies a distinction between 'reason without empathy' and 'empathy without reason,' each of which is a limited, extremist, and therefore dangerous disposition. In the case of the first, there is an excessive focus on logic and the flow of thought, while disregarding the clarity and

guidance that should derive from approaching reason and logic through their concrete embodiments. Agbakoba (2024) explained that although modernity was highly rated for its utmost regard for reason, the limitations and inadequacies of that human capacity were exposed during the colonial experiences when non-Western humans were excluded from the broader idea of what it meant to be human. They misconceived reason to be a “clinical and sanitized capability detached from affectivities, the conatus and concrete living” (Agbakoba 2024: 75). A proper conceptualization of reason requires an acknowledgement that it survives in the context of psychological states without which what is supposed to be logical turns into irrationalities. Reason without empathy is, therefore, sterile. It disregards the crucial place of contexts and skips the relevance of social emotions, whereas these emotions are supposed to enhance human intelligence and reason and enable reason to grow. So ‘reason without empathy’ focuses on logic and consistency without regard for beneficence, that is, regard for and empathy towards others.

Empathy without reason, on the other hand, focuses on the uniqueness of contexts to the point of disregarding structures and principles that should inform and guide the universalizability of human experiences and valuation processes across contexts (Ajah 2016; Agbakoba 2024). This part of the two extremes under consideration is therefore structureless. By lacking reason, ‘empathy without reason’ fundamentally lacks any basis for consistency, objectivity, fairness, clarity, social control, dependability, and sustainability. The balance that obtains when the two dispositions are united demands that

[L]ogical patterns of thought have to imbue, and are in turn imbued by, other dimensions of the psychological, spiritual and social forces that make up a human being—especially a human being engaged in action. (Agbakoba 2024: 77)

Reasonabilism, therefore, is about the degree of consistency and beneficence (radius of consistency-beneficence) that defines human choices, actions, and interactions among individuals, particularly of groups. The harmonious balance of reason and empathy, of consistency and regard for others, creates the mental framework for equity, equality, justice, creative and peaceful resolution of problems, solidarity, and collaboration among groups. Once this balance is lost, we have the rule of insensibility, irrationality, apathy, and insensibilism.

An analysis of several traditional societies in pre-colonial Africa suggests that many of these societies exhibited manifestations of this balance, such as closely knit kindreds and clans. Thus, reasonabilism guided the living conditions of some of those societies. However, Agbakoba explained that

The problem for Africa is that the radius of consistency-beneficence that held the clans together in brotherhood, that provided the “inner resources” for the “inner directed” personalities of the communalistic “nation state”, was at the time of colonization, much too narrow (particularistic and founded too much on flux-bound immanence and materiality) for the size and complexities of the modern state and economy. (Agbakoba 2019: 227)

We contend that the key problem of the will in postcolonial Africa, therefore, is the unwillingness to self-reflectively accept the inadequacies of the traditional social frame for the contemporary context. This refusal to accept empirical changes and facts has further implied an unwillingness to creatively transform their limited understanding of the world and the collective self, as well as Africa's place in it in relation to others outside their clans and brotherhoods. This means working against *being*—the fact that global relationship demands mutual collaboration among all humans—and still expecting to contribute to the improvement of the being of Africans and the manifestation of being in Africa.

One of the implications is that members of different ethnic groups in many African states rigidly hold onto their ethnic affiliations at the cost of willing for collaboration and creative pooling of their resources. When they move into cities and centers of political powers and business engagements in their countries, they insist on forming associations that include only members from their immediate communities (kindreds, clans, villages, and/or states). By doing this, they manifest their disregard for the contemporary manifestation of being. They work against reality. In most cases, their relationship with those from different ethnic groups—in the cities and outside their initial places of brotherhood, within the public spaces they share, and the systems that should collaboratively guide and co-create meanings (Okeja 2022; Ajah 2022b)—tilts toward merely impoverishing and exploiting those systems or spaces (Mere 1973; Ekeh 1975). They do this because their self-conception and understanding of where to direct their will have never transcended their kindreds, clans, and villages. They emphasize their tribal relationships and empathic connections with their kin, but they disregard the demands of reason, consistency of rules, and standards, among other things. They will for 'empathy without reason.' Thus, standards for recruitment of the best brains, as in admissions for university degrees, employment for jobs, award of contracts for building public facilities and amenities, and so on, are drastically lowered to favor those from one's ethnic group, and then to the detriment of all. This is part of what *The Economist* (2025) meant by African governments (and citizens) undermining their development.

Due to this limiting mode of self- and other-conception, relationship, and willing, it remains difficult for Africans to flourish. To alter this situation, they need to reconstruct themselves by themselves. This point derives from the validity of the position that for any set of societies to compete and cooperate fairly among themselves in the contemporary global context, they must be comparable "at the formal relational and organizational levels of functionality at least as well as at the knowledge generating, technical and creative levels" (Agbakoba 2019: 227). Africa is not comparable to the world's leading knowledge, technological, and creative hubs. This is incontestable. We argue that a lack of deeper awareness of the work required to meet sectoral functionality in most parts of Africa remains a problem.

The predominant preferences and willing patterns of an individual and a collective derive from their deepest, underlying self- and other conceptions. Ekeh (1975) was therefore correct to have traced the emergence of the disposition to exploit and impoverish the wider societal (second) public to colonialism. Yet, we contend that post-

colonial experiences of large-scale, self-inflicted poverty and low productivity on the continent should have led to self-reflective and self-critical processes. These should have also resulted in the collapse of the two publics by now. But this has not happened because most of the elites have willed to maintain the status quo. So, how can we re-humanize this will that sustains what harms its own, and yet blames others for harming them? How do we re-humanize this will that, despite being well into the 21st century, still offers so little to humanity in terms of knowledge production, which is the pinnacle of all forms of resources?

4. Re-Humanizing the Will, Making up for Generational Losses, and Placating Humanity

Africa's lingering underdevelopment crisis implies willful wastage of various forms of human brilliance and resources, as well as generational losses. For this reason, we reverse the logic of demands for reparations from the global West. Instead, we argue that realizing development in Africa should also be seen as what the continent needs to do to placate the rest of humanity for the many willful wastages within the continent, which resulted from misdirected willing by Africans against themselves. To take this inverted route, we begin by highlighting the nature of the human will as the conceptual and metaphysical ground for the related positions we defend in this section.

4.1. Re-Stating the Nature of the Human Will—Towards a Conceptual Grounding, 'Productive Willing,' and Conditions for Development

The will of a conscious human being is driven by deeply cherished values and preferences! The will, therefore, is the conceptual and metaphysical grounding for the idea of agency. When a will leads to changes from one pattern of lifestyle to another, it is because of an individual or group preference for a lifestyle over others. This same logic defines the use of the will in local and international politicking and agreements. Whenever more humane forms of politicking and regional agreements are withdrawn or weakened, it is defensible to hold that those at the helm of affairs have willed in favor of other values that do not support the dying lifestyle and/or abandoned agreement(s). Even the direction of power use is also a result of the preferences of power holders in each context. In the case of the manifestation of the will as a collective, it is driven by social values and (mutual) expectations.¹ In this latter sense, we argue that the nature of the will is that it is a collective social phenomenon that manifests in the interaction of humans in relation to/with other humans and/or other aspects of known reality. It is also the source of human responses to all forms of concrete existential experiences. This implies, for instance, that an individual or group is never conquered nor gives up on their positive values and creative hopes unless they will to do so. Thus, there is a limit to the impacts of external factors to the direction of individual and collective wills. To, therefore, rethink a group's understanding of the will and the resultant use of power,

¹ A 10-year national survey by the Chatham House Africa Programme provides consolidated evidence on how value-driven social expectations have driven and consolidated low- and large-scale corruption in Nigeria. See their Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG) project available at: www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/our-departments/africa-programme/social-norms-and-accountable-governance-snag

requires that they first reconsider the degree of their respect for reality as it manifests itself and humanity as an aspect of reality. The result of the type of rethinking that we propose, which is guided by respect, promises to be a framework for a renewed understanding and approach to life within and outside of Africa. Such a framework needs to be adopted as the core feature, source, and determining factor in contemporary understanding and use of the will. There is no need to tag its description as peculiar to any society, region or stage in human history.¹ In our view, it is simply a framework for viewing reality and humanity in the contemporary era, with the aim of ensuring that humanity develops and adopts an improved understanding and use of their will, power, resources, and so on.

Our attempt on conceptual clarifications so far indicates that the capacity 'to will' is a property of human agents as living, conscious, capable, reasonable, and empathetic beings. It is necessarily connected to the idea of choosing among options. To will, therefore, is a follow-up from 'to have chosen to or not to.' So, individuals and groups can also choose to strengthen or weaken their capacity to will. That is, they can 'will' in favor of weakening their capacity 'to will.' Based on these clarifications, we argue that describing human activities in various stages in Africa as if Africans must continue to be people to whom things happen suggests that no matter what happens, the will of Africans differs substantially and metaphysically from the will of other humans. Insisting on doing so, under whatever guise, implies intentional dehumanization of one's will and the will of one's group. The way out is to re-humanize the understanding of the will of this group. We argue that doing so is a necessary condition for development in Africa and anywhere. Grounding development on this condition is assured because the nature of the will, as Agbakoba rightly noted, includes the individual or group agent's possession of "self-reconstructive capabilities" (2019: 327) and a second-level, self-reflexive capacity to access these capabilities and creatively improve them with resources from all possible sources whenever the need arises.

No matter the volume and spread of self-deceptive narratives that several contemporary Africanists would like to tell themselves or project to the world about the continent, Africa is a consolidated case of *wheels willing and weaving wastage of all forms of resources*. The idea of re-humanizing the will on the continent implies reversing this consolidated problem. This derives from the views of the second author of this reflection [Anthony Ajah] that underdevelopment in Africa needs to be reconceptualized not just as a lack, but more importantly as willful wastage, injustice, and loss of generations of human resources, creative potentials, and potential life-changing wills.

The point about "re-" doing something necessarily implies recreating, reconstructing, or more generally responding to the thing or some aspect(s) of it. By the term "re-humanizing human will" in Africa, we aim to articulate a fresh direction for

¹ This point is based on our assumption that in a very strict sense, no stage in the human history can be honestly considered as *absolutely* better (intentional emphasis) than all others. Human knowledge in the traditional, pre-modern era, for instance, was so inadequate that it tolerated massive crimes that are currently unimaginable and avoidable. It is therefore unreasonable for any human group in the contemporary era to tag all the best possible values in their society to have obtained in their past.

human willing by Africans in relation to the continent within a global context, and to envision a reliable, more productive, and sustainable source of meaning for this direction. Since development is necessarily an intentional process (Agbakoba 2019), it is also a process that results from the predominant direction of the will of the majority of the members of each society. So, entrenched underdevelopment in Africa is also a result of the overall choices and will of Africans. Therefore, seeking development in Africa implies an initial and foundational process of re-humanization of wills on the continent. This is what we mean by the point that re-humanization of the will is a condition for development. It is about choosing between what has been and what needs to be. This includes the choice among (i) the decolonial option of confronting and severing from others as eternal enemies, (ii) seeking alternatives in tradition as evidence of uniqueness, and (iii) seeking collaboration with others. A choice in favor of the third of these is, in our view, the most productive and promising of the three. We describe this as ‘productive willing.’

Africa’s underdevelopment has meant the continuous, willful wastage of human lives, and potentially creative and life-changing wills. In this sense, to re-humanize the will in Africa also implies setting up the stage, through conceptual and methodological groundings, to stop wasting human lives and their creative wills. Development in Africa will also imply, more importantly, a concrete process of placating the wider human family for the tens of millions of wasted lives and wills that African elites have engineered and continue to do. Put another way, we hold that Africans need to placate humanity by developing themselves and their societies.

So far, our reflections have focused on Africa’s agency. We contend that the primary way to put Africa’s agency to good use is to accept that they are largely responsible for the direction that their lives are unfolding towards. In similar terms, *The Economist* (Jan. 2025) noted in strong terms that perhaps most important, Africa needs to recover a sense of ambition because in many of their countries, the default approach is what Ken Opalo calls “low-ambition/muddling-through developmentalism”, a “destination anywhere” approach. This implies a case of a lack of developmental goals among African elites, and no interest in rallying their citizens. Thus, rather than focus on irrelevant issues and blaming others, “African elites should align themselves with their countries’ needs—Otherwise the future looks zero-sum” (*The Economist* 2025). We agree with this recommendation and reconnect it to our core focus on will and willing since the process of alignment of one’s will to a goal or task is a process of willing for an option rather than a series of others.

4.2. Towards Methodological Grounding for Re-Humanizing Collective Will in Africa

How does the idea of transcolonialism generally, and reasonabilism in particular, serve as a methodological framework for Africans to re-humanize their wills, make up for their generational losses, and placate humanity? As we noted earlier in section 3, one of the key principles of Afro-constructivism as a central framework for transcolonialism is that it redirects the will from others to the self. Agbakoba explained in this regard that

Afro-constructivists jettison the other-focused perspective and intellectual orientation... in favour of a realist, objectivist and vigorously self-evaluative one that does not shy away from the 'hard questions.' (Agbakoba 2019: 327)

We add, then, that a central way of re-grounding a process of re-humanizing the will of most Africans is to jettison the other-focused and -consumed orientation to willing, in favor of a self-evaluative, critical, and responsible approach.

One clear route out of Africa's mess is for the elites, particularly intellectuals and policymakers, to rethink their self-conception, re-humanize their wills, and lead the process of transforming their societies. In situations where they fuse their collective engagements to undermine their societies, they need to unbundle their destructive collaborations. This aligns with Stefan Dercon's recommendation that a key route to progress in Africa is the process of "rebooting relationships and attitudes among elites" (*The Economist* 2025). This will result in situations where the elites who had confused their lanes and continuously will to undermine progress in their countries, need to rather agree among themselves to develop an "implicit pact" which embodies a more humane will that balances empathy and reason. Doing so will increase the size of the economic pies in their countries rather than simply gobbling them up. This is about the elites in African societies bargaining among themselves to reach "the right elite consensus" for the good of the continent. Such consensus had been reached in Singapore, India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and several other Asian societies that were previously as poor as many societies in Africa. The difference is currently clear between these societies and their African counterparts. The evidence of 7% growth per year for the past three decades in Ethiopia and Rwanda is also evidence of the positive results of such consensus. According to *The Economist*, it is unclear whether these elites are willing to strike this bargain and reach a consensus. We agree with this position. We also contend that for this bargain and consensus to be realizable, as a condition for development, these elites need to change the sources of incentives that define their choices and drive their will. They need, for instance, to make improving the quality of life an incentive to seek development rather than focus on wasting resources. Such improvement needs to become part of the issues that appeal to their interests. But how can they change their interests to include the good of all if most of them only think in terms of their tribes?

The willingness to think and relate in terms of humanity and beyond the tribe is the route out of this problem for Africa. At the global level of reflection, this is the weak link into an insistence on the past, continued enthusiasm for African alternatives, and an alarming normalization of disregard for standards. African scholars and elites more generally, having formed a more productive consensus, need to transcend their sense of self that is limited to their tribes and, rather, embrace a fuller sense of being human. This is a form of reasonableness, which balances honoring one's place of biological origin (empathy) with acknowledging that living is incomplete and impossible without working fairly, reasonably, collaboratively, and productively with others from different places of biological origin (reason). Achieving this balance at national levels is the inevitable condition for consensus among ethnic groups in multiethnic contexts like Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, and so on, where lives and development gains are continuously lost to ethnic rivalry that is fueled by myopia, greed, and absence of reasonableness (the imbalance

between reason and empathy). This point is crucial because when the human mind is focused on humanity rather than on the tribe, the will is also subconsciously and effectively rewired to de-tribalize and be re-humanized. Thus, when a collective sees its being beyond its tribe, it has begun the journey of re-humanizing its will. This is a point repeatedly made by the second author of this reflection on de-identification education, whereby individuals and groups courageously redefine themselves to focus less on their smaller identity markers and more on their unity with the rest of humanity.

One of the recommendations from *The Economist* (2025) for closing the Africa Gap is “to ditch decades of bad ideas”, including the idea that Africa requires others to save it. The idea of not requiring saving connects with our argument for Africa’s agency. To adopt a sense of agency and responsibility is a necessary way of ditching bad ideas of enthusiasm and calls for renaissance without clear goals, as was the case in poorly grounded calls for African Renaissance. Ditching bad ideas includes abandoning the practice of blaming others for all of Africa’s woes. It includes dismantling the project of referring to the past for solutions to more contemporary problems, or demanding to disconnect from the pool of global intercultural, human brilliance and cultural resources in the name of de-linking from former colonizers.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we set out to explore how the transcolonial framework provides conceptual and methodological grounding that enables Africans to creatively re-humanize their predominant understanding and use of their agency. We contended, among other things, that one of the key problems of will in the continent is the persistence of ‘willing for the tribe, the past, and today’ over ‘willing for humanity, for standards, for today and the future, and for sustainability.’ This mode of expression of the will manifests the preference of most African elites; and it results in underdevelopment. Yet, many Africanists blame others for the results of their consolidated, factual, and indisputable historical preferences and willing.

In the process, we argued that one way of conceptualizing Africa’s underdevelopment crises and the consequent high level of poverty and dehumanization is that by means of these crises, Africans have engaged in massive generational losses. They have also, in various degrees, yet as a collective, offended humanity. They need to placate her. We contended that a one-directional, consistent reference to Africa’s past has proven to be a negative, non-productive route towards making up for the losses and/or placating humanity. We then argued that the broader and self-critical transcolonial framework provides a more positive foundation for developing and effecting a new framework for re-humanizing the will in Africa. This framework strikes a balance between the demands of reason and those of empathy, within the principle of reasonabilism.

The positivity in this new transcolonial framework promises to yield a more humane conceptual understanding of human nature and condition—one that emphasizes creative, constructive, and productive agency. This key and foundational result of the new framework can then ensure the realization of more palpable positive results in terms of

knowledge productivity, such as innovations, patents, and so on. It will also ensure improved societal values (that are reasonable, consistent, and empathetic). These values will inform concrete political engagements (that focus on the good of all) and result in palpable developmental outcomes (as concrete embodiments of goodwill, consistent good thinking, and empathy). Like any virtuous circle, this latter result will also lead to a consolidated sense of African agency, then to a more humane will in the continent, and ultimately to a more developed continent in which living becomes more humane that the children of the colonized will not be leaving their homes like people fleeing from shackles.

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