

Introduction

Africa is an almost unbearable configuration of death, more death, and life. This insufferable crystallization inhibits actualization of worthwhile life. The problems of this troubled continent need to be confronted in the power of vulnerable life, through a normative political philosophy that taps deeply into the roots of Africans' intense attachment to life, living on, and human flourishing amid anxieties of mortality and finitude. This concern, in essence, will be the task of this book.

Africans' vexing failure to properly engage with life and draw from it the necessary resources to live fully into their aspiration of human flourishing has generally been attributed to two deficiencies: economics and politics. Economic maladministration is not the worse of these two obstacles. Politics is the primary cause of Africa's societal failure. Politics underdevelops Africa, and obsolete political philosophy underdevelops obsoletely. *Regular underdevelopment* holds a people down, moves them backward, and deprives them of the energy to lift themselves up from poverty into prosperity. Regular underdevelopment kills persons, destroys their potentialities, and steals their future.

Obsolete underdevelopment goes beyond all these. It is an *unheimlich* habituation to death, decay, dehiscence, and destruction. Obsolete underdevelopment is deadlier than regular underdevelopment. It tends to separate a people from their potentiality-to-do, rendering obsolete their life, subjugating their lives to the power of contingent, dispersed death. In the regime of obsolete underdevelopment, national economic management is not about disciplining bodies to control them and increasing productivity in the economy. It is about creating zones of death, exercising the power to take life, signifying the ultimate exercise of domination as capability to impose death on the people. Unlike regular underdevelopment that

struggles to improve life and living conditions, obsolete underdevelopment “reveals itself in the guise of arbitrariness and the absolute power to give death anytime, anywhere, by any means, and for any reason.”¹⁰ Obsolete underdevelopment is a form of necropolitics. It is a “driver of necropolitical principle insofar as it stands for organized destruction of [human potentiality] . . . a generalized cheapening of the price of life.”¹¹

Today, African leaders have political philosophies that manufacture death instead of supporting life. African politics and its underlying political philosophy and administration of terror have produced hundreds of millions of people who live at the edge of life, precariously standing at the rim of the void of death. As Achille Mbembe puts it in his book *Necropolitics*, these are persons

for whom living means continually standing up to death, and doing so under conditions in which death itself increasingly tends to become spectral, thanks both to the way in which it is lived and to the manner in which it is given. This life is a superfluous one, therefore, whose price is so meager that it has no equivalence, whether market or—even less—human; this is a species of life whose value is extra-economic, the only equivalent of which is the sort of death able to be inflicted upon it.

As a rule, such death is something to which nobody feels any obligation to respond. Nobody even bears the slightest feelings of responsibility or justice toward this sort of life or, rather, death. Necropolitical power proceeds by a sort of inversion between life and death, as if life was merely death’s medium.¹²

Indeed, the situation in Africa is dire. Mbembe bears witness to the depravity of the African postcolony. The powerful witness in his books *On the Postcolony* and *Necropolitics* causes many African readers’ blood to boil within them, almost enough to stir up their revolutionary spirit, to nudge them to muster the courage to transform their nations. This is also the hope and motivation of this book—from a different angle of the African predicament. I write to provide a political philosophical framework for the day after the revolution. Not only to provide for that day alone, but also to provide resources for today’s need. There is an urgent need for action. Indeed, African leaders have lost their soul and hence the *future* of the continent. Every morning the sun rises, and African leaders behave as if nothing has happened the previous day. To them, bad things

must always happen to Africa. But the sun that rises every morning is not neutral. It relentlessly shines its light on the decadence, poverty, and depravity of the race. The leaders hope the sun will bathe their oppressions and injustice in its eternal light. They hope that as men and women hail the wonderful light of the world with joy every dawn, they will celebrate their poor performances, their nonachievements. No, no hope for them.¹³

We must not fold into ourselves, into our being, this grave obscenity. Not in this century, not in these throes of death. Every day, thousands of African children die because of malnutrition and common diseases. No sane leader will ever have his or her country's future carried out in wrapped mats. But our insane leaders see it and say nothing about it. In this century, in this poverty, we (the citizens) should recover our future. If we are in power, we will never let thousands of our children be carried to their comfort of nothingness. In this century—in this horror!—we should never let the world give only a passing glance at our dead children within its exuberant and indifferent celebration of abundance of life. We are worried that our “blackness” will die tomorrow and our unborn will have nothing to say to the world. This is true because they are not equipped to speak! In this century, in this poverty, in these throes of death, we must arise like the sun and no longer pretend that the helpless children being parceled out to their lonely spots are “sheltered by God's hands,” sleeping as if in their “mother's house.”¹⁴ Frightened to death in the African storm of poverty, they depart without even speaking to us. In this storm, in this horror, we will no longer let them be carried out. For Africa's sake we will no longer hold our peace.

We do not need to wait for the day after the revolution to change our political philosophic orientation in ways that would help the African child. In place of the deadly and deadening political philosophies that underpin and invigorate obsolete underdevelopment, I offer the *philosophy of lifemaking*. Lifemaking is the totality of those practices and ideas that resist death or all that thwarts human flourishing. The measure of politics of lifemaking, then, in general, “is the difference which exists between the effort”¹⁵ of advancing human flourishing and resisting all that thwarts this objective.

In Africa, lifemaking and necropolitics confront each other as opposing forms of politics. The advancement of necropolitics is the retreat or the near obliteration of the other in the zero-sum game. From all indications, it appears the excesses of necropolitics now offer Africans only one choice. This book not only endeavors to clearly describe the alternative

of lifemaking but also provides normative principles capable of framing a new perspective on politics and unifying its variety of logics, expressions, and visions within an indigenously generated framework.

Lifemaking: Political Philosophy for Human Flourishing in African Perspective constructs a political philosophy from a tradition of thought that is indigenous to Africa, arguing that there are long-neglected resources within African philosophy to guide African citizens and leaders toward creating African polities that can sustain human flourishing and resist necropolitics. Exploring notions of power, justice, freedom, citizenship, law, and corporate belonging, I construct a political philosophic framework to rethink solutions to the vexing problems of political development. I examine the meaning the Kalabari give to each of these notions. I also interpret the necessary conditions of their giving each notion a meaning. Then I provide an account of how the meanings hang together in a coherent way or relate them to the quest for human flourishing. Basically, it is an account of how life is *made* to produce and sustain a set of virtues, capabilities, and conditions that generates higher levels of well-being, the good life, and prosperity, as well as generating new relations, practices, and realities that support the actualization of potentialities of a person, group, or community. The goal of the drive toward human flourishing is to create community that perpetually permits every human being to be the best that she can be given her gifts, talents, and communal-institutional support for her sake and that of the community—individual and community aiming for the highest good, *lolo*.

Political philosophy is made rather than found.¹⁶ It is made in the power of lifemaking, lifepoiesis. Political philosophy is a “property” of lifemaking, a society’s particular way of making life. Human beings make political philosophy by making life in which to articulate or phrase human flourishing. Political philosophy tracks or traces lifemaking that is already ongoing, and it makes life that has never been dreamed of before. It brings lifemaking to self-consciousness, frames the countless contingencies of lifemaking entering experience. Political philosophy is the story (a dramatic narrative of self-overcoming) a society tells about lifemaking, describes itself in the act of lifemaking. As a narrative, political philosophy is not a system of general principles but a reminder of, an abbreviation for, a co-traveler of lifemaking and not a justification of it. Lifemaking and political philosophy rejoice in each other’s company in their bounded context. Because political philosophy (at least, as conceptualized in this book) is tied to lifemaking in a particular context, to lifemaking in a particular present

situation, there is no need to bring particular political philosophy under some general principles. Political philosophy is particular, a product and producer of idiosyncratic contingencies of past and present lifemaking. There is no intrinsic human lifemaking—no lifemaking that escapes from time and chance, no lifemaking that is definatory of humans. Thus, political philosophy cannot latch on or dock with something universal. “To demand more than this is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need.”¹⁷

In the preceding paragraphs I have provided preliminary meanings of lifemaking, human flourishing, and political philosophy, the three key terms in the title of this book. A question arises at this point: What is the social glue that holds these notions together in the Kalabari traditional society? What is the social glue that holds political (social) organizations? The *Alabo* (chief of the *wari*, the canoe house trading and fighting corporation; it was also the basic unit of Kalabari traditional polity¹⁸) is the quilting or anchoring point for stabilizing or stitching the dissemination of meanings of the three terms. The chief (*Alabo*: wealthy man, creator of wealth; the governor or ruler of the political unit; *omualabo*, the warrior that maintains peace; and free person) is the structured network of meanings, which enables them to take on a precise signification. The *Alabo* (a metonymic assemblage of the community’s promise of wealth and well-being) is the nodal element that sews the five major concerns (peace, freedom, economic prosperity, wealth-in-people, and self-creation) of public policy together to perform or illustrate the point of the polity. Collectively the chiefs hold groups of individuals (*wari*) into a political totality, the Kalabari community.

Peace (Dein): The *Alabo* (*imbi saki tebo; dein-weribo*), as the leader of the war-canoe house, with the help of other members of the house, generates, manages, and sustains the capability and financial means to defend his *wari* and community in wars and ensure peace in the community.

Freedom (sibi toambo so te; sibi nyana): *Alabo* is the epitome of a free person, he owns his body and shows his “who” in the public space as subject to freedom (*sibi nyana bara ke angaa*). He also works to ensure that he raises other men to this level of freedom by helping them to become chiefs (see chapter 4 for more discussion on this).

Prosperity (Lolo): *Alabo* by definition is a wealthy person, and the primary goal of his leadership is to increase the wealth and prosperity of the *wari* (house) and improve the well-being of its members.

Wealth-in-people (wari duama): This is about commitment to social worth. It is defined as “the value of people, but also the value obtained

through people and the value invested and accumulated in people.”¹⁹ Every chief (*wari dabo*) works to increase the number of people in his *wari* through birth, marriage, and absorption of outsiders. The goal of having more people in the *wari* is to increase its labor and military capabilities, enlarge social relations, and build a group with diverse and complementary skills or qualities. *Wari duama* is not just about political strength in number, it is fundamentally about putting human well-being as the front and center of communal life, at the top of society’s value-hierarchy, and the *wari* is about people—making life in its physical, economic, social, affective, aesthetic, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions. The normative practice of wealth-in-people is a creative process of nourishing individuals to reach higher levels of self-actualization and human flourishing. The *Alabo* as the leader of the *wari* apprehends the lives of house members not only in their facticity but also in their possibility. *Alabo* is a lifemaker.

Self-creation (tombo-tombo so): The conditions and organizational format of *wari* and *ama* (town) are geared to give opportunities or chance to every member for self-creation, for members of the house to be the best that they can be given their abilities.

The *Alabo*, as one at the center of the rhizomatic network of these pentagonal energies, is the lifemaker-in-chief. This is a role he shares with all citizens of the polity. In holding these five public concerns together, he quilts not only lifemaking, human flourishing, and political philosophy but also the polity. The *Alabo* as a signifier “creates” a consistent polity (a unified, structured field) for the citizens. All this is not to say that the *Alabo* (as *point de capiton*) is the point of supreme or ultimate meaning in the polity, but he is a performative tool that gives the appearance, if not the illusion, of a totalizing ideology of the community or unified field that halts the sliding of meanings. He has to perform power to maintain the perception of a quilting point, to continuously knot disparate meanings. He is like the upholstery button that holds the fabric and mass of stuffing together. The Kalabari chief literally wears this “quilting function” on his body as exemplified by the “buttons” he wears on his dress. The *doni*, a full-length flowing gown with long sleeves worn only by chiefs, has four stud buttons. Men (gentlemen of substance) who are not chiefs wear only three stud buttons on their *woko* dress. In the Kalabari-Ijo number symbolism scheme, three stands for men and four for females.²⁰ The use of four stud buttons by chiefs is a subtle device for them to give themselves a larger-than-life and “spiritual” image. The physical representation of spirits in the forms of sculpted masks and dressings of masquerade players are

always made to look like a hermaphrodite (i.e., the co-representation of both male and female features in the same masquerade). The four stud buttons convey the image of the male chief as a quilting point for both feminine and masculine energies of the community.

The *Alabo*—theorized here as the quilting, anchoring point—should also not be construed as the big reality behind the three notions (life-making, human flourishing, and political philosophy) and the five public policy concerns (peace, freedom, economic well-being, self-creation, and wealth-in-people). He is only a pattern of appearance of these notions and concerns that are not suprahistorical, that is, not beyond contingent historical circumstance and institutions. He is not a metaphysical figure.

Perhaps I need to explain why this study is limited to the Kalabari-Ijo people. As I do not have the ability or sufficient time for an in-depth study of the philosophies of many indigenous groups for this book, I have chosen to focus on Kalabari. They are located in the Niger Delta in southern Nigeria. Nigeria is a country of over 200 million people in the throes of necropolitics, poverty, and obsolete underdevelopment but with great potential for political transformation and economic development. As I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, there are resources within Kalabari philosophy to guide policymakers toward creating African polities that can sustain human flourishing. The indigenous Kalabari philosophy is the opposite of a *planned* academic philosophy; it is a philosophy that grew organically around everyday practices, needs, interactions, and lives of the people. The orientation of this philosophy is to make it possible for all persons to live and develop their full potentials in community. In a previous book, I demonstrated how this kind of Kalabari philosophy could help African leaders to transform their national economies, to craft economies that can positively respond to the existential desire of Africans as it relates to human flourishing.²¹ Economics and politics in the traditional Kalabari community are about constructing the practices, norms, values, procedural rules, and institutions that could create the material conditions that not only sustain the production, reproduction, and growth of human life but also enable every person to develop their full potentials.²² My aim in this book is to capture the inner logic of indigenous Kalabari political philosophy, critiquing and developing it into a form of political theory that can assist the African postcolony to negate necropolitics and affirm life.

With this book, I join with other African scholars and social justice activists with the hope to render to life those that the African postcolony has given over to death—if not directly them, then their descendants or

their future. We need to render to life, to bring new bodies to form new communities of Africans to re-create their worlds. Mbembe in his inimitable way expresses this hope in this way: “Rendered to life and thereby different to the fallen body of colonized existence, this new body will be invited to become a member of a new community. Unfolding according to its own plan, it will henceforth walk along together with other bodies and, doing so, will re-create the world.”²³

In this book I offer a new body of political philosophy arising from a fallen Kalabari body of indigenous knowledge, a body in its neglected, traumatized, and colonial existence, inviting it to walk along with other bodies of knowledge to re-create Africa, to *make life*. The abiding task of this book is to posit, postulate, and position human life as the urgent and proper subject matter of African political philosophy. Lifemaking as a philosophy in today’s Africa does not forgive intellectual silence.

Let me state some of the intellectual steps I took to (re)construct the inherited African philosophy for possible political development of the African postcolony. The philosophy is crafted from these four sets of raw (or processed) materials. First, the political philosophy in this book is based on or draws from Kalabari political theories, social traditions, history, and political practices. Second, it is based on my interpretation (or theorization) of the Kalabari materials. There is no appeal to nonlinguistic knowledge in my interpretations: they are not based on metaphysical arguments but on sociohistorical data through and through. Third, the first and second steps place us inside the Kalabari tradition, and the proximity can blur our vision, hindering the opening of critical perspective on the materials. So we need to step outside of them, to properly grasp their contours and to reach into their core meanings: “We need to look at [them] from the outside, expressing ourselves in different [but related] language from its own.”²⁴ This need led me to engage non-African philosophies (e.g., continental philosophy) to offer critical and helpful perspectives on the materials I was studying without ceding the animating force of my analyses to extra-African thoughts. Finally, there is the infusion of my ideas (as embedded in my interpretations) into the inherited tradition (nonetheless, an ongoing debate) to create a framework of political philosophy for today’s Africa.

What emerges from this methodology of study is that my ideas are simultaneously inside and outside the horizon of Kalabari philosophy. The intake of my political ideas (or, for that matter, continental philosophy) is carefully done to illuminate only core Kalabari ideas, to highlight their

extraterritorial relevance, never to put the Kalabari substance in the shadow of my political thought (the thought of a Kalabari man formed by training in Western universities and now living and teaching in the United States of America). I believe that the four intellectual steps I undertook enabled me to open a point of immanence within Kalabari philosophy intended to bring it into deep conversation with ideas, philosophies, and perspectives in contemporary cutting-edge political theories or African studies. Every time we as Africans must tackle twenty-first-century political problems by drawing from the past, our indigenous philosophies or received wisdom must be slightly expanded. As Frantz Fanon put it: “Everything up to and including the very nature of pre-capitalist [indigenous communities], so well explained by [our ancestors and their collective philosophies], must here be thought out again.”²⁵

The result of this synthesis or expansion is a *hashtag*. The synthesis was created to enable possibilities of thought to coalesce around the key idea of political development of the African postcolony. This is similar to what hashtags do around trending or viral topics. While hashtags do this with memes that have powerful semiotic charges, the quadruple steps as foci of emphasis and concentration of ideas promote and provoke interaction and dialogues across intellectual traditions. The synthesis I have named as “hashtag” is to collect and organize rigorous ideas to instantiate a new framework of interpretation of the political predicament of the African postcolony. The four-pronged methodology or the book, like a hashtag’s message, is not about revealing or recovering the supposed objective original meaning but about deciphering dynamic ideas that might work best to uplift Africans from their excruciating necropolitics. The synthesis is an assemblage of ideas that I am floating in the ocean of uncertainty of lived experience to seek understanding, to create islands of promise, and to condition that lived experience of Africans. The synthesis constitutes a critical realistic bundle of methods of analysis that operate empirically, imaginatively, and theoretically to respond to existential situations.

The bottom line is that this study is not necessarily a regurgitation of traditional Kalabari political philosophy, but a Kalabari philosophy spiced and marinated by my intellect and by my vision of what it should be for contemporary Africa. More precisely, I should say I provide pictures of Kalabari indigenous political ideas. These pictures are not photographs of the indigenous ideas. They are also not idealized paintings that project any form of congruence between an ideal philosophical model and the philosophical minds of the traditional Kalabari society. The philosophical picture of each

set of ideas that I provide is an “expressionist portrait.” I have tried to enter into the deepest meanings of each set of traditional ideas that I studied, to profoundly “participate” in its reality, in its “inner life” to mine the deepest philosophical meanings embedded in its core. In every chapter I will try to take the reader beyond the surface traits of indigenous political thoughts or an idealized version of them (the traits) according to a philosophical model, allowing the reader to experience the “being” of Kalabari political thoughts through a participation in their deepest meanings.²⁶

At the end, the portrait that I paint of any set of political ideas, using the expressionistic style, carries the force of realism, impressionism, and expressionism. Realism because the certitude of my interpretations of each idea (practice) are rooted in the inner reality of Kalabari society (culture, worldview)—and not on mere abstract intellectual musings that do not reflect or do distort the *reality* of the tradition. There is enough force in the interpretation to leave the reader with an *impression* of rigorous philosophy in the tradition. Finally, there is a powerful witness to the reality and philosophical impression in the portraits to impact the reader with the sense that an encounter with each of the portraits is an *expression* of a call to social justice or social transformation of the African postcolony.²⁷ The power of this call is a weak one; it is not a brute force.²⁸ It summons or calls Africans to their greatness, to the promise ahead of today, and to their forgotten paths to human flourishing through the force of their inherited political thoughts and selective borrowings from other traditions.

This book makes seven contributions to the study of political philosophy. First, it provides a general foundation for future work of scholars of African political philosophy that would make indigenous political thought their point of departure. Second, the book crafts an understanding of political philosophy that puts at its center lifemaking, engendering intensification of social life, putting life’s centers of gravity in life, and refusing to define existing life against death. Lifemaking is lived in the expectation of the new and not in the fear of subsumption of life by death. Third, often scholarly works that retrieve African ideas for use today are driven by nostalgic appeal or lost completeness. They locate ultimate enjoyment (satisfaction) in Africa’s own past or in the others, such as Westerners, whose enjoyment of life is coming at the expense not only of Africans but also of future Africans’ enjoyment. Such works project the idea that Africans might return to a stable relation with past objects (i.e., political institutions or values) with possibilities for harmony or complete sat-

isfaction. This book is not driven by what I believe Africans have lost and needs to be regained but by an investment in the future that carries forward the valuable lessons of the past.

Fourth, this book offers the *lifemaking method* of discovering a community's answers to human existential questions through interpretation of observable practices, ideas, data, and transcripts of the sacred.²⁹ This method mobilizes a tripartite system of analysis to unlock the answers. The method brings together three vital elements (principles) in philosophical thinking for the interpretation of politics: sacred (the abyss of the universal set of possibilities), form (the form the abyss takes in social existence, dimension of organization), and human flourishing, which unites the first and second principles, the universal set and form, such that the balance between dynamic and form is geared toward human flourishing.

Fifth, Achille Mbembe's work portrays postcolonial Africa as the home of necropolitics (death-making)—and rightly so. This book draws from indigenous philosophy a robust model of being-with, politics, and life's way of being that counter the necropolitical narrative and seeks to provide the resources of lifemaking that might reconstruct the political in the African postcolony.

Sixth, this book demonstrates the nature, logics, and dynamics of "biopolitics" in precolonial Africa—if I may call what I have studied in this book *biopolitics*. What I have loosely named—for the sake of discussion of this book's contribution to knowledge—as biopolitics in Kalabari is different in conception or form from what obtains in the West. Generally, biopolitics in the West is about the administration, monitoring, and survey of human life processes for maximal political control, hierarchization of life, and various forms of discriminations, exceptions, erasures, and violence that place death at the heart of politics or being-with. Biopolitics in Kalabari is geared toward human flourishing, mutual care, communality, and the equipping of every citizen to leave a legacy for future generations. Kalabari biopolitics is not just about legitimation of power as life-protecting but about the philosophico-political logics of lifemaking of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Finally, this whole book is a theory of lifemaking, an innovative framework for comprehending how life hangs together in a polity. This is a theory that is not only concretely correlated with the African predicament of necropolitics but also came out of the lived experience of pain. It is what bell hooks might name as theory of liberating practice. She writes:

I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing. . . . I found a place of sanctuary in “theorizing,” in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently. This “lived” experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, became a place where I worked at explaining the hurt and making it go away. Fundamentally, I learned from this experience that theory could be a healing place. . . . When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what experience makes more evident is the bond between the two—that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other.³⁰

Organization of Chapters

The rest of the book is divided into six chapters. In chapter 1 (“Lifemaking: Poetics of Politics in Traditional Africa”) I lay out the concept of lifemaking and show that this notion is key to understanding the political philosophy of Kalabari society. I also demonstrate why it is important to rethink political philosophy, to reconceptualize human flourishing and politics within the framework of lifemaking. Lifemaking as a philosophy and practice can serve as a remedy for the necropolitics of Africa.

Chapter 2, “The Philosophy of King Amakiri: Kalabari as a Political Narrative,” explores the various institutions and ideas that a Kalabari king, Amakiri, and his chiefs in the eighteenth century deployed to create and sustain lifemaking as the central philosophy of politics and governance. The range of institutions and practices that were informed by the philosophy of lifemaking was wide and deep. For instance, even the theory of citizenship was transformed. Citizenship moved from being determined by indigeneity to residence, language, and culture. Members of the society were bound together principally by location (their placeness in the same territory) and the institutions, the civilization, and the history they

commonly possessed, and not by blood or descent. This was a remarkable political thought. Compare it to how citizenship is generally understood in twenty-first-century Nigeria. Today in Nigeria, “home” is defined as ancestral, and indigenous land is only for the natives. Citizenship is ultimately defined on the basis of indigeneity—whether or not a person can trace his or her ancestry to an indigenous abode. Citizenship is equated with ancestral home in the precolonial period.

The discussions of King Amakiri and his chiefs in chapter 2 portray sovereignty in the Kalabari context as the creative cultural-moral functions of human life oriented toward mass flourishing of citizens. The chapter offers us what sovereign power organizes in Kalabari: the production of a flourishingly humanized people or the excellent self (which we shall treat in chapter 6). In this way, this book offers an understanding of sovereignty that is outside the biopolitical and thanatopolitical continuum in which most Western theories of sovereignty are stuck. Once the reader grasps this insight, she is likely to see the book as a subtle tracing of the category of sovereign power and how it is conjugated in different ways across spheres of life. Thus, this book uncovers an understanding of sovereignty in indigenous Kalabari society as subjugated to the praxis of lifemaking, a symbolic order of meaning and purpose, and not to the (brutal or exceptional) power to “make die and let live” or to “make live and let die.”

The philosophies of governance, citizenship, nation-building, sovereignty, and lifemaking that Amakiri and his chiefs crafted were geared to enact and sustain a high quality of human life. Their efforts would have come to naught or accomplished less than what they did without a sense of collective belonging. They created a virtual/ideal entity (non-entity) that (can only) exists as the subjective “presupposition” of engaged or subjectivized Kalabari citizens. This is called *amatemeso*, functioning like a symbol of the nation. It

exists only insofar as subjects act as if it exists. Its status is similar to that of an ideological cause like Communism or the Nation: it is the substance of the individuals who recognize themselves in it, the ground of their entire existence, the point of reference which provides the ultimate horizon of meaning to their lives, something for which these individuals are ready to give their lives, yet the only thing that really exists are these individuals and their activity.³¹

Amatemeso is a result of collective existence—the people becoming a product of themselves. *Amatemeso* is the people in the process of their own self-actualization. It is often interpreted as a transcendent (supernatural, transhistorical) being. But it could also mean an immanent being, a product of human interactions. And this is how I interpret it in this book for the limited purpose of our study of lifemaking. The discourse and interpretation of *amatemeso* is the subject of chapter 3, “*Amatemeso*, Otherness, and Violence.”

The chapter presents *amatemeso* as a form of political imagination of the Kalabari nation. It also analyzes the ethos of masculinity that increasingly came to condition political practice during the Amakiri era, such that political imagination increasingly got more masculine and harbored an ontology of violence. These two were parts of the three major forms of political imaginations that arose from the Amakiri era. The institution of chieftaincy was the third form of political imagination of the state, of the imaginative power of state. The Kalabari state and chiefs were a realization or an unfolding of an imaginative idea of a particular kind of nation building or politics-as-statecraft. The next chapter explores chieftaincy as a form of political imagination.

In chapter 4, “Chiefs: Subjects to Freedom,” we see how the Kalabari people embody freedom in persons and institutions, and we consider how the Kalabari political philosophy centers on beginnings (*natality*). Among this people, chiefs symbolize as well as instantiate the freedom to begin a new kind of time and to effect passage to new conditions of being or existence. Our analysis of the Kalabari chieftaincy institution as a locus of freedom reveals that for the Kalabari the political is a form of imagination, a way of being for the new, of representing to the self a form of human existence.

Chapter 5 (“Sediments of Life: On *Poiesis* of Social Immortality”) investigates how Kalabari people create and manage an ethical system that harnesses legacies of deeds of both chiefs and non-chiefs to make lifemaking into the highest good in their community. In Kalabari society there is a drive for legacy as a paradigm of transcendence, as a means and hope of going over the limitations of day-to-day existence, death, and transience. There is an opposite of legacy, which is the erasure of the person, symbolically expunging a chief and his war-canoe house from society, from memory. This happens when a chief dies or is captured by enemies in a war. If legacy “let live” a chief in the afterlife, the erasure

“make die” a chief in the same sphere. Both states of the dead are part of the symbolic order of meaning and purpose of Kalabari society.

What does this chapter tell us about lifemaking in the Kalabari context? In a certain sense, the value of a person’s life in relation to others is ultimately seen in its contributions to her legacies for her own community. The significance and meaning of today’s work are sought in relation to how it would be considered in the future as the actual performance moves into the past. Work (as creativity leaving behind legacy) is considered in the context of the *togetherness* of the three temporal modes of the human creativity: past, present, and future. In the same way, lifemaking, which is the context of the drive for legacy, is not limited to the present of the individual’s or community’s activities but also involves the togetherness of the three temporal modes. Through legacy, past work (actualities) enters the presence of the lifemaking so as to fashion and refashion it. Present ongoing work can actualize itself only as a finished product by taking account of the potential that past work offers and the potential and possibilities for future work. Past work is involved in present work, and future work is also involved as anticipated.

The concern with legacy is not about “timing” the value of one’s work or legacy but about the maintenance of the webwork of relationships that undergirds a community’s lifemaking. This is the connection between legacy (work as social creativeness, or social ethic) and lifemaking. Chapter 6 (“The Excellent Self: Existential End Goal of Lifemaking”) further explores the nature of the link between social ethics and lifemaking, further elucidating deep ethical thinking that informs lifemaking. It establishes the end of lifemaking as the production of the “excellent self;” the production of a flourishingly humanized people. At the very end I suggest that lifemaking could be the restrainer (*daasamaye* in Kalabari) of necropolitics in Africa.

NIGERIA’S PROBLEMS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

While each of these six chapters is crafted to present a particular dimension of Kalabari indigenous political philosophy, each of them offers resources to reflect on solutions to some of Africa’s (Nigeria’s) political problems. They are (1) necropolitics; (2) weak cross-cutting foundational political institutions and ethos to properly orient governance toward national cohesion; (3) weak citizens’ sense of collective belonging; (4) no clear-cut ideal to galvanize the nation toward human flourishing, an ideal

the nation's leaders must embody and endeavor to always actualize; (5) no trans-ethnic value system that moves citizens to engage in deeds and actions that would generate legacies for the betterment of future generations; and (6) no clear notion of the ideal of the "excellent" Nigerian, the Nigerian oriented toward the common good of the nation and committed to creating and sustaining an environment where all citizens can flourish. This list of Nigeria's problems is by no means exhaustive. To address comprehensively and exhaustively all of Nigeria's political problems in any one text is to write an impossible book.

Chapter 1 offers a conceptual rethinking of politics, laying out lifemaking as an alternative to necropolitics. Chapter 2 demonstrates how a team of visionary leaders can craft the politico-cultural institutions that would promote human flourishing in their nation. Currently Nigeria's leaders cannot craft the constellation of institutions that would advance the political development of their nation. They are also struggling to build a sense of collective belonging among Nigerian citizens. There is an urgent need for a viable social philosophy to aid in the reconstruction of ethos in ways that will foster senses and practices of human co-belonging, co-humanity. Chapter 3 provides resources within the indigenous knowledge and spiritual systems of Kalabari to aid the task of crafting Nigerian national spirit. Chapter 4 demonstrates how Nigeria can overcome its leaders' lack of commitment to freedom, the endless actualization of human potentialities. The precolonial Kalabari system of governance demonstrates how leaders can embody the ideals of freedom necessary to sustain human flourishing in their community.

Another problem that plagues Nigerian national politics is the absence of an ethical system that encourages its citizens in one generation to execute deeds that would make the country better for the generations behind them. The ethological model of social immortality discussed in chapter 5, the ethical process of creating legacies as an ideal of good citizenship, offers Nigeria's leaders a way to reflect and create a similar system fit for the twenty-first century. Finally, chapter 6 teaches us that the end goal of lifemaking and politics is to create the *excellent self*, that is, the flourishing citizen, the people living flourishing lives based on actualization of their potentialities as driven and supported by an environment that allows every person to be the best that he or she can be given their natural endowments and acquired skills.

All this has implications for the way we evaluate the political administration or governance of any community and its common good.

A political leadership geared toward creating excellent citizens must aim to create an *excellent nation*. At the minimum, excellence in national governance practice will involve the creation of possibilities for the nation and participation by all its members so that their potentialities can be drawn out for the common good. A nation should be adjudged *excellent* because it allows (creates an enabling environment for them) its people to develop their potentialities in the pursuit of ever greater common good. How well a nation does this will depend on how it allows individuals to develop their unique traits, capabilities, and potentialities and on how well these individual endowments are related to each other in the pursuit of the common good. An excellent nation is the one that is adept at combining these two opposite tendencies or processes: a movement toward uniqueness counterbalanced by movement toward union.

In such a nation the orientation toward the *not-yet* permeates all of its social practices and individual lives. The goal of politics is the creation of possibilities for all to participate in the polity (economy) and to realize their potentialities and in so doing enable the community to realize its potentialities. Science is an engagement with nature so as to fully understand, realize, extend, and create possibilities buried in the potentialities of all beings and processes in the universe. Education (*e-ducere*) is to draw out and lead forth the potentialities of a person. The organization of market competition is also oriented in this way—it is *agonistic*. The Latin root of our English word “competition” is *con petire*, which means to seek together. In competition the participants help each other to stretch their skills as they meet the challenge posed by the other. What each participant is seeking is the actualization of their own potentials and to help the other person come to his or her best.³² In the same vein, an excellent friendship is the type of partnership and fellowship in which each person aspires to bring to realization the latent potentialities of the other. The friends say to another, “Let your actualization advance as mine does.” An individual’s life will be adjudged excellent if it is a life that is engaged in the pursuit of ever greater development and creative realization of his or her potentials. This involves, among other endeavors, overcoming challenges to create, manage, and sustain possibilities for responsible personal development.