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## The Concept of the Person in the Bantu-Fang Culture

*El concepto de la persona en la cultura Bantú-Fang*

Florentino Ncogo-Ndong

Universidad Abat-Oliva, Barcelona, España

Facultad de Humanidades, Programa de Doctorado en Humanidades para el Mundo

Contemporáneo-CEINDO-CEU

[fncogon@uao.es](mailto:fncogon@uao.es)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9398-1014>

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### Abstract

Entering globalization without an identity, or leaving its own identity aside, is taking its toll on Equatorial Guinea. Most of its young people are unaware of their cultural identity. Therefore, reflecting on the concept of personhood is crucial to help them rediscover their identity. This paper aims to define the concept of personhood in the Bantu-Fang culture and to analyze the influence that this concept may have suffered during colonization. The method used in this research has been analytical-descriptive. Through an analysis of the Fang language, the concept of person was explored. The results indicate that the concept of Fang persona has not undergone acculturation. This is because the colonizing action focused on the destruction of the tangible cultural heritage, leaving the intellectual and conceptual aspects relatively intact. In addition, the analysis of the term mot (man) revealed a double meaning: ontological and moral. In the ontological aspect, the person is called muan mot (one who belongs to the human race). In the moral dimension, the term mot reflects the socio-cultural acceptance of the person within the community. In conclusion, being a person, according to the Fang perspective, implies both belonging to the human race and acting in accordance with the values and norms expected of human beings. This holistic view highlights the importance of keeping cultural identity alive in a globalized world.



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## Keywords

Bantu-fang, African Communities, Culture, Dignity, Personhood.

## Resumen

Entrar en la globalización sin identidad, o dejando de lado la propia, está pasando factura a Guinea Ecuatorial. La mayoría de sus jóvenes desconocen su identidad cultural. Por ello, reflexionar sobre el concepto de persona resulta crucial para ayudarles a redescubrir su identidad. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo definir el concepto de persona en la cultura bantú-fang y analizar la influencia que este concepto pudo haber sufrido durante la colonización. El método empleado en esta investigación ha sido analítico-descriptivo. A través de un análisis de la lengua fang, se exploró el concepto de persona. Los resultados indican que el concepto de persona fang no ha sufrido aculturación. Esto se debe a que la acción colonizadora se focalizó en la destrucción del patrimonio cultural tangible, dejando relativamente intactos los aspectos intelectuales y conceptuales. Además, el análisis del término *mot* (hombre) reveló una doble acepción: ontológica y moral. En el aspecto ontológico, la persona se denomina *muan mot* (aquel que pertenece a la raza humana). En la dimensión moral, el término *mot* refleja la aceptación sociocultural de la persona dentro de la comunidad. En conclusión, ser persona, según la perspectiva fang, implica tanto pertenecer a la raza humana como actuar conforme a los valores y normas que se esperan del ser humano. Esta visión integral resalta la importancia de mantener viva la identidad cultural en un mundo globalizado.

## Palabras clave

Bantú-fang, Comunidades africanas, Cultura, Dignidad, Persona.

## 1. Introduction

A close observation of today's Bantu youth shows that they are experiencing an identity complex. The manifestations of this phenomenon are multiple: to make up the skin, to spend enormous amounts of money in the purchase of western straight hair, to put on earrings of the boys, etc. all this leads to the rejection of himself. But he does not realize, the young Guineo-Ecuadorian, that he will never be able to be the other. Eboussi Boulaga denounced this phenomenon in his work *le bantou problématique* (the problematic Bantu). "The Cameroonian philosopher believes that Africa has embarked, with the rejection of itself, on an asymptotic march that will make it remain in underdevelopment" (Eboussi, 1968, p. 34).

In effect, the phenomenon that is now being verified in African and Bantu youth would be the result of colonial learning and teaching. The colonist has instilled in the heads of the natives that everything about the black man was synonymous with ugliness, devil and sin. It can then be deduced that what is found is the result of a collective learning. It is thought that research on the person from the Bantu-Fang tradition can stop the rejection of their identity that the young people here experience.

In the present work, the concept of *mot* (person) was studied from this double dimension: Fang cultural and colonial. The aim of this study is to offer, with this study, a vision of the word "person" that allows the young Bantu-Fang to identify himself culturally in the midst of others. The questions that drive the research can be formulated in the following terms: what is *mot* (person) in Bantu-Fang culture? What influence has the term *mot* undergone during the colonial period? Put another way: has the word *mot* suffered acculturation effects from colonization?



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From this perspective, it is understood that the objectives to be achieved in the research are: to define the concept of person from the Bantu-Fang perspective; to find cultural elements that support the same definition; to study the influence that the word “mot” has suffered from colonization; and to compare it with the classical definitions of person. This set of objectives will provide a clear notion of mot that will help the young Bantu to define himself as such.

In the theoretical framework, two types of theories on the person can be evoked, the individualistic one of Tylor and the collective one of Mbiti or Tempels. Tylor's theory can be perceived as Western because it defines the person as a being centered on himself, on his time and dignity. The African collective conception of the person, however, says that “being is force” (Tempels, 1949). The word “force” in African philosophy denotes not only the unity of the entity, but also its essential bond with other entities. All beings give themselves the force to exist. One is a person because one receives strength from other persons and vice versa.

Mbiti, after Tempels, gathers in the definition of the person, “the western singularity and the African plurality” (Mbiti 1991, p. 13). To conceive of the person as an individual being with no link to the collectivity, or vice versa, can only be ideological. The person, because of his corporeality, is an individual being who defines himself through the relationships he weaves in the social scenario. The position is that, in spite of all the vexations suffered throughout history, the Bantu African has maintained his conception of the person that encompasses the collectivist and individual vision of the human being. From the methodological point of view, the research followed the analytical-descriptive process because the concept of person in the Bantu-Fang language was studied from texts that use it. In this way, the technique of content analysis was used. This means that the books and manuals of the authors mentioned in the previous paragraphs were used as a source of data. In addition, interviews conducted on the conception of the person in older adults will also be used.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the article consists of five (5) parts: 1) General considerations on the person, the different reflections on the concept of person from philosophical, sociological and cultural traditions are approached. 2) On African communities, emphasis is placed on the different cultural manifestations of African communities, in this sense, they can be considered as culturally authentic. 3) The person according to the Western conception. It is a question of analyzing the conception of the person of Boethius and Tylor among the many that the West has produced. 4) The concept of the person of the Bantu-Fang culture. Here we analyze the terms and expressions that contain mot in order to deduce the meaning it has with the person. And in the last point, 5) An approach to the concept of person in African communities: the case of the Bantu-Fang, the aim of this section is to find a proximity to the concept of person in order to know what is the conception that the Bantu-Fang have of the concept of person.

## 2. General considerations about the person

Before evoking the classical philosophical definition of the person and the traditional one that will be extracted from the traditional Bantu-Fang culture, it is appropriate to clear the ground by exposing the concept of the person as a being with multiple factors. Geertz (1973) makes no distinction between the terms man and person when he states that:



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Attempts to situate man in terms of his habits took various directions and adopted various tactics; but all of them, or virtually all of them, conformed to a single general intellectual strategy, what I will call the "stratigraphic" conception of the relations among the biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors of human life (p. 46).

To speak of man, all his dimensions are taken into account, that is, biological, psychological, social and cultural. Since man does not develop outside of a society, he is not comparable to another species. In the African context, man is measured through all his dimensions. To be considered a person, it is understood that he has to meet the conditions to which the author Geertz has referred in his text fragment. It is understood that the consideration of the person is not reduced to a single aspect. For Geertz (1973), the person is made up of several layers, and each layer has its determined function. Hence:

When you analyze man you peel away layer after layer, and each layer as such is complete and irreducible in itself; peeling it away reveals another layer of a different kind beneath. Peel away the motley forms of culture and you find the functional and structural regularities of social organization. Peel away these and you find the underlying psychological factors—"basic needs" or whatever—that support them and make them possible. Peel away the psychological factors and you find the biological foundations—anatomical, physiological, neurological—of the whole edifice of human life (p. 46).

The person is a very complex being; he is as dynamic as he is changeable. But the judgment that is made is objective. What is expressed with this idea is that man is not static in his behavior. Although education, especially in human values, which he has received while growing up, we cannot rule out situations that induce him to act in the opposite way, such as ignorance. The philosophical considerations on the person present the person insistently underline that he is a being that is constantly recreating himself, that is, he is not made once and for all, because he is pure mobility, what Ortega y Gasset calls "pure naked existence, pure project, mere eagerness to be" (Ortega y Gasset, 1964, pp. 34-35).

In view of what is said in this quotation, three essences are presented that characterize man or the person in all his dimensions.

Essence or nature is something common to many; but man, every man, is an unrepeatable personality.  
 Essence or nature is something fixed; but man is essentially mutable.  
 Essence or nature is something determined, delimited; but man is free, he is constitutively open, loose (García-López, 1976, p. 169)).

In the philosophical tradition there are thoughts that estimate that the corporeal part of the person cannot be discarded because it is a *sine qua non* condition of his essence. The person is a free rational subject, capable of realizing the identity of his being,

Human substance is also essentially corporeal, that is, it consists of duly organized material elements, and consequently it possesses the general properties of all bodies, that is, it is extensive, it occupies a place in space, it is changeable with all kinds of change (of place, qualitative, quantitative and even substantial) and it possesses sensible qualities. Any conception



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of man that excludes corporeality from his essence is false, such as the Platonic or Cartesian conception, or that of those others who understand man as pure history or mere freedom. The body is not something that man only has or to which he is accidentally united; the body is something that man is: a constitutive part of his essence (García-López, 1976, p. 179).

Expanding our argument from sociological and cultural perspectives, the concept of person is closely linked to the question of dignity and values. Dignity is understood as “the person is presented as an innate and essential characteristic of the human being that makes him worthy of treatment in accordance with his substratum” (Domínguez Guillén, 2019, p. 81). The human person is the great protagonist of all expressions of social life, therefore, he has a dignity. And, that dignity makes him superior to all other existing living beings. Through values, allusion is obviously made to actions as correct that lead the person to grow in his dignity. These values are related to virtues. *Roughly speaking*, the concepts of person and man in the Bantu-Fang context refer rather to ranges of value. The realization of the world of values means that the individual is elevated to the category of person, but without renouncing his intrinsic essence.

### 3. On African communities

To understand the complexity of the social structure of Africans, it is necessary to take into account the importance that they give to society, in relation to the life of the individual and of this one with the community, and different groups or social units that compose it. “They present us with a broad vision of forms of interpersonal relationships, which, although they are not sufficient to configure the being of the community, they provide the necessary experiential basis” (Von-Hildebrand, 1998, p.57).

Talking about Africa is very complex, due to its diversity. It is a continent “geographically enormous, with a great diversity in cultures, political situations, historical (post)colonial heritages, populations, or ecosystems” (Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid, 2018, p. 5). For a long time, African history has been hidden. African societies were considered as those without history, despite different research, many anthropologists argued that African communities could not be the subject of scientific study, primarily because of the lack of written sources and documents.

In Africa, African traditional communities consist of several ethnicities and peoples, “each with its religion, worship and artistic style, whose animistic practices have in common that they all show a deep spirituality” (Galán Moreno, 2015, p. 9). Then, African communities constitute a “plurality of peoples, and [...] groups, with specific social, cultural and political configurations that present specific cultural traits, social institutions, worldviews, linguistic forms and political organizations” (Vargas-Hernández, 2008, p. 9).

African communities have marked identities, and, “the identities of these peoples are organized and centered much more strongly on a collective identity, rather than on an individual identity; that is why they are recognized as having collective rights along with individual rights” (Vargas-Hernández, 2008, p. 9). It should also be noted that Africa presents a double cultural profile; on the one hand, the Maghrebi culture is related to Arab cultures, located in North Africa.

Africans are notoriously animistic, that is, they believe in the force of nature, and their religious beliefs, “a study of the peoples who hold these beliefs, with all the complexities of



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traditional and modern life... there are approximately three thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its own system" (Mbiti, 1991, p. 1). Cultural diversity leads to different problems. According to Mbiti (1991), he believes that "ignoring these traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices can only lead to a lack of understanding of the problems and behaviors of Africans" (p. 1). On the basis of the above, to say that people are culturally rooted in their languages, customs and traditions, which are publicly asserted, is the consequence of the cultural diversity of African peoples or communities. The cultural symbols, incorporated into personal life from the beginning, are exercised in community life.

It should be added that the first and most important community for Africans is the family. In the words of Ferrer (2000) he affirms that:

The family is a community of objective belonging, which transcends the interpersonal experiences that are at its core. Even the conjugal society itself is consolidated from unifying goods and values that surpass reciprocity in experiences: while love between spouses is a response of value that endures as an act amidst its diverse expressions, the feeling of community union extends to the goods that are possessed in common (the home, acquisitions, patrimony...). In being a community of belonging, it resembles other communities, such as the nation, the lineage or Humanity, in which people are rooted beyond their voluntary acts (p. 124).

Along the same lines, it is highlighted that:

The family community acts as the personal condition of entry into other communities, to the extent that one belongs to them through the family, which is what provides the private and public identity to each of its members (Alvarez Munárriz and Guerrero, 1999, pp. 169-181).

The family is a community where people are valued for their unique and unrepeatable character. Belonging to a family is an inherent fact, that is, one does not enter it through a conventional contract. The identity of a man comes first from his family, so identification is made public through the name and surnames coming from it (family). Family ties turn out to be inherent to the person, who takes them with him wherever he goes.

In the words of Ndongo (1985), he estimates that:

In general terms, this is the meaning of the African family. The meaning of the family in the traditions of African peoples has been, and is, universally recognized as one of the great values of African culture and religiosity. The entire social organization rests on the family. It is the foundation of society, its nucleus and what configures it as a community of brothers (p. 43).

For Africans, one cannot speak of a community without excluding the family. For this is the natural environment in which every person is born and works, finds the necessary protection and security, and has, in short, its continuity beyond earthly life through the union with the ancestors.

The sense of family is also an element inherent to African tradition. In this regard, we must emphasize the moral and even religious value of



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affection for the family, also demonstrated by the bond with ancestors, which finds expression in so many and such widespread manifestations of worship (Ndongo, 1985, p. 42).

Community practices and life are intended to strengthen individual or personal life, social life; it also ensures one's personality, which is needed in life, in society, and which is the greatest vital force. The vital force of the community is obviously concentrated in essential points of the person. Considering the community in this way, in the African conception as essential for the full realization of every human person, it is logical and necessary to appreciate it in all its context. For the African, the community is the means of participation in life, where the founding ancestor, associated with his descendants, survives and is prolonged. Mallart (1971) says:

Man lives in society with all the forces of creation. According to the Bantu system, man is the centre of the universe, but not alone, but in relation to all other creatures. His universe is like an immense spider's web in which all beings are interdependent. By the principle of interaction of forces, according to which the forces of the universe act on each other, man enters into communion with all creation (p. 79).

Primarily, blood groups determine the requirements of a social life. These are adjusted on a broad and true cooperation in everything. This particularity is what gives the group its cohesive character. Because the group or community is the center of communal or collective life and individual life, where all its individuals come together.

Because all the activity that occurs outside the social context and commentary ceases to have its own meaning, sense, effectiveness, energy and vitality. It is society that preserves all the richness of the tradition received from the elders. If one moves away from it, one cannot enjoy it; only in social life is tradition and the legacy of the ancestors updated, contributing new personal elements and those provided by the environment in which one lives. In this way, society envelops everything (Ndongo, 1985, p. 40).

In short, it should be emphasized that African societies formed by men and women are based on the family as the first element; then come several family groups known as clans, an extension of families; in a broader sense, the unification of several clans gives rise to tribes; the group of several tribes having the same linguistic roots forms an ethnic group; finally, the ethnic groups gathered in a large territory give birth to a group or a community. Each community is linked to each other, it is the great pyramid that constitutes the African society. It is considered as the true pillar of individual, social and community existence. For a better understanding of the cultural aspects of African peoples, it is important to take a look at their cultural, economic, political, religious and social structure, that is to say, to have a deep knowledge of their organization. In fact, African communities have their own socio-anthropological units that are distinct from each other.

### 3.1 The person according to the Western conception

Much has been written about the person in the Western world. It is not possible to be exhaustive in the analysis of everything that has been said about the person in this context. Two points of view will be evoked that could reflect the general conception of the person in the West, these are the point of view of Boethius and Charles Tylor mainly.



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Boethius' definition of the person has been the fundamental basis for many other definitions and was taken into consideration despite other formulations, but this being the starting point, in this sense, the book "Liber de persona et duabus naturis, defines the person as rationalis naturae individua substantia, individual substance of rational nature, which exists by its own right (sui iuris) and is perfectly incommunicable" (Díaz, 2008). Saint Thomas, for his part, perfected the definition of Boethius, emphasizing, as transcribed by Martínez (2013), that the person is "the distinct subsistent in an intellectual nature" (p. 319). This definition is characterized by giving each human being his individuality and considering that; regardless of the fact that human beings are equal in human nature, but there is an individuality of each one of these that is the person, a classification such as distinguishing a certain number within the numeration, is of the set, but represents itself its value, independence, essence or its identification as something equal in the group and separated from these in itself. On the other hand, taking into account other ideas from other philosophers and great thinkers, they could also serve us in terms of a better reflection on the conception of these concepts of person and dignity, thus also incorporating the point of view of the philosopher Kant who understands the person as "freedom of a rational being under moral laws", establishing the human person as "an end in itself" (Díaz, 2008). In the 1980s, before the appreciations of Carlos Díaz, Tylor, a Canadian philosopher and pedagogue, already conceived the human person as a "being that has a sense of self" (Taylor, 1985, p. 67).

García Cuadrado (2010), referring to Max Scheler's conception of the person, says that:

Unlike what happens with the rest of natural beings, man is not an "object" but a "subject". Considered as an "object" he carries with him the loss of his specificity. Man is not a "thing" in the world (a what) but a "person" (a who) (p. 27).

The human person is not a simple subject, but a special creature within nature by voluntary choice of the creator, God, so that the person is the only being of rational nature, this choice does not lead to his disregard for this special being to be considered as something, thing, but rather to be of pure conception and order of the Lord, someone, person.

### 3.2 The concept of person in Bantu-Fang culture

In this section, an approach to the term community is made. "The community is a form of society characterized by the predominance of affective ties or the continuous and stable coexistence of certain human beings united by common feelings" (Armenta & Gamboa, 2017, p. 22). The community propitiates cultural resources for the individual to develop socially in his adult life, and thus give a cultural identity to that one. Before situating ourselves in the person, we will give as a first laso to know the person from humanity in the Bantu-Fang culture.

The person, mot, mutu, muntu or ntu, nti, etc. These are some of the denominations of the person that are most considered among the African Bantu languages. The concept of person or man, in the context of African cultures, especially Bantu cultures, can be deduced not only from the philosophical-anthropological studies of authors such as Placide Temples, Eboussi Boulaga, Alexis Kagame, etc., but also from the linguistic richness of the indigenous languages: Swahili, Lingala, Fang, to name a few.

The aim of this research article is not to highlight or find the linguistic differences between the different African areas, languages and ethnic groups in terms of the term. It is to define



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man, that is, to exhume from the linguistic and anthropological richness of the Fang peoples a definition that would give us a concrete idea of the Fang person or man. It can be noticed that, however, there is no clear anthropological or philosophical definition in Tempels, Kagame, Eboussi or Ela, although they do not give a unique and clear definition of the African person, they leave in their studies a quite clear concept of what is the African “Bantu” man (plural of ntu formed from ba desinence indicating the plural, and ntu meaning man or person). We use these conceptions to construct the concept of “Bantu” man.

A first approach to being can be found in the work *Philosophie bantoue* written by the Belgian Placide Tempels in 1945. He affirms that “being is force”. African Bantu cultures would not contemplate a being outside existence, that is to say, detached from materiality and concreteness. Being is situated in time and space and, what is more, there can be more or less being depending on whether it has more or less “vital” force. It should be noted that African Bantu man is stuck and does not seem to have the means to help him get unstuck. The pillars of a culture such as religion, language and technology have always suffered strong shocks that in their essence lack real substance. One of the cultural elements that usually help man to know himself and position himself in the world is religion.

In African communities such as the Bantu, the person corresponds to “identity, personhood and full humanization that is the result of self-knowledge” (Zavala-Olalde, 2010, p. 305). In fact, the elements that constitute a person in the African communities are:

In addition to the body, characteristics that manifest themselves in the body itself and through it in the unity of the person. I refer to: pixan (the soul), ik` (the spirit), ki`nam (the energy of the living), ool (the will), tucul (the thought) (Zavala-Olalde, 2010, p. 212).

In this way, the person is not only an individual of flesh and blood. “This variety of elements means that there is a broad reflection on the idea of a person” (Zavala-Olalde, 2010, p. 212). It is difficult to understand what a person is without referring to their culture, and it is difficult to find a culture that is not made up of men, of people.

In traditional life, the individual cannot exist alone, but corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations. He is part of a whole. The community makes, creates, or produces the individual, who is dependent on the whole group. Physical birth is not enough: the child must go through certain rites of incorporation to become fully integrated into his society. These rites extend throughout the person's physical life, as he passes from one state of corporate existence to another. The final stage is reached with death, when the person is ritually incorporated into the great family of the living and the dead (Mbiti, 1991, p. 144).

The Bantu conception of man is much closer to the Platonic and Aristotelian conception because:

It has a body and a soul. The soul lives in a body of which it is a prisoner. It can escape from the body momentarily, for example during sleep, and travel: sleep, trance, witchcraft and reposition, without the body dying; it does not leave the body permanently until death. Death, in fact, is the dissociation of vital elements. After death, the soul begins to haunt the



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places of its earthly existence and can then be reincarnated in a child, join God or even go to the forest (Akare, 2018, p. 130).

At the time when the Bantu-Fang considers himself to be special for having intelligence and reason. There are two approaches to the conception of man: the dynamism in being (the Fang changes with time and the things and people he has or surrounds him); and the reciprocal influence in the relationships of being that makes everyone depend on everyone and everything. Being alone is poverty, misery and lack of identity. Man is what he is and what contributes to his being, that is, people and things.

### 3.3 Muan mot (human beings)

In Fang culture, the human being is considered as muan mot, which forms the block of man in the collective as an appreciation and qualification in a non-individual or different way of rational nature. It is known and recognized in Bantu-Fang culture, muan mot (human being), which is broken down or qualified in three dimensions: individual, social and moral.

### 3.4 Mot (person)

The term “person” is used to refer to two very specific meanings: a human being endowed with intelligence, feelings and dignity. Therefore, one cannot speak coherently about man (person) without taking into consideration the two aspects mentioned above that encompass the understanding of man as an individual. (*mot*).

### 3.5 El ane mot (It is worthy)

In the Fang mentality and language, being a person is not the same as being a person (Mot and “ane mot”). The two phrases are not opposed, they complement each other, or rather, the second enriches the first more. As we said in the preceding paragraphs, mot finds its understanding within the Boethian definition of individual substance of rational nature. This basis is common to all men of all species. The other meaning, that is, ane mot, cannot be attributed to anyone, but to a few people. Thus, when the Fang says of the other that ane mot, he sees in him not only a being possessed of intelligence and reason (*ken ya fak*), natural and individual properties, but something more that places him as deserving of a position in society. ane mot is to achieve the status of being truly a man. Thus, when the Fang says ane mot he affirms that his interlocutor is worthy, that is, there is coherence between what he is and what he should be, he seeks good and not evil and does what is expected of him. And from this consideration, that is, from the ane mot, it finds its dignity; this phrase, usually stated in the third person, is a recognition that is uttered for the other man or the other person, it is a testimony of possession of legality and goodness, it is finding improvement and human greatness in the interlocutor.

It is convenient to establish a true relationship between mot and ane mot, in the Bantu and Fang mentality, mot differs from other beings of nature: tshid, eleh, osuygn, etc., that is, we are born different from animals, trees or rivers, but it is not enough for men that I am different from other beings, I have to compare myself to other men, this is where the expression ane-mot comes in, that is, he is not just a man mot, he is a true man, because he has been compared to other men. He has been measured in the community of bot. The proper thing for a person is not to be bad or to seek evil. This goes against the evolution and development of humanity and is in contrast with the social coexistence that defines man, as Aristotle recognizes when he conceives of man as a “political animal,” understanding the word “political” in its original meaning of polis, society, city.



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Aristotle recognizes that man cannot live without the other man, he always has to coexist, that is, live with others. Nature forces him to do so: he was born from others and cannot develop without others. Even his rationality finds meaning and foundation in others.

### 3.6 El ase mot (it is worthy)

*El ase mot* or is unworthy, indicates that dignity in the fang understanding celebrates this recognition of otherness (*ane mot*). Whereas, to act badly is synonymous with unworthiness (*ase mot*). It is an insult, because it not only expresses acting unaccepted by others, but also recognizes in him the seeds of evil that will possibly cause him to perpetuate his nefarious behavior in the future. Both *ane mot* and *ase mot* are characteristics that tend to be defined with the person in the worthy by *ane mot*, and in the unworthy that *ase mot*.

The fang seems to develop a concept of man that cannot easily be understood outside of the community, of the other man. The other is the one who recognizes in me being a man (*ane mot*). It is not correct for me to identify myself as a man (*mene mot*), this would be to boast, to be proud. The normal thing is for the brother to say *ane mot* (he is a true and good man). The person himself does not affirm his personality, but it is the others who must know and confirm that the other is worthy (*ane mot*).

In this sense, it is not proper to man to insult, steal or despise for any reason; he who acts in this way is a person, but he has not yet become a man, therefore, he cannot yet place himself in the upper echelon, that of humanity. It is not proper for a person to be evil or to seek evil. This paddles against the evolution and development of humanity and is opposed to the social coexistence that defines man as recognized by Aristotle when he conceives man as a “political animal”, understanding the word “political” in its original meaning of polis, society, city.

Based on the above, in African communities, man is man before being reinforced or diminished in being. The physical aspect, rationality, morality and religiosity are aspects that are registered only in man's being. In this sense, if “human cultures are as old as the different human groups, ethnicities, and peoples that make up humanity” (Krotz, 2004, p.13). Human values are based on the different forms of interpersonal relationships that constitute the sustaining pillar for communities.

## 4. Methodology

The research is placed within the sociocritical or interpretative paradigm because it is about deeply understanding a concept, that of the person. It is not intended to generate laws, so neither hypotheses nor research variables are used. The research sample is double, because two texts are analyzed in order to have the different meanings of the term person from the Bantu vision. It also uses the ethnographic method with the interview technique carried out on 5 elders who detail what they understand as person or ‘mot’ in the Fang tradition (Cotán Fernández, 2020).

The content analysis is done with the MAXQDA software on texts by Placide Tempels (*la philosophie bantoue*) and John Mbiti (*The Encounter of Christian Faith and African Religion*). The questionnaire used for the individual interview was unstructured with the intention that the participants draw out everything they know about the person. The meetings with the participants lasted less than 15 minutes per interview. They all spoke in Fang and were transcribed into English using the transcription application that comes with Android phones. The questionnaire for the collection of data from the texts and interviews



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has one main question: What is the person (mot)? But, in the coding there will be several subcategories that will be related to the subquestions that derive from the main one, see the following table:

Categories	Questions
Person in Bantu-Fang culture	What is the definition of the person in Bantu-Fang culture?
Influence of colonization	Has the Fang concept of the person been influenced by colonization?
Ontological dimensión	Does the definition have an ontological or moral dimension?

Table 1: Script of questions for the texts and interviews

## 5. Data analysis presentation

As announced above, this work follows the analytical-descriptive process with the ethnographic method. The data collected from the categorization of the two types of documents (texts and interviews) are analyzed).

### 5.1. From the texts of Mbiti and Tempels

The result of the analysis of the texts read by the two authors is shown in Table 2. It should be noted that it is not the result of the entire works, but of the pages of these.

Categories	Codes	Segments
Definition of the person	Being collective and individual	2 5
Colonial influence	Being a forcé	1
Dimension	Little or nothing	5
	Moral	2

Table 2: Data from the Mbiti and Tempels texts

### 5.2 From the interviews

Five interviews were conducted as stated in the methodology section. The results of all of them are presented following the same scheme as in the two previous texts: categories, codes and segments.

Categories	Codes	Segments
Definition of the person	<i>Mot</i>	5
	<i>Muan mot</i>	7
Colonial influence	little or nothing	1
Dimension	Moral	10 1

Table 3: Data from the 5 interviews

### 5.3 Concept of person between Westerners and African-Bantus



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Conception	Boethius	Saint Thomas Aquinas	Tylor	Tempels	Mbiti
Individual person	Individual substance	Subsistent distinct	Sense of self	Being is strength	Corporate existence
Community person	rational nature	from rational nature	Life plans	Of other beings	Beyond life.

Table 4: Conception of the person between Westerners and Bantus

Table 4 shows two dimensions of the conception of the person according to 5 thinkers (4 Westerners and 1 Bantu African). Placide Tempels, although he claims to be an African philosopher, was a Belgian missionary who invites his brothers to conceive of Africans as people with their own culture and conception of the world.

As far as the data are concerned, it is clear that each of the definitions of the person that we have evoked has an individual and communitarian dimension. The Westerners, however, emphasize the individual tendency of the person (individual substance, subsistent, distinct, sense of self), while the African thinkers, among whom we include Tempels, emphasize the communitarian dimension (corporate existence, being a force). No definition excludes absolutely one of the dimensions, all of them integrate them, but not in the same proportions.

#### 5.4 Concept of person in the Fang language

The Fang of Equatorial Guinea belong to the trunk of languages that make up the Bantu culture or cultures. They name man, like many languages of the same trunk. Their meaning of man has common connotations, but we want to highlight the specificities of this language in the particular context of Equatorial Guinea.

It must be recognized from the start that the Fang defines the person not so much in the anthropological-philosophical context, but in the axiological-moral aspect.

Definition	Moral dimensions	Ontological dimension
Man	<i>Mot</i>	<i>Muan mot</i>
Being a man	<i>Ane mot</i>	<i>Ane muan Mot</i>
Not being a man	<i>Ase mot</i>	<i>Ase muan mot</i>

Table 5: Conception of the person in Fang culture

Table 5, besides exposing the two dimensions, moral and anthropological, exposes two definitions: man and being man (being human). To the latter definition we have introduced the negative meaning (not to be man or human).



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It can be observed that when the fang introduces the particles *ase* or *ane* joining them to the noun *mot*, it places itself in the moral dimension, valuing the person in its aspect of dignity, while, in the ontological dimension, the same particles are joined to the noun *mot* interposing the common noun *muan* (of the genus of). The fang knows perfectly well how to distinguish the two dimensions of the person as a rational being (*muan mot*) and as a moral being (*ane mot*). Consequently, his definition of person is not a consequence of the Western definition, but is preserved from his African Bantu culture and tradition.

Translated with DeepL.com (free version).

## 6. Results

This research work has been designed with four (4) objectives: to define the concept of person from the Bantu-Fang perspective; to find cultural elements that support the same definition; to study the influence that the word *mot* has suffered during colonization; and to compare *mot* with the classic definitions of person.

The results of the research carried out will be presented, especially in relation to the first three objectives. The content analysis carried out on the texts and the interviews has the same categories and codes. The same information was sought in the two types of documents. The categories are: the Fang concept of the person and the colonial influence on the Fang concept of the person. Each of the categories includes codes that allow the information to be grouped and classified. For the first category (the Fang concept of the person) we have: moral dimension and ontological dimension. As for the second category (colonial influence on the Fang concept of the person) we have positive and negative influence as codes.

### 6.1 Definition of the person

En atención a los resultados expuestos en los cuadros, se puede deducir que la persona en la lengua fang se expresa con el término *muan mot* que traducido literalmente sería el que ha nacido como persona o el que tiene la forma de la persona. Esto expresa el aspecto físico y biológico de la persona. El término *mot*, tiene una connotación moral, significa la persona cuyo comportamiento es aceptable o es modelo para los demás. Así, el término *mot*, además de significar el valor que los demás dan al comportamiento de su conciudadano, sitúa al hombre entre el pasado y el futuro. Decir a una persona que *ane mot*, es también afirmar que él es aceptado por los ancianos y ancestros y puede servir de paradigma para las siguientes generaciones.

### 6.2 Colonial influence on the concept of the person

The number of coded segments in the two analysis groups shows that there has been little colonial influence on the concept of person, and this may be due to the fact that the settlers did not speak Fang and therefore could not change or modify terminology whose meaning they did not know. However, although colonization did not have much influence on the conception of the person directly, it should be noted that the fact of eliminating many cultural signs, of prohibiting students from expressing themselves in their native languages, could have an indirect and negative connotation on the concept of person.

### 6.3 Prevalent dimension in the concept of Bantu-Fang person

The two terms: *muan mot* and *mot* express the term person according to the ontological and moral dimension respectively. With *muan mot* the fang understands the spatio-temporal



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placement of the person. It is the being located in a town and in a precise period. With mot, we have the attitudinal expression of the individual's actions. It is the aspect that confers dignity on the individual and also the part that makes the subject a collective being because he is born from the community, lives from the community and must behave according to the schemes of this.

## 7. Discussion

The main objectives of this research were twofold: to define the concept of person and to determine whether this concept has been influenced by western acculturation, given the invasion and changes that African traditions and cultures underwent during the process of colonization. Taking into account this twofold concern and, based on the data obtained, we can affirm that:

Fang Bantu Africans of Equatorial Guinea and neighboring countries of the same language, define the person as a human being (muan mot) from the ontological aspect and as a worthy human being (ane mot), from the moral dimension. In short, although the moral aspect stands out in the Fang conception of personhood, its ontological dimension is not excluded from the traditional Fang definition. Also, it can be recognized, after the affirmation of the preceding paragraph, that the Fang have preserved their definition of man. The missionaries who brought Western culture and taught it to the natives were neither philosophers nor linguists; many did not learn the local languages, which means that they could not have had much influence in changing the concepts that the natives had about reality. The destruction of the culture was more at the level of objects and rites, but not at the level of concepts and expressions.

## 8. Conclusion

This research has been built on two concerns: to define the concept of person from the Bantu-Fang culture and to determine the originality of this definition. Based on these objectives and reviewing the set of ideas that have emerged from the handling of the data, it has been shown that the Bantu-Fang have a specific conception and definition of the person from the ontological dimension as a human being (muan mot) and from the moral dimension (ane mot). The first meaning celebrates the fact that every man comes from other men, while the second evokes the sense of dignity contained in the expression (ane mot). It is not enough to be a man, but one must deserve to be one. He who does wrong is not worthy of being called a man in the Fang conception. There is the feeling that man is not called to evil, but to good. He who does wrong is therefore usually given the expression ase mot (not worthy of being called a man) in definition.

The values and dignity of the person cannot be separated. Man, in any culture or people, wherever he is or whatever his social conditions, is worthy; in other words, dignity is inherent to the nature of the person. This is also reflected in this study that has been done on the notion of the person of the Fang man. In the thoughts and experiences of the person and of African communities such as the Bantu, "being is strength". Thus, the African Bantu cultures would not contemplate a being outside of existence, that is, detached from materiality and concreteness. Being is situated in time and space and, what is more, there can be more or less being depending on whether it has more or less "vital" strength.

Strength is not only the set of material goods, but also spiritual goods of this world and the hereafter. The community within which the person is defined is not limited to the living, but also extends to the ancestors who live with the living in an invisible dimension. The Bantu-



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Fang culture, like many others on the African continent, has suffered the phenomenon of acculturation through colonization, which has destroyed its religious and cultural symbols, rites and manifestations. The missionaries who came to these lands treated all these cultural manifestations as diabolical, but it seems that they have attacked not so much the invisible part of the traditions: concepts, expressions, but the visible and material part. For this reason, the Fang would have preserved the concept of person that they still have today. The community is the result of the union of several individuals; the community would not exist if individuals did not exist. To build or reconstruct the concept of dignity in African communities, it is necessary to focus a lot on the ontological dimension of the term. A collective dignity that crushes individual dignity would not be conceived in its correct understanding.

Addressing this issue has not been an easy task; it has constituted a deeper analysis to understand the concept of person in complex communities such as those in Africa. However, some information has been collected from bibliographic sources that have allowed us to understand how Africans, especially those from black African communities, function. It is hoped that this research will open the door to other possible investigations, since this research article does not exhaust the subject addressed, but rather opens a theoretical framework on this subject.

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## Author

**FLORENTINO NCOGO-NDONG** in 2019 obtained a degree in Humanities and Social Sciences from the Higher Institute of Science and Education (CUISE), Alicante. In 2021 he obtained his Master's degree in Philosophy and Christianity from the Catholic University of Murcia, and in 2021 he obtained his Master's degree in Humanistic and Social Studies from the University Abad Oliba CEU-Barcelona.

He is currently a Doctoral Candidate in Philosophy at the CEINDO CEU International Doctoral School. As a researcher, this first article has been written at the UNGE (National University of Equatorial Guinea) during the mobility stay.



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