

**Review of Trending EAST by Upenyu S. Majee - Sounds of Dawn, Nairobi, 2026.
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Upenyu S. Majee's *Trending EAST* opens with a deeply personal preface that situates the book within "lived realities, relationships, and shared humanity." Majee reflects on his formative years teaching English at Chikwariro Secondary School in Mutare District, Zimbabwe, and the enduring influence of the Form 4 East class of 2001. What begins as recollection becomes a meditation on Ubuntu: the recognition that our lives are woven together across time, geography, and circumstance. The preface establishes the book's central concern: how memory, relationships, and education shape who we are. It frames the text not as a private memoir, but as an invitation into shared reflection. Through an acknowledgement of both the unfinished stories of students lost too soon and the complex legacies of language and colonial history, Majee grounds his work in lived experience while opening it to universal questions of belonging, care, and responsibility.

After setting the tone and stage for this love letter from a teacher to his past students, reunited through reflection after 25 years of separation, Majee reaches an intellectual and emotional depth few are patient enough to attain. From this foundation, *Trending EAST* develops a philosophy of inquiry that is both reflective and relational. Each letter of the acronym EAST represents four propositions that Majee builds into "a conceptual and practical framework for being together in the world" (p.64) throughout the book. The four propositions are as follows: E - Engaging Differences, A - Asking Questions, S - Seeking Restoration, and T - Tending Wounds. It is an homage to his Form 4 EAST class of 2001, but the reader is warmly and seamlessly invited in.

The book challenges the prevailing cultural tendency to equate knowledge with certainty and efficiency, arguing instead that wisdom emerges from dwelling within ambiguity. In a society that prizes quick answers and decisive conclusions, Majee's work is a counter-cultural call to embrace the "unsettled space" of questioning, where clarity has not yet crystallized and where transformation becomes possible. This unsettledness is not portrayed as weakness but as the very condition of growth, un-learning, and the

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cultivation of humility. Questions, in this framing, are not endpoints, but openings, not instruments of control, but invitations to relationship.

The interpretive thread running through the book is Ubuntu. Majee insists that “I am because we are” and “a person is a person through other persons” are not slogans but a lived ethic, embodied in acts of seeing, questioning, and greeting. His reflections on *Sawubona* (I see you) and *Ngikhona* (I am here) exemplify that recognition and presence are not transactional but constitutive of personhood. To ask sincerely is to affirm another’s humanity, to acknowledge their dignity, and to situate oneself within a community of belonging. As Majee observes, “*To ask a sincere question is to say: I see you, your story matters, and I am willing to slow down long enough to understand.*” This insight underscores the ethical dimension of inquiry, situating it as a discipline of generosity rather than a strategy of control.

The book’s strength lies in its ability to elevate ordinary acts into philosophical engagements. African greetings, classroom exercises, and communal resilience are treated not as peripheral cultural practices, but as epistemic sites. Majee’s metaphors are abundant, sometimes to the point of excess, yet the redundancy reflects the richness of Ubuntu’s refusal to reduce complexity and deepen understanding. The text is strongest when it anchors metaphor in cultural practice: the Shona greeting traditions, the relational depth of *Sawubona*, checking in, and the pedagogical exercises that encourage students to respond to questions with further questions. These examples demonstrate how inquiry can shift classroom dynamics from intellectual competition to intellectual companionship, cultivating humility, patience, and attentiveness. In this way, *Trending EAST* challenges conventional educational paradigms that prioritize definitive answers and measurable outcomes, offering instead a vision of learning as a communal journey shaped by openness and care.

The later chapters extend this philosophy of questioning into the domain of listening and restoration. Majee argues that genuine listening is not merely about preparing a response or gathering information but about slowing down to honor another’s experiences and perspectives. This form of listening, paired with questioning, becomes a practice of patience and attentiveness that affirms dignity and creates space for dialogue. The text acknowledges the risks of such engagement: misunderstandings, conflict, disappointment, but insists that these risks are intrinsic to authentic human connection. In this way, *Trending EAST* refuses to romanticize Ubuntu; it presents it as a demanding ethic that requires humility, resilience, and courage.

Majee succeeds in weaving together philosophy, pedagogy, and his lived experience with remarkable coherence, offering readers a text that is both intellectually rigorous and deeply humane. His communal framing of inquiry, grounded in Ubuntu, is powerful in its insistence that identity and wisdom are relational. This emphasis opens fruitful avenues for reflection on how difference and dissent might also be negotiated within communal structures, suggesting possibilities for further dialogue and deeper connection rather than presenting limitations. The transition from questioning to restoration is brisk, yet it underscores the urgency of moving from inquiry into practices of healing and repair. The layering of metaphor, abundant throughout the book, sometimes challenges the reader’s patience, but this density is itself generative. Rather than diminishing clarity, it invites readers to linger and slow down. In this way, the text reframes inquiry as a moral and communal act, offering a vision of scholarship that is expansive, relational, and transformative.

Comparatively, *Trending EAST* resonates with African decolonial scholarship that foregrounds lived experience as knowledge. It recalls Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's insistence on language as identity, while also aligning with feminist and peace studies discourses that privilege relationality. Majee's reflections on questioning and humility echo broader debates in African philosophy about epistemic justice and the ethics of care. His insistence that wisdom emerges not from immediate answers but from dwelling with uncertainty situates the book within a wider intellectual movement that resists the instrumentalization of knowledge and insists on its interpersonal, ethical dimensions. In this sense, Majee's work contributes to the ongoing project of decolonizing knowledge by insisting that African cultural practices - greetings, communal rituals, pedagogical exercises - are not marginal, but central to human philosophical inquiry.

Equally striking is the way *Trending EAST* elevates the constructive use of technology, particularly artificial intelligence and digital communication, as instruments of memory and community. What began as a WhatsApp group among former classmates in African countries and the resulting connection with their 2000-2001 teacher, now residing in the United States, gradually evolved into conversations that culminated in the production of this book. The first of a three-part Foreword, written by one of the Form 4 East students, captures this dynamic vividly, recalling how audio reflections shared within the group became seeds for deeper exchanges and eventually shaped the manuscript itself. As the student recalls, "*Eventually, we settled on audio messages posted to the WhatsApp group, a kind of digital circle around a virtual fire.*" (p.x) This image captures the intimacy and communal warmth of the exchanges, showing how digital tools can recreate spaces of belonging across time and distance. The student further writes,

The resonance and impact of these messages was undeniable. One classmate, Precious Munyonho, captured it beautifully: 'He has never changed. He is a perfectionist. During our high school days, he came to class with neatly folded papers and such a strong work ethic that you always felt you had to rise to the occasion...' It is from that sacred space of memory, gratitude, and reflection that this book was conceived. That is why these messages would not remain audio files buried in a WhatsApp thread of a single group. (p.xi – xii)

This testimony grounds the book in captured memory and demonstrates how digital communication can become a vessel for Ubuntu, carrying recognition, gratitude, and shared humanity across borders.

Inviting reflection on collective memory, the book treats memory itself as a relational practice rather than an individual possession or archive. From an Ubuntu perspective, memory is constituted by shared stories and ongoing dialogue, and Majee portrays the significance of the WhatsApp platform as a space where collective memory is actively sustained and renewed in everyday life. In doing so, *Trending EAST* shifts attention from technology as a mere tool to technology as a relational environment in which memory is continually renewed. Thus, the book reframes digital memory as a communal process, suggesting that remembrance is sustained not only through formal sites of memory but also through the everyday interactions that shape digital communities.

In this sense, the book is not only a product of memory and philosophy but also of technological mediation. AI and digital platforms are reframed here not as threats to human connection, but as tools that can extend it, enabling dispersed communities to sustain dialogue across time zones. The WhatsApp group convening becomes a

metaphor for Ubuntu in the digital age: “I am because we are” enacted through shared voice notes, conversations, and collaborative reflection. This dimension of the text suggests that technology, when harnessed ethically and relationally, can amplify, rather than diminish, communal bonds, offering a model for how African philosophies can shape the future of digital engagement.

This perspective resonates with emerging scholarship in African digital humanities which emphasizes the importance of using technology to preserve memory, amplify marginalized voices, and sustain cultural practices. The book illustrates these principles through the book’s account of the WhatsApp group becoming a “*digital circle around a virtual fire*,” demonstrating how digital platforms can be contemporary spaces for storytelling, encouragement, and meaning-making. Rather than treating technology as inherently alienating, *Trending EAST* reframes it as a medium through which Ubuntu can be practiced, showing that reciprocity, care, and belonging are not limited to face-to-face encounters. In doing so, the book extends Ubuntu into the digital sphere, contributing to decolonial technology ethics by providing an African philosophical framework for reimagining technology. *Trending EAST* illustrates the ethical relevance of Ubuntu for digital contexts and positions African philosophy as a generative source of knowledge for shaping debates about technology.

Moreover, the book’s origin in a WhatsApp group highlights the democratizing potential of digital communication. Unlike elite academic conferences or formal institutions, the group was informal, accessible, and rooted in collectively shared memory. Yet from this modest beginning emerged a text of philosophical depth and scholarly significance. This trajectory challenges the idea that serious intellectual work must originate in formal spaces, instead affirming that knowledge can be co-created even in everyday digital interactions. It also underscores the potential of AI and digital tools to archive, curate, and transform such exchanges into enduring contributions to scholarship.

At the same time, Majee’s work invites reflection on the ethical responsibilities of digital communication. The decision to transform audio reflections into a book was not merely technical, but moral; it unearthed the memories of students and classmates, honored the unfinished stories of those lost, and ensured that the conversations would not “... *remain audio files buried in a WhatsApp thread*.” This act of preservation exemplifies Ubuntu’s ethic of care, showing that technology can be used to safeguard dignity and prolong community across generations. It also gestures toward the future, suggesting that AI and digital platforms, when guided by Ubuntu, can help African societies navigate concerns for authenticity and human connection in an increasingly digital world.

This contribution enriches the book’s broader thesis: that questions, listening, and recognition are central to human flourishing - whether enacted in classrooms, communities, or digital circles around virtual fires.

The book also makes a significant contribution to decolonial and Ubuntu-centered scholarship, challenging Western epistemic paradigms that equate knowledge with possession, certainty, and power. In their place, Majee offers an alternative vision in which understanding emerges through humility, attentiveness, and care. In doing so, the text lays the groundwork for the exploration of restoration, showing that the act of asking is both the beginning of connection and the foundation for healing when relationships falter. Even so, Majee clarifies in the conclusion that the four propositions that he expounds upon in the book are not meant to simply be for intellectual reflection or

scholarly discussion. He describes them as “mindful and heartfelt ways of moving through a complex world with greater attentiveness, sturdier courage, and more expansive compassion” (p. 240).

Trending EAST is thus both intellectually rigorous and tenderly human. It is not merely a book of metaphors; it is an invitation to slow down, to see differently, and to embrace Ubuntu as a scholarly and everyday ethic. For scholars of African philosophy, gender and peace studies, and those committed to decolonial approaches to knowledge, Majee’s work offers a rich, generative text that insists on the transformative power of questioning, listening, and recognition. It is a book that rewards slow reading, reflection, and dialogue, embodying the very ethic it advocates.

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