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ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

**UNIVERSALISM VS PARTICULARISM: HERMENEUTICS AS AN
INTERMEDIARY APPROACH FOR AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY**

BY: FENTAHUN YITAYEW

DECEMBER 2020

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ETHIOPIA

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY,
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PHILOSOPHY.**

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Abstract

The issue of identity, methodology, and relevance has never been uncontroversial in African philosophy. As a result of the intentional attempt of Eurocentric scholarship that nullifies the identity and historical contributions of African peoples, the subject of African identity and methodology becomes the chief area of African philosophy. Eurocentric scholarship characterized itself as the only path of humanity's progress and its philosophy as universal and modern. Furthermore, it also characterized its alleged 'other' like the Africans as backward and particular/ traditional. This characterization caused the chief topic of this thesis, which is the debate between universalism and particularism. One of the main ideas in the criticism of the universalistic schools of thought against particularism is the cultural attachment in philosophy and collective thought. This makes the thought of the philosopher, which is categorized under the umbrella of the school of ethnophilosophy as traditional and irrelevant. In this thesis, by holding the middle road of the hermeneutical approach, I have criticized some essential points of both universal and particular schools. And the finding shows that, since philosophy evolves from culture, every philosophy, whether it is African or not, has particular features. But the fact of the recognition that philosophy originates from a particular culture doesn't in any way invalidate the universality of its problems.

Key Words: Universalism, Particularism, Hermeneutics, Culture, African, Philosophy.

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Introduction

Contemporary African philosophy has been grappling with the quest for identity. For a long period of time Eurocentric scholarship has repudiated the Africans' right to "self-determination and self-identity". (Mawere & Mubaya, 2016:192). Moreover, Eurocentric scholarship has also identified Africans as traditional and uncivilized. So as to address its failure to include and recognize African philosophy, the question of identity becomes relevant for African intellectuals. For this reason thinkers like Bekele Gutema underlined, "[f]ighting false identities imposed on us by the Europeans is one of the main tasks of African philosophy" (Gutema, 1998: 73).

Europeans consider their civilization as a universal exemplar of humanity. In this regard, Europe universalized her particularities, annihilating in the process the history and culture, the socio-economic and political institutions of black peoples. It is shocking, but true that these ideas were introduced by philosophers, like David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and others. The humiliating thoughts of those philosophers resulted, in an identity that described the African as pre-logical and as such incapable of philosophical thought.

Some intellectuals have tried to uncover the existence of the philosophy of African peoples, but the colonial power, by coining a name such as particular or traditional, excludes it from a philosophical trend. For some Western and western educated African intellectuals, what they called particular/traditional African philosophy is nothing other than a lowest opposite of the universal (Western) philosophy. This identity foisted and intellectually accepted as the true African identity for centuries, until now.

Eurocentric scholars coined terms that characterize themselves as universal, modern, civilized, etc. They also coined reverse terms like particular, traditional, and uncivilized and so on, to

characterize Africans or their alleged lower opposites. These terms were applied to justify an alleged superior/ inferior dichotomy between the West and Africans. Having said this, the thesis will examine such pejorative terms and names that were/are coined and applied by colonial powers to influence as well as harm the African identity. Following this, the thesis will also examine the historical and philosophical contexts that uphold the responsibility of introducing essentialised views of culture which helped to the misconception of African culture and philosophy. As already noted, such misconception perpetuates under the veil of different dichotomized terms, the thesis most emphatically interrogates the universal/particular dichotomy of philosophy.

On this basis, after the emergence of the work of Placid Temples entitled *Bantu Philosophy*, which later on categorized under the schools of ethno-philosophy, African philosophy has shifted into the ideological debate between the defender and critics of ethno-philosophy. These debates, basically, depends on cultural attachment and cultural detachment in philosophical inquiry concerning the identity of African philosophy. The debate resulted in two main groups these are: the traditionalists, with the particularizing point of view, and the universalist or modernist with a universalizing perspective. Following this, there are divergent views towards African philosophy, the notion of universalism in the one hand and particularism on the other, regarding meaning and nature of African philosophy.

In this regard, African and Western philosophy are dichotomized as particular and universal respectively. This thesis questions such dichotomized assumption and demonstrates that, as a human undertaking, all philosophies remain under the tone of culture or it's culturally oriented. Philosophy is, in its very nature, the integral part of human culture, thus no philosophy raised or evolved from a vacuum. The reason behind this is that, philosophy begins when someone starts

to examine the established beliefs, customs, and other cultural elements of his/her society. That is why we can reasonably characterize philosophy as self-examination of culture.

The thesis, among other things will attempt to explore the controversies between universalism and particularism among the two traditions; Western and African philosophy. Some of the central questions that this thesis intended to address are: what makes philosophy universal and particular? Does philosophy constitute a universal or particular aspect, or both? If it is universal, so, what is the implication of different cultural tags that are applied to philosophy, like Western, Chinese, and African? Doesn't this negate each culture's unique way of understanding the world out there? Or if philosophy is particular, as the particularists assumed, why the world views of each culture uniformly considered as philosophical (why all are uniformly called philosophy), irrespective of their cultural qualifications or specificities?

To achieve this task the thesis is organized into three chapters. The first chapter deals with the concept of culture and philosophy. In this chapter, I will try to show the symbiotic relations between philosophy and culture. Hereafter, the notion of hermeneutics and its task will be dealt with. The second chapter will focus on the conception of African philosophy. The meaning and nature of African philosophy will be summarized in this chapter. In doing so, some challenge on African philosophy will be dealt with in a cursory glance. In the third chapter, I will attempt to address the fundamental difference between universalism and particularism, by arguing that African philosophical hermeneutics challenges both stances and occupies the middle position for different reasons. In the concluding part of the thesis, I have critically pointed out the significance of a hermeneutical approach to African philosophy so as to detect the roots of the false dichotomy and polarization between the West and African philosophy. Once the roots of this dichotomy have been clearly pointed out, I will argue that deconstructing of the dichotomy

and avoiding the idea of universalism (as a universalist assumed) and particularism from African people as well as the colonial vocabulary is essential. Indeed, this cannot be possible without awakening the society's consciousness that these ideas are illusion. To this end, I will criticize an African intellectual who takes the universal position because of inappropriate critiques on the particularistic perspective of philosophy. But it does not mean that I will totally agree with the particularistic perspective of philosophy on Africa.

Chapter One

Culture and Philosophy: Task of Hermeneutics

In this part of the thesis I will try to discuss the symbiotic relationship between culture and philosophy in a nutshell. In this vein, I will try to clearly expose the task of hermeneutics basically in its role to mediate the contention of culture and philosophy. Before explicating the symbiotic relationship between culture and philosophy; it is necessary for us to have an understanding of the concept and meaning of culture and philosophy. Because doing so enables us to grasp the issue we will be dealing within this chapter in particular, as well as in this thesis in general.

1.1. What is culture?

When we talk about culture, we may begin by admitting the controversies regarding its nature and meaning. But it's beyond the scope of this study to engage in discussing such controversies and uncertainties. Thus let me spend on what I believe are essential for my topic. As Catherine Hoppers (2017) underlines, culture is usually understood as the whole way of life of people, the interaction between the individual and the group. And also, it is a way of thinking, believing, and “a mechanism for the normative regulation of behavior, and a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other people” (Hoppers, 2017: 1).

Furthermore, David Millar, Bugu Kendie, Atia Apusigah and Bertus Haverkort defined culture as “the totality of the human created world. It comprises the intangible [and tangible] aspects of life – language, beliefs, myths, folktales, proverbs, histories and legend, philosophy, world-view, laws, values, attitudes, [cloths], knowledge, religion, rituals, music, and dance [...] of the human habitat” (Millar, et al, 2006, p. 54). This implies that culture is man-made or

artificial not something innate or inborn. As history exhibited, culture also has a dynamic aspect rather than being stagnated, and it always has been in flux. Culture is a worldview that evolved by peoples to overcome the environmental challenges around them by assigning names and meanings to their political, economic, artistic as well as the philosophical aspects of life. Following this, “acquisition of culture is a result of the socialization process”, since then culture is carried by peoples and peoples make changes in their value and social pattern through meeting or contacting with others. Thus, we can possibly say that, either willingly or unwillingly culture can be altered. If a given country imposes its own culture forcefully on another one, then it wouldn't be right in every respect. However, this was what has been done by colonial countries of Europe. Colonial Europe has tried to change and replace African cultural values by their own culture. African cultures, therefore, have been suppressed and delegitimized by colonialism or Western culture (Idang, 2015:99).

Moreover, as Zhu Majie noted, for Clyde Kluckhohn if we understood culture as people's daily activities and routines, then we can possibly ascertain that no one is culturally independent. This indicates that, in fact, there can be no people without a culture. Culture has a survival aspect and it also has recessive and dominant tendencies which are shared by a certain group or by some individuals in a certain period of time (Cited in Xintian, 2002: 23). Consequently, in order to emphasize the role and value of culture Jenks uses C. Geertz, and argues:

There is no such thing as human nature independent of culture. Men without culture would not be the clever[est] savages of Golding's *Lord of the Flies* thrown back upon the cruel wisdom of their animal instincts; nor would they be the nature's noblemen of enlightenment primitivism or even, as classical anthropology would imply, intrinsically talented apes who had somehow failed to find themselves. They would be

unworkable monstrosities with very few useful instincts, few recognizable sentiments, and no intellect: mental basket cases. (Jenks, 1993:1)

As history has shown there are different massive cultural changes in our life in a certain period of time such as industrialization and urbanization as well as our contemporary technological era. According to Jenks, those changes revolved “at the social, political and personal levels” (Jenks, 1993:7). In line of this, Samuel Segun clearly noted that “[c]hanges are often noted in cultures due to interactions with other cultures and so the cycle continues. Culture then becomes the sum total of mutually borrowed ideas and customs” (Segun, 2014:13).

As Catherine Hoppers notes the word culture, etymologically, comes from the Latin term *cultura* which means *cultivating*. As Teodros Kiros (2017) stated, Amilcar Cabral also notes that, culture is an internal root of human creativity. In this regard, culture has shown the potentialities of human beings in order to create. Moreover, as Yao Jiehou argues, “[c]ulture in a broad sense (including material culture, system culture and spiritual culture) is the [lively] meaning of civilization”. (Jiehou, 2009:79). This creativity potential, besides producing cultural product, it also takes part in order to making and remaking the political, economic and spiritual aspects of our lives. Following this, culture is an agency of power. So, the dichotomy of the world into, according to Toyin Falola, ““traditional” and “modern”, [universal and particular] —Africa and West—is, at the same time, a cultural project” (Falola, 2003:12). When African philosophy is treated as particular/traditional; processes of cultural, mental and other domination were involved.

The issue about culture can be summarized by the modern anthropologist Edward B Tylor’s definition, because other intellectuals’ notion of culture mainly echoes his definition. According to Tylor, “culture...is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals,

law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 2016:13). I agree with Tylor’s notion of culture for it tries to be comprehensive of those elements of culture which we live by and are more important in our whole life. Now, keep it in your mind the discussion held in this chapter and other consecutive chapters will depend on Tylor’s conception of culture.

If we turn our compass to philosophy, we may firstly recognize that, finding its definition has never been uncontroversial. The question of defining philosophy by itself, surprisingly, has been the most interesting area of debate among scholars within the discipline. Thus, it is difficult to have a single answer on defining philosophy which is perfectly satisfactory and conclusive. In this vein, there is no single or dogmatic answer which belongs to the meaning of philosophy that alleges to fully express its richness and diversity. However, in “[e]ach epoch, even each individual philosopher, must tackle the problem [and try to] anew within the context of its/his/her own particular agenda of motivating problems”, but it was/is not sufficient to solve the problem regarding meaning of philosophy. Thus, the problem is, still now alive (Tangwa, 2017: 20).

But, we need to start with some definition of philosophy, if so; we may agreeably infer its etymological definition. The word Philosophy originates from two Greek words “*Philo*” and “*Sophia*” which means “love of wisdom”. It is also “a *search for truth*”. Philosophy, according to Munyaradzi Mawere & Tapuwa R. Mubaya (2016), is characterized as the mother of science or birth-bed of all sciences. It is, also, the commencement of “all searching and theorization” (Mawere & Mubaya, 2016:1). Philosophy relentlessly questions every way of human life and its techniques which are applied in different fields of study. However, our

concern here is that, philosophies undeniably arise out of wonder within the exercise of particular cultures.

1.2. A Symbiotic Relationship between Philosophy and Culture

This part of the thesis explores the symbiotic relationship between philosophy and culture. As it is noted in Tylor, culture has comprehensive elements which are art, knowledge, belief, custom, morals, laws and other capabilities acquired by a human being in his/her entire life. Philosophy is a reflective, critical thinking in order to modify our behavior, our way of thinking, and also broadens our form of inquiry and intellectual horizons.

If culture has those elements, for example, aesthetical, metaphysical, epistemological, axiological, among others, then philosophy has been raised from these cultural elements. Thus, as Okere stated, “all philosophical discourse is first and foremost an answer to problems and questions raised within a questioning horizon which means always, a culture” (Mbithi, 2014:17). On this basis, every philosopher is a product of a particular culture, and thus, philosophy is inextricably linked to culture and has unique cultural form. In relation to this, Tosam and Takov, noted:

“[e]very philosophy emerges as a reaction to, or as justification for a particular culture and it is for this reason that philosophy may differ from one culture to another. It argues that philosophy is an essential part of every culture. Philosophy is the means by which every culture provides itself with justification for its values, beliefs, and worldview and also serves as a catalyst for progress” (Tosam & Takov, 2016 :)

This implies that philosophy did not come out of a vacuum rather it evolves from a certain culture. As Samuel O. Imbo (1998) argues, philosophy started with our day to day experience and begins with the relationship with one another. Human experiences are rich as well as

different and these experiences, even the ordinary ones may lead us into various philosophical questions. For instance, when one witnesses different religious adherents he/she may wonder and ask such questions, what makes one's religion truer than the others, for whom one addresses his/her daily prayer or is there a God. Similarly, an incurable illness or death of someone may lead us to ask about the possibility of the hereafter; we may even ask the very meaning of death itself. It is also not unnatural to be skeptical about the truthfulness of our ancestor's belief systems.

The point which I am reiterating here is that, philosophy can or could not exist without having an undertone of culture. The outlook of any philosopher towards a certain phenomenon is the total product of his or her intellectual, cultural as well as social experience. Philosophy can be mostly characterized as a set of guide for the track of life. If philosophy is placed in this characterization, then we may reasonably conclude that those set of rules and guides follow from what is taken to be too valuable in various cultural contexts.

In line with this, culture has been characterized as a raw material or data as well as the laboratory from which philosophers, scientists, and other intellectuals perform their thought experiments. Based on this reason, "a philosopher, however intense his love of wisdom would be devoid of any material for speculation should he do away with culture. In short, without culture, philosophy is impossible." (Asiegbu, 2016:7). In this manner, culture considered not as philosophy, rather it is considered as the first order activity of philosophy. If philosophy denotes questioning, in addition to plucking the good of culture, as Asiegbu stated, Carl Friedrich von Weiszäcker argued that the question could also help us to transcend "the narrowness of the horizon of thinking, and the dictatorship of custom" (Ibid).

After construing philosophy in such a way, now we may underline that the role of philosophy in culture is to question, assess, and re-evaluate traditional values, beliefs, customs, and practices having a plan of improving them and find the solution for their problem in order to ascertain human wellbeing. Philosophy is not far away from the everyday life of human beings, philosophy, as such, is also the worldview that guides and maintains a culture. This is why different scholars characterized philosophy as critical self-examination of culture or, as Gutema stated that, “self-consciousness of culture” (Gutema, 2015: 139). What we understand from this is that, philosophy is not only arising from cultures rather it can also carry out the process of self-understanding and critique of culture.

Based on the above reasoning, philosophy arises from and within cultures. But, it does not mean that culture is philosophy by itself, nor it is only a raw material for philosophy, rather it constitutes the background of each philosophy. If philosophy emanates from culture, then different cultures will have different effects on philosophy. Precisely Greek philosophy is Greek because it originated from the Greek culture. Hence, because of the firm linkage “between philosophy and culture, a continent that has different distinct cultures will definitely house different philosophies” (Uduma, 2014:132). If the cultures are somehow different then the philosophies they give birth to also become different. As Odhiambo precisely noted philosophy is closely “connected to the milieu. As milieu changes, so too must philosophy” (Odhiambo, 2010: 97). However, we should bear in mind the fact that individuals also may come up with different ideas from within the same cultural background, for instance, Plato and Aristotle must not be expected to have similar ideas just because they are from the same culture.

In relation to this, Munyaradzi Mawere & Tapuwa R. Mubaya (2016), in the book entitled: *African Philosophy and Thought Systems: A Search for a Culture and Philosophy of Belonging*,

argued that: “African culture itself is the birth bed of African philosophy” (Mawere & Mubaya, 2016:188). Additionally, they argue that:

Philosophy is drawn from a particular cultural orientation. There is no philosophy without elements of culture from where it is rooted. Similarly, cultural identity emanates from the general philosophy of a society where it is drawn from. This means that the baseline of the cultural identity of a particular person is their philosophy of life. It can therefore be noted that there is a relational network between culture and philosophy vis-à-vis cultural identity (Ibid).

According to them African culture is the bedrock or the base of African philosophy, and also African philosophy is the base of African cultural identity. I agree with them, but this is not feasible only for Africans/African philosophy. Akin to African philosophy, European, Chinese, Indian among others could possibly possess philosophy that is founded on their own cultural identity. Astoundingly, the so called philosophy of Europeans brought forth in self-described manner with descriptions like individualization, rationalization as well as modern and universal which transcends the tradition and collective thoughts. This thought helped them to think their own culture as superior than others, and the ‘Other’ should follow them as a real model. In relation to this, Kwadwo Okrah observes that:

People who believe that philosophizing is a wholly individualistic affair fail to recognize that the thinker perforce operates on diffuse and inchoate ideas of the cultural milieu. We obviously cannot divorce the philosophy of an individual thinker, from the ideas current among the people, for the philosophy of the individual thinker is rooted in the beliefs and assumptions of the culture (Okrah, 2003:15).

This implies that, culture enriches philosophy and produces philosophers with the patent of that cultural background, and vice versa, their relationship, often, is symbiotic rather than

antagonistic. Thus, a cultural account should complement, rather than replace the place of philosophy.

In this regard, each and every of our thoughts and ideas, either it is philosophical or scientific, emanate from culture. Here, let me follow Serequeberhan's way of quoting Jacques Derrida, so as to strengthen my argument. Derrida argues that: "[m]etaphysics- the white mythology which resembles and reflects the culture of the west: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason" (Derrida, quoted in Serequeberhan, 1991: xvii). In addition to this, Theophilus Okere clearly avers that:

[W]hether it is a Plato from Greek antiquity, a Hegel from modern philosophy, or a contemporary philosopher like Heidegger himself, the conclusion is the same, namely, that their thought is inscribed and their problematic dictated by the non-philosophy, [those are cultural element], which is their own cultural background especially by their religious beliefs and myths (Okere, quoted in Serequeberhan, 1991: 10).

The implication of the foregoing line is that, since culture embraces the language, idioms, arts, beliefs, and others of the people, every philosophy flows from culture, whether African, Western, or others philosophy. Consequently, authentic philosophy must be a product of certain peoples of culture. Then, in addressing the symbiotic relationship among philosophy and culture, Theophilus Okere, also argues that:

It is clear that all philosophies [are] local and even individual before it can be universal; and nothing can be genuinely universally valid unless it was first authentically personal and interested within a given culture. If this is the case for philosophy, it is likely to be the case for human knowledge, since every form of human knowledge must be situated or generated from within a culture or bounded by presuppositions, judgments, interests etc. (Okere, 2005: 21).

Every different philosophical thought is under the blanket of different cultures. Terms like universalism, modernism, and also, civilization in accordance with their mission were provoked by the politics of European colonialism. Europeans have tried to dominate other cultures in the realm of philosophy, and “violently universalized its own singular particularity and annihilated the historicity [as well as identity] of the [Other] in general and Africans in particular”. Moreover, [t]he practices of philosophy, the most sublime realm of European culture, thus served as the theoretic buttress of colonial expansion” (Serequeberhan, 2015:12).

Following the above reason, there are a lot of terms and names which manifest different things within European cultures with the implicit mission of colonization. Such terms were basically invented by Europeans to accomplish two plans: on the one hand when we see the terms (modernity, civilization, universalization and etcetera) outwardly, it seems to connote an inclusive evolution of mankind which explains something that is conceivable around the globe, but the implicit agenda of words had a colonization mission on the other hand. For instance, “the ideas that their civilization was destined to rule, just as darker peoples were destined to be ruled” (Ibid). In this regard, they chiseled, through inventing different words; universal/particular, modern/traditional, as such, those words into our minds to accept the supremacy of the white man, and to establish our mind in order to think the measurement what we are doing should be Europeans. Astonishingly, those things are practiced in their own philosophical texts. Moreover, these rhetoric words of universal philosophy, civilization, modernity, and among others, was/is used as “a Trojan horse” that smuggles in the Western culture to non-Western cultures especially African culture in the flag of modernity, civilization, and universal philosophy. But it does not mean that all Western philosophical thought are about colonizing others or it is not a solution for what human beings are facing around the world.

Based on this, what I would like to point out here is that philosophy totally arises from culture and thus any authentic philosophy must include philosophical traditions from all cultures and regions of the world because the truth is not located in a single culture. In this regard, scholars trying to find an alternative philosophical remedy to some of the rampant problems that human beings are facing around the globe including social, political even metaphysical. Following this, to a universal humanity, we cannot suggest to depend solely on remedies from a hegemonic culture or from the most influential cultures in economical lens.

1.3. The Nature and Task of Hermeneutics

1.3.1. The Origin and Characteristics of Hermeneutics

Etymologically the term hermeneutics derived from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, which simply means, to explain, translate, and interpret. The word hermeneutics is usually associated with the wing-footed messenger of god in the Greek mythology, whose name is Hermes. Hermes was considered as mediator between the gods and mankind. In addition to this, Hermes was also considered as the creator and discoverer of language, speech, writing, and others. These discoveries are an indispensable instrument which enables humans to comprehend the meaning and inform it to others. These numerous functions make Hermes the nominal representative of Hermeneutics (Zimmermann, 2015: 22-23).

In line with this, the term hermeneutics carries the meanings like ‘to interpret’, ‘to express’, ‘to translate’ or to ‘understand. Further, this is a term that has been considered as the science of biblical interpretation in order to understand religious or sacred books. In the 17th century the term ‘hermeneutics’ were also, related with the interpretation of books which were written by different scholars in theology, philosophy, literary and legal theorists. Moreover, hermeneutics

is a philosophical discipline which for the purpose of understanding deals with questions that enables us to unconceal what has been concealed. The role of hermeneutics is to uncover and scrutinize hidden textual contents, to obtain unlimited opportunities of meaning that allows understanding. However, “hermeneutic philosophers believe that in each of these vital areas of our experience, key developments in modern thought and culture have brought about a distorted view of who we are and how we arrive at knowledge” (Ibid, 30).

Thereafter, different scholars from theology and philosophy have come up with various types of methodologies in line with philosophical hermeneutics. It has also been used as a methodology of interpretation in order to understand theology, law, and even science. It, also, has been the general rule of human understanding by different philosophers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Paul Ricoeur, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, among others. However, each of these philosophers has used hermeneutics in different ways. In this regard, since this part of the thesis, intends to elucidate the nature and the characteristics of hermeneutics, it will inevitably cover different theories and introduces a number of theoretical concepts which are related to hermeneutics. For this reason, in the following part, let me at least provide overviews of the two prominent hermeneutical philosophies, Heidegger's and Gadamer's as instances.

For Heidegger and Gadamer, hermeneutics is an ontological event. Heidegger's hermeneutics “turns into fundamental ontology, which is primarily an understanding and interpretation of Dasein”. Literally Dasein translates as “there-being” or “being-in-the-world”. Thus, then he did not make a delineation between the self and the world, “rather the self and the world self and the world are the unity of the structure of “being-in-the-world”” (Agrey, 2014: 190). As Zimmermann pointed out that, “Heidegger argued that hermeneutics is not a theory of

interpretive principles, but a philosophical analysis of the way we move about in the world” (Zimmermann, 2015:50). According to Zimmermann, for Heidegger, human beings always struggle to negotiate a complex world of meaning association into which we are coming into this world. We are born into different things including, ideas, institutions and social values that mold our perspective of the world. Thus, for Heidegger it is not necessary, doing hermeneutics is a sufficient condition instead of being necessary. This is because, for him “we are self-interpreting animals”, and with this emphasis, hermeneutics took a decidedly ontological turn (Ibid).

On Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutics, his student Gadamer constructed and developed his hermeneutical theory, not as a methodology, rather as philosophy per se. According to Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics is a theory of understanding which is embedded by art, history and language. In his theory of hermeneutics, he comes up with a positive connotation of prejudice against the Enlightenment thinkers. As Zimmermann clearly articulated, for Gadamer the thought given by Enlightenment thinkers about prejudice is mistaken. Etymologically, the term “prejudice” derives from *pre-judicium*, which means pre-judgment that is our all prior experience. It also frequently influences and accompanies our act of understanding.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, many philosophers believed that by totally avoiding what they believed to be sightless tradition and authority, in the searchlight of critical reason it is possible to brighten up the darkness of superstitions. At the time of, “this cultural period we now call ‘The Enlightenment’, tradition and authority became the enemy of reason or critical thought”. But, for Gadamer understanding should be seen within the context of tradition. Thus, for him treating tradition and authority as, the enemy of reason, and meaningless for critical thinking is a huge mistake, because “tradition furnishes the web of conceptions within which we live, move, and have our historical being” (Zimmermann, 2015:57). Moreover, he argues that, in order to

understand our history prejudice is crucial. For Gadamer, “our prejudices do not constitute a willful blindness, which prevents us from grasping the truth; rather they are what we stand on to help launch our understanding” (Agrey, 2014: 190). In light of this, for Gadamer, language has an indispensable element in this tradition. For him, “every meaningful interaction with the world occurs through language, a sentiment captured in his well-known adage, ‘being that can be understood is language’” (Zimmermann, 2015, 61). As Peter Amato also noted that, for Gadamer, “the pursuit of understanding is framed and motivated in language, leads to the pursuit of understanding in conversation, and results in or produces a truth that emerges and is acknowledged in language” (Amato, 2017: 307). This indicates that, our understanding depends on language, thus language serves as a vehicle for understanding. It can be said that, understanding is language-bounded, and language in turn is not free from prejudice at all

After having these cursory views on modern hermeneutical theories, I will turn to another theory of hermeneutics, which is the ‘African philosophical hermeneutics’. European imperialism and colonialism violently dislocated Africa’s cultural, social, and political endurance via the realm of philosophy. Since Odera Oruka, there are many African philosophers who have been using a hermeneutical approach to overcome such European violence. The famous proponents of this theory are Tsenay Serequeberhan, Okonda Okolo, Theophilus Okere, and Lucius Outlaw among others. The starting point of African hermeneutics is the lived experience of Africans, and this is what all they shared. In the last chapter of the thesis, I will try to look how they used the hermeneutical theory in African philosophy as approach in a cursory glance.

1.3.2 Looking at Culture from Philosophical Point of View: Hermeneutical Context

Within each tradition, one shall not have a futile search for authentic philosophy. Considering cultural bases becomes a fashion in philosophical circles. For that reason, philosophy grasps witticisms, proverbs, myths, and religious conceptions of wondering humans. These regions of culture shape not only the simplest inputs for philosophizing; however, in addition, they represent the root of any philosophy. Okere argues that such areas of culture are, as a result, “non-philosophy”; they instead are “pre-philosophical” (Asiegbu, 2016:4-5). Thus, mediation, understanding, reflection and an interpretation of a given culture is needed. So as to achieve this significant role of eliciting philosophy from culture hermeneutics plays a vital role. In relation to understanding, Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that: “understanding becomes a special task only when . . . misunderstandings have arisen” (Serequeberhan, 2015:77). Indeed, for Gadamer, understanding plays a crucial role in order to interpret as well as reflect on a certain doctrine. As a matter of fact, philosophy is culturally bounded, thus “[c]ontextual constraints, which circumscribe the rise of philosophy in any culture, render philosophy culture-bound” (Asiegbu, 2016:1). According to Barry Hallen (2004), human understanding, mostly, disposed by different context which it is located; so that our understanding is “always and inevitably *interpretation*” (Hallen, 2004: 126). In line with this, if we do not understand the context, we could never understand the text that has been produced in a particular culture. So, how can one say that a certain text or culture is philosophical or not, without even understanding it in an appropriate manner.

As I have said above, the main reason behind the closeness of philosophy of culture is, as Okere notes that: “[h]ere philosophy is really manufacturing from raw materials. It is a forging out of

thought from the materials of culture. It is an act of intellectual creation where the new creation is a meaning born from the melting of one's total experience" (Okere, quoted in Hallen, 2002:62). Philosophy is an interpretation or the search for meaning in the world. In light of this, human beings try to give a meaning that requires a self-interpretation. It is difficult to imagine humankind's thought out of the box of culture. To have exposure and understanding of such truth/world is possible via hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, as Oguejiofor (2009), asserted "involves [in] bringing an inner meaning [of cultural elements and subjects them] into [critical reflection]. It entails making explicit what is implicit. It is thus a quest for meaning, one's own meaning in one's life, society, and milieu—in short, in the totality of one's universe, which could be said to be constituted by one's cultural symbols" (Oguejiofor, 2009: 80). This implies that, the philosophy of an individual thinker is inextricably linked, to the current ideas among the people, for the philosophy of the individual is rooted in his/her interpretation and analysis of the assumption of the milieu.

When we critically explore and understand the inherent philosophical elements in African culture, we can then overcome the denial of the existence of African philosophy. The principal aim of hermeneutics is to sweep the path for more enlightening meanings that are conceivable but not yet known. Thus, through the exploration of meanings and symbols that depend on African culture, proverbs, myths, and languages, it is not difficult to justify those African peoples' rationality as well as philosophy. Such explorations and justifications "if coherently and logically done together with its intelligible outcomes suffices for philosophy" (Ibeka, 2008:4). Following this, culture is the raw material of philosophy, and we cannot find philosophical thoughts that are not culturally constituted. In this regard, a philosopher makes philosophy through interpretation of non-philosophical elements of culture with a *telos* of instilling them

with meaning. Even if philosophy is arising from cultural background, to construct itself, upholding culture solely is not sufficient. Thus, a need for mediating tool between philosophy and culture is crucial, and this can be achieved through hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is, according to Louis-Dominique B. Komo (2017), a necessary trend in philosophy, because philosophy is essentially hermeneutical.

If hermeneutics is understood as an interpretation, then we may refer to Paul Ricoeur's definition of interpretation "as an intellectual exercise which consists of deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning. This intellectual work which moves from a symbol to its reflective interpretation is philosophy" (Komo, 2017: 87). Based on this, the responsibility of the philosopher by virtue of his love of wisdom and the motivation to protect the scientific boundaries and disciplinary requirements of philosophy is to bring forth philosophy from non-philosophy.

All cultures have their own signs, symbols, words and body languages which are pregnant with meanings. Critical reflections on those cultural elements, which are pregnant with meanings, enable us to act as a midwife who assists for the emergence of a newly born philosophical meaning. Thus, it is impossible to produce a philosophy without the undertone of culture. There cannot be any philosophy, either European or African, without the interpretation of their own culture. Okere elaborates the issue at hand as follows:

The very basis of interpretation shows that works only with presupposition-in our context, within the framework of a certain culture. The ... prior acquisition- represents the entire heritage and tradition of the interpreter, a heritage which not only furnishes the material to be interpreted but the background of all interpretations. The ... pre-view is the prior orientation which, generally in the form of *weltanschauung* or ideology, orients all our interpretation (Okere quoted in Kom, 2017: 90).

This implies that either intentionally or unintentionally our interpretation or our philosophical thoughts depend on our cultural background. No one can escape from traditional/cultural prejudice. Because according to Tsenay Serequeberhan, “philosophy, thus is a historically situated and saturated interpretative querying, sifting, and sieving of lived existence [or culture] focused on, and open to, the possible in that which is” (Serequeberhan, 2015:11). This is why Gadamer presents his critique into the Enlightenment thinkers, those who argue that we can grasp everything in our reason alone. In light of this, throughout the process of interpretation no interpreter can be free from his background while attempting to understand the truth, provided that philosophical inquiry is a search for truth. This leads us to what hermeneutical thinkers call “hermeneutics circle”. This circle denies a singular claim of the truth. This is what most Europeans and European mentored Africans failed to notice.

A hermeneutical approach, here, plays a crucial role to be a mediating tool between philosophy and culture. Other than that, hermeneutics also gives a careful interpretation of the texts with a strong potentiality of looking into another culture. The strongest reason why I offer a hermeneutical approach here is to consider the traditional element within philosophy. Moreover it also helps us to critically examine the source and the implication of different dichotomies as such, modern/traditional, universal/particular, and civilized/primitive. Therefore, the reason to assert hermeneutics in the process of mediating culture and philosophy is because of the need to assert various philosophical thoughts within all cultures around the world. Because there is no absolute truth located in a specific culture; this should lead us into dialogue among cultures with the aim of reciprocal understanding. Thus, to understand and be understood by others, hermeneutical approach is inescapably necessary for Africans/ African philosophy, and others.

Chapter Two

An Exposition and Discussion of Philosophy in Africa

As the title indicates, this chapter aims at exposing the notion of ‘African philosophy’ and related issues with it. Since the nature and scope of African philosophy might be vague for few of my readers, I decided to insert some relevant discussions in and on African philosophy. This part of the thesis will present the nature and scope of African philosophy. I have presented four sub-topics which I thought, will help my readers to understand the very nature of African philosophy. It also helps readers to understand, the problematic dichotomy of universal/particular, modern/traditional, and among others between Western and African philosophy respectively. Apart from broadening the horizon of their understanding, these sub-topics could also be an input for the coming chapter.

2.1 Philosophy in Africa: Western and African perspective

As Uduma stated, Agbo rightly observes, as long as “philosophy is a product from (not just of), a culture, there are differences in philosophies from various cultures” (Agbo, quoted in Uduma, 2014:133). Thus, different cultures may have different ideas of what counts as viable ideas in philosophy, and this does not reduce the quality of the philosophy they do. However, the western-oriented scholarship turned a blind eye to African thought systems. For that reason, Africans have been isolated from the potentiality of having and doing philosophical discourses in general.

Before the arrival of colonial powers, different religions such as Christianity and Islam had come, established, and influenced African ways of living and thought (see, e.g., D.A. Masolo 2017; V. Y. Mudimbe 1988). In a special manner, “Christianity [...] played a major role in

paving and smoothening the way for colonialism” (Mungwini, 2015: 398). Beside the influence of different religions, the colonial powers have also employed political tools so as to manipulate African indigenous knowledge, modes of thought and social structure. Following, their arrival the colonial powers allowed different social scientists to bring and impose a variety of Western ways of thinking at the expense of indigenous sources of knowledge that belongs to African peoples. They were developing their files on an assumption of converting the social and cultural lives of Africans into a new science. In this scenario, as we shall see, many parties were responsible for bringing their self-described universal civilization and on giving an alleged right direction for how Africans were supposed to act in their own home place.

Unfortunately, they were trying to study Africans through the lenses provided by their own cultures. European anthropologists, missionaries, and authoritative bodies were the main influential producers of the thought that Africans lived in primitive conditions in which their thought system and social organization were thought as rudimentary by European standards. As D.A. Masolo (2017) depicts:

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, European agents—the missionaries, the anthropologists, and the government administrators who often doubled as freelance scholars of the knowledge of “Africans and their ways”—dominated the realm of knowledge in its most general sense. They established and ran schools, collected taxes, and administered the law. Their dictum on Africa and African people was often considered indisputable and almost law unto itself. Africans’ participation in the creation of this knowledge about them was nil. They were merely the subjects (Masolo, 2017: 61).

Following this, it is possible, without exaggeration; to argue that the arrival of the colonialists in Africa was harsh. As a result, Africans production of knowledge was degraded and treated as

incapable in contributing for world civilization. It is also seen “as ineffective in advancing any understanding of the world in every sense of the term—physically, historically, and morally” (Ibid, 62). According to Masolo, Africa was excluded from making any improvement through teaching, whether in the government or other different missionary schools. Because of this, both the indigenous and innovative (newly acquired) knowledge of native Africans became worthless from Western-oriented educator’s point of view. Astonishingly, the colonizers conceived themselves as a sole responsible party for bringing forward the light of their self-proclaimed civilization to Africans through importing their own value system. It was to pass down their own value system that they established educational system with missionary orientation. Thus, according to Masolo, “[t]he resulting effect has been referred to as Westernization or Europeanization” (ibid). This is why Mudimbe (1988), in his book *The Invention of Africa* contends that the current Africa is the creation of Europeans. Or as Bekele Gutema nicely summarized him, he pointed out “that the idea of Africa is not the true idea of Africa, but the Africa that the Europeans want and that they invented through their own discourse” (Gutema, 2015: 146-147).

When we come to the commencement of superior and inferior notion among human beings, it resulted, as Mogobe Ramose (2003) noted, directly from Aristotle’s definition of man, which characterizes humans as “rational animals”. Following this, modern Western philosophy in its many aspects upholds Aristotle’s characterization of humans as rational beings. If we agree with Aristotle’s notion of rationality as it is, the human race would not put under the catalogue of different dichotomies such as superior/inferior, rational/ irrational, and so on. Unfortunately, in his definition Aristotle didn’t want to be taken as it is, “because [for him] barbarians were less rational than Greeks, they were less human and so could be ruled and enslaved by the Greeks”

(Velasquez, 2009, p. 56). In addition to this, non-Greeks as well as women are less human because it was believed that they are not rational.

In what follows let me briefly uncover how Aristotle's separationist idea was shared by different racist philosophers such as G.W.F. Hegel, Immanuel Kant, and David Hume. If we begin with Hegel, in his pejorative thought on the history of the world, he placed "Africa outside of History, as the absolute, non-historical beginning of the movement of Spirit" (Eze, 1997:8). Other than Hegel; Hume as well wanted to make nature responsible for the inferiority of blacks in comparison to whites. For him, it is difficult to find "ingenious manufacturers amongst them [the blacks], no arts, [and] no sciences." (Ibid.9). Moreover, Kant whom we all know as the great modern philosopher also threw his biases as follows: "[t]he Negroes of Africa [has] by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling." (Kant quoted in Coetzee and Roux, 2003:81). And again for him "reason and rationality are not indigenous to [...] black African, peoples" (Ibid, 82). The nub of racism did not cease by these philosophers, but even thinkers who allege to have a pacifist lifestyle like Bertrand Russell engaged in racial discrimination; in his, *Principles of Social Reconstruction*; for instance, he portrayed "Germany as a great nation had the right to colonies" (Oguejiofor & Ohaeto, 2015: 6).

The aforementioned dichotomizing view of the philosophers gave rise to a more demarcating description of Western and non-Western cultures in a way that comprehends the first as "logocentric and ratiocinative, and therefore civilized". The second one pictured as having the complete inverse of these attributes (Odhiambo, 2010: 20-21).

Following the above philosophers' trivialization of Africa, as Mudimbe argued that colonizer always produced different subjects to fit those goals. To realize such aims colonial laboratory

projects created structure of marginalization. Because of this, according to Mudimbe, a “dichotomizing system has emerged, and with it a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed” (Mudimbe, 1988: 17). These traditional/modern, universal/particular, civilized/uncivilized, and other dichotomies have emerged from within the colonial discourse. Astoundingly, in order to strengthen these dichotomies the colonial power created different institutions such as cultural, religious and others. These institutions cemented the way for other differences that twisted out to be “the intermediate space between the so-called African tradition and the projected modernity of colonialism [...] This ordering depicts Africans as inferior and incapable of any good taste, because what is good in Africa must have come from outside of Africa” (Bongmba, 2001: 58). As a result, Africa was enslaved by the whites for the purpose of implanting their way of doing things as well as to glorify their culture. The resulting effect of the justification of Western cultural and epistemological hegemony in Africa has been achieved through the philosophy of the hierarchy among the human race.

Since this part of the thesis is dedicated to interrogate philosophy in Africa through the eyes of both the West and Africa, I have tried to depict the European domination of Africa in the name of the “civilizing mission” as well as other fabricated names in their discourse in a nutshell. The claim that there is no philosophy in Africa “is no more true[r] than the claim that they have no history” (Kwame, 2017: 97). Based on this, S. Kwame avers:

“From a Western approach to philosophy, the history of African philosophy has been, largely, a postcolonial one. The assumption seems to have been that, prior to having contact with Europe, Africa obviously had religion, as confirmed by anthropologists as well as casual observers of African rituals, but that Africa was too primitive or naïve to have had philosophy in a rigorous sense. While the belief that African philosophy is no

older than Africa's contact with Europeans may be a corollary of racism and colonialism, it is also a function of some conceptions of philosophy" (Ibid).

All the above implies that, Africa is, in short, portrayed in books by European anthropologists, philosophers, and historians as primitive or savage, and also Africans described as people who did nothing in order to participate in world civilization and history at all. As Innocent Onyewuenyi noted, C.P. Groves, in his *the Planting of Christianity in Africa* stated that: "It is the paradox of this vast continent that while sharing in the earliest history of the human race, it was yet not opened up until the late nineteenth century" (quoted in Onyewuenyi, 1991:31). It is not an exaggeration to say that, the indication of this thought is that there were no any notable African historical remarks before the 18th century at all.

According to Masolo, "[p]hilosophy has not been spared the agony of stagnation due to the bias that favors Western philosophical knowledge and production. This bias extends and deepens the effects of colonial domination and therefore compromises the very idea of liberation from colonialism at its core" (Masolo, 2017: 62). Consequently, the perpetual colonial occurrence in Africa aimed at conditioning the continent to be "either consumers who prefer Western goods to our own, or producers for Western consumers to whom we export our best products" (Ibid). This is what happened in the name of universal and particular dichotomy in African philosophy. Thus, if we need to claim the universality of philosophy in Africa, the western oriented intellectuals believed that we (Africans) have to prefer and follow the Western ways of doing philosophy. While if African philosophy patented as a particular as European assumed, they thought it is up to them to illuminate us in the name of 'civilization'. Hereafter, in the name of this alleged civilization they replace our tradition by their own tradition. Consequently, they achieved their initial goals through creating Westernized Africans. Following this, several African intellectuals

have tried to interrogate the malady and also suggested remedial treatment. It is at such times that African thinkers like Kwasi Wiredu, Messay Kebede, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and others, addressed, "[t]he need for conceptual decolonization in African philosophy is pervasive", or decolonizing the mind in their philosophical outlook and literature (Wiredu, 2004: 15). In addition to philosophy, other disciplines and institutions such as political, social, cultural and religious were also wrestled for the recognition of African autonomy along with the rehabilitation of African identity in the twentieth century. African intellectuals have stood for the task of redressing the immense colonial imposition of the cultural values on the peoples of Africa.

2.2 Defining the Nature and Scope of African Philosophy

As I have stated in the first chapter there is no universal agreement on the definition of philosophy. When we came to the definition of African philosophy, we have got the same problem, even more, that makes the task of locating the exact nature and definition of African philosophy difficult. Because of different thoughts with regard to the meaning of African philosophy, Hountondji provides his own definition. He argues, "[b]y 'African philosophy' I mean a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves" (Hountondji, 1983: viii). Philosophy here seems to be understood as 'written' or 'the necessary condition to philosophize. With this definition there is also another thought which developed as a critique of Hountondji's definition. Accordingly, Bodunrin, for instance, argue that "[e]ven if writing cannot be a precondition for philosophy; nevertheless, the role of writing in the creation of a philosophical tradition cannot be underrated" (Bodunrin, quoted in, Kwame, 2017: 102). Kwame, also, argue that, "[o]ne does not have to be an African to produce African philosophy" (Ibid). However, the debate on the meaning of

philosophy shows the controversial nature and meaning of African philosophy. While some argue and understand philosophy in a more strict sense, others understand it in a loose sense¹. As there is no universal convention in order to define the conception philosophy, there is also no single definition of African philosophy. Nonetheless, before we ask why are the meaning and nature, even the existence, of African philosophy controversial issue, we have to figure out to answer the question which is, is philosophy a universal discipline? If so, why the meaning, even the existence, of African philosophy is controversial issue? In relation to this, when we mention the name African philosophy numerous problems arise with it. It is not because of the term African philosophy has been ambiguous and need to be defined, but the term African philosophy constitutes two concepts: African and philosophy. It is clear that the term Africa locates a geographical determination. So, if we try to understand even the term 'African' beyond a geographical location has led us into more confusion than clarity and understanding. Among others, Mudimbe, Kwame A. Appiah and Paulin Hountondji are pioneers regarding clarifying and deconstructing the term African philosophy.

In regard to the nature of African philosophy, different intellectuals understood and used it in different aspects. Indeed, most of the time the nature of African philosophy has been determined by the practitioner's scenarios. Let us look at some thoughts and comments regarding African philosophy. For some African intellectuals, the name African philosophy is not problematic;

¹ G. Tangwa understood philosophy into two senses. On the one hand, we can find the loose/general/popular or mild one, here philosophy indicates "a set or system of fundamental beliefs and convictions which are usually reflected in action." Whether it is visible or invisible in this sense all societies and individuals own philosophy. But we should keep in mind that, in this sense owning philosophy doesn't necessarily make (you) a philosopher. On the other hand, we can find the strict/particular/ special or rigorous sense of philosophy; here philosophy indicates "a consciously articulate and critical discourse (verbal or written) that is necessarily individual in origin, and secondarily to a corpus or system of such discourses together with the supporting structures in which they are symbolically encoded" (Tangwa, 2017: 22).

thereby the thought under this have to be geographical. Thus, “[e]ach geographical space on the continent is therefore identified with a distinct philosophical genre (or philosophical tradition)” (Mawer & Mubaya, 2016: 73). From this, we can understand that geographical implication cannot entirely be the subject of exclusion. For instance, Hountondji in his remarkable book *African Philosophy: Myth and Rationality*, strongly argues that the term Africa has not more than a geographical implication, because the geographical implication is inextricably linked with the subject. Thus, he argues that “the subject being African philosophy cannot exclude a geographical location...a work like Bantu philosophy does not belong to African philosophy, since its author is not African” (Hountondji, 1983, 64). This indicates that unless the authors of the works are Africans, that works cannot be counted as African philosophy. Samuel, O. Imbo expresses his thought accordingly,

“[f]or Hountondji, African philosophy is addressed to Africans. Even as ethnophilosophy served the purposes of Europe in its colonization of Africa, so should an African philosophy which is both critical and reconstructive serve the purposes of a contemporary Africa. The geographical origin of the writers and the audience for whom these writers write become essential points in defining African philosophy” (Imbo, 40).

There is also another issue which shouldn't be escaped easily; the issue of language while doing African philosophy. Different languages around the world have had a strong influence on the nature of philosophical activity. As Godfrey Tangwa argued, “[t]he African Philosophy debate—“Is there such a thing as African philosophy?”—was contemporaneously paralleled by a larger debate about the language of African academic productions and artistic expressions” (Tangwa, 2017: 130). This is why some scholars tried to exclude Bantu philosophy from the catalogue of African philosophy. With regard to this, Azenabor, for instance, argued that: “Bantu philosophy was not written in an African language, but in Dutch, and so it is said not to qualify as African

philosophy” (Azenabor, 2000, 233). Now the question should be is it possible to write an authentic African scholars’ work without using African language? Let me stop my discussion of language for other parts of this chapter. For other intellectuals, the name African philosophy by itself is problematic, because it is not inclusive, whether the diaspora or others who are living outside Africa since the term African philosophy is determined by its geographical location. In light of this, some intellectuals argue that African philosophy should uphold black personality without boundary restriction or reference. Moreover, other scholars do not worry about the naming rather they focus on the content and argue that the content should be an African philosophical issue. They only focus on the subject and its role in order to improving African philosophy. Thus, before proceeding to understand the history, nature, and other issues in African philosophy, it is indispensable to understand and define what philosophy is. Unfortunately, defining philosophy has remained a continuous philosophical problem. Thus, there is no a single dogmatic agreement about the exact meaning of philosophy. This perpetual problem led us only to describe what African philosophies mean, rather than further clarity and understanding of it. Instead, different scholars prefer to expose what the task of doing philosophy basically locates. Within this, defining African philosophy has remained difficult.

Accordingly, to define the meaning and the nature of African philosophy there are different philosophical discourses used by African scholars. Thinkers like Sogolo even argues that, “the controversy over what constitutes an African philosophy tends to dominate sometimes so much that it forms almost the entire content of the course” (quoted in Oyeshile, 2008: 57). Thereby, the controversy is not only based on the conceptual meaning of African philosophy rather it is based on the description of the discourse and issues encompassed. This is why; different African scholars understand philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular in different ways.

For Tsenay Serquebrihan, for instance, philosophy is all about “a reflexive and reflective discourse on the actuality of lived historico-cultural and political milieu” (Serquebrihan, 1994: 2). Following this, African philosophy for Tsenay has to be hermeneutics which are based in and on lived experience with the aim of the quest for liberation from the injuries imposed by European domination.

Additionally, according to Hountondji, “philosophy is simply a theoretical discipline which like any other can develop only in the form of literature” (Hountondji, 1983: 68). This indicates that, for him, African philosophy can only exist and improve within the form of literature. And also, for Masolo “philosophy is experience and African philosophy must be born out of its own peculiar cultural circumstances combined with a living and constructive zeal amongst individual African intellectuals to understand and explain the world around them” (Masolo, 1994:251). Apart from the aforementioned ones, there are also other thinkers that attempt to define African philosophy. But my intention here is to show that there is no a single definition of African philosophy, hence different scholars describe and define African philosophy based on their own conception of the nature and feature of African philosophy.

Consequently, we can understand that the main challenges to define African philosophy directly or indirectly are related to those problems of philosophic investigation in general. Thus, according to Mawere & Mubaya (2016), African philosophy understood in two main features of philosophic inquiry: On the one hand “while African philosophy presupposes pluriversality in so far as it implies the existence of a distinct philosophy in Africa with a distinct approach”, which implies that as a set of reflective practices embedded in a particular culture. And also, on the other hand, “African philosophy as a discipline is fast gaining a place in academia either replacing or taught alongside Western philosophy in African universities” (Mawere & Mubaya,

2016: 46). In order to describe an African philosophy in terms of its nature and scope this is not sufficient.

Even though, in the former sense, some intellectuals argue that African philosophy exists in African cultures or traditions, and also critically investigates different elements within those cultures or tradition is entirely the task of the philosophers. In the latter sense, some scholars argue that there can be no philosophy without academia or disciplinary format. In this regard, for the later one African philosophy is restrictive in a sense that it failed to go beyond the universities. Thus, different scholars understand the meaning and nature of African philosophy in different ways and used it differently. Moreover, with regard to the issue of universalism and particularism in the nature and meaning of African philosophy has also been controversial issue. The claim of universal Western philosophy and the exclusion of African philosophy as particular laid the foundation to the debatable nature of African philosophy. Furthermore, although defining philosophy in the singular and dogmatic way by itself is problematic, it makes the task more challenging in the African context. In connection with this, Lansana Keita argues that “the questions concerning the definition of philosophy are even more problematic in African, philosophy” (Keita, 1991: 133). Above all, African intellectuals are, since its inception, grappling with the harsh implication of colonial discourse so as to grasp and discuss the African tradition. Our understanding regarding the form of knowledge in African philosophy should be depending on understanding the inextricable relation between Africa and philosophy.

2.3 Do Africans Need an African Philosophy?

The various attempts to elucidate the existence of African philosophy and to affirm the different nature of African philosophical paradigm has a socio-political and cultural discourse in Africa beginning from the last quarter of the twentieth century. Similarly, African philosophy raises

and addresses fundamental questions. Two of them will be my concern: who and why. In relation to this, the various attempts to redefine and justify who qualifies as an African philosopher have suggested different intellectuals in Africa and in the diaspora. Today, the question like, who is an African philosopher? And why we need an African philosophy? Or is the quest for African philosophy to Africans is inescapably necessary? The reason why these attempts have ensued and the purpose they are meant to achieve are still under rigorous discussion today.

Consequently, there is a lot of conversation between different African intellectuals on the questions who is an African philosopher. For instance, according to Hountondji, African philosophy refers to “a set of texts, specifically, the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by the authors themselves” (Hountondji, 1983, viii). The basic import here is that for a text to be an African philosophy the author of the work and his/her geographical origin is crucial. If the African author expresses his/her own works as philosophical, that work is philosophical and classified as African philosophy. This indicates that African philosophy can only be done by African authors and it is said to be African philosophy if the authors of that work declare them philosophical. According to Hountondji, thus, the geographical origin of a philosopher is one of the criteria for African philosophy. However, there are a lot of critiques on Hountondji’s thought towards the Africanness questions. According to Uduma, for instance, the criterion of geographical origin of a philosopher leads “the scope of African philosophy too big and too thin at the same time”. The reason behind this is, according to him, if African philosophy is done by only African authors then it will be very restrictive. It leads African philosophy to be an exclusive academic discipline that can be done only by African philosophers. Thus, for him, Hountondji’s suggestion does not hold water (Uduma, 2014: 134).

From now on, let me partially address the relevance of African philosophy for Africans. The racist description of Africa nullified the existence and meaning of African philosophy and portrayed them in a way as if they naturally lack the ability of rationalization. Levy Bruhal, for instance describes Africa/Africans as “primitive” with “primitive” mentality” (Quoted in Oruka 1991:47). His pejorative thought improved by most Eurocentric philosophers in different ways, and this kind of thought left not even a single hope which helps to recognize Africans as human beings.

The rejections of Bruhlian negative narration on Africans by some intellectuals as such, for instance, Robin Horton cannot be ignored. Why, because, Horton rejected, “the claim that the African mentality is most fundamentally symbolic and/or ritualistic in character” (Hallen, 2002:18). For him, the African condition is not essentially religious, oral-dependent, perceptual, etc. Instead, Horton argues that “those who rejected the theoretical thinking of African philosophy (or, its distinct philosophical paradigm) have failed to see the correlatives in other cultures because they are blinded by a difference of idiom” (Horton 1998, 18, quoted in Oyedola, 2015:54). Furthermore, I believe that it is a quest to have an authentic African philosophy which gave birth to the debate about the existence of African philosophy and a paradigm to improve the development of African socio-political discourse. Moreover, the relevance of the question, why African philosophy? basically, have several reasons. At a cursory glance let me discuss some reasons. Firstly, it helps us, as a cultural and an academic response to the proposition that depicts Africans as if they lack rationality. Secondly, it helps us to avoid or relegate the views by Europeans that African philosophy as pre-logical, savagery, religious, un-written, and so on. Three, as a reaction, to challenge European thoughts which treat Africans as nothing, both in

socio-political or cultural and economic value, and to “reinsertion of Africa, and the non-European world, into history” (Serequeberhan, 2015: xiii).

2.4 Challenges in African Philosophy

Since the history of African philosophy has been the history of struggle with different controversial issues, thereby, African philosophy is in its very nature dynamic. We can see these problems within two angles. On the one hand, some problems are directly associated with the history and issue of colonization. Some problems, however, are associated with the emergence of philosophy and of teaching philosophy in African universities. Because of this, the challenges of Africans are not rare. According to Makwinja, [t]hese problems are [as] considered more pronounced in certain areas, i.e. the tensions between “universalism” and “particularism,” and that between the notions of the “modern” and the “traditional” (Makwinja,2018: 95). The challenges are also associated with language, methodology, disciplinary form, source of African philosophy among others. For the time being, let me expose and discuss some problems related to African philosophy, especially, language, disciplinary structure, and the issue of methodology.

In relation to disciplinary structure, according to Dennis Masaka, various cultures come to understand each other, the world around them and philosophies, through their own existential situation and cultural experience. Despite that, overtime Western philosophical hegemony has been implanted via cultural imperialism upon other thought systems. And this effected “epistemicide or the suppression of the paradigm of thought of the dominated people to the extent that it has remained largely sidelined from the philosophy curriculum in higher education in Africa” (Masaka, 2018: 2).

This implies that, according to Masaka, Western philosophy has more places in the philosophy curriculum in Africa. It is unjust and questionable. This injustice perpetrated against African philosophy and “its agents could [only] be situated within the context of Western cultural imperialism” (Ibid). In this manner, unfortunately, African philosophy has not been released from the harsh Eurocentric narrative. It is possible for African philosophy to claim a place in philosophy curriculum in Africa as well as to develop from the present situation. Moreover, for him, “[t]he new challenge to African philosophy is in respect to its acceptance as a canon that can equally compete with the dominant philosophy in Africa and elsewhere” (Ibid). To achieve this we should broadly insert African philosophy in philosophy curriculum in African universities, and also, to struggle for self-assertion and acknowledgement of the contribution of African indigenous thought to the philosophical arena.

Language is the major phenomena of mankind, for this reason, philosophers, philologists, linguists, and so on, hitherto spend much of their time exploring about it. The issue of language has also been chief concern of the “[t]wentieth-century Western analytic philosophy. (Hallen, 2002: 54). In one way or the other, language undeniably also influenced African’s philosophical inquiry. Because, “the African Philosophy debate—“Is there such a thing as African philosophy?” was contemporaneously paralleled by a larger debate about the language of African academic productions and artistic expressions “Can an authentically African literature or other intellectual works be produced in a foreign language?” (Tangwa, 2017: 130). In contrast to an analytic philosophical perspective of language which limits the scope of philosophy only to language analysis, phenomenologist thinkers like Heidegger and Gadamer viewed language from social and historical perspectives. Consequently, as Zimmerman avers, language is, for Gadamer, “the medium in which mind and world are always already connected and it is this very

connection that provides the ground for objective knowledge” (Zimmerman, 2015: 56). As Heidegger also famously put it, language is “a house of being” (Ibid, 33). Thus, based on this school of thought, some African intellectuals have tried to emphasize on African languages. In relation to this, Kwami Gyekye and Barry Hallen among others even tried to show the African philosophy in the artifacts of language such as proverbs, tales, and others.

Based on the above reason, to understand that language is far more than a mere tool of expression; it is a medium of understanding, thinking as well as writing philosophical ideas. Consequently, it has played a crucial role in human beings’ understanding of the world around them. For this reason, we cannot belittle/overlook African languages since African societal values are located in the languages. Because of this, language is, one way that distinguishes people of different linguistic backgrounds, and the spot of people’s essence. It is also very noteworthy in order to construct self-identity. In this manner, Franz Fanon, (as Teodros Kiros 2017), argues that, “the white man knows the black as a nigger. The black is fixed by language and is in language” (Kiros 2017, 50). In connection to this, Bonny Norton, stated that:

[I]dentity is constituted in and through language. By extension, every time language learners speak, read or write the target language, they are not only exchanging information with members of the target language community, they are also organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. As such, they are engaged in identity construction and negotiation (Norton, 2013: 4).

The connection between language, cultural, and personal identity speaks a lot about what African indigenous languages look like in African philosophy today. In line with, understanding, writing, and teaching one’s particular culture language plays a crucial role. Thus, some scholars argue that, we have to use African languages to produce a genuine and authentic African philosophy. Accordingly, scholars such as O. Yai, S.B., Olúwolé, argue that, “the use of African languages

in constructing, documenting and analyzing such a philosophy could also assist in reducing the chances of misrepresentation which often come with using alien languages” (Yai 1977, 8, cited in Masaka, 2018: 3). Some scholars also enhance this thought by arguing that, “flight from one’s own language is the quickest shortcut to cultural alienation” (quoted in Azenaber, 2000: 323). Based on this, we can argue that, in order to interrogate the ontology, epistemology, morality and cultural value of Africans in general, philosophizing in African language is essential. African philosophy as well ought to be, “constructed and written using indigenous languages if it is to evade the problem that comes with philosophizing and writing it in non -indigenous languages” (Masaka, 2018: 3).

While arguing in support of philosophizing in African languages some scholars went to say even to the extent that “there can be no African philosophy until there is a philosophy in African language(s), not just a translation or interpretation” (Azenaber, 2000: 322). Nevertheless, this argument is problematic in many ways, and let me discuss some of the reasons. Firstly, as far as I understand, writing philosophy in an African language may be a sufficient condition for proving the existence of African philosophy, but it is definitely not a necessary condition. Secondly, we already employed European languages as official languages in African schools. In this regard, European language is a world-wide language, so if we write in the European language, then it may help us to disseminate the African experience to the world, as Chinua Achebe argued². The least not the last reason is, it seems difficult even to think of utilizing African language in the education system. Therefore, arguing that there is no philosophy unless it is written by African

² Without denying the difficulty of using the colonizer’s mode of communication, Achebe encouraged African writers to employ English “affirming the value of a language that reaches such a wide audience and alluding to a number of [African] authors [like himself, J. Kariuki, C. Okigbo, and J. P. Clark] who have shaped English to remarkable aesthetic effect though it was not their first language” (Lynn, 2017: 77).

language, by default, is a restriction to the possibility of articulating African philosophy by non-African language.

Apart from the above mentioned challenges, there is also another problem of African philosophy which has something to do with methodological questions. As mentioned in Serequeberhan, Outlaw “observes, at a deeper philosophical level the methodological “issues involved” in the question of African philosophy “are only immediately concerned” with philosophy as an intellectual discipline” (Serequeberhan, 1991: 15). The issue of methodology is, however, not only Outlaw’s stress, but it is also another African scholars concern as such, Lansana Keita, Kwasi Wiredu, Peter O. Bodunrin, and Paulin J. Huntondji among others. The methodological problem, however, is not only seen as a challenge for African philosophy, but it is also a problem of philosophical inquiry in general. Because, we cannot totally run away from the question of methodology, since mostly methodological differences are directly determined by the very definition of the term “philosophy” which can possibly infer the appraisals of one method more than the other. Thus, it is common to see methodological disagreements in African philosophy and philosophy at large. Now, however, I will not give an emphasis on methodological problem here, because, we will discuss it broadly in the coming chapter.

Chapter Three

Is African Philosophy Universal or Particular?

We have seen ‘culture and philosophy, and their symbiotic relations in chapter one, and also, the nature and the meaning of African philosophy in chapter two. In this chapter, we are going to discuss and interrogate the notion of universality and particularity integrating with the nature of philosophy. In doing so, I will try to discuss the two diverging views regarding African philosophy, these are: essentialist (ethno-philosophy) and universalist (Professional philosophy). Moreover, I will discuss the hermeneutical approach to African philosophy as a reconciling approach these two divergent views.

3.1. The Power and Thought behind Naming

As we have tried to see in the previous chapters there were destructive colonial narratives on Africa, which constitute an instance and processes of naming that in turn serves to reconstruct and rebuild the African social life or realities. Most importantly, for the reactive purpose of rehabilitating the African identity and culture, the discourse of nomenclature also played a huge role. This is the reason why we needed to show the discourse of naming in this part of the thesis. Naming has a significant role so as to distinguish and create an identity. In this manner, D.S. Martin (2000) clearly discusses that “names participate in the construction of social reality since to name is also to classify, and therefore to assign a position. The individual or object named is situated in the order of the world - in the structures of meaning invested in by a particular collectivity” (Cited in Mungwini, 2011: 4). Martin argues that in relation to geographical place and reproduction of power within the social life of the world naming plays an indispensable role. As a matter of fact, there were certain names coined by Western that served

as a tool of control and a means of inscribing and denigrating a certain cultural, economical, and socio-political ideologies in Africa. Thus, coining a name is one of the prerequisite to depict one cultural or socio-political ideology as superior, and others as inferior.

Following this, with regard to showing how naming could reproduce power and create an identity, M. Ramose (2008), clearly discusses that:

By giving a name to an aspect of reality, those who do so arrogate unto themselves the power to define and describe that reality. Acceptance of such definition and description often entails practical consequences and these may not always be to the benefit of the named. To challenge imposed identities is in effect to question the power of the name giver and, ultimately, to reverse the adverse negative consequences that flow from the imposed identity (Ramose, 2008, 327, quoted in, Mungwini, 2011: 4-5).

This indicates that, the power of naming is beyond inscribing something it is by itself a progress in order to create an identity as well as to make a history. According to Mungwini, names create different representation and relations with certain places or objects, and can be a way of violence. For him, the reason behind this is, names are a form of symbol and used as an instrument of affirming power. Other than that, it also serves as a relevant instrument of writing and rewriting history both at societal and personal levels. Thus, Mungwini argues that, the “postcolonial Africa is replete with strong sentiments about the need to rename in order to reassert a lost identity or correct distorted history” (Ibid). Moreover, to give a strong emphasis on the significance of naming on people either individually or communally, he uses the following opinions of Martin:

... the power of naming perhaps does not appear anywhere more obviously than in colonial situations where it was a question of both seizing a space, and the people occupying it, and of categorizing these people in such a way that the ‘differences’

assigned to them legitimized and perpetuated the domination resulting from this conquest (Martin 2000, 101, quoted in, Ibid).

This indicates how the colonizers employed naming so as to quicken the task of grabbing both the land and mind of the colonized. There were a lot of terms which were coined or produced by colonialists to name and rename everything African. Despite changes in history, the use of coining names for colonizers helps to perpetuate the main objective for which they were aimed. Coining names have also an indispensable function in a political scenario. As Mungwini underlines, naming is not only a means of taking or remaking “space and history”, but it is also, a means of controlling epistemologies along with denying the indigenous people’s voice of capability, as it would have been now. For him, “[n]ames also served as epithets to express approval or disapproval, particularly when applied in the Eurocentric and racist depiction of things African. This was a means of making the way of life of the Africans trivial, and at the same time denying them a future” .This is why the term like, traditional, particular, primitive, undeveloped, an unprogressive were not just a nickname for everything Africans. The terms what I have tried to mention so far, are produced or coined by Europeans and, surprisingly, defined in their own ways by the line of thought, that the “supposedly dying African culture lying prostrate at the feet of Western modernity, religion and science” (Ibid, 6).

Furthermore, the postcolonial cultural scenario of Africa challenged to move away from the basic catalogue of humanness as a result of the colonizer’s degrading definement. Naming plays an indispensable role in manipulating and controlling the image of societies as well as it has an essential influence in the construction of history, reality, and identity of a certain society. In this regard, Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* is a brilliant general survey of how Western construction of "primitive" and "savage" images [of identities] of Africa, particularly in historical

and anthropological studies, has influenced the rise of alienated discourse and self-identity among Africans themselves” (Masolo, 1994: 178). This denigrated past is what continuously represent Africans as ‘traditional’ in a constructed discourse. In Africa the term traditional in contrast to the ideology of modernity was initiated by some racist European intellectuals, for the purpose of achieving their colonialist agenda. According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, for instance, “Max Weber's characterization of traditional...in opposition to rational is with his general characterization of modernity as the rationalization of the world, and he insisted on the significance of this characteristically Western process for the rest of humankind” (Appiah, 1993: 144). Moreover, the thought of Enlightenment, also, was another name coined by Europe, which excludes the rest of the world outside of Europe in general and Africa in particular. In relation to this, Heinz Kimmerle wrote that:

In the period of the Enlightenment Western culture began to regard itself as the climax of all histories which have happened on earth from the beginning of mankind up to the 18th century. The different lines of what had happened in the various parts of the world led to Western history and finally ended in the presence of Western Europe in the 18th century [...] History was conceptualized as [a totalizing unilinear] progress from an early beginning on a primitive stage to the climax of culture and humanism in the period of the Enlightenment [...] Other cultures did not exist . . . other cultures just formed stages on the way to the presence of this period. For the conception of world history, which thus became possible, the price had to be paid [which was] that the different histories and cultures [i.e., other peoples] were reduced to the prehistory of one culture (Quoted in Serequeberhan, 2015: 14).

In this way, the Enlightenment was characterized in two ways. On the one hand it inscribed to the alleged ideal of the advancement of singular/universal humanity. On the other hand, it engaged the imperial or colonial conquest of other races through imposing their own cultures on the rest of the world, specifically, in Africa. It follows that western scholarships, according to

Mudimbe, “speak[s] about neither Africa nor Africans, but rather justif[ies] the process of inventing and conquering a continent and *naming* its “primitiveness” or “disorder,” as well as the subsequent means of its exploitation and methods for its “regeneration.”” (Mudimbe, 1988: 20, emphasis added). In this regard, “[t]heir new identity tag is a product of the European gaze - a creation of European ethnocentrism - hence the names resonate with the [ideological] tyranny of Europe” (Mungwini, 2011:15). On this basis, the Africans in the gaze of European men are traditional, which is according to their detrimental description and meaning of humanity at large. Thus, Africans were excluded, for long years, from the category of rationality and at worst; the African world view is indiscriminately patented as primitive, pre-logical, and irrational.

In line with this, the philosophy of Africans which was narrated as particular from mere prejudice, depicted as if it is destined to play no role for the world civilization. They also considered the African condition as if it is in need to be taught by Europeans to be able to participate into their self-described ‘civilization’. This is the reason why the need to interrogate the universal-particular dichotomy in philosophy is crucial.

3.2. What makes Philosophy Universal and Particular?

As I have tried to discuss in chapter one, philosophy did not evolve out of the vacuum rather it evolved from culture. Hence, we may be able to argue that philosophy can and could not exist without having cultural foundations. As a result, for any idea to be philosophical, it has to relate with a reflection on the experience of a certain society, group as well as individual. This reflection can be necessitated by wonders about some challenges in human reality, knowledge and action. For the reason that, “as human beings we must live around other people, social and political philosophy is the branch that helps us deal with questions about such things as the legitimacy of government, our obligations to the people around us, and how to design just laws”

(Imbo, 1998: 19). On this basis, it can be argued that there is no society or a group of peoples in the world that does not have philosophy because all human beings are in perpetual reflections on their experiences so as to find an authentic remedy to the challenges in human lives from time to time.

If philosophy arose from culture or cultural experience what makes it universal and particular? Is it the similarity of the question which has been raised by human beings in different cultures that makes philosophy universal or not? Or is there any single philosophizing method, which has been applied by all human beings? So as to determine the African identity, answering these questions is the basic epistemological assumption of these two schools of thought: the particularist and universalist schools of thought. To simplify and clarify what makes philosophy universal or particular, we also have to interrogate the above mentioned questions.

The issue of methodological problem that we have promised in chapter two is not only the challenge for African philosophy; rather it is, also, a challenge for a philosophical inquiry in general. Consequently, the issue of methodology is not a mere subject, especially, in African philosophy. The issue of methodology is too controversial, because it is one main reason to cause delineation between African and Western philosophy as particular and universal, respectively.

Mostly, it is not uncommon to see a methodological disagreement in philosophic discourse in general. I agree with Keita's argument that "there is no consensus as to what methods of investigation are proper to philosophy and what topics should be of special research interest" (Keita 1991: 133). On this basis, we can easily find incommensurability in philosophical research in between the "continental" and "analytical" philosophical tradition as an

instance. Moreover, Samuel Imbo also, avers that the incommensurability of philosophical methods in philosophical discourses by saying:

Clearly, then, there is no one philosophical school or method that is always dominant, completely confident in its conclusions. There is simply no single method of dealing with philosophical problems. Some philosophers are analytic, concentrating on careful analysis of ordinary speech to discover therein pseudo-problems caused by faulty language usage. Other philosophers are prescriptive, believing that it is possible for people to influence one another's actions and emotions, and thus they outline ways in which people should act. Yet others are dialectical, always working their way into contradictions from which they attempt to glean new insights. Some philosophers adopt none of these methods (Imbo, 1998: 21).

What we understand from the above quotation is that there is no a single philosophical method which all philosophers share in philosophical inquiry. Methodological difference is not only exhibited in traditions, since individual scholars apply different methodologies even within the same tradition. As Keita stated in the context of African philosophy it is possible to argue that “the structures of African philosophical thought have been determined to a great extent by the ideological systems of beliefs imposed on Africa by European scholarship of the pre-colonial and postcolonial eras” (Keita, 1991:134), the universalist schools of thought were viewed adopting one of the philosophical method, especially Anglo-American analytic. This is why the proponents of universalist schools of thought defend their stance that looks philosophy as universal and in this they followed the way of western philosophy.

In this regard, the universalist schools of thought totally reject the particularist perspective of philosophy and approve Western methodologies which are said to be used as normative standards. Thus, due to the incommensurability of method in philosophical discourse philosophy is not universal. We cannot find a single method that can be used universally irrespective of a

certain circumstance such as culture, geographical place, gender, race among others. However, it is possible to argue that what are common for all in philosophy is the love of “wisdom” and the critical reflection of cultural elements. The ability to think critically is a tool that will serve us well in every kind of endeavor. The philosophic pursuit of knowledge trains us to look both within and without, examining our deeply held beliefs and the belief systems that govern our world. Reason, as Pascah Mungwini stated, “does not become something different because it is exercised in the tropics. Reason is supreme and does not bow to geography. But precisely because reason is not blind, it has, in order to keep an accurate and firm grip on things, to apprehend different realities differently” (Ki-zerbo, quoted in Mungwini, 2015: 395). This implies that the reason is not endowed for one race alone. Thus, as reason is “exercised in the tropics” every culture has their own philosophy and philosophy is also, exercised in the tropics. The question which arose in cultures may make philosophy universal. The reason is that since death occurs around the world, everyone in certain culture tries to know what death means. In this vein, based on their cultural experience, all human beings also try to know the meaning of life in every kind of endeavor. In this regard, it is possible to argue that philosophy is a continuing investigation of reality through our cultural element. This is the reason why all philosophy is culture oriented and context dependent.

As we will see broadly in the coming topic, for a long period of time African philosophy's debate is reluctantly dichotomized and polarized in between essentialist (ethnophilosophy) and universalist (professional school). What has been the long standing problem among the two schools of thought in African philosophy's debate is nothing more than either following or not following the methodological categories of the Western tradition. But, as Bruce Janz warns, “if the method is an Anglo-American analytic philosophy, African philosophy already comes

subordinated to it, because it refers to another tradition as its arbiter” (Janz, 1997: 234). In line with this, in my opinion other approaches such as hermeneutics which possibly fill the gap between the two antagonistic perspectives can be cited. Since both schools of thought are more or less problematic, thus we should use the hermeneutical approach as a way out. However, one may ask the question, is it a non-Western tradition? In order to answer this question, I have to quote how Tsenay Serequeberhan (1994), addresses this question. He argues that, “the hermeneutical approach to philosophy has already been adapted, filtered, and amended by the work within and on it by non-Western thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral” (Serequeberhan, cited in Hallen, 2004: 129).

3.3. The Universal and Particular Dilemma of Philosophy in Africa

There has been a continuing debate on the discourse of identity in relation to African philosophy. The debate was initiated by a reaction to the colonial discourse which denies the African rational capacity and the humanity of Black peoples in general. Surprisingly, Europeans have taken reason as a privately owned gift from nature, enforcing black thinkers into a position where they must either affirm that they do not have a philosophy, and be civilized into European reason, or they must show or produce their own philosophical element which is different from European. Based on this problem black thinkers strive to find the alterity or identity of African philosophy in different ways. Following this, there has been a divergent view towards African philosophy regarding the nature and identity of African philosophy.

Accordingly, the particularistic school of thought on the definition of African philosophy argues that there is a philosophical element within an African traditional belief system and practices which is totally different from Western philosophy. The universalist school of thought emerged as a reaction to the particularists. The proponents of these schools of thought, are skeptical about

the mode of existence of philosophy in an illiterate/unwritten philosophy in Africa. They also, argue that the one and the only way of doing philosophy is the Western way. This part of the chapter will therefore focus on the dominant basis on which the definitions of philosophical thought in Africa have been articulated. The object of this section is to draw the view of the two dominant schools of thought regarding African philosophy from a divergent point of view.

3.3.1. The Particularistic (Essentialist) Thesis: The Alterity of African Reason

This school of thought is the group of ethnophilosophers, such as: L.S. Senghor, A. Kagame, John Mbiti, Placide Tempels, Cheikh Anta Diop, among others. Before it has been characterized as particularistic or essentialist schools of thought, it was known as ethnophilosophy with the emergence of Tempels' influential work *Bantu Philosophy*. The term ethnophilosophy, as Pauline Hountondji (2004) uttered, was first used by Kwame Nkrumah to describe general ideas and views in the African cultural thought system as philosophy. Even Tempels was publishing his book with the aim to expand European colonization as well as Christianization of native Africans. His book has been also used by African thinkers in order to struggle against his aim. But, they failed to fully challenge Tempels' ways of method or definition of African philosophical thinking. As Imbo (1998) asserted, Tempels takes philosophy as collective thought of all individuals of a culture. Bantu philosophy is the extract of the Luba people's cultural element, because their lived experience is their philosophy. This means, "African philosophy includes proverbs, idioms, folktales, maxims, and aphorisms, among other shared experiences and wisdoms of the African people" (Mawere & Mubaya, 2016:58). As quoted in Messay Kebede (2004), Tempels' expressed his understanding of philosophy as follows:

The persistence of these (Christian as well as Bantu) attitudes through centuries of simultaneous evolution can only be satisfactorily explained by the presence of corpus of logically coordinated intellectual concepts, a “Lore”. Behaviour can be neither universal nor permanent unless it is based upon a concatenation of ideas, *a logical system of thought*, a complete positive philosophy of the universe, of man and of the things which surround him, of existence, life, death, and of the life beyond (Kebede, 2004: 26, emphasis added).

In light of this, as Josias Tembo (2016) stated, at that time Temples attributed the capacity of human reason to Bantu people, which resulted in the astonishment of many Europeans. He also attributes to the Bantu ways of life, a philosophy, with “a logical system of thought”. For him, Bantu philosophical reason is “a logical system of thought”, which has peoples’ permanent or universal attitude and behaviors with relation to their culture and the human condition. Despite this, as he assumes “the Bantu, unlike the Europeans, are not conscious of their philosophy and indeed are incapable of expressing it systematically. The Bantu are not in a position of formulating a philosophical treatise, [and] complete [it] with an adequate vocabulary” (Odhiambo, 2010: 48). Thus he took the responsibility to articulate the Bantu philosophy. He argues that Bantu philosophy is a collective system of thought which is not consciously thought of the Bantu people.

If philosophy is, according to Temples, a logical system of thought under the cultural tone of Bantu people, then the role of the philosopher is to unearth the unconscious logical system underlying Bantu people’s cultural practice. Masolo avers that the role of the philosopher in ethnophilosophy acts as “a mere revealer, in the physical sense of the term; he renders visible that which already is, he calls with a new name that which has always been. But the true subject of philosophy, he who makes it, remains the anonymous and eternal ethnic group. His product is ethnophilosophy” (Masolo, 1994: 160). If this is the case, philosophical participation is a

discovery of ‘reasoning’ that founded in the worldviews of the community. Thus, Bantu philosophy lies in the cultural practice of the Bantu people.

Against the view, that Bantu philosophy is a communal unconscious thought which does not produce individual thinker, Odera Oruka articulated the school of philosophic sagacity. Oruka in his notion of philosophic sagacity wanted to ascertain the presence of individual philosophers who participate in bringing a critical analysis upon their cultural experiences that precedes their affirmation or negation of its belief and practices. In this connection, Oruka argues that:

Philosophic sagacity, however, is often a product and a reflective reevaluation of the [cultural] philosophy. The few sages who possess the philosophic inclination make a critical assessment of their culture and its underlying beliefs. Using the power of *reason* rather than celebrated beliefs of the communal consensus and explanation, the sage philosopher produces a system within a system, and order within an order (Oruka, 1991: 52).

Beside the perspective of ethnophilosophy, that African philosophy lies in unidentified collective thought, the philosophic sagacity characterizes the agency of scholarship to individual sages who critically reflect on his/her cultural elements. The espousers’ of philosophic sagacity uphold Temples’ view of philosophy for a divergent goal. Even if Temples developed Bantu philosophy for the purpose of the colonial project, which is the “civilizing mission” as well as Christianization, the followers of Temples espoused it to rehabilitate the lost identity and in the long run the humanity of black people in general and African in particular. But, it is inconceivable to understand the entire nature and function of philosophy. According to Van Hook (1999),” [e]thnophilosophy and philosophic sagacity both attempted to mine the philosophy embedded in the traditional thought of pre-colonial African culture” (Hook, quoted in, Tembo, 2016: 26). The independence of African peoples depends on regaining the

philosophical system from African systems of thought and their cultural practice and to apply them to the contemporary African situation. Proponents of ethnophilosophic and philosophic sagacity ways contend “philosophy is a particularist human enterprise with as many approaches and methods as there are human cultures” (Tembo, 2016:26). This point of view leads us to argue that philosophy cannot evolve without the undertone of culture. Consequently, an authentic African philosophy is one which appropriates African systems of thought to address African cultural experience.

To sum up, the particularist view is that, there has always been a uniquely African philosophy, and the supporters of this school “find African philosophy in the proverbs, myths, folk tales, sculptures, and traditional cultures” (Imbo, 1998: 10). They attempted to search a philosophy that is embedded in African pre-colonial culture and tradition. Its particularity lies in its specific character which is culturally bounded systems of thought and concerns. As a result, the role of the philosopher in this school of thought is to unearth philosophical elements from African cultures and traditions. In doing so, as Robert E. Birt stated, “[e]thnophilosophy is a body of writings that seek to present the traditions, myths, folklore, and symbolic beliefs of traditional Africa as African philosophy” at all (Birt, 1991: 96). In light of this, the proponents of the particularist school, understands African philosophy as “the philosophical thought of Africans could be sifted from their various world views, myths proverbs, etc.”, and it is indigenous philosophy, which is untainted by European ideologies (Anthony, 2015: 28). Finally, critical thought in this school of thought is defined as a way of unveiling of the original, instead of searching for a better choice. Thus, problems have not gone ignored by African intellectuals.

3.3.2. The Universalist (anti-essentialist) Thesis: The Continuity of Eurocentrism

The trend, negative to ethno-philosophy,...is the professional approach. It is a critical, sometimes technical approach. Most of it urges that African philosophy should not be confused with African religion or ethnography. Philosophy it is contended is an argument, not a recitation of myths and taboos (Oruka, quoted in Odhiambo, 2010: 77).

The universalist school of thought emerged by criticizing the view of particularism in general and ethnophilosophy in particular. From the universalist point of view, the foundation of particularist in general relies on a reaction to the colonial ideology of identity. According to Mesay Kebede, “the thesis of African otherness is the common source that inspires anthropological and ethnophilosophical discourses. The idea of a collective and unconscious philosophy is how the alleged otherness of Africans finds a philosophical corroboration. Those who have a different nature cannot philosophize as Westerners” without the help of the help westerners themselves (Kebede, 2004: 85). According to particularists, identity of African philosophy in order to depict the truth about the nature of African philosophical thought as culturally defined. And also, to repossess the degraded peoples of Africans to prove the presence of reason of African systems of thought before and after the European encounter.

Philosophy for universalists has some irreducible basic characteristics and features. Accordingly, their presupposition is that it is a human enterprise pursued by individual intellectuals concerning universal problems. In connection to this, Hountondji in his, *African philosophy: Myth and Reality*, for instance, tried to make a distinction among philosophy in the “vulgar” sense of the word and philosophy as a discipline. For him, both of them are universal regarding defining philosophy. He argues that, “[i]n this vulgar sense of the word, everyone is naturally a

philosopher, and so is every society” within their own cultural practice (Hountondji, 1983:47). But in the strict sense of the word, for him, philosophy is not practiced by everyone as well as by every society. The reason behind this is, that philosophy as other discipline, such as chemistry or physics has its own “specific theoretical discipline with its own exigencies and methodological rules” (ibid). As a result philosophy has an “infallible criterion by which to judge the absurdity or relevance of any proposition of philosophy, however general” (ibid). On this basis, according to Hountondji, philosophy is universal based on an infallible method and rules.

The universalist view, however, is celebrating the universality of the philosophical approach and knowledge, has been proven to be advocating nothing more than the ethnocentrism of Euro-centrism. Accordingly, Hountondji’s definition of philosophy, for instance, does not have a universal consideration of human epistemological endeavor; rather he only considers the Western perspective on what constitute philosophy. We can simply grasp Hountondji’s Eurocentric perspective through analyzing his question regarding ethnophilosophy. He writes the questions as follows: “[L]et us now ask the crucial questions: Is this the meaning of the word philosophy? Is it the way it is understood, for instance, in the phrase ‘European philosophy? Clearly not” (Hountondji, 1991:116). On this basis, for Hountondji ethnophilosophy has not any philosophical element and it is not philosophy at all, because it does not follow the Western version, standard, or method of philosophy. Other than failing to follow the western standard, for Hountondji, it also failed to transcend cultural tones. In this manner, it is obvious that, Hountondji’s definition of philosophy is not based on a universal human experience and epistemological exertion for its universality. Rather, Hountondji takes the Western perspective of philosophy and submit it with universality.

Accordingly, “[i]n an attempt to articulate a universal conception of philosophy, the universalists reject the stance of the particularisms as well as their supposed conception of philosophy, by arguing that it presents philosophy as dogmatic on the one hand and collectivist on the other” (Ikuenobe, 1997: 200). Regarding African philosophy, besides some Western intellectuals, the universality of philosophy is also undertaken by contemporary professional philosophers who trained by Europeans. On this basis, there are many European and African intellectuals who take into account the Western philosophical method as the one and only method in order to philosophize. Putting aside, the different ideas in between the professional philosophers, they all agree that myths, folklore, and traditional worldviews of Africa do not constitute philosophy. In illustration of the universalists view of philosophy, Hountondji argues that:

the problem is whether the word 'philosophy', when qualified by the word 'African', must retain its habitual meaning, or whether the simple addition of an adjective necessarily changes the meaning of the substantive. What is in question, then, is the universality of the word 'philosophy' throughout its possible geographical applications. My own view is that this universality must be preserved — not because philosophy must necessarily develop the same themes or even ask the same questions from one country or continent to another, but because these differences of content are meaningful precisely and only as differences of content, which, as such, refer back to the essential unity of a single discipline, of a single style of inquiry (Hountondji, 1983: 56).

Peter Bodunrin also joins those who take the universalist perspectives of philosophy. In this vein, he makes the delineation between the philosophical and non-philosophical discourse. Thus, according to Bodunrin, “[o]nce we have distinguished philosophy from what is not philosophy, we can decide whether a given idea or discourse is African philosophy. If it does not meet the "universal" criteria of philosophy, then, it also fails as African philosophy. And the criteria are essentially those of Western academia” (Ikuenobe, 1997: 200). This implies that, African

philosophy does not count as a philosophy unless it follows the way of Western philosophy. Surprisingly, based on the above universalist view, Kwame Appiah, without hesitating argued that, “[i]f African philosophy shares neither the problem nor the methods of Western philosophy, one is bound to wonder what the point is of calling the activity ‘philosophy’ at all” (Appiah, quoted in Hook, 1997: p. 386). Moreover, Peter Bodunrin also has argued recognizably that “Western philosophical tradition is still the benchmark for whoever claims to be a philosopher. That is, he reaffirms the claim that philosophical methods and problems must be universalist [...] which in the Western philosophical tradition forms the core of anything that is to pass as a philosophy” (Makwinja, 2018: 96). The above citations are representative sample of many similar ideas on the universalist conception of philosophy.

The universalist view, in short, is that since philosophy has some irreducible features (like being critical, argumentative, and others) it is not restricted in culture or tradition. Consequently, as Ada Agada (2019), clearly avers “universalism favours an African philosophy that embraces the analytical methodology of Western philosophy” (Agada, 2019: p. 4). In relation to this doctrine, a philosophical discipline must use a method of inquiry which entails analytical, rational, and argumentative as essential characteristics. In relation to methodology most non-African thinkers argue that Africans are not capable to philosophize due to the absence of a certain method. Following this, philosophy, in fact, searches for truth and hence this is accomplished through objective method or “a single discipline” (Hountondji, 1983: 56). Thus, therefore, for universalist in general and for the contemporary African professional philosopher in particular, a discipline cannot be philosophical, unless it follows the method of and be similar to, Western philosophy. In this manner, for universalists, what particularists (ethnophilosophers) display as

African philosophy is not philosophy for it does not hold the irreducible features of philosophy. Since philosophy is typically critical, reflective, and others in character.

3.4. Beyond the Dichotomy: The Hermeneutical Approach for African Philosophy

In our discussion thus far, we have tried to see the two antagonistic African philosophical schools which are: the particularist and universalist. When ethnophilosophy appeared from a particularist point of view so as to initiate African philosophical debate, professional scholars on the other hand appeared with a universalist perspective and as a critical repudiation of ethnophilosophy. Following this, most intellectuals in the universalist (professional) school avoided the main assumptions of ethnophilosophy. Based on this, the hermeneutical approach is introduced in the midst of antagonism between the particularist and the universalist school. Before directly entering into the detailed discussion of hermeneutics as a noteworthy approach to African philosophy, I think it is plausible to see its root in African philosophy.

On this basis, some African intellectuals who are interested in and understand the benefit of hermeneutic philosophy applied it in African philosophic problem and concern, for the purpose of articulating African philosophy from African lived experience. In relation to the hermeneutics of African philosophy, Theophilus Okere, Okonda Okolo, Tsenay Serqueberhan, and Bruce Janz, among others are the principal proponents. These proponents of hermeneutic philosophy, however, have a different perspective and applied the hermeneutical approach to African philosophy in different ways. Their perspectives will therefore be discussed briefly.

Most of them argue that both ethnophilosophy and professional schools of thought are problematic regarding defining African philosophy as well as understanding the real

philosophical problems in Africa. They also argue that the foundation of African philosophy should be the post-colonial situation of Africa, but it does not mean that the foundation is necessary for all possible African philosophies. On this basis, Tsenay Serequeberhan, (1994) argues that “African philosophy is concretely oriented toward thinking the problems and concerns that arise from the lived actuality of post-colonial 'independent' Africa” (Serequeberhan, 1994:7). Accordingly, he argues that to rehabilitate African social, cultural, and political identity, hermeneutics plays a vital role. In this regard, first it helps us to bring the liberation of the continent still fully not independent, a continent that still suffers the destructive result of colonialism and neocolonialism that is mirrored in the social, cultural, environmental and intellectual institutions of Africa. Secondly, African hermeneutics plays a crucial role in order to rediscover and reexamine the African past. These, he argues that, African philosophy should be directly and historically associated to the dethroning of the European hegemony.

For Tsenay beside the two opposed schools of thought, “it is important to note that the concerns of contemporary African philosophy are focused on the possibilities of overcoming the misery and political impotence of our present post-colonial situation” (ibid, 8). Following this, contemporary African philosophy for Tsenay and other proponents of the hermeneutical trend should be the political as well as the cultural existence of Africa. Hermeneutical approach challenged both ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy, because both schools failed to recognize the main objective of African philosophical debate. According Tsenay, “Africa has thus far innocently been either “pre-philosophical” or “non-philosophical”... so that hermeneutic perspective counters itself both to particularistic antiquarianism of ethnophilosophy and abstract universalism of professional philosophy” (Ibid, 5). Consequently, unlike both schools of thought

the hermeneutic approach to African philosophy is more focused on the political, economic as well as a cultural existential crisis in postcolonial Africa.

Like Tsenay's, Okere also, argues that the foundation of African philosophy should be the postcolonial situation of Africa. However, his hermeneutical approach more or less tends to reject the universalist perspective in favor of particularistic point of view. But, even from the particularistic schools, Okere denied the ethnophilosophical view of unconscious Bantu philosophy. For Okere, as B. Janz stated that,

hermeneutic philosophy is both the interpretive tool and the result of mediating and rationalizing lived experience...philosophy must always deal with the non-philosophical features of lived experience and its expression, whether that be religion, culture, or even the irrationality of certain presupposition (Janz, 1997, p. 224).

Hence, Okere believed that philosophy arises from and deals with culture. Herein, as Hallen stated, Okere agreed with Gadamer's notion of relativity of cultural and social context, since "all philosophical discourse is first and foremost an answer to problems and questions raised within a questioning horizon which means always, a culture". Moreover, for Okere, African philosophy to be authentically African, "Africa's philosophers and philosophy must arise from and relate directly to the particular culture(s) in which they are sited" (Hallen, 2004: 127). Thus, he insists that the hermeneutical approach should be applied to construct the African identity as well as to encounter the postcolonial condition of Africa. This conviction of Okere implies that, to reinsert into world history, to retrieving and reintegrating traditional thought of Africa into the modern one the hermeneutical philosophy is inescapably needed.

Moreover, including Tsenay and Okere, most proponents of the hermeneutics of African philosophy have supposed that "hermeneutics emerges as a result of some failures, a quest for

understanding” (Anthony, 2015:26). The main value of hermeneutic philosophy is to put the issue of self-understanding into a new stage. The reason behind this is to rescue the genuine African cultural value from such unfortunate situation of western imperialism, which threatens to overwhelm the authentic African identity. In support of this belief, Bruce Janz avows that “the question of African philosophy needs to be re-asked, not from an essentialist, but from a...hermeneutical point of view” (Janz, 2009: 7). From this, it can be argued that to reconcile the two different schools of thought, particularity and universality, there is no preferable approach than hermeneutics.

Besides their common understanding of African culture, intellectuals under the hermeneutical approach have their own philosophical ground with the aim to achieve some goals. If we look for some significant divergences under the umbrella of hermeneutics, we may find Okere’s orientation to be philosophic essentialism. This is because, he argues that “all philosophies must spring from and deal with non-philosophical features of lived experience” (Anthony, 2015: 25). Here, by non-philosophy, Okere meant, the non-reflected baggage of cultural background. He also elucidated it as follows:

[W]hether it is a Plato from Greek antiquity, a Hegel from modern philosophy, or a contemporary philosopher like Heidegger himself, the conclusion is the same, namely, that their thought is inscribed and their problematic dictated by the non-philosophy which is their own cultural background, especially their religious beliefs and myths. (Quoted in Tsenay, 1991: 10)

Based on this quotation, we can argue that Okere’s philosophical inquiry is limited to cultural experience; this is what leads him to be a philosophical essentialist. But, he differed from the ethnophilosophers because of his denial of wise sayings, myths, proverbs and others to be philosophical as they are regardless of any interpretation. In supporting this, Hallen argues that,

it is on such cultural raw materials like proverbs, tales, and others “that hermeneutic philosophers might labor so as to render them philosophical by interpreting them—distilling and assessing their meaning(s), their true significance(s), and their value(s) to and for Africa’s cultural present and future” (Hallen, 2004: 127).

As a result, there are non-philosophic cultures which every philosopher uses as a laboratory of thought and they are the potentialities of philosophical activity. As Okere already avers, African culture or tradition should be the bedrock of African philosophy. Thus, African philosophy will not be constructed from a vacuum, but from African culture, and cultural essentialism is also the main base of ethnophilosophy.

As Samuel Imbo stated, “the hermeneutical tradition has challenged both ethnophilosophical and universalist perspectives” and occupies the middle position (Imbo, 1998: 43). Both schools of thought are problematic, because they in one way or another endorsed the Eurocentric definition and description of Africa. To redress both schools’ problem the hermeneutical approach “counters itself to the particularistic antiquarianism of ethnophilosophy and the abstract universalism of professional philosophy” (Mesay, 2004: 119). Unlike the universalist schools of thought, hermeneutical approach respects and opens itself to the cultural elements of Africa. But, unlike the particularistic, it does not occupy itself with the documenting and cataloging of the worldviews of Africa and “unduly exalts the African past and confuses culture with philosophy” (Imbo, 1998: 44). Thus, unlike the particularist point of view, the hermeneutical approach endorses the cultural (traditional) thought of Africa and subjects them to critical, analytical and reflective analysis.

Since philosophies arise from cultural background, it has a universal and a particular perspective. Philosophy is a reflection and interpretation of human life based on their own cultural or traditional experience, and that life is lived differently under different circumstances. Following this, as B. Ramose underlined, philosophy is “a “particularist interpretation with universal appeal” (Ramose, quoted in Oguejiofor, 2009: 82). This implies that, philosophy is an interpretation of individuals based on their own cultural experience with the universal appeal. In this regard, an authentic philosophy should have a stage of relevance (for all humanity) that transcend the particular place of their first incubated. This philosophy would be, particular regarding to its cultural and historical manifestation, and universal in its essence that is the level of relevant for the whole human beings. Hermeneutics here, can serve “as a tool of knowledge for the extraction of philosophical thought from within culture” (Anthony, 2015: 27). Thus, cultural elements such as myths, proverbs, and worldviews are best raw materials that can produce philosophical thoughts when a hermeneutical philosopher interprets them. By discussing Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach, Raphael Madu strengthened the above idea as follows:

The choice of the hermeneutic principles of Paul Ricoeur as philosophical method is based on the ‘new’ relevance it gives to culture by providing a very profound yardstick of interpreting religious symbols and mythical languages that characterize most cultures... Previously archaic and oriental symbolism was regarded as important only as a datum in the development of human consciousness. Such was the disdain philosophers felt about symbolic thought, that symbols were regarded as ‘primitive and lacking the cogency of reasoning’ (Madu, quoted in, Ibid).

This implies that, according to Madu, different cultural elements as such symbol, proverb, myth, and others are essential as well as relevant to philosophize. In this regard, hermeneutics is a way or method of extracting the philosophical contents from the aforementioned cultural elements through interpreting. As a result, it can be argued that, what makes philosophy universal is that

the question which is raised by philosopher based on cultural and traditional appeals. In doing so, it is possible to argue that the hermeneutical approach is vital to explore the African culture and using it as the base of contemporary Africa. The commencement of African philosophical hermeneutics was motivated, basically, by respect for African cultural elements which should be followed by critical interrogation.

So, all things under this discussion lead us to recapitulate that philosophy is culturally bound, since philosophy is a hermeneutics of cultures. Thus African philosophy involves an interpretation of the possible elements of philosophy rooted in African culture. Cultural elements as such proverbs, myths and others are not philosophy; however, it would give birth to philosophy within the contexts of hermeneutics. Moreover, a “hermeneutic engagement and analysis of the culture—world-view, language, idioms, religion, symbol, and arts of the ethnic groups within an African country would lead to the emergence of different philosophies” (Udoma, 2014: 133). However, arguing “traditional African philosophy is the only African philosophy, as the ethnophilosophers did, is mistaken”, because, it’s difficult to talk about philosophy, since philosophy is a communal thought of a certain people (Odhiambo, 2010: 97). At the same time, automatically rejecting the traditional elements of Africa as useless is inappropriate. An African philosopher should learn from the traditions, myths, and others in order to draw an authentic African philosophy.

That is why I preferred the hermeneutical approach to reconcile the two different schools of thought. It is hard to deny that, philosophy is neither African nor Western based on certain circumstances like race or others. Instead what makes philosophy, African or Western or Chinese is the cultural background that it is evolved from. In other words, the prefix Western or African in philosophy indicates its dependence on the cultural background that provides the material for

philosophizing. In this regard, when someone, whether Western or African reflects or writes on the African or western worldview, then we can say he/she does African or Western philosophy. If we add a hermeneutical interpretation on African cultures then we can possibly find the birth of African philosophy. Therefore, my argument here is, that the hermeneutical approach, could balance the two opposed positions in regard to the meaning and nature of African philosophy. And it would also interpret the African cultural (traditional) systems of thought and it subjects them into critical and analytical reflection, if this is the case, African philosophy will have a universal character without losing its particularity.

Conclusion

Here in my concluding remarks, I want to show that, as far as philosophy has evolved from cultural experiences, it inescapably constitutes both universalistic and particularistic features. Accordingly, culture is the raw material or laboratory of philosophical inquiry. But, the role of culture shouldn't be restrained only on being the raw material of philosophy. For the reason that culture is the bedrock of philosophy, it has also a power to make the identity of philosophers (that belong to a certain culture) and their philosophies. Philosophy is, as we have seen in chapter one, a way in which people critically understand and reflect on their cultures. For this reason philosophy and culture have a symbiotic relationship. If it is impossible to think a person without a culture, and if culture is a background of each philosophical thought, we shouldn't understand philosophy as if it is a monopolized possession of a certain culture of a particular race or color.

As we have discussed earlier the colonial power has foisted different prefixes, such as traditional, particular, and un-civilized among others, on the African systems of thought. Astoundingly, the colonizer also described its western-oriented philosophy as a sign of modern and universal philosophy. Here, classifying African thoughts as traditional/particular holistically determines African identity. These pejorative terms was mainly imposed by the colonial power for the purpose of African dehumanization, and alienation from their culture. Accordingly, I argue that the notion of 'universalism' as most Western and some African intellectuals assumed is a mere illusion. This is because, considering the notion of a universal philosophy regardless of cultural particularities is akin to expecting something from nothing. Since cultural elements are input materials for philosophical reflections, it is undeniably true that, philosophical thoughts evolve from cultural experiences. If culture is the root of every philosophy, logically, Western philosophy cannot be the exception to this canon. Even if some proponents of the alleged

European universalist claim still hesitate to scholars even argued to the extent that Western philosophy is exonerated from cultural undertones, therefore, philosophy in the West has not succeeded in liberating itself from its cultural particularities.

But, Europeans purposefully dichotomized their own philosophy as universal and others philosophy, specifically, African philosophy as particular so as to accomplish their colonialist agenda. In the flag of universalism Europeans relentlessly tried to dominate others through replacing others cultural value by their own. For this reason, the “Enlightenment” case is notable which rhetorically promised to release humankind from their prejudice, and yet remained itself in culturally bounded prejudice. Here, “[t]he Enlightenment masterfully masked the mastery of humankind under the exacting mantel of the progressive advancement of a singular humanity” (Serequeberhan, 2015: 14). And also, as Abiola Irele discussed “many [Africans] have been betrayed by [...] the Enlightenment ideals of universal reason and universal equality [...] by the difference between word and deed” (Eze, 1997: 12). Here we should understand that, like the enlightenment covertly preached a single culture in the name of liberation, the universalist thinkers as well are covertly preaching a western-oriented cultural path, while overtly claiming to come up with a universal and culture-free path.

Let me bring two expanded counter arguments on universalist thinkers. Firstly, as I discussed in chapter three, if Africans want to be legitimately accepted as those who engaged in a philosophical speculation, the universalist recommends the adherence of a Western way of doing it. They even argue that European philosophy “are comparatively superior to another philosophically, to the extent of denigrating one (African) as un-philosophical or denying its existence as a philosophical system” (Ikuenobe, 1997: 190). African intellectuals became the proponents of the universalist stance, because they were trained in the way of the Anglo-

American analytic tradition. For that reason, they played an indispensable role to achieve the mission of Westernized Africa in addition to the Westerners themselves. In this regard, this Turkish proverb may describe my intention well, “When the axe came into the forest, the trees said: the handle is one of us” (Serequeberhan, 2015: 9). But, it does not mean that I totally reject their work and struggle as useless or meaningless for Africans.

Secondly, as I discussed in chapter one, philosophy almost in its totality arises from cultures. Every philosophy evolved from a culture, since the culture of a people embraces their idioms, language, religion, arts and others. Following this, an authentic philosophy can also be excavated from an interpretation of the unwritten thoughts of cultures. In this regard, every philosophy, either Western and African or Chinese and Hindu, must be a product of, and from the works of proverbs, arts, and beliefs of their own cultures. Thus, African philosophy can possibly excavate from an interpretation, examination, and analysis of the unwritten thought of African tradition. On this basis, even if philosophy arises from cultures, it doesn't necessarily imply that every detailed experience of each culture is philosophical. Hence, if culture is defined as a people's way of life, it comprises their lore of knowledge, craft, art, their cosmology, legends, myths, wise-sayings, laws and others. It is possible to argue that without culture, doing philosophy is inconceivable. In this regard, the total rejection of the perspective of the particularist (ethnophilosophy) schools of thought as traditional and communal is inappropriate. It might be these proverbs, tales, myths and others that are a collective thought and become old through time process, but it does not mean that they are useless or meaningless at all in philosophical inquiry. Finally, as African intellectual's relentless struggle to restate the African identity, it may now be time for them to reject the unjustified dichotomy and inappropriate nomenclature, for instance, African as traditional/particular, uncivilized, and the like, from the colonial dictionary as well as

from African minds. The reason behind this is, as I argued in this thesis, if Africans blindly swallow the imposed classification that identify them as an inferior, particular/traditional, “a process of mental and technological” influence would be facilitated easily in the name of civilization, modernization, universalization, etc. But, “when Africans reject their categorization of inferiority, a cultural project of self-affirmation is implied” (Falola, 2003: 12).

It is, however, not possible to achieve the task without having a deep philosophical outlook. Postcolonial Africa is already described inappropriately with identities like particular/traditional, for this reason the dissemination of neocolonialism seemed easy. In these days, we couldn't, indeed deny Yuval Noah Harari's note when he says “clarity is power”, and it is to regain their power that Africans are in need of clarifying the terms that the Euro-centrists foisted upon them as their identity (Harari, 2019: 11). In this regard, philosophy, plays an indispensable role in achieving this task, since it helps us to, critically examine what we have experienced, and it also enables individuals to actively engage in the examination and deconstruction of the foisted Eurocentric identities. Therefore, in order to disentangle Africans *self* from the colonialists constructed identity; African educational institutions should include philosophy in their curriculum, at all levels.

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