

***African Philosophy in Black and White:  
Identity, Ideology and Discourse***

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***“O my body, make of me always a man who questions!”***

**Frantz Fanon**

## **Abstract**

Contemporary African philosophy has been struggling with questions of identity and lack of direction since its inception. This is in part due to its unique position between two traditions, that of Africa and the West. These two traditions had shown considerable historical polarity that made it difficult to explicitly canonize and formulate an 'African' system of thought. In this sense, European discourse on Africa had been the main challenge, where the former continued to deny the latter recognition and inclusion. As it were, it undermined everything African and worked relentlessly to replace it. As a result, Africans were forced to prove the existence of philosophy in Africa. However, the very denial being political-ideological, along with the struggle for freedom, liberty and independence from slavery and colonialism, African intellectuals were engaged in this political-ideological struggle beyond an epistemic one. As a result, narratives such as Negritude, Afrocentrism, African personality, African Renaissance, etc., became essential narratives of African discourses. Even today, a century after the abolition of slavery and decades after independence, African thinkers remain trapped in the same conceptual and existential struggle against this history and its continued legacy. What is an African philosophy? What do its content, form, method, etc., should look like? How can it make use of the two traditions to its own benefit? In this thesis, I will explore some historical backgrounds and current trends of this struggle. I will argue that the hitherto debates between African and European intellectuals externally and between Africans internally foundationally are continuations of the legacy of the racism and ideology of black-white dialectics. Though this dialectics is less important today, African philosophical practice has been unable to fully escape its shadow. As such, it needs a shift in method and direction that fits its unique nature, for which I introduced a new approach in this thesis – what I called a symbiotic-discourse.

Key words: African philosophy, African identity, Afrocentrism, Negritude, conceptual decolonization, symbiosis

## Introduction

What constitutes being an African? Identity is based on the principle of sharedness, and as such refers to a common denominator that individuals or groups take as a binding and defining element. Hence, is it shared history, language, culture, tradition, religion, geography, world view, physical appearance, political unity, etc., that makes one an African? When an African conceives and identifies himself as such, what does he take it to mean and stand as?

For those of us born into independent Africa, speaking both African and foreign languages, grow up in local cultures and educated in “foreign” epistemic order, one foot in Africa and the other in the West or East, in the dichotomy of tradition and modernity, individualism and communitarianism, democracy and authoritarianism, literate and illiterate, mystic and rational, believer and pagan, relativism and universalism, Africanism and Westernism, being and becoming, what does our Africanity mean? Who is the new black man standing at these crossroads?

For the likes of me, African philosophy is this conceptual dilemma, the challenge of making sense, the enigma of identity and meaning, the ambivalence of destiny, the question of arbitrating being and becoming, the choice between freedom and subservience, determination and will, belief and truth, knowledge and dogma, education and propaganda. As a beginner and apprentice of philosophy this is my struggle; the search for footing, the need for understanding, the will for freedom, the reason for learning, the thirst for clarity, the hunger for truth.

Today in a half-light and half-dark luminous I (and I believe many like me) think I stand at a cross-road of the present caught in-between the light of the future and the darkness of the past. To an “African” like me which road to take, where to and why presents itself as one of the ultimate questions of existence.

In this thesis, I have presented a brief overview of how African philosophy was born, how it has become a system of thought that it is today and what its short history reveals about it. I do so from Eurocentric discourses on Africa and African philosophy as a response to it. Though my analysis takes this narrow topic in order to analyze the wider contemporary African philosophy, I believe that this seemingly narrow theme has played a fundamental role in shaping this school of thought and as such would provide a deeper understanding of the subject. To do so, I divided this thesis into

four chapters. In the first chapter, I will examine one of the fundamental grounds (and topics) in African philosophy – African identity. I will provide its historical background and I argue that not only is African identity an ideological invention and narrative (by both Europeans and Africans) but also show that, without clear rational ground and justification for itself, it continues to justify and ground African philosophical discourse.

Chapter two takes up some old but reminiscent questions regarding whether there is such a thing as an African philosophy, if there is one what is it, what are its hitherto thematic and canons of inquiry, what sort of philosophy qualifies for African and who qualifies as an African philosopher. In this chapter, I will argue that philosophy was inherited from the West and as such belongs, at least technically, to a new philosophical tradition that is neither purely African nor Western. In addition, I will show how African philosophy and black philosophy remain synonyms and entangled in conception, qualification, and history. Finally, I will address the issue of the identity of the African philosopher and argue why the identity dilemma is mainly ideological rather than rational.

Chapter three addresses some of the major philosophical inquiries that dominated African philosophy since its inception. Among them I will briefly present the rationality debate, Negritude, Afrocentrism, and conceptual decolonization. They are largely theories developed as responses to European discourses on Africa. However, I will argue that these defensive and offensive theories have contributed to the politico-ideological conception and practice that dominated African philosophy.

The final chapter is concerned with providing a remedy to some of the fundamental misconceptions and mis-practices that in my view have thwarted and mis-directed African philosophical discourse. As such I argue that though African philosophy has greatly benefited from Western philosophical tradition and remained comparative or intercultural, it remains yet with no clear direction as to what this interculturalism would and should look like. Accordingly, I will introduce what I called "symbiosism" and argue that African philosophy should strive for a mutual-inclusion, when possible, between itself and other traditions. However, given the struggle over domination between cultures African cultures remain under the constant threat of imposition, dissolution, and possibly, death. Accordingly, African philosophy must stand for the interests and values of African cultures, by rebuilding and reconstituting them from the inside. As such, the importing of ideas and methods of other traditions must help in cultural restitution rather than facilitating subsumption and replacement by other cultures. Finally, this thesis will present, analyze and reflect on published sources, primarily books and articles.

## Chapter One: African Identity as a Foundation of an African Discourse

### 1.1 African Identity

*Grandmother pointed out my brother PERRY, my sister SARAH, and my sister ELIZA, who stood in the group. I had never seen my brother nor my sisters before; and, though I had sometimes heard of them, and felt a curious interest in them, I really did not understand what they were to me, or I to them. We were brothers and sisters, but what of that? Why should they be attached to me, or I to them? Brothers and sisters we were by blood; but slavery had made us strangers. I heard the words brother and sisters, and knew they must mean something; but slavery had robbed these terms of their true meaning.*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 46-47)

For someone familiar with African philosophy, the one thing that remains perplexing is the term "African": what makes this or that philosophical text or discourse "African"? What does the qualifier "African" stand for, and what is its discursive significance? On the outset, this qualifier is not unique to African philosophy since we use "–European", "–Chinese", "–Indian", etc., to differentiate philosophical discourses, in a descriptive sense. Implicitly, however, these qualifiers are normative rather than descriptive. As a result, understanding the normative "African" prescription is fundamental to understanding the discourse.

As I will argue, the concept or name "African", normatively, is embedded in "blackness" – black culture, black personality, black being; as different from or in opposition to white, red, or yellow. Needless to say, in my view, black intellectuals treated blackness as a metaphysical entity (black being or essence), as an epistemological concept (black perception or belief), as an aesthetic object (black beauty or appearance) and as a moral cognizance (black virtue or value). As such blackness has played an important social-cultural and politico-ideological role in personal, societal, and racial self-consciousness, and in the subsequently institutionalized African studies, including African philosophy. In fact, if I were to point out a single factor that changed [for good or for ill] black peoples' existential presence and essential presencing [internally and externally] in the last four hundred years, I would without hesitation single out blackness. Black color, the embodiment of blackness, not only became the fundamental identity predicate but also, almost single handedly, fixed black peoples' place in the world – at the bottom of all humankind as such. At one and the same time black color made us one giant 'human race' and one monstrous 'subhuman colossus'.

Despite this fundamental role, however, blackness remained, in my view, one of those ambivalent and enigmatic concepts in black intellectuals' existential and essential self-understanding and self-(re)presentation. Its ambivalence lies in its controversial prescriptive role in determining black norms and values. Its enigma seems to lie in its paradoxical descriptive role in delineating black being and agency.

However, today, the use of "African" as a qualifier to anything and everything "black" seems to be a common place and passes without any difficulty, or with little qualification. Our concern here being African philosophy, as an "Africanism" discourse, it is helpful to explore this Africanism's inherent grounding in blackness. The African philosopher, first and foremost, is faced with the question: what is "African" in the domain of philosophy and as a philosophy of horizon? As I will show, the question has been one of the fundamental underlying factors for the long overdue debate in and on African philosophy. This problem becomes evident when we note that, in addition to its very ambiguity, "African" stands for a two-pronged identity: the "authentic" and the "invented" Africa.

This is clearly the case in point, for example, when Mudimbe ambiguously states, in *The Invention of Africa (1988)*, that his philosophical discourse is neither to justify his commitment to philosophy nor to an *invented* Africa, ~~but~~ to what it *essentially* means to be *an African* and a philosopher today" (Mudimbe, 1988: 11). Mudimbe assumes a difference between ~~authentic~~" and ~~invented~~" Africa, and wants to commit himself to the authentic one – the *essential* Africa. However, he doesn't clearly state the difference between the two. Instead he presumes the ~~authentic~~" Africa as self-evident and goes to identify and critique the ~~invented~~" Africa. This ambivalence, Kwame A. Appiah argues, lies ~~in~~ the very conception of *an African identity*" (Appiah, 1992: 61; emphasis added). Yet, Appiah himself also fails to provide a clear designation, when he says: ~~I~~ don't want to be misunderstood. We are Africans already. [...] Being African already has ~~a~~ certain context and a certain meaning"..." (ibid: 177). As I will show in this chapter, this presumed, yet unclear, *authentic* identity as the foundation of Africanism is where the problematic of African philosophy begins (unfortunately not where it ends). To this we can add the presumption of collectivization rather than individuation of the black subject.

For Africa [and Africans], by and large, this authenticity is a curiosity: though trained in Europe or in school and universities dominated by European culture, the African [philosophers'] concern is not the discovery of a self that is the object of an inner voyage of discovery. Their problem – though not, of course, their subject – is finding *a public role*, not a private self (Appiah, 1992: 76).

This desire to assume a public role, the urge to speak for the entire African continent and black race, has remained the pivot of African philosophy and Africanism in general that dates back to the very first [re]invention of 'African' identity and African subject.

## 1.2 Black, Negro, African

*There is not, beneath the sky, an enemy to filial affection so destructive as slavery. It had made my brothers and sisters strangers to me; it converted the mother that bore me, into a myth; it shrouded my father in mystery, and left me without an intelligible beginning in the world.*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 58)

Let's start with the question: what sort of identity does "African" stand for, and what contexts and meanings does it carry with it? Historically, "African" identity was first assumed by black intellectuals in the West, rather than those on the continent. As James Sidbury notes, "during the second half of the eighteenth century a group of *African-descended* authors and activists<sup>1</sup> living in England and America *began to present* themselves as "Africans"" (Sidbury 2007: 6; emphasis added.) Again, the identification was first used by European rather than Africans [blacks] themselves. It was used by European Enlightenment thinkers to refer to "savage [black] people who existed outside of the narrative of Western progress" (ibid: 6.) Kwame Appiah argued, the concept 'African', as something more than a geographical entity, was founded on "the very European concept of *the Negro*" (Appiah, 1992: 62; emphasis added). Sidbury says the term was widely used by these European thinkers to imply unanimous cultural and/or racial unit among sub-Saharan African peoples. In fact, argues Sidbury, "...between 1650 and 1750... Britons in England and America used "Africans" interchangeably with "Negroes" and "blacks" to refer to the people they *purchased and imported* into the Americas, as well as to the American-born (or creole) *descendants* of those victims of the slave trade<sup>2</sup>" (Sidbury, 2007: 6).

If so, when these slaves or children of slaves, after the European, started to identify themselves as "Africans", an identity loaded with so much degrading and dehumanizing connotations, what was

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1 According to Sidbury the first self-acclaimed "Africans" include, "Ignatius Sancho, James Albert, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, and Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa in England, as well as Phillis Wheatley, Venture Smith, and John Jea in North America" (Sidbury, 2007: 6.)

2 K. A. Appiah elsewhere says "Earlier in American history the label 'African' was applied to many of those who would later be thought of as Negroes, by people who may have been under the impression that Africans had more in common culturally, socially, intellectually, and religiously than they actually did. Neither of these kinds of errors, however, stopped the labelling from having its effects. As slavery in North America became racialized in the colonial period, being identified as an African, or, later, as a Negro, carrying the 'badge of colour', had those predictable negative consequences, which Du Bois so memorably captured in the phrase 'the social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult'" (Appiah, 2003: 436).

their rationale? What did it mean to them, particularly, as opposed to what it meant to the white man? Sidbury argued, since these writers learned and worked “within Western literary and cultural traditions” they had no other option but to accept this identification. However, in doing so they were hoping to “re-place [the image of] Africa within the Enlightenment's grand narrative” (ibid: 7) by valorizing its European negative conceptualization. In other words, this epistemic entrapment meant that these intellectuals were viewing themselves from within the Western episteme, albeit negating or challenging it. The truth is, however, this tradition of viewing oneself through the European spectacle, this claim to Africa, has nothing to do with them being Africans or speaking from an African episteme, rather only with being black.

In my view, however, there is another reason as fundamental as their entrapment in Western episteme – namely, a metaphysical entrapment; that of Being Black. Re-naming was not strong enough to dissolve the black [slave] image, because, as Frantz Fanon puts it, “The evidence was there, unalterable. My blackness was there, dark and unarguable. And it tormented me, pursued me, disturbed me, angered me. Negroes are savages, brutes, illiterates” (Fanon, 1967: 117). Fanon calls this the Negro Myth. This Enlightenment narrative characterized Africans (Negros)<sup>3</sup> as a different sort of humankind, or else less evolved human beings. This subhumanity was taken to be evident in the black man's skin color (what else can black possibly be but darkness?). Slavery materialized this view by putting the black man to “his” natural existential and essential position – under the white man. The black man became truly a Negro – in the words of Frederick Douglass “a man transformed into a brute” (Douglass, 1885: 212). Out of this brute, this Negro, the black man was soon to be reborn as an “African” – a rebirth that would reinstate the black subject to his primordial being, his pre-Negro self, the real human behind a sub-human skin, or so it seemed.

In this “new becoming” and self-re-definition and re-presentation of the enslaved black subject and “re-naming” was taken to be the fundamental “first step in the rhetorical process of controlling and constraining the rhetorical [black] subject” (Gordon, 2003: 109.) This is the case, for example,

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3 I have been trying to see the difference and similarity between “African” and “Negro” in the Enlightenment Literature. Were these writers looking at black people through the “Negro” stereotype or the other way around? We can say that “Negrotude” (if there is such a thing) that has nothing to do with “Aftude” but only with European stereotypes. It is true that stereotyping is not a unique European trait; stereotyping existed and exists everywhere. Though its roots lie in existential “difference” its conception carries with it an “essential” difference. As such, it is important to ask whether the European “Negrotude” is fundamentally about “Aftude” or not. In my readings, I found no empirical or theoretical justification for “Negrotude” of black-skinned subjects but only ideological theses of stereotyping. That's why I believe that Enlightenment characterizations of black subjects has no factual and truth ground that needs to be “destroyed” as Fanon believed. In my view, Europeans haven't said anything that I consider to be of any rationale point of debate. How can I defend myself when I haven't been attacked? If someone calls me “Negro” when I am not, should I defend myself? How can we reason against unreason?, as Fanon would say it. If we have to defend ourselves against every stereotyping that others hold against us, for whatever reason, we will waste our lives in a futile and pointless debate and conflict.

when 18<sup>th</sup> century black activists in the United States, such as David Walker (in the *Appeal*) and Robert Young (in the *Ethiopian Manifesto*) addressed this problem in such a way that ~~the~~ *Appeal* refers to blacks as 'coloured,' 'people of colour,' and 'Africans.' The designator 'Negro' is used only cynically. The *Manifesto* uses 'black,' 'black Africa,' 'African slave,' 'degraded sons of Africa,' or 'Ethiopian!...'” (ibid: 87). It is important to note that this ambivalence of naming (hence re-conceptualization of identity) is neither arbitrary nor a minor problem. On the one hand, ~~the~~ the names controversy among blacks in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries is at its heart a contest over the individual and collective identity of blacks” (ibid: 109). On the other, despite this controversy, naming will have come to influence, positively or negatively, implicitly or explicitly, first the self-consciousness of blacks in the West<sup>4</sup>, and latter that of black ~~race~~” in general. According to Gordon, ~~the~~ naming here is crucial because it is an important indicator of the ingenious efforts in these works [the *Appeal* and the *Ethiopian Manifesto*] to create a black subject who has a strong African connection....” (ibid: 88). He further points out, ~~it~~ is not just the use of the term 'African' in these pamphlets that is of interest here. ... in the North, 'almost all blacks,' as late as the second decade of the nineteenth century, referred to themselves as Africans‘ or free Africans” (ibid: 87.) In essence, this re-naming was not merely semantic. Rather it was a spatial and platial re-location and re-connection, an attempt to re-present and re-instate ~~the~~ black sub-world” as a means to escape essential and existential alienation in the white world – we can call this, *denegrification*. It was also a means to the dis-alienation of the black subject to Africa itself – in short, *Africanization*.

African identity was and has since been an essential and existential revitalization, re-presentation and re-claim of something that was nullified by alienation, objectified by subordination, estranged by displacement. It was an act of undermining the slave owner's image of blackness (Negrotude<sup>5</sup>) in the proslavery sense. Yet, despite re-naming themselves 'Africans' these blacks were a long way from equality, inclusion and recognition. Fanon bitterly comments on black characterizations by saying, ~~but~~ in my own case I knew that these statements were false” and he argues that this Negro myth must be destroyed ~~at~~ all costs” (Fanon, 1967: 117) for the true identity of the black man to be re-established. But, what is this cost? What is the cost of being?

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4 Kwame Appiah argues, ~~If~~ we follow the badge of colour from African‘ to Negro‘ to coloured race‘ to black‘ to Afro-American‘ to African-American‘ ... we are thus tracing the history not only of a signifier, a label, but also a history of its effects” (Appiah, 2003: 436-437.) Among the effects of naming is its presumed role in shaping true black self-consciousness, with its dual feature of denegrification and Africanization. But isn't ~~the~~ history of effects” just part of human life, or even human life itself? Has anyone ever escaped and lived a life free of ~~the~~ effects”, free of imposition?

5 I use the word ~~Negrotude~~” [what Fanon called Negrohood] to imply the proslavery designation of ~~Negro~~” to differentiate it from Senghorian ~~Negritude~~.” The former refers to ~~black~~ inferiority” and subhumanity while the latter refers to black ~~Otherness~~” or alterity.

This Negro myth that the white man invented to objectify the black subject, to keep him in servitude, to dominate him<sup>6</sup>, has naturally been the number one enemy of the black subject(s) since the 1700s. He had to prove that he is a man, a subject; not an object, not a brute, not a subhuman. The African self-(re)discovery and self-(re)cognition, is ~~a~~ *sum* that is metaphysical not in the Cartesian sense but in the sense of challenging a *social* ontology; not the consequent of a proof but the beginning of an affirmation of one's self-worth, one's reality as a person, and one's militant insistence that others recognize it also" (Mills, 1998: 9.) Hence, African identity is not to be seen as a ~~private solipsistic self,~~" or something like the Cartesian *sum*. Rather it was the black man himself, in flesh and blood, coming to the world and announcing his presence. He was simply becoming a man, an African taking off his ~~–Negro~~" mask, a man evolving out of a thing. In replacing "Negrotude" with "Afrotude" the black man was attempting to attain the disalienation of being i.e., the white master's recognition and blessing of manhood. He needed the recognition of another man *to be*; the permission of the "Other" to become "Same". He knew that his manhood was meaningless as long as his objecthood still stands; his self-acceptance was meaningless unless he was accepted by the other who denied him in the first place. This ambiguity, one might even call it a paradox, is well expressed by Fanon:

Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self (Fanon, 1967: 109.)

This rhetoric for re-claiming African identity was based on the belief that, under slavery, —. blacks were alienated from fellow blacks; from Africa, the homeland of their ancestors; from fellow humans (whites); and perhaps most significant, from themselves. There was a loss of control over the most prominent mode of production, the rhetorical access to the dominant public fora, and its major product, which was *black identity*" (Gordon, 2003: 22.) If so, the forging and accessing of true black identity was the first step towards fighting this universal alienation. These eighteenth century black intellectuals, alienated under the white slave holder, projected their alienation in and from the West to include the alienation of all black subjects in the world. If you are black, slave or

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6 In this paper, I mostly used 'man', 'he', 'one' or 'subject' to refer to and to stand for both sexes.

not, wherever and whenever you are, you are a Negro. In this presumption, not only they granted the entire world to the white man's will and power, but they also preemptly surrendered the black "race" to the subjugation of the white "race". In truth, [black] slaves were alienated not only in the West but also in Africa itself. Wasn't it Africa<sup>7</sup> which sold them to slavery in the first place? Weren't blacks enslaved and alienated on the African continent, by blacks themselves? Weren't they called names synonymous to "Negro" and weren't they objectified and despised just the same? My point is that being black has nothing to do with one's alienation. That 's why, I think, first, black slaves in the West were alienated primarily because they were slaves, not "African" slaves; secondarily, not because of their blackness but because of the white man's [mis]conception of blackness<sup>8</sup>.

This ambivalence of African identity carries the following three major implications. As Gordon points out, "Both Young and Walker confronted the challenge to *black humanity* posed by Anglo-America's racist depiction of the black subject. Walker avers, "all the inhabitants of the earth, (except however, the sons of Africa) are called *men*, and of course are, and ought to be free. But we, (coloured people) and our children are *brutes*".... Consequently, blacks, as Walker saw them, "had to prove to the Americans and the world, that we are MEN and not *brutes*" (ibid: 83; emphasis added.) This is the first problem. Because slavery and racism were not "challenges to black humanity" alone unless we agree that, at least by the time of Walker, all black people were under the white subjugation. Again black subjects needed to prove their worth to the white man, since the white man was not convinced to grant them humanity and equality. But, the same was true for slaves everywhere, despite color, race, culture, and even time and space. It might still be true that Walker was speaking only about the black people in the United States, calling them to rise against the white hegemony, against the master-slave system. But, he ended up enslaving the entire black "race" along the way.

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7 Of course one can argue that, given the dehumanizing nature of slavery, wasn't blacks selling their fellow blacks to enslavement validate the European designation of black people as primitive, backward and brute? I personally don't know what actions could constitute primitivity and backwardness; nonetheless, slave system (past or present, in whatever form and name) is a sign of low consciousness and lack of respect for human dignity and freedom. Yet, whatever attribute we attach to this deed on the side of seller [backward, brute, etc.] the same holds for the buyer. Hence, everyone involved in a slave system are equally backward, brute and primitive.

8 There is a difficulty here. Were black people enslaved because they were black? Or, was it enslavement that resulted in the synonymy of black subject with a slave? David Walker seems to have been caught in this dilemma. On the one hand, he says "[I]n sorrow I must say it, that my colour all over the world, have a mean, servile spirit. They [those slaves who accepted their own enslavement] yield in a moment to the whites, let them be right or wrong—the reason they are able to keep their feet on our throats" (quoted in Gordon, 2003: 86). He seems to imply that 'colour' is the very rationale for the white master to enslave blacks, because black is taken for 'servile' colour, a view which even black slaves themselves seem to have accepted and yielded to. Yet, he seems to argue to the contrary when he says, "The white Americans have applied this term [Negro] to Africans, by way of reproach for our colour, to aggravate and heighten our miseries, because they have their feet on our throats" (quoted in Gordon, 2003: 87.) In this latter sense, it is enslavement that resulted in reproach for black colour, not the colour that resulted in enslavement.

The other problem is collectivity. African identity was not claimed at an individual level but at societal or racial level. This might be because alienation of the black individual was not personal but something that was shared among all black subjects in the West, on the one hand, and on the other, since it was an existential reality for these blacks irrespective of time and space; hence it was assumed collectively. Gordon argues, “In establishing a black identity, black nationalists constructed a narrative of black life that functioned ideologically to constitute a *collective black subject*, to posit a *transcendental subject*, and to advance an *illusion of freedom*” (ibid: 174-75; emphasis added.) The new black identity was grounded in “African consciousness,” self-consciousness not as slaves with no history and culture, but as proud people who were victimized by their dislocation and disconnection from their natural home, true history and authentic culture. This view advanced the thesis that black subjects should view themselves as a collective unit – black society; a unit with common historicity that transcends time and space – black race; and unity that was further strengthened by the will to regain their primordial human essence – free people.

The final problem with African identity is this: even if it is taken as a positive self-consciousness, it remains a [re]invention and as such far from re-presenting these people in their “true” identity. They were not Africans, in the strict sense of identity. Being not an African, is more than, say, not being 'Temne, Igbo, Kongo, or Yoruban' (anymore). It is not that they were less Africans just because they were not in Africa. The problem lies in the fact that they neither had a "true" conception of Africa nor had "real" place in Africa to reference their identity to. In the words of Sidbury “having been labeled 'African' writers” these black writers “accepted that label and subtly altered what it meant to be 'African'... Neither Africa nor African identity plays a central role in their texts, but the identity is present and acknowledged” (Sidbury, 2007: 7). In doing so, they attempted to undercut any notion of an 'indigenous African identity' and thereby created a narrative of African identity that took its meaning from the western influenced diaspora rather than the continent (ibid). This tradition of [re]inventing Africa at will, first by Europeans and later inherited by black and African intellectuals, has resulted in distorted intellectual tradition more fundamental and more harmful than mere misconception and inaccurate re-presentation.

Re-naming themselves "Africans" they invented a new [image of] Africa and a new representation of African subject(s). They advanced a new re-interpretation and re-presentation of African history, African people, African culture. They believed that they were placing Africa vis-a-vis the West; African episteme vis-a-vis Western. In truth, they were merely re-placing Africa in the West, and espousing a new Western episteme called “African”. They invented Africa out of faint memories and out of mythical narratives. Afterwards they re-located themselves in their beloved “re-invented”

Africa and created the illusion that they re-placed themselves in their own “true” African center. That's why it is important to understand that the very African self-consciousness had less to do with Africanness, and more to do with blackness, which was the primary (if not the only) common identifier of both “diasporan” and “continental” Africans. In truth, there was no such a thing as one African identity, African people, African culture, African center – these were European inventions. And Africanism was at best a re-invention of this European invention. The only link between invented [European] Africa, re-invented [Diasporan] Africa and real (whatever continental Africa was) Africa was skin color. The Africanity of black slaves, therefore, not only gave skin color a new narrative (blackness) but it also reduced African life-world to Negrotude. In short, their 'imaginary' Africa - the land of one people, one race, and the land of free black men - had less in common with the actual Africa - the land of fragmented societies, diverse peoples [races?] and cultures, and the land of slavery. In all honesty, the real<sup>9</sup> Africa was as horrendous as the West these people were trying to escape and the black slave-holder was just as ruthless as the white slave-holder. Contrary to their claim, these new Africans, therefore, were neither "truly" Africans nor did their "imaginary" Africa exist. This conceptual marginality to fact and estrangement to Africa's reality becomes evident when we see how some black intellectuals came back to Africa and found a different Africa than the one they had in mind, or had re-invented. Alexander Crummell's impression of Africa and its people is a good example here:

Africa is the victim of her heterogeneous idolatries. Africa is wasting away beneath the accretions of moral and civil miseries. Darkness covers the land and gross darkness the people. Great social evils

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9 One day, when I was a kid, two strangers, a mother and daughter, appeared at my grand father's house. As it turned out, the mother and her family were once my great grandfather's slave. After the abolition of slavery she left looking for a new free life. But after years of wondering around she came back home, the only home she had, and begged my grandfather to take her in. As a kid, it was fascinating to me to see a “slave”, in flesh and blood, whom I heard so much about. Where I grew up, they were called “Garba,” a name that carries the same meaning as “slave.” They were characterized as subhuman, beings who lack “Namummaa” - humanity. In the Oromo language, the concept “Garba” stands in contrast to “Dhala Namaa” or simply “Nama,” where the latter means “Children of Men” or simply “Men” (Nama stands for both sexes).

That's why nothing about these women fit into my “Garba” imagination (except their darker skin colour relative to the lighter skinned Dhala Namaa.) I thought slaves were different sorts of humans. I had known someone from my neighborhood who people say belonged to a slave family; again, other than his darker complexion, there was nothing that could satisfy my curiosity, my wild imagination. That's why he was never the embodiment of a slave for me. Be that as it may, when I saw the woman and her daughter, I tried to find out where they have been and why they came back. I never found out anything, but looking back, I can't help but think that they were not able to fit anywhere, couldn't be treated as equals and lead a “free” life. Once a slave, they were outcast as such – no home, no land, no property, no family, nothing. There was no economic or social system that would accommodate them. The mother died shortly, but the daughter lived with my grandfather, served him for years, and boys in the neighborhood used her as a sex toy; in secret of course! Who would admit sleeping with a slave! She had a baby from one of my cousins, for which he was insulted and laughed at. Naturally, he denied it and left the baby without a father. I remember how little sympathy she received when her baby died. The child was never treated equal with the other children and no wonder she was short lived (I should add that child death rate was very low at this time; the child's death was not just a bad luck). She left shortly afterwards. I have no idea where she went and I haven't heard about her in over twenty years. She was a slave; who cared!

universally prevail. ... Licentiousness abounds everywhere. Moloch rules and reigns throughout the whole continent, and by the ordeal of Sassywood, Fetiches, human sacrifices and devil worship, is devouring men, women and children (Alexander Crummell, quoted in Appiah, 1992: 23).

In sum, the very 'African' identity was built upon black skin, towards re-building a free black race (we can call this *denegrification*) and an independent African space and place in the world (or simply Africanization). Africanity, therefore, is nothing more than the black man's cry for the recognition of his skin, or himself in his skin. As Appiah puts it, "consequently, since the body is the bedrock on which the social order is founded, the body is always in view and on view. As such, it invites a gaze, a gaze of difference, a gaze of differentiation..." (Appiah, 2003: 457). The black man turns black under the gaze of the white man. The black man turns to a black object under the scrutiny of the white subject. He turns African under the alienation and externalization of Europe.

Similarly, Kadiatu Kanneh notes, "Blackness becomes a concept of excruciating visibility with the suffocation of all other differentiation beneath itself. If there is no place to position the self within this discourse, the result is a form of self-annihilation that, beginning in the mirror of White society, becomes a conscious and then an internalised unconscious activity" (Kanneh, 1998: 166.) In short, the black man ends up asking to be black, demanding respect and recognition for his blackness. Appiah summarizes this point well:

An African-American after the Black Power movement takes the old script of self-hatred, the script in which he or she is a nigger, and works, in community with others, to construct a series of positive black life scripts. In these life scripts, being a Negro is recorded as being black; and this requires, among other things, refusing to assimilate to white norms of speech and behaviour. And if one is to be black in a society that is racist then one has constantly to deal with assaults on one's dignity. In this context, insisting on the right to live a dignified life will not be enough. It will not even be enough to require that one be treated with equal dignity despite being black; for that will require a concession that being black counts naturally or to some degree against one's dignity. And so one will end up asking to be respected as a black (Appiah, 2003: 450.)

It is this color-centered descriptive and normative discourse that underlies African identity and Africanism. It led Fanon to cry out his final prayer: "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (Fanon, 1967: 232). For a man whose reality is reduced to an appearance, for a corporealized subject, what else is left of him but a body?

Slavery played a crucial role in creating distorted "African" identity for black subjects outside of

Africa. Likewise, colonialism played an equally important role in importing and establishing this identity among continental Africans. To bluntly put it, colonialism brought *home* an African identity, loading it with ~~–~~“strange” images and conceptions. To make matters worse, it was presented in relation to foreign yet ~~–~~“ideal” Europe. The African, therefore, came to see himself in light of European image of Africa and in relation to European image of Europe. What else has Africanism been but the historicity of this unfortunate encounter? What else is an African identity today, but the alleged Otherness of the white European?

More importantly, the African became the subject he is as a result of this alterity. It was the beginning of the consciousness of ~~–~~“what is truly” “Same” and “Other”. Before the arrival of the white colonizer, Africans used to interact and differentiate between themselves as Same and Other. But, when we look at the historical background of today's African identity it was the white man who became the ~~–~~“ideal” Other, through which the black man discovered ~~–~~“true” Sameness (one black race) and Otherness (black and white races). As Fanon observed, ~~–~~“The arrival of the white man in Madagascar shattered not only its horizons but its psychological mechanisms. As everyone has pointed out, *alterity* for the black man is *not* the black but the *white man*” (Fanon, 1967: 97; Italics added). Why and how so? What makes the white man any different to a certain black man or society as compared to some an-other, equally strange black man or society? To the Oromo society of Ethiopia, for example, how does the Yoruba of Nigeria or the Kikuyu of Kenya any different from some other society in Europe or Asia or the Middle East? What do black societies specifically share in common – culture, tradition, language, history, etc – that they don't share with white societies? In short, what does 'Africanism' presume as a common ground for 'Sameness' of peoples and subjects of the continent, internally, and as a difference ground for 'Otherness' with other peoples and subjects, externally?

In Oromo identity conceptual paradigm there is a concept called “Sidama”. Crudely seen Sidama, I understand, refers to an identity that is not an Oromo; i.e. the Other. The Sidama is a society that has been living alongside (territorially) the Oromo for centuries, and I have come to believe that, the Oromo had long history of contact with the Sidama more than any other society. Hence, anyone who is not only different but also stands against the interest of Oromo is called Sidama, so much so that when the Amhara people, under the leadership of Menelik II (the man who defeated the Italian colonial invader in 1896 and made Ethiopia the only uncolonized ~~–~~“nation” in Africa) invaded the Oromo Fatherland (Oromia) they were referred to as Sidama, the enemy, the Other. On the other hand, the Amhara also identified the Oromo as the Other; ironically still, as the inferior Other. The Amhara, until very recently, called the Oromo ~~–~~“Galla” - meaning the savage, barbaric, pagan. It is

easy to notice the semblance between –Galla” and –Negro”.

Today there are many Oromo intellectuals fighting this Amhara socio-political hegemony (albeit historicist in form) as much as there are some Amhara hegemonists who are still trying to keep the Oromo where they belong. As I write this thesis, there is an ongoing Oromo uprising all over the Oromia Regional State, which, more than anything, is the result of this inherited and sustained socio-economic and political-ideological bi-polarity. Needless to say, this polarity is not the result of the white man's systematic manipulation and brainwashing. The polarity not only dates back to pre-colonialism but also that Ethiopia was not colonized (except for an Italian –occupation” that lasted for five years) for the white man to take the blame. If the Oromo and the Amhara in today's Ethiopia<sup>10</sup> are bi-polar, standing in 'Same and Other' dialectic, where is the 'Sameness' that 'Africanism' presupposes or entails to exist between all peoples of Africa? How can we create an African collective unit even when we don't have it in parts?

As I mentioned earlier, the polarity between two (Oromo and Sidama/Amhara) societies in Ethiopia, a polarity that I believe might go back centuries, was not based on the color-factor. What makes the polarity between contemporary African and white<sup>11</sup> society, therefore, comes down to *color* and its conceptualization and manifestation as *blackness*. In this sense, Africanism is nothing more than 'color-polarity,' where all aspects of human and material, physical and psychological, cultural and spiritual dialectics are thrown behind the masks of color. Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* is an excellent portrayal of this dialectics, where blackness serves as the skin of Africanism, and Africanism as the mask of (anti/counter)Westernism.

### **1.3 Black Person, Black People, Black Race**

*... a few months of his discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in*

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10 I don't believe that this bi-polarity is restricted only to Ethiopia (even within Ethiopia itself, bi-polarity is not Oromo-Amhara only). Given the history of pre- and post-colonial ethnic, cultural, economic, and religious wars and conflicts between different societies of several African nations, I believe that African peoples have more polarity internally than they have with the white people (unless we blame the white man for everything that happened, happens and will happen in Africa, which we usually do.)

11 Notice that –black skin” stands primarily, as the result of the historical black-white encounter, in dialectic with –white skin.” In essence, however insignificant and implicit it might be, blackness is the making of black subject (people) in light of white skin only. As a result, blackness doesn't carry much water in relation to the yellow or red skin, as it does in relation to the white. To the contrary, there exists a sense of –brotherhood” with –colored” races, some sense of –Sameness” in the face of the white man. This is due to the white man's groupings of –colored” races as the –Others”. This implies, not only is black colour –truly” black only in relation to white, but also that blackness has no comport outside –whiteness.” Unfortunately, whiteness is neither as –objective” as blackness came to be, nor does it define the white man's world view in itself. For all I can deduce, the white man doesn't look at the black man to identify his place, but looks at the black man to identify the black man's place itself. To the contrary, the black man looks at the white man to identify his own place and looks at himself to identify the white man's place in himself. The white man assumes –human” as his essence while the black man assumes –black human” as his. Whichever way we look at it, therefore, –whiteness” is the subject and the object of blackness. In the end, the black man ends up asking *to be black*, and by extension, asking the white man *to be white*.

*body, soul and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed; my intellect languished; the disposition to read departed; the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 212)

Analyzing the epistemic archaeology we see that black [African] identity has primarily been grounded in European conception of *black people*, not a black subject. For all the black man was or has become, he was or has become in light of this Western imaging. As such, there exists a split in black identity, a polarity between self-image and other-image. Who is this man, split between self and other? Homi K. Bhabha, in his Forward to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967 says representative figure of such dual personality, ~~is~~ the image of post-Enlightenment man tethered to, *not* confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being” (Bhabha, 1967: xiv.) This splitting of being ~~turns~~ on the idea of Man 'as his alienated image', no Self and Other but the 'Otherness' of self and inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity” (ibid: xiv-xv).

Colonialism ~~robbed~~” the black man of his identity (ethnic, cultural, historical, etc) and replaced it with a strange new one. The new black man's identity, being, soul, in the words of Fanon, ~~is~~ the white man's artefact” (Fanon, 1967: 16). He divides himself, one element, into two. He ceases being black [Negro] and becomes black [African]. But these seemingly two beings are One. His very Self has "self" and "other", where ~~its~~ split representations stage that division of 'body' and 'soul' which enacts the artifice of 'identity'; a division which cuts across the fragile skin - black and white - of individual and social authority” (Bhabha, 1967: xv). It is in this sense that colonization split the black man into skin and soul, left him divided, left him singular dialectic. Blackness was called on to being in relation to whiteness. This calling to being stood on a split ground, between two spaces, stretched over two polarities, ~~the~~ tethered shadow of deferral and displacement. It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness – the White man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body” (ibid: xv-xvi). From this antagonistic space the black man invents his identity, ~~the~~ *production* of an 'image' of identity and the *transformation* of the subject in assuming that image. The demand of identification – that is, to be *for* an Other – entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of Otherness. Identification... is always the *return* of an image of identity which bears the mark of splitting in the 'Other' place *from which it comes*” (ibid: xvi; emphasis added).

Africanism, as valorization and re-presentation of ~~the~~ "true" African image, is empty and meaningless outside of and excluded from the white man and this history of dialectics. Yet, trapped in this white image, albeit negating it, blackness struggles to disentangle itself from whiteness. Homi Bhabha illustrates: "There is a binary, two-part, identities function in a kind of narcissistic reflection of the One in the other... For identification, identity is never an *a priori*, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an 'image' of totality" (ibid: xvii-xviii.) This problematic becomes evident when we see, as noted earlier, the ambivalence and enigma of creating an authentic image of Africa and black personality. "For the image – as a point of identification – marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split - it makes *present* something that is *absent* – and temporally deferred - it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition" (ibid: xvii). This is because identity (African in particular) is not a claim to what or who one really is. The quest for African identity is rather the result of displacement and alienation. In creating the self one creates the other. In other words, before and in order to assume an African identity, the African must see himself facing the other, from whom he differentiates himself. In looking at the white man, he sees himself as negative, sees his wronged self. He looks at the other and looks at himself in this other, as a self withdrawal from other and a self withdrawing out of the other. "The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence and by that same token a metonym; a sign of its absence and loss. It is ... [an] edge of meaning and being, ... [a] shifting boundary of otherness within identity..." (ibid: xvii-xviii).

The African is caught in the paradox of being-in-himself and being-in-the-Other. In the words of Fanon, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon, 1967: 110). The black man was not black but only a man (a man of ethnic, cultural, or even racial identity) before the encounter. Whoever he became after this encounter, it was never merely "a ~~a~~ Myself, then the Other is never simply an It-self, a font of identity, truth, or misrecognition" (Bhabha, 1967: xviii). His new identity was to be to be determined by his relation to the white man. His own image became dependent on the white man's image of him; his episteme became a reaction to Western episteme. "After all ..., it will be understood that the first impulse of the black man is to say no to those who attempt to build a definition of him" (Fanon, 1967: 36). Most importantly, Africanism became an epistemic trend of defying or resisting Western episteme. As Fanon explains it:

This culturally familiar consciousness, this necessary negation of identity, necessitates an inverse, requires a new African that confronts the other, who recognizes himself in this otherness, who recognizes the entire African society as the new race opposed to the European invented black race. It

is because he wants to emphasize *the rupture* that has *now* occurred. He is incarnating a *new type of man* that he imposes on *his associates and his family* (Fanon, 1967: 36; emphasis added)

This —~~new~~ type of man” is the man the black intellectual claims to be, an identity that he imposes on his ethnic group, nation, Africa, and the black people in general. The rupture has occurred, a rupture that splits the Negro from the true black man. The new black man occupies this void space, fill up this rupture, "the marginal space" of Mudimbe, the "dis-located" realm of Kwame Appiah. This new creation is one of (if not the only one) the successes of European slavery and colonialism. It was the creation of a man who is not aware of *his place* in the world; a man who questions his place in the world. He is preoccupied with questions, like: who am I – who is this black man? What makes me the black man I am? Where and how do I fit into this world? He is alien to himself, stranger to the society, a cast-away in the world. He turns to the white man for an answer. Colonization achieved its natural goal: the creation of a subordinate man, or worse, a thing-man. He demands freedom and liberty – to decolonize himself. He needs to become someone other than he is. In the words of Fanon, he attempts to substitute ~~one~~ ~~species~~” of mankind [European creation] by others [African creation]” (Fanon, 1964: 1). This replacement needs to be ~~un~~conditional, absolute, total, and seamless” (ibid). Anything short of this primordial metamorphosis is unacceptable. What sort of man is borne out of the subordinate? What is this primordial metamorphosis? What does the colonized man desire, clamor for, demand to make of himself? In short, what does the colonized man take himself to be and what does he aspires to become? Fanon says, ~~The~~ ~~thing~~” colonized *becomes a man* through the very process of liberation” (ibid: 2). This liberation is a recognition, a blessing. He wants to be recognized as man by the white man. But why? Appiah addresses this ambivalence when he says:

It is, among other things, my being, say, an African-American that shapes the authentic self that I seek to express. And it is, in part, because I seek to express my self that I seek recognition of an African-American identity. This is the fact that makes problems; for recognition as an African-American means social acknowledgement of that collective identity, which requires not just recognizing its existence but actually demonstrating respect for it. If, in understanding myself as African-American, I see myself as resisting white norms, mainstream American conventions, the racism (and, perhaps, the materialism or the individualism) of white culture<sup>6</sup>, why should I at the same time seek recognition from these white others? (Appiah, 2003: 447-448.)

Why does the black man want, indeed, the white man's recognition? On the one hand, the black man contends that the white man is the very dehumanizer of his being. On the other, he needs the same man's validation or humanization to be. He wants to be free of the white man, but he demands

the white man to set him free. This vicious narcissism has come to shape the black man's self-image. Such is the outcome of colonization; such is the black man who is truly the artifact of the white man. For Mudimbe, colonization is the creation of “marginal societies, cultures, and human beings” (Mudimbe, 1988: 17). Marginality being an intermediate space between what is African and what is European, his argument suggests that colonization debased Africans' “true African place and space” and put them in a different version of Africa, a “false” Africa, or simply, an “invented” Africa. This “invented” Africa is placed in between paradigmatic dialectics, thrown into a void in-between space, somewhere between traditional and modern, oral and written, barbaric and civilized, etc. In Mudimbe's words, “this marginal space has been a great problem since the beginning of the colonizing experience; rather than being a step in the imagined “evolutionary process,” it has been the locus of *paradoxes* that called into question the modalities and implications of modernization in Africa” (ibid: 18; emphasis added). These paradoxes, in our context, include individual versus society; society versus race. In black identity creation, there seems to be a blur of boundary between individual and society; society and race. With a single leap, the black intellectual assumes societal and racial identity. Without having an individual identity he jumps to a collective identity; without building societal identity he creates racial identity. What does this mean?

One, the implication of this ideological scapegoat is apparent when we see the resulting black intellectual tradition, which has been built, implicitly or explicitly, upon this collectivization (Africanization) of black subjects. As such, “Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts; narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories” (Appiah, 2003: 449). The black intellectual provides these scripts to his society and black race in general, but claims the vice versa. He presumes that if one is black one is destined to behave and act in a black way, but he doesn't know what this black way is. From his forced way of behaving and acting under subjugation, he invented “scripts” which he prescribes to all black subjects, across time and space. This is the paradox of black identity. Inheriting the tradition of speaking about Africa from the other side, the African intellectual today similarly speaks of Africa as if he has no contact with it, a tradition of speaking from a lost ground, from marginal space.

Two, there was no point in claiming this or that ethnic and cultural identity in Africa, since these were meaningless to the white man, who conceived Africa not in parts but as a unit. In other words, Africanity made sense to the white man, only, when it implies skin color, without which there was barely anything left to re-present as African. So they used their skin color to re-claim an identity that the European understands, at the cost of their own *self-misunderstanding*. This tradition is evident today in African philosophy, where philosophy (whatever it stands for) of one individual or

ethnic group is boldly referred to as African, presented as representative of the entire continent. In addition, the African knowledge production has been for the consumption of the white man, the only man the black man is interested in to convince. In the intellectual's mind the white man wouldn't recognize him if he identifies himself with a certain ethnic group or society. If the black intellectual fails to present himself accordingly, he would be ignored and left unrecognized by the white man, which is nothing short of an intellectual death.

Three, "African" represents millions of black people on the continent and outside, which is instrumental for the black intellectual's hidden mission – lose himself in its vastness. This gives him the illusion that the European would think of him as representative of the entire black 'race' and would give his 'intellectualism' some weight. It is a means of challenging the alleged hegemony of the white man by lining up the people behind him. He neither has any individuality nor does his individuality have any power against the white man.

As a result, first, the black intellectual imagines Africa in light of Europe. His representation of Africa must match the mighty Europe, no matter what Africa remains to be. In this sense, African epistemic locus is always an Africanized Western episteme. Two, it is the ego of the black intellectual that is at issue rather than the truth about Africa. Whenever Africa seems to undermine his self-presentation in the face of Europe, he denounces it, or tries to replace it, or tries to validate it; whenever it seems to help uplift his ego, he worships and preaches it almost dogmatically. The African intellectual is more European than African, though admitting this, for many, would be an ideological, political, and academic suicide. As such, the celebration of 'Africanity' is nothing more than the rage and outcry of the black intellectual, who, at all costs and by whatever means, has to have his revenge against Europe that enslaved and colonized him. As Mudimbe argued, –since its inception Africanism has been producing its own motives as well as its objects” (Mudimbe, 1988: 11). Its motives have been all about uplifting the ego of the Africanist intellectual, whereas Africa has been the object, and naturally, Europe the subject. And the intellectual stands externalized, in his marginal in-between space, losing sight of both worlds, lost to both worlds, in what Fanon calls a –zone of nonbeing” (Fanon, 1967: 10).

In sum, black person, black people, black race merge together in blackness. No matter what sort of identity the black man claims, he remains the white man's collectivized object. To shed some light on this problem, therefore, I will briefly overview how the black man struggled and continues to struggle with this objectification, in the name of search for authenticity and demand for freedom.

## 1.4 Black Consciousness, Black Personality, Negrotude, Afrotude

*I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meanings of those rude, and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle, so that I neither saw or heard as those without [outside] might see and hear. They told a tale which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones, loud, long and deep, breathing the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirits, and filled my heart with ineffable sadness. The mere recurrence, even now, afflicts my spirit, and while I am writing these lines, my tears are falling. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conceptions of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds.*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 96-97 )

Needless to say, yet, that this “invented” [both European and African] Africa, has come to represent the “actual” Africa of our intellectual practice. On the outset, we either can't tell the difference or the difference seems irrelevant. We have a good reason to confuse the two since the two Africans have one thing in common: *blackness*. In truth, African identity is nothing more than the self-objectification of the black man. Blackness is the very thing that makes him the very subject he is while this very blackness continues to make him an object – both in his own and in the white man's eyes. Fanon provides a good narrative to this when he describes his encounter with a white child:

"Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*, ... Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other . . . and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea .... (Fanon, 1967: 112).

Though the Negro doesn't exist in fact, it nonetheless exists in the psyche of both black and white subjects. Fanon tells us that it exists in three forms: its white image (the child's image of Fanon), the black image of this white image (how Fanon saw himself as in the child) and the black itself (Fanon's image of himself). The black self is a divided self. Yet, this image is not merely Fanon's individual image; rather it is the image of all black subjects, of all black selves. Fanon explains the

extent of this merged one-and-many black self:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin".

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, *I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object*. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that splattered my whole body with black blood? (Fanon, 1967: 112).

In addition to the merged one-to-many and many-to-one, this dislocation of space, objectification of being, an amputation of self, throws the black intellectual back into that alien space, strange place, from where he looks at himself through a third eye, in the third person. Whenever the black man meets the white he becomes three objectified beings, a Trinity of Being, occupying one body and struggling for cohabitation and dominance. As Fanon puts it:

And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a *third-person consciousness* (Fanon, 1967: 110-111.)

This internally divided self, this polarity between the soul demanded a justification, an explanation. The black subject set out for the rediscovery of Africa and black personality, that has led to the global intellectual movement of black existential culture. There was a need for re-search, re-presentation and re-evaluation. The black subject underwent a radical image reconstruction. Blackness and Africanism became the new ways of being and thinking. In the words of Kadiatu Kanneh;

Exploring *'African-ness'* from the late eighteenth century to the present, from the historical moment when ideas and productions of Africa were fomenting in lasting, violent and traumatic ways, reveals the peculiar tensions and fantasies of the modern world. *'Africa'*, in this enduring historical period, has never been a mere geographical location or variety of cultures and languages. The immense textual and political energies that have produced *'Africa'* as knowledge and meaning have also, inextricably, formed the discourses of race, sexuality, culture and time that dominate contemporary thought. The construction of identity in the twentieth century cannot be extricated from the overt and

implicit constructions of race that emerge from Africa's metaphoric and troubled space (Kanneh, 1998: 192).

This newly re-invented Africa was loaded with historical, existential and essential mythical and ideological narratives. It becomes a "black hole" that annihilates the white hegemony, a "black mirage" that provides the black man with true self-image. The black subject underwent physical and psychological, conceptual and political, cultural and historical metamorphosis. Black consciousness and Negritude replaced Negrotude [Negrohood] and colonial statehood. In the words of Kanneh,

What colonial histories show is that, however much we can deconstruct concepts such as race, nation and culture, reveal their instabilities and illogical natures, they still operate actively to oppress groups of people and materially, psychologically and violently affect their lives. Has a recognisable, separate and valid history and identity been created, and does this positively define Black people? From which predicates can we begin? (ibid: 142).

That is the question. Where do we begin? What does Africa and Africanism entail? How can we escape this vicious circle? How can one become a black person who is not Negro? The black man of slavery and colonialism, the old black, in the words of Appiah, "passed" as Negro. If so, what does the new black man of the new Africanism pass for? In short, who could the new black man be? Fanon addresses this ambivalence when he says:

In all truth, in all truth I tell you, my shoulders slipped out of the framework of the world, my feet could no longer feel the touch of the ground. Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned. Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man. Between the white man and me the connection was irrevocably one of transcendence (Fanon, 1967: 138).

Yet, Fanon is a good example for the black intellectual's subtle desire to escape his skin, to become something more than a black man, to become something more than an African. But how do I transcend when I am inescapably chained to my body? How can I transcend the white man when I am chained to him with everything I am, with my body? Fanon was aware of the irrationality of such polarity: "It was hate; I was hated, despised, detested, not by the neighbor across the street or my cousin on my mother's side, but by an entire race. I was up against something unreasoned" (ibid: 118). In the world where the white slave-owner and white colonizer continue to exist, with his supremacy intact, with his prejudice and despise unwavering, the black man is up against this

“unreasonable” state of consciousness, an irrational that fosters and sustains his inferiority, from where he continues to view, to see, to think, to speak.

In the end, we find two groups of geographies, histories, cultures, etc., entangled and split, same and other, conforming and diverging. This is not merely a black-white dialectic problem. As far as African studies are concerned, this problem lies in the black-Same conceptualization itself. As Fanon observes, blacks outside Africa seemed to have had a different notion of "African" for themselves and for the African proper, the Negro, the native of Africa. For the West Indian black, Fanon argues, blackness represent two distinct identities. “The West Indian was a black man, but the Negro was in Africa” and the West Indian only proclaims himself a Negro “in his relations with a white man” (Fanon, 1964: 21). But after 1945, the West Indian proclaimed himself a full Negro, a proud Negro, by undergoing “a metamorphosis of his body” (ibid: 24). With this metamorphosis completed, like his ancestor, the West Indian “discovered himself to be a transplanted son of slaves; he felt the vibration of Africa in the very depth of his body and aspired only to one thing: to plunge into the great “black hole.” It thus seems that the West Indian, after the great white error, is now living in the *great black mirage*” (ibid: 27).

As a result, as I will show in the following chapters, the African philosopher approaches philosophy from this triple-personality point of view, equally torn into three, unable to choose, unable to decide, unable to find the 'one' place to stand on, the 'one' person to stand with, the 'one' mind to rely on. He stands with one foot in the West and one foot in Africa. He can't choose either. He can't make one world; he can't make two either. Yet he must choose one. The pressure is on. Kanneh explains this as the following:

My point here, then, is that African thought (from Blyden to Senghor; through Kagamé, Mbiti, and Idowu; to Irele, Hountondji, Bodunrin, Oruka, and Wiredu), whether nativist or anti-nativist, has always focused not on *difference* from the West but on *sameness* with the West. It is precisely because African intellectuals accept and identify so much with European thinking that they have created African versions of Western things (Kanneh, 1998: 471).

The following expression by Chinua Achebe supports Kanneh's “European version or reflection of Africa” where the African place, at one and the same time, becomes elusive but concretely there nonetheless:

I am an Ibo writer, because it is my basic culture; Nigerian, African and a writer... no, *black first*,

*then a writer*. Each of these identities does call for a certain kind of commitment on my part. I must see *what it is to be black* and this means being sufficiently intelligent enough to know how the world is moving and how the black people fare in the world. *This is what it means to be black – or an African – the same*. What does Africa mean to the world? When you see an African what does *it mean to a white man*? (Chinua Achebe, quoted in Appiah, 1992: 73; italics added).

What else is “African” except what it means to the white man? It seems to me that the African is invisible unless he is seen by the white. Being an African is empty unless it is recognized by the white. As long as the black man remains under this objectifying conceptual and bodily gaze, he would never become a subject, be visible, be a man. As Appiah puts it, “They [African writers] are Asante, Yoruba, Kikuyu, but what does this now mean? They are Ghanian, Nigerian, Kenyan, but does this mean anything? They are black, and what is the worth of the black person?” (Appiah, 1992: 76). What is his worth indeed? This is a difficult question to answer. For now, for our purpose here, we can conclude this: being an African is to be standing somewhere in-between Europe and Africa. The African needs to be an African to worth anything; he also needs to be in Europe where his worth is determined. In the words of Fanon, “The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man” (Fanon, 1967: 17).

## Chapter Two: Africa and Philosophy

*In its isolation, seclusion, and self-reliant independence, Col. Lloyd's plantation resembles what the baronial domains were during the middle ages in Europe. Grim, cold, and unapproachable by all genial influences from communities without, there it stands; full three hundred years behind the age, in all that relates to humanity and morals. [...] This, however, is not the only view that the place presents. Civilization is shut out, but nature cannot be. Though separated from the rest of the world; though public opinion, as I have said, seldom gets a chance to penetrate its dark domain; though the whole place is stamped with its own peculiar, ironlike individuality; and though crimes, highhanded and atrocious, may there be committed, with almost as much impunity as upon the deck of a pirate ship—it is, nevertheless, altogether, to outward seeming, a most strikingly interesting place, full of life, activity, and spirit; and presents a very favorable contrast to the indolent monotony and languor of Tuckahoe. Keen as was my regret and great as was my sorrow at leaving the latter, I was not long in adapting myself to this, my new home. A man's troubles are always half disposed of, when he finds endurance his only remedy. I found myself here; there was no getting away; and what remained for me, but to make the best of it?*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 62-63)

Our attempt to understand what “African” means, beyond a geographical designation, has led us astray, or at least left us with more confusion than clarity. Among others, V. Mudimbe, Kwame Appiah and Paulin Hountondji are pioneers in deconstruction of African philosophy, especially in clearing this confusion.

Paulin Hountondji provides a thorough critic of the “Africanity” concept and the role it plays in African philosophical discourse. In his book *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, he attempts to dissolve (he calls it demystify) the very concept and lay it bare for its true meaning. He argues,

There was, therefore, need to start by *demystifying* Africanity, by reducing it to a *fact* – simply the fact and, in itself, perfectly neutral, of belonging to Africa – by removing the mystic halo of values arbitrarily grafted upon this fact by ideologists of African identity. There was need, in order to deal with the complexity of [our] history, to bring back the scene of that history to its original simplicity; in order to deal with the richness of African traditions, there was need to *impoverish* resolutely the concept of Africa, to *free* it from all connotations, ethical, religious, philosophical, political, etc., loaded on it by a long anthropological tradition, the most evident of which was to close the horizon, to close history prematurely (Hountondji 1987; quoted in Hountondji, 1996: xiii.)

To do so, he starts, in the preface to the second edition, by asking the question: “what is it to be an African? Is it belonging to a race, in this case the black race, if we decide to restrict ourselves to black Africa? Should one, to be an African, share a common culture and adhere to the value system or systems conveyed by this culture? Must one profess a given religious or political credo?” (ibid: x) and answering in the negative. He argues that we must “reject any definition of an African that would, by implication, restrict or confine [the African] in a conceptual, ideological, religious, or political stranglehold and reinforce the illusory belief that some inexorable fate weighs him or her down forever” (ibid). Yet, responding to one of his critics on his reduction of Africanness to a fact, an event, a belonging, (his critic claims that Africa is a political and cultural reality), he writes, “The question is disturbing as long as we continue to confuse *concept* and *reality*. As if the concept of dog could bark!” (ibid: xi; emphasis added). For me, his confusion doesn't only lie in his shallow distinction between “concept” and “reality.” After all, the *reality* of barking is inherently constituted in the *concept* of a dog, since “conceptualizing” a dog includes [one of] the reality of dogness – barking. Unfortunately, only in the very next paragraph, he seems to contradict himself when he contends, “I have no difficulty admitting that the *concept* of Africa is *first of all a geographical* concept in that it designates a continent. Second, it *lends itself to other determinations* as a political, cultural, or even anthropological and religious concept, among a thousand other possible determinations” (ibid). The main dilemma that he raises and upon which his entire thesis hangs is whether one can ignore these determinations and conceive of Africa per se, which he fails to do. The question remains, how can one, once fated to these “determinations,” escape and become “simply African” that he seems to suggest? The only way out for Hountondji was to annihilate the concept “African” itself. But, of course, this is nothing short of a suicide (literally and figuratively.)

Kwame Appiah also recognizes this “identity” problem in African discourse, when he suggests, “If an African identity is to empower us, so it seems to me, what is required is not so much that we throw out falsehood but that we acknowledge first of all that race and history and metaphysics do not enforce an identity: that we can choose, within broad limits set by ecological, political, and economic realities what it will mean to be African in the coming years” (Appiah, 1992: 176). Appiah, like Hountondji, suggests that we can “choose” an African identity that is “free” from “racial, historical, and metaphysical” determinations. But, what do “ecological, political, and economic realities” imply as factors of choice of identity? Isn't the very “African” identity Appiah is trying to dismantle *already* built upon and built into the former factors, which merely lend themselves to the latter? Or simply, how can we tell between “true” and “false” African identity?

Kwame Appiah (ibid: 178) identifies three implicit factors that might illuminate this enigma. First, African identity, like all identities, institutionalized before anyone has permanently fixed a single meaning on it, is complex and multiple and grows out of Africa's history of changing responses to economic, political, and cultural forces, and almost always stand in opposition to other identities, European in particular. In short, if Appiah is right, "African" is grounded in "Blackness" versus "whiteness", since "color" stands as the major "dialectic" factor between the two identities. Within African philosophical discourse we can call this *Africanizing philosophy*. Second, identity flourishes despite mis-recognition in its origin, despite its root in myths (African image of Africa – particularly Negritude and Afrocentrism) and lies (European image of Africa). These myths and lies transform themselves into political and ideological formats when they lose critical narratives. In such a case, "African" is sustained by "Africanism" versus "Westernism". We can call this *philosophizing Africanity*. Finally, and as a consequence, there isn't much room for rationale in the construction of African identity as opposed to its study and management. In other words, the concept "African" became an integral part of conceptual and practical discourse, without any rationale to ground and sustain it.

In sum, African philosophy not only inherited this ambivalent and uncritical notion of "Africa" but also uses it as a legitimate foundation of place and space. This problem has been recognized by Mudimbe (his critic of *invented Africa*), Appiah himself (his critic of *alterity* of traditional Africa), Hountondji (his critic of *ethnophilosophy*), and Oruka (his critic of *otherness* of Africa). This is to say, to some African philosophers some element of "Africanity" must accompany, reflect, characterize and represent their "philosophy," on the one hand, and on the other, some form of "philosophy" must accompany, reflect, characterize and represent their "Africanity." As a result, there is always a question of "identity" in their philosophy and a question of "philosophy" in their identity. In the following topics, I will try to address the problematic of "identity" and "philosophy," in light of Africanizing philosophy and philosophizing Africanity in the short history of contemporary African philosophy.

## **2.1 Is Philosophy African? Identity of Philosophy in Africa**

*I was more than that, and she felt me to be more than that. I could talk and sing; I could laugh and weep; I could reason and remember; I could love and hate. I was human, and she, dear lady, knew and felt me to be so. How could she, then, treat me as a brute, without a mighty struggle with all the noble powers of her own soul.*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 147-148)

Today, as I will show later, the existence of African philosophy is undoubtedly established. For the moment, let's inquire into the very identity of philosophy: is philosophy borrowed and inherited or is it authentically African? According to Mudimbe, philosophical discourses have not only socio-historical origin but also epistemological contexts" (Mudimbe, 1988: 9). In our case, asking whether philosophy is African or not is to ask whether it has always been part and parcel of African socio-historicity (African life-world) and epistemological locus (form, content and style of African knowledge production and presentation). For Mudimbe, though the "Africanity" of philosophy is undeniable its "authenticity" is not. Because, he says, all social and human sciences, including philosophy, can really be understood only in the context of their epistemological region of possibility. The histories of these sciences as well as their trends, their truths as well as their experiences, being driven from a given space [European], speak from it and, primarily about it" (ibid: 31). He establishes that philosophy, as it is practiced in Africa, is borrowed from and imposed and inherited as Western episteme. He further observes, "until now, Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order. Even in the most explicitly "Afrocentric" description, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order" (ibid: 11). The question of identity of African philosophy arises from this belief that 'philosophy' is Western cultures' (systematic, critical, normative and rational) self-reflective discourse produced, developed and exercised from and within this Western perspective and experience. If so, at least explicitly, it cannot be considered to be "African" and cannot be applied (if it applies at all!) to African cultures, histories and epistemological orders without qualification and adjustment. That's why, Mudimbe's thesis goes, adopting [Western] philosophy as African not only distorts authentic African socio-historicity and epistemology, but also leads to further marginalization or destruction African philosophy. He warns us that in speaking of African philosophy, therefore, we have to look into what makes African philosophy possible before accepting it "as commentary on revelation, or restitution, of an African experience" (ibid: 10).

From this epistemic entrapment and authenticity challenge, he asks, "Does this mean that African Weltanschauungen [life-world] and African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality?" He believes this is possible and suggests that one should try to discover or recover this authentic discourse in the "rejected forms of wisdom which are not part of the structures of political power and scientific knowledge" in Africa (ibid: 10-11). Unfortunately, he states almost regrettably, that "My own claim is that thus far the ways in which they [rejected African wisdom] have been evaluated and the means used to explain them relate to theories and methods whose constraints, rules, and systems of operation

supposed a non-African epistemological locus” (ibid). Yet, he himself not only failed to excavate this “rejected” episteme, but also remained entirely within Western episteme<sup>12</sup> in his exposition.

Paulin Hountondji (1996: 71) provides another point of view: philosophy as a *history*, not a system. Meaning, philosophy is system of knowledge production that exists as a recorded (written) history of ideas, and as such exists as a system of free discussion, of claims and counterclaims. Hence, to ask whether philosophy is African or not is to ask whether “history of ideas” exist in an African place. For him, though this history exists, it exists in a non-discursive sense. In other words, as opposed to its Western counterpart (which has explicitly inscribed history) it exists as an implicit oral history. On the outset, both Mudimbe and Hountondji agree that “philosophy is African” but disagree on perspective. For Mudimbe “Africanity” of contemporary African philosophy is not “authentic”. For Hountondji “philosophy” as African is both assertable and questionable. Assertable because it has become “African” since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Africanizing philosophy has been realized; questionable because what has been done so far largely is not philosophy proper – philosophizing Africanity has remained mystical.

Masolo's *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* (1994) primarily addresses the question: Is philosophy African? He refers to it as the "rationality debate". As we will see in chapter three, the debate takes its departing point from the old-age Western conception of African mind as pre-logical, mystical and irrational. Accordingly, African philosophy arose as a counter-claim to this view and built itself as a counter-discourse. Even so, despite what it has managed to achieve in the course of 'rationalizing' African mind – in both Africanizing philosophy and philosophizing Africanity – Masolo's analysis is witness to the fact that the problem of identity of philosophy in an African place is far from settled. To put it bluntly: how can African philosophy question (under the guise of proof) its very existence and exist at the same time?

Despite his unwavering commitment to Africa's self-determination and independence from Europe in episteme, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o rightly addresses the dilemma in “African literature” by saying,

Was it literature about Africa or about the African experience? Was it literature written by Africans? What about a non-African who wrote about Africa: did his work qualify as African literature? What if an African set his work in Greenland...were African languages the criteria?...What about French

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12 According to D.A. Masolo, Mudimbe “lamentably fails to emancipate himself from the vicious circle inherent in deconstructionist sense. In other words, he fails, in *The Invention of Africa* and elsewhere to show clearly how the “usable past” should be used by “experts” to construct an “authentic” African episteme” (Masolo, 1994: 179). Masolo adds “Mudimbe's *Invention of Africa* is almost a rewriting of Foucault's neostructuralism (as in *Power/Knowledge* and *The Order of Things*) in an African perspective” (ibid: 181).

and English, which had become African languages? What if an European wrote about Europe in an African language? (quoted in Kanneh, 1998: 36)

In sum, though I don't doubt that philosophy is part and parcel of African life-world, modern or traditional, conceptually and practically, the question of identity of philosophy in Africa arose mainly as a result of denial by some European thinkers. It is important to note that, as Masolo establishes, philosophy is to be understood in two senses<sup>13</sup>: in the ordinary sense, which refers to "some kinds of opinions and commitments to certain ideas or ways of interpreting things, to values and beliefs about the general nature of things" while in the more academic and professional sense it refers to "a commitment to an investigation rather than to any specific idea(s) or opinions" (Masolo, 1994). Accordingly, African philosophy also connotes both meanings; there are beliefs and views that Africans hold as the basis for their cultures, traditions and practices, and there are works investigating different issues and inquiries that make up contemporary African philosophical discourse. In my view, though philosophy is African in the ordinary sense, contemporary professional or academic African philosophy is of Western origin and as such stands as a borrowed (yet became an integrated and re-appropriated) system. Needless to say, African studies have borrowed other methodologies and systems besides philosophy, that have become an integral part of theoretical and practical African epistemological locus. Hence, in my view, though borrowed, today philosophy as a system of reflective thought is African as much as it is European, to which the bulk of African philosophical works to-date bear witness.

## **2.2 Is There an African Philosophy? Alternative World View, Substance, and Method**

*Even the much dreaded old master, whose merciless fiat had brought me from Tuckahoe, gradually, to my mind, parted with his terrors. Strange enough, his reverence seemed to take no particular notice of me, nor of my coming. Instead of leaping out and devouring me, he scarcely seemed conscious of my presence. The fact is, he was occupied with matters more weighty and important than either looking after or vexing me. He probably thought as little of my advent, as he would have thought of the addition of a single pig to his stock!*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 71)

When one picks up a book entitled –African philosophy,” given that one is accustomed to other philosophies, what is his/her imagination and expectation of this book? Why would anyone be interested in it? For my part, I say he/she would expect something –new.” Notwithstanding whether

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13 Lucius Outlaw provides similar 'two senses' in which 'philosophy' could be understood. What he calls [p]hilosophy refers to natural mental disposition where everyone is said to have a world view that governs one's beliefs; where as what he calls [P]hilosophy refers to the professionally or academically practiced discourse (Outlaw, 2003).

this expectation is right or wrong, without this “new” element at the back of the reader's mind, “African” philosophy is either an empty or wrong qualification. Among other things, the reader expects “different” ideas, theses, hypotheses, theories, etc. (Of course this is true for every book we read, whatever the genre, the discourse, the theme, etc.) In our case, the reader doesn't (explicitly) expect to read Plato, Confucius, “Augustine<sup>14</sup>”, Descartes, Kant, Wittgenstein, Rawls, etc., as an “African” philosophy. At least he/she expects to read these thinkers in a “new” light, in an “African” version<sup>15</sup> or context (I must say, this was my initial expectation.) This expectation might be due to; one, Africa is an unexplored epistemological jungle which harbors radical and 'original' world-views, hidden from the world and uncontaminated by the same-old western philosophy. Africa has awoken to the “modern” world and as such would bring something extraordinary, something the world lacks. Two, Africans must view the world from a different angle, due to their unique and divergent cultural and historical circumstances. Africans have been affected “differently” and would have “different” views and approaches to the world of ideas.

Given this fact, therefore, to what extent can one speak of African *philosophy*<sup>16</sup> and in what sense? Mudimbe says African philosophy is part of the larger body of knowledge on Africa called Africanism. This Africanism, since its inception, “has been producing its own motives as well as its objects, and fundamentally commenting upon its own being while systematically promoting a gnosis. From this gnosis ultimately arose both African discourses on otherness and ideologies of alterity of which Negritude, black personality, and African philosophy might be considered to be the best established present-day intellectual history of Africa” (Mudimbe, 1988: 11). In other words, Africanism, though on the outset was an attempt to discover and recover an authentic or “primordial” African epistemological order, at least since the 1970s, it implicitly became a form of an “epistemological vigilance” where much concern was given to strategies for mastering intellectual paradigms about the “path to truth,” by analyzing the “political dimensions of knowledge and determining procedures for establishing new rules in African studies” (ibid: 49).

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14 I will address the question whether Augustine is African or not in Section 2.5

15 For Peter Bodunrin, for example, “African philosophy is philosophy done by African philosophers whether it be in the area of logic, ethics or history of philosophy... Thus, if African philosophers were to engage in debates on Plato's epistemology, or on theoretical identities their works would qualify as African philosophy” (quoted in Sogolo, 1993: 2).

16 The perplexity of this question is well caught by Laleye: “Is there an African philosophy in existence today? To resolve this abruptly formulated question would thus not only be presumptuous, but also erroneous. What it postulates in the first place, is an investigation. That is to say, neither more nor less than an examination of currently accessible African thought in order to discover whether it would deserve the epithet philosophical or not. An investigation of this nature naturally supposes that its authors are not only equipped with a valid definition of what philosophy is, but also that they know how to ask questions susceptible of revealing philosophical activity to those to whom the questions are going to be put” (Laleye, 2003: 101). Laleye seems to suggest that the very question is legitimate only from European definition of philosophy, and as such asked from within this one-sided conception of philosophy.

We can note two reasons for this approach. First, authentic African epistemological order is long buried under the Western one before anyone was able to grasp it fully. This is precisely the case of Mudimbe's own work. Second, the changing social, political and material conditions of African life-world - where the Western episteme presents itself as a dialectic to African episteme - made the African episteme irrelevant and unpractical. This is the view of Marcien Towa. Therefore, as Mudimbe contends, ~~philosophy~~” was adopted as an ~~African episteme~~” with an ~~epistemological vigilance~~.” This resulted in a philosophy which despite its change of motives, change of theses about its foundation, and differences of scale in interpretations, at the core, however, ~~extends to Western epistemological territory~~” and became African only ~~by virtue of its authors and promoters~~” (ibid: 199) – this implies, respectively, what I called philosophizing Africanity and Africanizing philosophy.

Unfortunately, one would be very disappointed once familiar with ~~African philosophy~~” of the last fifty years (except those who find some consolation in Senghorian Negritude theory and its possible versions of ethnophilosophy) because some major works not only pre-occupied themselves with a counter-discourse but also remained as possible versions of European philosophy qualified with ~~African~~” context and narrative. This might disappoint us. As I pointed out above, this disappointment may be the result of our uncritical imagination of ~~Africa~~”, or because of our misconception of what ~~philosophy~~” means in Africa (since there is no ~~new and alien~~” philosophy in Africa.) But, we are still right in expecting that ~~African~~” should carry something more than a mere ~~interpretation~~”<sup>17</sup> of Western philosophy and more than a mere re-presentation of ~~European~~” invented ~~African life-world~~” (since African life-world cannot possibly be reduced to Africa's encounter and its continuing relation to Europe.)

If so, coming back to our question, ~~Is there an African philosophy?~~” let's once more start by asking what is implied by it. According to Outlaw<sup>18</sup>, African philosophy implies that ~~within \_Philosophy~~‘,

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17 Lucius Outlaw further contends, ~~the emergence of philosophy~~” in Africa and the diaspora as a post-traditional discursive enterprise bearing that name is conditioned by the historical circumstances of domination of Africans and people of African descent by ~~Europeans~~” and European descendants” (Outlaw, 1998: 30). In this sense, African philosophy is a counter-discourse. On the other, ~~it~~ presupposes unity or communality of thought, agendas and practices that supposedly underlie black experience, where ~~what~~ allows initially for this grouping of diverse intellectual endeavors of diverse persons under a single heading is... identity (in part) of the persons that are the subject-objects of the endeavors as either African or African-descended, thus sharing *socially and culturally conditioned biological characteristics, cultural traditions, and historical experiences* more or less *distinctive of the race*” (ibid; emphasis added). If Outlaw is right, this ~~conditioned~~” yet ~~shared~~” experience is of Europe and towards it, which initiated theoretical and practical abstractions of black life-world as imposed, distorted, objectified.

18 Elsewhere Wiredu refers to Lucius Outlaw's definition of African[a] philosophy as the following: ~~Africana philosophy is philosophy by and in the interests of black peoples~~. This, evidently, encompasses both African philosophy and philosophy as cultivated by all peoples of African descent in the diaspora. As philosophy is an

an enterprise assumed to be unified by ‘universal’, ‘necessary’ principles and procedures, there are *modalities and traditions* that can be distinguished by their being ‘African’” (Outlaw, 2003: 162; emphasis added). In addition to the role of culture, Outlaw also notes the fact that African philosophy has been fundamentally influenced and shaped by "black philosophy" of the diaspora. As such it is easy to see the extent of influence that black versus white ideology, that flourished via the slave-master dialectic in the West, have had on African thought system. Perhaps it is Oruka who provides a clear overview of how African philosophy could be understood, in his division of African philosophy into two<sup>19</sup> senses:

In one sense, African philosophy is explained or defined in opposition to philosophy in other continents but in particular to Western or European philosophy. It is assumed that there is a way of thinking or a conceptual framework that is *uniquely* African and which is at the same time radically un-European. So African philosophy is conceived as a body of thoughts and beliefs produced by this *unique way of thinking*. To the extent that European philosophy is known to manifest critical and rigorous analysis, and logical explanation and synthesis, African philosophy is considered to be innocent of such characteristics. It is considered to be basically *intuitive, mystical, and counter or extra rationalistic* (Odera Oruka, 2003: 141-142).

This conception of African philosophy is mainly advocated by Negritude thinkers. It asks: what makes ideas, principles, laws, etc., upon which African cultures and traditions are built unique and different from those of non-African cultures?

In the other sense, philosophy in general is viewed as a universal activity or discipline. And so its meaning (if not content) is believed to be independent of racial or regional boundaries and specialities. Philosophy is taken as a discipline that, in the strict sense, employs the method of critical, reflective, and logical inquiry. African philosophy then is not expected to be an exception to this meaning of philosophy. So the talk of a uniquely African conceptual framework or way of

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essentially collaborative enterprise, this concept should open up, in the imagination at least, vistas of cooperation between the Africans of Africa and the Africans of the diaspora. Historically, that kind of interaction has been an objective fact of blessed consequences. The most effective and influential African liberation leaders, such as Leopold Senghor, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, owed much of their inspiration, at the level of philosophy and ideology, to figures of the diaspora, such as Aime Cesaire, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and others. In the converse of this flow of influence, Nkrumah had considerable impact on the struggles of the peoples of the diaspora” (Outlaw, quoted in Wiredu, 2004: 23; emphasis added). This is why I argued in chapter one that African identity and philosophy owes much of its origin and existence to slavery and colonialism and the resultant black versus white racist ideology in the West than those of continental Africa (slaves and free men alike).

19 Godwin Sogolo similarly says that there are two broad orientations in African philosophy. –The first, which appears backward-looking, is the attempt by some contemporary philosophers in Africa to extract traditional African thought ingredients believed to be of philosophical relevance.... The second orientation is that which seeks to clothe Western philosophy in African robes, what is now referred to as the domestication of the philosophies of other lands” (Sogolo, 1993: xiv).

thinking (African mentality) with respect, at least, to the discipline of philosophy is not entertained. African philosophy is seen to exist not as a peculiarly African phenomenon (for most philosophical problems transcend cultural and racial confines), but only as a corpus of thoughts arising from the discussion and appropriation of authentic philosophical ideas by Africans or in the African context. African philosophy in this sense is considered in terms of African past, current, or potential contribution to philosophy in the strict meaning of the term (ibid: 142.)

In this second sense, African philosophy is expected to align with other (regional) philosophies with some form of 'Africanity'. It asks: what makes African thought equally philosophical as other philosophies? In the first sense described above, it is "African" that is in view rather than philosophy, and in the second sense, it is "philosophy" that is under consideration.

However, this sort of identification of African philosophy raises some questions. First, Orika implicitly takes "African" and "philosophy" for granted, or supposes that what they stand for is clear, in need of no justification or clarification. This raises the question: what is that makes a discourse "African" as opposed to "Western", "Chinese", "Indian", etc.? This is because, as Appiah puts it, "the important question for an African scholar about her involvement with Western academic philosophy are not to be settled by geography. For she will want to ask, first, if there is anything distinctive she can bring to the Western tradition from her history, in her culture, language, and her traditions and, second, what in Africa, is the teaching and writing of Western-style philosophy for?" (Appiah, 1992: 90). Appiah's view corresponds, respectively, to the problem of philosophizing Africanity and Africanizing philosophy. In short, in order for us to "qualify" a discourse as an African, we have to make its Africanity clear. If so, the question remains: How can we "Africanize" philosophy? Or better still, how can we be able to "just do" philosophy?

Second, "Africa" is the land of numerous cultures and traditions<sup>21</sup>, that are not only diverse but also divergent from one another. If so, what is our basis to assume, implicitly or explicitly, unanimous "philosophy" that would represent, even at some rudimentary level, all peoples of Africa? As Appiah acutely observes, there is no such thing as an "African" culture, tradition, history, etc.; "there are only so many traditions with their complex relationships – and as often, their lack of any

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20 Here 'just doing' philosophy is not to mean that we engage in a philosophy that has no ground, value and context; rather, it is to mean: how can one 'speak one's mind' without explicit commitment and allegiance to this or that view, idea, belief, etc., other than the ones one come to hold in life and experience?

21 Contrary to this, some hold the opinion that, despite the allusion to "the sociological diversities and therefore cultural pluralism in Africa" such "a *multiplicity of the phenomenal* does not inhibit an epistemology. We still can speak of 'African epistemology'. Such a univocal term draws from the *ontological unity* beneath the phenomenal. Therefore a cultural thematic approach, rather than a phenomenological approach may elucidate relatively similar epistemological experiences in traditional Africa. This relative similarity arises from the *metaphysical oneness of the classical African past*" (Nassem, 2003: 305; emphasis added).

relationship – to each other” (ibid: 80). He further establishes, one cannot ~~take~~ an African world for granted but to take for granted [one's] own culture – to speak freely not as an African" but as a Yoruba and a Nigerian, for example (ibid: 79). Hence, one cannot take for granted a common stock of cultural knowledge. This unqualified merging of African diversity and putting them under one cultural realm, on the one hand, and on the other, boldly naming single culture's context as ~~African~~” (in the name of ~~from an African~~” continent) has been taken by some as a trend. This in my view is quite problematic. Because the one thing almost all Africans possibly share (in some devalued sense) is colonial socio-history and its post-colonial state, which cannot justify the unity assumed in Africanism. In the words of Appiah, ~~even if... economic and technical similarities were to be found in Africa – and they aren't – they would not, even with the similarities in colonial history, justify the assumption of metaphysical or mystic unity, except on the most horrifyingly deterministic assumptions”~~ (ibid: 81). Hence, ~~African~~” can neither be taken fore-granted nor can it be tagged<sup>22</sup> at will.

Yet, at least so far as African philosophy is concerned the question of ~~alternative discourse~~” is one that we cannot afford to ignore, though addressing it has so far been less fruitful. Before Mudimbe, it was attempted by Leopold Senghor, who tried to theorize a divergent African epistemic order – something we can call *rationality of irrationality*, or to paraphrase it in Masolo's words, rationality of emotivism. However, many African thinkers have come to undermine his view as both incorrect and pro-Eurocentrist. Mudimbe himself believed in the existence of authentic African epistemic order but failed to provide one. As for myself, I am still waiting for such an alternative to come to light.

As a result, therefore, we find ourselves limited to ~~Western philosophical paradigm~~” when we talk of ~~African philosophy~~.” This also means that African philosophers have to admit that ~~philosophy as we know it and practice it today~~” is not an African origin. If it were, we would talk not of ~~philosophy~~” but some other ~~African~~” version of it, such as those of Chinese and Indian conceptions. This is the case in point where in Ethiopian philosophy two seventeenth century Ethiopian philosophers (Zera Yakob and Walda Heywat) named their discourse ~~Hatata~~.” Claude Sumner defined this *concept* as ~~Treatise~~,” and as a result called the works of the two thinkers

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22 However, there is an exception to this problem. ~~African~~” can be used to qualify philosophy when and if the work so titled ~~African philosophy~~” is presented as ~~history~~” containing several ~~philosophical texts~~” from all or most parts of Africa, just like ~~European~~” philosophy refers to works from different parts of Europe. Likewise, just like ~~German~~” philosophy alone doesn't present itself as the philosophy of all Europe, philosophies from Nigeria or Ghana or Kenya alone cannot be presented as ~~African~~” philosophy. However, they can be presented in one text and can be called ~~African~~” philosophy. Of course, this can only be done when we have a clear identification and understanding of ~~what or which~~” philosophical text qualifies as ~~African~~” and why.

Ethiopian *philosophy*, instead of Ethiopian *Hatatas or Treatises* (Sumner, 2004: 173). [For me these discourses not only remain but must also be referred to as *–Hatata*”<sup>23</sup>.] Though I don't intend to address whether the *–Hatatas*” are or can be an *–Ethiopian*” or *–African*” philosophy as such, it remains the case that contemporary African *–philosophy*” can only be understood in terms of this *–borrowed*” or *–re-appropriated*” system we call philosophy. However, philosophy, in the academic sense and in its contemporary form, is not an *African origin* doesn't mean that it is not African. On the one hand, rationality, at least in the sense of Emmanuel Eze's *common [ordinary] reason* (Eze, 2009), is part of African thought system as much as it is Western, Eastern, etc. Meaning, as much as other cultures *–provide*” or *–presuppose*” one or another reason for holding a belief, Africans also have *–reasons*” for theirs; or simply, all beliefs have rationales.

On the other, though philosophy is a product of Western socio-historical and epistemological tradition, as Hountondji notes, it is however not a closed and finished system. Through this openness philosophy *–readily*” fits and becomes part and parcel of any socio-historical setting and can also be used to *–adjust and transform*” any (unsystematic and uncritical) epistemic order. In short, philosophy is a critical reflection on cultures, traditions, ideas, beliefs, etc., and as such is not exclusively owned by one culture, despite its origin, form, purpose, etc. In other words, African philosophical discourse is not about rejecting Greek, Chinese, Indian, etc., reflective cultures and adopting those *–authentically African*” ones, but is about *–borrowing*” a system of critical reflection of these cultures, as part of the diverse cultural exchanges of our time, and replicating it in African cultures and life-worlds. And this, in part, has been achieved by contemporary African philosophy. Meaning, despite the implicit search for an authentic discourse or system that Senghor and Mudimbe felt necessary, African philosophy so far has progressed through Africanizing philosophy.

Yet *–Africanizing*” philosophy itself also carries one fundamental issue with it: the problem of language or vernacular. The question of language has occupied the center stage in African philosophy. For example, Sogolo argues, *–Systematized philosophy is relatively new in Africa and its pioneers are intellectual products of alien cultures who, out of necessity, have to philosophize in alien languages, using alien conceptual frameworks (more specifically English, French and allied*

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23 According to Claude Sumner, "Now the root . . . *hatata*, originally signified *to reduce to small portions by rubbing, to grind.* Its meaning has progressively passed from the physical reality to the figurative application of: *to question bit by bit, piecemeal; to search into or through, to investigate accurately; to examine; to inspect*" (Sumner 1978, quoted in Hallen, 2002: 9). Against Sumner's attempt to denote "Hatata" as "Treatise" of Rene Descartes or some other European version of mainstream form and method, Hallen warns, "It is tempting to assign meaning to the obvious similarity between these root meanings and the contemporary academic philosophical approach that has come to be known as *–analysis*” or as *–analytic philosophy*,” but the temptation should be resisted lest one underrate the originality of Zar‘a Ya‘aqob’s thought by summarily reducing it to nothing more than a curiosity insofar as it becomes an anticipation of mainstream twentieth-century academic philosophy" (Hallen, 2002: 9).

European languages)” (Sogolo, 1993:1). Because of this, he says, the African philosopher, “doomed with alien theoretical categories”, is not sure what to do or which direction to follow. As Kwame Appiah puts it, “Despite the disparate use of African languages, writing in sub-Saharan African even after independence continues to be in English, French, and Portuguese” (Appiah, 1992: 4), those languages imposed by “the might of the legions.” This creates the suspicion that certain hidden and “hostile Sprachgeist [linguistic spirit or ghost]” is being at work. This implies, on the one hand, that Africans complain against defilement by alien traditions in an alien tongue, and on the other, face the ambivalence of defending themselves against this defilement using the defiling languages themselves. This raises the dilemma: if we are using Western conceptual framework and methods and languages to do African philosophy, what makes it really African then? In addition, what do we do with the problem of “incommensurability” where these languages fail to authentically address and coin “local” epistemological order? In the words of Sogolo,

One does not need to read Wittgenstein to know that language is a product of culture... Even the logic of a people's reasoning, despite all claims about the universality of human nature, is determined by a variety of cultural factors. Development in the history of ideas have given support to this inextricable relationship between language and thought and between thought and experience. It is, therefore, strange why many philosophers in Africa should continue to believe that they can scrutinize the language and thought of an alien culture, the experience of which they have never shared. What they fail to realize is the general difficulty of cutting across categories of thought (Sogolo, 1993: 24).

One simple option to this difficulty or “conceptual cramp” is the use of African languages. This would not only help us build authentic and familiar Sprachgeist, but also help us towards the desperately sought after “conceptual decolonization.” However, we face at least two<sup>24</sup> difficulties. One, which languages are to be used? We have so many languages in Africa. For many nations of Africa, like that of Ethiopia where we have nearly eighty languages, which one would we use for an

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24 There exists a problem even in usage of the same language. In his analysis of the disagreement between Kwasi Wiredu and J. T. Bedu-Ado on the *concept of truth* in Akan language, both of whom are Akan, Sogolo says, “the crucial question arises as to whether the disagreement would remain if Wiredu and Bedu-Ado were discussing the concept of truth in Akan, using the Akan language itself and to an Akan audience” (Sogolo, 1993: 26). He believes that the problem between the two arose because, first, they are using English concepts (truth and truthfulness) to analyze an Akan concept and second they also antagonize each other on other English concepts, for example, as to whether truth in Akan is “subjective” or “objective” (ibid: 26-27). Though Sogolo makes it seem as if borrowed language is the only thing responsible for such difficulties, he seems to ignore the fact that philosophers in all cultures have had different and often conflicting and contradicting conceptions on similar concepts in the same language. Of course, the African philosopher's dilemma can be seen as two-fold: one, on conceptions (whether “akware” and “arkwardi” are the same in Akan language and which is better, for example) and second, which semantic to conceive in (whether “akware” and “truth” are the same and which is better). Yet, we know that not all philosophical problems are “analytic”; plus, even if we cut out European languages from the debate, the same difficulty would remain within and between African languages as well.

Ethiopian philosophy? has remained problematic. Today Amharic is the official language of the country, while a dozen other languages are being used for regional pedagogic and administrative purposes. Even Amharic, which has its own unique alphabet, written history, along with ~~“developed”~~ phonetic and semantic usage for centuries, has not been exclusively used for high-level educational, scientific, and cultural discourses. This may be because of the country's low literacy level and absence of human and material resources to advance the language to the levels of European languages, notwithstanding the policies and strategies of Europeans (mainly English speaking) in imposing the English language. Or it may also be due to the introduction of modern education in foreign languages, mostly in English and also because many Ethiopians have been traveling to Europe to attend higher educations. Despite all these factors, despite the propensity of Amharic language to become (even pose itself as) an ~~“Ethiopian”~~ language, if and when we are able to use it for our academic, in this case, philosophical discourse, what makes ~~“Amharic”~~ any better than English for non-Amharic speakers of dozens of Ethiopian ethnic groups?

Two, in fact, even as it stands today, Amharic<sup>25</sup> is considered as ~~“hegemonic”~~ and ~~“imperialist”~~ language by many non-Amhara ethnic nationalists of Ethiopia. Despite the presumption by African linguistic nationalists, as if all Ethiopians, Kenyans, Nigerians, etc speak Ethiopian, Kenyan, Nigerian, etc languages, or worse, as if all Africans speak the ~~“Afrikaan,”~~ the problem of which language to use poses the same difficulty as the foreign languages. Plus, a considerable number of Africans use foreign languages such as English and French as their first language. In truth, most of the proponents of ~~“African”~~ language – those who have a more advanced linguistic structure and usage in their respective countries – belong to some ~~“imperialist”~~ ethnic group and, implicitly or explicitly, want to advance their linguistic and literary hegemony in the same manner Europeans did.

Yet, I don't mean that we should continue using European languages and vernacular for African discourse. What I am saying is that the problem of language in African philosophy apply to African languages internally as it does to the Western ones. In my view, the adherence to African languages without due consideration to the above challenges, or enigmas of philosophy of language in general, is incomplete. Most importantly, the problem with foreign languages should not merely be

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25 The largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, the Oromo, for example, rejected the [indigenous] ~~“Geez”~~ alphabet (in which, as far as I know, Afan Oromo – Oromo Language – was first written) and adopted Latin [foreign] alphabet that is in use today. This replacement was in part due to ~~“incommensurability”~~ between Geez semantics and Afan Oromo, and for a better technical development of the language. However, in my view, this decision has to do more with ideological-political reasons rather than technical and epistemological, where the Oromos (Cushite) adoption of Latin was and is, in part, to reject ~~“Amhara”~~ (Semite) hegemony, and in part, an attempt to self-align with Western element.

associated with the cultural, political, and ideological colonial dialectic between white and black subjects. In my view, conceptual and technical difficulties of language better take precedence over these factors. As such, why shouldn't Africans use English and French for philosophical discourse is not because they are not our languages but better be for the reason that using African vernaculars is more suitable conceptually and technically for our discourse. Most of all, given the intercultural nature of contemporary African philosophy, which language to use for this comparative advantage should be our point of reference. In essence, our discourse need not liberate itself from Western vernacular; rather, it should deliberate for making the best use of its dual vernacular advantage based on the principle of 'mutual-inclusion' of the two conceptual resources at our disposal.

### **2.3 African and Black Philosophy: Disentangling Mind and Body**

*I suffered bodily as well as mentally. I had neither sufficient time in which to eat or to sleep, except on Sundays. The overwork, and the brutal chastisements of which I was the victim, combined with that ever-gnawing and soul devouring thought—" I am a slave—a slave for life—a slave with no rational ground to hope for freedom —rendered me a living embodiment of mental and physical wretchedness.*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 214 )

For someone unfamiliar with African philosophy, the following two phrases appear utterly confusing: African and Africana. Barry Hallen, in his book *A Short History of African Philosophy* (2002), was aware of this confusion when he writes in his footnote: “I use the term “African” to refer to scholarship that is specifically concerned with the African continent and its cultures. “Africana” is a more inclusive term for scholarship related to both Africa and the diaspora” (Hallen, 2002: 4). Similarly, Lucius Outlaw argues, “Africana philosophy” is very much a heuristic notion – that is, one that suggests orientations for philosophical endeavours by professional philosophers and other intellectuals devoted to matters pertinent to African and African-descended persons and peoples [read *Blacks*]” (Outlaw, 2004: 90).

As we have seen from the foregoing discussion, this ambivalence of synonymy<sup>26</sup> of “black” and

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26 Emmanuel C. Eze, in *African Philosophy: An Anthology* (1998) says the book intends at: “Constructing an anthology of “African” philosophy that would respond to the needs of students and teachers in Africa, America, and Europe demands of necessity a recognition of *some shared historical concerns* – intellectual, cultural, and political – that constitute the Diasporic relationships” (Eze, 1998: xi; emphasis added). In his view, it appears, these “shared historical concerns” are concerned with “black” experiences (under white subjugation) shared among peoples of Africa and their descendents. That's why, he says in the Preface, “The fields of philosophy constructed in this volume, then, are called “African” because they include philosophical materials from: (1) the continent of Africa (the traditional and the modern, of diverse inspirations: secular, Islamic, and Christian); (2) African-America; (3) Afro-Caribbean, and (4) philosophical writings by African-descended European, Black Atlantic, thinkers” (ibid: ix). If we inquire why he labels the works of individuals from different continents and diverse backgrounds as

–African” left African and Black studies entangled<sup>27</sup>. Paulin Hountondji frustrated by –Africanist” (ethno)philosophers (who, in his view, remain under the shade of ethnocentrism inherited from Europe, who try to make a genuine philosophy out of legends, tales, myths, etc. to prove their status to Europe, who produce literature for the European public rather than African, who write about Africa not for Africa), writes: –We must at all costs liberate our thought from the *Africanist ghetto* to which it has been confined, get out of our intellectual prison, open up a breach in the closed space of our collective fantasies, so that theoretical issues may surge in, to be shared first of all with our immediate brothers” (Hountondji, 1996: 54; emphasis added). Though he, unlike me, approaches the problem of –African philosophy” from –philosophy” rather than –African” sense, his analysis shades light on the problem of –African” that is relevant to my thesis. The –Africanist” ghetto is primarily the case in point here, a ghetto where African intellectualism has been self-imprisoned and from which Hountondji intends to free it.

This –Africanist ghetto” is *blackness*<sup>28</sup> which presents itself as an ontological, epistemological, aesthetic, and axiological alterity (or sub-reality), which, through its counter-distinction – whiteness - represents itself, implicitly and ambiguously, as an –inferior Other”. On the ontological front, it presents black subjects as essentially unified across time and space – one Negro race; on the

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–African”, the answer lies in what they share in common – blackness. (He also refers to it as –Africana”, to imply that, it seems to me, these works are not limited to –African continent” on the one hand, and on the other, to show their –historical” concerns (black experience) and also African root (black identity).) In doing so, he seems to equivocate the substance of –black” philosophy to –African” philosophy and the vice versa, or reduce the existential and essential concerns of –African” people to –black” (slavery, colonialism, etc.) experience – all Africans are black and they exist and think through this blackness. Again, he reduces the existential and essential life-world of all black people (historical, cultural, and political) to the African continent, to Afrocentrism, to Negritude – all black people are Africans and they exist and think from an African place. However, not only are the two different, they also have less in common than largely assumed. This is because, as far as a counter-discourse goes, among many other factors, –black” shared experience (outside the African continent) refers mainly, if not exclusively, to –slavery” while –African” shared experience (on the continent) refers to –colonization”. If so, it is not only unsystematic to merge these two independent experiences into one but it is also uncritical to consider their respective reflections as categorically the same.

27 Black philosophy, in my view, makes sense where –color” is part of socio-historical and cultural-political narrative, such as, where these are existential and essential issues for groups and individuals of black skin. African philosophy on the other hand has no business with 'black' issues, since blackness is not an issue for peoples of Africa (nor for black nations outside Africa for that matter). The only sense in which African philosophy can be confused with black philosophy is if the world is taken as –white” where black people are considered only as inhabitants of a sub-world within this white-life-world.

28 The issue of black identity raises one crucial question: what is the difference between African and Africana philosophy? Continuing the tradition Outlaw states, –what is referred to as –Africana philosophy” is initially constituted through a third-order [blackness?] surveying and arranging of discursive practices and literatures according to an agenda exercised through the arranging and naming [...] This naming is conditioning only of those practices – mine and others’ – that are deployed under this name self-consciously” (Outlaw, 1998: 30-31). Yet, he seems to have the same dilemma when he asks, –Still, what, beyond the race and ethnicity of the thinker, if anything, is common to the endeavors I have included under the –Africana philosophy” heading?” and, nonetheless answers, –In general, for post-traditional thinkers it is the effort to forge and articulate *new identities and life-agendas* – to survive, and then to flourish – in the face of the limit-situations of racialized oppression and New World relocations; it is, as well, the effort to *recover or reconstruct life-defining meaning-connections to lands and cultures of the African continent*, to its peoples and their histories” (ibid: 31; emphasis added).

epistemological front it presents the black mind as a collective unit across culture and history – one Negro culture and history; on the axiological front it presents the black subject as a collective determination – one Negro value and virtue; on the aesthetic front, it presents the black subject as physical and psychological determination – shared Negro self-consciousness. As Achebe tells us, the black subject is “black first” and then, and only then, become “an African,” “a Nigerian,” “an Ibo,” “a Christian,” etc. Second, if so, at least normatively speaking, *black discourse* functions as a foundation for *Africanist discourse*, a value that all black subjects presumably share. If so, how can we differentiate “African philosophy” from “black philosophy”?

As might be clear by now, as far as “African” passes today as an intellectual paradigm, as a value of identity, space and place, it is primarily “(re)invention”. It is from this *re-invented* identity, space and place that we examine African philosophy. In this sense, African philosophy and black philosophy are synonymous. Meaning, we have restricted, implicitly or explicitly, “Africanism” to a *black discourse*, which itself is a negation or anti-thesis of white discourse. Hence, all black subjects and nations have been given one common mission: defend (and may be avenge) themselves against Europe and the white man. This is the existential project since the dawn of slavery and colonialism, under the banners of anti-slavery and anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-neo-colonialism; took different forms through the ages: black consciousness, African consciousness, Black Power, Negritude, Afrocentrism, Pan-Africanism, etc.; aimed at the abolition of slavery and colonization and their multiple contemporary versions of demands for equality, freedom, liberty, sovereignty, autonomy, development, etc. As a counter-discourse our philosophy, in essence, remained apologetic and sympathetic, trying to free the black subject from the white subject, while, despite our efforts to transcend our inferiority and descend the white man from superiority, the racist “black versus white” dialectic continues under the politico-ideological guise of “Africa versus Europe”.

As a result, when we bracket out “African” and poke behind the shield of “blackness,” which constituted the black subject's existential discourse and its essential presuppositions, the problem comes down to one I raised above: How can we free African philosophy from black ideology? How can we escape the “Africanist ghetto”?

African philosophical literature of the last half century is witness to the primacy of this ethical question. Philosophers proposed diverse and divergent ways to change the *black image* painted by white racism. Sadly enough, the West perpetually stood by this re-imaging and re-conceptualization by constantly portraying blackness as evil. For example, whenever a black/ African achieves the

level of the white for the first time, we are accustomed to hearing him being called (by blacks/Africans and whites alike) the First/Only Black/African so and so.

As far as African philosophy as a "philosophy of struggle" is concerned, one of its missions was to be recognized as a philosophical school, and it undoubtedly has achieved this. Yet, for all its achievement, for all its progress in the last half century, it largely remained a *black* discourse rather than African. Because, as I made clear by now, –African” came to imply, implicitly or explicitly, *black*. To rephrase Hountondji, –African” remained in a –Black” ghetto, as a result of which –African” in its many forms and conceptualizations remained the anti-thesis of –Western”, or more precisely, –White.”

In sum, African philosophy as a counter-discourse failed to cross Du Bois –color line”<sup>29</sup> and continues to present itself as –black” discourse, with a minimal platial and spatial dis-segregation and qualification. John Mbiti's –We are, therefore, I am” still functions as an epistemic mask for ontological racial and cultural unanimity, where –I am an African” continues to mean, I belong to –one gigantic racial and cultural colossus.” The black subject still suffers from the enigma of merged Body and Mind. As soon as the black subject faces the white world, he becomes and enters his assigned realm of blackness. And when he does “his” philosophy, he first assumes and embodies –blackness” and what it stands for in the white dominated world. Africans need to be –conscious of their blackness,” which of course means, in my view, –don't lose sight of the color line, son!”

Whichever way we look at it, African philosophy fails to escape the –identity” dilemma: How can we do –African”, and not –European” philosophy? How can we do and use philosophy for conceptual and practical betterment of the continent and its peoples?

## **2.4 Authenticity, Relevance and Practicality of African Philosophy**

*To enslave men, successfully and safely, it is necessary to have their minds occupied with thoughts and aspirations short of the liberty of which they are deprived. A certain degree of attainable good must be kept before them. These holidays serve the purpose of keeping the minds of the slaves*

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29 In his book –The Conservation of Races,” Du Bois claims, writes Thomas Miles, that “the people of the world can be divided into recognizable groups called races and that the most basic principle around which these races are organized and identified is that they are always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life” (Miles, 2003: 19-20). Lewis Gordon also comments, “Born from the divide of black and white, it serves as a blueprint of the ongoing division of humankind. The color line is also a metaphor that exceeds its own concrete formulation. It is the race line as well as the gender line, the class line, the sexual orientation line, the religious line—in short, the line between –normal” and –abnormal” identities” (Gordon, 2000: 63).

*occupied with prospective pleasure, within the limits of slavery. The young man can go wooing; the married man can visit his wife; the father and mother can see their children; the industrious and money loving can make a few dollars; the great wrestler can win laurels; the young people can meet, and enjoy each other's society; the drunken man can get plenty of whiskey; and the religious man can hold prayer meetings, preach, pray and exhort during the holidays.*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 244)

The entanglement of “black” and “African” resulted in the dialectic of “authentic” versus “invented” African gnosis. As I argued in chapter one, the difference between the two comes down to “representation,” which in turn depends on where one perceives oneself in representing. Simply put, both “authentic” and “invented” Africa are viewed from within “Western” episteme, the only difference being who did the invention and why. Since “authentic” Africa is believed to have been long lost or replaced by “invented” Africa, the authenticity that contemporary Africanists adhere to can only be called “re-invention”. As Jahn puts it;

The Africa presented by the ethnologist is a legend in which we [Western] used to believe. The African tradition in the light of neo-African [re-invented] culture may also be a legend – but it is the legend in which African intelligence believes. And it is their perfect right to declare authentic, correct and true those components of their past which they believe to be so (Jahn 1961; quoted in Mudimbe, 1988: 205.)

What Jahn tells us is that if the African believes in a certain sort of Africa and does a certain African discourse of his will, who is to say he is wrong? This not only reminds us Kwasi Wiredu's conception of “truth as a point of view,” but also raises the question: is there such a thing as an authentically “other” African truth, so much so that the non-African has to take the African at his word? Odera Oruka provides an illuminating sarcasm:

What may be a superstition is paraded as 'African religion', and the white world is expected to endorse that it is indeed a religion but an African religion. What in all cases is a mythology is paraded as 'African philosophy', and again the white culture is expected to endorse that it is indeed a philosophy but an African philosophy. What is in all cases a dictatorship is paraded as 'African democracy', and the white culture is again expected to endorse that it is so. And what is clearly a de-development or pseudo-development is described as 'development', and again the white world is expected to endorse that is it development – but of course 'African development' (Odera Oruka 1972, quoted in

Hountondji, 1996: 60).

Oruka's humor is deeply disturbing. On the one hand it reveals the fact that African philosophy is produced for Western consumption rather than Africans; and on the other, it shows that African philosophy needs Western endorsement (whether it is philosophy proper or mythology). Appiah expresses the same concern when he asks: "How can we ask people who are not African, do not know Africa, to take us for granted? And, more importantly, why should we?" (Appiah, 1992: 78). This way of knowledge production for "external" consumption raises the question of relevance and practicality of African philosophy in Africa.

As I will discuss further in chapter three, African philosophy took more of a "reactionary" approach in tackling and responding to Eurocentrism. This mainly took two forms: Rationality debate (re-imagining Africa) and, Negritude, Afrocentrism and conceptual decolonization (re-claiming Africa). First, let's briefly see the major trends in African philosophy (according to Oruka's well-known four trends<sup>30</sup>) (Oruka, 2003) as to their relevance and practicality in the hitherto African philosophical thought.

Despite the all round attack on ethnophilosophy (which I believe would have been less severe if it was not written by a white person first, and its Negritude background, which again would have been less controversial if Senghor's and Cesaire's views didn't turn out to be damaging to the black image in the eyes of the white man), it is easy to understand ethnophilosophers' commitment to free the African mind from Western episteme – to create an indigenous and independent African gnosis. They aim at excavating, recovering and building ideas and beliefs embedded within different African cultures, traditions and histories. Their belief that societies have primordial and philosophically relevant belief systems, which, if recovered and systematized, could be more

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30 Odera Oruka divided the current trends in African philosophy into four: Ethnophilosophy, Philosophic Sagacity, Nationalistic-ideological philosophy and Professional philosophy. According to him, ethnophilosophy refers to "those works or books (and the majority of them are works of anthropologists or theologians) which purport to describe a world outlook or thought system of a particular African community or the whole of Africa belong to ethnic-philosophy" (Oruka, 2003: 143). The second trend, Philosophic Sagacity, is concerned with Sage philosophy, or philosophy of the Sages. Oruka argues, "Among the various African peoples one is likely to find rigorous indigenous thinkers. These are men and women (sages) who have not had the benefit of modern education. But they are none the less critical independent thinkers who guide their thought and judgements by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of the communal consensus. They are capable of taking a problem or a concept and offer a rigorous philosophical analysis of it, making clear rationally where they accept or reject the established or communal judgement on the matter" (ibid: 143-144). The third trend, Nationalistic-ideological philosophy, takes its departing point from the fact that "in the modern world African philosophy, like African culture, can only be revived or authenticated on the basis of a truly free and independent African society. Thus in this sense the exact nature and existence of African philosophy would remain obscure unless we seek for it on the basis of a clear social theory for independence and the creation of a genuine humanist social order" (ibid: 144). And lastly, Professional philosophy refers to those "works and debates of the professionally trained students and teachers of philosophy in Africa" (ibid: 145).

productive for the society itself and the world in general is ethically noble (though epistemically naive). Yet, as we see from Hountondji's severe critic, their project undermines the very essence of "philosophy" on the one hand, and on the other, as Marcien Towa argued, it is both "unpractical" and "irrelevant" to contemporary [modern] African life-world.

However, Hountondji and his proponents seem to neglect the fundamental cons and pros of ethnophilosophical project. First, notwithstanding the methodological and conceptual difficulties, the attempt to recover (dis-cover) alternative world views that lie behind the curtain of culture would have the potential to provide us with broader conceptual resource to tackle philosophical challenges. In addition, without this resource, *African* philosophy remains merely (and arguably) *blackened* white culture. Second, there is no harm in inquiring into what people believe, understand the laws and principles governing those beliefs and the role of knowledge-formation in shaping cultures. The ethnophilosopher's attempt, in this regard, would help build a ground for *inter-cultural* philosophy (internally and externally). Third, it would also help us see the impact of cultural conflicts (in the contemporary interdependent life-worlds) in light of differences and similitudes between new cultures and old ones (relatively atomized life-worlds). In today's merging global cultural world, looking into the past is one way of assessing and addressing the impact of this seemingly inevitable cultural transformation. In this sense, the critic's rejection of ethnophilosophy as "unphilosophical" is less grounded. Ethnophilosophy can provide a fertile ground for assessing the dialectics of "culture and philosophy", "tradition and modernity", and most importantly, that of "African and Western" philosophy. Even if the relevance of ethnophilosophy is to preserve "culture or tradition" in some discursive form, as long as our entire philosophy doesn't end up doing it, it helps us to retain "African beliefs" in some form and provides our philosophy with an alternative from which we can chose and upon which we can re-construct.

On the other, however, the challenge to ethnophilosophy (I don't intend to repeat Hountondji's assessment here) itself lies in the following two issues. First, the ethnophilosopher is using critical, systematic, normative self-reflective practice invented and developed by another culture (Greek or European) to facilitate African cultures' self-reflective activity. This approach, as Mudimbe meticulously observed, either subsumes African cultures' self-reflective discourse under Greek culture, or undermines or dissolves the "authenticity" of these cultures' self-reflective system by exposing them to and evaluating them by an alien system. This could lead to conceptual 'colonization' and estrangement. As such the 'Africanity' that the ethnophilosopher adheres to and wishes to preserve is questionable in its hitherto format.

Second, ethnophilosophy itself is initiated rather externally, in this case by the Western educated African philosopher, who attempts to reflect on a given culture using the self-consciousness of another, European [Greek?] culture. This not only puts the resulting philosophy “outside” the culture under critical transformation but also imposes a certain aspect of Greek culture upon it (Wiredu's "conceptual decolonization" precisely captures this difficulty). In this sense, what the philosopher re-presents as “African” and what he retains and inherits to future generation as such, by large, is a culture that is neither African nor Western – in short, this results in a marginalized discourse or epistemic order. This becomes an issue mainly because, for one, the Western philosopher doesn't face (relatively) the same degree of cultural self-marginalization. Secondly, as Hountondji argued, such works are mainly produced for Western consumption rather than Africans themselves, especially those whose culture the philosopher investigates. Leaving who benefits more aside between the two, I believe that the African faces a higher tendency of self-externalization unlike his European counterpart who investigates his culture through his culture's self-conscious reflective practice. This leads, at least implicitly, to existential and conceptual cultural-alienation in the name of preservation or transformation. In sum, contrary to its claim, 'Africanity' of ethnophilosophy remains questionable.

Hence, when this marginal discourse is put to either theoretical narrative or practical application, the culture understands and evaluates itself via its own estranged beliefs. More importantly, as long as the ethnophilosopher continues to apply the Western tailored reflective and systematized epistemological system (how much ever open it is, as Hountondji argued) to his culture, where he acts as a double-agent – playing the role of the victim, the accused, the judge and jury between the two cultures – there is little “authenticity” in his practice, but only the illusion of “authenticating” the re-invented; re-center the “marginalized”. In the end, therefore, ethnophilosophy remains a comparative discourse, rather than something authentically African. I don't mean that this is wrong. My point is this: ethnophilosophy should recognize its dual-ground and accept that its authenticity is an illusion. More importantly, it should not continue in falsely advocating Africanity and putting an imaginary rift between African and Western episteme. Once cognizance of this fact ethnophilosophy could work towards building an African episteme by integrating both traditions. The same goes for Philosophic Sagacity.

In the same logic, Nationalistic/Ideological and Professional philosophy face similar “relevance” and “practicality” challenges. The former faces the “inferior Other” or “subordinate” factor, where the African philosopher views African life-world via the hegemony and domination of Europe. This is the case mainly when Africa is presented as the “victim” and the philosopher assumes this

–victimization” as the discursive ground for the entire African spatial and temporal life-world. Africa becomes a thing of –eolonial” creature, with no greater existential and essential mission other than fighting Europe. This puts Africa within the negative Other of the West in the name of *re-centering Africa by de-centering Europe*. In short, African philosophy is in Europe or of Europe or towards Europe, with its relevance and practicality confounded to second-rate dialectic discourse for independence and liberty. Though its relevance and practical importance is undeniable, still it remains ambiguous. Because, in addition to being –eounter-discourse” it also conceptually limits Africanism to –eolonial” discourse and its aftermath (post- and neo-colonialism). The root of this problem has to do with the failure to recognize and find a mutually inclusive ground between Africa and Europe, a ground that guards African values and interests. The dark history between the two continents and the long ideological conflict has blinded many thinkers to such a mutual epistemic ground. Still I don't mean that Africans shouldn't fight European hegemony and racism; they should. However, they have to be conscious of the fact that the history and destiny of the two continents have been inseparably linked and as such it is we better find a mutually inclusive epistemic ground instead of mutual-exclusion. As far as African philosophy remains, implicitly or explicitly, the negative other of Western philosophy while the two factually remain complementary, our philosophy would have less conceptual and practical relevance to the current African life-world. More importantly, our concern should be about rebuilding African conceptual and existential canons using both traditions.

Professional philosophy itself, albeit its allegiance to both –Africa” and –philosophy,” some of the adherents of this school show commitment to –Africa” over philosophy (such as Mudimbe, Masolo, Oruka, and Wiredu) while others invest more value to –philosophy” over Africa (Hountondji, Appiah, and Towa). Yet, both group equally struggle with the dilemma of –Africanizing philosophy,” on how to endogenize and practice philosophy in an African place. Wiredu, for example, believes that African philosophy needs to be done in such a way that African cultural (traditional) beliefs achieve the level or quality of philosophical justification. In his view, African philosophy is a critical analysis of African –traditional” beliefs, with the purpose of challenging universal philosophical ideals from within African cultural ideals. Mudimbe takes Wiredu's thesis a step further and argues that African philosophy must critically analyze African traditional cultures using African episteme; simply put, African philosophy is –authentically” African only when we reflect on African cultures using critical, systematic, normative African rationality. Unfortunately, as Mudimbe himself only managed to do, contrary to his –authenticity” thesis, African philosophy remains merely challenging –European” philosophy from an –African place”. In essence, –authentic” African philosophy is unpractical but relevant for Wiredu, while –invented” African

philosophy is irrelevant but practical for Mudimbe.

For Hountondji, on the other hand, African philosophy should be done in the strict sense of philosophy, by taking only what fits into this strictness from an African culture. In his view, therefore, African philosophy is merely the appropriation of philosophical ideals to African context. For Hountondji, both the relevance and practicality of African philosophy depends on it being “philosophical” discourse rather than an “Africanity” discourse. Again Towa seems to even radicalize Hountondji's thesis. For Towa, the conception of African philosophy outside the context of Western philosophy is conceptually banal and practically irrelevant. Africa has to learn the secret of European philosophy that created or facilitated its “mighty” power, and to achieve this, African philosophy must adopt the same episteme to African context.

Both sides attempt to answer the question: where would and should “Africa” stand as “philosophy of realm” and how does this place fit into “realm of philosophy?” In other words, how can we speak of “African” value without determining its “value” philosophically (for Wiredu and Mudimbe), and how can we determine the “value of philosophy” in order to decide “Africa's value” in this valued-space (for Hountondji and Towa). Though the Professional school understands a priori the relevance (value) of philosophy to Africa and is pre-occupied with explicating the conceptual and practical application of this value to African life-world, some challenges still remain. For one, these thinkers are pre-occupied with “theoretical” debate on “what makes African philosophy” relevant and “what sort of philosophy” is practical in African life-world, rather than doing the philosophy itself and debating or testing afterwards if a certain discourse is relevant and practical, or not. Again, all of them, without exception, approach “African” philosophy from Western episteme; i.e. adopt Western concepts and methods to formulate and validate their respective inventions of “African” philosophy. It is this conceptual self-externalization and methodological other-internalization that raises the question: “Is African philosophy in Africa?”

Wiredu's project of “conceptual decolonization” (Wiredu, 2004) is one example here, where he attempts to replace “Western” concepts or vernaculars by “African” ones. Wiredu believes that as long as we continue to use Western concepts in African philosophy – exposition of African cultural beliefs and values – our philosophy remains under the veil of (conceptual) colonization. Again, if we remain within “traditional” beliefs and values, we remain outside “modern” life-world. Yet, Wiredu himself, for example, in his exposition of “theory of truth” rely on Western speculative discourse to define, analyze and validate “African” (Ghanian/Akan) theory of truth. In his own words, “Since my thinking about the *meaning of truth* has been *conditioned* by both a *formal*

*training* in Western ideas and an originally *informal education* in an African way of thinking, I would like in this discussion to work my way through both environments. I start from the *Western angle*” (Wiredu, 2004: 35; emphasis added). It is this “standing with one foot” in Western episteme, but failure to clearly recognize this fact that has hitherto been the main challenge to “entering” African philosophy in Africa. In my view, our starting point should be an *African angle, not Western*. As a result, relevance and practicality of African philosophy to African life-world (traditional or modern) remains questionable, as far as our philosophy remains a struggle for independence rather than interdependence.

Concluding, therefore, though the existence<sup>31</sup> of “African philosophy” is *undeniable*, its relevance and practicality remains ambiguous. In my view African philosophy, so far, failed to contribute to clear national and continental policy (political, cultural, economic, scientific, etc) issues and, even at its best, hardly formulated an “African” place in philosophy, from and through which Africans interact, internally and externally. Instead what has been done so far is merely stating the fact that Africa has been victimized in global political, economic and cultural relations, formerly with the West, with the East recently joining in. Though we can grant that the hitherto achievement could serve as a starting point for advancing the African philosophy we all desire and crave for, the short history of counter-discourse in Africa reminds us that we need an alternative direction going forward, an alternative that helps us live with the rest of the world with better harmony without sacrificing our conceptual and practical life-world to the others.

## **2.5 Who is an African Philosopher? Discourse and Identity**

*Slaves, generally, will fight each other, and die at each other's hands; but there are few who are not held in awe by a white man. Trained from the cradle up, to think and feel that their masters are superior, and invested with a sort of sacredness, there are few who can outgrow or rise above the control which that sentiment exercises.*

(Frederick Douglass, 1885: 242)

In their Preface to the second edition of *African Philosophy Reader* (2003), Coetzee and Roux,

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31 Today African philosophy exists, though the ambiguity of what it really is remains unresolved. As I tried to show, it primarily exists as a re-presentation of Western discourse within an African context or re-evaluating an African life-world within Western discourse. This is true when we read African philosophical texts, most of which employ Western discursive methods to advance an “African version” of epistemology and “African values” contra Western values. As I will argue in the next chapters, the failure to delineate “Western epistemology” from “epistemology per se,” “Western values” from “values per se,” “Western discourse” from “discourse per se,” etc., is at the heart of the ambivalence of “identity of African philosophy.” In a sense, as long as we continue to describe “knowledge” as external to African life-world, or worse an imposition by the West, we are bound to remain at the periphery and limited to speaking from this margin.

announce “of the 37 contributors 33 are *black Africans speaking for themselves*...” This is a curious statement that requires serious critical inquiry. One, these (33) intellectuals are philosophers with the tag “black Africans”. It seems that beyond (at least alongside) their profession, being black and African is what qualified their works to be included in “African” philosophy. Two, these intellectuals do not merely speak their minds but “speak for themselves”. Though I don't know what “speaking for oneself” really mean, I assume that, being *black Africans*, they “write” from a “black experience,” out of “what it means to be truly African”. Three, the other three<sup>32</sup>, which I took it to be Jennifer R. Wilkinson, Gail M. Presbey and Uma Narayan, are non-black or non-African. Though they address “African” issues (why else they be included in the book?), according to Coetzee and Roux, they speak for “the Other” as opposed to the rest who speak for themselves. Finally, these “black Africans” are not limited to “native or continental” Africans but also include “African descendants” as well. This ambiguity of identity has been one of the fundamental issues in African philosophical debate: what is the criteria for an African philosopher? As such, Coetzee and Roux seem to suggest the following three criteria: one, black *skin*; two, black/African *experience*; three, speaking for Africa and its peoples *from within*.

Paulin Hountondji revised his controversial “definition” of African philosophy in his Preface to the Second Edition of *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, and states “By African philosophy' I mean the set of philosophical texts produced (whether orally or in writing) by Africans” (Hountondji, 1996: xii). He elaborates, “What does 'African' mean in the phrase 'African philosophy'? Answer: Something African is something produced by Africans” (ibid). From this he addresses the question of “who” qualifies for an “African”<sup>33</sup> philosopher. After providing a long list of names in the end notes (see page 185-186) he comments,

I have cited only African authors, in accordance with my definition<sup>34</sup> of African philosophy. Non-African Africanists are not included [...] But I have included West Indians like Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon. They are African of the Diaspora... [...] Finally, North-African literature is omitted for material reason alone [really?]. It is *of course*, an integral part of African literature *in general*,

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32 I have to confess that I don't know who the three “non-blacks speaking for blacks” the editors are referring to. To identify them I used one criteria: those whose names don't resemble “African/black” names.

33 Godwin Sogolo, in addressing this problem, says “One qualifies as an X philosopher insofar as one's work belongs to the philosophical tradition of X” (Sogolo, 1993: 4). He argues, against P. O. Bodunrin, by saying that “An African thinker who engages in “debates on Plato's epistemology or on theoretical identities” is undoubtedly doing philosophy but his work does not qualify as African philosophy if it has no bearing on the African experience” because philosophical practice's “material base must rest on the people's culture” (ibid). Yet, even within Sogolo's criteria, it doesn't mean that one has to belong to a given 'race' (say black) to be an African philosopher but to belong to a certain African culture.

34 His original definition reads: “By '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, 1996: 33).

although it constitutes a comparatively *autonomous subset, no less than* the black African literature on which we focus here. [One day] it would be useful to investigate *systematically* the *problem of the real unity* which underlies the obvious differences between these two literatures (ibid: 186-187).

What do we make of this? Isn't he implicitly suggesting "black enough" as the basic criteria? Isn't he using "Sahara" as the dividing [color and culture] line between black and non-black Africa, when he talks about the "problem of real unity" between the North and South? If the unity of North and South of the Sahara demand "systematic investigation" why doesn't he hold similar reservation for "unity" of the South (which includes the South, East, West and Central Africa)?

Let's address one more problem before we proceed. In the same preface mentioned above Coetzee and Roux point out the difficulty of engaging in a complex debate and interaction between black and non-black African intellectuals, on the one hand, and on the other, between anglophone and francophone Africa. This difficulty, they note,

raises complex problems concerning the relationship between black academics and Western knowledge systems seen in the context of Africa's challenge to the hegemony of Western philosophical notions, and the mistaken perception that the whole enterprise of philosophy in Africa is neo- rather than post-colonial. One fundamental problem is that of identity: shifting, fluctuating—the identities of writers in and of Africa may be said to be in a state of betweenness, simultaneously inhabiting two worlds (Coetzee and Roux, 2003: viii).

In their view, the "African" philosopher not only is caught in the ambivalence and engima of "identity" but also faces challenges that, directly or indirectly, arise from this identity issue due to the unique positioning between two traditions and cultures.

It is true that individuals from all wakes of life have "specific" histories, cultures, life-worlds (in some fundamental respects) that they don't share with others. This "specific" experience come to influence how we think, live and interact with human and physical world. Being an "African" carries this "specificity" that Europeans, Asians, Americans, etc., do not share. This implies, those who are grouped or identified as "Africans", despite their internal differences, share some experiences that help or force them to "unite" in the face of non-African peoples. If so, being an African refers to specific "African" values, out of which, through which and for which the "African" philosopher "speaks," internally (to Africans) and externally (to non-Africans). This value is what necessitates and guides "speaking" for Africa – for oneself. This value-language is

what is called *Africanism*. The same holds for being black, and that of speaking black-value-language is what I so far called *blackness*<sup>35</sup>.

But, again, we encounter some difficulties. One, the ~~only~~” experience that almost all Africans share and that came to be of a significant shared-value is *colonial experience*. Hence, speaking from an African experience becomes speaking from colonial experience. However, colonization is not a value; if anything it is a devalue. Hence, Africans don't share it, nor do they hold it as a shared value, unless in a very dehumanizing context. If there is any shared value here, it is ~~anti~~” colonialism” which became an ~~anti~~” Europe” political ideology. This approach also fixes Africa in ~~post~~” colonial” state rather than in an ~~in~~dependent” state.

Two, Africans are presupposed to share ~~color~~” and the value it represents (blackness) while the fact is that not all Africans are blacks nor is blackness of equal value to all Africans. In fact, crudely seen, it was of little<sup>36</sup> or no value before the white man devalued it. Just because the white man looks at a black man in a certain way doesn't make blacks ~~Negroes~~”. If anything blackness is a shared ~~anti~~” racism” value that again presents itself as an ~~anti~~” white”. Even in a value-neutral sense, the implicit or explicit equivocation of ~~black colored~~” with ~~African~~” leaves so many Africans ~~out~~” and brings so many ~~non~~” Africans” in. Not all blacks live in Africa nor all blacks share ~~blackness~~” as such, at least not with equal value. As I noted earlier, for those blacks alienated in their own (white dominated) countries because of their color, blackness is invested with more value than in continental Africa, where color is not an element of alienation (at least not two decades after the fall of apartheid and its many forms of white-racism) as such. If so, blackness, and its ideological and political versions (Negritude and Afrocentrism) cannot and shouldn't be taken as a shared value. Hence, speaking for black value cannot merely make one an African philosopher.

Three, as I discussed earlier, Africans don't share one culture, history, tradition, etc. There is no single ~~African~~” culture, history, language, etc. If so, there is no ground for the ~~African~~”

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35 Cornel West (1998: 156) asks ~~What is black authenticity? Who is really black?~~” and answers, ~~—~~. blackness has no meaning outside of a system of race-conscious people and practices. After centuries of racist degradation, exploitation, and oppression in America, blackness means being minimally subject to white supremacist abuse and being part of a rich culture and community that has struggled against such abuse... any claim to black authenticity – beyond being the potential object of racist abuse and heir to grand tradition of black struggle – is contingent on one's ethical understanding of how this interest relates to individuals and communities in and outside black America. In short, blackness is a political and ethical construct”.

36 It is important to note that 'colour' played significant value-role in some African societies like Ethiopia. As I said earlier, shade of blackness was used to value and de-value humanity in Ethiopia. Some Ethiopians, mainly the highlanders, have lighter complexion that was considered as a higher value to that of darker complexion. Until very recently, a darker complexion was given many degrading names, among which 'Shankala' was the one commonly used. Though I have been unable to make a clear definition of it, it meant something like *dark as coal*, *slave-colour*, or possibly *a Negro*.

philosopher to identify himself with anonymous yet ideal “African” cultural, historical, linguistic, etc., identity. For all he can, he can only identify himself with this or that culture, history, tradition, etc., within the African multitude life-world. As such: is being a philosopher the same as speaking *for and from* some specific cultural, historical, etc., value and background? would remain controversial. One can simultaneously answer it in the negative or in the affirmative.

Four, if “African” identity is a geographical designation, something that Africans share because of sharing a continent, then this value should include everyone who is in Africa and exclude those outside it. Still, the problem of “descent” needs to be settled. Though I don't intend to provide an exhaustive analysis, I believe that “descent” must have linguistic, cultural, historical, traditional, religious, etc., affiliations with “origin” to be re-presented in a shared-value space. In this sense, when there exists a gap between “descent” and “origin” in these attributes, so much so that the “descents” are more “recognizable” with “non-African” (with the value of destination society – such is the case of black Americans - or with their own unique values in their new lands – such is the case of black Caribbeans) than “African,” they cannot and shouldn't be identified as “African.” Hence, individuals and groups who are not born in Africa and who do not share one or more of the above elements with peoples of Africa shouldn't be identified as “Africans,” no matter what their views and beliefs, shade of their skin, texture of their hair, size of lips, flatness of nose, endowment of genitals and hips (Fanon, 1967), etc.

Five, again if being an “African” is to speak from an “African” perspective and context, anyone who has produced a text from this perspective and context can be taken as an “African philosopher.” Hence, Hountondji's “non-African Africanists” and Coetzee and Roux's “speaking for oneself” cannot be valid criteria. Yet, there is a tendency to exclude those people who ill-spoke or are ill speaking about Africa, especially from without. But, how about someone who speak “ill” about or against Africa from an “African experience, or being an African?” Does one lose one's “African” identity?

Six, what if someone is “African” but fails to speak about or for Africa? What if he engages in a discourse that has nothing to do with an African experience (cultures, history, value, language, world-view, life-world, etc.), or with no [direct] black-African-value (Afrocentrism, Negritude, etc)? When Hountondji was faced with the same dilemma with Anton-Wilhem Amo<sup>37</sup>, for example,

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37 Hountondji, in *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, after a brief presentation of Amo's works and unable to find anything “African” in them, asks himself the “most difficult” question: “What does this work contain that can be called African?” and answers “Disappointing though it may be, the answer must be: *nothing*.” It could have been an

whose work reflect none of these values, he bluntly labels him an “African philosopher”. He openly confesses he has no reason for doing so, but all the while tries to justify it by appealing to Amo's birth and death in Africa. But, even in our time, there are philosophers who were born in Africa, such as Jacques Derrida, Albert Camus, Louis P. Althusser, etc., whose works do not reflect [direct] African values and commitments; yet, I haven't encountered a single text referring to them as “Africans” or even extend the benefit of the doubt that Hountondji gratuitously grants Amo. What makes these philosophers any less “African” than Kwame A. Appiah, Emmanuel C. Eze, etc? Because they don't share “drop of black blood” that made Amo African?

Kwasi Wiredu, in his forward to Masolo's survey of African philosophers in the Greco-Roman era, comments,

The philosophers in question – unsung ones apart – are Origen (ad 185–253), Clement (ad c.150–c.215), Tertullian (ad c.155–c.240), Augustine (ad 354–430), and Cyprian (ad 200–58). An interesting question arises at once. These thinkers were *Africans* and were responsible for a considerable body of thought. But did that formation of thought constitute an *African philosophy*? This question poses a problem at all because these philosophers, though African, *thought and wrote within the context of a Western tradition*. Granted. But, in this respect, how different are they from

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honest response if he had stopped there. He continues, “But we must understand correctly the meaning of this 'nothing' and properly assess the meaning of our inevitable disappointment: what could the Africanness that is so sadly lacking in Amo's work have consisted in? And, in general, what can be meant by the Africanness of a philosophical work?” (Hountondji, 1996: 128). To this he provides two answers.

One, our disappointment with Amo's work is not its lack of “philosophical” content, but only in his failure to include some sort of “African metaphysics and negritude” - its social insertion. He criticizes the “uncriticality” of this expectation, by saying that, “To require thinkers to be content with reaffirming the beliefs of their people or social group is exactly the same as prohibiting them from thinking freely and condemning them in the long term to intellectual asphyxia” (ibid, 129). In one sense this critic is directed to “ethnophilosophers” and “African nationalists.” He holds the firm belief that an African thinker should be allowed to engage in the search for truth wherever he finds it. If so, the African philosopher must be judged by the content of his work (valid and justified enough or not, for example) not by his allegiance (African enough or not), which he believes “Africanists” are trapped in.

Two, Amo the African did his philosophy entirely within “an-African theoretical tradition,” wrote in Latin, for the European public, and this is indeed regrettable for Hountondji. But, doesn't this make Amo's work “an-African?” God, No! says Hountondji. This cannot make him a non-African philosopher, because “Obviously Amo was not responsible for this painful isolation. He was the victim of an historical situation, and it is clear that he did everything that it was humanly possible for him to do. The times were not ripe. Failure was inevitable” (ibid, 130). What do we make of this last lines? Doesn't this contradict Houtondji's first point? I can't help but feel Houtondji's “contempt” for Amo. Why does practicing philosophy within Western philosophic discourse, in Western language, for the Western public, etc., suddenly makes Amo (the African philosopher) contemptible? Unless of course Amo has lost something fundamental, say his soul! If Houtondji believes that an African philosopher should be able to (if he is capable of course!) freely seize “the whole *existing* philosophical and scientific heritage, assimilating and mastering it in order to be able to transcend it,” which he believes is exactly what Amo did, why on earth does he entertain the idea of Amo's failure? The only rationale is that being an “African” necessitates some sort of “particular” way of assimilating, mastering and transcending [European] philosophy. Still, as I will show later, this is not what being an African philosopher is about either.

contemporary African philosophers? The answer is not as simple as one might, at first sight, have supposed. *Every point of differentiation* turns out to be a *matter of degree rather than of kind*. Contemporary African philosophers too, *especially if they are Christians*, are in no way innocent of Western influence. Perhaps the greater difference is that the psyche of a contemporary African philosopher is shaped by an African culture and imbued with a commitment to it. But, for example, Augustine's consciousness was not untouched by his African roots, and it is *speculated* that some of his views were conditioned by that circumstance. In the final analysis, it is the *degree of dedication to the advancement of an African tradition of thought that must make the difference*. Whether this is so or not, it seems clear that, if the thought of Augustine, as also of the others mentioned along with him, were to become a subject of sustained and prolonged interest among contemporary African philosophers, it would ipso facto *become part of African philosophy* in a quite stout sense (Wiredu, 2004: 23-24; emphasis added)

Wiredu seems to suggest that for someone to be an African philosopher his works must show some commitment to African culture and tradition of thought and as such must speak from it and about it. I agree with Wiredu on the fact that, at least today, an African philosopher speaks from an African place and space; however, I don't believe that he is limited to it, nor must he limit himself to it. In my view, the African philosopher's dedication, first and foremost, is to ideas and views he believes in and uphold, rather than a dedication to this or that culture. Wiredu seems to have caught in such identity-discourse dialectics-dilemma when he says;

The philosopher Anton Wilhelm Amo... is somewhat like St Augustine, but, if anything, *closer to home*. Born in Axim, Ghana, he was raised in Germany and academically trained there. He was productive philosophically *within the traditions of German philosophy* operative at his time. *But his commitment to Africa was explicit and repeated*. He returned to Ghana and remained there until the end of his days. His work invites African exploration (ibid: 24; emphasis added)

In truth, since Amo's works don't show African content and context, his works are German rather than African. In my view, following Wiredu's own analysis, Amo is a German philosopher. Yet, if we ignore the 'non-Africanity' of his work, the man still remains African who had practiced philosophy from a non-African perspective. His philosophy is all about self-consciousness-of-German-culture, despite being born to an African culture. This is especially important today given the debate over the identity of philosophers and classification of their works. One, born and raised in an African culture, yet educated in a philosophy of self-consciousness of Western cultures, some Africans explicitly philosophize from within a non-African culture. Two, for some philosophers, born and raised within multiple cultures, African and non-African, such as those born to parents from different cultures (people like Kwame Appiah, for example), their works don't explicitly

express a single culture's context. In such cases, we need to differentiate between the following: purpose and context of a discourse (socio-cultural and moral commitment) and content and form of a discourse (socio-cultural and epistemological background). Accordingly, Amo's work for example, is non-African in both cases. Again, we need to differentiate between culture as self-consciousness of a practitioner and culture as an epistemic order. In this sense, Amo's African cultural background had given him an African (black) self-consciousness, but his epistemic order remained German. That's why, in his day, he was referred to as an African who mastered German-philosophy (Abraham, 2004). Contrary to this fact, Wiredu's suggestion that his work needs an African exploration, by which he means, his works implicitly contain an African content, form, context or purpose that needs to be investigated and recovered from what is explicitly German is misleading. It is true that Amo fought against the subordination, objectification and dehumanization of black subjects as an integral part of his philosophy mainly in his work, "De Jure Maurorum in Europa": in other words, on the rights of Black Africans in Europe" (ibid: 192). It is true that, to a greater degree, he did this because he was black. However, in my view, not only he did this from within the same German-episteme, but also that he was not the only one to stand for black liberty and equality. This was the position of other blacks as well, whether they were born in Africa or in the West. In addition, there were non-blacks who hold the same view. In sum, Amo's identity and the identity of his work stand considerably apart. To conclude, his was an African who practiced German philosophy, or more precisely, he was a black German philosopher. If we identify him merely based on an epistemic order, he is German; if we identify him merely based on socio-political order, he is black/African. If I may grade his identity he was black first and an African second; this is because, his commitment was to 'blackness' first and can only be (if at all) 'African' thereafter. As for his work, it is German philosophy first and black/African philosophy second; this is because one reads it as German first and can only read it (if at all) as a black discourse thereafter.

Likewise, as to what makes Origen an African, Masolo writes, "Origen was born in Alexandria... to an indigenous Christian family.." (Masolo, 2004: 52). Not only that. He lists several other reasons that make him African.

First, eminent historians and commentators of his time refer to him as 'the African,' as they did Clement, Tertullian, Augustine, Cyprian, Arnobius, and other African scholars. ... Secondly, references, in sources on his early life, to his mastery of Greek philosophy and language as a sign of his affluent family background, which would not be such if he was Greek, indicate that he was an outsider to Greek culture. Also, the fact that he wrote in Latin, the preferred language of the African intellectuals of the time, rather than in Greek... Thirdly, we learn that he was expelled from

Antioch, where he had gone at the invitation of Julia Mamaea, the mother of Emperor Alexander Severus, when all Egyptians were ordered out of the city.... Origen's doctrines appear to have roots culturally and historically far deeper than his engagements with them for the sake and good of Christianity (ibid: 53-54).

It seems to me that, despite his works showing the contrary, Masolo goes a long way to claim Origen's Africanity. More importantly, Masolo seems determined to add celebrities like Origen and Augustine to raise the status of Africans in philosophy at all costs. Though I understand that we need to get our facts right about the identity of these philosophers, to make their identity a matter of building one's own school's repository is far from satisfactory. Again this is what Masolo has to say about Augustine:

Undoubtedly the most celebrated *African thinker in history*, and one of the greatest thinkers of all time, Aurelius Augustinus was born of Berber parents in Thagaste (probably the present-day Be'jai'a in Algeria), a small North African town facing the Mediterranean at Souk Ahras (then known as Numidia).... There has never been any doubt among historians regarding Augustine's Berber ethnicity.... According to Ferguson..., not only was Thagaste a center of Berber culture, but his own name, and those of his mother and son, are all either Berber, or Berber-derived in their meanings. In Ferguson's view, while Monica is certainly Berber, Adeodatus, the name of Augustine's son, is without doubt a Latinization of Iatanbaal (given by God). Ferguson mentions additional evidence of Augustine's African heredity..., including the apparent outsider's style of his discussion of the Roman Empire in *The City of God* and an African nationalist attitude in the *Confessions* (ibid: 59, emphasis added).

Again, when Augustine's works fail to show any 'Africanity' Masolo goes to rely on the words of historians and geographical location to claim his Africanity. My question is, why? Why was Masolo so determined to prove his African identity when the man seems to be more European than African, in both life and deeds? In my view, Augustine's works are European in content, form, purpose, context, etc., just as much as those of other European thinkers of his day. In fact, if we had no 'evidence' that he was born on the African continent, it would have been impossible to identify him as African from his works. The question remains: is it one's discourse that identifies one as African, Western, Eastern, etc., philosopher, or is it one's place of origin? Though philosophers practice philosophy from both temporal and spatial consciousness of human and natural, material and immaterial world, contrary to what the existential identity-dialectics between black and white seems to dictate, one's discourse doesn't necessarily prescribe one's socio-cultural and politico-ideological identity, nor is the latter the necessary determinant of the former. Yet, as far as identification remain

an integral part of contemporary philosophical practice, one's identity as an African philosopher cannot be inferred from, nor limited to, one's 'Africanist' view and beliefs. One doesn't need to be 'African' to be an Africanist (remember the saying: I am an African not because I was born in Africa, rather because Africa was born in me), nor be from outside the continent to be a non-Africanist. In sum, though one needs to be from Africa to be called an 'African' philosopher, one cannot be an African philosopher just because one is 'black-skinned' or an 'Africanist', 'Afrocentrist', 'Pan-Africanist', 'pro-black', etc.

## Chapter 3: African Philosophy as a Counter-Discourse to Eurocentrism

So far we have seen the problem of grounding African philosophy on the premises of “dehumanized” African subject and “derogatory” historical encounter of Africa with Europe. This brings us to the question: What is it to be truly African and what is true African philosophy? This is where the hitherto debate in African philosophy arose. The short history of African philosophy has been a battle ground for the questions of what African philosophy is and what its epistemological and moral grounds could and should be. Though whether this long overdue debate itself constitutes philosophy or not remains ambivalent, in this chapter, I will provide a short overview of African philosophy as a response to Western discourses on Africa.

### 3.1 Dissolving the Myth of Rationality

Kwame Gyekye opens his book *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (1995) with a list<sup>38</sup> of its philosophical prerogatives;

[1] to stress the fact of the universal character of the intellectual activity called philosophy – of the propensity of some individuals in all human cultures to reflect deeply and critically about fundamental questions of human experience; [2] to point out that philosophy is essentially a cultural phenomenon; [3] to argue the legitimacy or appropriateness of the idea of African philosophy and attempt a definition of (modern) African philosophy; [4] and to demonstrate that there were sages or thinkers in Africa’s cultural past who gave reflective attention to matters of human existence at the fundamental level, and, as part of the demonstration, to critically explore the philosophical ideas of the Akan traditional thinkers (of Ghana) (quoted in Barry Hallen, 2004: 110-111).

Gyekye's forward can serve as an exemplary canon of contemporary African philosophical

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38 One of African philosophy's departing points, as Gyekye tries to do here, is “de-Westernizing” African knowledge, place and space. In the same line with Fanon's dialectical process of struggle, Gyekye's project substantiates the Europe-Africa dialectics, or as Mudimbe it, “the specific and abnormal on the one side and the general and normal on the other” (Mudimbe, 1988: 211). Mudimbe (ibid), following P. Veyne's criticism of history of Western episteme (an episteme which hegemonially presents itself as the single-Truth for all humankind), postulates that there is more to being an African and having an African destiny than offered by 'Western philosophy via its mechanized tautologies of the history of Same'. As a result, the claims and conter-claims between European discourse on Africa and African response to it, if seen in the post-modern structuralist model, Mudimbe argues, have the following four implications for African philosophy: –(a) an interrogation about the subject of discourse; (b) a re-evaluation of the concept of rationality from the viewpoint of intrinsic properties of categories functioning in regional texts, myths and interpretations; (c) a re-conceptualization of scientific method and the relationships that “scientific knowledge” might have with other forms or types of knowledge; and (d) a redefinition of human freedom”. He goes on to comment that “These are not small issues, and because of their range, structuralism, to use an unfortunate expression of M. P Edmond, has been perceived as a process of de-Westernizing scientific knowledge”. Evidently, Gyekye's four prerogatives clearly match Mudimbe's four implications.

discourse – in content, form, method, and goal. His work, implicitly or explicitly, intends to tackle one of the fundamental issues in contemporary African philosophy: the question of the “nature” of African traditional thought (primitive mind), which has come to be known as the “Rationality Debate”<sup>39</sup>. Masolo, in his book *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, argues that rationality debate has played a fundamental role in the conception and espousing of African philosophy. He presents it as the dialectic between Logocentrism and Emotivism, as *two systems in struggle for control of identity*. The root of this debate is “the concept of reason, a value which is believed [by the European] to stand as the great divide between the civilized and the uncivilized, the logical and the mystical,” in short between “Western and non-Western” (Masolo, 1994: 1). This debate took many forms and discussed a variety of topics, centering around the “individual's role and impact in the shaping and control of one's identity and destiny” (ibid). This debate arose from the European [Enlightenment] discourse on Africa, where Africans were thought of as lacking the ability to be conscious of, shape and control their identity and destiny. The argument goes: rational thinking is the means to achieve one's true self and one's natural destiny, and if anyone lacks it, eventually, one lacks human attainments resulting from it: including history, culture, civilization, true religion, enlightenment, etc. Naturally, African philosophy presented itself as an anti-thesis of this Enlightenment thesis, as a system of proving the existence of African history, culture, civilization, religion, etc.

One major reason for the centrality of this issue has to do with the belief that denial of African rationality necessarily amounts to denial of African philosophy. As a result, African philosophy needed to reclaim itself, prove its existence and legitimacy before moving forward. As Barry Hallen notes, “In a sense, then, African philosophers were reclaiming their own territory when, by both deed and word, they reasserted the prerogative of their discipline to define the “rational” in any culture” (Hallen, 2004: 104).

Many African philosophers contend that some European thinkers such as Emmanuel Kant, Frederick Hegel, David Hume and Lucien Levy-Bruhl espoused that the African subject either has never reached the level of rational thought or lack<sup>40</sup> it altogether. These Europeans argued there is

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39 Tsenay Serequeberhan believes that “the present prolonged and ongoing debate in and on the status, nature, and indeed the very possibility of African philosophy”, where the rationality debate takes the center stage, “dates back to the early 1970s, when the challenges to the ethnographic and documentary hegemony of Temples, John Mbiti and others began to be registered” (Serequeberhan, 1994: 3). However, Masolo seems to suggest that this debate dates earlier to Tsenay's 1970s since he presents the Rationality Debate from the time of Césaire. Yet, Césaire's views were continuations of the overall black intellectuals defensive and responsive tradition which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

40 Kwame Appiah writes, “... that for almost the whole period that there have been people of African descent in the New World, Europeans and Americans of European descent have consistently denied that black people were capable

no true history, culture, religion and no worthwhile civilization to be found in Africa. To this discourse, Masolo presents an overview of “African [black] responses [reactions]”, different in forms, spatial and cultural backgrounds, theoretical and experiential thematic. He groups into the Harlem Renaissance of Edward Blyden, Du Bois, McKay; essentialist theories of Negritude by Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor; Historical capitalizations of Cheikh A. Diop, Martin Bernal and Henry Orla; Liberation movements of Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah and Frantz Fanon. Similarly, among the key authors of Negritude and Afrocentrism Hensbroek includes Edward Blyden, Africanus Horton, James Johnson, and Alexander Crummell, who “developed comprehensive arguments that can be considered classical positions on the issue of an African response to the West” (Hensbroek, 2004: 78).

Here I summarized Masolo overview of the responses of these schools into the following four points: (a) European negative characterization of the black subject forced these thinkers to re-conceptualize and re-define the [true] essence of the black subject; (b) European denial of African history and culture forced them to re-define and re-write their “alienated and undermined” cultures and experiences and re-claim “forgotten” or even “stolen” histories and legacies; (c) enslavement and colonization forced them to struggle for “freedom” and challenge the global [European] World Order; and (d) imposition of Western cultures, traditions, and religion necessitated the demand and struggle for mental and conceptual decolonization. In essence, these discourses, these re-definitions, re-conceptualizations, re-formulations, re-presentations, re-makings, re-claims, re-births, etc., albeit their difference on the outset, have one thing in common at the core: anti-Eurocentrism. As Paulin Hountondji notes, African intellectuals of the above schools take their departing point from history and culture. He argues, “The larger historical and ideological background to this process of African self-reflection is provided, of course, by the colonial experience” (Hountondji, 1996: 11), where the existential dimension and mental alteration colonialism is evident in Westernized African elite and the resultant views they present as philosophy.

As I noted earlier, though rationality debate has been central to black intellectuals' defensive and reactive discourse since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, the birth of Rationality Debate on the African continent is largely associated with the emergence of Placid Temples' *Bantu Philosophy*. Bantu philosophy gave a general framework to the earlier fragmented and franchized thoughts of black and African thinkers. Emmanuel Eze argues that African philosophy, being a counter-discourse to

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of contributing to “the arts and the letters”... Even in the Enlightenment, which emphasized the universality of reason, Voltaire in France, Hume in Scotland, and Kant in Germany, like Jefferson in the New World, denied literary capacity to people of African descent” (Appiah, 1992: 52).

colonialism, should be seen from two perspectives: the emergence of Placid Temples' *Bantu Philosophy* (which brought the rationality debate to the continent in ~~disproving~~ the European view of pre-logical African mind) and the African intellectual's continuing struggle with what he calls the ~~Age of Europe~~ (the age of European encounter with Africa since the 15<sup>th</sup> century) (Eze, 1998: 217). Masolo reflects the same point when he says,

At the beginning, African philosophy did little more than echo the premises which has been expressed by the Harlem Renaissance and negritude movements [...]. The view was that Africa has a duty to accomplish, and this was to identify and define all the material and psychological constituents of her civilization. [...] to redress these material and psychological values in a manner likely to make them acceptable to the ... Western world, by claiming the essential differences of the ~~pre~~ African from the ~~pre~~ European. [...] The result was a struggle over the control of identity by means of definition of reason, its nature and its functions (Masolo, 1994: 40).

Though Masolo implies that African philosophy has moved past this 'beginning' the truth is, as I will show, it still carries this view today. Needless to say this reactionary<sup>41</sup> (refute Western philosophical claims) and apologetic (reclaim true Africanism) debate in its every form reflects the need and wish to convince the old slave-master and colonizer about the humanity, equality and freedom of the African subject, place and space through rationalization, equalization and liberation.

At this point it is necessary to raise the following important questions: Can this discourse be called African philosophy? Do Africans in any aspect of their being and becoming need to prove themselves to the dead or living European, rationalist or ideologist, philosopher or anthropologist? Is the ~~incapability of the African mind~~ to do philosophy a philosophical question in itself, and is proving this capability philosophical? Whichever way one answers<sup>42</sup> these questions, the truth remains, such a discourse, from its very ground remains a commentary. Most importantly, the very proving of ~~African rationality~~ itself is highly problematic, especially in its hitherto form, content

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41 Clarence Walker, after Frederick Nietzsche and Liah Greenfeld, calls it Ressentiment, where ~~Ressentiment~~ is by definition a *reaction* to the values of others, ... and not to one's own condition regardless of others" which implies, the newly emergent African thought system ~~is~~ necessarily influenced by the one to which it is a reaction", i.e. the Western" (Walker, 2001: 114). According to Walker, value concepts such as African Personality, Négritude, and ultimately Afrocentrism are ~~all reaction~~ to the West that, although challenging European (or ~~white~~) values, nevertheless frames their arguments in terms of Western (or European or ~~white~~) values and terminology" (ibid, 31).

42 For example, Serequeberhan argues engaging in Rationality Debate, and along with it, ~~the~~ very questioning of its own groundedness and originative horizon is a concern proper to and constitutive of a philosophic discourse in its very nature" for African philosophy (Serequeberhan, 1994). But, Serequeberhan seems to confuse two different points. It is one thing for a given system of thought to reflect on itself, as in the case of modern and post-modern self-reflective practices in Western philosophy. Such a system doesn't doubt itself but wants to critically examine its constitutive horizon. However, it is another for a system of thought to try to prove itself that it is indeed a philosophy. How can it be a philosophy when it hasn't proved itself to be one? And more importantly, prove itself to who?

and method. Consider Outlaw's comment on the Rationality debate and the role of Temples' *Bantu Philosophy*;

In short, the task was to establish that Africans, too, were appropriately to be placed in the premier category of European philosophical anthropology, that of rational man, a task that involved challenging the category's denotative limits as set by the rules of control at work in the discursive practices of European Philosophy and in their implementation in European colonialism. One of the merits of Tempels' *Bantu philosophy* was its forcing of these issues (Outlaw, 2003: 171).

Not only does African philosophy hangs on the ~~justification~~ "of African rationality" enforced by Tempels, but also takes its departing points from it. Because African philosophy needed to ~~free~~ traditional thought from the charge of irrationality" (Sogolo, 1993: 71) and also show that ~~different~~ forms of life call for different paradigms of discourse" (ibid). As Outlaw further points out that;

It was in this context that the voices of Africans concerned with the liberation of African peoples from colonial domination in general, and with the reclamation of African character and being as exemplified in various fields of endeavour in particular, including that of Philosophy, were raised in challenge to the European caricatures of black peoples, some of which efforts are now framed by the phrase African philosophy. This framing gives identity to a new field of discourse which, simultaneously, is heavily conditioned by its European heritage (e.g. in calling itself Philosophy) while, in many instances, challenging this very heritage and its claims to Truth, exclusively, and thus, predominance (Outlaw, 2003:171).

In the end one wonders if the Rationality Debate is about proving African rationality or disproving the European's exclusive claim to it, or if it merely about attacking this ~~hegemonic~~" and ~~racist~~" claim. For example, Leopold Senghor claims, argues Walker, ~~We~~ "were in revolt against order, against the values of the West, and especially against Reason... We opposed to the platitudes of reason the lofty tree tops of our forest," which implies, ~~For~~ Senghor the idea of the primitive did not connote inferiority or a lack of sophistication. It was, however, a site of rebellion against European colonization" (Walker, 2001: 33-34). In either case, the debate over rationality is more of ideological rather than rationale discourse. Serequeberhan argues, behind the Rationality Debate lies ~~an~~ "obscure and rather enigmatic clash of contending political agendas – agendas which have not been explicitly declared or even articulated" (Serequeberhan, 1994: 3). After all Hegel himself was merely relying on dialectics of white versus black, rather than white mind versus black mind in his *Philosophy of History* (Houtoundji, 1996: 11). As such any anti-thesis and counter-claim given by Africans suffer from the same ideology, dogma and racism that it intends to dissolve.

Serequeberhan, for example argues, that "the practice of philosophy is never politically [ideologically] neutral and any belief in political 'neutrality' in philosophy, as in most other things, is at best a 'harmless' naivete, and at worst a pernicious subterfuge for hidden agendas" (Serequeberhan, 1994: 4). It is true that philosophers speak from a certain point of view. However, this doesn't mean that we should be limited to our points of views nor impose our views on others. If all of us hold our positions and fail to see the other side, such is what some European thinkers did, we might go in circles and remain excluding and externalizing others. In my view, even our political agendas should not keep us apart but help us come together. Yet, what this 'coming together' would look like remains a question.

### **3.2 Remaking Identity and Reclaiming Destiny: Negritude and Afrocentrism**

Godwin Sogolo identifies two orientations in contemporary African philosophy: one that attempts to extract "philosophy" from African traditional cultures and beliefs, and the other that attempts to examine philosophical issues raised in Western traditions of philosophy from an African viewpoint (Sogolo, 1993: xiv). It seems to me that the former led to the birth of Negritude while the latter led to Afrocentrism, with little difference between the two. Eze writes,

With the "discovery" of Bantu philosophy in Africa and the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance in the United States – with its philosophers and intellectuals: Alain Locke, Claude McKay, W. E. B. Dubois and others – where Africans in the Diaspora were already engaged in the critique of African colonialism and the racism of the New World, a third moment in the history of African philosophy was born: Negritude. As a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement originated in Paris by African and Afro-Caribbean students, Negritude, through Aime Cesaire and Leopold Sedar Senghor, found in Bantu Philosophy and in the pluralist anthropologies of Frobenius, Herskovits, and Delafosse, and in the cultural movements of the Harlem Renaissance, renewed energy and resources for a continuing struggle against European denigration and deprivation of Africans, on the continent and in Europe. The idea of "African philosophy" as a field of inquiry thus has its contemporary roots in the effort of African thinkers to combat political and economic exploitations, and to examine, question, and contest identities imposed upon them by Europeans. The claims and counter-claims, justifications and alienations that characterize such historical and conceptual protests and contestations indelibly mark the discipline of African philosophy (Eze, 1998: 217).

This is how Negritude and Afrocentrism came to occupy the center stage on which some major African philosophical practices have been revolving. Since the beginning these theories were coined as a response to Eurocentrism, and as a result, were thought to contribute to Africa's conceptual and practical liberation from Europe. For example, concerning the father of Negritude and

Afrocentrism, Hensbroek writes;

Blyden's thought, in all its stages, centered on the idea of race, race-pride, love of the fatherland (Africa), and belief in a brilliant African renaissance. He held the view that every race is a natural unit, having its own "home" continent, character, and mission. As a result, he is often considered the precursor of Negritude and of the idea of anti-racist racism in the twentieth century... (Hensbroek, 2004: 80)

If Hensbroek is right, Negritude was coined as an anti-racist racism that tried to divide and keep races apart, where the black race would eventually take over Africa and re-Africanize it. In order for this to happen, Hensbroek continues, Blyden believed that "African culture should be protected against alien (including Christian) influence. He thus initiated a new, what could be called an 'Afrocentric' or 'African Regeneration,'..." (ibid, 81.) Again, this African regeneration hang on enlightening the Negro about his Africanity and forge a specifically African mode of thought and life-world, an African that thinks and acts different from the European. For Blyden, African identity was to be defined not only as different but also in contrast to the European.

... The more radical implications of Blyden's identity philosophy, such as the idea of a specifically African personality... was defined in contrast to the European, which was identified as harsh, individualistic, competitive, combative, non-religious, and materialistic. The African's contribution toward world culture would be that of peacemaker and conservator of the spirituality of the world (ibid, 82).

Negritude's reactive and apologetic thesis, argues Ibiola Irele, is conditioned by "the Negro predicament of having been forced by historical circumstances into a state of dependence upon the West, considered the master society and the dominating culture," (Irele, 2003: 38) where Negritude was presented as a means to political and ideological freedom of black people, "a counter-movement away from this state" of dependency and subordination. He says, Negritude literature constitute "a symbolic progression from subordination to independence, from alienation, through revolt, to self-affirmation" (ibid). The feeling of alienation, aggravated by "the most pathetic aspect of the French-speaking Negro intellectuals' specific situation" sums up Negritude literature as the expression of black life in an alien white world and the resulting psychological trauma, of being alienated from "his own black" world and the suffocating longing for home. Irele further states,

The overwhelming sentiment that dominates in this connection is the black man's sense of separation from his own world and of being thrown into a social system with whose cultural values he can strike no personal relation. The black man recognizes himself as belonging to an "out-

group', an alien in relation to the West, which controls the total universe in which he moves. For the French-speaking Negro writer, this situation is signified by his physical exile in Europe (ibid: 39).

As to the similarity between Negritude and Afrocentrism Clarence Walker says, "Within francophone Africa, the popularity of Négritude may be explained because it provided a coherent concept of identity, which gave the colonized blacks 'a sense of the Africans' separate cultural and spiritual inheritance" (Walker, 2001). This sensibility, he believes, was enhanced by "the work of Cheikh Anta Diop, the Senégalese humanist, scientist, and political rival of Sènghor.[...] Diop and Sènghor were both nationalists, but their opposition to French colonialism was expressed differently. Sènghor's nationalism was mystical and poetic, whereas Diop's occupied another analytical space" (ibid). The points of views between Negritude and Afrocentrism can be read as either complementary or antithetical. Despite their differences, however, the proponents of Negritude not only saw themselves under white domination and economic exploitation, but also found themselves as being out of place, existentially and conceptually. They saw the black race in general as subordinate to the white race, which led them to the inverse-substantiation of white racism: "us blacks" versus "them whites" dialectics. They justified their alienation by establishing their "otherness". This resulted in conflicting paradigms of which the debates in contemporary African philosophy are the true embodiment.

The Negritude elite was expressing himself within colonial and slavery's conceptual framework while his very struggle was to escape the very episteme he is caught in. This vicious circle haunted him, since his knowledge of himself as Other is nothing more than his knowledge of himself as the negation of the white man's conception of his blackness. Cheikh A. Diop is quoted by Walker: "Psychic liberation from the intellectual hegemony of Western thought was a prerequisite for black liberation" (Walker, 2001: 35). Negritude was black-man's self image that begins and ends in reversing the image projected onto him by the white man. "The black man," argues Irele, "and especially the intellectual, found himself a man no longer in his own right, but with reference to another, thus estranged from himself; in exile, not only in a political and social sense, but also spiritually" (Irele, 2003: 42).

That's why I believe that Negritude and Afrocentrism are continuations of the legacy of black versus white ideology inaugurated by European Enlightenment. In doing so, they urge black people to search for their true [new?] identity, history, episteme, values, destiny, etc., that are dichotomous yet equally vital to the Western ones. To do this Africa must be remade and reclaimed – it must be

different. Africa must stand on its own ground and should be understood and judged only from this ground. If so; one, it is only Africans who could talk about Africa, since the legacy of European view of Africa is proof that the European cannot rightly understand and represent it; two, the African should speak and plot for Africa [against Europe?] since Africa has been spoken for wrongly and plotted against viciously by the European.

As a result, says Irele, “a myth of Africa developed... , which involved a glorification of the African past and a nostalgia for the imaginary beauty and harmony of traditional African society” (ibid, 47). African philosophy is made unique. This philosophy would present a new conception of truth, reality, ethics, God, freedom, etc. As Blyden theorized, blacks are [racially] different which makes them culturally and epistemically different as such. Not only that; blacks everywhere in the world share this essence, Otherness, which makes them Same among each other and Different from other races. And as such they should “think independently”, as Marcus Garvey would put it. The goal, for Garvey, “was the emancipation of ‘the Negro from the thoughts of others.’ The emphasis in Garvey’s work on changing the way black people think occupies a central place in contemporary Afrocentric discourse” (Walker, 2001: 37). This might mean that Africans should stop viewing themselves in light of European discourse on Africa. Yet, Garvey's very claim itself is thinking in this very light, i.e. it has no meaning outside Europe-Africa dialectic.

Ironically, however, Negritude “represents the ultimate and most stable point of self-awareness” and marks the emergence the modern African self-consciousness, as well as collective “African” self-expression (Irele, 2003: 57). In fact “It marks a ‘desacralization’ of African collective life, an attitude which is spontaneous and no longer imposed, and out of which have begun to flow new currents of ideas for tackling present-day African problems” (ibid: 58). As a consequence; first, Negritude became part of an overall struggle of black [African] people, a legacy which African philosophy carries with it today. Second, Negritude provided the justification for the need for “African discourses” of which African philosophy is one. And third, Negritude established the otherness of African subjects and cultures, and by extension the particularity and relativism of African philosophy.

In light of Negritude, African philosophy is, to use Irele's and Eze's expression, a “counter-discourse”, where Western philosophy and philosophers<sup>43</sup> were treated as plotters against Africa and

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43 Despite the primary occupation of African and black philosophy with white racist discourses on Africa and its subjects, Charles Mills says, “A collection of explicitly racist statements about blacks from the major works of the central figures in the Anglo-American canon would not be a particularly thick document” (Mills, 1998: 3). The

Africans, for which every African philosopher has the duty to either denounce or refute their views, or provide an unwavering response from the authentic epistemological wealth of Africa. Contrary to this, however, almost every book I read as African philosophy (see Bibliography) refers to some White philosopher(s) to validate its arguments against some other anti-African White philosopher or any divergent black philosopher<sup>44</sup> [the Subordinate]. Implicitly or explicitly, if “our” philosophy becomes a discourse of negating the evil European [instead of the evil human being, whoever he is and whatever made him evil] and as long as our context is the dehumanized African [instead of the dehumanized human being, once again, whoever he is] we are far from both objectivity<sup>45</sup> and intellectual honesty, above all responsible discourse [which ironically everyone claims as the value of their respective philosophies], and remain trapped in a struggle against the “anonymous, faceless” Black Public Enemy.

On the cultural and political front, establishing itself behind the shadow of the grandiosity of Ancient Egypt, Afrocentrism poses itself as the deliverer and console of the wretched black subjects of the Earth. Unlike Negritude, which is primarily “essential” in approach, Afrocentrism advocates existential Africanism for all black subjects in the world. “According to Asante, Afrocentrism places ‘African ideas and values at the center of inquiry.’” (Walker, 2001: 38). In the words of Molefi K. Asante,

The Afrocentrist seeks to uncover and use codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data. Such a method appears to go beyond western history in order to revalorize the African place in the interpretation of Africans, continental and diasporan (quoted in

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quarrel that African philosophy has with Western philosophy, Mills believes, lies in the latter's silence on the inhuman conditions and treatments black subjects had to endure under white subordination, “a silence not of tacit inclusion but rather of exclusion: the black experience is not subsumed under these philosophical abstractions, despite their putative generality” (ibid). As a result, there is also a sense of self-exclusion by blacks from philosophical discourse, argues Mills, and comments, “The impatience or indifference that I have sometimes detected in black students seems to derive in part from their sense that there is something strange in spending a whole course describing the logic of different moral ideals, for example, without ever mentioning that *all of them* were systematically violated for blacks. So it is not merely that the ideal was not always attained but that, more fundamentally, *this was never actually the ideal in the first place*. A lot of moral philosophy will then seem to be based on pretense, the claim that these were the principles that people strove to uphold, when in fact the real principles were the racially exclusivist ones” (ibid: 4).

44 As Walker notes on Afrocentrism, “Like religion, Afrocentrism operates in the realm of faith or belief. One either accepts its preposterous claims or is anathematized. Doubtters are either racist, if they are white, or inauthentically black and co-opted by a world of Eurocentric madness” (Walker, 2001: 129).

45 As Clarence E. Walker argues regarding this pro-African thought system, “... Afrocentrism is not history. To most contemporary historians, ... history is an interpretive practice, not an objective natural science” (Walker, 2001: 77). In essence, the debate over the ownership or belongingness of Egyptian history is more of ideological than both factual and truth claim. It is true that history must be re-written as correctly as possible. As such, it might help for the moral-ideological self-esteem of blacks in the face of white racism who claim that blacks haven't achieved any civilization; however, Ancient Egypt is as remote to the current Africa as it is to Europe or Asia in both fact and truth.

Walker, 2001: xviii).

As a philosophy, therefore, –Afrocentrism or Africalogy is [...] the ... study of phenomena, events, ideas, and personalities related to Africa. [...] The scholar who generates research questions based on the centrality of Africa is engaged in a very different research inquiry than the one who imposes Western criteria on the phenomena” (Asante, quoted in Walker, 2001: 40). In doing so, the African intellectual tries to rescue and reconstruct Black humanity and recuperate African cultures a centering which, as Maulana Karenga puts it, –heals and restores black psyches wounded and disoriented by centuries of Eurocentric historical presumption and arrogance” (Walker, 2001: xix). In doing so it aims at centering and uniting black people around the idea of what it means to exist as a black subject in the white dominated world. This project ranges from rewriting and reclaiming history (Egyptian civilization), to the creation of a noble African image, often u-turning European image of Africa and re-presenting it in some poetically intoxicating mythological form. As to the need of re-writing and re-claiming history as part of African philosophical discourse Theophile Obenga argues,

African philosophy as a historical fact must be understood within a historical frame. The origin, evolution, and development of African philosophy follow the streams and currents of African history. The long history of African philosophy has shown connections with other continents, chiefly with Europe, since the Graeco-Roman world. In remote times African philosophy was mainly located in the Nile Valley, that is, in Kemet or ancient Egypt, and in Kush (Napata-Meroe). Philosophy flourished in Egypt from about 3400 bc to 343 bc and in Kush (also known as Nubia or Ethiopia by the Greeks) from about 1000 bc to 625 bc (Obenga, 2004: 31).

Obenga doesn't deny that African philosophy has a long history of interaction with Europe. What he doesn't explicitly state is the fact that African philosophy has more to do with European philosophy rather than Egypt. Accordingly, though philosophy flourished in Egypt and Kush, whether this philosophy can be considered as part of contemporary African philosophy is questionable. In truth, given the Afrocentrist claim that Greek inherited Egyptian philosophy, and given the fact that contemporary African philosophy is inherited from Europe/Greek, it is fair to say that either Western and African philosophy have the same historical source, or that African philosophy wouldn't have claimed Egypt as a source if Europe hasn't sustained the tradition. In my view, given the mistake of European philosophy for its continual denial of Egypt as its root, and given that African philosophy has broke away from this root a long time ago, African philosophy would make the same mistake if it doesn't admit its indebtedness to Europe. I also think, since people like

Augustine and Origen have practiced European philosophy and contributed greatly to its history, as Masolo argued, European philosophy needs to recognize its indebtedness to African thinkers as well.

Afrocentrism's another dimension is the mystification of Africa as a response to European portrayal of it as the 'dark' continent. As such this mystic uplifting of Africa has influenced African thinkers to venerate and celebrate it as the land of mystery and greatness. In her analysis of V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979), Kadiatu Kanneh catches the influence of this mythical image and its pretensions;

The familiar colonial rhetoric of the timelessness of Africa, the emptiness of village life, locked in a fixed and lost dimension, the primitive savagery energising the episodic destruction of order, lies against the familiar rhetoric of celebration which is positioned as another object, distanced from the narrative voice, the particular —understanding of history as a dominating narrative destiny, intention overriding and writing over what is... *essentially* African”, the veneration of Africa which is nothing but the veneration of the writer's ability to seek out, to witness African cultural objects, and placing these objects in his/her conceptual museum, locating the site of the European school to interpret these cultural objects, where the force of European history, its power to exterminate Africa in the name of logic it at play... (Kanneh, 1998: 3).

Kanneh believes that such objectification and exaggerated misconception of Africa has resulted from the fact that writers such as Naipaul being displaced from Africa, yet recreating it from their own fantasy and consumed by the perpetual longing for home resolved themselves into inventing an anti-colonial narcissist image of Africa.

As a result, independent, modern Africa, distanced from the hopeless, timeless secrecy of hidden forest villages, simply exists at the interchange of conflicting narratives, born of colonial discourse.[...] Out of the constant self-referencing self-consciousness of Salim's [the main character in the novel who represents a *South Asian* African] narration, caught in his own idea of postcolonial displacement, and prey to his own object, the novel identifies Africa as, inevitably, a site of its own narcissism: 'Those face of Africa!... They were people crazed with the idea of who they were' (ibid: 3-4).

Africa is posited as a ground, root, source, spring of black being, thinking and acting. Walker similarly argued, —Afrocentrism sentimentalizes Africa by depicting it as a place where blacks lived in perfect harmony before the arrival of whites. Like the Puritan 'city on a hill,' the Afrocentrists' Africa is a transhistoric exemplar. Its 'sensational' place within this cultural paradigm resides in the

racialization of ancient personages and the naming of Africa as the ur-site of Western civilization” (Walker, 2001: 91). Again, Africa was not only misconceived and misrepresented by Afrocentrists but also led to an ideology of anti-Europe Africa. As such, instead of looking for an interaction and symbiosis with Europe, Afrocentrists appear to have chosen to create an Africa that stands outside and opposite to Europe and Eurocentrism.

Afrocentrism's role as a colonial-era black philosophy and its influence on post-colonial African philosophy is clear. Yet, by large, some Afrocentrists were looking at Africa from outside, speaking about a continent that they lost contact with for ages. As a result, I believe, Afrocentrism became a theory of place and space from no-where. Or, at best, contrary to its claim, it was about putting Africa on the philosophical map of Europe, in the name of mapping an independent Africa. Bruce Janz, in his book *Philosophy in an African Place*, writes,

The concern with philosophical identity and legitimacy is really a concern for one's place in a discipline, and in the academy. The "nowhere-ness" of African philosophy, from the point of view of the discipline as a whole, must be countered by those who believe that African philosophy has or deserves a place on the philosophical map. But how? (Janz, 2009: 3).

For Afrocentrists, being black is irreducibly chained to being “from Africa”, a proud Africa. Wiredu notes, speaking from this perspective states, “... pride of place belongs to substantive issues of philosophy as these have occupied the African mind in communal conceptions and individualized cogitations” (Wiredu, 2004: xix). The Afrocentrist asks, “Where am I?” and answers “I am where I am from”. Janz says,

—There are many writers, from Wallace Stegner and Wendell Berry in the West to Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Okot p'Bitek in East Africa who evoke in their writings a sense of place. ... these writers speak eloquently about the way that place affects how we understand the world. [...] We are necessarily rooted in place, in the sense that we necessarily come at the world from an understanding, from a set of commitments. We come caring about something, no matter how dispassionate we try to be. We come from a place (Janz, 2009: 10).

Many black thinkers, born and raised to a place that rejects and externalizes them, were forced to look to Africa as the place and space for self-grounding, self-understanding, self-representation, and self-evaluation. In my view, such an approach not only led to a misconception and misunderstanding of African identity and destiny, but also resulted in the continuation of 'Africa versus Europe' struggle instead of looking for a common ground. It is true that the two places have

had and still continue to have their differences and even opposition. However, just like some European thinkers wrongly advocated this difference as an irreconcilable rift and urged for Europe's subsumation of Africa, a project by Africans to create Europe-free Africa might end up taking the same problem of dissecting two organs inseparably co-joined. Though Africans have rightly struggled and continue to struggle against Europe's evil deeds and though this struggle constitutes an important chapter in African discourse, the form of this struggle remained violently exclusivist rather than an inclusive one.

Black and African philosophy, as “philosophizing born of struggle” must “look at, listen to, feel, and experience what does matter most to black folks in their various life-worlds as conditioned by struggles against racial oppression” (Outlaw, 2003: 94). Following this Afrocentrist tradition, African philosophy became “consumed with its place in the world of philosophy in general, its place in relation to its cultural origins and present milieu, its place in the formation of the identities of its practitioners” (Janz, 2009: 6). In the words of Kadiatu Kanneh, African philosophy of Afrocentrism “... is readable as a metaphor for the object it represents—the encoded body, the native culture, the past. However, this readability is an illusion of its own making. Historical and ethnographic writing simply re-orders the scraps and tatters of other textual references to *create* a supposedly adequate object *beyond* the text, which is retrospectively and remotely awarded an intelligible sequence and order” (Kanneh, 1998: 20). What is being written in the name of African philosophy as a response to Eurocentrism did not escape Blyden's “baptism of slavery”, a baptism that has resulted in modern and enlightened African subject's self-representation from the history of slavery and colonialism. As such, it underlies the need for the search for a source, an origin, a place far away from Europe, away from the slave-holder, away from the colonizer.

### **3.3 Conceptual Decolonization**

Conceptual Decolonization has been presented as another response to Eurocentrism. It takes its departing point from the fact that contemporary African philosophy has been practiced using concepts and conceptualizations of Western philosophy. As such, it proposes that African philosophers should look into their own indigenous episteme when addressing philosophical inquires. As Godwin Sogolo puts it,

there is the need for a new orientation in thinking among African scholars, both those in search of an African philosophic tradition and those in search of a new social order. They should be more self-asserting and start their search from within an indigenous cultural base. This calls for conceptual decolonization; putting aside, as it were, some of their intellectual borrowing. They

should aspire to ensure that their theoretical formulations are African in content, that being the only way in which their works can claim legitimacy to the prefix 'African'" (Sogolo, 1993: xx).

Given the fact that most contemporary African philosophers begin philosophical education via Western episteme, where this episteme remains their ground for philosophizing, there is a rational concern that whatever is presented as African episteme remains Western as such.

According to Masolo philosophers such as Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga, Marcien Towa, Meinrad Hebga and V. Y. Mudimbe are few of the proponents of this approach. Their thesis, he argues, derives from Crahay's thesis which says ~~for~~ Africans to produce a system of philosophy they need to reconstruct African discourse at speculative level by first identifying and then employing conceptual schemes or basic principles of reasoning indigenous to Africa" (Masolo, 1994: 147). By rejecting approaches such as ethnophilosophy (though, in my view, how much are they free from it remains a question) ~~as~~ a product of Western power/knowledge" and accusing contemporary African intellectual practice for taking place ~~within~~ the format and formulas dictated by Western epistemological categories and principles", they advanced the view that ~~African~~ intellectual practice must break away from its Western conditionings to be able to make any sense to Africans themselves" (ibid).

Hebga, for example, argues, ~~Why~~ could not African peoples have their own way of seeing the world, and man, and the problems raised by human existence? ... the so called pure and universal mankind's philosophy is a mythical being or, at best, an ideal never to be reached..." (quoted in Masolo, 1994: 174). As we saw in the previous chapter, perhaps Mudimbe is the major critic of Africanism's self-grounding in Western episteme. He argues, in the words of Masolo, ~~Modern~~ African intellectual history is part of a consistent escape from the harshly negated African past. In the humanities and social sciences in general, and in philosophy and religion in particular, African intellectuals continue to define their world on the basis of Western epistemological standards" (ibid: 178). The denigrated African past, particularly the history of slavery and colonialism haunts these elites, and as a result they are ~~constantly~~ eager to abandon their past in order to adapt what is foreign (Western) because they think it is ~~modern~~" and ~~civilized~~"", where the past is seen as ~~traditional~~", and are as such caught in the ambivalence of the contrast and complementarity of this past and the ~~present~~" creating ~~distinct~~ periodizations of history and identity" (ibid). Hence, there is a need for ~~decolonizing~~" and freeing African thought from this epistemic entrapment. In the words of Wiredu, this ~~decolonizing~~ effect",

... consists in an African's divesting his thought of all modes of conceptualization emanating from

the colonial past that cannot stand the test of due reflection. This divesture does not mean automatically repudiating every mode of thought having a colonial provenance. That would be absurd beyond description. What it calls for is the reviewing of any such thought materials in the light of indigenous categories, as a first step, and, as a second, evaluating them on independent grounds. Of the indigenous categories of thought one can take appropriate cognizance by simply trying to think matters through in the vernacular. To do this, however, requires a conscious and deliberate effort, because if you are trained in philosophy exclusively in a second language, it tends to become your first language of abstract meditation (Wiredu, 2004: 15)

Wiredu believes that African [ethno]philosophy often blindly and uncritically employ Western episteme to espouse, narrate, or evaluate African [traditional] thought. “The need for conceptual decolonization in African philosophy is pervasive” he argues, because, “in talking of the uncritical use of foreign categories in the exposition of African thought, one is thinking of such categories of thought as are embodied in the distinctions between the spiritual and the physical, the natural and the supernatural, the religious and the secular, the mystical and the non-mystical, or, by way of substantives, between substance and attribute, mind and matter, truth and fact, etc” (ibid: 11). He goes on to list some Western concepts that African philosophy continue to uncritically employ, concepts which nonetheless demand decolonized treatment in African philosophy, including:

Reality, Being, Existence, Object, Entity, Substance, Property, Quality, Truth, Fact, Opinion, Belief, Knowledge, Faith, Doubt, Certainty, Statement, Proposition, Sentence, Idea, Mind, Soul, Spirit, Thought, Sensation, Matter, Ego, Self, Person, Individuality, Community, Subjectivity, Objectivity, Cause, Chance, Reason, Explanation, Meaning, Freedom, Responsibility, Punishment, Democracy, Justice, God, World, Universe, Nature, Supernature, Space, Time, Nothingness, Creation, Life, Death, Afterlife, Morality, Religion (ibid: 15).

For Wiredu since these concepts furnish the essence of Western philosophy adopting them as they are and relying entirely on them alone would eventually alter (Westernize) our thought system or would hinder the exploration and exploitation of our own conceptual schemes. Wiredu's rationale is that “in regard to all these, the simple experiment of trying to think various issues through in an African vernacular is likely to generate second thoughts about a lot of notions that have seemed intelligible or even plausible when viewed within the framework of some Western system of thought” (ibid: 15-16). If Wiredu is right, the intelligibility and plausibility of philosophy is influenced by the concepts we adopt and as such uncritically adopting Western concepts in African philosophy would result in a philosophy that is less plausible and intelligible to Africans.

To achieve this, Wiredu followed, in my view, the Analytic tradition and tried to rely on –Akan” concepts and culture to validate the intelligibility of Western concepts and also to find –second thoughts” in his works on Truth, Person, God, etc. On the other hand, people like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o suggested that for African philosophy to achieve conceptual decolonization, we not only need to test the intelligibility of Western concepts but we also need to entirely revert to using African concepts and languages for our philosophical discourse.

The challenge to Wiredu's approach is whether the goal of such a project is to make Western philosophy intelligible to Africans or to practice intelligible African philosophy. It is true that concepts, theories and hypotheses make sense to us when they are presented in our vernacular. It is also true that professional African philosophers make sense of philosophy first-hand in Western vernacular. Again, it is also true that as long as African philosophers continue to canonize African beliefs, ideas, concepts, views, etc and re-present them via Western vernacular, African philosophy remains estranged and foreign. Accordingly, if Wiredu's project is to present Western philosophy to Africans in the vernacular they understand, Africans might remain receptors of foreign views. On the other hand, if the project is to make African philosophy intelligible to Africans the whole project must be done using African vernacular. Hence, there is no need for conceptual decolonization. However, if the project is to practice a philosophy that is independent of Western system of thought, this might lead to leaving out an important and vital knowledge system from which Africans could benefit.

Wiredu himself, in his theory of truth, for example, tried to present African/Akan theory of truth vis-a-vis Western theory of truth. In doing so, he did two important things. One, he was able to show that different cultures view the world differently and as such African cultures can be used to advance a philosophy that is not tailored as per Western episteme. Hence, bringing to light beliefs and views of Africans is a means of liberating the African mind from the dictation of Europe. Second, he was able to show that Africans could advance a philosophy that provides an alternative conception to Western philosophy, and as such could benefit both African and Western episteme.

Despite such achievements, however, one can also see why Wiredu's approach has fallen victim to the Africa versus Europe antagonism. For one, his philosophy was presented in light of challenging Western episteme from an African point of view. This is because his approach takes its departing point from 'what is being believed in Akan culture' rather than presenting what such a belief looks like from a critical point of view. In my view, he labelled several points of views on Truth advanced by thinkers in the West as Western and tried to provide an African/Akan point of view, rather than

his own. He argued from 'Akan culture' rather than owning and adopting it as his own view. Crudely seen he was relying on some 'anonymous' belief for his argument. In truth, we have no way of knowing whether Akans hold the same theory of Truth that he presented or not. As such, his view may be fall pray to Hountondji's critic of ethnophilosophy. In addition, his conceptual decolonization project takes its departing point from Western philosophy. Meaning, it was his learning of Western philosophy that urged him to reflect on his own culture. Though he insists that it is the legitimacy of a view, rather than whose view it is or one's allegiance to a given view, that should guide our philosophy, his work seems to show the opposite, in method, if not in content.

## Chapter Four: Symbiotic-Discourse as an Alternative Approach

The history of African philosophy shows, to a considerable extent, that it has been grounded and shaped by African identity and destiny which has been coined after and influenced by Western discourse on Africa and its subjects. As discussed in chapter one, African identity took its departing point from the European image of black subject, i.e. the Negro. African destiny also took its departure from Europe's conquest and oppression of Africa, mainly colonialism. Though such approaches were unavoidable and also important, it doesn't necessarily mean that it has been and it is the right course. In this chapter, I will present an alternative perspective into both African identity and destiny that should arise and build itself upon a legacy and experience that lies beyond and above the racism and subjugation of Europe and its subjects. In line with the previous three chapters, I will try to address some of the questions raised but left unanswered: what is an African identity? What is an African philosophy? Who is the African philosopher? How can we advance a discourse that presents a better conception, analysis, and evaluation of the past and the present state of Africa and Africans?

As I argued so far, the struggle between Africa and Europe had led to the birth of an 'Africanism' that evolved as a counter-response to Eurocentric discourse on Africa. As Serequeberhan argued, "For us, contemporary Africans, the condition that has resulted from the colonial obliteration of the 'standards and practices of our fathers', to use Plato's words, and the consequent neocolonial inertness of our contemporary situation is *the necessary departure* of any worthwhile or meaningful philosophic engagement" (Serequeberhan, 1998: 9; emphasis added). As such Africanism became the struggle against racism and oppression for which black and African thinkers stood 'united' through Negritude, Afrocentrism, Pan-Africanism, Black Freedom and Liberty, and African decolonization. They stood against the hegemony and self-righteousness of Europe, where it took the center by pushing Africa into a conceptual and existential periphery. For those ignored, oppressed and objectified the mission of the black and African philosophers became, in the words of Aime Cesaire, that of making "a systematic defense of the societies [Africans] destroyed by imperialism [Europe]" (Cesaire, 1998: 226). It is from such counter-defensive narrative that African identity and destiny were conceived, analyzed and evaluated. In fact, Cesaire says, "It comes as little surprise that African people should *react* to the colonial question in an attempt to reaffirm singularity, uniqueness, identity, and most importantly, a sense of self. African philosophy *in its different guises* can be recognized as being *in reaction* to the debased view of the African and

his/her philosophy that has been, and that is still held by the Western world” (quoted in Deacon, 2003: 116; emphasis added).

Apparently, such a reaction took two forms: one, decolonizing and defending African place and space from and against Europe; and two, excavate and cultivate true African history, culture, value, virtue, etc., that have been undermined, distorted and replaced by those of Europe. This is what Mudimbe called an 'epistemological vigilance', where as Serequeberhan and Fanon called it a violent response. In the words of Serequeberhan, –Given the violence of Africa's encounter with Europe through which the 'dark' continent was *introduced into the modern world*, the question of violence should have a central importance for the discourse of contemporary African philosophy” (Serequeberhan, 1998: 234; emphasis added). He seems to share Fanon's view that violence is the necessary element of thought and action in order to realize African liberation, autonomy and progress in this Europe dominated world.

For me, the question remains: what sort of 'singularity, uniqueness, identity and sense of self' did such Africanism bring? What sort of destiny did proponents of decolonization and independence project for Africa and Africans? Though many claim an African identity and envision an African destiny of a sort, as we saw throughout this discussion, it is not clear as to what they really mean. This is clearly evident in the debate over the nature, content, form, method and purpose of African philosophy. In my view, the birth and evolution of Africanism is foundationally interlinked with the violent history of European encounter of Africa. Even today Africans suffer from the remnants and continuations of this an unfortunate encounter, where Africa remains the negative other of Europe in modernity, democratic rule, economic growth, technological advancement, power, literacy, innovation, etc. Unfortunately, Africa still suffers from so many set-backs that hindered it from attaining the level of Europe and continue look up to it, while Europe continues to look down on it, which, I think, had left many in a dilemma. It is not clear whether we reject or embrace our historical enemy and its ways. We are not sure which legacy of Europe we keep and which ones to get rid of. As Odera Oruka notes,

In Africa, we often vehemently reject foreign ideologies but remain mum about many values of foreign cultures. We, for example, reject a multi-party democracy as a sign of foreign ideology. But we retain all the trappings of the judiciary of foreign cultures. In academic circles, we sometimes brand and reject ideas of foreign social thinkers as foreign ideological indoctrinations. But on the other hand, we continue to keep intact the academic protocols imposed by the colonial systems (Oruka, 2003: 69).

In my view, the question of identity of African philosophy suffered from similar dilemma. I am aware that this question is not as important and as controversial as it was before the turn of the century. The project of excavating and rebuilding some sort of 'authentic' African epistemic order has been undermined as unpractical and unnecessary. Many have accepted the intercultural and comparative nature of the school and have moved beyond this self-doubt. However, even the currently popularized intercultural approach has some critical limitations for African philosophical practice.

#### **4.1 From Monoculturalism to Interculturalism**

For centuries Western philosophy had presented itself as an objective, value-free, universal system of all humanity. However, the existence of other philosophies in all cultures brought the realization that this claim is false. Accordingly, Western philosophy is reduced to one philosophy among many, rather than philosophy of all. This brought the view that philosophy is merely self-consciousness of a culture and as such is not objective, value-free and universal. Since no one culture is a universal culture, no philosophy is a universal philosophy. Intercultural philosophy is a system of thought that recognizes this culture-based nature of philosophy and intends to bring different cultural consciousness together, instead of the traditional approach where one [European] culture presenting itself as the only source of truth and knowledge. In the words of von Hamid Reza Yousefi,

Interculturality is an orientation of thought and action that stems from the idea of unity in diversity – with this is meant the protection of one's own cultural differences and the acceptance of those of other cultures. Cultures, in an intercultural context, are not balls that bang and bounce against one another but rather the threads of a fabric interwoven together, each with its own individual colour. They are free patterns of action and can demonstrate both commonalities and illuminating differences; the emphasis here is set on that which is shared, that which connects (Yousefi, 2007: 118).

This is mainly the case where counter-Euro-monocentrism, as a result of its military and economic power, Europe advanced a hegemonic system of thought that dismisses the views and beliefs in other cultures and attempt to replace it. Upon independence from colonization, many regions and cultures brought forth their own thought systems that rivals and stand on equal footing with that of Europe. This eventually resulted in a struggle between European and non-European cultures over relevance, practicality and purpose of these epistemological orders. To solve such a problem, intercultural philosophy has been proposed as a new approach for philosophical practice. As such, it

dictates that since no one culture is the true and only source of knowledge different cultures must come together, communicate, share their views and beliefs for mutual enrichment and inclusive system of thought. Accordingly, no one philosophical system can dismiss another as worthless and unphilosophical. Instead, all cultures have something to contribute for human understanding and as such deserve inclusion. Bekele Gutema argues,

intercultural philosophy was founded by philosophers such as F. M. Wimmer, R. A. Mall, H. Kimmerle, and others with the conviction that philosophy and the history of philosophy have been Eurocentric, which has had at least two important results or implications. First, the assumption that philosophy is European/Greek relegates philosophies embedded in other cultures to a second-class status. European philosophy's exclusive claim to rationality and hence to philosophy has no rational or empirical justification. Second, the practical implications of such an understanding and the behavior it involves are not helpful to humankind because Europe's exclusive claim to rationality and philosophy denies the philosophies embedded in other cultures. In other words, it denies the experiences of a huge segment of humanity (Gutema, 2015: 150).

As noble as this approach it is yet to solve some fundamental questions as to what the nature of this intercultural dialogue would look like. Yousefi says, "one of the tasks of intercultural philosophy is to question and relativize the self-erected claim of the universality of views from reductive philosophy in terms of the history of ideas, philosophy and development. In so doing, a *dialogue may be conducted as equals* between traditions of thought" (Yousefi, 2007: 121; emphasis added). The question therefore is, first: are these different traditions of thought 'equal'? Second, how is this dialogue or monologue to be conducted? Given the domination of European philosophy over other philosophies today, mainly in Africa, there is little evidence of equality, in both theory and practice. Second, the implicit fair and free inclusive interaction remains the most ambivalent. Philosophy being culture-based and cultures being value-laden, how can different cultures with different and possibly divergent interests communicate and equally enrich one another is the issue here. In the words of Yousefi, "Intercultural philosophical efforts, however, remain ineffective if a structural asymmetry in power exists, where an argument made by the centre of power is seen to be the only one of validity, creating a powerless periphery" (ibid: 124).

This is of primary concern for African philosophy. As Odera Oruka notes, –It is, therefore, difficult, especially in the world of conflicting ideologies, to safeguard or advance a culture while remaining naïve or oblivious to matters of philosophy. In a world of this sort only those cultures with well-articulated and consistently appealing philosophies survive. Those otherwise remain in the

abandoned museums of human civilizations” (Oruka, 2003: 71). Oruka is right on the fact that this absence of explicit articulation of African cultures leaves them susceptible to domination by other cultures, especially European. This because intercultural dialogue faces the risk of dominance of one or few strong and dominant cultures over the weak ones. The dominant cultures have both the means and the power to impose themselves, undermine or even exterminate weak cultures. It is naive to think that cultures would communicate fairly and freely for mutual benefit. As history is a witness, there is no fair and free exchange of ideas and beliefs. Our current African predicament is also an evidence to the fact that weak cultures can be easily abandoned and replaced by those which show socio-economic and politico-ideological supremacy.

This risk clearly runs through the vein of African philosophy – that of losing itself to Western and Eastern philosophies. To solve this problem, Oruka contends, African philosophy must focus on the revival and rebuilding of African cultures as its major tenet. –Hence, the need for the revival and promotion of African culture is and must also be the need for the founding of a dynamic and consistent socio-political philosophy for modern Africa” (ibid). Yet, there is another problem that poses an equal challenge: this revival and promotion of African culture is to be done after the model of European cultural revival and promotion. In other words, African philosophy as a cultural self-consciousness is tailored to that of European cultural self-consciousness. But, is there a way out?

As we saw in chapter three, Wiredu, for example, admits that African philosophy is a dual African and European cultural consciousness. In other words, the cultural identity of African philosophy is both African and European. Yet, this doesn't mean that the two cultures have come to such an interaction by choice. In fact, for what the history of colonialism thought us, Europe had worked towards, in the words of Wiredu, "a systematic program of de-Africanization" (Europeanization) of African cultures (Wiredu,2004: 1). As Paulin Hountodji argued, this legacy has resulted in the need for re-Africanization (mainly in ethnophilosophical and nationalistic-ideological schools) to reground African philosophy in African cultures. Despite their critic of traditionalist and ethnophilosophical approach to African philosophy, both Wiredu and Hountodji agree that we cannot practice African philosophy without an African culture. Yet, they differ in approach: Wiredu's approach is towards an excavation of neglected traditional African knowledge (Western philosophy must be re-presented within an African vernacular and culture) while Hountodji seems to suggest that African vernacular and culture must be re-presented within Western epistemic order.

In my view, such differences arise from the above discussed intercultural approach of African philosophical practice, which grounds and understands itself in comparison to European philosophy.

As Wiredu observes,

Contemporary work in African philosophy has a certain richness deriving from its unavoidably comparative character. This is due to the interesting fact that contemporary African philosophers belong to two cultural traditions, the African and the Western. This can be an advantage, because working in more than one tradition can broaden your mind by acquainting you with a multiplicity of fundamentally different conceptual options. But it is also a problem, because African philosophers came to be situated within the Western tradition through the historical adversity of colonization (Wiredu, 2004: 11).

What Wiredu identifies here as a problem, along with his call for conceptual decolonization in practicing African philosophy interculturally clearly implies that African philosophy runs the risk of losing to Western philosophy in such a dialogue. The question remains, therefore: how can we avoid this risk? Wiredu suggests: "There is the need, first, to bring out the true character of African traditional philosophy by means of conceptual clarification and reconstruction and, second, to try to find out what is living or fit to be resurrected in the tradition" (ibid). Yet, Wiredu's solution faces the same challenge because the very conceptual decolonization and cultural resurrection is to be tailored to Western philosophical tradition's conception, interpretation and evaluation of cultural-consciousness. In sum, as far as African cultural-consciousness remains within and in comparison to European cultural-consciousness, the legitimacy of such an intercultural approach is questionable. As Yousefi puts it,

The real deficit in many comparative studies is, as we have seen, that they set the standard of comparison in a particular tradition. Quite often, the familiar is sought in the unfamiliar; one's own cultural behaviours are put into hypostasis as a measuring stick – reified and compared at will with behaviours of foreign cultures. Any form of comparison that lacks intercultural orientation in theory and practice is categorically worthless (Yousefi, 2007: 118).

#### **4.2 Introducing Symbiosism**

Granted that philosophy is self-consciousness of a culture, meaning individuals get to reflect critically and systematically on views and beliefs of a given culture or from within it, it doesn't follow that one has to be from that specific culture to do so. At best, it means that one has to have knowledge and understanding of a culture to reflect on it. This is the case of Anthon W. Amo and Placid Temples. Second, it doesn't follow that one reflects on a given culture in a certain, predetermined manner. At best, this reflection is free and transcendent of the culture it is reflective

of. This is the case of many professional philosophers. Lastly, it doesn't also follow that cultures are particularist and atomized entities, so much so that reflection on culture A is incommensurably divergent from that of culture B. In truth, reflection on culture A could serve, at some fundamental level, for other cultures as well. In fact, this is the foundation for inter-cultural philosophy and the main reason why we adopt ideas and views of non-African philosophers to explain and explore African life-world. There exist philosophies by non-Africans which speak to us and our culture so much so that we find them relevant and practicable to our life-world, just as much as there are some that we find incommensurable, irrelevant and unpractical. Yet, how can reflective practices from different cultural backgrounds can exist simultaneously, grow in parallel while communicating, exchanging and enriching each other, have become the essence of contemporary philosophizing. However, such questions have been overloaded with both historical and ongoing dialectics and struggle for supremacy between cultures and peoples of the world.

As a result, the ideology of identity and destiny remained central to Africanism as counter-Eurocentrist discourse, to the extent that African intellectual practices have been analyzed, explained and judged as to their Africanity, as much as they were scrutinized for epistemic content, rationale and validity. The result can be seen as both positive/constructive and negative/destructive. On the positive side, it has led to the establishment of African philosophy as an independent school of thought. On the negative side, I believe, it considerably influenced the direction and progress of the school due to its counter-discursive nature. This is especially the case in point when we see: one, many philosophers dedicated so much ink in trying to refute a handful of European racist comments on Africa and its people; two, the debate as to what African philosophy should be has remained a point of debate among African philosophers with no clear consensus unavailable to-date. This however doesn't mean that there should be a consensus; rather, it is to say that this lack of direction has contributed to the belief that one has to address the issue before one starts to engage in philosophizing. It is due to this fact that a large body of literature, even today, deal with the very nature of African philosophy anew. Three, and most of all, for beginners in African philosophy, such as myself, where to start and how to proceed in the discourse remains unclear. In essence, one doesn't only need to hold a belief but one also needs to be politically and ideologically correct.

It is from this stand point that I attempt to present an alternative way out from this conceptual and directional entrapment. I believe that African philosophy needs a new approach moving forward, a direction that I believe would contribute to the progress that has been achieved to-date. Accordingly, I chose to introduce a concept called Symbiosism.

This is why it is important to approach African philosophy in a light different from the hitherto offensive and defensive approaches. In this sense, I believe that symbiosism would play a crucial role in re-defining and re-constituting African philosophical practice. Though it is important to leave African philosophical practice open to its own discursive growth and development through debates and counter-debates, my own suggestion only attempts to contribute to these ongoing debate as to the form, content, method, etc., of African philosophy. As such, I will try to provide a brief overview and analysis of symbiosism and my own rationale for choosing it.

Symbiosism<sup>46</sup> is a state of interdependence where two or more cultures interact on the basis of equal inclusion and fair sharedness. This concept is not new and is widely known in Biology. In a given ecosystem there exist biological entities that mutually benefit from co-existence. The most common example is that of a bird picking left-over meat from crocodile's teeth, there by feeding itself and cleaning the crocodile's teeth. In today's merging world, earth is becoming more and more like an ecosystem by bringing different and divergent cultures into close proximity that necessitates interaction and exchange of ideas, views, beliefs, etc. This is what initiated the contemporary intercultural approach. Gutema believes,

As a founder of intercultural philosophy, Wimmer was inspired by, among other factors, the fact that a globalizing world requires mutual understanding and, if possible, reciprocal enlightenment and enrichment among the different cultures that comprise humanity. The real situation involving cultures and philosophies demands an intercultural approach if philosophy is to be meaningful to humankind (Gutema, 2015: 150).

Yet, as I noted above, this new ecosystem is far from being mutually beneficial to all. Just like the natural ecosystem, this cultural ecosystem is also a realm of prey and predator. Some cultures are devouring others and erasing them out of existence. With changing climatic conditions some perish and others come out changed and evolved.

In my view, cultures are like biological entities. In themselves they are particular, complete and autonomous organisms. Yet, for their existence, sustenance and evolution in the diversity of the ecosystem they rely on on interaction and exchange, benefit some others and receive equal benefit from them. In the natural ecosystem the give and take principle is not deliberate and benevolent. Each member of the ecosystem cares only for the its own survival and continuity. It strives to exist

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46 In biology, Symbiosis refers to interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both. In the social sphere, it refers to a mutually beneficial relationship between different people or groups, cultures and traditions (see online at [www.Merriam-Webster.com/dictionary/symbiosis](http://www.Merriam-Webster.com/dictionary/symbiosis)).

and protect itself as a particular, complete and autonomous entity. This is also true for cultures, with one fundamental difference: deliberation. Unlike the natural ecosystem where interaction is instinctual, cultures interact with full awareness of what this interaction would be. As such, cultures have the freedom and liberty to decide and determine the nature and purpose of their interaction. Here, I don't mean that two cultures have equal say in their relationship. Rather, it is to mean that whatever their relationship turns out to be, mutually-beneficial, mutually-destructive or one-sided, it is done with full consciousness and intention. In the case of African and European cultural-interaction, for example, both Europe and Africa were fully conscious of the nature and character of their interaction. As time passed, Africa realized that the interaction was not symbiotic, that was Europe benefiting more from this relationship.

Accordingly, cultural symbiosism implies that when two cultures come into contact each one deliberates on what to do with the other. Not only does each consider what its benefit is but also how to maximize this benefit. This benefit maximization, as it were, rarely ends up benefiting both. As history of cultural relationship entails, no two cultures ever played bird-crocodile game. It ends up, in my view, with one culture intending to be both the bird and the crocodile. When this fails to be the case, in such cases where both cultures fail to dominate one another, they usually remain in perpetual struggle and conflict. In my view, intercultural philosophy should solve this problem to be a sound approach. In the case of Africa, where European culture remained the bird and the crocodile, it is important to question the desire and goal of intercultural approach. Again, African philosophy has been intercultural since its inception, whereas European philosophy has remained monocentric. At best, intercultural philosophy is primarily a call for European philosophy to open up to other traditions, not the other way around. The problem is not that African philosophy is not intercultural; rather, this interculturality has remained harmful mainly because African philosophy is more European than it is 'African'. The way I see it European culture is taking over African culture in the dual-culturality of African philosophy; it is the European cultural element that is more pervasive in this duality over the African one.

It is from such line of thought cultural, and philosophical, symbiosism needs to be approached. In my view, the belief that cultures could mutually enrich and benefit from their interaction is far from the reality. Unlike the unintentional natural ecosystem, cultural ecosystem cannot be indifferent to value-ladenness of interaction and exchange. If so, a culture must deliberate to strengthen and enrich itself from another culture(s), despite what the other gains or loses. If we follow our previous analogy, the relationship between the bird and the crocodile is merely self-interest based. The bird is not intending to clean the crocodile's teeth, rather to feed itself. The crocodile by itself is not

benevolently feeding the bird. Most importantly, both are aware of their position, albeit instinctual and unintentional. For example, the bird doesn't go around looking for any open mouth with pieces of meat lying between teeth; nor does the crocodile let every hungry animal pick its teeth. It is this time and space specific relationship that constitutes symbiosism. In the same way, cultures must be aware of their place and interest vis-a-vis the other(s). If the bird mistakes one of its predators for its benefactor the crocodile, it would end up being devoured and that would be the end of it.

Let's see what this means for African philosophy. One, African philosophy is about the self-preservation and development of African cultures. For each of us who identify ourselves with a specific life-world our culture, tradition, history, language, etc., is dear to us. These are what make us who or what we are, our place in the world, our views and understandings. A discourse that neglects this fact gives itself up for dissolution and death. However, how do we come up with the making of such cultural identity and destiny is important. As my discussion so far made it clear, the approaches of Negritude in the making of African identity from the conception of the Negro and Afrocentrism's making of African center and destiny from the conception of dark-Africa are fundamentally flawed. Such an identity and destiny owes its conception to negative ideology and mysticism, rather than true self-perception and self-grounding in one's life-world. Nor can identity and destiny be made up from a void. It is true that ideology remains an integral part of cultural relationship; nonetheless, an ideology that doesn't have a ground remains a dogma.

Two, African philosophy must be selective in approach. It must know what it is and what it is not, internally, along with what the others are and are not, externally. In today's global cultural ecosystem, African cultural-consciousness must clearly express its place and space. Most importantly, it must explore its roots and foundations before attempting to enter into dialogue with other cultures. Given Africa's historical and current predicament, it is important to remember that not every open mouth is there to feed it, nor everyone feeding from its mouth is cleaning it. Accordingly, one must make explicit both one's culture and determine if it benefits or loses in interacting with other cultures.

Three, African philosophy must divorce itself from the negative historical set-back, such as slavery and colonialism, and start to establish and represent itself anew. Such pseudo and mystical theories of black Africa cannot serve it today. Africa is home to hundreds of cultures and societies and dozens of free and independent nations. What this freedom and independence entails, what these cultures could offer for its progress and development must be the departing point of African discourse. Given the fact that such historical predicaments have been the results of imposition and

manipulation, we need to rethink on how to transcend it. To do so, we need to make the best of these experiences to re-establish and safeguard our interests and values.

All these being said, let me address some fundamental issues that have received little attention in the hitherto African philosophy. First, there is no an African culture; only African cultures. As I said, Africa is a continent, an ecosystem of diversity; not one nation, one people, one culture. Even at nation levels such as Ethiopia there is no such a thing as an Ethiopian culture, only cultures of peoples of Ethiopia. As such, we need to be critical of any culture that attempts to present itself, however implicitly, as the culture of all Africans. In my view, such a tradition explicitly or implicitly owes its beginning to black thinkers of non-African origin. The early self-acclaimed Africans, just because their families were from Africa, and most of all, just because they were black, came up with an identity and destiny that has little to do with the real Africa. Placid Temples continued this uncritical conglomeration in his presentation of one culture as an African culture, under the guise of Bantu philosophy as an African philosophy.

Second, as much cognizance of and safeguarding African cultural interest (though this remains superficial political ideology) in relation to non-Africans is important, it is also important to stand for the interest of one's culture and society within African cultural interaction. Any discourse that doesn't promote the interest and value of its culture and society it represents would eventually fail to represent and be a value to anyone. Today any philosopher who claim African identity belong to one culture or the other. His space and place, inheritance and experience, conception and understanding fundamentally derive from it. As such, he owes his discourse to it and his discourse must address this root and value, however implicit. If a philosopher fails to speak for and speak to his culture, fails to reflect on it and reflect for it, his culture would end up neglected and abandoned. Hence, his discourse would have no say within symbiotic cultural dialogue. Yet, this doesn't mean that he cannot or shouldn't reflect on other cultures he came to know. It only means that one shouldn't chose another culture over one's own. In case one has more than one cultural roots, he should show the same allegiance to them all. I don't be misunderstood here. I don't mean that one should remain in a certain cultural cage nor accept his culture dogmatically. As far as philosophizing goes, his critical and systematic reflection and investigation should serve the interest and value of his own culture, either by building the good in his culture or dismantling the bad in it. Again, this doesn't mean that he cannot or shouldn't borrow the good of other cultures to build his own. Rather, it means that this borrowing shouldn't kill the good in his culture. Still, this raises the question of how we can determine what is beneficial and harmful. This is difficult to answer; yet, I believe that one always speaks from a value-laden position. Though I am all for mutual benefit, in principle, I don't

believe that we can attain it by wishing it. I don't mean that what we wish for and value for ourselves doesn't benefit others; it could. But we cannot know that. We cannot speak for all human race. We cannot know what is good for everyone. Who can play God? The best we can do is speak for ourselves and hope that our voice also represents others, just as much as we find voices from other cultures that are of value to ours.

Third, following the second point, African philosophy must be broken down to specific cultures and individual views and beliefs. As such, Wiredu's, Hountondji's, Mudimbe's, Oruka's, etc., philosophies must be seen as their personal views and beliefs, or at best, their respective cultural self-consciousnesses. Most importantly, we should fight against those views that attempt to present themselves as values of an entire nation (unless there exists a homogeneously shared culture), or worse, the entire continent. In truth, there exist hegemonists, among African philosophers themselves, who want to impose the value and interest of a certain group upon other societies, in the name of one nation, one culture, one people. This is evident in Ethiopia, for example. Such Ethiopianism remained a major source of conflict between the peoples of Ethiopia and as such it serves as means for continual suppression of the interests and values of many Ethiopian societies to-date.

#### ***4.3 How to Practice African Philosophy in a Symbiotic-Discourse***

What constitutes being an African and what an African stands for has remained controversial. This is because, just like all identities, African identity is not fixed in time and space. Today, being an African is constituted and constitutes by both individual and societal, epistemological and ideological, political and historical, religious and cultural conceptual and existential beliefs and experiences that are inherited, borrowed, lived and reflected from Africans' place and space in their relation among each other and with other peoples of the world. As such my Africanness represents my cultural, political, historical, etc., instances, awarenesses, consciousnesses and reflections on what makes me the person I am in my own self-perception, others' perception of me and my perception of others. That's why, I think, being an African changes throughout time and space and as such needs to be constantly re-defined, assumed and claimed. Hence, it is difficult to set a fixed African identity. Most of all, being an African must be dissociated from some factors that seem to common sensically define it, such as skin color and race. As a result, African identity is both spatial and temporal representation of individuals and groups in parallel with and in relation to other identities. As such, it is a functional and normative placement that shapes and gets shaped by one's outlook to the world from a certain descriptive and prescriptive place and space. Most of all, it

changes with how we view 'Africa' from our own particular cultural basis. It doesn't in any rationale sense represent some determinate and unanimous self-perception, either in African-to-African relation or African-to-non-African one.

The second question is: what is an African philosophy? To a greater degree, African philosophy is associated to African identity and cultures. As such, African philosophy is a philosophy practiced by individuals who identify themselves as Africans, despite their views, ideologies, beliefs, etc. However, given the contemporary intercultural philosophical practice (internally and externally) coupled with the influx nature of identity, it is difficult to explicitly delineate it. Today most works classified as 'African', by large, are both written and practiced after the philosophical tradition of other philosophies, mainly Western. Some of these works deal with issues coined by Western philosophy, deal with questions raised by this culture, methodology, form, and even language. Because of this, some works are being questioned as to their 'Africanity'. Accordingly, many argued that for a philosophy to be 'African', it must reflect 'certain' African thematic, methodic and normative element. Given that philosophy at the core is self-consciousness of a culture, I also agree that African philosophy must take its departing points from African cultural, historical, epistemic, reflective and experiential backgrounds. As I said above, this doesn't mean that it must be limited to African culture, history, episteme, tradition, language, etc. Though these would greatly contribute to the both the valuation of African cultures and help to safeguard African cultural interests, any discourse that contributes to this valuations and progress of African cultural self-consciousness as per the symbiotic principle could be taken as African. However, any discourse that is presented outside an African life-world-consciousness cannot be called African, despite its remedy to African values and interests.

The other major question is: Who qualifies for an African philosopher? In my view, an African philosopher is someone who identifies himself or is identified by others as an African and whose works are being labelled as philosophical. Again, just like the case of African identity, the criteria for an African philosopher has been a point of contention. This is because for someone to be considered as an African philosopher, at least implicitly, his work must show 'certain' degree of Africanity in content, method, form and value. Despite the complexity of determining what this Africanity should and could be, for me, an African philosopher is someone who engages in critical and systematic reflection and investigation of ideas, views, beliefs, etc., within, from, for and towards an African cultural self-consciousness. Most importantly, one cannot qualify for it just because one is black-skinned.

#### **4.4 Summary**

Symbiosism dictates that African cultures benefit from interaction with other cultures. History is not on our side on this point, since we were victims of interaction. Despite what the past have been we cannot nonetheless exclude ourselves from interaction. I understand that there is no purely African culture today; but, there is no purely non-African African culture either. This have come to have a tremendous effect on our current discourse, both positively and negatively. In the words of Eze,

The African experience.... has never really been a monolith, on the continent or abroad. From Amo to Nkrumah to Du Bois; from Equiano to Locke to Senghor; continental and Disapora modern African found a “language” - largely based upon their awareness of a collective entanglement with the history of the modern West, their objectification and “thingification” by this West, and so have always individually and collectively struggled in multi-faceted and pluralistic ways against tendencies within European capitalist cultures, and the illegitimate colonial structures that crush African initiatives on the continent (Eze, 1998: 219).

African philosophy has challenged this Europe-biased cultural interaction. This of course have been addressed as white-black existential struggle. In it we also notice a general tendency of black vengeance towards white racism, hegemony and subjugation. In other words, our discontent with socio-economic and political-ideological aspects is far greater than our discontent with cultural-epistemological aspects. As far as philosophizing is concerned, African philosophers are not against borrowing and adopting Western epistemic order. Their dis-contention rather lies in the fact that Europe has not been equally open to recognize and accommodate African epistemic order into its own. Meaning, by imposing its cultural self-consciousness on African cultures, it denied the existence of valuable thought system in Africa. Even when Africans were able to prove its existence, Europe was not willing to enter into symbiotic relationship with it. Fortunately, today, to a certain degree, Europe has finally agreed to recognize African philosophy and shown willingness to dialogue with it. However, as I argued above, even if the two cultures agree to trade and exchange ideas, it is plausible that African cultures would come to lose in this unfair trade.

Second, along with fighting for inclusion and recognition with Western philosophy, African philosophy had to struggle internally to reground itself. The major difficulty, in my view, remains on how to use this borrowed or imposed culture constructively to advance an African cultural-consciousness. Whichever way we look at it, settling Europe-Africa interactive difficulty is far from

over. Be that as it may, its other greatest challenge lies at its backyard – that of violent cultural interactions between Africans themselves. Crudely seen African philosophy has done a lot in addressing Western violence towards Africans than it addressed internal violence. Though the issue whether Western violence is greater or lesser than African-to-African violence and how much of this internal violence is conditioned and facilitated by the West remains ambivalent, still it is undeniable that internal violence is equally important to deserve exploration and attention. There has existed and still exists racism, hegemony and subjugation among Africans themselves. As a result, many African nations and societies live through an ever-present conflict, discrimination and subjugation. Civil wars, ethnic and religious division and discrimination, cultural conflicts, politico-economic disparity, wars between nations, etc are everyday realities for millions of peoples. In my view, the lack of symbiotic approach for inclusion, interdependence and mutual-benefit have resulted exclusivist tribal- and national-centrism. Just like the external Eurocentrist discourse, internal cultural, religious, economic and political denigration and subordination continues within and across African nations and societies, often with similar violent responses and counter-responses. In this regard, African philosophy should work on a better way of harmonizing and reconciling internal differences and antagonisms, just as much as its focus on external harmony.

Here I would suggest the following. First, every African philosopher should take his existential reality as a ground of reflection. Since everyone of us a multitude of inherited, experienced and lived backgrounds out of which our individual views arise, our philosophy should take its departing point from this place, from where we stand today to look at the world. Our philosophy must be about making this place and space explicit, making sense of our conditions. It is how we understand ourselves in the world and our understanding of the world. Accordingly, our commitment must be to our beliefs, to being true to ourselves, to what makes us the person we are in this time and space.

Second, our philosophy must address and reflect on the collective will and need of ourselves as individuals and members of a society we belong to. It is not about commitment to the world at large. It is not about explaining the entire universe for everyone. Rather it is our commitment to understand ourselves and others, to change and shape the world for ourselves, to set ourselves in the world of numerous settings, to claim the world to ourselves. As such, everyone of us find ourselves in the midst of diverse and conflicting world, and the best we can hope is to strive to create the world we want for ourselves (and hope that the world we thus created is good for us, for others, and eventually for all humankind.)

Finally, in this sense, our cultural-consciousness doesn't mean that we dig out some form of

designed and determined 'culture' from the past or present. We don't go out there looking for our culture. There is not pure eternal river of culture flowing somewhere beyond the mountains of time and space. We are the embodiment of our culture; our life its scripture. Culture merely means what we believe and do as right, virtuous, beneficial, etc., as individuals and a society. It is the totality of what makes us the person we are, what justifies our views, validates our beliefs, governs our actions, shapes our behavior – in short, what makes the world around us and our place in it meaningful. As such, everyone of us are already cultural and our deepest thoughts are our beginning for our philosophy. It is merely an attempt to make sense of this seemingly sense-less world, justify the seemingly unjustifiable, value the seemingly valueless.

It is true that there have been are still exist countless shameful deeds that humankind has done to each other. Even today, a time when so much has been achieved and when our awareness about human and the natural world has reached a new height, there are so many an abominable evil deeds within humanity that we accept and practice, or remain indifferent, or have given little attention, whether it be in our own or others' culture and tradition. They are quite baffling to any rational mind: racism and stereotyping; civil wars; wars between nations, groups, factions; states and governments compartmentalizing and disfranchising humanity; free market and exploitation; the race for power and dominance among nations, companies, groups, individuals; the authority of religious institutions and governments; spiritual servitude and servitude to heads of states, royalties, heads of religious institutions; corruption, abusing women and children, sex-slavery, wage-slavery, gangsters and mafias, thieves, etc. Hence, African philosophy should engage in these issues and explore, reflect on and evaluate them for the enlightenment and betterment of Africans, and by extension all humankind. As much as reflection and violence is vital towards the wrong done in the past, it is the present that is in our hands and it is the present that better occupy our mind. As much as we blame the past and the dead for all the evil they inherited us, we have to make sure that the present doesn't repeat the same.

Fanon echoed the same call when he said, –Come brothers, we have far too much work on our hands to revel in outmoded games. Europe has done what it had to do and all things considered, it has done a good job; let us stop accusing it, but let us say to it firmly it must stop putting on such a show. We no longer have reason to fear it, let us stop then envying it” (Fanon, 1963: 238). He wanted African and other non-European philosophers [his brothers in slavery and colonization, in arms and ideological struggle] to make a new start, move beyond Europe, make an independent discourse not a counter-discourse. –If we want to respond to the expectations of our peoples," he says, "we must look elsewhere besides Europe... Moreover, if we want to respond to the

expectations of the Europeans we must not send them back a reflection, however ideal, of their society and their thought that periodically sickens even them. For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man” (ibid: 239). In my view, we don't move beyond Europe; it is Europe who needs to move beyond Europe. Africans can only move beyond Africa, beyond the Africa that has been victim and loser.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o writes about this Fanonian dilemma of “moving beyond Europe” from his experience as an African student in Europe: “This was the sixties when the center of the universe was moving from Europe or, to put it another way, when many countries— particularly in Asia and Africa—were demanding and asserting their right to define themselves and their relationship to the universe from their own centres in Africa and Asia. Frantz Fanon became the prophet of the struggle to move the centre” (Thiong'o, 2003: 63). He further observes, “The basic question was: from what base did African peoples look at the world? Eurocentrism or Afrocentrism? The question was not that of mutual exclusion between Africa and Europe but the basis and the starting point of their interaction” (ibid: 67). This remains critical today. Each side tries to dominate the other or else fence off domination by the other. In essence, our philosophy cannot ignore such difficulties. As Outlaw notes,

Each of the key terms in ‘African philosophy’ is made problematic by the very efforts to carve out, uncover (and thus recover) distinctively African modalities or traditions in the complex enterprise of philosophy. In some ways this problematizing is not unique and is rather easily understood in its similarities with previous and contemporary ruptures in the history of Philosophy which have either occasioned or represented efforts to rethink and redefine ‘Philosophy’. However, there are ways in which the question of ‘African philosophy’ challenges the very idea of Philosophy as it has been construed by the more dominant voices narrating the history and setting the agenda of philosophy in the West, and does so in a most radical fashion (Outlaw, 2003: 163).

Outlaw's argument suggests that given the achievements of African philosophy in challenging the hegemony of Western philosophy it should as well deliberate an African discourse that is uniquely and exclusively African. Yet, given the difficulty building an authentic African philosophy, our choice becomes on how to make the best of intercultural discourse as per a symbiotic principle. Bruce Janz is right in saying that, “African philosophy has emerged as the result of a series of inter- and intra-cultural conversations, its place cannot be abstracted from those in favor of finding some

sort of place-less, time-less African philosophy” (Janz, 2009: 24). This place-less and time-less Africa of Negritude and Afrocentrism is nonexistent. Whatever Africa should and could be, it already is. This is our ground, our place, our space that we should and could use in order to retrieve it from the darkness of history and ambivalence of the present. There is no origin beyond the present; there is no beginning but our own beginning.

Paulin Hountondji has the following to say about contemporary African [ethno]philosophy as an independent thought system, its violent relation to Western philosophy and its place in intercultural philosophy:

The quest for originality is always bound up with a desire to show off. It has meaning only in relation to the Other, from whom one wishes to distinguish oneself at all costs. This is an ambiguous relationship, inasmuch as the assertion of one’s difference goes hand in hand with a passionate urge to have it recognized by the Other. As this recognition is usually long in coming, the desire of the subject, caught in his/her own trap, grows increasingly hollow until it is completely alienated in a restless craving for the slightest gesture, the most cursory glance from the Other.

For his part, the Other (in this case the European, the former colonizer) didn’t mind a bit. From the outset he himself had instructively created a gap between himself and the Other (the colonized), as between the master and his slave, as the paradigmatic subject of absolute difference. But eventually, as a gesture of repentance, or rather, to help allay his own spiritual crisis, he began to celebrate this difference, and so the mysterious primitive ‘mentality’ was metamorphosed into primitive ‘philosophy’ in the hard-pressed master’s mystified and mystifying consciousness. The difference was maintained but reinterpreted, or, if one prefers, inverted; and although the advertised primitive ‘philosophy’ did not correspond to that which the colonized wished to see recognized, at least it made dialogue and basic solidarity possible (Hountondji, 2003: 155)

In the spirit of Hountondji’s critic, it is important to aspire for a different philosophy that contributes to the progress of Africa life-world, rather than trying to succumb Africa to Europe. African philosophy should take the best of other cultures to advance its own cultural base and use its cultural base to reject the harmful ones.

Symbiosism is not a principle of finding a consensus, no established common ground. Rather, it is a principle of that takes its departing point from difference, a complementary of gain – how can “my” culture make use of the “best” of its own and other cultures and use it to sustain and build itself in today’s competing cultural sphere. Those cultures which can use others and establish themselves on

a strong ground would be able to survive. If two cultures are able to give and take equally and fairly, there comes a balance, an interdependence, mutual-benefit and enrichment. If this is achieved, different parties come together, offer what they have and exchange for what they don't have. If a symbiotic relation is fully achieved, there is no winner and loser; there is no charity; there is no dependence; there is no outcast; there is no center; there is no periphery. Yet, if this is ever to be realized, African philosophy must build a cultural foundation that is equally vital in the cultural ecosystem, internally and externally.

Symbiosism, in the end, is not about creating one single life-world, view, belief, understanding, knowledge, etc. It is about how better we live in today's diverse life-worlds, views, beliefs, etc. It is about conservation of this diversity. It is about acknowledging the fact that diversity is not what pushes us apart, rather what strengthens our bond. In this world of ours we all call home, our diversity functions like those different raw materials we put together to build a house and serve as those several household stuff that makes our house complete and cozy. Just like we cannot build a house only out of bricks alone, just like we cannot live in a house with only a couch inside, we need all the views, beliefs, practices, etc in the world.

It is from this perspective that I propose symbiosism as a way forward for contemporary African discourse. As such the diverse epistemic orders that have flourished and are flourishing in all corners of the world is what we can rely on to build our discourse. If we follow this argument further, we also see that all not everyone build their homes in the same fashion nor do they furnish it with the same stuff. We all build our homes as per the design and purpose of our time and place, big and small, on hills and in valleys, on sea shores and in deserts. But we can always change our designs, our location, the size of our house. Our family size changes; our children fall in love with a stranger, get married and move out; our fathers and grand fathers die out and get replaced by subsequent generation; children either inherit their families' homes or build one for themselves; some homes serve several generations where some even fail to last for years; some invest a lot to a home, collect the best furniture from all corners of the world, create an aesthetic marvel of a house. Most of all, love, respect, harmony, familyship, care, sharing, benevolence, peace are the basic essences of a home. This is how I conceive the future of philosophy and philosophizing.

Philosophy is a home. It is what we build for ourselves, for our children. Today, we know that a philosophy that consciously furnishes itself with several traditions makes a better discourse. Such a discourse knows that views and ideas complement each other, not conflict and contradict. This is the symbiosism principle I am taking about. As such African philosophy is not merely about

exploring views and beliefs that peoples and cultures in Africa hold. It is not about leaving Western, Indian, Chinese, Arabic, etc philosophies to their respective traditions and practitioners. It is not about deciding and choosing what is relevant for itself from other traditions either. Nor is it about deciding and presenting what is relevant for other traditions. Rather, it is about consciously reflecting on our experience of African life-world from both African and non-African traditions. It is about looking at the existing diverse human-to-human, human-to-natural, and natural-to-human interactions to the extent of one's discursive depth and expanse.

## CONCLUSION

Counter-discourse to Eurocentrism has been one of the defining features of African philosophy. Such a discourse, mainly, stood within the same Western tradition it was attempting to challenge. As necessary as this project has been, the form and direction this discourse has taken, to a considerable degree, has been a politico-ideological defense. As such, the essence of African identity and destiny has been presented via the damaging and degrading projects of Eurocentrism. So many thinkers have been advancing a discourse that would undermine and abolish racism and hegemony. So much ink has been spilled, so many lives have been lost, so many sacrifices have been made to undermine Eurocentrism and liberate black subjects and African space from this an unfortunate legacy. Yet, as much as I recognize the effort and contribution of many African thinkers, as much as I acknowledge the outcomes and benefits of such a struggle, I have come to believe that the way forward should take a different direction than the past.

In their struggle to refute and reverse Eurocentrism, some important aspects of African discourse have been pushed aside or took little consideration. For one, this counter-discourse has remained mainly Europe-directed and as such the racism, hegemony, dehumanization and subjugation between Africans themselves have received little attention. As much as it is necessary to tackle Eurocentrism it also vital that Africans address what is going on in their own communities, nations and the continent in general.

Two, the discourse against Eurocentrism has canonized African discourse as a black discourse, which I believe is not the case. Africa is the land of non-black peoples and Africanism is a discourse of non-black subjects as much as it is that of blacks. Hence, we need to be critical of such an approach and recognize the diversity and multitude of Africa in our discourse. In addition, Africanism should be an approach that is inclusive of all peoples of Africa and advance towards bringing peoples of Africa and the rest of the world together. As such, Africanism and blackness need to be separate and addressed accordingly. The legacy of Eurocentrism that equated Africa with black need to be undermined and replaced by the actual Africa of diverse peoples, races and cultures.

Finally, going forward African philosophy should look for a better direction in order to transcend the evils of the past and antagonism of the present that seem to linger behind the shadow of our

discourse. In my view, such a new approach could be sysmbiosism. For all the legacy of Eurocentrism has thought us exclusion and hegemony towards one group would result in pains and loses. Africans understand this more than any other society in the world. Hence, African philosophers would make the same mistake of losing to Europe if they think that Europe would come to free and fair terms of cultural exchange and interaction with Africa. Though I hope that one day some sort of acceptable complementarity would be realized between different cultures, this is not the case today and there is no reason to think otherwise.

In sum, I believe that the choice is in the hands of each African to determine his/her identity and destiny, the identity and destiny of his/her people, and of the continent when possible. There still exist so much racism, subjugation, control, manipulation, exclusion and externalization against Africans and within Africans. It is only through building our own respective cultures and life-worlds can we establish national, regional, continental and global culturally symbiotic ecosystem. Those undeveloped cultures would have nothing to contribute to this symbiosis and would die out. Those who give in to the dominance and manipulation of other cultures would die out. Those who don't make a critical use of both their own and other cultures reflective wealth to reestablish and rebuild themselves would eventually die out. Hence, for the sake of self-preservation and for the sake of building a rich global cultural ecosystem, let's value our own individual cultures, use its resources and the relevant resources available to us today to rebuild it, and one day, we might be able to build a better world of diversity and unity.

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