

**A DECLARATIVE MAPPING ANALYSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF PAULIN  
HOUNTONDJI**

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**Abstract**

Paulin Hountondji is a philosopher from Benin who has, over the last several decades, proposed and then developed a philosophy that has attempted to place centrally the lives and experiences of people residing in the continent of Africa. Indeed, Hountondji's philosophy is inherently political in terms of it being intimately connected to the affairs and well-being of people from his own and neighbouring countries. In this essay we offer the declarative mapping approach as a potential framework for the analysis and understanding of Hountondji's philosophy. The framework we develop proposes a clear declaration of Hountondji's scholarship in the form of a formal sentence of ordinary prose. The declarative mapping sentence for Hountondji's philosophy specifies eleven facets or major components to be present in his work with each of these facets of Hountondji's thinking having subcomponents or elements. We describe the facets and elements and comment upon how they structure Hountondji's work as a whole. In this essay we describe how we arrived at the final declarative mapping sentence and how we connected together the important aspects of Hountondji's philosophy in a way that suggests how these relate to each other. We then embrace the sentence's structure to demonstrate how the sentence has the potential to elucidate Hountondji's ideas. In conclusion we state our belief that declarative mapping has the potential to shed light and understanding upon Hountondji's scholarship. However, it must be remembered that this is a preliminary foray into his work using the declarative mapping approach and future research may use the approach to more critically and deeply engage with Hountondji's work.

**Keywords:** African philosophy, Ethnophilosophy, Declarative Mapping, Paulin Hountondji

**Introduction**

The mid and final few decades of the last century saw a change in Western academic philosophy's outlook towards and understanding of what at the time was referred to under the phrase African philosophy. The notion embodied in the term African philosophy was that it was possible and desirable to identify a genuinely unique form of philosophy that related to the experiences of those living in the continent of Africa. There was much debate from this period regarding the existence of a distinctive form of philosophy and value system from Africa, a discourse that was intimately connected with an exploration for a distinctly African identity. One of the prominent names in regard to this scholarship is Paulin Hountondji (Sunday & Lawrence-Hart, 2021).

These endeavours to develop an African philosophy can be seen in many ways as being a positive step<sup>1</sup>. This is due to the fact that offensive and disparaging terms were often used in the context of Africans and African civilisation. For instance, as Sunday and Lawrence-Hart state:

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<sup>1</sup> It is not only philosophy which has found itself in a situation of post-colonial anxiety and having its Western roots and theoretical bases questioned. Another example is African psychology, which in a similar manner has attempted to shake off its Western biases in a number of different manners (see, for example, Kessi, et al, 2021). Indeed, many similarities can be seen between the struggle to establish a "home-grown" psychology by psychologists in Africa and the similar attempts that have been made amongst philosophers in Africa in regard to their discipline and professional practice.

For centuries African philosophy and value system were denied; African philosophers, schools of thoughts, and traditions were not recognized as part of world philosophy; as a result, pre-colonial African cultures, and societies were labeled “ahistorical,” “primitive,” “paganistic,” “savage,” and “juju,” among other terms (Sunday & Lawrence-Hart, 2021, 1).

Kanu also states that “African philosophy is as old as the continent itself” (2009). This statement boldly illustrates that African philosophy has far predated the Western inquisition and seeks to emphasize a decolonisation of thought through the identification of a philosophical existence of a value and logic system unrelated to the West and owned by Africa. However, there are many negative aspects associated with the concept of African philosophy. These include, for instance, the questionable assumption that a continent as large and diverse as Africa can be typified by a single philosophical perspective<sup>2</sup> and that a philosophy may be isolated that differentiates African philosophy from philosophy in other global regions. For decades intellectuals and artists have sought to provide evidence to support the existence of an African philosophy and related value systems and their connection to a singular identity (Sunday & Lawrence-Hart, 2021). It is also blatantly obvious that, just as there are many strands of European philosophy, African philosophy too is a multifarious concept and practice. Essential differences in philosophy that were extant in Africa in the late twentieth-century was commented upon by Oruka (1981, 1990).

Paulin Hountondji developed his approach to philosophy during this period of the late 1970's when these and other questions about the nature of African philosophy were being considered. Hountondji studied under prominent French philosophers Louis Althusser, Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris (Verharen, 2003). During his program he was immersed in the works of Husserl and adopted his views and ambitions for philosophy to evolve into a “super-science” believing that philosophy should lead to certainty. Hountondji began to wrestle with the inability to apply these concepts to so-called African philosophy which ultimately influenced his departure from Europe and his return to Africa (Verharen, 2003). While his critics have argued Hountondji's European educational foundation bonded him to the threads of elitist eurocentrism, supporters view his homecoming as an act of emancipation. Hountondji's return to Africa marked his resolution to engage philosophical concerns with political concerns. In *The Struggle For Meaning* he writes that from one end of his “African Journey” to the other, “hovers ... a concern about the future of Africa that in the end becomes quite explicit: it is a political concern, political in the strictest sense of the term” (Hountondji, 2002). To Hountondji, philosophy's objective is freedom, and through conceptual freedom emerges political freedom (Verharen, 2003). Hountondji, amongst numerous other African scholars, has grappled with the liberation of African philosophy's identity from the imposition and shackles of Western philosophy. It is not a sufficient effort to reclaim this philosophical identity merely for Africa; it is of vital importance for African philosophy to be rightfully and equitably placed with respect on the global stage. Hountondji characterizes this paradigm in the following manner:

Our philosophy consists essentially in the process of analysis itself, in that very discourse through which we have been doggedly attempting to define ourselves - a discourse, therefore, which we must recognize as ideological and which it is now up to us to liberate, in the most political sense of the word, in order to equip ourselves with a truly theoretical discourse which will be indissolubly philosophical and scientific (Hountondji, 1996, 33).

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, philosophers working with the continent of Africa have themselves explored the notion of philosophies that typified specific countries or regions within the continent (e.g., Merawi, 2019).

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We have only very briefly mentioned the debate around the existence of African philosophy and the forms it may take as this controversy is not at the heart of this writing. Moreover, interesting and comprehensive texts on this subject already exist.

#### **Reasons For and Aims of the Article**

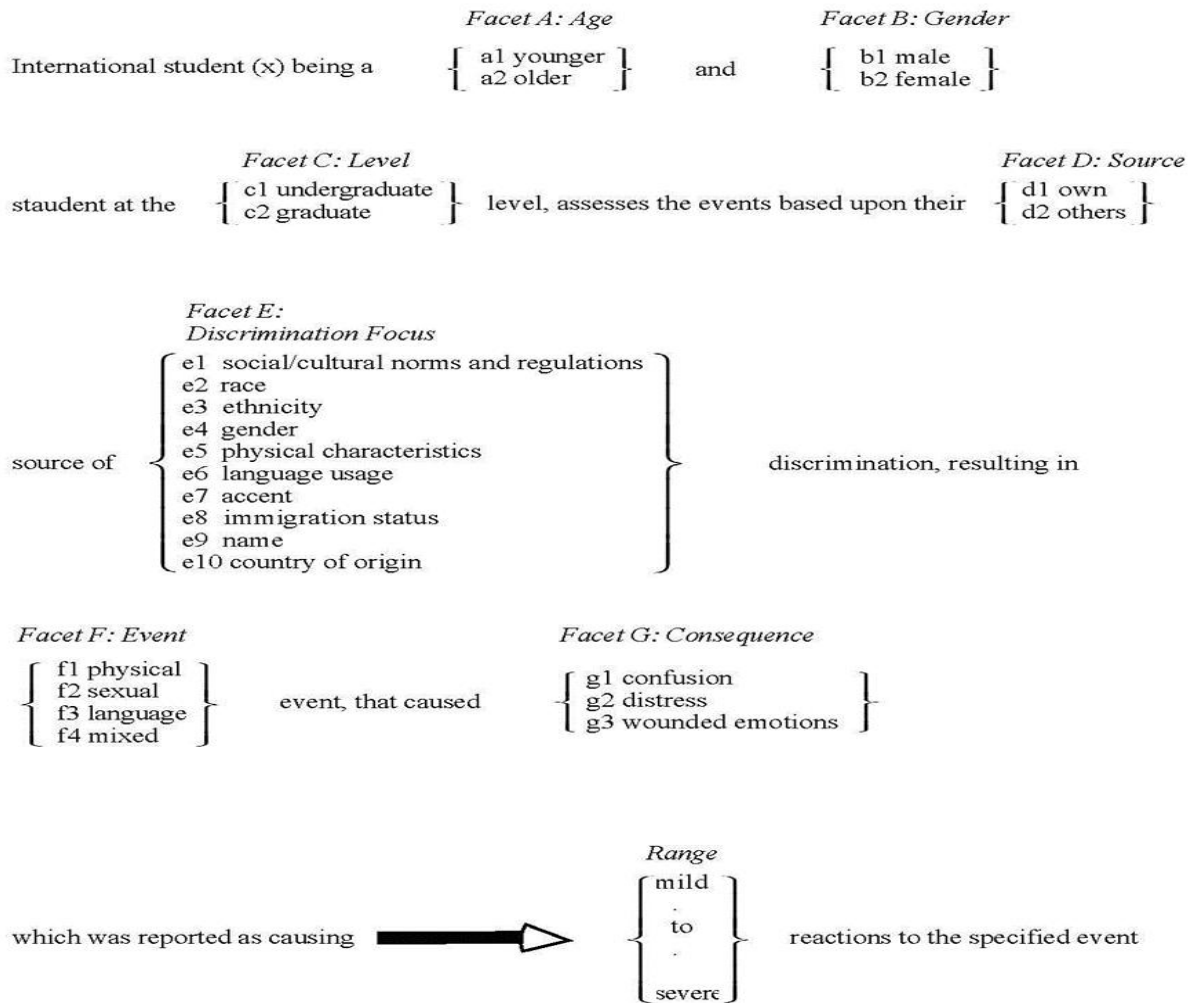
To this point in this essay, we have been writing about the existence of a so-called African philosophy. More specifically we have mentioned how Paulin Hountondji was an early proponent of such a philosophical stance and we have provided brief details of the development and breadth of his philosophical perspective. Due to the complexity of Hountondji's writings we believe these can best be understood through the use of a methodology that embraces and embodies the intricacy of his theories and the interrelationships between the distinctive aspects of his thinking. We now turn our attention to the main thrust of our writing which is the proposition of the declarative mapping approach as an appropriate tool to analyse the main components of Hountondji's conceptualisations. We therefore commence by providing a somewhat terse account of the declarative mapping approach.

#### **Method: The Declarative Mapping Approach**

Declarative mapping as an approach to philosophical research is a relatively recent form of scholarship developed in the writing of Hackett (for an exposition of this approach see, Hackett, 2018; Gordley-Smith and Hackett, 2022). Declarative mapping as a way to conduct philosophical research, and qualitative research in general, was developed out of the quantitative social science research design and analysis procedure known as Facet theory (Gutman, 1944, 1947, 1959; Canter, 1985; Hackett, 2021a). Cardinal to facet theory are the notions of the form of data or information in social science research (see, Coombes, 1964) and how the variables that exist in a domain of quantitative research may be conceived of and handled in a specific research enquiry. In the former of these characteristics, in facet theory data is seen to be composed of multiple interrelated and interacting variables. That is to say that variables cannot be isolated from each other when conducting a study. Instead, in facet theory research, all of the variables that are suspected to be influential in constituting the state of the phenomena of interest are considered together and it is the quiddity of their combined nature that is of prime interest: the subject matters *in esse*. In terms of the second of the characteristics of facet theory research, how variables are conceived and handled, facet theory has a distinct approach in that it states all pertinent variables within a sentence which specifies the expected relationship between the variables and the phenomena of interest. This sentence statement is called a mapping sentence. An example will help to illustrate the use of a mapping sentence.

The example given below is of a traditional mapping sentence that has been designed for quantitative research in the social sciences. This mapping sentence, as with all forms of mapping sentences, is used by reading through the sentence and when reaching each facet (the names of facets are given as an italicised word or phrase) the facet name itself is ignored and one of the elements (words/phrases within parentheses) is read as part of the sentence. This process is repeated multiple times with different permutations of facet elements included in each reading of the mapping sentence. So, using the mapping sentence above an international student can be: an older female student at the undergraduate level who assesses the events based upon her own experiences as a source of gender discrimination resulting in a physical event that created distress which was reported as being a severe reaction to the specific event. It can be seen that as this is a traditional mapping sentence associated with quantitative research the sentence "maps" into a quantitative response range of reported severity of the incident.

**Figure 1. Mapping Sentence of International Students' Experience (Hackett, 2014)**



At its termination, the mapping sentence in the above illustration, and in all forms of the traditional quantitative mapping sentence, specifies the range of quantitative observations or measurements that will be gathered. The measurements are used in order to attempt to test the veracity of the variables contained in the sentence for allowing a clear interpretation of the phenomena of interest. The principal aspect of the declarative mapping approach is the development and use of a declarative mapping sentence which is the central tool of the approach and constitutes the initially proposed structure for the research. The declarative mapping sentence is also usually the end point of the research, which is often modified during the research process from its initial form. The main difference between the traditional mapping sentence (see, Levy, 1976) and declarative form of the mapping sentence (Hackett, 2021a,b,c,d, 2020a,b, 2019a,b,c,d, 2018, 2017a,b,c, 2016a,b, 2014, 2013, 1995; Hackett and Fisher, 2019; Koval and Hackett, 2016a,b; Lou and Hackett, 2018a,b; Lustig and Hackett, 2018a,b; Schwarzenbach and Hackett, 2015) is that the former specifies the quantitative measurements that will be made during the research whilst the latter has no specified

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outcome and allows any form of information to be used in the scholar's endeavours to shed light upon the phenomena and to adapt the structure of the sentence.

The declarative mapping sentence when used in philosophical inquiry and qualitative research is a structural template that the researcher develops at the commencement of a facet theory inspired research study. The mapping sentence is a statement by the researcher of all aspects of the research domain that is being investigated along with research participants (if subjects or participants form part of the research). Within a declarative mapping sentence all important aspects of the research content are brought together in a sentence written in ordinary prose. The pertinent aspects of a content domain are specified and are called facets. Also specified are the pertinent sub-aspects of each facet, called elements. These two forms of components are joined together using ordinary language in a way which is believed to represent how the aspects of interest are thought to interact in everyday life. When the declarative mapping sentence is used in a philosophical study, published literature, conversations with other scholars and the researcher's own thoughts are used as the basis for the construction of the initial declarative mapping sentence. In both declarative and traditional mapping sentences, facets are incorporated within sentences that present a hypothesised structure for the interaction of the facets in the domain of inquiry. By explicitly stating an area of inquiry using a declarative mapping sentence the believed relationships between facets may become obvious and the pertinence of the facets and their interactions may be more clearly revealed.

The corpus of our present writing is the presentation of a declarative mapping sentence for the philosophical approach of Paulin Hountondji. The declarative mapping method requires us as researchers to expatiate upon the facets in the sentence and to explain how the incorporation of the facets in the sentence sheds light upon Hountondji's work. Indeed, the facets and elements that we have chosen to incorporate within our declarative mapping sentence specify what we believe to be the important aspects of his perspective in a way that allows a critique of his work. It is important to note that the development of a declarative mapping sentence is not a simple statement of the obvious characteristics of the phenomena in which you are interested (in our case, Hountondji's work). Instead, to develop a worthwhile and trustworthy declarative mapping sentence the researcher must continually revisit the source and writings that they are using to form the content of the sentence. This back and forth and continual self-reflection and self-criticism was an ever present characteristic of the procedure adopted in developing a declarative mapping sentence for Hountondji's work, the development of which required us to wrestle with Hountondji's publications and with other scholars' writing about these (for example: Chimakonam, 2020; Etieyibo, 2018; Hallen, 2009; Imbo, 1998; Wiredu, 2006, etc.). Every aspect of the mapping sentence requires repeated revisiting and consideration. For example, the identification and naming of facets is one of the most difficult processes and these often change and facets may be reclassified as facet-elements, and vice versa. Moreover, the declarative mapping sentence we formulated is not an end point, but instead is part of an ongoing process that may be changed and modified, either by ourselves or by other scholars, who are immersing themselves in the writing of Hountondji: In figure 2. we present our declarative mapping sentence for understanding Hountondji's ideas in regard to what constitutes an African philosophy.

**Figure 2. Declarative Mapping Sentence for understanding and critiquing Hountondji's Philosophy**

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Hountondji developed a philosophy that was influenced by the thinking of:

**Philosophical influences**  
- Althusser

- Derrida
  - Husserl
  - Nkrumah
  - Ricoeur
- which located African philosophy as being an:
- Ownership**
- *indigenous*
  - *endogenous*
- looking philosophy, that is rooted in:
- Paradigmatic antecedent**
- *independent scientific practice,*
- that is dialectically related to philosophy, and that is:
- Political participation**
- *politically engaged*
- and is a philosophy that becomes transmittable and cumulative through:
- Agency**
- *written discourse*
- as its means of knowledge building and expression in attempts to address the:
- Cynosure**
- *realities of African lives*
- whilst reflexively engaging with:
- Corpus**
- *Western knowledge*
  - *Western languages*
  - *Western cultures*
- through a critique of:
- Ethnophilosophy**
- folklore
  - societal wisdom
  - traditional past
  - ideologism
  - collective identity
- aspects of ethnophilosophy, and rejects ideas expressed through:
- Ethnoscience**
- colonialism
  - Eurocentrism
  - African centric
- and defended notions of:
- Extraversion**
- intellectual extraversion
  - material extraversion
- from attack by philosophers, which has implications on the:
- Universality**
- universality
  - particularity
- of the philosophy produced, and through which, method

transcends content and results in contemporary critical  
African praxis.

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### **Facets of Hountondji's Philosophy**

There are eleven facets to Hountondji's philosophy. These facets are distinct areas of his thinking and critiques of his scholarship<sup>3</sup>. The eleven facets are: ownership; paradigmatic antecedent; participation; corpus; cynosure; corpus; ethnophilosophy; ethnoscience; extraversion and universality<sup>4</sup> and in the writing that follows we will use these facets to frame our discussion of his work. It is important to note that these eleven facets should not be thought of as independent areas of his thought as they overlap and intricately interact with each other. Moreover, our separation of Hountondji's thinking into these eleven areas does not imply that the facets constitute exclusive categories.

Having stated the above declarative mapping sentence for Hountondji's indigenous philosophical perspective, we will now consider the facets in greater detail and we will do this by presenting his philosophy under the eleven facets and in reference to their respective facet elements.

### **Philosophical influences**

Our first facet displays a finite list of Hountondji's philosophical influences. Whilst these names do not present an exhaustive record, our aim is to justly acknowledge the impact of these philosophers on Hountondji. We seek to explore these facet elements as a way to position the foundational influences amongst the sundry developments of the other facets in the declarative mapping sentence. We recognize that the chosen persons vary greatly based on context and the focus of Hountondji's work. While studying at the École normale supérieure Hountondji was influenced by Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricouer. Derrida and Ricouer guided Hountondji's academic focus toward Edmond Husserl whilst Althusser educated Hountondji on the concept of philosophy as a "theory of science". Hountondji developed his thesis around Husserl and committed himself to Husserl's idea of "philosophy as a strict science" (Verharen, 2003). Additionally we included Kwami Nkrumah due to his influence on the political dimensions of Hountondji's writing and his position toward ethnophilosophy.

### **Ownership**

We have called our second facet ownership with two facet elements of indigenous and endogenous forms of knowledge. The two elements, on Hountondji's understanding were stage sequential with indigenous knowledge being transformed into endogenous truth through a process of critical assessment. By this transformation Hountondji means that an African philosophy starts within the

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that whilst there are eleven facets in the declarative mapping sentence in figure 2, as with all mapping statements, not all facets have equal value or offer equivalent insights into Hountondji's thoughts and writing. In the Hountondji sentence we believe that whilst all facets are necessary to understand his work it is the final four facets are of central importance.

<sup>4</sup> The eleven facets each possess differing numbers of facet elements within each facet. The element number reflects the psychological make-up of the facet. It should also be noticed that some facets have a single element. This is because within Hountondji's writing, and the writing of others about Hountondji's philosophy, the facets appeared as distinct aspects of his approach but these aspects did not appear to be readily divisible. However, it is important to include such facets as they are pertinent aspects of Hountondji's work and sub-elements of the facet may become apparent at some future point.

philosophical currents that “occur naturally ” within Africa (indigenous currents) but then grow within Africa (Endogenous). Some have criticised Hountondji for mistakenly conflating ethno-philosophy with proper forms of African philosophy instead of recognising the former is the indigenous form that led to the endogenous latter (Agada, 2015). However, this seems an unfair criticism and as Hountondji sees the ultimate goal as being to foster and grow knowledge development in the continent in a form that was self-sustaining but that initially may have to turn to the deeply rooted origins of African experiences and local knowledge (Hountondji, 1999). Hountondji identifies the aim of any philosophy as self-determined independent theoretical thinking which may be achieved through, “... literacy, inventive critical thinking, analytic argumentation, and competitive testing of alternative hypotheses” (Hallen, 2009, 71). Moreover, the inclusion of endogenous knowledge philosophy allows Hountondji to counter critics who have seen his claims as being too universalistic (e.g., Osha, 2011). Furthermore, the term endogenous, as opposed to that of indigenous, does not possess the proclivity to, “Other colonial and postcolonial subjects, especially in Francophone countries” (Dubgen and Skupien, 2019, 62, original emphasis).

### **Paradigmatic antecedent**

The first single element facet in our declarative mapping sentence is the facet of paradigmatic antecedent. Hountondji understood independent scientific practice to be an essential component of the demarginalisation of African thought and other activities. Only through developing independence in science and technology can African independence be arrived at. According to Hountondji the fostering of scientific practice must precede philosophy as philosophy is seen to possess a dialectical relationship with science which provides an historical and methodological context which would allow for the development of African philosophy. Much of what we have written above under the facet of *ownership* applies to the facet of pragmatic antecedent, and we will not tediously repeat this here.

### **Political participation**

The facet of political participation has a single element of being politically engaged. This stipulation by Hountondji that an African philosophy should engage with the political life of Africa and Africans is hardly surprising given his lifelong engagement with politics. This point is emphasised by Hallen (2009, 70) who notes how Hountondji claims that “his underlying motive throughout has been political (and) to liberate Africa from external intellectual, economic and political dominance and control”. Hallen goes on to say that Hountondji’s (2002) political aims were to revitalise the cultures of Africa and allow the continent to take charge of its own destiny. This led to his rejection of ethnophilosophy as it did not work towards these aims (Hountondji, 1997). When thinking about the philosophical work of Hountondji, his political experiences and beliefs should be neither underplayed or separated from his intellectual work as Dubgen and Skupien (2019, 86) note, “Both his (Hountondji’s) intellectual work and his political experiences are deeply intertwined and there are strong indicators they influenced one another ”.

Hountondji served in ministerial roles and has in other ways been highly active in his political praxis and as an educational activist which has had a major input into his theoretical writing and thought about scientific dependency and extraversion (Dubgen and Skupien (2019). It should be noted that we have identified a single element of being politically engaged but this may readily be divided to reflect different aspects of such engagement.

### **Agency**

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Hountondji identified the oral tradition in knowledge transmission as being associated with the consolidation of knowledge in the form of dogmatic systems of understanding. Such systems were, he believed, intangible and did not readily allow individuals to critique knowledge between themselves and across generations. The lack of written texts within African philosophy led directly to the emergence of ethnophilosophy as exemplified in the work of scholars such as Kagame (1956), and Temples (1959). Hountondji believed that written praxis was the agency of evolution for a philosophy. At the very heart of Hountondji's understanding of an African philosophy is the notion that philosophy is something that must be done rather than simply theorised: It has been noted that, "According to Hountondji, there is no philosophy, as a scientific discipline, without a written praxis" (Dubgen and Skupien (2019, 34). Hountondji distinguishes pre-colonial philosophy in Africa as possessing discourse but it was not widespread enough a practice for it to bring about scientific debate (Hountondji, 1996). For Hountondji a written philosophy was one that freed the intellect to develop new ideas and associations and was better placed to reject traditional lines of thought. However, Hountondji did not seek the dismissal of the oral past of African philosophy but rather for this to be selectively recorded in writing. Oruka (1990) agreed with Hountondji on this and has transcribed interviews with African philosophers.

In the declarative mapping sentence the facet of agency had a single facet of written praxis as Hountondji stressed that this form of undertaking philosophy was a necessity: there are therefore no alternate facet elements as there are no alternatives according to Hountondji.

#### **Cynosure**

Another important aspect of Houtonndji's philosophy is that he insisted that a philosophy that was specifically African should deal with the contemporary realities of the lives of African people. This is another facet with a single facet element as, from our reading of Hountondji's work he did not offer an alternative to this position, or suggest differing forms of focus for an African philosophy. His insistence on such a focus did however have several parts.

#### **Corpus**

Closely related to the earlier facets of ownership, paradigmatic antecedent, agency and cynosure, the facet of corpus addresses thinking and social forces that are outside of Africa. Within the context of a developing African philosophy Hountondji thought it important that African philosophy should not only be endogenous but that it should also engage with Western forms of knowledge, Western languages and Western cultures: Western knowledge, language and culture are the three elements of this facet.

#### **Ethnophilosophy**

Our facet of ethnoscience had the elements of: folklore; societal wisdom; traditional past; ideologism and collective identity and as a group of concepts we will discuss these elements below. Ethnophilosophy formed a significant component of the works of scholars such as Tempels (1959), Kagame (2014), Ibanga (2022) and others. Indeed, ethnophilosophy has been a rich ground that African scholars have tilled and have found fruitful during the post-colonial era through to contemporary work by scholars such as Chimakonam (2012, 2020); Chimakonam, and duToit, (2020); Chimakonam, et al, (2021); Chimakonam, and Oghbonnaya, (2021); Etieyibo, and Chimakonam, (2018) and those who have contributed chapters to Agada's edited collection, (Agada, 2022) which closes with a debate regarding the contemporary status of ethnophilosophy (Imafidon, et al, 2022).

An example of ethnophilosophy is provided by the Nguni Bantu concept of Ubuntu, which means humanity but is also translated as “I am because you are” and which has been used in popular media and by politicians and by contemporary African philosophers such as, Agada (2022) and Ramose (1999, 2003).

However, Hountondji criticises ethnophilosophy as he claims this is not a form of indigenous self-affirmation or a critique of Western discourse. He is clear about the point that colonial sciences and any critique of these sciences, are similarly colonial as they affirm a Western discourse and they are both western inventions. The question has therefore been asked (e.g., Merawi, 2021) about how Eurocentrism in African philosophical discourse can be avoided? Ethnophilosophy is Eurocentric and Western philosophy makes sense of African world views using ethnophilosophy (eg, Tempels, 1959). Kagame has been seen as providing a philosophy that better reflects and encompasses the experiences of Africans than Tempels, but he still engages in generalizations. This is one of Hountondji’s criticisms of ethnophilosophy that it creates generalizations none the least of which is a generalized view of Africa. On Hountondji’s understanding, ethnophilosophy equates philosophy with collective views within a culture and therefore abdicates responsibility for the consideration of philosophical thought. Hountondji calls for sources of information and expression in Africa to be accessed and rigorously analysed, but this analysis should be undertaken outside of African traditions.

Therefore he identifies ethnophilosophy as seeing philosophers and social scientists as engaging in comparable work that conflates philosophy and customs, rational analysis and communal views, logical inquiry and mythology. Hountondji starts his critique of ethnophilosophy by identifying the hidden power behind this approach and the material that it seeks to legitimize. Western dominance must, he says, be countered by African philosophers exposing the logic of Western imperialism that excludes Africa from science and technological domains. This may be achieved, he believes, through a critique of the collective view of Africa as being ontologically distinct. As we have already noted, much of Hountondji’s philosophy and other work is overtly political and he sees the traditions and myths of Africa as first being used to unify the continent and its people and then to subjugate them. Ethnophilosophy reduces the dynamism of African cultures to something that is static and historical and which stresses the conformity of cultures to traditional ways and thinking. Hountondji believes his philosophy attempts to demarcate an arena, a space that facilitates a rigorous philosophical methodology in Africa and does not subjugate Africans to neo colonial domination.

Ethnophilosophy sought to be a legitimate vehicle for European power and a desire to inquire into the thinking and ways of the other, which also identified and legitimated the uniformity of the African and formed another basis of control. Melawi (2021) says “Empowering individuals to philosophize is a psychological decolonization aimed at freeing the self.” Hountondji dislikes ethnophilosophy’s intimate links to myths and traditions and that it concentrates on the past and on customs. Janz (2009) says Hountondji believes African philosophy should focus on the reflexive processes rather than objects of reflection. However, Hountondji stresses that African philosophy possesses and embraces difference, change and varying trends. African philosophy for Hountondji must be a current praxis and not focused on the past. Hountondji rejects folk wisdom as a philosophy and sees ethnophilosophy as discarding the individual. In essence ethnophilosophy is a cultural anthropology, and ethnology and not philosophy. Hountondji has been seen as elitist and promoting Western ways of thinking over African, whilst discarding Africa’s past and African wisdom. According to Melawi (2021) African philosophy must surmount two illusions. First, it must free itself from feeling the need to be able to solve all human problems. Second, it must escape ideas that

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African philosophy has an emancipatory and practical dimension that revolutionizes relations of material production, i.e. that African philosophy can solve political, economic and social problems.

To conclude consideration of the ethnophilosophy facet we remind ourselves that we identified a series of five elements of folklore, societal wisdom, traditional past, ideologism and collective identity. From our discussion of this facet it should be obvious that the elements that we have specified are in their infancy and may be modified to better represent the content of Hountondji's thinking in this domain.

#### **Ethnoscience**

We identified three elements to the ethnoscience facet, those of Eurocentrism, colonialism, and African centric, where the former two elements are identified by Hountondji as negative aspects of African philosophy, whilst the third is positive. Auge (1999) defines ethnoscience as attempting to look at the practices people engage in order to maintain their health, their understanding of the world around them (for example their biological and botanic knowledge) and how they classify and meaningfully bring things in their world together. Atran (1991) says that ethnoscience is concerned with investigating and understanding culture from within a scientific perspective. However, within an African context, decolonization did not free Africans from exploring and analysing problems that were associated with a Western discourse and the people of the continent were still materially, mentally and politically dependent on the West. Hountondji says African philosophers shouldn't be practitioners of Western paradigms but must address themselves by identifying anomalies and putting forward revolutionary alternatives to these irregularities and inconsistencies. It has been claimed that because of extraversion (see next facet) efforts have been made to claim individuals in a culture as essentially different from those in other cultures. Empirical investigations of traditional societies that are seen as ontologically different then results in the construction of otherness. Universities embody the ways a society understands and transmits knowledge and, according to Hountondji, are institutions which perpetuate otherness constructs. Hountondji correctly identified the social political and ideological implications of ethnophilosophy but also seems to throw out African traditional life and wisdom.

#### **Extraversion**

Related to notions extant in African philosophy of the immediately post-colonial era is the phenomena Hountondji names extraversion and in this section we turn to Hountondji's writing on this. Extraversion on Hountondji's understanding is associated with the positioning of a philosophical or scientific practice within or outside of its region of origin and from where such practice draws its sources and knowledge base. The facet of extraversion that we included in our declarative mapping sentence has two elements of intellectual extraversion and material extraversion, which, according to Hountondji are extraversion's principal forms.

Hountondji comes from what has been called the first generation of post-colonial African thinkers. This group of intellectuals concerned themselves with, amongst other things, the initiation, instantiation and building of a philosophy that could be identified as being distinctively African. In their attempt to achieve this they often drew upon African culture and heritage. This has led to claims that within this rubric, oral heritage was interrogated, and concepts and proverbs were re-analysed and adapted to facilitate self-exploration and understanding within African societies (Okeja, 2020). However, out of this arose a debate in regard of what constituted an African philosophy and who and where this could be practiced. Extraversion is a cardinal concept in Hountondji's (1970, 1972, 1978)

thoughts about ethnophilosophy, which he sees to consist of a process of alienation. For Hountondji extraversion means “the orientation of African scholars towards a perpetual conversation with the West.” (Dugben and Skupien, 2019, 68). Moreover, because ethnophilosophy has a discourse written for European rather than African readers it is therefore extroverted. Furthermore, Hountondji sees attempting to satisfy foreign interests forms a blockage in African scholars' efforts to work towards the future of their own societies. Consequently, energies need to be redirected, “to freely develop African scientific and philosophical inquiry into local and global affairs within African societies themselves” (Dugben and Skupien, 2019, 69). This quotation emphasises the point that Hountondji understood that extraversion was a pertinent concept in a wide range of African research (Hountondji, 2002)<sup>5</sup>.

Being extraverted is another of Hountondji's criticisms of much of what has passed for African philosophy that has been rooted in indigenous, cultural practice. He states, “African scholars in African studies and in all other disciplines (need to) understand that they have been doing so far a kind of research that was massively extraverted, i.e. externally oriented, intended first and foremost to meet the theoretical and practical needs of Northern societies. It invites a new orientation and new ambitions for research by Africans in Africa.” (Hountondji, 2008, 149). Hountondji says that collective thought exists in all societies but that such assemblies are not necessarily philosophy. For Hountondji African philosophy must analyse and lay bare ideology, look at other philosophical traditions to discover universality and discover hidden problems: This is achieved through descriptive, scientific and philosophical analysis. Hountondji criticizes extroversion as he sees attempts to represent a group true to an outside audience as being an attempt to create an intellectual product. In this situation the value of the knowledge produced, its coherence and objectivity is not the issue as the representation is the product. As we noted at the start of this section, Hountondji identified two distinct forms of extraversion: material extraversion and intellectual extraversion and for Hountondji, forms of material dependency lead to mental or intellectual dependency and it is necessary for scientific knowledge to transcend positivism and instrumental rationality (Melawi, 2021).

## **Universality**

The last of our facets is that of universality which has the two elements of universality and particularity (Ikuenobe, 1997<sup>6</sup>). For Hountondji what is wrong in universalism is the uncritical acceptance of communal worldviews. For him, ethnophilosophy affirms Africa's unique ontology and Western cognitive modes and is thus its particularity. Hountondji addresses in some depth questions as to whether African philosophy should be universal or particular. That is, whether African philosophy should draw from and speak to cultures outside of the continent or whether it should solely concern itself with African issues and draw exclusively from African thinking and its forms of knowledge, reasoning, etc. As an example of the indigenous (particular) perspective Hountondji cites Bantu philosophy and traditions. However, Hountondji questions whether folklore, traditions, and wisdom are valuable or useful basis from which to develop an African philosophy and as with other philosophers. Hountondji criticises the notions present in traditional African worldviews as being communal and implicit. With such considerations in mind Hountondji attempts to develop an African philosophy that is: universal, rational, written, individualistic and reflects

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<sup>5</sup> Hountondji's thinking about extraversion and Africa's external focus grew out of his understanding of dependency theory: (Amin (1968, 1990), Emmanuel (1979, 1982), Hirji (2017), and Rodney (1981 [1972])).

<sup>6</sup> Ikuenobe, (1997) support such a division of Hountondji's philosophy.

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scientific practice<sup>7</sup>. It has been claimed that Hountondji “dismiss(es) the idea of a collective African worldview as a myth” (Agada, 2018, 179) and that Hountondji believes African philosophy isn’t restricted to African culture. He identifies ethnophilosophy as being related to the ways in which the world is perceived, understood and categorized in African cultures and how cultures adhere and conform to doctrines and to ideas and notions that have popular appeal within a culture.

#### Peroration

In our writing above we have proposed 11 facets to exist, along with their relevant elements, which constitute the major aspects of Hountondji’s work. These facets, and the declarative mapping sentence framework, offer a structural critique. In this section we now suggest how the declarative mapping sentence for Hountondji’s work may facilitate critical engagement and understanding of Hountondji’s thought.

Paulin Hountondji developed his own philosophy which he primarily wrote about in his two books *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (Hountondji, 1996) and *The Struggle for Meaning, Reflections on Philosophy, Culture and Democracy in Africa* (Hountondji, 2002). However, his cannon is much larger and in his other writing he further expands upon and evolves his thinking.

In his review of Hountondji’s claims in regards to what is needed of an African philosophy, Fasil Merawi (2021) identifies 4 aspects of Hountondji’s philosophy: **ethnophilosophy; ethnoscience; extraversion; universality**. Melawi says Hountondji offers a profound critique of “ideological implications of traditional past folklore and societal wisdom (but) devalues the value of traditional wisdom in African philosophy.” Melawi also claims that Hountondji misses the fact that thinking within philosophy can take a variety of forms and modalities. We find merit in Merawi’s classification system for Hountondji’s philosophy. However, we have added other facets to allow a richer understanding of his thoughts in order to allow greater understanding of what we believe is perhaps Hountondji’s greatest contribution to philosophy in the African continent (**universality**) which is the content and scope of his philosophy.

We have illustrated how Hountondji’s philosophy grew out of critiques of **extraversion** and **ethnophilosophy** in African philosophy. In his writing he asserts that he believes that African philosophy must be both universalistic (**universality**) and based adhere to punctilious scientific practice (**pragmatic antecedent**) that must be grown and undertaken by, and be concerned with, Africans within Africa (**ethnophilosophy, cynosure**). Hountondji addresses his endeavours toward what he terms endogenous African science (**ownership**) and scholarship and in doing this he has studied many aspects and approaches to philosophy (**philosophical influences, corpus**) and many other disciplines. See for example his edited collection *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trials*, (Hountondji, 1999), that received praise along with criticism of Hountondji’s sometimes withering assaults upon Western science and scholarship (**corpus**) (Simpson, 1999). Hountondji believes that it is the thinker’s intellectual responsibility to engage in rigorous discourse that takes into account scientific practice (**pragmatic antecedent**).

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<sup>7</sup> Many philosophers and other thinkers have offered critiques of African philosophy in terms of its methods and concepts (e.g., Sogolo, 1990) its language (e.g., Rettova, 2002) etc.

Hountondji is against the anthropological approaches used to establish a so-called African philosophy that were imposed by often well-meaning philosophers from outside of the continent such as Tempels (1959). Moreover he stood against ethnophilosophy that unsympathetically constituted an African philosophy related to traditional folk wisdom which he identified as an anthropological ethnophilosophy that was riddled with racialised tropes, even though its aims were to redress the Eurocentrism of philosophy from the colonial era. Embodying such clichéd structures Hountondji identified the inflexibility of ethnophilosophy that served the purpose of locating the African within rigid values and belief systems and firmly positioned philosophers from Africa outside of the individualised and critical analyses in which their European counterparts engaged. Central to his contribution is a belief that philosophy from Africa should offer clear argumentation and emphasise critical thinking that is firmly rooted on textual analysis and that philosophy in Africa needs to be practiced within the continent and engage with contemporary local issues (**political participation**). Hountondji also explicitly addressed his writing towards an audience in Africa in a reaction and an attempt to end scientific extraversion and by addressing his work towards the progress of continental Africa. His work is political and as Dubgen and Skupien (2019, p8) say, his writing “offer(s) strong arguments for more epistemic justice in global academia, and for substantial transcultural encounters among scholars”. Furthermore, Houtondji’s conception of philosophy was transcultural and philosophy in Africa should reflexively extend into other global regions and interact with such thinking.

Hountondji sees African philosophy as a way of carrying out a form of philosophical enquiry that embraces cognitive issues that are universal in their scope and nature (**universality**). As an African philosophy universalist Hountondji seeks to detect the common philosophical themes that exist across cultures. Hountondji’s universalism is: personal, rigorous, objective, it rails against convention and authority, and is informed by problematics that are well recognized in other cultures. Universalist African philosophy separates philosophy from culture and is against African philosophy being unique to African languages and cultures (see, for example, Moseley, 2006): it is therefore anti-ethnophilosophy. For Hountondji philosophical method is not encapsulated in a specific culture although it does relate to and reflect culture. That is to say that whilst temporally located and spatial contexts (**ownership**) may differ, the essence of philosophical concerns remain constant and reflect the universality of its method (**paradigmatic antecedent, written discourse**) and which is written, transferable and cumulative (**agency**).

African philosophy may be considered to be a methodical study on African experience, perspectives, and understandings of reality (**cynosure, political participation**), which seeks to illuminate these facets through the examination of traditional African thought found in myths, wisdom and folklore (**ethnophilosophy**) (Sunday & Lawrence-Hart, 2021). Neoteric practices dive into the undercurrent of western philosophical tradition’s impact on African philosophy (**corpus**) and aim to decouple the relations while analysing the issues that agitate the African mind (**cynosure, political participation**) (Sunday & Lawrence-Hart, 2021). Whereas not all African philosophers agree on the particulars, there is a consensus that African philosophy holds distinct value and logic and moreover that it exists.

One line of research that grows out of our declarative mapping analysis of Hountondji’s work should be undertaken which clearly relates the different facets and their facet elements, to the other facets from the declarative mapping sentence. This form of analysis would allow a deeper understanding of the intricate complexity that is present in his writing. For example, if we take the first two facets in the mapping sentence, the **philosophical influences** facet could be related to the **ownership** facet. In this instance reading of Hountondji’s work could be undertaken that focus upon

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exploring the relationship between Hountondji's intellectual engagement with the work of the philosophers, Althusser, Derrida, Husserl, Nkrumah and Ricoeur and how these individuals impacted upon Hountondji's understanding of African philosophy either being an indigenous or endogenous enterprise (**ownership**). This demonstrative example employed the **philosophical influences** facet, which is largely a facet that embodies the background to Hountondji's thinking. However, analyses could of course be performed with other combinations of facets. As we stated earlier, we believe that the final four facets are central to understanding Hountondji's work and analyses could, in the future, look at the relationships between the first seven facets and the final four facets.

The connective phrases chosen to link facets in any mapping sentence are cardinal to the understanding of the concepts embodied in the sentence. This is true of our declarative mapping sentence in which the connective phrases were selected to allow us to form an initial declaration of his philosophy as a whole. However, further consideration may suggest that these phrases should be amended and the ordering of facets changed so as to better reflect Hountondji's work.

### Conclusion

In this essay we set ourselves the aim of clearly depicting the major aspects of Hountondji's philosophical perspective using a declarative mapping methodology. We hope and believe that we have achieved this objective. We also hope that through the stating of the declarative mapping sentence, our declarative mapping method offers a concise summary of our understanding of Hountondji's philosophy and provides a framework within which further discussion may be undertaken.

As we analysed Hountondji's writing, along with the writing of other scholars on the words of Hountondji, we found ourselves to be engaging in an iterative cycle of thought, questioning and the restating of our position. As is always the way when using a declarative mapping approach, over and over again we were forced to reconsider our positions and to reflect these changes in the declarative mapping sentence we were constructing (see Hackett and LI (2022) for further details and an exploration of this procedure).

The utility of adopting this approach includes the clarity of the examination that the method avails. An additional advantage of the declarative mapping method is that it facilitates direct comparisons to be made between different phenomena from a similar class of phenomena to be directly compared. In this research we have not undertaken such comparison. This would require the presentation of other philosophical perspectives, such as those that have originated in Africa, to be analysed using declarative mapping sentences which could then be compared and contrasted. We believe that this would be an extremely interesting piece of research to undertake and one that would both provide fascinating insights into Hountondji's scholarship in relation to other African perspectives and would allow greater understanding of the similarities and differences that are present within so-called African philosophy. We hope this brief essay sparks further discussion and leads to a methodological space devoted to illustrating the diverse and extensive reality of African philosophy.

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