

**A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF HOUNTONDJI'S CRITIQUE OF
ETHNOPHILOSOPHY: TOWARDS NEW SPACES OF THOUGHT**

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Abstract

African philosophy is a critical analysis and interpretation of the traditional worldviews and wise sayings of the African people as embedded in their languages, religion and cultural values. However, this approach to African philosophy is what has been denigrated as ethnophilosophy, which Hountondji regards as non-philosophical or pseudo-philosophical, and scholars such as Placide Tempels, L.S. Senghor, Alexis Kagame, Cheikh Anta Diop, and John Mbiti labeled ethnophilosophers. The radical universalist critique of ethnophilosophy notwithstanding, is not without scorn, thus the need for a new space of philosophical thought. This study presents a critical evaluation on Hountondji's critique of ethnophilosophy. Using the philosophical method, the study discovered that the irony of African philosophy revolves around the tendency of certain African philosophers to denigrate the intellectual orientation in African philosophy while, at the same time, depending on ethnophilosophical resources to advance the various ideas and concepts to which they are committed. The study expresses displeasure at the reluctance of universalists like Hountondji to appreciate ethnophilosophy as the original and true philosophy of Africans in the same sense that there is a British philosophy, an American philosophy, a Greek philosophy etc. The study advocates for the development of original thought-systems, an aspect of philosophy that has not received due attention from African philosophers.

Key Words: *African Philosophy, Ethnophilosophy, Zĩibalogzĩĩ Philosophy*

Introduction

The debate over the existence or non-existence of a philosophy that can be qualified as African has been on for decades. Consequently, one is tempted to ask, are the bulk of material called African philosophy by their authors, readers or researchers genuinely philosophy and genuinely African philosophy? Amidst all the tradition-based narratives of in the texts of P. Tempels, A. Kagame, and J. Mbiti as well as the political thoughts of S. Senghor, K. Nkrumah, J. Nyerere, N. Azikiwe really philosophic in a sense or mere collection of stories. However, no serious mind will doubt the philosophical dexterity and critical status of authors and scholars like Paulin Hountondji, Theophilus Okere, Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Bodunrin, Odera Oruka and Panteleon Iroegbu to mention but a few.

Okere (1993) argues on the conditional possibility of African philosophy with his *philosophemenes*. Wiredu, having contrasted the traditional thought patterns with the already existing Western philosophical texts branded the much lauded African philosophy Folk philosophy. Bodunrin sees in the Bantu philosophy (Tempels and Kagame) and Mbiti's work a mere justification of belief system devoid of philosophical rigour. Oruka was apt in distinguishing

and grading philosophical works or rightly put, works on African Thoughts done before him thus: ethno-philosophy, philosophical sagacity, nationalist ideological philosophy and professional philosophy - of which Hountondji, Bodunri and Wierdu's work excelled as professional philosophy and others were collection of worldviews. In line with the above, one can conclude with Hountondji that African philosophy is still before us, not behind us. That is, it is yet to come according to Wiredu and Bodunri, and Okere was very sure that they can be African philosophy given the needed hermeneutics of culture, as there exists a reservoir of cultural *philosophemes* in Africa. Other later contemporary philosophers like K. Gyekye, H. Mauurier, K.C. Anyanwu, C. Onyewuenyi, C.B. Okolo, P. Iroegbu, and I.M. Osuagwu readily accept there is African Philosophy as philosophy as such. The criteria for African philosophy and being an African Philosopher however should not be limited to authorship irrespective of continental boundaries like Hountondji and some philosophers may argue. Omeregbe in Bodunrin (1985), was very succinct in declaring that, "when there is reflection on the fundamentals questions about man or about the universe (whatever form this reflection may take) there is philosophy".

In other words, both Western and African scholars have argued that philosophy in general is the articulation of the ideas within the context of a people's cultural experience and heritage, that is, the experiences and worldviews of a given people (Russell 1945; Momoh 1993). This implies that all philosophies are the natural products of cultures in the sense that one cannot avoid or overlook the philosophical in a people's cultural experience. African philosophy in particular has been described as African way of thinking and rationalizing situations around them. It is a critical analysis and interpretation of the traditional worldviews and wise sayings of the African people as embedded in their languages and cultural values.

Ethnophilosophy, is an approach to African philosophy which asserts that the unsystematised traditional worldviews of the black people of Africa are philosophically valuable and viable; and that this philosophy can be rediscovered, revived, rehabilitated and revitalised from African culture which has been distorted by European colonisers and Christian missionaries. While some African thinkers, the ethnophilosophers, believe that these worldviews constitute a unique philosophy when described using the tool of language (Tempels 1959; Senghor 1964; Mbiti 1969), the professional philosophers or universalists argue that ethnophilosophy is simply folk wisdom due to its critical deficiency (Appiah 1992; Hountondji 1996; Wiredu 1996). Ethnophilosophy is doubly undesirable to the second group because of its racial connotation, having been promoted by Western missionaries like Placide Tempels, who tacitly or expressly considered the African mind poor, championed racial connection (Matolino 2011). Hermeneutic thinkers such as Okere (1983), Okere et al. (2005), and Serequeberhan (1994) sought to bridge the universalism-particularism divide by recognizing that philosophical traditions are inextricably linked to the culture in which they were conceived, and that the culture serves as a discourse horizon.

Despite the radical universalist critique of ethnophilosophy, the orientation has had a significant impact on African philosophical development, with even its detractors relying on it to

thrive philosophically. According to Osha (2011), the radical critique of ethnophilosophy relied on the work of ethnophilosophers to obtain relevance, as Hountondji, the greatest critic of ethnophilosophy, did. Given ethnophilosophy's unavoidable reach, moderate critics such as Wiredu and Oruka attempted to systematize the descriptive component of ethnophilosophy in order to give it the criticality it required. Wiredu, Hallen, and other professional philosophers who critically investigated traditional African ethnic group phenomena are sometimes referred to as academic ethnophilosophers, as their writings became increasingly ethnophilosophical in content (Rettová 2002; Hallen 2010; Osha 2011; Agada 2019; Agada, 2022). Wiredu, in particular, changed his concentration from Western formal logic to the elucidation of indigenous Akan thought, a contribution to African philosophy that will be remembered forever.

Other African scholars, such as J. O. Chimakonam, and Afro-communitarian philosophers such as Polycarp Ikuenobe, Matolino, Motsamai Molefe, as well as Asouzu and Agada, have built philosophical systems based on ethnophilosophy. As a result, the goal of this research was to come up with new ideas or build new systems by cleverly transforming concepts from the traditional Ogoni-African worldview. It focuses on the ethnophilosophical foundation of *Ziibalogzii* philosophy, or reciprocal reflection.

What is Ethnophilosophy?

Ethno-philosophy is neither a branch of philosophy nor an applied philosophy of any philosophical tradition but rather a derogatory aspect in the understanding of one particular philosophical tradition or philosophy that is Africa by origin, praxis and practice. Many African scholars opined that the term ethno-philosophy was first used by Kwame Nkrumah having been coined by Pauline Houtondji who viewed it as a combination of ethnography and philosophy. By various African historical methodologies of (deconstruction, deduction, construction and reconstruction), the basic problems and project of authentic African philosophy like every other philosophical tradition is assured and guaranteed. In favour of much opposition against African philosophy, Onyewueyi (1993) writes: "the history of Africa, as presented by European Scholars has been encumbered with malicious myths." Osuagwu (2010) reiterates thus: "the major argument is that Africans lack the natural faculty and cultural capacity of reason, and so could not have formally philosophized or historicized." Ethno-philosophy defined as such is philosophy that is based on the works of ethnographers, sociologists and anthropologists, interpreting our African world views as well as our myths and folklores as constituting part of African philosophy. Ethno-philosophy is a critical study against the age long bias that Africans lacked culture and history and are illiterates. Ethno-philosophy therefore should *study any and every indigenous philosophical system*.

Ethnophilosophy is derived from two Greek words: *ethnos* and *philosophia*. "Ethnos" refers to a country, tribe, ethnic group, or race that has a common cultural heritage. The search for knowledge or wisdom about the universe and man is referred to as "philosophia." In this meaning,

"ethnophilosophy" refers to an ethnic group's quest for understanding of the universe and man. It is critical to emphasize that the search is for an indigenous interpretation of proverbs, folklore, myths, tales, religions, and traditions. In other words, it is a reflection on specific people's worldviews. Ethnophilosophy is also known by a variety of other names. Collective philosophy, folk philosophy, people philosophy, culture philosophy, and ethnosophy are some of them.

It should be noted that proponents of ethnophilosophy did not invent or coin the term. In reality, Paulin Hountondji popularized the term when he used it to describe certain African philosophy literatures in the 1970s. He coined the phrase to describe Placid Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* as simply ethnological endeavor in his book *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*. He stated: "This Belgian missionary's *Bantu Philosophy* is still considered a classic of 'African philosophy' by some today. In fact, it's an ethnological study with philosophical overtones, or, to use a term I coined, an 'ethnophilosophy' work" (Hountondji, 1983). Since then, ethnophilosophy has been viewed as a philosophy based on the collective worldviews of African people.

In addition, Paulin Hountondji stated that he was not the first to coin the term ethnophilosophy. In the 1940s, it already existed. He traced it back to Kwame Nkrumah's memoirs. Kwame Nkrumah mentioned in his book that he had applied for a PhD in 'ethnophilosophy.' Ethnophilosophy, according to Paulin Hountondji, could be "the name of a discipline... in academia" (Hountondji, 2004). He suggested that ethnophilosophy looked to be the study of the most general ideas and beliefs in various societies, citing ethnobotany and ethnozoology as examples. Deeza (2024) identified some of the proponents of Ethnophilosophy who presented the African communal worldview as philosophy to include Placid Tempels, John S. Mbiti, Alexis Kagame and E. J. Alagoa. They stated that a person's philosophy is their worldview.

Placide Frans Tempels (1906-1977)

He is the foremost proponent of ethnophilosophy. He was a controversial Belgian missionary who wrote *La Philosophie Bantoue* (Bantu Philosophy). Tempels attempted to demonstrate in *Bantu Philosophy* that philosophy is a community property of all members of a civilization. In addition, he believed that Bantu or African philosophy is based on people's actual experiences. He looked for philosophy in people's religious beliefs, culture, customs, language, and behavior in that situation. "What is the best approach to lay up a comprehensive account of Bantu philosophy?" he wondered. "We may begin by comparing the Bantu people's languages, styles of behavior, institutions, and customs; we could then examine and extract their essential ideas, and lastly develop a Bantu thought system from these elements" (Tempels, 1959), Tempels advocated vital force as the Bantu people's overall concept of existence in the long term.

John Samuel Mbiti (1931-2019)

John S. Mbiti, a Kenyan theologian, was discovered to be an ethnophilosopher through his writings. He, like Tempels, maintained that African philosophy is a collection of Africans' shared worldviews.

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In his book *African Religion and Philosophy*, he lays out his beliefs. In his opinion, Mbiti's "philosophy is rooted in the history, culture, and religion of Africans" (Deezia, 2024). As a result, it is unnecessary to discuss philosophy as a particular discipline. "African existence is pervaded with philosophy" (Njoku 2002).

Alexis Kagame (1912-1981)

He was a Catholic priest from Rwanda. He claimed that people who speak a language share explicit abstract philosophical conceptions in his writings *La Philosophie Bantoue-Rwandaise de L'être* and *Philosophie Bantoue Comparée*. Language encapsulates culture, mediates life, and expresses ideals (Njoku, 2002). As a result, Kagame came to the conclusion that people who speak the same language had similar philosophical ideas. This indicates that everyone in a language community agrees on everything. This established Kagame's status as an ethnophilosopher. He made an attempt to depict philosophy as a shared worldview.

All of the ethnophilosophers named above suggested a collective philosophy for Africans, influenced by Hegel's notion of 'unity of being,' which brought coherence to the natural order that might be represented in some universal fashion in a single underlying principle (Bell, 2004). Their positions were meant to demonstrate that Africans are rational, and that African philosophy existed as a result. They largely demonstrated that African thought exists.

Ebiegberi Joe Alagoa

Another example of this sort of approach is the work of E. J. Alagoa born April 14, 1933, in Nembe, Byelsa State, Ngeria. Alagoa in his paper *An African Philosophy of History in the Oral Tradition* (1994) argues for the existence of an African philosophy of History based on traditional proverbs from the Niger Delta. According to Alagoa age is viewed as a significant aspect in gaining wisdom and interpreting the past in African philosophy. He quotes proverbs like "More days, more wisdom", and "What an old man sees seated, a youth does not see standing." Truth is said to be everlasting and unchanging ("truth never rots"), although people make mistakes ("Even a four-legged horse stumbles and falls"). It is risky to make assumptions based on appearances ("a large eye does not equal sharp vision"), but first-hand observation can be relied upon ("he who sees does not err"). Although the past and present are not considered as fundamentally different, all history is contemporaneous history ("a storyteller does not tell of a different season"). The future is still a mystery ("even a bird with a long neck cannot see the future"). "God will endure eternity." History is seen as crucial ("One who is unaware of his origin is nonhuman"), and historians (known as "sons of the soil") are held in high regard ("he son of the soil possesses the python's piercing eyes") (Deezia, 2024).

Critical Evaluation of Hountondji's Critique of Ethnophilosophy

Paulin Hountondji, a Beninese philosopher born in 1942, was a professor of philosophy at the University of Cotonou. He was classified as a professional philosopher, and one of his influences was

Jacques Derrida. Hountondji's notoriety stemmed from his most divisive book, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, which grabbed the attention of many contemporary African philosophers. He embarked on an intellectual journey to learn more about African philosophy. This question wasn't so much about whether or not African philosophy existed. He took it for granted that African philosophy existed. The question of 'where does African philosophy lie?' was at the center of his intellectual curiosity.

Explicit and flagrant misrepresentations of Africans by Eurocentric philosophers can be found throughout the pages of African history. It is impossible to overstate the importance of Hegel's historical caricature of Africa. In a similar vein, Levy-Bruhl labeled African thinking as "primitive." To this end, Europeans suggested that primitives were irrational, prelogical, and so on. This statement implicitly excludes Africans from the category of men. To deny a being its identity is to deny it that which defines it. In this sense, denying Africans rationality entails denying them human nature, as rationality is one of the characteristics that distinguish man.

Many literatures were created and published in defense of an African philosophy in this context. Regardless, Paulin Hountondji, who argued that "philosophy should write its narrative" (Hountondji, 1983), found these literatures wanting to be assimilated into African philosophy after a critical review. He defined African philosophy as "a series of literature," emphasizing that it is "particularly the set of works authored by Africans and designated by their authors as philosophical" (Hountondji, 1983). As a result, Hountondji implies that everything that should be classified as African philosophy must not just be written, but authored by Africans. Furthermore, we learn from him that such a text should be classified as a philosophical text.

Furthermore, we learn from him that such a document should be classified as a philosophical text by its writers. His fundamental argumentative statement on this viewpoint was concentrated on the publication *Bantu Philosophy*, written by Belgian priest Placide Tempels. Placide Tempels elevated this book to the stature of a philosophy, specifically African philosophy, when he authored it. Paulin Hountondji demoted it to the level of "ethnological work... a work of ethnophilosophy" in the face of intense opposition (Hountondji, 1983). He outlined some literatures, including Alexis Kagame's *La philosophie Bantoue – Rwandaise de l'être* (1956) and *La philosophie Bantoue Comparée* (1976); John Mbiti's *Akamba Stories* (1966), *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), *Concept of God in Africa* (1969); Marcel Griaule's *Dieu d'eau, entretiens avec Ogotemmel*; *Dogon Philosophy*; *Diola Philosophy*, Yoruba Ethnophilosophy is what they are. As a result, he clarifies his concept of African philosophy through a critical examination of ethnophilosophy. To be more specific, we'll be looking at his criticism in terms of collective worldview, technique, writing, non-African orientation, and non-scientific orientation. As a result, we'll start by looking at what he means when he accuses ethnophilosophy of promoting a common vision as philosophy.

Hountondji on Collective Worldview

Ethnophilosophy, according to Paulin Hountondji, proposes a community worldview. He made it apparent that philosophy should not be reduced to collective worldviews, and that it cannot be (*weltanschauung*). To that end, he emphasized the importance of philosophy as a purely individual

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endeavor defined by freedom of thought and debate. As a result, such thinking and discourse should set off the Hegelian trilemma of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis. As a result, he believes that true philosophy can only be triggered in the sense of autonomous effort as opposed to group worldview orientation. In fact, he summed up the ridiculousness of this communal worldview orientation, which assumes definitiveness, when he said:

If we believe that it is of the essence of any science to be constituted by free discussion, by the confrontation of hypothesis and theories created by the thought of individuals (or at least assumed by them) and reaching total convergence through reciprocal amendment, then we must also find absurd the idea of a collective immutable and definitive philosophy (Hountondji, 1983:47).

He went on to say that Kagame and all African intellectuals "who have taken it into their heads to define a specific African philosophy, a worldview common to all Africans, past, present, and future, a collective, immutable system of thought are as guilty as Tempels" for their views on the absurdity of a collective philosophy (Hountondji, 1983). To that end, ideologies that resemble Bantu philosophy, such as Ogoni philosophy, Igbo philosophy, Rwandan philosophy, Dogon philosophy, Yoruba philosophy, Wolof philosophy, and so on, do not qualify as true philosophy. He underlined that they presume a myth after an extensive inventory of works with a tincture of collective tendencies. "The myth of primitive unanimity," he said, "with its idea that in primitive culture — that is, non-Western societies — everyone always agrees with everyone else." As a result, there can never be individual beliefs or philosophies in such cultures, just collective belief systems" (Hountondji, 1983). As a result, vouching for such ethnophilosophic theory as "everyone agrees with everyone else" means the end of philosophical conversation. It suffocates philosophical endeavor.

Another criticism of Paulin Hountondji's critique of collective worldview orientation was directed towards Kagame, who would understand philosophy from the perspective of a linguistic group. Hountondji characterized Kagame as believing that people who share the same language community share the same beliefs, which he referred to as philosophy. Paulin Hountondji, echoing Kagame's viewpoint, stated that these common thoughts formed from language may be found in proverbs, fables, dynamic poems, and all of Africa's oral literature (Hountondji, 1983). It would be a gross exaggeration to suggest that Paulin Hountondji was opposed to the idea that members in a community share and live by a set of assumptions. He simply objected to ethnologists and certain philosophers' quick classification of such sets of assumptions as philosophies (Hountondji, 2004). However, he avoided labeling these community-wide preconceptions as 'unphilosophic' in a subtle way. As a result, he made it obvious that these shared assumptions constitute the starting point for philosophy's development as a critical, personal body of thinking (Hountondji, 2004). To put it another way, ethnophilosophy is not philosophy as it is presented by ethnophilosophers. Looking back to the time when ethno-philosophy was very popular, Hountondji writes in his 2004 contribution to Wiredu's celebrated anthology *A Companion to African Philosophy*:

Not so long ago, there was a widespread belief that the only way for Africans to do philosophy was to philosophize about Africa. More exactly put, it was believed, first, that all Africans (or at a lower level of generalization, all the Wolof or Yorubas or Bantus, etc.) share a collective world-view; second, that these collective world-views may be called philosophical; and, third, that all we have to do is to discover these collective philosophies, to study them as accurately as possible, and display them for the use and intellectual delectation of the external world. (Hountondji 2004, 529)

For Hountondji (2004), ethno-philosophy is in fact “a branch of ethnology mistaken for philosophy.” Ethno-philosophy is folk philosophy, an unsystematised and uncritical accumulation of traditional wisdom. Hountondji (1996) believes that the philosophical enterprise adheres to a “single style of enquiry.” This universalist understanding of philosophy does not imply that diverse cultures must have or share the same themes or subjects. Hountondji's goal is demonstrating that philosophy everywhere must carry the stamp of criticality and analyticity if it must count as philosophy.

Oruka towed the path of Hountondji and Towa and considered ethnophilosophy uncritical. For Oruka, when ethnophilosophers proposed that African philosophy is a collective worldview, they had the intention to wiping out the possibility of an African philosophy. Thus to prove the flaws of ethnophilosophy, he presented his idea of philosophic sagacity. The sage philosopher though, uneducated in Western principles are able to make rigorous critical thinking. However, Oruka does not do away with collective worldviews. He insisted that the philosophic sages have these worldviews as their source of philosophy. The question is, if the source material of the sage philosopher is the collective worldview, where do these collective worldviews originate? Did they fall from the sky? In any case, Oruka seems to take sides with ethnophilosophers but only differed from them by observing that the collective worldviews are material sources of philosophy. They are not philosophies in their original form. Philosophy can only be elicited from them when the sage philosophers plunge his critical mind on them. As such, the sage philosopher exhumes philosophy from these collective worldviews. Kwasi Wiredu on his part modifies Oruka's view when he suggested that collective philosophies, if there is such a thing, originate from individual critical thinkers. Bodunrin brings it to limelight that he is not denying that the collective worldviews – African folk-lore, tales, myths, proverbs, religious beliefs and practices and African culture at large – are worthy of the philosophers' attention. In that case, he accepted that there are philosophies entombed in collective worldviews. Towa advanced this point when he asseverated that the philosopher's attitude to these collective worldviews is to collect, interpret and disseminate. This strikes a line in the hermeneutical approach to African philosophy.

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Mangena, (2014) also disagrees with the basic views of Hountondji that ethno-philosophy is a collection of uncritical beliefs, customs, and traditional values. Mangena (2014, 31–32) asserts that:

[E]thno-philosophy is not a mere collection of beliefs, customs, values and traditions of a particular group of people; it also involves critical analysis of the same. *Reasoning* involves analyzing the relationship between or among given premises and drawing conclusions from them. Thus reasoning—as an analytical task—is a product of two mental processes, namely, deduction and induction ... It is unfortunate that most definitions of ethno-philosophy, especially by professional philosophers, have tended to focus on the “collection” task, thereby deliberately ignoring the “analysis” task.

According to Mangena, the logical necessity, which connects premises with conclusions in a deductive argument, and the probability which goes with induction can all be found in ethno-philosophical thinking. For him, scepticism about the criticality of ethno-philosophy arises when we insist that the Western analytical method is the only universal method of philosophising; approached from an African inductive context, ethno-philosophy is critical and analytical. Mangena tries to show that proverbs, which universalists claim to be uncritical and unworthy to be regarded as philosophical, are products of critical thinking. The Ogoni proverb *aba nee naa bee dor naa*, meaning “one man cannot surround an anthill.” The import of this proverb is that a big task is better accomplished when people come together to work. The inventor of the proverb, according to Mangena, reached his or her conclusion inductively, after a serious analysis of the facts before him or her in the Shona society. Based on this example and similar examples of the rationality of proverbs, Mangena (2014) asserts that: “The job of the ethno-philosopher, then, would be to collect and analyse these proverbs to see if philosophical thinking can be mined from them.” that ethno-philosophy deserves more respect than has been so far granted it. Unlike Mangena, however, I do not think that ethno-philosophy should be equated with African philosophy on account of its critical and constructive deficiency which the universalist critique exposed.

Hountondji on Method of Inquiry

Paulin Hountondji's critiques of ethnophilosophy call into question the ethnophilosophers' approach of investigation. Francis Njoku, commenting on Paulin Hountondji, underlined the importance of taking note of "the universal process of inquiry" in order to generate real philosophy (Njoku, 2002). One philosophizes with a method and prior knowledge in this light. In that scenario, philosophical tradition has left us with a language, a vocabulary, and a conceptual equipment that we cannot do without if we are to be true philosophers. It goes without saying that there is a systematic turn in philosophy, which is methodological and always connected to an existing tradition. The

philosopher must follow the philosophical process in order to philosophize rather than just tell stories (Hountondji, 1983).

Barren Hallen, commenting on Hountondji, observed that the inventive critical thinking, analytic argumentation, and competitive testing of alternate hypotheses inherent to such disciplines that, appropriately, address African research priorities are sure to encourage the kind of independent individualized theoretical thinking that Hountondji finds essential to philosophical discourse that is truly worthy of the name (Hallen, 2002). To go against this strategy is to engage in a business that is unrelated to philosophy. As a result, Hountondji boldly claimed that their "investigation amounted to creating a new standard of philosophic practice specific to Africa and such other areas as are traditionally considered research fields for ethnographers and anthropologists" because ethnophilosophic enterprise side – tracked the universal method of inquiry (Hountondji, 2004). The enterprise became a unanimous venture, according to Hountondji, because ethnophilosophers did not adhere to the universal method of inquiry. "Like chemistry, physics, or mathematics," he argued, "philosophy is a specific theoretical subject with its own necessities and methodological principles" (Hountondji, 1983). Ethnophilosophers, according to Paulin Hountondji, followed anthropological method rather than the methodological standards of philosophy. This rendered their endeavor descriptive rather than analytic, artistic rather than logical, uncritical rather than critical, and rather than engaging in continual individual rational questioning, they were engulfed by a collective worldview. To that end, he excluded ethnophilosophy from the philosophical sphere.

However, Agudosi quoting Nwigwe and Emedolu stated that, "the tendency has always been to sidetrack African wisdom as unphilosophic, largely on the ground that it follows no recognized philosophical method. But then, methodological constraint must not be brought forward since methodology per se is not a criteriological necessity in philosophy" (Fabian, 2008). In other words, he endorsed ethnophilosophy and quashed the opinion that philosophy has a method. From the forgoing one comes to terms with the idea that philosophy as an argumentative discipline not only argues about the content of a philosophy but also about method of inquiry. The question that demands urgent response remains, 'is method necessary in philosophy? Must every philosophy be methodological?'

Hountondji on Lack of Writing in Ethnophilosophy

Paulin Hountondji was opposed to ethnophilosophy since it could not be written down. African philosophy, according to Hountondji, is "a collection of literature, particularly those authored by Africans and identified as philosophical by their writers" (Hountondji, 1983). To that end, he emphasized that ethnophilosophy is not philosophy because it is not written down. To put it another way, philosophy can only exist as literature. "Philosophy, the highest form of critical thought, cannot properly grow unless it 'writes its memoir' or 'keeps a journal'" (Hountondji, 1983). This diary, or memoir, as he referred to it, becomes the foundation and wellspring of a genuine African philosophy. As a result, he emphasized that "in terms of authentic philosophy, everything starts at the precise moment of transcription, when the memory can rid itself of cumbersome knowledge now entrusted to papyrus and thus free itself for the critical activity that is the beginning of philosophy, in the only

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acceptable sense of the word" (Hountondji, 1983). It goes without saying that philosophical critical action begins only when the substance of our memories is portrayed in black and white, through literature. He lowered the status of oral literature by agreeing with this viewpoint. Indeed, since he stated that philosophy must only evolve as literature, one wonders if oral literature may be absorbed into his definition.

In other words, Hountondji's definition of African philosophy as a set of texts, a specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves (Hountondji, 1983), pigeonholes African philosophy to written philosophy by Africans alone. As a matter of fact, it presupposes literacy. This bars ethnophilosophy from posing the view that African philosophy is equal to proverbs, legends, and African folklore. In that case, Hountondji observed that these collective worldviews are unwritten. On that ground, he avowed that they are not part and parcel of African philosophy. Making an elaborate discussion, he insisted that thousands of Socrates could never have given birth to Greek philosophy, however talented they might have been in dialectics. So, thousands of philosophers without written work could never have given birth to African philosophy (Hountondji, 1983). This seems to disqualify the opinion of Oruka, who opined that a sage could conceive and give birth to philosophy. For Oruka, to accept only written tradition will stifle the growth of African philosophy. He opted that both written and unwritten literature, otherwise called oral literature should be incorporated. The oral literature comes from his sage philosophers whose thoughts are written down by trained philosophers. But then, one may pose the argument that Oruka's sage philosopher cannot reach maturity. His sage philosopher may be anything but systematic. In that case, for a philosophy to be systematic it has to be in written form. Thus: Hountondji proposed:

We must bear in mind that so far as authentic philosophy goes, everything begins at the precise moment of transcription, when the memory can rid itself of cumbersome knowledge now entrusted to papyrus and so free itself for the critical activity which is the beginning of philosophy, in the only acceptable sense of the word (Hountondji, 1983:85).

Therefore, written tradition is the only form acceptable if one wants to philosophize. Wiredu was not silent on this issue. He elaborated:

Where long-standing written sources are available, folk philosophy tends not to be made much of. It remains in the background as a sort of diffused; immanent component of community thought habits whose effects on the thinking of the working philosopher is largely unconscious. Such a fund of community thought is not a creation of any specifiable set to philosophers; it is the common property of all and sundry, thinker and non-thinker alike, and it is called a philosophy at all only by a quite liberal acceptance of the term. Folk thought, as a rule, consists of bald assertions without argumentative justification, but philosophy in the narrow sense must contain not just theses

(sic). Without argumentation and clarification, there is, strictly no philosophy (Wiredu, 2004:156).

Even though folk philosophy is taken as inferior philosophy, a certain assumption is implicit in Wiredu's opinion. He proposed that "folk philosophy is not a creation of any specific set of philosophers; it is the common property of all and sundry, thinker and non-thinker alike. Wiredu did not make it clear whether or not folk philosophy fell from the sky. As a matter of consideration, somebody must have invented folk philosophy. In any case, if a folk thought is analyzed and it is philosophically enriched, if it solves any African problem, why should Wiredu relegate it to the background. In the same vein, what if a folk thought is more philosophical than a written thought? Towa seems to vouch for folk philosophy otherwise called oral tradition. He enunciated:

Philosophy expresses itself in discourse, oral or written, and it is from this discourse that one has to start; that is to say, from texts. The first task of the historian of African thought consequently consists in establishing a corpus of texts congruent with the adopted definition of philosophy and makes them available to researchers (Towa, 1991:195).

Towa made a subtle escape from equating oral and written philosophy. On the long run, he passed a verdict such that oral philosophy played second fiddle to written philosophy. This is evidenced when he pronounced that philosophy has to start from discourse; that is to say, from written texts. His opinion became clearer when he urged historians to start transcribing African thoughts into written form. In other words, historians should produce texts constituting African thoughts. Even though right of place is given to written form, it seems apparent that there cannot be written form without oral form. Towa like Kant who posed as a mediator between rationalists and empiricists struck a balance between ethnophilosophers and Hountondji, by insisting that Hountondji's written philosophy must come from oral tradition. Those who hold on to oral tradition on the other hand should not limit themselves to orality. They have to transcend to written form. We must remark that Towa's mediation does not go without a caution. He admonished that ethnophilosophers should not equate culture with philosophy, just like philosophy is not reducible to written text. He theorized, as mentioned somewhere, that philosophy consists in critically sifting inconsistencies, irrelevances and untruths from oral literature (Towa, 1991). More so, Mkemnkia stated that "there are two possible ways in which one can formulate a philosophical reasoning process. They are by articulating orally on questions and propositions and the second consists in putting into writing what we have discussed" (MKemnkia, 1999). By inference, he vouched for written philosophy but insists that it must take its root from oral tradition. That is, oral text predates written text. In that case, what should be written down are thoughts which have undergone or are undergoing critical discourse. Therefore Paulin Hountondji opined that because

ethnophilosophy is not in written form, it is not philosophy. One wonders whether or not he will change his opinion when he is presented with philosophical text that emanated from oral tradition.

Hountondji on Non-African Orientation

Paulin Hountondji was a staunch opponent of ethnophilosophy's non-African perspective. He made it quite clear that ethnophilosophical endeavor was solely Eurocentric. As a result, he conveys the impression that "modern African philosophy, insofar as it remains an ethnophilosophy, has been constructed primarily for a European audience." The speech of the African ethnophilosopher is not intended for Africans. It was not created with their advantage in mind" (Hountondji, 1983). To put it another way, it was simply a mastermind of colonists seeking to achieve their own selfish interests. It was not for the benefit of Africans, but for the benefit of Europeans in that sense. As a result, Bantu philosophy, for example, attempts to "enable what it refers to as Europe's mission to civilize" (Hountondji, 1983). Paulin Hountondji claimed that the ethnophilosophic idea was merely a ruse to promote a European social project. As a result, it is "a self-delusory fabrication that conceals itself beneath its own project" (Hountondji, 1983). This appears to be self-evident in the aim to civilize, which was defined by instilling an inferiority complex in the 'soul' of the black man. This becomes a colonizer's method to get the black man to bow to his colonial demands. It takes a close examination to discover that the effort was not actually about defending the African mind, or what Levy-Bruhl referred to as "primitive" mentality. Tempels' essay concludes with a chapter titled "Bantu philosophy and our goal to civilize," which seems to back with Hountondji's assertion.

As a result, Africans are considered as mere objects when it comes to issues affecting them. "The black man continues to be the polar opposite of an interlocutor; he remains a topic, a silent face under private observation, and an object of possible speech," Hountondji asserted (Hountondji, 1983). As a result, Africans play an active role in the ethnophilosophic debate. It's no surprise that Hountondji limited African philosophy to African literature. As a result, he dismissed Bantu philosophy because the author was a foreigner. He went on to say that those Africans who followed Tempels' approach in building ethnophilosophy failed miserably. They failed to recognize the ambiguity of ethnophilosophy, according to Paulin Hountondji, and thus unknowingly played their opponent's game (Hountondji, 1983). This was prompted by the desire of Africans to defend themselves against Europeans. Trying to define ourselves in front of Europeans, he thought, was a waste of time. As a result, he recommended African philosophers to write for an African audience rather than a non-African audience (Hountondji, 1983). Ethnophilosophy, he believes, is unphilosophic as a result of this.

Severally, Paulin Hountondji advised real African philosophers to distance themselves from ethnophilosophy. He said that the discourse was not for the benefit of Africans. Wiredu lamented that ethnophilosophers underline the basic non-scientific characteristics of traditional thought in general as the sole reserve of Africans. In other words, they shot their eyes to the fact that even the western world at some time and even at present preserve some of their unscientific traditional thoughts. Keita recognized the colonizer's project and he asserted:

In a world in which the African thinker is made to perceive himself as a tyro among the so – called civilized, he is forced to justify his existence only by defending those traits imposed on him by the colonizer. Even among those thinkers relatively untouched by the negritude movement one perceives a general advocating of the theory that systematic thought was unknown in Africa until the advent of the colonizers (Keita, 1984:70).

This is a clear representation of what Tempels and African ethnophilosophers proposed. One understands why Paulin Hountondji eliminated foreigners from the ambience of African philosophy. With much vexation, he defined African philosophy as a set of texts written by African authors. In that light, Tempels and other foreign authors are not considered as African philosophers. For Hountondji, African problems should be handled by Africans themselves, maybe because they are the ones who understand the African predicament. But then, is it the ideal? Again, what about those who are trained in western cannons and are not at home with African predicament? Are they qualified to contribute and be recognized by Hountondji and co.? These questions quest for answers.

Hountondji on Non-Scientific Orientation

Science, according to Paulin Hountondji, predates philosophy. Recreating Lenin's claim that philosophy has not always existed: it's only been observed in places where there is also what is called science or sciences – science in the strict sense of theoretical discipline – Paulin Hountondji claims that great philosophical revolutions are the result of great scientific revolutions (Hountondji, 1983). As a result, he began to correlate the birth and development of science with the growth and evolution of philosophy. A string was woven around science and philosophy in that situation. "African philosophy is inseparable from African science," Hountondji believed (Hountondji, 1983). As a result, any effort purporting to be philosophical must first and foremost be scientific. Ethnophilosophy, in his opinion, does not meet scientific qualifications. He even referred to it as pseudo-science (Hountondji, 1983).

According to Hountondji, ethnophilosophy cannot be philosophy in this instance. Philosophy, he believes, must evolve in the shape of scientific writing. He said that the former consists of "tales, fables, stories, myths, proverbs, biographies, and autobiographies, etc." (Hountondji, 1983), whereas the latter belongs to philosophy. As a result, ethnophilosophy does not exist as a scientific but more as an aesthetic form of expression. As a result of Paulin Hountondji's classification of sage philosophy as ethnophilosophy, the standing of sage philosophy is in jeopardy. Paulin Hountondji, on the other hand, suggested a fresh approach to African philosophy. Philosophy, he believes, should only be a theoretical discipline (Hountondji, 1983). He stated that in order to build a genuine African philosophy, African philosophers should first promote and sustain ongoing free conversation about all issues pertaining to their profession. He hoped that if Africans began discussing theoretical issues among themselves rather than with outsiders, they would be inspired to explore other continents' and societies' scientific achievements (Hountondji, 1983). When interlocutors have a common ancestor,

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he claims, cultural particularism gives way to universality because interlocutors are relieved of the need to express themselves in front of others.

The opinion that ethnophilosophy is not scientific was used by Paulin Hountondji to disqualify it as African philosophy. This is because ethnophilosophy is bound within the sphere of what he called 'artistic' literature. That is, it consisted of fables, tales, legends, folklores, and proverbs. For him, Africa has no science. He expressed skepticism about the existence of scientific literature in Africa. No wonder he argued that science predates philosophy. In fact he quoted Lenin thus: "philosophy has not always existed; it has been observed only in places where there is what is called a science or sciences" (Hountondji, 1983). He threw his weight on this premise and asserted that philosophical revolutions are consequences of scientific revolutions. In other words, there should be science before philosophy. He seems to admonish that "rather than noisily claiming the existence of an African philosophy which would save us the trouble of philosophizing, we would therefore be better advantaged to work patiently and methodically for what we could call African science and African scientific research. It is not philosophy but science that Africa need first (Hountondji, 1983)."

In that case, for Hountondji, there is no African science. Note that, he said that science predates philosophy. By inference, he proposed that there is no African philosophy. He thus plunged himself into contradiction because he had stated somewhere that he does not deny the existence of African philosophy. If he denies the existence of science which he said predates philosophy, one wonders what he means when he said that he does not deny the existence of African philosophy. Commenting on this, Kebede inferred:

The correlation establishes the appearance of scientific discipline as a prerequisite to philosophy whose essential function is then to become a theory of science, that is, an investigation into the nature and possibility of scientific knowledge. Philosophy is unthinkable without science Since no African scholar argues in favour of the existence of a scientific form of knowledge in traditional Africa, this dependence of philosophy on science takes philosophy as far as possible from Africa (Kebede, 2004:85).

Kebede makes a general statement that embodies a fallacy. I think he should be reminded that Hountondji's stance that there is no African science does not imply that all Africans agree with him.

While it is apparent that philosophy is a universal discipline, it is also undeniable that its universality is predicated on the fact that it is first contextual and cultural (Chimakonam 2017). Because it was largely geared at answering Western existential concerns as they emerged from the Western philosophical position, Western philosophy was first and foremost a contextual and cultural philosophy. Philosophy, of course, starts in a (philosophical) location and moves into (philosophical) space. The concept is that the place is the context or culture in which philosophy is initially

articulated, and the space is the world outside of that context where philosophy is also applicable and meaningful. As a result, no philosophy can exist without first being cultural. The immanent aspect of ethnophilosophy, according to Etieyibo, is the thinking or thought, the critical feature that makes it philosophical. He also points out that the ethno element of ethnophilosophy is made ethnophilosophy by this critical or philosophical (immanent) feature of ethnophilosophy. Ethnophilosophy is "an unraveling of African civilizations or a critical study on indigenous systems," according to him (Imafidon et al, 2019).

This paper's author does not think that ethnophilosophy is synonymous with African philosophy, nor see ethnophilosophy as a defunct discourse that has no place in modern African philosophy. His position, like Agada's, is that ethnophilosophy continues to play an important part in African philosophy. African philosophers had no base to fall back on for their philosophy at the early stages of academic philosophising in Africa, according to Agada, who claims that they ran into the challenge of performing ethnophilosophy as African philosophy. Agada further contends that ethnophilosophy should not be seen as true African philosophy in the twenty-first century, but rather as the starting point for, and first step forward in, African philosophy, which has great potential for the future of African philosophy (Agada, 2013). As a result, the irony of African philosophy centres around the tendency of certain universalist African philosophers to disparage the philosophical orientation in African philosophy today known as ethnophilosophy. At the same time, they rely on ethnophilosophical resources to further the numerous ideas and concepts to which they are dedicated. Indeed, it is difficult to find philosophers working within a distinctly African philosophical framework who can confidently say that ethnophilosophy is no longer an issue.

Ethnophilosophical currents animate the thoughts of not only philosophers like Placide Tempels, L.S. Senghor, Alexis Kagame, and John Mbiti, but also universalism sympathizers like Pauline Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, H. Odera Oruka, Innocent Asouzu, and Bernard Matolino, among others, in one form or another. If ethnophilosophy had not provided him with a base to examine and condemn the ethnophilosophical perspective in the infancy of modern African philosophy, Hountondji's name as a prominent African philosopher would not have been securely established (Deeza, 2014). The early radical critique of ethnophilosophy was intended to entirely eliminate the orientation. The extinction has not occurred. Indeed, a number of African philosophers have been compelled to investigate their ethnic group's traditional worldviews in the hopes of distilling components worthy of philosophical investigation and subjecting the emergent elements to philosophical scrutiny. Against this trend, it might be claimed that it poses a threat to African philosophy by elevating group thought to the status of true philosophy at the expense of individual thinking.

But, if one can criticize the above-mentioned trend, which unabashedly returns to group thinking in the pursuit of philosophical wisdom, there is another trend that bodes well for African philosophy: the recognition of ethnophilosophy as a distinct orientation, similar to what we might call cultural philosophy, which is the critical exploration of worldviews associated with specific ethno-religious groups. Contemporary philosophers such as Asouzu, Mogobe B. Ramose, and J.O. Chimakonam, as well as Afro-communitarian philosophers such as Polycarp Ikuenobe, Matolino,

and Motsamai Molefe, have all attempted to develop original ideas or construct original systems by ingeniously transforming concepts derived directly or indirectly from raw traditional African worldviews.

***Ziibalogzii*: Towards the New Spaces of Thought**

The fundamental principle which describes the core of the African spirit is harmony; although reality exists as individuals, they converge at the point of reasonableness. Among the Ogoni indigenous people of Nigeria, one central aspect of their worldview is the interconnectedness of all things, including humans, animals, plants, and the environment. This interconnectedness is reflected in the concept of *Ziibalogzii* philosophy, which refers to the life force that animates all things. *Ziibalogzii* philosophy literally translates to the state of being human in an interconnected web; seeing reality in terms of a universe of forces that interlinked together, and that are in constant interplay with one another (Deezia, 2013). This indicates the importance of interdependence and reciprocity in human cooperation, collaborativity, and interconnectedness of all in the traditional Ogoni reciprocal, collaborative way of thought.

Ziibalogzii implies that one's own existence is inextricably linked to what one does in respect to others, specifically, acknowledging their humanity and forming compassionate relationships with them. By appealing to the reality that individuals are 'human together,' it stresses basic qualities of relational intimacy and care of traditional village life, demonstrating the worth of connections, respect, and acknowledgement of others in their midst. Furthermore, this research shows that in *Ziibalogzii* philosophy, the term "communing with others" alludes to a fundamental connection of all lives in natural and spiritual settings, not simply living humans. As a result, *Ziibalogzii* is a religious and philosophical philosophy that brings the natural and spiritual worlds together. This religious and philosophical system is founded on a totemic framework in which an individual should consider himself or herself as connected to and interconnected with the spiritual realm on the vertical axis, as well as other nonhuman species and the wider environment on the horizontal axis. As a result, according to *Ziibalogzii*'s religio-philosophical theory, personhood/humanness is inextricably linked to the dynamic (bio) physical and spiritual worlds through a web of interconnectedness and relatedness, with one's current and actual web of communion, such as current family ties, taking precedence over future or possible links.

With phrases like *Zii te naa lu kue* (a tree does not make a forest), *doo-i-tor* (live and let live), *bue nee kum-zoo* (individuals make up the community), *bae gbo kpen loo*, *ba kpo kpue* (hunting wild animals requires collective efforts of the dogs and the hunter), etc., *Ziibalogzii* is a relational philosophy. Rather than emphasizing objectivity and rationality, it emphasizes the need of a subjective and emotional awareness of human experience. The collectivist nature of *Ziibalogzii* emphasizes the value of teamwork, cooperation, and community. It encourages compassion and respect for others, as well as the importance of banding together in the face of misfortune. It's somewhat unsurprising that such a mindset has prevailed on a continent that has experienced so much social, political, environmental, and economic turmoil, and where communal action and mutual

aid have been crucial to survival. While other collectivist ideologies have been labeled as restrictive and dictatorial, *Ziibalogzii* has been described as an inclusive approach to human interactions that promotes dignity and respect. While the notion *Ziibalogzii* is classed as a collectivist philosophy, it is inter-subjective in that it concentrates on the individual's relationship with the collective rather than the collective's relationship with the person.

The moral norm of *Ziibalogzii* recognizes and values the fact that the parts of social reality are reciprocally determined; that is, they are interdependent in legal ways. One's activities will be asocial or antisocial in the short run, and self-defeating in the long run, to the degree that one's understanding of self-interest does not incorporate one's obligations toward society at large. This could be indicated by the statement *nu mfo ne mbugura-a* (I shall reap what I have sowed), or by the fact that people I have insulted will cancel the effects of my efforts. Three ethical methods are regarded to jointly control ethical behaviour in Ogoni-African civilization, and they are subordinate to the principle of *Ziibalogzii*: beneficence, justice, and respect for persons. The first ethical technique, beneficence, entails providing positive benefits while avoiding damage, allowing for the unilateral giving of resources for individuals whose dependent condition prevents return in kind. Justice, the second ethical strategy, necessitates a fair allocation of duties and benefits, ensuring that rights and obligations are appropriately balanced and mutual enjoyment is achieved. The concept of respect for persons involves honoring the decisions of autonomous individuals for the general good, based on a naive understanding of the third ethical approach respect for persons.

As a result, *Ziibalogzii* philosophy, which is rooted in African philosophical tradition, is a philosophical reflection that is a process of exposing interpretatively the magnificence of African cultural symbols and natural heritage. *Ziibalogzii* is Ethnophilosophy in all senses, but it is not Ethnophilosophy in the narrow sense, because it is more than just cultural philosophy or wise words. *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy, on the other hand, has Ethnophilosophical underpinnings but rises above Ethnophilosophy to the level of Philosophy as philosophy.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper is the attention it has drawn to the ontology of *Ziibalogzii* philosophy, which implies reciprocity, reversibility, and dependency. It is the belief that the cosmos is made up of a symbiotic network of things, people, ideas, and values. In their complementary unity, all creatures and components complement one another and serve to complete the universe. Reciprocal reflection, *Ziibalogzii* philosophy's epistemological vehicle, advances the case for existence as a whole marked by comprehensiveness and future referentiality. The approach of reciprocal reflection promotes dialectics in a process that sees the human mind grow up to the realization that what appear to be contradictions are actually the world's diversity of complements. The oneness of varied complements is reality.

In other words, the research showed that *Ziibalogzii's* ontology and logical system are examples of 21st-century African philosophers relying on ethnophilosophical resources to develop thought-systems they say are both uniquely African and universally applicable. This means that,

notwithstanding Hountondji's harsh criticism, ethnophilosophy is still important to African philosophy if critical-minded contemporary philosophers can uncover a well-spring of philosophical conceptions in traditional wisdom stored in an African language. Unlike philosophers like Wiredu and Gyekye, who drew on their ethnic group's worldviews, this study moved away from ethnophilosophy's core data and aggressively pushed a system as universally applicable. As a result, the study made fewer references to the Ogoni belief system and emphasized system development, a part of philosophy that has gotten less attention from African philosophers.

Without any shadow of doubt, ethnophilosophy became a point of departure in the discourse of African philosophy. It is common knowledge that an account of Greek philosophy usually started with its history. Likewise, discussion on African philosophy cannot be holistic without highlighting the contributions of the works of ethnophilosophers. They were the people who engineered the discourse in African philosophy among contemporary African philosophers. Their many flaws notwithstanding, their contributions were enormous. Probably, no one would be talking about Africa philosophy if they did not make their contributions. Is it not interesting that the work, *Bantu Philosophy* could merit several international and national philosophical conferences, seminars, workshops, articles, and journals? To that effect, we cannot afford not to say a big 'bravo!' to ethnophilosophers, however faulty their project might seem.

More so, ethnophilosophy was a step to African historical self-identity reconstruction. Circumstances like slave-trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism bedeviled the African history. They made Africa and Africans look inferior to the Western world. It was worse when great philosophical giants like Hegel, Hume, and even Kant presented the Africa mind as lacking the faculty of reason. It took a lot of pluck on the side of ethnophilosophers to prove that Africans are still part of *Homo sapiens*, even when the Eurocentric figures have dogmatized that the African fellow is black even in the mind. In fact, ethnophilosophers ameliorated the African predicament caused by Europeans.

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