

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF INCULTURATION: AN AFROMODAL CONTEXTUAL TURN

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ABSTRACT

African philosophy as a disciplinary movement (Onebunne, 2024) is love of African wisdom, (Iroegbu, 1994). It is a critical reflection on African lived experiences. More so, inculturation is all about integration of faith and culture. It has to do with bringing ones culture into ones faith. It is a contextual embodiment of belief in one's way of life. In sum, African philosophy of inculturation is a critical integration of faith within African lived experience. However, in this paper, African philosophy of inculturation as African philosophy of indigenous engagement or African philosophy of contextual meaning critically articulates a reflective and symbiotic union between African traditional worldviews and the critical task of interpreting faith, knowledge and social life within concrete cultural contexts. Rooted in African tradition and culture, inculturation affirms the African Weltanschauung. The researcher, nevertheless, finds that African philosophy of inculturation is a holistic vision of reality characterized by a contextual turn in afromodality¹ as versed in

¹ Jude I. Onebunne's afromodalism is a neologism used in describing the African communal and metaphysical modality of *to be*; that is, the existential modalities of being within the boundaries of African orientation. Afromodal is an African concept that encapsulates all the conceptual framework upholding the genesis of the core of African communal philosophies and critical modalities such *igwebuike*, *ubuntu*, *egbeberegobere*, *onyeaghananwanneya*, *birikambiri*, *kwetuism*, *njikoka*, *consciencism*, *ibuanyidanda* and several others which share common philosophical threads and dealings within the African roots. Continuing Onebunne (2025) insists that Afromodals reflect the African sense of having shared walks, solidarity, cooperation, interdependence and mutual responsibility. These ideas describe subtly distinct facets of a shared conviction that human life is fundamentally relational, not individual. Afromodal, while not yet firmly established in scholarly literature, is a conceptual position or philosophical modality developed from African worldviews and epistemologies. It captures the interplay of

communality, relational ontology, sacred inter-relatedness of life, connectedness of realities as one and continuity between the visible and invisible worlds. African philosophy of inculturation also responds to the historical marginalization of African religion and culture under colonial and Eurocentric dominance. As a hermeneutical framework, African philosophy of inculturation enables the contextual reinterpretation of faith and appreciation of foreign religion in ways that resonate with African tradocultural values and existential concerns with transformative insights grounded in African experience, oriented towards the communal well-being and human flourishing.

Key Terms: *African Philosophy; Inculturation; Afromodalism*

INTRODUCTION

The question of how African thought can authentically express itself within global philosophical and theological discourses has become an old issue in philosophical colloquium and never a central concern in modern African scholarship and authorship. Echoing *correctively* the stand of some scholars and emerging from the historical experience of colonialism, cultural displacement and colonality, African philosophy has persistently sought to and continued to reclaim indigenous categories of meaning, rationality and value against the dominance of Western conceptual frameworks (cf. Hountondji, 1997). Within this intellectual struggle and disposition, inculturation arose as a critical project aimed at deepening faith (into the peoples' way of life as culture and at time as something handed down for the people as tradition) in rooting reflection, especially theological, ethical and social reflection, within African cultural and existential realities rather than treating them as peripheral or inferior adaptations.

African cultural principles, especially those that emphasize community, shared humanity and moral responsibility. Afromodal was first published: Onebunne, J. I. (2025). "An Exposition of the Afromodal: Exploring a New framework of Connectedness". In *Nnadiebube Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 8, NO.3, 2025. <https://www.acjoi.org/index.php/NJP/article/view/6818/6605>

Inculturation presupposes that culture is not a neutral vessel but a living matrix of meaning through which reality is perceived, interpreted and valued. African cultures, shaped by a distinctive *Weltanschauung*, understand reality as holistic, relational and life-centered, emphasizing community, continuity between the living and the ancestors, and the sacredness of life itself (Bujo, 2001). Consequently, any authentic inculturation must engage people's culture and tradition, in our context, African tradition, not merely at the level of external symbolism or ritualism but at the deeper philosophical level as it borders on ontology, epistemology and ethics. This is precisely where African philosophy becomes indispensable as the critical discipline that interrogates, systematizes and rearticulates indigenous worldviews.

Within this discourse, Afromodalism offers a complementary and unifying framework. Afromodality emphasizes the plurality of African modes of knowing as it borders on mythic, symbolic, communal, spiritual, moral and rational, while it insists that African meaning-making cannot be reduced to a single epistemic method modeled after Western models of rationalism. Instead, Afromodalism gives room for Afrocentricism with regard to truth, value and knowledge that are accessed through an integrated life-world logic in which experience, community, history, and transcendence mutually inform one another (Ukpong, 1995). When applied to inculturation, Afromodalism ensures that African categories function not as cosmetic trado-cultural elements but as prescriptive modalities shaping understanding and practical appreciation of realities as such. African philosophy of inculturation is all about authentic adaptation of the faith or religion in peoples way of life. It is a critical opportunity for faith-culture dialogue. Therefore, a genuine inculturation project is best understood as a conceptual *marriage* between African philosophy and Afromodalism, grounded in African tradition, culture and *Weltanschauung*. By intersecting inculturation within Afromodal philosophical frameworks, the paper demonstrates how African

thoughtful realities can remain faithful to its indigenous roots while engaging critically and creatively with universal theological and religious dispensations. This applied approach, therefore, reaffirms Africa as a legitimate *locus* for faith, religious and cultural dialogue. This conceptual idea makes African philosophy an indispensable and significant partner in the ongoing task of contextualization and dialogical reflection initiated by inculturation. The paper will border much on tradition and culture as well as African philosophy of inculturation with man as locus of operational references.

MAN: A TRADOCULTURAL ENTITY

Man, a human being, a *cultural being* as well as a *traditional being*, is a being in and of relation, hence, a relational being. Man simply relates to every reality that seems to confront him. Relationship most often defines him as such. In the famous quote: *no man is an island*, of John Donne's *Meditation XVII* (1624) noted that every man is *a piece of the continent*. This is the classical foundation in the appreciation of man as *homo est animal sociale* (Aristotle & Aquinas). There is this emphasis on man's orientation not just to individuals but to structured communal life. Man, therefore, becomes a being oriented towards the society, that is *homo est ens socialis* as well as *homo est ens ad relationem*. The society, of course, deeply entrenched in traditionalism or perennialism, is defined by the shared life of the people as shown most often in their way of life (culture) or borrowed experiences (tradition). Traditionalism, therefore, explores humanity's ways of life whether learnt, borrowed or transferred. There is this intricate connection between human beings, traditionalism, culture and tradition.

Traditionalism

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.) defines traditionalism as an "adherence to the doctrines or practices of a tradition" as well as "the beliefs of those opposed to modernism, liberalism, progressivism, or

radicalism". Wikipedia (n.d.) explains that traditionalism or perennialism, also known as the *traditionalist school*, is a school of thought within perennial philosophy. Originating in the thought of Rene Guenon in the 20th century, it proposes that a single primordial, metaphysical truth forms the source for, and is shared by all the major world religions. Unlike universalist forms of perennialism based on commonalities in religious experiences across cultures, traditionalism posits a metaphysical unitary source known as tradition which forms the basis for the major religions in their *orthodox* forms. Tradition has exoteric and esoteric dimensions. The exoteric aspects of a tradition are primarily represented by its ceremonies, rituals and rules, whereas the esoteric aspects are concerned with its spiritual and intellectual qualities. Traditionalists often confront "tradition" to modernity. While "tradition" has a transcendent origin, "modernity" takes little or no account of this dimension, (Wikipedia, n.d.).

The theory of traditionalism² is an ideological worldview which is chiefly concerned with values of life that shape humanity's influencing interaction with other environmental realities as well as other sociopolitical *cum* economic institutions. In the religious circle, traditionalism refers to adherence to long-established interpretations and practices. As a critical theory, traditionalism reverentially and preferentially privileges the past over the present and the future. Some scholars sees it as a reaction against all forms of modernism and contemporaneity. Often, traditionalism stages a resistance to any social change. Traditionalism, therefore, is a stand against enlightenment rationalism. Hence, there is often need and move for a revival through a synthesis of cultural heritage. In line

² The perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*), also referred to as perennialism and perennial wisdom, is a school of thought in philosophy and spirituality that posits that the recurrence of common themes across world religions illuminates universal truths about the nature of reality, humanity, ethics, and consciousness.

with this form of thought for a revival or renewal, traditionalism simply shares overlapping domains with the *perennial philosophy*. In sum, traditionalism is a multifaceted ideology rooted in the reverence for inherited wisdom and the perceived stability of the past. While it can foster cultural continuity, identity and spiritual depth, it also demands critical evaluation to avoid becoming a barrier to progress, inclusivity and justice in a pluralistic world, (Wikipedia). However, proper appreciation of traditionalism is done through functional appreciation of culture and tradition.

Tradition

The Latin word *traditio*, etymologically is rooted in *trādere* (*trans*: across) and (*dare*: to give) meaning “to hand over, deliver, transmit, surrender.” So, *trādere* literally means “to give across” or “to hand over.” From this comes *trāditiō*, meaning “a handing down” or “delivery.” Classical Latin definition has it thus: *Traditio est actus tradendi, per quem aliquid de manu in manum datur*, (Tradition is the act of handing over, by which something is given from one hand to another). Originally, this definition often has legal implications but later its meaning extended to intellectual, moral and cultural transmission (of ideas, customs, religion and or faith). Tradition, therefore, is the bridge between the past and the present and often it extends to the future with identity preservation and meaningful extensions.

Tradition refers to the transmission of customs, beliefs, practices and cultural knowledge from one generation to another. It encompasses the inherited patterns of thought and behavior that define a group’s identity and guide its social norms. According to Edward Shils (1981), tradition is "a belief or practice transmitted from one generation to another and accepted as authoritative, often, without questioning". This imported transmission as tradition differs from culture. Culture is the totality of the way of the life of a people while tradition is the specific customary practices handed

down which. However, it becomes the people's culture. In this understanding, tradition as a cultural phenomenon shape and stabilizes societal existence. Conventional resilience and profound significance give special character to tradition. Tradition has a lot of nuances of meaning within the bounds of something borrowed that needs human interpretation by the borrowers and or custodians. As a consequence, tradition intersects with the general outlays of human existence. In sum, Scholars try to explain that tradition is both a link to the past and a tool for the present identity. While it provides continuity and a sense of belongingness, it also invites critical engagement to ensure its relevance in a changing world.

Man as *Homo Traditionis*

As a being in relation with the realities in his environment, of which one of them is tradition, man is identified as a traditional being: *homo traditus*, which literally mean, *man handed down*, signifying the one who receives the tradition. Some scholars in line with this traditional dependent relationship with tradition and man is referred to as *homo traditionis*, that is, *man of tradition*. This idea highlights man's identity as bound to tradition. Equally, there is this appreciation of man as *homo tradens et traditus*, that is *man who hands down and is handed down*, capturing the dual role of man as both recipient or inheritor and communicator or transmitter of tradition. In all these appreciative understandings, man as *homo tradens et traditus* is considerably the most accurate referential appreciation of man since it emphasizes that man is not only shaped by tradition but also, he shapes it and actively passes it on. Hence, to define man in relation to tradition is to understand the human person as an individual being as well as a cultural and social entity who is shaped by culture and tradition typified in inherited customs, beliefs and practices. Tradition often expressed in culture provides the framework through which man interprets his personal identity, communal values and purpose in life. As a relational, being expressed in different appreciations of cultural tradition, man as *homo tradition* is identified in few forms thus:

- *Man as Custodian of Tradition:* Man is a dynamic bearer and carrier of tradition and its imprint. This idea simply defines him as the agent of traditional transformation. He is the bearer of cultural heritage. While he helps in preserving it, he transmits the customs, moral codes and knowledge of the past generations to the next generation. Without the human carriers participating, the tradition will not survive into the next generation.
- *Man as Modeled by Tradition:* Man is by this understanding is conditioned by traditional continuity as he is a reflection of tradition. Tradition shapes man. Hence, man is merely shaped and reshaped by tradition. Traditional influence on man's personality and worldview is so enormous that it shows more in his social relations, religious practices and moral choices. Tradition simply defines and reshapes his unique understanding and appreciation of relational ideas of family, community, authority and spirituality. Man, as a being is highly constituted through tradition.
- *Man as a Reformer of Tradition:* Tradition transforms and reforms man. Man, as a transformer of tradition is a renovator of inherited values. While man inherits tradition, he remains the evolving force within tradition with which he also critically evaluates and adapts it to new realities. This makes tradition dynamic rather than static and man invariably remains the creative agent.
- *Man as Product of Tradition:* It is in the community that man relates and in turn becomes the product of tradition. Since tradition is a collective inheritance, man is defined within the communal context and nevertheless, he becomes the construct of traditional consciousness and as well, is fashioned by such collective memory through continuity of tradition. By the fact that man is a being constituted by tradition, his identity and role are meaningful when placed within the network of communal traditions, rather than in isolation.

Appreciation of Culturalism

According to Merriam-Webster. (n.d.), culturalism is defined as an “adherence to the doctrines or practices of culture”. Culturalism, therefore, is a philosophical and methodological orientation that emphasizes the centrality of culture in shaping human identity, knowledge systems, values and social practices. It holds that human thought and behavior cannot be adequately understood outside the cultural contexts that produce and sustain them. In this sense, culturalism resists abstract universalism by insisting that meaning, rationality, and truth are always mediated through historically situated cultural structures (Wiredu, 1996). At the core of culturalism, culture is affirmed not merely as an external addition to human life but a constitutive element of it. It encompasses language, symbols, norms, beliefs and practices that inform how individuals and communities interpret and live out reality. As such, knowledge is seen as culturally embedded rather than culturally neutral. This perspective challenges the dominance of Western epistemological models that often present themselves as universal while marginalizing other ways of knowing (Gyekye, 1995). In African philosophy, culturalism plays a significant role in reclaiming indigenous thought systems and resisting epistemic domination. It supports the view that African philosophical reflection must arise from African cultural resources, including proverbs, oral traditions, myths and communal practices. Scholars like Kwame Gyekye emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage in shaping moral and philosophical reasoning while allowing room for critical evaluation (Gyekye, 1997). Similarly, Kwasi Wiredu argues for conceptual decolonization, which involves rethinking philosophical categories through African languages and cultural contexts (Wiredu, 1996). In sum, culturalism underscores the indispensability of culture in philosophical inquiry and human understanding, particularly in contexts seeking to affirm marginalized epistemologies and promote intellectual self-determination. However, there is a relationship between culturalism and culturality. Culturality simply refers to the

dynamic, lived expressions of culture in human life. It is the ways of beliefs, values, symbols, practices and meanings that are embodied, negotiated and transmitted within a community. It highlights the fluidity of culture in its relationality and evolutionary nature. Culturality expresses the lived and evolving reality of culture in everyday human experience, while culturalism provides the theoretical framework that interprets and emphasizes the central role of culture in shaping that experience.

Culture

Culture refers to a known pattern of life as expressed in behaviour, beliefs, values, customs, language, arts and social norms that define and characterize a people, as it is essential for their identity, integral development. Scholars explain that the tapestry of culture is seen as a whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society. Culture, therefore, is product of societal action shaped by human realities and environmental interaction. The tapestry of culture is seen in the network of activities cobwebbed in the decisive daily living and meaningful human life. This is why Clifford Geertz (1973) maintains that “culture is a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by which people communicate and develop knowledge about life”. The dynamism in culture is very clear as it relatively preserves tradition. Generally, culture is deeply rooted and communally expressed in language, rituals oral literature and music. Mbiti (1969), however, in relation to culture, emphasizes that communalism, respect for elders and spiritual interconnectedness.

Man in Relation with Culture

Culture is fundamentally humanity's way of life that differentiates him from animality and all forms of plantness. This way of life is described as a relationship. However, man as *animal culturalis* can only relate to culture as a product of culture and producer of culture

as well as a transmitter of culture or custodian of culture. Human being, therefore, lives within culture as way of his life and in turn is shaped by it. By and large, he is transformed by it. Man is a transformer of culture. Beyond producing, creating and transmitting the nature of culture, man transforms and reforms by it in some ways thus:

- *Man as a Product of Culture:* Culture as transformer influences man's way of thinking, behavior and worldview. Human being is simply shaped by the culture into which he is born. However, he socializes through culture as a framework, mastering the norms, values, beliefs and language of his environment. In this context, culture becomes the lens through which sees realities, interprets and appreciates them.
- *Man as a Creator of Culture:* Man, knowingly or unknowingly creates culture, shapes and is shaped by culture. As a rational animal, giving meaning to symbolic realities around him, man shows up in many creative outputs as we see today in new ideas, technologies, arts and institutions.
- *Man as a Transmitter of Culture:* Culture as a way of life is simply passed on. Hence, culture outlives the creator and practitioners, ensuring proper identity and continuity, thriving from one generation to the next by way of education, storytelling, rituals and imitation.

MAN: A TRADO-CULTURAL ENTITY

Man associates with his environment as a rational interactive being with bumps of sociability, relationality, functionality, *et cetera*. The proper definition of man in relation to tradition and culture is all about understanding the human person from the perspective of a social, historical and meaning-making being whose identicalness and way of life are molded and shaped by inherited customs, beliefs and practices. However, tradition and culture form the basic structural framework through which man understands and appreciates realities. The relationship between tradition and culture in human environment help in value orientation and communal

placement. Hence, while tradition in spelling-out the meaningful cultural innuendoes of a people, culture simply shows such a people's way of living. Man, therefore, is a product and producer of tradition and culture. This dual nature of man makes him unique and very active in this relationship of interaction and dialogue. In sum, man is both the bearer and creator of culture, which represents the total way of life of a people. Within culture, tradition serves as the inherited body of beliefs, customs and practices transmitted from one generation unto the next. Moreover, traditionalism arises when the man as a rational animal consciously seeks to preserve and uphold these cultural traditions as vital expressions of identity and continuity. Together, they form a continuum where man is both the product and guardian of inherited values (Mbiti, 1969). Summarily, the human being lives through culture, sustains it through tradition and defends it through traditionalism. Furthermore, man's relationship with tradition and culture has chanced all forms of traditional religions and practice of acculturation as well as enculturation. Consequently, traditionalism involving culture and tradition intersects in connectedness with the concepts of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and inculturation.

Appreciation of Religion

Man's desirous interaction with the Divine is expressed in ritual or religious act. Thus, religion is humans' reverent relationship with the Divine. It is a responsible expressive relationship with the non-human. It is humanity's response-able approach to the Divinity. In these appreciable understanding, therefore, religion is man's disposition and mental devotion as well as spiritual allegiance and psychical disposition towards a being who is looked unto as greater with a candid aura. Merriam-webster (n.d.), noted etymologically that religion is from the Middle English *religioun*; from Anglo-French *religium*; Latin religion-, *religio* supernatural constraint, sanction, religious practice, perhaps from *religare* to restrain tie back. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia (2023) maintain that

religion, is “human beings’ relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine or worthy of special reverence. It is also commonly regarded as consisting of the way people deal with ultimate concerns about their lives and their fate after death”. Religion, of course, is a personal set of attitudes, beliefs and practices. Continuing, religion is at the service and worship of God or the supernatural as well as the committal devotion to religious faith or observance, (Merriam-webster, n.d.). In this sensible understanding, religion, a way of life that is Divine-bound, is properly appreciated and ought to be established on a sound theology. As a way of life, religion is a humanity’s relationship with divinity established in codes as doctrines or theology. Theology informs religion properly. In this strict sense, religion is at the operational and practical function of theology. Theology, therefore, is at the service of religion as *ancilla religio*.

African Traditional Religion (ATR)

Having prefixed African Tradition on Religion one may be, beyond temptation, decides to define ATR as the religion of traditional Africans. That is, religion borne out of African traditions and cultures. It’s a particularized religion within African cultural innuendoes expressing their ways of life, whether borrowed or natural. In this sense, ATR is the people’s religion that grew from their experiential realities. Their theology will be within their experiences in the worship or reverence of their God. African theology is Africans understanding of God. It is the science of God within the boundaries of African realities. Such encounter is always within a definitive experience that leads to worship. Before the exploration and exploitation through colonialism, Africans have had unique experiences of the Divine with many forms of worship rooted in their exalted beliefs and belief systems. Such has been their theology, an African theology of the object and subject of their worship. African theology, therefore, is an ongoing experience and sustained encounter with African God as their Creator and all-in-all. African theology sustains the African knowledge of God and

ATR. Hence, African theology presupposes African theism. However, Ikenga-Metuh (1999) in line with this thought opined that “most African societies recognize fundamentally two different types of divinities: the Supreme Being and the subordinate deities”, (p.94). African traditional theology is a consequential result of African Traditional Religion (African Religion) as the religion of the people anchored deeply on inculturation and the *anonymous form of Christianity*. Nevertheless, in ATR, the human being (*homo religiosus*), culture, tradition, and traditionalism are inseparable. The Africans live their spirituality through culture, sustains it through inherited rituals and customs (tradition), and defends it through loyalty to ancestral beliefs (traditionalism). Thus, ATR exemplifies the statement as a lived system where religion, culture and human identity form one continuous reality.

Within ATR, there is this unbreakable bond of unity between the human beings, culture and tradition. This is why John Mbiti (1969) succinctly observes that, “Africans are notoriously religious; religion permeates all aspects of life”. The implication of this statement is impulsive. African man is religious in nature. African person, living religiously through culture is culture-bound. Of course, it remains an embodiment of the sacred values, rituals, and symbols of the community. The connection of tradition with ATR is seen when ATR serves as the sole vehicle through which religious truths and moral codes are inherited and transmitted across generations through different means of communal interactions. Traditionalism as a critical theory defends these inherited systems. Kanu (2010) noted in this regard that ATR represents “the totality of life and existence, the integration of the sacred and the secular,” where tradition becomes the medium for human participation in the divine order. In the appreciation of the connection between tradition, culture and traditionalism, the human person, therefore, lives his faith and meaningful life through culture, preserves them through tradition and protects them through

traditionalism. Human person is both the medium and the guardian of divine and cultural continuity.

Inculturation

ATR remains the religion of the native or primitive people within their experiential realities, hence, it has no defined dating nor well articulated doctrines that are uniformly realistic. Ikenga-Metuh (1999) explains further that “animism, totemism, fetishism, polytheism or primitive monotheism has often been used to designate African Religion...with other descriptive terms as Tribal Religion, Ethnic Religion, Preliterate Religion”, (p. 3). However, Ikenga-Metuh (1999) complemented this view when he maintains that “the study of African Traditional Religion is plagued by number of problems some of which are inherent to the nature of African Traditional Religion itself, while others derive from the historical development of its study”, (p.xv). However, ATR, is very specific with regard to many differential nuances when compared with other religions thus: ATR is not a religion of the book. It is a people-oriented religion. It is peoples’ religion. Hence, ATR as an ethno-religion that has many historical currents of interference and sweeping encounter, (Ikenga-Metuh, 1999). Colonialism and Christianization of Africa alongside contemporary developmentalism in Africa, all had their turns in subduing and reshaping ATR to Western imperialism and Christian-Europe subjugation. Most humiliating were the acts of stolen legacies where most of the African idols and artefacts in ATR were taken to museums in many European countries. Unfortunately, these were things they condemned as paganism and forms of black magic yet they adorn their museums with them. Ikenga-Metuh (1999) summarily captioned the interference of the West on ATR as recorded by the European explorers and Missionaries thus “many of the authors of the observers did not stay long enough in Africa to get acquainted with the people’s beliefs and practices, nor in fact did they attempt a systematic study of African Religion. However, these observations are significant in that they reveal the prejudices

and biases of the people who wrote them and that of the European public”. A little patience with our forefathers would have revealed to the White-men (the missionaries and colonial masters) the religious and spirituality of the Africans who were actually *anonymous Christians* in all ramifications. In inculturation, the Gospel of Jesus Christ’s message is expressed within the structure of people’s cultures, permitting faith to become truly incarnate in the life of a people. John Paul II (1982), however, maintains that inculturation is “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.” Inculturation simply reflects how human beings, as trado-cultural agents as well as products and producers of culture and tradition, live in and through culture and tradition, in the rhythms of daily life.

Appreciation of African Philosophy

Philosophy as part of world philosophical heritage has been a product of many philosophical traditions: Western Philosophical Tradition (WPT), Eastern/Oriental Philosophical Tradition (EOPT), Abrahamic (Judeo-Islamic) Philosophical Tradition (AbPT) and African Philosophical Tradition (APT), (Onebunne, 2024). The African Philosophical Tradition has given rise to African philosophical enterprises. African Philosophy, through many debates, after barrages of doubts of its possibility, has shared in the world philosophical heritage finally as a subject area of its own. African Philosophy, therefore, is one of the liveliest and quickest growing areas of African inquiries. A functional African philosophy is appreciatively defined as a *discipline* and a *movement*. At best, it is a *disciplinary movement*. African philosophy has come to stay. The questions of doubt and uncertainty as regards African philosophy have been overtaken over the years with many protruding scholarships and striking authorships. However, African philosophers, in their authorship and scholarships, have responded positively to such dubiety. To

question the existence of African philosophy now or doubt its scholarly influences is a show of culpable ignorance and sheer lack of scholarly investigative nerve.

Onebunne (2023) scholarly defines African philosophy as a discipline that is traditionally based on the knowledge of African realities and African realisms in their englobing universal principles. Pantaleon Iroegbu was among the very first to give a concise definition. In his definition, one can read a kind of defence as regards African philosophy. For Iroegbu (1994), African philosophy is a *philo-sophia*, a quest for African Wisdom. More so, as a discipline, African philosophy is the love of African Wisdom, that is, *philosophia Africana*. Echoing W. Anton Amo, it is the *habit of the intellect and the will*. That is, it is the *habit* of every wise-man and the *will* of every reasonable African man. As a movement, African philosophy connotes a kind of reaction and denotes a strong activity towards. Consequently, African philosophy as a movement is a clarion invitation by Bob Marley's redemptive insinuation to "emancipate yourselves from mental slavery". Continued as a movement, African Philosophy searches for the authentic knowledge that is philosophical and African within and or outside the African cultural world-view. Therefore, it is a definitive, thoughtful interpretation and critical analysis of the symbols of African cultures would-be African philosophy *qua tale*. This is Okere's *philosophemes* (Okere, 1983) and Iroegbu's *philosophemena* (Iroegbu, 1995) as well as Okere's appreciation of philosophy in general as *hermeneutics of culture* (Okere, 1983). Consequently, African philosophy as a movement is a reflection with profound application of criticality, analyticity and originality on African thoughts and cultures, which gives credence to philosophy and, rightly put, African philosophy. African philosophy is, therefore, a disciplinary movement (Onebunne, 2024) that started as a reaction to the years of hidden facts about the existence of African philosophy as such. This reaction simply became a movement in reclaiming what was actually taken away

from us in a way of intellectual dishonesty of the African exploiters and explorers.

Afromodality as African Philosophical Foundation of Inculturation

At the critical level, inculturation rests on the African worldview that sees reality as Afromodalistic, that is, relational, communal and holistic. Unlike Western metaphysics that often prioritizes the individual, African ontology situates being within community and participation (Onebunne, 2025; Mbiti, 1969). The African afromodalistic maxims capture the needed metaphysical and ethical outlook. Through inculturation, African thinkers reinterpret external ideas, such as Christian theology or Greek philosophy, through this Afromodal lens. Philosophers today argue that African philosophy emerges from the hermeneutics of indigenous thought systems, moral traditions and proverbs, which embody rationality and metaphysical reflection, (Okere, 1983; Gyekye, 1997 and Oruka, 1990). Thus, African philosophy of inculturation values indigenous wisdom (sagacity), pieced from people's culture (philosophemes) as a valid and fertile ground for critical operational innuendoes. African philosophy provides the conceptual and hermeneutical tools for critically retrieving indigenous categories, while Afromodality offers the integrative lens that harmonizes multiple African modalities into a coherent framework. Inculturation, informed by Afromodalism, thus transcends superficial cultural adaptation to become a dialogical and transformative process, a form of comprehensive appreciation of the tapestry of African symbols, proverbs, rituals, moral intuitions and communal practices. The critical union between African philosophy, inculturation and Afromodality is, therefore, intrinsically deep and mutually rewarding. African philosophy leverages on the worldview and critical rationality; Afromodalism provides the modal coherence and ethical compass; inculturation operationalizes these resources in concrete expressions of faith,

ethics, religion and social praxis. Together, they affirm Africa as a valid *locus* of integration for authentic African articulation of thought that is faithful to tradition, grounded in culture and open to universal faith dialogue.

African Philosophy of Inculturation

The concept of inculturation entails a philosophical complexity and theological innuendoes. The African philosophy of inculturation, therefore, is a critical appreciation of inculturation that seeks understanding in the practise of culture and faith. It is all about faith-culture dialogue. The dynamics of African philosophy of inculturation links culture and theology with proper hermeneutics of literary appreciation which runs through realities surrounding the people's way of life and their expression of faith in the divine. In this line of thought then, African philosophy of Inculturation is the matrix of rational and religious procedures through which African worldviews as expressed in their systems of thought, cultural symbols, and traditional representations are incorporated into philosophical expressions and unified in theological reflection without losing their contextual and indigenous authenticity. African philosophy in this approach becomes an interpretative appreciation of inculturation as one of the existential realities that confronts man as a religious being. As an instrument of profound explanation of African cultural patterns unto universal truths, African philosophy of inculturation asserts and enlightens people's lived experiences and tunes their critical experience of the divine within their existential boundaries. At the root of this critical excursus, African traditional culture is very receptive and adaptive of a religious faith that seems foreign to Africa but not actually foreign to her. A good comprehensible approach to religion explains this misinformation.

Religion is humanity's responsible and response-able relationship with divinity. Onebunne & Osigwe (2024) opines that "religion, therefore, is man's disposition and mental devotion towards a being who is looked unto as greater with a candid aura". Continuing, they

assert that religion is at the service and worship of God. This worship of God as religion is properly appreciated and established on a sound theology. Theology informs religion properly. In this strict sense, religion is at the operational function of theology. Theology, as narrative of God's encounter with humanity and humanity's responses, therefore, is at the service of religion as *ancilla religio* (Onebunne & Osigwe, 2024). However, religion, as the highest human discipline, is a human project on the divine, (Maritain, 2005). In this theological project, humanity seeks an understanding of divinity through his ways of life and tradition as something borrowed. Here lies the foundation of inculturation. African philosophy of inculturation, notwithstanding, remains a basic yardstick in the critical and comprehensive understanding and acceptance of religion within a people's *Weltanschauung*. African philosophy of inculturation in this basic appreciation ranks with African theology as African science of God. One tends to question how has African theology made Christ present to the African people as critical foundation properly established on African view and understanding. It is crystal clear that the historical genealogy of Jesus Christ is more religious than a political messiah (Onebunne, 2019c) which started with Israel's coming to dwell in Egypt on the invitation of Pharaoh Joseph *via* his pathetic slavery narrative (Gen. 37:25-27) as a family that later went back as a nation. Those moments of sojourn chanced a possibility for an intermarriage between Israelites and Egyptians. This marriage nevertheless chanced a mixture of an African blood in the forefathers of and in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. This was clearly played out in the Holy Family's (of Joseph, Mary and Jesus) flight into Egypt trying to escape the blood-splitting terror of King Herod's anger for a new King (cf. Mtt. 2:7ff) that was unleashed on all the age-grades of Christ known and referred today as massacre of the Innocents (cf. Mtt. 2:13ff). That flight was couched in one of the Igbo's age long maxim and adage that *oso chua nwata be nnaya ogbanaa ikwunneya*. To this extent one can assert that African

theology is deeply rooted in Jesus Christ and ought to be appreciated to have given opportunity to African Traditional Religion with proper African philosophy especially that of inculturation.

African culture, rooted in Afrocentricity, therefore, remains the *locus operandi* for every faith and culture dialogue. African philosophy of inculturation in this understanding remains a rational reflection that challenges every Eurocentric assumption that knowledge of God and practice of religion and other religious practices must be Western bound. The African philosophers of inculturation, therefore, create a dynamic opportunity for tradocultural and faith dialogue as displayed in their daily and existential encounters. Moreover, inculturation is not a mere adaptation of foreign religious faith and ideas as well as Christianity into African culture. It is a form of Africanization of Christian culture or Christinization of African cultures. African philosophy of inculturation in this way remains a critical enterprise that rethinks existential questions of realities in the light of African ontology in its relational and communal nature expressed in idiomatical and ritualistic paradigms. The philosophy of inculturation simply allows African scholars to articulate universal truth without prejudice to other cross-cultural enrichment from within African categories through many forms of decoloniality and postcoloniality. African philosophy of inculturation is a mutually transformative equipoise between people's way of life and belief system. In sum, African philosophy of Inculturation is critical integration of African beliefs within the bounds of African worldview. It is all about contextualizing African belief systems in African realities. African Philosophy of Inculturation is the critical and reflective integration of faith into African lived experience, worldviews, symbols, values and communal practices, such that faith is authentically expressed, interpreted and lived within African cultural realities while remaining open to dialogue,

purification, transformation, and universality (Mbiti, 1969; Bujo, 2001).

An Afromodal Contextual Turn for African Philosophy of Inculturation

African philosophy of inculturation, understood through an Afromodal contextual turn, represents a radical reorientation of philosophical reflection toward African modes of being, knowing and meaning-making. This approach insists that philosophy in Africa must not merely adapt external categories but must emerge from the internal dynamism of African cultural lifeworlds. Inculturation, therefore, is not a secondary exercise of translation or accommodation; it is a primary epistemic act that re-centers African experience as the *locus* of philosophical legitimacy (Oguejiofor, 2001). The notion of the Afromodal introduces a critical expansion to the discourse of inculturation. It refers to the distinctive modalities: ontological, epistemological, ethical and symbolic, through which African societies interpret reality. These modalities are embedded in language, proverbs, rituals, myths, and communal practices that shape both consciousness and rationality. Unlike Western philosophical traditions that often privilege abstract universalism, the Afromodal perspective emphasizes contextual rationality, relational ontology and the inseparability of the material and spiritual dimensions of existence (Mbiti, 1969). Thus, the contextual turn is not merely methodological but ontological, affirming that reality itself is apprehended through culturally situated modes.

Central to this framework is the concept of relational personhood, where the individual is constituted through community and moral participation. This stands in contrast to the Cartesian emphasis on isolated subjectivity. The Afromodal contextual turn in its Afrocentricity, reclaims this communal ontology as a legitimate ground for philosophical reflection, thereby challenging the

hegemony of Eurocentric epistemologies that historically marginalized African thought systems (Menkiti, 1984; Ramose, 2002). In doing so, it contributes to what has been described as epistemic decolonization, the dismantling of imposed intellectual hierarchies and the restoration of African agency in knowledge production (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Moreover, the Afromodal contextual turn is inherently critical. It does not romanticize African traditions but subjects them to rigorous ethical scrutiny. Harmful practices or beliefs are interrogated in light of broader human values such as dignity, justice and communal well-being. This critical dimension ensures that inculturation remains a dynamic and transformative process rather than a static preservation of culture. It aligns with the view that African philosophy must balance fidelity to tradition with openness to change and global dialogue (Gyekye, 1997).

In theological parlance and educational contexts, this structure offers a powerful hermeneutic for reinterpreting inherited systems of thought. In theology, it supports the expression of faith through African categories, symbols and narratives, making religious experience more meaningful and authentic to African communities (Shorter, 1988). In education, it advocates for curricula that reflect African realities, values and epistemologies, thereby fostering intellectual self-confidence and cultural relevance. The Afromodal approach thus bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, enabling a synthesis that is both rooted and progressive. Furthermore, the Afromodal contextual turn contributes to global philosophical discourse by offering alternative paradigms of thought. It challenges the universality claims of dominant traditions and proposes a pluralistic vision of philosophy where multiple epistemic centers coexist. This pluralism is not relativistic but dialogical, encouraging mutual enrichment among cultures while respecting their distinctiveness. In this sense, African philosophy of inculturation becomes both a local and global project, deeply grounded in African contexts yet open to intercultural engagement

within the global intercultural space. In sum, African philosophy of inculturation as an Afromodal contextual turn represents a profound shift in the orientation of philosophical inquiry. It reclaims African modes of thought as legitimate and foundational, critiques epistemic domination and promotes a contextual, relational and transformative vision of philosophy. By doing so, it not only revitalizes African intellectual traditions but also enriches the broader landscape of global philosophy, offering new pathways for understanding reality, knowledge, and human flourishing.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this research, one realizes that African philosophy is the critical reflection on African wisdom. It critically reflects African lived and shared experiences. More so, African philosophy is the critical love and reflective articulation of African wisdom as lived, shared and interrogated within African cultural and traditional worlds. Inculturation, however, deeply roots its meaningful operation in culture. African philosophy of inculturation unites both critical enterprise in culture and divine experience to affirm African worldview as a legitimate, life-centered source of knowledge. Tradition and culture, far from being static inheritances, emerge as living epistemic reservoirs through which the African *Weltanschauung* continues to interpret reality. In sum, African philosophy of inculturation is the critical reflection on African wisdom within its cultural and communal contexts. African philosophy of inculturation critically reflecting African wisdom in culture.

This paper, however, establishes African philosophy of inculturation as a core and foundational intellectual project rooted in African culture, tradition, worldview and faith as well as religious experience. It affirms culture as a dynamic source of meaning, not a mere background for interpretation. African philosophy supplies the critical tools for retrieving and refining

indigenous categories, ensuring that inculturation is both authentically African and philosophically rigorous. By mediating critically on culture and tradition, African philosophy safeguards inculturation from cultural idealism and traditional alienation. The intrinsic bond of union between African philosophy and inculturation affirms Africa as a valid locus of thought, thereby validly making African symbols, values and communal logics of the Afromodals as normative sources for belief, ethics and praxis. African Philosophy of inculturation thus emerges as dialogical process through which African identity and meaning are asserted with belief relevant experiences. African philosophy of inculturation coheres these diverse African modes of belief, spirituality and being into an integrated framework that safeguards inculturation from mere cultural and religious paradigms. This conceptual appreciation demonstrates that inculturation is most authentic when it proceeds from African realities employing African conceptual schemes for philosophical, theological and social reflection.

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