

**FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: HISTORY,  
TRENDS AND INFLUENCES**

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**Abstract**

In this paper, I engage in a critical discussion of Francophone African philosophy focusing on its history, the influences, and emerging trends. Beginning the historical account from the 1920s, I examine the colonial discourses on racialism, and the various reactions generated leading to the Négritude movement in Francophone African intellectual history. I explore the wider implications of the debate on Négritude as an integral component of ethnophilosophy in postcolonial Francophone African philosophy. Finally, I argue that in spite of the apparent linguistic divides/boundaries between Francophone African philosophy and the philosophical traditions in Anglophone and Lusophone Africa, there are robust interactions and critical exchanges of ideas converging and reconnecting with other philosophical orientations outside Africa.

**Keywords:** African Philosophy, Colonialism, Francophone, Anglophone, Lusophone, Négritude, Ethnophilosophy.

**Introduction**

Is it plausible, in the current globalizing context, to discuss how French-speaking philosophers have received English works and how English-speaking philosophers have received French ones in a bid to renew the dynamics of African philosophy? Could the interface between these philosophical traditions enhance philosophical practice in Africa and beyond? In this paper, I argue in the affirmative and show the evolution of the philosophical practices in Francophone professional circles. I focus on the main trends / schools of thought and the debates that have dominated the Francophone input in the domain of African philosophy. Though there is a corpus of Francophone literature in Anglophone philosophical circles, I argue that this literature is limited and under-explored.

Academic African philosophy emerged after colonialism as an aftermath of the identity crisis created by Eurocentric assertions, the dominance of colonial mentality, and the struggle towards modern states

in Africa. Eurocentric claims of Hegel, Rousseau, Kant, Hume and Lévy-Bruhl, an anthropologist, provided hierarchical placement of reason and rationalized universality and objectivity to the exclusion of Africa. Africa and other non-Western cultures or philosophies are constructed as the 'other'. However, the African reaction to these racialist tendencies gave Africans the urge of self-reflection and the imperative of decolonization. The works of French anthropologists like Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen and even the American anthropologist Melville Herskovits are instructive early responses to Eurocentrism. The most important counter reaction to European hegemony with particular relevance to African philosophy came from the Belgian Missionary, Placide Tempels (1906-1977). With his book *Bantoe-filosofie* (first published in 1945), Tempels and some other Francophone African followers including Alexis Kagame (1912-1981) from Rwanda, Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906-2001) from Senegal, Meinrad Hebga (1928-2008) from Cameroon, argued that Africans have a distinct identity and philosophy.

Attempts at systematizing the history of African philosophy in Francophone Africa could be traced from Senegalese physicist, historian and anthropologist Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986) who tried to defend the ancient Egyptian origin of African philosophy. Also worthy of note are the efforts made by Cameroonian philosophers Marcien Towa (1931-2014) (TOWA 1971a, 1979), Jean-Godefroy Bidima (1993,1998) and Hubert Mono Ndjana (2009, 2016), as well as Paulin Jidenu Hountondji (1983 [1976]) from Benin, Valentin Yves Mudimbe from the Democratic Republic of Congo (1988), and the Congolese Egyptologist and philosopher Theophile Obenga (1990).<sup>1</sup> Among these philosophers, only Masolo (1994) has both Francophone and Anglophone blend of both the phenomenological and analytic traditions in his historical narrative on African identity. The Nigerian philosopher, Abiola Irele (1936-2017), also discusses the contributions of Francophone African philosophers (IRELE 1996);<sup>2</sup> in another contribution, he throws more light on the main themes in French African thought which have inspired a current of philosophical activity in Africa with its own style of discourse. He highlights the dichotomy

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<sup>1</sup>In Anglophone African philosophical circles, we may cite the Kenyan philosophers Henry Odera Oruka (1944-1995) (ORUKA 1981, 1990, 1991) and Dismas Masolo (1994); I.M. Osuagwu (1999) and Kwasi Wiredu (2004); from Nigeria and Ghana, respectively.

<sup>2</sup>Abiola Irele (1996) discusses and throws more light on the contributions of Francophone African philosophers such as Marcien Towa, Cheikh Anta Diop, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Stanislaus Adotevi, Alexis Kagame, Pathé Diagne, Niamkey Koffi and Olabiyi Yai.

and the dominant influences on the formation of thoughts in the academic practice of philosophy in Africa between the Anglo-American analytical tradition in Anglophone Africa and the Continental tradition in Francophone Africa (IRELE 1998).

Belgian born Pierre-Philippe Fraiture (2015) asserts that there has been a prolific philosophical activity in Africa and shows how Francophone African philosophy has developed since the inter-war period, though it is underrepresented in the English-language corpus. In his edited journal special issue on “Francophone African Philosophy and the Aftermath of the Empire,” the various contributors follow the chronological anchorage of the evolution, recurring concerns, theoretical resonances and main exponents of Francophone African philosophy against the backdrop of decolonization and its aftermath (FRAITURE 2015). Moreover, the Nigerian philosopher, Sanya Osha (2017) has recently published an interesting contribution in which he critically examines the internal dynamics of African philosophy, especially between its Francophone and Anglophone contexts of evolution, with a focus on the main themes that influenced philosophers such as Wiredu, Oruka, Appiah, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Hountondji, and Mudimbe.

In contrast to these discussions on the history of Francophone African philosophy, I claim that this literature is limited and I provide reason for philosophers of each side of the linguistic divide to take seriously the philosophical traditions of both sides. A close reading of African philosophy in Anglophone philosophical circles reveals that the works of Francophone African philosophers that have been translated into English are used exhaustively by Anglophone African scholars unlike those that have not been translated into or published in English.<sup>3</sup> This is one major finding from my focus on the reception of French-speaking African philosophy by English speakers and vice versa. I also indicate how Francophone African philosophy has influenced Anglophone African philosophy and how in turn, Francophone African philosophy has been influenced by Anglophone philosophical tradition across Africa. I argue that there is a good reason for Francophone African philosophers to pursue much more vigorously an interlingual conversation with Anglophone and Lusophone philosophical articulations across colonial borders and with the philosophical traditions rooted in cultures outside Africa.

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<sup>3</sup> The most conspicuous names include Valentin Yves Mudimbe, Paulin Hountondji, Marcien Towa, Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga, Cheikh Anta Diop, Meinrad Hebga, Hubert Mono Ndjana, Soulemagne Bachir Digne, Frantz Fanon, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Theophile Obenga and Okolo Okonda.

In this paper, I articulate, first, my conception of ‘Francophone African philosophy’ and then provide an overview of the early approaches to it, identifying the main arguments of Tempels and his disciples. Second, I examine the main criticisms that have been levied against Tempels by professional philosophers such as Hountondji and Towa. Third, I identify the various themes that have preoccupied Francophone intellectuals from the 1980s till date. This permits me to prepare the groundwork for the second installment of the paper where I draw the conclusion that in spite of the distinctive use of the French language, the concerns of Francophone African philosophers have been interrelated with other thematic preoccupations of African philosophy in Anglophone and Lusophone Africa. Finally, I will infer that African philosophy is not only involved in a robust conversation with itself across colonial borders but also with the philosophical traditions rooted in cultures outside Africa.

### **On Francophone African Philosophy**

At present, one of the major attempts at systematizing contemporary (twenty-first century) academic or university-based philosophy in sub-Saharan Africa is by classifying it according to the major colonial language areas.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Francophone (and the same applies to

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<sup>4</sup> In an attempt to give a systematic overview of the history of philosophy in Africa, Anke Graness (2015) mentions three approaches namely; the Chronological overview (HALLEN 2009; MONO NDJANA 2009,2016 ; MAKUMBA 2011); the classification according to the major colonial language areas (IRELE & JEYIFO 2010); and Odera Oruka’s Six trends in contemporary African philosophy (ORUKA 1981, 1990, 1991). Chimakonam (2014; 2015, 9-34) has categorized African philosophy into the Pre-Systematic Era and the Systematic Era. This categorization also reflects the thinking of some Francophone African philosophers (DIOP 1954; TOWA 1971a; BIDIMA 1993, 1999; HOUNTONDJI 1983; MONO NDJANA 2009, 2016; MUDIMBE 1988; OBENGA 1990). According to Chimakonam (2014; 2015, 9-34), the Pre-Systematic Era refers to Africa’s philosophical culture, thoughts of the anonymous African thinkers and may include the Egyptian intellectual legacy, and the Systematic Era, where I limit myself in this paper, refers to the periods marking the return of Africa’s Western-tutored philosophers from the 1920’s to date. Following Chimakonam’s model (2015), I categorize systematic or literate Francophone African philosophy into three periods; the Early Period (1920s-1960s); the Middle Period (1960s-1980s) and the New Contemporary Era (1990s till date). This categorization does not imply that before the Early Period people in Africa did not philosophize—they did! There have been numerous anthologies, companions, and studies published to attest to the fact that before the Early Period there were serious philosophical activities in Africa. We may cite the cases of Ptah-hotep who lived c. 2400 BCE in ancient Egypt (see OBENGA 1990, 1992, 2004; HALLEN 2009); the ‘Early Church Fathers’ such as Origen (CE 185-253), Tertullian (c. CE 155-240), Aurelius- Saint Augustine (CE 354-430); Arnobius Afer of Sicca (died c.330) during the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian (284–

Anglophone or Lusophone, referring to those African countries that have had to, in some way, come to terms with European languages and cultures implied in that designation) African philosophy refers to the body of works produced by French-speaking philosophers in sub-Saharan Africa. The adjective 'African' means thought informed by the indigenous values characteristic among black people in the sub-Saharan region, which differ from, say, the Islamic religious way of life that is predominant above the Sahara desert. African philosophy is a discipline in its own right and it is conspicuously different from, say, Chinese, Islamic, Anglo-American, or Continental philosophy and so deserves a separate designation. However, when I designate a philosophy as 'Francophone', 'Anglophone', 'Lusophone', 'Islamic', 'sub-Saharan' or 'African', I am neither saying that some themes and approaches pertain exclusively to that specific linguistic or geographical domain in such a way that no one else holds them, nor that they are exhaustive of thinkers in a given linguistic or geographical domain, so that literally they all hold the same views. Instead I use these linguistic or geographical domains to first indicate that certain perspectives are salient in Francophone sub-Saharan African thought and practice in a way they have tended not to be elsewhere (METZ 2015), and second; this permits me to show the interface between these different but interrelated domains.

Osha (2006), opines that the birth of the mode of discourse known as African philosophy is quite an interesting one.<sup>5</sup> A version of this species of discourse has its origins in a mix of racism and a specific form of counter-discourse which Ghanaian philosopher Wiredu (1996) terms 'conceptual decolonization' and his fellow countryman, Anthony Kwame Appiah (1992) refers to as 'ideological decolonization'. Masolo depicts the debate on the history of African philosophy with two related happenings: the Western discourse on Africa and the African response

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305) (see MUDIMBE & NKASHAMA 1977); the Islamic thinkers- *falsafa* ( see DIAGNE 2004, 2008); the Ethiopian tradition of Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat (see SUMNER 1976) and the Germany-trained but Ghana-born Enlightenment philosopher Anton Wilhelm Amo (c. 1703-1758) (see HOUNTONDJI [1983] 1996; ABRAHAM 1996; WIREDU 2004). These examples cited above support the argument of a very prolific philosophical activity during the Early Period. Yet, much of their thoughts were not documented, and, as such, scholars cannot attest to their systematicity or sources. In other words, what this periodization shows is that African philosophy as a system first began in the late 1920s. For a more detailed analysis of the systematic study of academic African philosophy, see MUDIMBE 1988, MASOLO 1994, HALLEN 2009, CHIMAKONAM 2015, and MONO NDJANA 2009, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Sanya Osha 2006.

to this discourse (MASOLO 1994). For the discussions in this paper, I situate the origins of African philosophy within its encounter with post-Enlightenment modernity, slavery, apartheid, colonization, decolonization, and the post-colonial aftermath which often took the form of ‘neo-colony’ as described by the Cameroonian political scientist and historian, Achille Mbembe.<sup>6</sup> And, it is from this painful existential matrix, described as ‘frustration’ by the Nigerian philosopher Jonathan Chimakonam (2015), that one locates the birth of African philosophy in its modern and contemporary formation.

### Early Period: Return to the Source

Philosophical discourses in Francophone Africa during the Early Period could be situated on the one hand, within the French colonial context, associated with European ethnocentrism, ideological devaluation of the Africans and assimilation, and on the other, the African responses to these discourses. During the 1920s and 1930s, the expression ‘primitive philosophies’ was used in colonizing the African continent, its inhabitants, and its realities. Among the French-speaking African intelligentsia, intellectual discourses were aimed at retrieving and reconstructing African identity. Hegel, for example, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (HEGEL 1975, 190) argued that sub-Saharan Africans had no high cultures and had made no contributions to world history and civilization. Hegel’s racist assertions concerning the question of philosophy and culture in Africa could be summed up in seven theses: Africa is static; Africa is primitive; Africa is without history; Africa is profligate; Africa is savage; Africa has no proper philosophy; and Africa is a culturally homogenous continent.

The above assertions remain an example of European self-affirmation in opposition to other cultures and philosophies and ushered in a kind of elaborate rationalization of European ethnocentrism with claims to universality and objectivity. Ethnocentric tendency influenced major figures in Western philosophy such as Kant, Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau and an armchair anthropologist like Lucien Lévy- Bruhl.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Hegel’s radical polarization of Africa / Europe served as an inspiring philosophical base, which was exploited by the French Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, to belittle non-white races.<sup>8</sup> According to Lévy-Bruhl

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<sup>6</sup> Mbembe 2001.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Hegel’s racist and Eurocentric concept of philosophy, with particular reference to Africa, see for example, Masolo 1994 and Kimmerle 2014.

<sup>8</sup> For more on this radical polarization between the West and rest of humanity, see, for example, Arthur de Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1884), in which de Gobineau established a hierarchy of races, based on the supposed

(1910, 1922, 1927), Africa is the 'Dark Continent', with 'primitive' knowledge system, the 'savage or inferior mentality' or the 'other'.<sup>9</sup> He expressed racialism which emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the dominant expression of European expansion and transcontinental domination. Colonial rule after the Berlin Congress was saturated with racialism and it is this dominant discourse commonly thought by intellectuals around Europe and the USA that he tried to systematically express. For example, Lévy-Bruhl posits a radical difference between the West, characterized by a history of intellectual and spiritual reasoning, and 'primitives', whose life, *Weltanschauung* and thinking were viewed as having nothing in common with the West.<sup>10</sup>

These ethnocentric and racist stereotypes negated any possibility of an African philosophy or culture. This is probably why the late Nigerian philosopher, Peter Bodunrin, pathetically observes that "For too long, the Western conception of Africa has been a continent that has contributed little or nothing to human ideas and civilization".<sup>11</sup> Bodunrin is re-echoing a European-formulated discourse, wherein they attempted to dominate African peoples. To posit that Africa has had no input in human ideas and civilization leaves Africans as servants and the Europeans as masters. The Western colonial masters used anthropology, as a science, to foster their mercantilist ideology and influence Eurocentric prejudices about so-called 'primitive' peoples. The Western power/knowledge system (Foucault) had far-reaching implications for the constitution of knowledge about African realities. Nevertheless,

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genetic traits and endowments of the different branches of humanity, within which Africa and black races occupied the lowest level.

<sup>9</sup> It would be instructive to note that the works of Lévy-Bruhl were originally published in French and available for Francophone readership in the 1920s. They were later translated into English: Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1910, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, Paris: Alcan; translated in English in 1926, *How natives think*, London: Allen & Unwin; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1922, *La mentalité primitive*, Paris: Alcan; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1927, *L'âme primitive*, Paris: Alcan; translated in English 1965, *The 'soul' of the primitive*, London: Allen & Unwin; first English translation published in 1928.

<sup>10</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, it should be noted, was arguing against the works of the founding fathers of evolutionism in anthropology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as the J.G. Frazer, E.B. Tylor and H. Morgan. According to *evolutionists*, organisms inherently improve themselves through progressive inherited change over time (*orthogenesis*), and increase in complexity through evolution. The belief went on to include cultural evolution and social evolution. For them, human nature is already charted and is made up of specific features like the rational capacity in humans which are universally shared. Even if there are differences in the levels with what societies have done with ideas, these differences are sociological rather than epistemological.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Bodunrin, 1975 quoted by Abiola Irele, in Hountondji 1983, 11.

some Western, notably French anthropologists (GRIAULE 1948 [1965] and DIETERLEN 1941, 1951), later abandoned the idea of Western culture as a universal norm. The recognition of cultural relativism and the rejection of Western culture as a universal norm has been the hallmark of anthropology worldwide since the 1930s. Griaule and Dieterlen had direct experiences with other cultures, and so, were impressed with varying range of possibilities in the way human beings adapted to their environment. They also realized that human beings had the potentiality of developing their cultures (IRELE 1996). From this unearthing, cultural relativism surfaced and incited in Francophone African scholars, an urge to articulate specific African forms of cultural and social expression, in a bid to re-evaluate the continent, its peoples and counter colonial ideology. Summarily, the works of both Griaule and Dieterlen on the Dogon and Bambara ethnic groups in West Africa confirmed the existence of thought systems in Africa, and provided strong counter hegemonic bases for resistance to colonialist discourses (GRIAULE 1948 [1965], GRIAULE & DIETERLEN 1954, DIETERLEN 1941, 1951).

Noticeable, especially among Francophone African philosophers, is the heavy influence of the dominant Western philosophical trends at the time such neo-Marxism, phenomenology, existentialism, surrealism, anthropology, anti-colonial thought with their general revolt against Hegel's transcendental objectivism and 'system' (MASOLO 1994, 42). I agree with Masolo that these trends came first in the French colonies and have remained more lively and dominant there. These trends provoked the early thinkers to articulate counter discourses based on the African cultural situation. They stimulated the search for authentically African values and paved the way for a political agenda of liberation by creating the framework for a neo-colonial basis of knowledge production.

Placide Frans Tempels' axial work, *Bantoe-filosofie (La philosophie bantoue)* in 1945, was decisive in giving a philosophical orientation on the emerging discourse of cultural nationalism and African philosophy. He sought to create Africa's own philosophy as proof that Africa has its own peculiar identity and thought system. In a way, this systematic exposition of an indigenous African system of philosophical thought, characterized as an ontology in which being is conceived as 'vital-force', would counter European prejudice about the supposed intellectual deficiencies of Africans and also help in encountering and understanding the Africans. Tempels, a Belgian Franciscan missionary, lived among the Luba in the then Belgian Congo, known today as the Democratic Republic of Congo, and ascribed to them a collective philosophy in the following words:

I believe that we should most faithfully render Bantu thought in the European language by saying that the Bantu speak, act, live as if, for them, beings were forces. Force is not for them an adventitious, accidental reality, force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force. (TEMPELS 1959, 51)<sup>12</sup>

We may summarize Tempels' conception of a Bantu philosophy in five propositions: 1) Since Bantu are human beings, they have organized systems of principles and references. These systems constitute a philosophy even if Bantu are not 'capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary' (TEMPELS 1959, 36). 2) This philosophy is ontology. 3) Bantu ontology in its specificity implies that being, as understood in Western tradition, signifies force in Bantu tradition, and therefore one can state that being=force, or as the Italian translator entitled his abridged version of Bantu philosophy: Forza=Essere (TEMPELS 1959, 23). 4) Bantu ontology can be thought of and made explicit through the conceptual frame of Western philosophy. 5) Bantu ontology could be a guide to the ontologies of all 'primitive peoples' in general.

Since the publication of his book, the major aspects of African philosophy today revolve around Tempels' idea of a Bantu philosophy. His work provided a conceptual framework and reference for all future attempts to formulate the constitutive elements of a distinctive African mode of thought, to construct an original African philosophical system.<sup>13</sup> We see this impact in Senghor's conception of Négritude. Négritude is a literary, ideological movement developed by francophone black intellectuals, writers, and politicians in France in the 1930s. This group included Senghor, Martinican poet Aimé Césaire and the Guianian Léon Damas. Defenders of Négritude share solidarity in a common black identity as a better tool against French colonial racism. The violent colonial encounter between France and her African colonies, which led to the ideological devaluation of the Africans and the entire black race, triggered these intellectuals to come up with Négritude as a tool to assertive cultural nationalism. They believed that

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that the concepts 'vital force' and 'collective representations' by which Tempels sought to characterize Bantu thought are derivations from French philosopher Henri Bergson's *élan vital* and French sociologist / anthropologist Emile Durkheim's *représentations collectives* respectively.

<sup>13</sup> We shall return to the main criticisms of Tempels and his followers shortly.

the shared black heritage of members of the African Diaspora would help in fighting against French political and intellectual hegemony and domination. They formed a realistic literary style and adapted Marxist ideas as part of the ideological base of this movement. Senghor's conception of Négritude influenced black African intellectuals in retrieving the epistemological basis of their identity and worldview in a bid to articulate their distinctive mode of relating to the world.

Before delving into its impact among French-speaking African philosophers and beyond, it would be necessary to show the influence of a movement known as the Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Movement which came up in the United States of America in the 1920s. This movement set into motion a deeper, philosophically fascinating discourse on African humanity and identity, contrary to the traditional humanism in Europe. Harlem Renaissance called for "Afro-American identity with Africa and some form of Pan-African Unity...announcing a striking new independence for black Americans" (HUGGINS 1995). The Negro movement had among its ranks black Americans and Caribbean cultural icons such as Marcus Garvey, Amy Jacques Garvey, Claude McKay, Hubert Harrison, Claudia Jones, Cyril Briggs, Richards B. Moore, W.A. Domingo, and Eric Walrond. Many black writers from Francophone African and Caribbean colonies who studied in Paris such as Aimé Césaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Leon Damas who founded the Négritude Movement in the 1930s were influenced by the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance gave Négritude its form and content. The form was poetry and the content was diversity, plurality centred on an ontology that accepted diversity and otherness without hierarchical judgements of human worth on the basis of racial and cultural characteristics (MASOLO 1994, 10).

In Lusophone Africa, there was the Cape Verdean literary renaissance and cultural movement commonly known as the *Cabo Verdianidade Movimento* (translated as the Cape Verdeanness Movement). This Movement was an outgrowth of the journal, *Claridade* (founded in the 1930s) (translation as *Clarity*). In many senses, the *Cabo Verdianidade Movimento* was the Cape Verdean and Lusophone version of the Harlem Renaissance, Négritude Movement, Negrisimo Movement, each of which strongly influenced the Cabo Verdianidade writers (RABAKA 2014, 4). The writers of the Cape Verdean Movement, for the most part, broke with Eurocentric models and themes and turned their attention to Cape Verdean subjects, particularly ordinary people's life-worlds and life-struggles. Just like Négritude's *Presence Africaine* (founded in 1947), Cabo Verdianidade writers in their journal *Claridade* and later *Certeza* (founded in the 1940s), explored ethnic, racial, and cultural politics in a vacuum, as opposed to the connecting the

intersections and political economy of ethnicity, race, racism, and colonialism with the machination of modern capitalism and class struggle. These writers stressed the importance of returning to the source of their history, culture, and struggle - Africa. This group influenced one of the greatest African nationalist and revolutionaries Amilcar Lopes Cabral (1969, 1979). Rightly described, Cabral is a Négritude paradigm of a kind, an African liberation leader-poet-politico paradigm (MOSER 1978).

Meanwhile, in Anglophone Africa, the Nationalist-ideological philosophy is very similar to the Négritude movement (BODUNRIN 1981; OUTLAW 1996). Nationalist- ideological philosophy refers to the works of modern African political nationalists. Both involve discourses on anti -colonial struggle for African liberation. Nationalist-ideological philosophy is a corpus of radical political thoughts of the post-independence African leaders. As a school of thought, proponents of Nationalist-ideological orientation assume that communalism, as the supposed basic tenet of traditional Africa, should form the cardinal principle of any sound ideology for modern Africa (NKRUMAH 1970; NYERERE 1968, 1973; SENGHOR 1964).

Négritude got its first explicit philosophical articulation in Jean Paul Sartre's *Orphée Noire (Black Orpheus)* (SARTRE 1949), in which he defined the concept in Heideggerian / Existentialist terms, as 'the-being- in -the -world- of -the -Negro'.<sup>14</sup> Reiland Rabaka (2014) makes two distinct conceptions of Négritude: Caesarean Négritude and Senghorian Négritude. Césaire conceives of Négritude as a 'violent affirmation' of 'Negrohood' –or 'Africanity',- as Senghor would later have it- as well as 'a struggle against alienation', 'an awareness of the need for solidarity among blacks', 'a resistance to the politics of assimilation', 'a decolonization of consciousness', 'a reaction of enraged youth', 'a concrete rather than abstract coming of consciousness', and 'a search for ...identity'(CESAIRE , 1972,72-76; see also SENGHOR 1995,123; 1996, 46). Senghorian Négritude is a rebellious, not *revolutionary* as Césaire would have it, affirmation of Africanity in the face of assimilation, and similar to Césaire, a search for an attempt to overcome the 'loss of identity suffered by Africans due to the history of slavery, colonialism, and racism (SHUTTE 1998, 429). For Senghor, Négritude is the 'awareness, defense, and development of African cultural values' but it also welcomes the complementary values of Europe and the white man (SENGHOR 1996, 49; 1998, 441). In comparing Senghor and Césaire, James Clifford thinks Senghor

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<sup>14</sup> See Masolo 1994, Chatue 2009, Rabaka 2014.

elaborates a ‘backward-looking idealism’, a falsely naturalized, consistent African mentality that tends to re-inscribe the categories of a romantic, sometimes racialist European ethnography.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, Césaire’s Caribbean Négritude, according to Clifford, rejects all essentialist evocations (CLIFFORD 1988).<sup>16</sup> René Depestre (1970) tags the Senghorian doctrine a dangerous dogma, an irrational offshoot of nationalism which does not take into consideration the internal social disorder and diversity.

Hountondji makes the difference between Césaire and Senghor clearer when he argues that:

whereas for Césaire the exaltation of black cultures functions merely as a supporting argument in favour of political liberation, in Senghor it works as an alibi for evading the political problem of national liberation. Hypertrophy of cultural nationalism generally serves to compensate for the hypertrophy of political nationalism. This is probably why Césaire spoke so soberly about culture and never mentioned it without explicitly subordinating it to the more fundamental problems of political liberation. This also explains why, in works like *Liberte I*, Senghor, as a good Catholic and disciple of Teilhard de Chardin, emphasizes rather artificial cultural problems, elaborating lengthy definitions of the unique black mode of being and of being-in-the-world, and systematically evades the problem of the struggle against imperialism. (HOUNTONDJI 1996, 159-160)

Hountondji, in the quotation above, characterizes Senghor’s Négritude as a kind of ‘culturalism’ which lays emphases on ‘the cultural aspect of foreign domination’ but downplays and distorts the political and economic implications. In other words, culturalism does not explicitly show the implications of the political economy of colonialism, capitalism, and racism; and how each of these oppressive systems incessantly overlaps, intersects and interlocks in African life-worlds and

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<sup>15</sup> Towa (1971b) and Mudimbe (1997) also use the terms *rétrojection* (‘throwing backwards’) and *rétrodition* (‘speaking backwards’), respectively, to describe African intellectuals like Senghor and Kagame who engage in revisiting and romanticizing the past.

<sup>16</sup> For a similar comparison and concise theoretical and practical criticisms of Sartre’s definition of Négritude, see, Franklin 1953.

life struggles. By sidestepping the political and collapsing it into the cultural, Senghor's conception of Négritude connects with, and in some ways, becomes an imperial agent for colonial policy, colonial anthropology, and colonial ethnology. It distorts the primacy of political and economic problems and redirects Africans' attention away from the political economy of their neo-colonial conditions, to endless comparisons with European, and particularly French culture. This critique of Négritude, and by extension to ethnophilosophy, is very similar to the critiques made by other Francophone philosophers such as Towa (1971a, 1971b, 1979), Eboussi –Boulaga (1968, 1977) and Stanislas Adotevi (1972) from Benin.

Senghor's conception of African being and his efforts at its self-definition also influenced the ethnophilosophical tendency in French-speaking philosophical circles. According to the proponents of ethnophilosophy, African philosophy is a form of folk wisdom. Thus, beliefs, which are generally known to be characteristic of anthropological or religious systems, are depicted as typical examples of African philosophy. The earliest known works in this trend, following Tempels, include Alexis Kagame's *La philosophie Bantou-Rwandaise de l'Etre* and the Kenyan Pastor, John Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*. Hountondji, in an effort to disentangle African philosophy from ethnophilosophy, groups ethnophilosophy into three main genres: first, Western ethnophilosophy (as conducted by European authors such as Marcel Griaule, Dominique Zahan and Tempels who tried to reconstruct an African 'philosophy', and attempted contrasting this African pseudo-philosophy with an equally imaginary European philosophy); second, African churchmen who have endorsed this genre of Western ethnophilosophy such as Kagame (1956), Mgr. Makarakiza (1959) from Burundi, Rev. Fr. Rahajarizafy (1963) of Madagascar, Rev. Fr. Francois –Marie Lufuluabo (1962,1964) and Rev. Fr. Vincent Mulago (1965) from the Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rev. Pastor Jean-Calvin Bahoken (1967) and Rev. Fr. Hebga from Cameroon; and third, African laymen such as Senghor and Alassane N'daw from Senegal, Prosper Laleye from Togo , and Basile-Juleat Fouda from Cameroon (HOUNTONDJI 1983, 57-70).

Senghor's Négritude also influenced a major trend of cultural nationalism among French-speaking scholars, namely the historical school of the Négritude movement (IRELE 1996) with Afrocentrist critiques of Western discourses on Africa. Diop (1954, 1959) demonstrates Africa's central role and contribution to the origins of human civilization. He argues that: 1) Egypt has been cited and recognized as the origin of and leader in many forms of human civilization; 2) Many of those forms of civilization originating in Egypt

have closer affinity with similar forms in upper Africa than they have with their Indo-European and Semitic counterparts and; 3) Egyptians and Africans are the same people and are originators of world civilizations (MASOLO 1994, 18). The philosophical implications are clear: Diop is writing from his vision of Africa's historical personality in a bid to confront Hegel's philosophy of history and the evolutionist view of classical anthropology which placed the white race and Western civilization at the apex of human development (IRELE 1998). Second, he also draws upon Tempels' vitalist conception of the universe to characterize the African worldview. The cultural and historical affinity between ancient Egypt and black Africa which Diop posits led him to conclude that there is a distinctive African philosophy which originates from ancient Egypt and could be found in the various cosmologies in African societies today (IRELE 1996). His historical approach has been endorsed and exemplified in French-speaking Africa by scholars like Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1972) and Obenga (1990, 1992, 2004) and Africanists such as Martin Bernal (1987), Lefkowitz (1996), Lefkowitz & Rogers (1996) and Wim van Binsbergen (1997, 2003).

From our discussions on the Early Period above, it must be said that all these chains of intellectual developments such as the Eurocentric conception of philosophy, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Négritude Movements influenced the rise of Francophone academic African philosophy. From these perspectives, the African counter hegemonic responses, especially for Tempels and the Afrocentrist approach instigated by Diop, were aimed at a restitution of an African identity and reclaiming a spiritual and cultural heritage based on an original African essence. Specifically, we notice the prominence of Négritude in fostering ethnophilosophy and the nationalist-ideological schools. Chimakonam (2015) ascribes to these schools the term 'excavationism'. This is the tendency to erect the edifice of African philosophy by systematizing the African cultural world-views. The proponents of ethnophilosophy aimed at retrieving and reconstructing presumably lost African identity from the raw materials of African culture while the nationalist-ideological thinkers sought to develop compatible political ideologies for Africa from the native political systems of African peoples. Their concern was to build and demonstrate unique African identity in various forms. We also notice that the Francophone philosophical orientation went beyond the conventional racial divides and linguistic boundaries across the continent.

### **Middle Period: The Great Debate on the Nature and Possibility of an African Philosophy**

This period spanning from the 1960s till the 1980s was dominated by the heated meta-philosophical debate between the defenders and critics of ethnophilosophy. Following the publication of Tempels's *La philosophie bantoue* in 1945, a major controversy was sparked by the attempt to answer the fundamental question: Is there an African philosophy? (BODUNRIN 1981, 163; ONYEWUENYI 1991, 29). And if there is, what is it? (BODUNRIN 1981, 163) How can we retrieve it? What are the conditions of its possibility? (MUDIMBE 1988, ix). This debate on the nature and possibility of an African philosophy was largely sustained by the first generation of university-trained African philosophers. These philosophers include Hountondji and Towa on the Francophone side and Wiredu and Oruka, on the Anglophone side.<sup>17</sup>

Two main antagonistic groups are involved in this debate namely the defenders and critics of ethnophilosophy. The defenders of ethnophilosophy, otherwise called the 'traditionalists', or the 'Afro-constructionists' have particularistic tendencies, while the critics of ethnophilosophy, *Europhilosophes* (Europhilosophers) (DIAGNE 1981),<sup>18</sup> otherwise called the 'universalists', 'modernists', Afro-deconstructionists (CHIMAKONAM 2015) have stronger tendencies for a universalizing point of view (BODUNRIN 1985). The traditionalists prescribe a particularizing perspective to African

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<sup>17</sup> From the various debates in contemporary African philosophy, Oruka (1990) identifies four trends in current African philosophy. They are ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy, nationalist-ideological philosophy and philosophic sagacity. Oruka (1991, 5) later added two other approaches to African philosophy namely the hermeneutic and the artistic or literary trends. Oruka also classifies African philosophy into three 'Schools of African thought'. The schools, according to him, are the: Ethnographical school which he subdivides into the 'ethnographical descriptivists' (Tempels, Mbiti) and 'ethnographical rationalists' (Robin Horton, E.A Ruch, Onyewuenyi and Anyanwu); the Rationalist school (Wiredu, Bodunrin, Hountondji and Momoh) and the Historical school (Sumner, Mudimbe, Masolo and Outlaw). For more description of these 'Schools' see Oruka (1991, 15-31).

<sup>18</sup> The term *Europhilosophie* (Europhilosophy), synonymous to anti-ethnophilosophy, was first used by Senegalese philosopher Pathé Diagne (1981). It pertains to the condescending appropriation of Western philosophy in Africa. Diagne identifies Franz Crahay's (1965) article and the heavy influence of Louis Althusser on Hountondji's anti-ethnophilosophical position as major examples of this approach. In Anglophone African philosophical circles, the term Eurocentrism is synonymous to Europhilosophy (SEREQUEBERHAN 1997), and in opposition to Eurocentrism. Anglophone philosophers use the expression 'Continental philosophy' to designate a specific style or way of interpreting a select group of philosophers largely drawn from the phenomenological tradition (BERNASCONI 1997).

philosophy, asserting that Africans have a unique way of thinking and conceptualizing that make them radically un-European. They see rationality as culturally relative and sought to add rigor and promote the works of the excavators as true African philosophy. The defenders of ethnophilosophy include Tempels, Kagame, Senghor, Makarakiza, Rahajarizafy, Lufuluabo, Mulago, Bahoken, Fouda and Hebga.

Philosophers with a universalizing perspective, modernist or Afro-deconstructionists, viewed philosophy, especially from the North Atlantic society, as a universal discipline whose meaning and content are independent from racial or regional boundaries and specialties. Philosophy is regarded as a discipline that in the strict sense employs the method of critical, reflective, and logical inquiry. African philosophy, therefore, is not expected to be an exemption to this meaning of philosophy (HOUNTONDI 1983). Some members of this school include professional philosophers such Hountondji, Towa, and Eboussi-Boulaga launched serious criticisms against Tempels and his followers. They are opposed to the idea of a unique African identity or culture-bound philosophy and preferred a philosophy that will integrate African identity with the identity of all other races.<sup>19</sup>

Just like Oruka's taxonomies above, Francophone African philosophers have also grouped African philosophy into a plurality of

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<sup>19</sup> Mudimbe, with a cosmopolitan frame of mind, does not fall into any of these conceptual grids of a particularizing or universalizing conception of philosophy. Rather, he mentions the cultural intersections and North Atlantic influences in modern African philosophy. This explains his suggestion that the practice of African philosophy be a 'perpetual recommencement' - an unraveling without an end, dialectic of the universal and the particular (MUDIMBE 2005). The tendency to use and show the rapport between conceptual grids such as particulars and universals is deeply rooted in Anglophone, rather than Francophone African philosophical discourses. Osha (2005, 2017) shows this dichotomy and the interface in his reading of Wiredu and Mudimbe. Wiredu (1996), for example, in his attempts at conceptual decolonization, i.e. extricate unnecessary Western epistemologies that are to be found in African philosophical practices, makes a difference between *Westernity* and *Africanity* and between the North Atlantic *episteme* and an indigenous African *weltanschauung*. Mudimbe goes further in undertaking a broader archaeological deconstruction of the Western relationship to African otherness via a multiplicity of intellectual discourses—history, philosophy, religious studies, and anthropology. Secondly, he explores African philosophical responses to these Western constructions of otherness and the ways in which they determine discursive agency. Thirdly, he suggests the ways in which the contingencies of the private inform the constitution of broader philosophical projects; and finally, in between these various preoccupations, he demonstrates that ultimately, the philosophical subject is perpetually (re)constituted beyond the bounds of philosophy (OSHA 2017).

trends or diverse schools of thought. Alfons J. Smet (1980) and Oleko Nkombe and Smet (1978) classify African philosophy into the Ideological, Traditional, Critical, and Synthetic schools. The Ideological school includes the works of those thinkers who reacted to theories and prejudices, which in the past, supported the slave trade and justified colonization. They include African personality theory, Pan-Africanism, Négritude, African humanism, African socialism, scientific socialism, Nkrumah's Consciencism, and works on the idea of authenticity in the African context. The Traditional school includes the works that go against the 'myth of primitive mentality' racially ascribed to the Africans; recognize the existence of a coherent philosophy in traditional Africa through hermeneutical restoration. The Critical school includes the works of those who react to the theses of the two preceding trends in a bid to question their relevance and validity. The Synthetic school deals with the works of those involved in the use of hermeneutics in exploring issues, and examining new problems which may emerge in the African context.

In an attempt to delineate the landscape of African philosophy, Mudimbe (1983) distinguishes the usage of the word philosophy in the broad sense and philosophy in the narrow sense. In its broad sense, African philosophy is made up of two sub-groups; ethnophilosophy and Ideologico-philosophical tendency. Ethnophilosophy includes works which express and faithfully represent the coherence and unity of traditional African philosophies.<sup>20</sup> The ideologico-philosophical tendency includes works that address the situation of Africa in the present and future situation, while remaining true to African ideals. Mudimbe's second group comprises of those whose works are structured, following the Belgian philosopher Franz Crahay's *Décollage Conceptuel* (Conceptual Take-off) (1965), by the notion of philosophy in the narrow / strict sense. The first group comprises of persons who reflect on the conditions of possibility of an African philosophy such as Eboussi-Boulaga, Towa, and Hountondji. The second group involves those who reflect on the significance of Western science for African contexts such as Adotevi, Binda Ngoma and Mudimbe himself. The third group, made up of philosophers like Atangana, Njoh Mouelle, and Eboussi-Boulaga, reflect on philosophy as a critical auxiliary to the process of development.

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<sup>20</sup> Mudimbe does not use the term ethnophilosophy negatively as other professional philosophers like Towa and Hountondji do. Rather, he invites philosophers to probe into the philosophic status of traditional wisdom and not just dismiss it pejoratively as ethnography.

Finally, the works of Nkombe, Tshimalenga Ntumba, I.P. Leleye and John Kinyongo form a subgroup of those who reflect on philosophical hermeneutics (MUDIMBE 1983). Later, Mudimbe (1988, 154) lists three main approaches that characterize the post-Tempels era. He mentions, first, the ‘philosophical critique of ethnophilosophy’, a critique which draws upon Western philosophical tradition’s view of appropriate philosophical practice. This trend springs mainly from the academic lecture on the conditions for the existence of a Bantu philosophy, given by Crahay at the Kinshasa Goethe Institute in 1965. Second, is the ‘foundational’ trend, which questions the epistemological foundations of the human and social sciences and; third, the approach which includes philological studies, critical anthropology and hermeneutics. The third approach indicates avenues to new praxes on African cultures and languages.

### **Main criticisms of Négritude and Ethnophilosophy**

In this section, I focus on the main criticisms of Négritude and ethnophilosophy during the Middle Period marked by debates on the nature, possibility and existence of an African philosophy. Among Francophone philosophers, Frantz Fanon’s writings (1952, 1961) imparted a more radical approach in the struggle against pathology of colonial domination and racism. His critique of Senghor springs from his analyses of the psychological depredations of colonial hegemony and its moral impact on the colonized natives. He calls for a conscious, violent revolution in a bid to free the natives from domination, inferiority complex, fear and despair. This is the key to freedom, self-identity and self-respect. Fanon asserts that African culture will take concrete shape around the struggle of the people and not around songs, poems or folklore (FANON 1961, 164). Adotevi leans on the radical tone introduced by Fanon and dismisses not just the biological underpinnings of Négritude but also its political uses in the post-colonial period. He thinks the term is used as an ideological construct for the new African bourgeoisie. He posits that ‘revolution is not accomplished with myths, even shattered ones’ (ADOTEVI 1972, 81) and contests the black personality rhetoric in these words:

The Black person who accepts his race is a good Black, but if he forgets our fall, if he forgets himself, if he faints a mystical ecstasy, if he sees black when he should see right, he or she loses himself or herself, loses the being Black in losing perspective. (ADOTEVI 1972,102)

Towa (1971a, 1971b) criticizes the spirit of cultural nationalism inherent in Négritude and ethnophilosophy (two ideologies of servitude) in a bid

to provide the transformative role of philosophy in Africa. For him, philosophy should be influenced by immediate concerns of an ideological and political order, when he notes that ‘philosophy is essentially a relation between a theory and the demands of social life (TOWA 1979, 112). His uncompromising radicalism vis-à-vis Senghorian Négritude is seen in these words:

Senghorian négritude, and ethnophilosophy which seeks to perpetuate it, foster the illusion that Africa can offer to Europe a heightening of its soul (*un supplément d’ame*) before the complete liquidation of European imperialism in Africa. In reality, no cultural development of any importance will be possible in Africa until she has built up a material strength capable of guaranteeing her sovereignty and her power of decision not only in the political and economic fields but also in the cultural. Our inferiority in material terms places our culture at the mercy of the great powers in our time. (TOWA 1971a, 51-52)

It is for this reason that Towa also jettisons the idea of a unique and immutable essence of African being. According to him, “The transformation of one’s present condition signifies at the same time the transformation of one’s essence, of what is particular to the self, of what is original and unique about it; it is to enter into a negative relationship with the self” (TOWA 1971a, 41). Towa argues that Négritude, as an expression of ethnophilosophy, produces an illusory consciousness in one’s cultural identity, which is conceived to be different from others and is an extension of the ideology of neo-colonialism (TOWA 1971b, 24-25). He is more preoccupied with the concrete facts of human existence and not with accumulated heritage of an ‘authentic’ African past as ethnophilosophers argue. He opines that:

What ethnophilosophy praises in the past is not necessarily given by the analysis of the past. *Rétrojection* is the method by which ethnophilosophy alters and disfigures traditional reality by secretly introducing at the descriptive onset present-day values and ideas which can be considered completely alien to Africa, rediscovering them in a militant profession of faith, ‘authenticated in terms of their so-called Africanity.’ (TOWA, 1971b, 32)

Among Francophone philosophers, Tempels and his followers have come under serious attacks from Franz Crahay (1965), Hountondji (1983, 2004), Towa (1971a, 1971b, 1979), Eboussi-Boulaga (1968,

1977), Tshiamalenga Ntumba (1981), Ngoma-Binda (1978), Sow (1984), just to name a few.<sup>21</sup> It was Franz Crahay (1965), who gave the first philosophical critique proper of Tempels. According to Crahay, for Africans to produce a system of philosophy they need to reconstruct African discourse at the speculative level by first identifying and employing conceptual schemes or basic principles of indigenous to Africans. This critique has been endorsed by some philosophers in the critique of ethnophilosophy which they situate in the context of the Western power/knowledge (Foucault) paradigm. We may cite the cases of the deep social, political, and cultural crisis of *mntu*, the African person (Eboussi-Boulaga); Africans' continued servitude to Western hegemony (Towa); Africa's dependence on Western tutelage (Hebga); and the invention or idea of Africa at the margins of Western knowledge (Mudimbe) (MASOLO 1994, 147).

Using a metaphor from aeronautic vocabulary, taking-off (*décollage*), Crahay opines that Tempels has elaborated a rational theory about the Bantu worldview, nothing more nothing less. Tempels and his disciples have not made a distinction between a 'vision of the world', its reflexive potentialities, and the philosophical practice which can work on them. Crahay contends that Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*, whether correct or incorrect, has nothing in common with philosophy proper. At best, it can be regarded as a meta-theory on the Bantu worldview (CRAHAY 1965, 64-65).

Ntumba specifically focuses his criticisms of ethnophilosophy on three points. First, one cannot conclude that force is being in African thought merely because the Luba people that Tempels studied pay a great deal of attention to the reality of force. . Secondly, an ontology cannot be constituted on the basis of external signs. More importantly, the identification of the Bantu notion of force with the Western notion of being does not seem to make sense. Thirdly, the equivalence established between forces and being should be considered as a *simulacrum* since it is unthinkable without the Western conceptual *instrumentarium* Tempels used. Ntumba concludes that Tempels constructed a philosophy but did not *reconstruct* Bantu philosophy (TSHIAMALENGA 1981, 179).

The fiercest criticisms of ethnophilosophy in French-speaking Africa have come from Hountondji and Towa. They opine that ethnophilosophy is substandard and argue that it is neither ethnology nor philosophy. It is probably a branch of ethnology mistaken for

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<sup>21</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of these criticisms, see, Towa 1791a, 1971b, Eboussi-Boulaga 1977, Hountondji 1983, Mudimbe 1988, Masolo 1994, Mono Ndjana 2016.

philosophy (HOUNTONDJI 1983, 52-53; TOWA 1971a, 30-33).<sup>22</sup> Hountondji, just like Towa, reveals that Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* was meant for a foreign audience, in a bid to satisfy the ideological aspirations. The methodology of Tempels and his disciples is flawed because they tend to portray African beliefs as things that do not change, that are somehow timeless. Their philosophy presents itself as that of peoples rather than individuals. Ethnophilosophy speaks only of *Bantu* philosophy, *Dogon* philosophy, *Bakweri* philosophy; as such its scope is collective, tribal, a philosophy without philosophers, and of the worldview variety.<sup>23</sup> According to Hountondji, ethnophilosophy:

...aimed to reconstruct a particular *Weltanschauung*, a specific world-view commonly attributed to all Africans abstracted from history and change and, moreover, philosophical, through an interpretation of the customs and traditions, proverbs and institutions-in short, various data-concerning the cultural life of African peoples. (HOUNTONDJI 1983, 34)

Hountondji charges ethnophilosophy as embroiled in ideological myth because it has to account for an imaginary unanimity, to interpret a text that nowhere exists and has to be constantly reinvented. It is an indeterminate discourse with no object; a crazed language accountable to nothing; and a discourse that has no referent, so that its falsity can never be demonstrated. Hountondji concludes, therefore, that 'Bantu philosophy' is not the philosophy of the Bantu but that of Tempels', that the 'Bantu-Rwandais philosophy' of the other is not that of the Rwandais but that of Kagame's. Both Tempels and Kagame, Hountondji asserts, simply make use of African traditions and oral literature and project on them their own philosophical beliefs (HOUNTONDJI 1983, 62).

However, Hountondji and the other critics of ethnophilosophy have also been criticized by Hebga (1982). He criticizes those professional philosophers who keep opposing Tempels and belittling the works of his followers by calling it pejoratively *ethnophilosophy* as

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<sup>22</sup> Mudimbe, however, persuasively argues that the basis of African philosophical practice could be traced between Western epistemology and anthropology (MUDIMBE 1988, 1991, 1994, 2005)

<sup>23</sup> In an attempt to re-affirm the African subject and critically appraise the exercise of subjectivity in African intellectuals, Hountondji and Mudimbe assess the works and legacies of Anton Wilhelm Amo and E.W. Blyden, respectively (HOUNTONDJI 1983, 111-130; MUDIMBE 1988, 98-134). For indigenous African thinkers, see, Griaule (1948), Sumner (1981), Hallen & Sodipo (1986) and Oruka (1991).

being ungrateful to someone who made possible their philosophizing. Niamkey and Toure (1978) think that Hountondji and his followers are propagating a unitary and exclusivist approach to philosophy. They think that they are limiting philosophy to the Western rationalist tradition of philosophy, and clinging to the erroneous assumption that the Western model is the universal one. This explains why Irung Tshitambal'a Mulang (1988, 2-14) from the Democratic Republic of Congo thinks Hountondji and other scholars of universalist orientation in African philosophy are submitting contemporary Negro-African philosophy to Western hegemony. Mulang addresses the question why present-day sub-Saharan African philosophers have doggedly followed the paths originally blazed by Western philosophers. He opines that this 'excessive fidelity' to Western modes of approaching the philosophical enterprise cannot but lead to a betrayal. That is, betrayal of Negro-African peoples in general and their oppressed many in particular, by African philosophers. Mulang argues that, in fact, the Africans have already been betrayed. He turns to a consideration of the possibility conditions of altering the current situation in favor of the Negro-African peoples.

Elsewhere, Mulang (1987) criticizes those professional African philosophers who advocate that philosophical enterprise should have nothing to do with the study of mytho-poetic modes and systems of thoughts that are characteristic of traditional peoples. He argues that it is erroneous to judge these modes of thought by using the Western/modernist modes. This is because myths are engrained in a human context in which they function, within which they give meaning to human experiences. In challenging Hountondji, Towa, Crahay and others, he judges the dichotomy between the rational and the mythical as misleading and encourages a deep study of the mytho-poetic modes and other traditional systems of thought in its variegated manifestations as sound bases for African philosophical thought.

From the metaphilosophical debates in the Middle Period, one can glean how philosophers from both sides of the linguistic divides were trying to focus on the nature and possibility of an African philosophy. This long debate spilled on into the New Contemporary Era with a major challenge of not just talking about African philosophy but actually doing it. We also notice, in Francophone philosophical circles, attempts at linking African philosophy with anthropology and the various criticisms of ethnophilosophy. This is understandable given the French tradition of training which laid emphasis on multidisciplinary and the uses of history. In English-speaking philosophical circles, largely influenced by analytic philosophy, focus is on empiricism and

argumentative rigor than on anthropology, history, or ethnophilosophy as in French-speaking Africa (OSHA 2017).<sup>24</sup>

### **New/Contemporary Era: Critical Reconstruction of African Philosophy**

The main focus of this era among French-speaking African philosophers has been to answer this question: how can we renew the dynamics of an African whose stagnation has been caused by a sterile debate on ethnophilosophy? In this era, the 1990s till date, the Afro-deconstructionists of the Middle Period shifted focus to reconstruction in a bid to integrate and give a universal validity and relevance to African *episteme*. The postcolonial situation has broadened the debate among French-speaking African intelligentsia. They attempt to go beyond the essentialism inherent in Négritude and related theories of Africanism, and engage with the modalities of African existence in the modern world.<sup>25</sup> These scholars have been largely attracted by Continental philosophy in a bid to look at the African context, its history, and attempt at its transformation. This challenge is undertaken by philosophers like Mudimbe, Towa, Appiah, Hountondji and Eboussi-Boulaga who have reiterated that the African *episteme* be reconstructed in a bid to negotiate the ‘dilemma of modernity’, experienced as a problematic dimension of contemporary African life and consciousness (IRELE 1998).

Mudimbe (1973, 1988, 1994), for example, in his critique of Africanist discourses presents lucid picture of how Europe constructed its own image of itself by contrasting it with a correspondingly negative image of Africa and its inhabitants. He shows how Europe, and the entire North Atlantic society, has constructed its identity, culture, history, science and philosophy, religion and statehood by denying these same achievements to Africans. This hegemonic submission of Africans and their life worlds was evident during the colonial experience and perpetuated today in racism. They used anthropology to foster their ideology and influence Eurocentric prejudices about so-called ‘primitive’ peoples. The consequence is that Africa has become a province of a Western epistemological territory and depends on a Western epistemological order (MUDIMBE 1988, x). To counter this Western world system, Mudimbe speaks of African *gnosis*, broadening it to the experience of rejected forms of wisdom which are not part of the structures of political power and scientific knowledge (MUDIMBE

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<sup>24</sup> However, see the works of Appiah (1992) and Mudimbe (1988, 1994, 2005) for this interface.

<sup>25</sup> My interpretation has been influenced by Charles Romain Mbele (2015).

1988, x-xi). It is these empirical categories, *a la* Lévi-Strauss, which can be used as keys to a silent code, leading to universals (MUDIMBE 1988, 35).

Furthermore, with the end of the Cold War, the demise of Marxism, decolonization and the escalation of ethnic violence in several African countries, African philosophers continue to interrogate the meaning of humanity and not so much the Africanness of Africa (FRAITURE 2015). This period of suffering and catastrophes generated postcolonial critiques and reflection on the nature and universality of human suffering (MUDIMBE 1988; MBEMBE 2001) and the use of German Critical Theory by Jean Godefroy Bidima in his reflections on the status of African philosophy. These Francophone scholars have studied the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism with special focus on their human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized peoples and their lands.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in a bid to reconstruct African philosophy, Francophone African philosophers have gone beyond *Bantu Philosophy* as one can notice a striking *rapprochement* between disciplines such as Postcolonial Studies, German Critical Theory and renewed interest in important post-war thinkers such as Adorno, Cabral, Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Tempels (FRAITURE 2015).

### Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have tried to discuss the main trends and individual contributions that have dominated Francophone academic African philosophy from the 1920s till date. In the evolution of the thoughts of contemporary African philosophy, the contribution of Tempels cannot be underestimated as it sparked off criticisms from professional philosophers from both the Anglophone and Francophone sides, with the pejorative appellation 'ethnophilosophy'. Specifically, I have argued and provided evidence that in spite of apparent linguistic divides/boundaries, there have been interactions and interfaces with Anglophone and Francophone scholars' philosophical approaches converging and reconnecting with other global philosophical orientations. This clearly shows that African philosophy is not only involved in a robust conversation with itself across colonial borders but also with the philosophical traditions rooted in cultures outside Africa

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<sup>26</sup> Appiah (1992) echoes Mudimbe when he broadens the scope of the analytic tradition of Anglophone African philosophy in which he is trained by using history to address the legacy of E.W. Blyden and other major figures of Pan-Africanism. He is also interested in theories like race, cosmopolitanism post colonialism, and postmodernism.

such as the analytic and continental traditions of philosophy. There is an urgent need to deepen the interface between Francophone, Anglophone, Lusophone and Islamic orientations in African philosophy. This will permit African philosophers to engage in critical conversation with each other, revisit the African past in a bid to articulate the relevance and global relevance of African indigenous knowledge systems.

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